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Baseline evaluation in youth ice hockey players: Comparing methods for documenting prior concussions and attention or learning disorders

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2 **Study Design:** Cross-sectional.

3 **Objective:** To examine differences in concussion history and attention or

4 learning disorders reported by elite youth ice hockey players using a

5 questionnaire that allows parental input compared to a clinic-based test battery

6 that does not.

7 **Background:** A history of previous concussion and the presence of attention or

8 learning disorders can affect concussion management decisions; however, youth

9 athletes may not accurately report their medical history because they do not

10 know or recall important details.

11 Methods: The sample included 714 (601 male, 113 female) Bantam (ages 12-

12 14) and Midget (ages 15-17) ice hockey players from the most elite divisions of

13 play (AA, AAA). Players completed a take-home preseason questionnaire (PSQ)

14 with the input of a parent/guardian, then independently completed a baseline

15 Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Test (ImPACT) at the

16 beginning of the 2011-2012 hockey season.

17 **Results:** In 21.1% (95% CI: 18.1, 24.1) of cases there was disagreement

18 between PSQ and ImPACT in the number of previous concussions reported. For

19 those reporting an attention disorder on the PSQ, 85.7% also reported it on

20 ImPACT. Only 9.5% of those who reported a learning disorder on the PSQ also

21 reported it on ImPACT.

22 **Conclusion:** For 1 in 5 players, reported concussion history differed between

23 PSQ and ImPACT, and there was substantial disagreement between instruments

- 24 for those reporting learning disorders. The method of obtaining medical history
- 25 may therefore affect baseline and post-concussion evaluations.
- **Key Words:** Baseline testing; medical history; youth sport

48 Concussion is a common injury among youth athletes, with the highest rates reported in contact sports such as ice hockey.^{1,11,13,21,23} Defined as a 49 50 complex pathophysiological process affecting the brain induced by traumatic 51 biomechanical forces,²⁸⁻²⁹ concussion is an evolving heterogeneous injury. 52 Clinical findings of this multifaceted injury may include somatic and/or emotional 53 symptoms, physical signs, behavioral changes, cognitive impairment, and/or sleep disturbances.²⁸⁻²⁹ Baseline evaluations may enhance a clinician's ability to 54 55 diagnose, manage, and monitor the trajectory of recovery for athletes following 56 concussion.

Baseline evaluations commonly include a demographic and injury history 57 section, along with assessments of neurocognitive function, motor function, 58 and/or symptoms.^{5,13,19} Traditionally, baseline medical information has been 59 recorded using paper and pencil methods and, for youth athletes, parental input 60 61 is often permitted during questionnaire completion.^{11,13} Importantly, medical 62 history may not be known, recalled, or understood by youth, resulting in an 63 under-representation of conditions that can influence clinical evaluations when 64 the athlete does not have the benefit of parental oversight. This is of particular concern with the increasing popularity of computerized testing, which does not 65 66 allow for parental assistance (i.e., the athlete completes this information on 67 his/her own just prior to participating in the testing). Thus, depending on the 68 setting and nature of data collection, there may be variability in the information 69 collected from youth athletes.

70 The Immediate Post-Concussion Assessment and Cognitive Test 71 (ImPACT) is a popular web-based, computer-administered neuropsychological test battery used for baseline and post-concussion evaluation.^{18-19,24,35} A 72 73 demographic information portion is completed at the start of each test, and 74 includes items such as age, previous history of concussion, number of previous concussions, and previous diagnosis of an attention or learning disorder. 75 76 Research has shown that the results of baseline cognitive tests can be affected by a history of learning and attention disorders.^{6,26} Specifically, results from tests 77 78 of verbal learning, working memory, complex attention, and processing speed are most sensitive to these conditions.^{6,26} The accuracy of baseline information, 79 particularly related to medical history, is therefore essential when interpreting test 80 81 results and for the validity of clinical assessments.

It is necessary to consider, however, that children and adolescents may 82 be more sensitive to the mode of questionnaire administration than adults.⁴⁰ For 83 example, the current literature suggests that mode of symptom reporting has 84 been found to affect the number and intensity of concussion symptoms reported 85 by athletes.²² The issue of social desirability bias must also be considered when 86 87 discussing self-report of attention deficits or learning disabilities. Youth athletes 88 may under report these conditions to avoid embarrassment or to project a more favorable image to others.³ This issue may be particularly salient when athletes 89 are being tested in a team setting,³² although its effect on responses to the 90 91 ImPACT demographic questions is unknown.

92	Moreover, there is considerable evidence that concussions are under-	
93	reported by young athletes. ^{27,38-39} This has largely been attributed to poor	
94	understanding of the signs, symptoms, and potential long-term sequelae of	
95	concussion or deferring medical history knowledge to parents, and has been	
96	combatted with education-based interventions.9,34,37-38 Because a previous	
97	concussion is one of the strongest predictors of future concussions, ¹²⁻¹³ it is	
98	possible that athletes will under-report previous concussions to avoid being	
99	labeled as "high risk" or being advised to discontinue sport participation.	
100	The extent to which self-report of previous history of concussion, attention	
101	disorders, or learning disorders may differ between a paper baseline	
102	questionnaire and the ImPACT background history section is unknown.	
103	Therefore, the primary objective of this study was to examine the differences in	
104	concussion history, attention disorders, and learning disorders reported by elite	
105	youth ice hockey players using a paper-based questionnaire that allows parental	
106	input compared to ImPACT, which does not allow parental input. The secondary	
107	objective was to determine the effect of age group and sex on agreement	
108	between the 2 methods.	

- 109
- 110 METHODS

112 Study design and participants

113This validation study used cross-sectional data that were collected during114the baseline assessment phase of a larger prospective cohort study conducted in

115 the 2011-2012 ice hockey season.⁴ The study population was Bantam (ages 13-116 14) and Midget (ages 15-17) ice hockey players competing in the most elite 117 divisions (AA, AAA) in Calgary and Edmonton, Canada. Players were required to 118 be 13-17 years at the end of the calendar year to participate on a team in 1 of 119 these age groups, but some Bantam players were 12 years of age at the time of 120 baseline assessment. Similarly, some Midget players were 14 years of age at 121 baseline. Inclusion criteria were the following: male or female players; aged 12-122 17 through the season of play; written informed consent to participate (player and 1 parent or guardian); players registered with Hockey Calgary, Girls Hockey 123 124 Calgary, Edmonton Minor Hockey Association, or the Edge School (Calgary); 125 players participating in the Bantam or Midget age groups only; players in elite 126 divisions of play (AA, AAA); agreement of the player's head coach to participate 127 in the study; and agreement of the team therapist to collect information about 128 individual player participation and injury throughout the season as part of the 129 larger cohort study. Players were excluded if they had sustained a previous injury 130 or chronic illness that prevented full participation in hockey at the beginning of 131 the 2011-2012 season.

Approval for this study was granted by the research ethics boards at theUniversity of Calgary and the University of Alberta.

134

135 **Data collection**

Consent forms and Preseason Questionnaires were distributed to all
participants 2-3 weeks prior to baseline testing. These were completed at home,

138 with instructions that the questionnaire was to be completed with the assistance 139 of a parent or guardian, and submitted at the baseline testing session. Baseline 140 testing was conducted, by team, at the University of Calgary Sport Medicine 141 Centre, the Glen Sather Sport Medicine Clinic in Edmonton, or LifeMark 142 Physiotherapy at the Edge School. At these sessions, players completed 143 ImPACT on individual laptop computers with an external mouse under the 144 supervision of a research assistant. Up to 10 players completed ImPACT 145 simultaneously, and the testing environment was kept as quiet and free from 146 distractions as possible.

147

148 **Outcome measures**

The Preseason Questionnaire (PSQ) is part of a previously validated 149 injury surveillance system,^{11,13} and was designed to pre-screen athletes at 150 baseline for medical, mental health, or behavioral conditions. It is a paper-and-151 152 pencil instrument that collects information regarding participant demographics (ie: 153 age, sex, height, weight), current sport participation, protective equipment worn 154 during hockey participation, and previous medical history (ie: injury history, 155 surgical history, diagnosed medical conditions). The questionnaire asks 156 specifically about previous concussions ("Have you ever had a concussion or 157 been 'knocked out' or had your 'bell rung'?") as well as attention deficits and 158 learning disabilities ("Have you ever been formally diagnosed by a health care 159 professional (physician, psychologist, etc.) as having an attention or learning

issue?"). The PSQ was sent home with the study consent form, with instructionsthat it was to be completed with parental input.

162 The ImPACT battery is a web-based computer-administered 163 neuropsychological test.^{18-19,24,35} It was developed for the acute assessment of 164 sports-related concussion in youth, collegiate, and professional athletes, and was 165 designed to minimize practice effects through the use of several alternating 166 forms. ImPACT yields 5 composite scores for visual memory, verbal memory, 167 visual motor processing speed, reaction time, and impulse control, and also 168 provides a total symptom score from the post-concussion symptom inventory. 169 Prior to starting the cognitive testing with ImPACT, the athlete completes a number of sport- and health-related questions, including questions that ask the 170 athlete to identify the number of prior concussions they have experienced (i.e., 171 172 "Indicate number of times diagnosed with a concussion") and whether they have 173 any attention or learning disorders ("Check if the following apply: diagnosed 174 attention deficit disorder or hyperactivity; diagnosed learning disability"). The 175 ImPACT battery takes approximately 30 minutes to complete, including the 176 background questions, and the athlete completes it without parental input. 177 Although the PSQ and ImPACT have been used in previous injury surveillance studies,^{11,13,18-19,24,35} the validity and reliability of their demographic 178 179 and medical history questions have not been previously established in the 180 literature.

181

182 Analysis

183 Stata version 12.0 was used for all statistical analyses. Descriptive 184 statistics are reported as frequencies, proportions with 95% confidence intervals, 185 or medians with ranges. Agreement in the number of concussions and the 186 presence of attention or learning disorders reported using the PSQ and the 187 ImPACT test was examined using intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC). 188 Models [ICC(3,1)] were fit using a repeated measures design to account for 189 multiple scores given from individual raters. A multivariable logistic regression 190 model, adjusted for cluster by team, was fit to assess the effect of age group 191 (Bantam or Midget) and sex (male or female) on agreement (yes/no) in concussion history between the PSQ and ImPACT. 192 193 194 RESULTS 195 196 Of the 742 participants who were recruited for the larger cohort study, 714 197 (96.2%) completed both the PSQ and baseline ImPACT testing and are therefore included in the present analysis. Baseline characteristics of included players are 198 199 presented in TABLE 1. 200

The proportion of players reporting a concussion, attention disorder, or learning disorder using the PSQ and ImPACT are reported in **TABLE 2**. Overall agreement between PSQ and ImPACT for history of any prior concussion was moderate (ICC = 0.69), but it was substantially poorer for those reporting 1 previous concussion (ICC = 0.53). Agreement for reported attention disorders

206 (ICC = 0.95) and learning disorders (ICC = 0.94) across the entire sample was
207 very good.

208

Prevalence rates for disagreement in the number of previous concussions reported on the PSQ compared to ImPACT is shown in **TABLE 3**. Overall, there was disagreement between PSQ and ImPACT in 21.1% (95% CI: 18.1, 24.1) of cases. Compared to the PSQ, ImPACT indicated fewer concussions in 9.6% (95% CI: 7.4, 11.8) of cases and more concussions in 11.4% (95% CI: 9.1, 13.8) of cases. Disagreement was highest for those reporting 1 (41.3%) or 2 (38.7%) previous concussions.

216

When examining self-reported history of previous concussions, Bantam
players were less likely to have agreement (odds ratio [OR] = 0.53; 95% CI: 0.35,
0.80) between the PSQ and ImPACT than Midget players, adjusting for cluster by
team. There was no trend in favor of either instrument for the Bantam players.
There was no association between sex and agreement (males compared to
females: OR = 0.85; 95% CI: 0.45, 1.59).

224 Congruence between the PSQ and ImPACT regarding reported attention 225 and learning disorders is presented in **TABLE 4**. Overall, there was agreement 226 between PSQ and ImPACT in the vast majority (96.0%) of cases, with most 227 players reporting no attention or learning problems on either instrument. Of those 228 reporting an attention disorder on the PSQ (n = 14), 85.7% also reported a

problem on ImPACT. However, 90.5% of those who reported a learning disorder
on the PSQ (n = 21) did not report it on ImPACT.

231

232 **DISCUSSION**

233

234 In our comparison of the PSQ and ImPACT, we found notable 235 disagreement in self-reported learning problems and concussion history. 236 Although our results may reflect differences that existed due to the amount of 237 parental input given when completing the PSQ, it is likely that few players 238 completed the PSQ independently, given their age and the detailed nature of the 239 questions. As per the instructions, the majority of players likely had at least some 240 parental input or the parents completed the PSQ on behalf of the player. 241 Interpretation of the results is therefore framed to reflect PSQ responses that 242 included parental input. 243 The largest disagreements in concussion history existed for those 244 reporting 1 or 2 previous concussions, and more of those players reported fewer 245 concussions on ImPACT compared to the PSQ. It is possible that parental input 246 may have resulted in a more sensitive self-reported history, particularly for those 247 with a small number of previous concussions. Parents may have more precise 248 recollection or record of previous injuries, or they may consider some injuries to 249 be concussions while players do not. For example, parents may use a broader 250 definition of concussion and include incidents where the player was not medically 251 diagnosed but had observable symptoms, whereas players may not believe that

these events constitute a concussion.¹⁴ Considering the high number of players 252 253 who had a larger estimate of their concussion history on ImPACT compared to 254 the PSQ, however, it is equally probable that players included on-ice events that 255 their parents were unaware of because they were not formally diagnosed as 256 concussions. There is some evidence that children and parents have only low-to-257 moderate agreement in symptom reporting following concussion,¹⁴ congruent 258 with studies in the domains of psychology and quality of life research suggesting 259 that children often report more somatic symptoms^{11,16} while parents report more 260 cognitive or behavioral symptoms.^{11,16} This may have influenced whether parents 261 or athletes considered a particular event to be a concussion. These alternative explanations may indicate important differences in the level of concussion 262 263 awareness among elite youth ice hockey players and their parents, which 264 warrant further research and player/parent education considerations.

265 Moreover, there is evidence that the wording of questions can influence 266 the quality of information elicited from respondents. Using very specific items and providing comprehensive response options has been shown to stimulate recall 267 268 for health-related events.⁸ Because the PSQ provides a broader range of terms 269 used to identify concussion (i.e.: "Have you ever had a concussion or been 270 'knocked out' or had your 'bell rung'?") than ImPACT, which specifically asks 271 about the number of times an individual has been *diagnosed* with a concussion, 272 responses to the PSQ would likely capture a more sensitive picture of previous 273 concussion events. This has implications in terms of the type of concussion 274 history obtained through ImPACT (e.g., "diagnosed" concussions only), and may

indicate the need to collect a more comprehensive injury history during baselineand post-concussion evaluations.

277 Under circumstances where there is particular public attention to a health 278 issue, recall can be more accurate for the condition of concern than other related 279 health matters.¹⁷ Considering recent publicity and awareness campaigns directed 280 at sport concussion, it is likely that parents and players demonstrated enhanced 281 recall for concussion events in the present study. It is assumed that parents and 282 players completed the PSQ together, as instructed. Differential recall between 283 PSQ and ImPACT is therefore unlikely, given the short time frame between 284 administration of the 2 questionnaires, unless parents completed the PSQ without player input. Discrepancies between the PSQ and ImPACT may 285 286 therefore be attributed to other sources of error, such as recall bias related to the 287 timing of concussion events, or even differences in the medium in which 288 questions were presented (computer versus pencil and paper). 289 Although all self-report measures are vulnerable to recall bias, concussion

290 history may be particularly sensitive to the length of the recall period. In a 291 seminal study, Harel and colleagues¹⁵ found that parents have diminishing recall 292 of their children's injuries over time, particularly those injuries that did not require 293 medical attention or result in time loss from school. In the present study, 294 concussions occurring months or years previously may therefore have been 295 underreported, especially if medical attention was not sought. Harel et al¹⁵ also 296 demonstrated that recall for injuries sustained by adolescent (age 14-17 years) 297 boys appears to have a sharper decrease over time than for adolescent girls, for

298 whom recall remains relatively stable. For children 13 years and younger, they 299 reported a similar steady decrease in recall over time for both sexes.¹⁵ This 300 supports our finding that Bantam players were more likely to have disagreement 301 in their concussion history than Midget players, though we were unable to 302 replicate sex-specific differences. Due to the relatively small sample of female 303 players in our study we may have been underpowered to detect this relationship, 304 or elite level female athletes may demonstrate similar sport-specific injury recall 305 to their male counterparts and therefore have equivalent discrepancies in self-306 reported concussion history.

307 Social desirability bias is another potential source of error between PSQ and ImPACT. It has been suggested that youth athletes may under-report 308 309 medical conditions to project a more favorable image to others, particularly in a team setting.^{3,32} The high proportion of athletes reporting more concussions on 310 311 ImPACT compared to the PSQ indicates that this did not affect concussion 312 reporting in this sample. With changing attitudes in the sport community, there is 313 decreasing stigma associated with having sustained a concussion and, as a 314 result, athletes are likely more willing to be transparent about their concussion 315 history.

Similarly, with increased public acceptance of attention problems such as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD),³⁰ adolescents may be more willing to report being diagnosed with one of these conditions. The congruence between PSQ and ImPACT reports of attention disorders support this, although it is interesting that a small proportion (1.5%) of players did not report an attention

disorder on PSQ but reported one on ImPACT. This suggests that not only are
these players comfortable reporting attention problems in team settings, they
may report problems that have not been formally diagnosed or that they are
unwilling to report using a take-home questionnaire. Although these findings
pertain to a very small proportion of our sample, it may point to a valuable area
for future research.

327 The proportion of athletes who did not report a learning difficulty on 328 ImPACT despite a positive response on the PSQ, however, may be evidence of 329 social desirability bias. Although only a small percentage (3.2%) of our total 330 sample reported a learning difficulty on PSQ, 90.5% of those players did not report it on ImPACT. The stigma associated with learning difficulties,³⁶ 331 332 particularly in school-aged children, may have influenced responses on ImPACT because it was administered in a group setting.^{7,20,25,31} As learning difficulties 333 334 have the potential to affect tests of cognitive ability, the method by which 335 adolescents are asked to report their disabilities should be carefully considered, aiven these results.^{6,26} 336

From a clinical perspective, the importance of an accurate concussion history during neurocognitive testing can be debated. Studies have ranged from finding no residual cognitive deficits in children and adolescents following concussion^{2,4} to reporting significant lingering effects of prior concussion.³³ Minor discrepancies between a paper-and-pencil medical questionnaire and ImPACT may therefore be negligible in terms of concussion management. Yet, for the roughly 13% of players in this study who reported no history of concussion using

one instrument and at least 1 concussion on the other, there may be implications
for injury prevention. Because having 1 concussion is a significant predictor of
future concussions,¹²⁻¹³ it is important for baseline evaluations to be accurate to
allow for the most accurate baseline concussion risk assessment.

348 From a clinical standpoint, individuals with a history of multiple 349 concussions may be managed in a more conservative nature than an athlete with 350 a history of 1 concussion. Additionally, clinical monitoring for concussion may be 351 greater in individuals with a greater number of reported previous concussions 352 and result in more conservative management in the event of a suspected 353 concussion. In this study, disagreement in reported number of concussions was greatest for individuals reporting 1 or 2 previous concussions. Thus, depending 354 355 on the methods of reporting concussions an individual may be monitored more or less closely for future concussion. Future studies to compare the number of 356 concussions reported on the PSQ and ImPACT compared with a clinical 357 358 interview would be of benefit.

Differences in self-reported learning difficulties also have the potential to significantly affect baseline and post-concussion evaluations.^{6,26} As such, the PSQ or a similar take-home background questionnaire may be preferable to the medical history portion of ImPACT.

363

364 Limitations

365 Although standardized forms were used to collect the preseason baseline 366 data, it is not known how much input parents had when completing the PSQ. In

367 some cases, parents may have completed the majority of the questionnaire and 368 may have a more accurate recollection/record of the medical history of their child. 369 Individuals who completed the questionnaire with limited parental input may have 370 been more likely to report the same score on repeat guestioning. Alternatively, 371 the participants whose parents completed the entire questionnaire may have not 372 known the parental answers to some of the questions, resulting in interrater 373 variability rather than intrarater variability, as well as unknown measurement 374 bias.

375

376 Future directions

Considering the potential clinical implications of previous concussion history, attention disorders, and learning disorders, it will be important to determine the most valid method of collecting medical history information during concussion assessment. Future studies examining the validity of both paper and computerized self-report approaches are necessary to advance best practice standards in concussion management.

383

384 CONCLUSION

There are sizable discrepancies in self-reported concussion history and learning disorders between the take-home PSQ and the computerized ImPACT test, which may be due to the amount of parental input permitted using the PSQ method. Although differences in how concussion history is documented do not appear to systematically over- or under-estimate the number of previous concussions, there is a tendency to report fewer learning disorders on ImPACT.
Clearly, *how* an athlete is asked to document his or her past history makes a
difference on the answers obtained. Researchers and clinicians should account
for these differences when evaluating youth athletes, but future studies are
needed to determine the validity of both paper and computerized methods of
obtaining medical history information.

396

397 KEY POINTS

398 **Findings:** Youth ice hockey players reported their concussion history and

399 learning disorders differently using a take-home medical questionnaire compared

400 to ImPACT. The number of previous concussions did not appear to be

401 systematically higher or lower using either reporting method, but there was a bias

402 toward underreporting learning difficulties on ImPACT.

403 **Implications:** The interpretation of post-concussion assessments may be

404 influenced by the method of obtaining medical history. Researchers and

405 clinicians should consider parental input when assessing youth athletes, and

406 must be aware of potential biases in self-reported learning disorders.

407 **Caution:** It is unclear whether a take-home questionnaire that allows parental

408 input is more accurate than the ImPACT demographic questions. The validity of

409 both of these methods compared to medical records is unknown.

410

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	Males (n = 601) Frequency (%) or Median (range)	Females (n = 113) Frequency (%) or Median (range)
Age	15 (12-17)	15 (13-17)
Age group		
Bantam (ages 12-14)	166 (27.6)	50 (44.3)
Midget (ages 14-17)	435 (72.4)	63 (55.8)
Competitive level		
AAA	339 (56.4)	113 (100.0)
AA	262 (43.6)	-

Table 1. Participant characteristics.

	PSQ	ImPACT	ICC
	(95% CI)	(95% CI)	(95% CI)
Percentage reporting a previous concussion	41.2	36.4	0.69
(yes/no)	(37.6, 44.8)	(32.9, 39.9)	(0.10, 1.00)
1 previous concussion	32.9	23.7	0.53
	(29.5, 36.4)	(20.6, 26.8)	(0, 1.00)
2 previous concussions	6.2	9.2	0.70
	(4.4, 7.9)	(7.1, 11.4)	(0.11, 1.00)
3 or more previous concussions	1.3	3.5	0.76
	(0.4, 2.1)	(2.2, 4.9)	(0.26, 1.00)
Proportion missing	0.8	-	-
	(0.2, 1.5)		
Percentage reporting attention problems	2.0	3.2	0.95
	(0.9, 3.0)	(1.9, 4.5)	(0.82, 1.00)
Proportion missing	0.3	2.1	-
	(0, 0.7)	(1.1, 3.2)	
Percentage reporting learning difficulties	2.9	0.3	0.94
	(1.7, 4.2)	(0, 0.7)	(0.78, 1.00)
Proportion missing	4.9	2.9	-
	(3.3, 6.5)	(1.7, 4.2)	

533 Table 2. Players reporting previous concussion, attention problem, or learning

534 difficulty at baseline.

	PSQ concussions (Frequency)			
ImPACT concussions (Frequency)	0	1	2	3 or more
0	387	57	4	1
1	25	138	5	1
2	5	33	27	-
3 or more	3	7	8	7

Table 3. Disagreement in PSQ and ImPACT report by number of previous

540 concussions.

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	PSQ (Frequency)		
ImPACT (Frequency)	No	Yes	
Attention problem			
No	672	2	
Yes	11	12	
Learning difficulty			
No	644	19	
Yes	0	2	

Table 4. Comparison between PSQ and ImPACT reports of attention problems and learning difficulties.