

Mental Health Effects on Young Athletes: A Comprehensive Review

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ABSTRACT

Just like physical health, mental health is just as important for any young athlete. This is imperative as mental illness continues to rise in individuals ages 10-24, in addition to the demands that come with playing a competitive sport. The **purpose** of this review of literature was to observe how mental health affects young athletes and their methods of seeking help. Statistics have shown that mental health has taken a toll on younger populations in recent years, and it is important to consider how the components of being an athlete can weigh in. **Methods** throughout these studies consisted of various scales, surveys, and questionnaires to research how mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety have an impact on young individuals who participate in playing a sport, specifically their attitudes towards receiving the help they may need. **Results** showed that there are significant differences of mental health concerns between athletes and non-athletes, especially when there are other factors such as academics involved. Stigmas attached to mental health also showed to be a concern when it came to seeking counseling services, and many said that positive attitudes from figures like coaches would help. This review can be useful for implementing mental health programs and services designed specifically for athletes and bringing more awareness to this issue.

Key Words: Mental health, athletes, counseling

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the stigmas attached to mental illness in athletes?
- How can counseling services be molded specifically for athletes?

METHODS

- The review of literature is divided into the following categories: Attitudes, Barriers, and Facilitators of Seeking Help, Head Injuries and Mental Health, and Counseling for Athletes.
- *Attitude, Barriers, and Facilitators of Seeking Help:* The articles reviewed showed what barriers stand in the way of individuals getting the help they need based on attitudes and perceptions of mental health, and the facilitators encourage help seeking behaviors.
- *Head Injuries and Mental Health:* Damages to the brain are one of the most common injuries in sports. The results of this article showed how traumatic brain injuries affected levels of depression in patients.
- *Counseling for Athletes:* Based on players' perceptions and expectations of counseling services, this review explored how mental health programs can be made specifically for athletes.

CONCLUSION & FUTURE RESEARCH

The studies in this review suggest as mental health and illnesses continue to impact people each day, it is important to develop services that are easily accessible and are able to cater needs to specific populations such as young athletes. This includes research that brings more awareness to the matter of breaking the barriers that keep these individuals from seeking help. Other research could be conducted as to why females have greater odds of experiencing depression, and if that is true among female athletes as well. In addition, the development of counseling services specifically for athletes is suggested throughout the articles as a means for positive health seeking behaviors.

RESULTS

Article Title	Article Findings	Article Review
Young people's help-seeking for mental health problems	The questionnaires showed various types of mental illness such symptoms of depression, emotional distress, and thoughts of suicide were common throughout the answers, along with examining factors that hinder people from taking their psychological distress and seeking help (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, Ciarrochi, 2014).	These results matter because of the increasing number of suicides, especially in young people, due to not receiving the help they need. It is important to acknowledge what people consider as factors hindering them from engaging in help seeking behaviors.
Prevalence of and Risk Factors Associated with symptoms of Depression in Competitive Collegiate Student Athletes	This article showed how widespread symptoms of depression are in college athletes, and the factors that are affiliated in influencing these symptoms in this specific population. It was found that 21% of the subjects had experienced depressive symptoms, and females had greater odds than males, and freshmen had greater chances of symptoms of depression than the seniors (Yang, Peck-Asa, Corlette, Cheng, Foster, 2007).	These results matter because mental illness has an effect on many young individuals who are in college, and a large majority of college campuses are made up of student-athletes. It is important to continue research on this subject and also focus on why females and freshmen collegiate athletes are more at risk.
Social impairment and depression after traumatic brain injury	This study was conducted to evaluate how depression affected social factors in the first year of a traumatic brain injury (Gomez-Hernandez, Max, Koiser, Paradiso, Robinson, 1997). It was found that patients' job satisfaction, fear of job loss, and close interpersonal relationships were all factors that contributed to depression (Gomez-Hernandez et al, 1997).	The importance of these findings is being able to make a difference in the influence of prevalent factors in the early stages of post-traumatic brain injury, such as social interventions as the article suggested (Gomez-Hernandez et al, 1997). This is crucial because head injuries are extremely common throughout sports, and young athletes under the age of 25 are still in the process of fully developing their brains.
Barriers and facilitators to mental health help-seeking for young elite athletes: a qualitative study	The recorded data showed the most significant barrier was stigmas, such as embarrassment, attached to mental illness and seeking help. In addition, poor mental health literacy, lack of transportation, finances, and past experience were other barriers mentioned (Gulliver, Griffiths, Christensen, 2012).	The results here show the importance of fighting the stigma that comes with mental health, as that was one of the main reasons young athletes do not reach out for help. The promotion of facilitators and mental health literacy can improve how these individuals seek the guidance needed in battling mental illness.
Internet-Based Interventions to Promote Mental Health-Seeking in Elite Athletes: An Exploratory Randomized Controlled Trial	In feedback reports of this study, researchers found the online interventions to be helpful in increasing mental health literacy and destigmatizing, but not for an overall improvement in help-seeking behaviors (Gulliver, Griffiths Christensen, Mackinnon, Calear, Parsons, Bennett, Batterham, Stanimirovic, 2012).	Breaking barriers are the first step in increasing the intentions of seeking help and creating positive attitudes toward the action. Also, if the experiment had a larger pool of subjects, it is possible the results would have shown more significant results.
College Student-Athletes' Attitudes Toward Help-Seeking Behavior and Expectations of Counseling Services	It was found that most expectations had a direct influence on the students' attitudes toward seeking help in general. The results also concluded that there were distinct differences between those who were athletes and non-athletes. With this being said, student-athletes had a much more negative attitudes toward getting help than students who did not play a sport (Watson, 2005).	Knowing what exactly is expected should make the creation of mental health programs much more helpful and useful to this population. These could be counseling services that are knowledgeable and have an understanding of it takes to be a young athlete.



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