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Improving Student-Athlete Mental Health Through Wellness Check-Ins

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Improving Student-Athlete Mental Health Through Wellness Check-Ins

by
Emma Strasberger
April 2023

Master's Project

Submitted to the College of Education and Community Innovation

At Grand Valley State University

In partial fulfillment of the
Degree of Master of Education



The signature of the individual below indicates that the individual has read and approved the project of Emma Strasberger in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of M.Ed. in Higher Education, College Student Affairs Leadership.

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Emma Strasberger

Abstract

Mental health is an urgent topic in higher education as many college students are feeling an overwhelming sense of stress, anxiety, and depression. A population of students that significantly struggles with their mental health but does not utilize campus mental health services are student-athletes. Many student-athletes have reported wanting to reach out for help with their mental health, but they do not want to due to the stigma that seeking help makes an individual appear weak. This project explores the recent research regarding access to mental health services among collegiate student-athletes and how removing those barriers can encourage this population to be mindful of their overall wellbeing. In order to support student-athletes and their mental health an intentional wellness initiative should take place to acknowledge the unique needs of the student-athletes. The wellness initiative for Grand Valley State University athletics department addresses the various needs of student-athletes through one-on-one check-ins with coaches to provide a space for reflection and connect through mindful based activities. Additionally, this wellness initiative provides opportunity for coaches to listen and learn more about their student-athletes concerns and experiences to have a better understanding of what they might be going through and become a resource to connect them with different departments on campus.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement

Mental health has been a major concern for higher education institutions since the 1920s when the American College Health Association (ACHA) was established to advocate for student health and wellness (Huey et al., 2020). With the rising cost of college tuition and high academic standards many students experience elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression which becomes problematic when students do not have the proper coping mechanisms to improve their daily lives and wellbeing (Reid et al., 2021). It is important to recognize that there have been efforts made to reduce stigma associated with mental health services and get students informed through promotional campaigns; however, there is a divide between which students go and use the services and then follow up to receive treatment (Dunley & Papadopoulos, 2019). A specific population of students that significantly struggles to reach out for assistance with mental health concerns and overall wellbeing are student-athletes (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020). Therefore, intentional wellness programming for student athletes is a needed service that would be beneficial for this vulnerable population of students.

Importance and Rationale of the Project

Athletes are a unique group of students due to the additional pressures that come with being an athlete on top of academics. Student-athletes feel as though they must uphold a standard of perfection when it comes to their sport, and when they do not meet that standard, they solely focus on how they can become better ignoring their mental capacity (Moreland et al., 2018). If higher education can break down the barriers and increase access to wellness resources, a lot more student-athletes could prevent an issue from arising and have the resources at their fingertips to cope with their mental health. Some of the barriers for student-athletes include the

negative stigma associated with getting help, the location of the building, time commitment, and representation of faculty and staff members (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020). Once these barriers are addressed and an intervention is created for student-athletes specific to their sport, the student-athletes should feel more compelled to reach out for assistance or utilize the resources available to them to get the better.

Currently in 2023, there is a major need for colleges to provide different types of mental health services and wellness initiatives due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a previous student-athlete who has lived and is currently living through the pandemic, I personally know what it feels like to be stressed and not feel like there is a place to go to receive help. My coaches never talked about what resources are available to use, unless there was a significant issue going on. I struggled not having in-person practices, not being surrounded by my peers, and having to keep up with my performance even though we weren't sure when we would be back to normal. I noticed that at my university's counseling centers were overbooked to the point where they must turn away students because there are just too many students needing attention and not enough professionals.

If nothing is done to address the ongoing struggle to gain access to mental health services then there will many students not receiving the health they truly need which can lead to increased rates of suicide (Singh et al., 2021). According to the data collected by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), 1 one in 12 student-athletes reported feeling depression levels so high that it was difficult to function due to feeling overwhelmed and exhausted from the pandemic (NCAA Research, 2020). Higher education institutions need to be better equipped to provide support to student-athletes and care for their emotional wellbeing. The counseling center is a wonderful resource, but it cannot be the only way for student-athletes to receive help.

Wellness needs to be integrated into the daily lives of student-athletes, providing them coping mechanisms to take on the stressors of being an athlete in a collegiate setting, on top of the effects of the continuing pandemic.

Background of the Project

The NCAA established best practices guidelines to be implemented by campus stakeholders to support student-athlete mental health and wellbeing (Sudano et al., 2017). The NCAA strongly recommends that colleges employ a certified athletic trainer or mental health professional who specializes in sports psychology (Zakrajsek et al., 2016). Although this is great in theory, many student-athletes perceive their anxiety and depression or any mental health issue as a weakness to be dealt with on their own. According to Sasso et al. (2021), student-athletes seek informal support from athletic trainers, parents, or sports psychologists or they act in avoidance as a coping strategy. Sasso et al.'s concludes that this is due to hypermasculine culture and social stigmatization as a fear of potential negative consequences if they seek out help (Sasso et al., 2021). To address the stigma associated with mental health concerns, wellness initiatives and campaigns have been in the works for many institutions.

Mindfulness-based stress reduction and positive psychology have been proven effective in psychotherapy, workplaces, and education with reports increasing greater life satisfaction, well-being, and overall performance in practitioners of mindfulness (Wingert et al., 2020). Seligman et al. (2005) developed positive psychology which figured out character strengths, which is defined as positive qualities associated with a person's identity which is used as self-development and psychological well-being in individuals. Niemiec et al. (2012) looked at the Mindfulness-Based Strengths Practice (MBSP) within an 8-week program to help people integrate mindfulness and character strengths into a cohesive curriculum. The researchers found

that programs focused on decreasing problematic (e.g., stress, pain, marital conflict) or psychopathological behavior (e.g., depressive episodes, anxiety, substance use, binge eating) and substituting them for mindful-based stress reduction activities such as meditation helped the participants decrease or get rid of something that is dysfunctional. Similarly, MBSP gave practitioners concrete tools and language to figure out their personality traits, deep perspectives, and become more aware of their character traits to lean into what they enjoy doing and being instead of dwelling on what they are not (Wingert et al., 2020).

The integration of wellness into other student affairs departments like Campus Recreation, Academic Advising, Alcohol and Other Drugs and many more is fairly common in higher education; these departments are all working towards the common goal of helping students become successful on all levels mentally, physically, and academically (Huey et al., 2020). Swarbrick (1997) created the eight dimensions of wellness are looking at many aspects of one's life including physical, social, financial, occupational, emotional, intellectual, environmental, and spiritual wellness. The eight dimensions of wellness is designed to increase mindfulness and provide resources for students to improve overall wellbeing (Swarbrick, 1997). It is important that students are introduced to wellness practices so that they can learn ways to be healthy both physically and mentally.

Evers et al. (2021) tested out a 4-week pilot mindfulness training for student athletes and was proven effective for coping with stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms. After the 4 weeks, student athletes experienced improvement in mental health, overall mindfulness activities and two mindfulness subdimensions of awareness and acceptance (Evers et al., 2021). Correspondingly, Tingaz et al. (2022) studied the relationship between mindfulness and self-related performance in student-athletes and found that mindfulness mediated their role of

depression, anxiety, and stress, The athletes with low levels of stress demonstrated higher levels of performance and the more mindful athletes had lower levels of perceived stress. While mindful interventions have been proven to alleviate symptoms of stressors it is important to note that mindfulness programs can only do so much for the student-athletes and there needs to be structural change as well to assist students with the high demands and stress with being an athlete in college (Evers et al., 2021). Overall, there are policies in place to assist student-athletes and their mental health but there isn't a direct person that is checking up on their overall wellbeing, providing ways to cope with stress, and guiding them to direct resources on campus.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this project is to improve student-athlete wellbeing by developing a wellness initiative to increase awareness of mental health and remove the negative stigma associated with reaching out for help. This training will include original topics and activities for team coaches to use when they are checking-in with each individual student-athlete. This training will be developed to occur two times during the team's pre-season practices and tryouts to better prepare the coaches before interacting with the student-athletes. The trainings will be delivered by wellness coaches who have the professional certification to give wellness advice to team coaches. The content covered at each training will provide training on what it means to be well and principles that can be used to help the student-athletes recognize when they are experiencing signs and symptoms of a mental health disorder. At each wellness check-in, between a player and their coach, there will be resources provided for individual wellness practices, how to recognize when to reach out for help, and where to go to receive additional support. This training for the team coaches will not be limited to the learning that occurs during the workshop but also

having ongoing conversations about student-athlete needs, better ways to support, and strategies to implement wellness application into their daily lives.

Objectives of the Project

- By participating in this project, team coaches will be able to make time and a safe space for student-athletes to check-in on their mental health and wellbeing.
- Team coaches will develop an understanding of the eight dimensions of wellness.
- Team coaches will be able to provide resources to their student-athletes that can help them with their mental health and overall wellbeing.
- Team coaches will be able to recognize when student-athletes are experiencing mental health issues and provide healthy ways to cope with those signs and symptoms.

Definition of Terms

Perceived Public Stigma- (i.e., stigmatization by others) is an individual's perception regarding stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination held by the public toward people with mental illness (Corrigan, 2004, as cited in Chow et al., 2021)

Self-Stigma- reflects the internalization of public stigma by incorporating others; stereotypes and prejudices about people with mental illness into beliefs about oneself (Vogl et al, 2006, as cited in Chow et al., 2021)

Mental Health Literacy- an individual's knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management, or prevention (Jorm et al., 1997, as cited in Chow et al., 2021)

Self-Determination Theory- based on eudaimonic perspective of wellbeing, challenging periods are not necessarily detrimental to wellbeing and can instead enable personal growth and feelings

of achievement depending to some extent on mindset (Dweck, 200; Deci & Ryan, 2012, as cited in Alessandri et al., 2020)

Wellbeing- Hedonistic (enjoyment of positive affective states, happiness, and pursuit of pleasure) and eudaimonic (experiencing meaning and purpose in life) perspectives of wellbeing (Dodge et al., 2012, as cited in Alessandri et al., 2020)

Wellness- a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or illness (World Health Organization, 2023, as cited in *Grand Valley State University*, 2023)

Mindfulness-Based Stress Practice- brings science and best practices of both mindfulness and character strengths together (Wingert et al., 2020)

Positive Psychology- positive qualities associated with a person's identity which is used as self-development and psychological well-being in individuals (Seligman, 2005)

Eight Dimensions of Wellness- identifies eight key dimensions of wellness: emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, and spiritual wellness (*Grand Valley State University*, 2023)

Emotional Wellness- Coping effectively with life creating satisfying relationships (Swarbrick,1997).

Environmental Wellness- Good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being (Swarbrick,1997).

Financial Wellness- Satisfaction with current and future financial situations (Swarbrick,1997).

Intellectual Wellness- Recognizing creative abilities and finding ways to expand knowledge and skills (Swarbrick,1997).

Occupational Wellness- Personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from one's work (Swarbrick,1997).

Physical Wellness- Recognizing the need for physical activity, diet, sleep and nutrition (Swarbrick,1997).

Social Wellness- Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system (Swarbrick,1997).

Spiritual Wellness- Expanding our sense of purpose and meaning in life (Swarbrick,1997).

Scope of the Project

This project will provide structured workshops for team coaches to use to integrate wellness into student-athletes daily lives. This preventative practice will enable student-athletes to have resources and a person of contact at the tips of their fingertips instead of having to book an appointment and talk to a counselor who may not understand their circumstances and unique needs. There will be information that is sport-specific based on the eight dimensions of wellness; physical, social, financial, occupational, emotional/mental, intellectual, environmental, and spiritual wellness. The workshop will be provided with a variety of activities to help student-athletes reflect and be mindful about their mental and physical health and wellbeing. The information for each workshop can be learned by any coach, mentor, or trusted captain/leader, therefore the administrator of the topics does not have to be a licensed counselor or therapist.

It is important to note that the level of buy-in of student-athletes is completely dependent on how invested the sports teams are in supporting wellness. The more fun and encouraged these workshops are, the more student-athletes will believe that this can help them throughout and past their college experience. It is difficult to control how the information for each workshop is presented, however the training for each dimension of wellness will be thorough and extensive in

the hopes that student-athletes will get the most out of these workshops. If sports teams do not have enough time to mandate a wellness workshop, then there will be online options as well that talk through the dimensions of wellness and provide the same resources that would be talked about in-person. The wellness workshop is not designed to be individual counseling sessions led by mental health professionals, rather they are a way to get information out to student-athletes in a safe and encouraging manner.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Student-athletes are unique in that they have a lot of conditional stressors compared to their non-athlete peers; competitions, practices, complex relationships with coaches and university staff members lead to many student-athletes feeling overwhelmed and burnt out (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Experiencing high levels of stress is common among student-athletes which is why they have a hard time recognizing their concerning symptoms and need for professional help like counseling, therapy, or medical assistance (Bissett & Tamminen, 2020). This type of pressure and stress can add up and can create physical symptoms such as headaches, eating disorders, insomnia, anxiety, depression, and even heart conditions (de Souza et al., 2019). Without some sort of treatment or way to cope with their symptom's student-athletes will most likely suffer on their own and not reach out for help (Tingaz et al., 2022). On top of these added pressures student-athletes experience significant barriers that push them away from wanting to receive help, for example the negative stigma associated with getting help, the location of the building, time commitment, sport-specific health professionals and representation of faculty and staff members (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020).

To integrate proper intervention strategies for the student athlete population there must be a deeper sense of help-seeking intentions, proper ways to destigmatize mental health, and an analysis of the barriers to help improve utilization of wellness resources. Self-Determination theory (1985) will be considered along with various aspects of synthesized literature. Both qualitative and quantitative studies will be explored to understand what student-athletes might be struggling with on a day-to-day basis and why they are not utilizing mental health services. Understanding the gaps between literature will be beneficial to see what may be missing as an

intervention form to help student-athletes with their mental health and wellbeing. If institutions can break down the barriers and make mental health a preventative action instead of reactive services, then more student-athletes should feel more compelled to utilize the resources readily available to them.

Theory/Rationale

Student-athlete wellbeing is a personal journey that needs to be nurtured and cared for in order for the athlete to be at their best mentally and physically. Student-athletes are intrinsically motivated when it comes to their sport, therefore they are used to pushing themselves in order to be successful (Alessandri et al., 2020). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) states that humans have an inherent motivational drive to master their social environment through self-determined actions such as motivation, engagement, performance, and well-being (Gagné et al., 2012). SDT is a complicated theory that includes lots of lines of thought to construct of wellbeing (Gagné et al., 2012). If student-athletes learn that improving their overall wellbeing could assist them in school and their sport performance, then will take advantage of the opportunity and put in the work to improve their mental health.

An element of Self-Determination Theory is developing competence. Competent meaning individuals feel as though they can master the challenges and demands that are presented to them (Gagné et al., 2012). Harrison et al. (2015) conducted a study analyzing African American male scholar-athletes and peer influence on motivation. Using SDT to conduct their research, the researchers recommended that student affairs professionals go beyond an introduction or orientation to athletic culture but encourage athletes to get involved on campus and join peer groups that emphasize intellectualism and cultural awareness outside of athletics. This idea helps reinforce becoming competent by putting the power in the students' hands to do

something successfully outside of athletics. Within this proposed project, coaches will talk about how student-athletes can get involved on-campus and different avenues that help relieve stress and improve their wellbeing. The hope is that once they get involved, they see the benefits of coping with stress and continue to do activities that makes them happy.

Another critical aspect of Self-Determination Theory is learning how to live a life with autonomy, meaning that an individual has a sense of psychological freedom and choice without being pressured or coerced into making decisions (Gagné et al., 2012). Academic advisors should advise but not steer student-athletes when they are choosing the courses and selecting a major, the student-athletes should take control over their academic experience by being autonomous (Harrison et al., 2015). The development of autonomy and becoming competent are two skills that come from intrinsic motivation, it is not something that can be pushed upon someone rather it is their own self-determination (Gagné et al., 2012). Providing an opportunity for a check-in with students will not force the students to address their mental health, but it will encourage the students that are intrinsically self-determined. They will learn some good coping mechanisms, skills, and resources to deal with stress and make the necessary changes to live a healthier lifestyle focused on their wellbeing.

Lastly, relatedness is a significant component of Self-Determination Theory. Relatedness is a more external motivator that shows that meaningful social relationships, both giving and receiving, assist in becoming self-determined (Gagné et al., 2012). An example of this is when faculty members establish mentor-mentee relationships with student-athletes for the purpose of creating a safe environment for a sense of relatedness (Harrison, 2015). It is essential that student-athletes can create bonds outside of their sport so that they can be supported throughout

the process and encouraged to take control of their circumstances from intrinsic and extrinsic motivators.

Due to the nature of student-athletes, they are used to internalizing their problems but do not have a safe space to express those feelings or learn about what might actually be going on in their head. My proposed project will use student-athletes self-determination and motivation as fuel to help direct them to focus on their mental health and wellbeing. The proposed project will enable team coaches to meet with their student-athletes on an individual basis to talk about mental health, provide time to reflect on how they are feeling, and get them connected on campus with different programs and resources. If student-athletes are knowledgeable that they are experiencing symptoms of stress, anxiety, or depression they will be more likely to address those issues head on and get to a place where they are able to live life more freely (de Souza et al., 2019). After going through these wellness check-in's student-athletes will gain autonomy over their life and be able to do activities and meet people outside of their sport that can bring joy to their life and improve their overall wellbeing.

Research/Evaluation

The research examined in this literature review will focus on the factors that inhibit student-athletes from utilizing and taking advantage of mental health services on a college campus. When analyzing the scholarly literature, there are a plethora of factors that influence why student-athletes do not use mental health services, like their personal help-seeking intentions, the stigma associated with mental health, and lack of accessibility due to time, location, and specialization. The goal is to understand why student-athletes are not taking care of their mental health and develop a stronger sense of how to eliminate barriers and increase access to getting and receiving help for mental health. Looking through the lens of Self-Determination

Theory, we know that student-athletes must be competent, autonomous, and have a sense of relatedness, therefore it is important when synthesizing literature to understand why student-athletes might not be ready to reach out for help. The factors that will be analyzed in this section will be used to understand intervention strategies that will be constructed and implemented in next Chapter 3.

Help-Seeking Intentions

Awareness and Mental Health Literacy

Student-athletes do not expect to experience mental health issues therefore they do not recognize the need to seek help (Bird et al., 2018). Student-athletes are also more susceptible to not seeking help, due to the fact that athletes' mental health problems are not always physical but can seem invisible (Bissett & Tamminen, 2020). Because of the lack of knowledge about mental health issues student-athletes will be less likely to reach out for assistance since they aren't aware of a problem.

Chow et al. (2021) focused on the impact of a 4-week program on stigma, mental health literacy (MHL), and attitudes and intentions towards seeking help with 33 National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I student-athletes. This study utilized the MHL Scale which is a unidimensional questionnaire with 35 questions about disorder recognition, how to seek mental health information, knowledge on the risk factors and causes, self-treatments, available professional help, and how to promote recognition and appropriate help-seeking (Chow et al., 2021). This one hour, in-person, contact and educational-based group intervention resulted in increased knowledge of MHL which resulted in improvements of attitudes towards mental health illnesses. Correspondingly, Bird et al. (2018) conducted an educational intervention that has been proven effective with teaching about the broad concept of mental health literacy to help student-

athletes to help them learn about the myths and symptoms of psychological disorders and effective treatments. The researchers found that when student athletes reflect on their current mental health state it is positively associated as a coping response (Bird et al., 2018). If students could learn about mental health symptoms and reflect on how they are feeling they might be more inclined to reach out for help when they are experiencing various problems that they recognize as a mental health disorder (Chow et al., 2021).

Social Support

The personal lives of student-athletes are an essential part of fostering help-seeking behaviors (Bissett & Tamminen, 2020). A significant influence on a student-athlete going to receive help are their coaches; if a coach can show interest in student-athletes' personal lives then they can show a more humanistic side to themselves and help the athletes realize they can about their wellbeing (Bissett & Tamminen, 2020). Habebb et al (2022) found that coach connection had the strongest relationship with athlete help-seeking intentions. Athletes indicated that trust was important, they often emphasized they were more likely to seek help when they felt they were understood and cared about by people in positions of power (Habebb et al., 2022). In contrast, Bird et al. (2018) found that student-athletes were significantly more likely to seek help after being referred to a mental health professional by a family member compared to a coach, teammate, or making a self-referral. This is because athletes might feel more comfortable talking with their family members especially if there is a family history of a mental health condition like depression or anxiety (Bird et al., 2018). Although some student-athletes may be more comfortable talking to their family members about their mental health, coaches can still provide insight and resources that emphasize that they may need some extra social support along the way.

Environment

For many student-athletes they view their sport as a place of work or a place of business, not an environment to deal with their emotions or manage their mental health (Habeeb et al., 2022). Habeeb et al. (2022) analyzed organizational factors that impact an athlete's willingness to seek help and found that coach connection had the strongest association with pathways and magnitude for students' help-seeking intentions. The athletes in this study indicated that trust was very important and they were more likely to seek help when they felt they were understood and cared about by people in positions of power. Interestingly, if sport organizations are highly business focused, the coaches can use this perception that mental health is a performance issue and use that to the athletes' advantage to encourage them to seek more formal support (Habeeb et al., 2022).

The importance of good coaching to set a principle for athletes to feel comfortable talking and reflecting on their mental health is also shown in Spandler et al. (2014) study based on using a football metaphor to non-stigmatize the environment. This study held coaching sessions that were in essence group therapy sessions within a football stadium. The coaches facilitated conversations about self-understanding by helping players to identify what kind of person ('player') they are and talking through the limitations of their current coping mechanisms. The coaches also emphasized the importance of achieving one's goals in life or 'score' they must realize that they need outside supporters to help them recognize the diversity of qualities needed to become a 'well-rounded player'. Understanding that athletes might like a team approach better than an individual approach shows how a safe and comfortable environment can lead to student-athletes' willingness to seek and receive help (Spandler et al., 2014).

Another approach that was examined by Habeeb et al. (2022) is the people-first approach which can be used by coaches and sports management to see the athletes as humans with emotions before treating them like athletes working for a business. This people-first approach makes the athletes feel heard which creates an appropriate culture that welcomes help-seeking actions instead of pushing them away to deal with it on their own. Athletes have a very high dependence on their coaches, so the coaches hold the power to create connections between the student-athletes and mental health services (Bissett & Tamminen, 2020).

Destigmatization

Perceived Public Stigma

Student-athletes frequently refuse to seek help from mental health professionals because of the public perceived stigma that surrounds mental illness; this can be seen specifically in Division I athletes because they are constantly being watched and scrutinized by the public eye (Chow et al., 2021). When comparing college athletes to their non-athlete peers Kaier et al. (2015) found that college athletes experienced higher levels of perceived public stigma than personal stigma. These findings suggest that athletes may be more susceptible to internalizing prejudices about mental illness that are pushed on them from the public.

Some of the top public stigma factors that affect student-athletes seeking behavioral health services are the fear of losing scholarship eligibility, losing playing time, and disappointing teammates and coaches (Moore, 2017). How student-athletes are viewed by their team and coaches plays into how they view themselves because they felt as though they would be viewed as “less than” or “not ready to play” if they were seeking out mental health services (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Bird et al. (2021) found that public stigma is positively related to self-stigma which has led to negative attitudes towards seeking help for mental illnesses. Because of

the correlation between personal stigma and perceived public stigma there needs to be change happening both within the sport and outside the sport to change the perception of mental health services (Bird et al., 2021).

Self-Stigma

When looking at why student-athletes do not use mental health services, self-stigma is one of the major factors that was considered in many studies, because there is still a significant association with negative attitudes towards counseling which indicates the need to reduce stigma (Hilliard et al., 2019). A tool used to help measure the attitudes of student-athletes is the “Self-Stigma of Seeking Help” scale, a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), in which participants rate how they might react in each situation regarding their own desire to seek help (Bird et al., 2021; Hilliard et al., 2019; Chow et al., 2021). This tool has been proven useful to show the shame often associated with stigma and how self-compassion can be used to reduce shame (Hilliard et al., 2019). Hilliard et al. (2019) stated, encouraging honest conversation regarding mental health issues and hearing stories from their teammates can further normalize seeking help and the stigma associated with mental health services.

Toughness

Student-athletes are socialized into hypermasculine cultures and are less likely to seek mental health support because they fear of being seen as weak or a failure (Moore, 2017). In a study where student-athletes were asked to describe what deters them from seeking help, they indicated that the fear of being looked down upon due to imperfection in their character would lead to their inability to succeed in their sport (Habeeb et al., 2022). These athletes often used the word “strong” to describe what an athlete should be and described feeling “weird” for experiencing a mental health issue (Habeeb et al., 2022). This is because athletes are taught that

mental toughness is a tool that can be used to produce consistently high levels of performance and the ability to sustain goal-directed behaviors, ignoring the everyday challenges and stressors (Bird et al., 2021).

Sasso et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study that found student-athletes seek informal support for a variety of mental health issues due to stigma, vulnerability, and the fear of appearing weak. A participant spoke about their challenges dealing with mental health and why they felt it would make them feel weak, “you’re expected to be tough, that’s one of the reasons that you play sport, you’re expected to always win and excel... a mental illness is deemed as weak, and that’s just not the type of stereotype that we’re used to having” (Sasso et al., 2021, p. 55). Some male athletes within this study mentioned that they did not want to appear vulnerable and feel emotions such as crying or else others would think they are less capable and unable to deal with the pressures of competition (Sasso et al., 2021).

Similarly, Ryan et al. (2020) found that through qualitative research many of the male participants felt the need to be tough and fit into a hypermasculine box. Although many participants touched on the macho mentality effect that surrounds men’s sports, none of the women student-athletes discussed the same issue in women’s sports (Ryan et al., 2020). The difference between male and female mentality in student-athletes is important to acknowledge especially when addressing an already stigmatized topic like mental health. Females may be more open to talking about their mental health compared to males due to the macho mentality, but it is important to still provide a space for reflection and an opportunity to ask questions in case the student-athletes want to start addressing feeling of being overwhelmed or stressed.

Accessibility

Time

Student-athletes face many stressors that influence their psychological well-being daily including academics, competition, practice, family life, campus engagement, and relationships with coaches and university staff (Miller & Hoffman, 2009, as cited in Wilkerson et al., 2020). Many mental health concerns stem from adjusting the rigor and demands of athletics, managing their time between their athletic and academic responsibilities, and living up to the expectation of others (Sasso et al., 2022). In a study examining the perceived barriers of Black football student-athletes in seeking professional mental health treatment, Wilkerson et al. (2020) found time constraints are a major barrier to student-athletes utilizing mental health services. Participants conveyed that if they are having a difficult time finding time to eat throughout the day and making time for their social life then how can they be expected to have time to utilize professional health services (Wilkerson et al., 2020).

Time is a major barrier for all students, not just student-athletes. There are so many students needing to meet with a counselor that there isn't enough time in the day to schedule an appointment for everyone (Dunley et al., 2019). Students can be on waiting lists for months and by the time the appointment arises the students may no longer be experiencing the same magnitude of distress and not receive help (Dunlet et al., 2019). The time it takes to schedule an appointment is a physical barrier for students due to the fact that there is limited availability for mental health services, and they tend to find the process to be difficult to navigate (Broglia et al., 2021).

Sport-Specific Needs

Student-athletes are unique in that they may require a counselor or psychologist that understands the stress that comes with being both an athlete and a student. Student-athletes do not feel comfortable talking to others about their problems in general, especially a stranger who does not know their specific circumstances (Sasso et al., 2020). It is important for student-athletes to have a variety of resources to accommodate for different needs, including a sport psychologist for the team, counseling center availability, and the programs and services from the university health and wellness center (Ryan et al., 2020).

Wilkerson et al. (2020) suggests sport psychologists should be on the medical staff to make mental health services more accessible to student athletes. The mental health personnel should be very involved and incorporated into team activities to remove the stigma and normalize the programs and services which encourages the athletes to prioritize taking care of themselves mentally and physically (Wilkerson et al., 2020). Lastly, some institutions lack the appropriate services that student-athletes need such as confidentiality, cultural sensitivity, and convenient services to the athletes (Moreland et al., 2018).

Summary

Student-athletes have many stressors that come from having very high expectations for themselves regarding their sport and their future career (Evers et al., 2021). Having to appear tough and strong through the pain takes a major toll on student-athletes mental health (Stamatis et al., 2020). With increased awareness of mental health issues and the services offered on a college campus, student-athletes are able to start thinking about seeking help mental health literacy can significantly aid student-athletes by helping to recognize their experienced

symptoms and go and receive help (Chow et al., 2021). Coaches know their student-athletes and can serve as a person of contact when they are experiencing some mental health concerns.

Many student-athletes value their coaches' input, therefore having a coach that promotes and recommends utilization of mental health services goes a long way with student-athletes (Wilkerson et al., 2020). By providing a space and time for reflection on mental health, that opportunity allows student-athletes to think about what symptoms they may be experiencing and to consider if they need to receive some extra help along the way. Changing the atmosphere from a business environment to a more people-first approach will allow students to feel comfortable talking about what might be bothering them throughout their time in college (Habeeb et al., 2022).

The stigma and fear that student-athletes face is a major barrier to seeking help, student-athletes do not address their mental health because they do not want to be judge by other's (Kaier et al., 2015). Because student-athletes do not want to appear weak they have a negative personal and perceived stigma about using mental health services (Sasso et al., 2021). By initiating conversations about mental health and listening to others' lived experiences, student-athletes can relate to one another and realize it is not weak to go and receive help, rather it makes them stronger. If student-athletes start to see the benefits of working on their mental health issues, then they will be more likely to change that stigma and work together to achieve a more positive outlook on mental health services and attitude towards improving their overall wellbeing.

Another key finding is that student-athletes have very limited time and will not go out of their way to receive help. Because of student-athletes busy schedules, there must be other ways to receive help like having online options, different hours for services, having dedicated time for athletes, or even a sports team professional readily available (Ballesteros & Tran, 2020). It is

important to the student-athletes that the professional they are meeting with be knowledgeable about what they are going through as a student and an athlete. Although accessibility can be difficult with student-athletes busy schedules, the team coaches can be a good starting point to start talking about ways to cope with high levels of stress and if they need some more professional help then they can get them in contact with someone they trust.

Conclusion

Social support is a key factor in improving student-athlete mental health and overall wellbeing. When student-athletes feel supported through their coaches they build trust that allows them to work on areas of growth if they are experience high levels of stress, anxiety, or even depression. It is important to change the athletic culture of being tough and dealing with mental health issues on their own to an environment that promotes self-awareness and opportunities for healing. Providing training for team coaches on student-athlete wellbeing is the first step towards changing around the stigma around mental health.

The proposed project will be an informative training for team coaches, that provides ways in which the coaches can check-in with their student-athletes wellbeing and help facilitate conversation around mental health. This integrative wellness initiative will help the coaches connect more with their athletes and feel well prepared to talk about the stressors associated with the rigor of being a student-athlete. Once the team coaches have proper training and an understanding of their student-athlete needs they will be able to bridge the gap between a lack of knowledge and connect them to a program or service that can assist their athletes. The coaches will also be able to teach and utilize mindful based stress reduction and positive psychology as a way to cope with some mental health disorders that their athletes face. Following the training

will be ways coaches can evaluate and get feedback on if this wellness initiative has made an impact on their student-athletes mental health and overall wellbeing.

Chapter Three: Project Description

Introduction

Although most higher education institutions have mental health services like a counseling center, a population of students that significantly needs assistance with their mental health and overall well-being is student-athletes. The unique stressors of student-athletes can come from coaches, competitions, and scheduling demands which puts this group of students at risk for psychological and academic difficulties (Evers et al., 2021). Student-athletes significantly struggle with their mental health and tend to not reach out for assistance because of their drive to push through the pain and the stigma associated with needing professional help. In recent years, mindfulness-based interventions have emerged as promising strategies for alleviating the burden of stress in college students specifically student-athletes (Evers et al., 2021). This information clearly explains the importance of student-athletes' mental health and the need for intentional wellness programming. Mindfulness-based interventions may be beneficial for student-athletes to help with reducing depression, anxiety, and stress which ultimately increases sports performance (Tingaz et al., 2022). These mindfulness practices need to be embedded into student-athletes' everyday interactions.

This project will provide structured training for team coaches to implement with their student-athletes to help improve their overall mental health and well-being. This training will improve mental health literacy to recognize symptoms, coping mechanisms, mindfulness strategies, and resources to provide their athletes when they need extra assistance along the way. Following this introduction will be an overview of the project components, a detailed plan for evaluating the effectiveness of the project, overarching conclusions that can be drawn from the project, and explicit plans for implementation.

Project Components

Since student-athlete mental health is a topic of concern, working towards improving their overall wellbeing is extremely important. Because student-athletes need to be both physically and mentally well to perform at their best, there needs to be an intervention that addressed the barriers they have reported like time, location, and sport-specific needs, and the stigma associated with mental health services. Therefore, I am proposing a wellness initiative for student-athletes within this project. This project is designed to inform the team coaches on ways to implement wellness into a check-in meeting with their student-athletes. This wellness check-in will be a way that coaches can better connect with their student-athletes while also being a person of contact to connect them to other mental health services and support systems. While participating in this training, coaches will be given the opportunity to increase their knowledge of student-athlete barriers, theories that can be used to better understand the athletes, wellness practices through positive psychology and mindful-based stress reduction, the eight dimensions of wellness, and resources that are available to student-athletes to improve their overall wellbeing.

This project includes material for two presentations, that are designed to be presented to the team coaches during pre-season practices and tryouts. The presentations were created to be included as a training and onboarding process for the team coaches so that they know how to integrate wellness into their coaching practices throughout the academic year. The presentations give helpful strategies and methods to get student-athletes thinking about their mental health but can also be altered to talk about their sport-specific needs. For example, a basketball coach may download the presentation used for the training and add questions about basketball conditioning to connect better with the student-athletes and get real feedback about what is going on with

them as individuals. The presentations are intended to be a guide for student-athlete check-in meetings and not a required structure. The training is designed to cover each of the eight dimensions of wellness over the course of two semesters, which is equivalent to one dimension of wellness per month. In the end, there will be time used for discussion and brainstorming of ways wellness can be integrated more into the sport.

Training Day One

The first presentation (Appendix A) talks about what the literature has to say about student-athletes and mental health. The slideshow presentation mentions barriers student-athletes face like mental health literacy, social support, environment, stigma, accessibility, and importance of sport-specific needs. It then proceeds to talk about self-determination theory and how student-athletes are motivated by engagement, performance, and well-being. The presentation will give an example of how the institution would like the team coaches to implement this wellness initiative with their student-athletes with monthly check-in meetings. Lastly, there will be a quick overview of all of the resources available on campus that student-athletes have access to throughout the year. It is important to be an advocate for these resources so that it reduces stigma and helps the student-athletes make connections to receive the help they need.

Training Day Two

The second presentation (Appendix B) goes more in-depth about what each check-in meeting could entail. The way the second presentation is formatted by listing all eight dimensions of wellness and how they can be integrated into the student-athletes' lives. It recommends asking mindful-based questions or reflections to get the student-athletes' thinking, then goes into teaching about a specific dimension of wellness, and finally provides resources if they would like to reach out for more assistance. All of the questions and mindfulness activities are

recommendations that can be used to help the student-athletes understand the importance of diving deep within to reflect on how they are truly feeling at that moment. It is imperative to end each meeting by providing the student with other resources on-campus in case they want to follow up for additional help or information.

Wellness Team

The Recreation and Wellness department at Grand Valley State University has wellness coaches who are certified as a health coach and student wellness navigators that put together presentations to help students cope with various stressors. The wellness coaches have the knowledge and expertise to teach the team coaches this wellness initiative and give helpful tips while working with student-athletes. The wellness coaches along with the help of the student wellness navigators will be presenting these trainings to the athletic team coaches. Prior to the trainings the wellness coaches and navigators would be work with the athletic department to learn more about how the team coaches interact with their student-athletes to have a better understanding of how to schedule these individual check-ins. The goal is to make the trainings as relevant as possible so that the team coaches know how to address each dimension of wellness to their student-athletes. The primary objectives are how to make create time in their schedule to create a safe space for student-athletes to check-in on their mental health and wellbeing, therefore the presenters need to know how different team coaches and sports team's function.

The wellness team is well versed with the eight dimensions of wellness; therefore, they need to be able to communicate that to the team coaches so that they have a general understanding of each dimension and can refer their students to the wellness coaches and navigators for more information and resources. Another objective is that the team coaches will learn more resources offered to be knowledgeable about the different programs and services and become an advocate

for getting connected on-campus. If a coach recognizes that a student-athlete is struggling with their mental health, these wellness check-ins will service as a safe space to refer them to seek counseling by a mental health professional. These trainings are not to intended to teach team coaches to counsel their student-athletes, rather these trainings are intended to teach them how to bond more with their athletes, provide them a space for reflection and mindfulness, and help them connect to resources if they need extra assistance.

Post Training

After the trainings will be an exit ticket survey that is designed for the team coaches to reflect on everything that they have learned and provide an opportunity for them to think about how this wellness initiative is relevant and applicable. The proposed schedule for wellness check-in meetings within the presentation may not work for all team coaches but the hope is that they are able to pull from these trainings and develop some type of meeting with their student-athletes to help them know that they care about their mental health and overall wellbeing. The exit ticket survey as serves as a way for the team coaches to provide feedback for future trainings. By reading through feedback, that should inform the wellness coaches on what they did well, what needs some improvement, and how can they do things differently to make the training run more efficiently. Lastly, there is an opportunity for the team coaches to learn more about the different programs and services on campus if they feel as though they did not learn enough information in these trainings.

These pieces of training are intended to equip student-athletes with mindful-based practices to cope with mental health issues and to help foster connections on campus. This training hopes that by educating the team coaches on the importance of wellness practices and the positive effects that can occur, this knowledge will be transferred to the student-athletes. The intentional

focus on student-athlete mental health will become more naturally embedded in the athletic culture throughout these wellness check-in meetings. Optimistically, student-athletes will feel more comfortable talking about their mental health and reach out for assistance if they have a person of contact every month throughout the semester. The team coaches will ultimately become advocates for student-athlete mental health and wellbeing.

Project Evaluation

This project will be evaluated by measuring the effectiveness of this training program for team coaches through an exit ticket survey (Appendices C). The questions will be used to assess the coach's knowledge on the eight dimensions of wellness and the different resources to recommend for their student-athletes, how to recognize when student-athletes are experiencing mental health concerns and provide health ways to cope with those signs and symptoms, and a plan for implementing this wellness initiative into practice. The exit ticket survey will be open note so they can go back and reflect on the topics talked about in the training. The eight dimensions of wellness is a lot to remember at first, therefore it is valuable to go back and revisit topics that were discussed during the training. The team coaches do not need to be experts by the end of this training but have a good base to start the conversations with their students-athletes and then can refer them to professionals when they have more questions or concerns. This exit ticket survey is not a test, rather a way to evaluate if the team coaches are learning about wellness and will be using this training to implement wellness into their coaching practices.

The first question on the exit ticket survey address's objective two from chapter one and asks the team coaches to list the eight dimensions of wellness and a brief summary of the term, this will ensure that the team coaches know these wellness terms and by definition. The term itself can make the team coach feel confident they are able to inform the student-athletes on what it

means to be well in all of these eight categories of wellness. If all eight dimensions are listed with definitions by the team coaches, then this training was successful at meeting the objective on learning the eight dimensions of wellness.

To address objective three, the second question lists the different resources on campus and encouraging the team coaches to go to their specific department and learn more if they are not familiar with their programs and services. This question enables team coaches to learn what services they currently know about and which ones they would like to learn more about. The training talks about each department briefly but there is opportunity to learn more about by answering the follow up question where the team coaches are asked which department you would like more information on. From that question, the coaches will be sent information from that department directly to learn more about what they can offer for their student-athletes and what programs and services they offer in general.

Addressing objective one, the third question asks how the team coaches will implement this wellness initiative into practice. This question is to get the coaches thinking how is this applicable and how can it be worked into their schedule. The training recommends having one-on-one check-ins with student-athletes once per month. This would enable the coaches to build close relationships with their student-athletes and time them time to reflect on their mental health and overall wellbeing throughout the semester. By creating a plan this shows that coaches are taking this training serious and can be held accountable for implementing wellness with their student-athletes. The plan should include mindful based activities and positive psychology activities which also addresses objective four that team coaches will be able to recognize when students are experiencing mental health issues and provide healthy ways to cope with those signs and symptoms.

The final questions are to evaluate how this training could be improved in the future. By seeing what was important that they learned can inform the next training to keep that information and by looking at what could make this training more effective could provide a space for team coaches to talk about the presentation format, the times of the trainings, the load of the presentations, etc. It is important to get feedback so that the coaches feel supported and heard throughout their time with the institution.

Project Conclusion

Using the training provided in this project, team coaches can provide their student-athletes with a space safe for reflection, knowledge about mental health, and resources in order to help them with their overall wellbeing. As Stamatis et al. (2020) states, performance in sports may be the ultimate goal but mental toughness and self-compassion are skills that can assist with student-athletes' positive psychological health and overall well-being. Building a team environment that has trust, respect, and honesty takes time but is extremely important so that student-athletes can get the help they need or use coping mechanisms in order to live a healthier lifestyle. If a coach can show a softer side and become interested in student-athletes' personal lives then they can show a more humanistic side to themselves and help the athletes realize they can about their wellbeing (Bissett & Tamminen, 2020).

Team coaches are not expected to be counselors or mental health professionals, rather they are there to support their athletes and be a guide to different resources on-campus. Student-athletes enjoy a team approach and prefer to talk to someone that understands what they are going through as a student and an athlete (Spandler et al., 2014). My proposed program demonstrates how imperative it is that team coaches to be well informed and have training on student-athlete mental health. Therefore, requiring that every student-athlete participate in these

wellness check-ins will demonstrate to the team that their mental health and wellbeing is a priority and that they are supported along the way throughout their academic and athletic journey.

A question that remains regarding this topic is how in-depth team coaches will go during wellness check-ins. Coaches have very limited time and meeting with each and every student-athlete can seem overwhelming, but the hope is that they will meet with each student so that wellness can start to be infused into their lives. Much of the success with these wellness check-ins will be up to the team coaches and how much effort they put into each student-athlete. The more informed and willing there are to learn about wellness practices and do research on mindful-based practices the more personable and caring the coach will seem to their athletes. In addition, since each coach has a different personality there is no guarantee that they will feel comfortable addressing mental health and wellbeing.

In conclusion, students-athletes mental health has been a growing problem over the past few decades. This specific group of students have been taught to tough it out and move on without any kind of support or resources. By team coaches taking the time to talk to their student-athletes, the hope is that they can reduce the stigma associated with mental health and start conversations to encouraging them to work on their overall wellbeing. Through the strategies and activates covered in this wellness initiative training, coaches are provided with various ways to check-in with their student-athletes and get them connected to the proper resources.

Plans for Implementation

This project will be implemented at Grand Valley State University, a division two university, located in Western Michigan. The wellness initiative training for team coaches will

take place during pre-season practices and tryouts so that the coaches do not have to come to campus before the start of their season. This training will be over the span of two sessions approximately 60 to 90 min in length. The Assistant Director of Wellness and their team would facilitate the trainings with support from Counseling and Alcohol and Other Drugs. These training sessions would be mandatory for all team coaches to go through in-person, however if there are circumstances where the coach is unable to show up the trainings will be recorded. All coaches in-person or virtual will participate in the exit ticket survey to ensure that all coaches are knowledgeable and are able to implement wellness into their practices. Optional opportunities will be offered for the team coaches if they would like to continue learning more about wellness activities offered on campus. The team coaches that implement the suggested pre-survey and post-survey (Appendix D) for the student-athletes will be examined by the Athletics department and share out on the athletics website to show how Grand Valley State University is focused on student-athlete wellbeing.

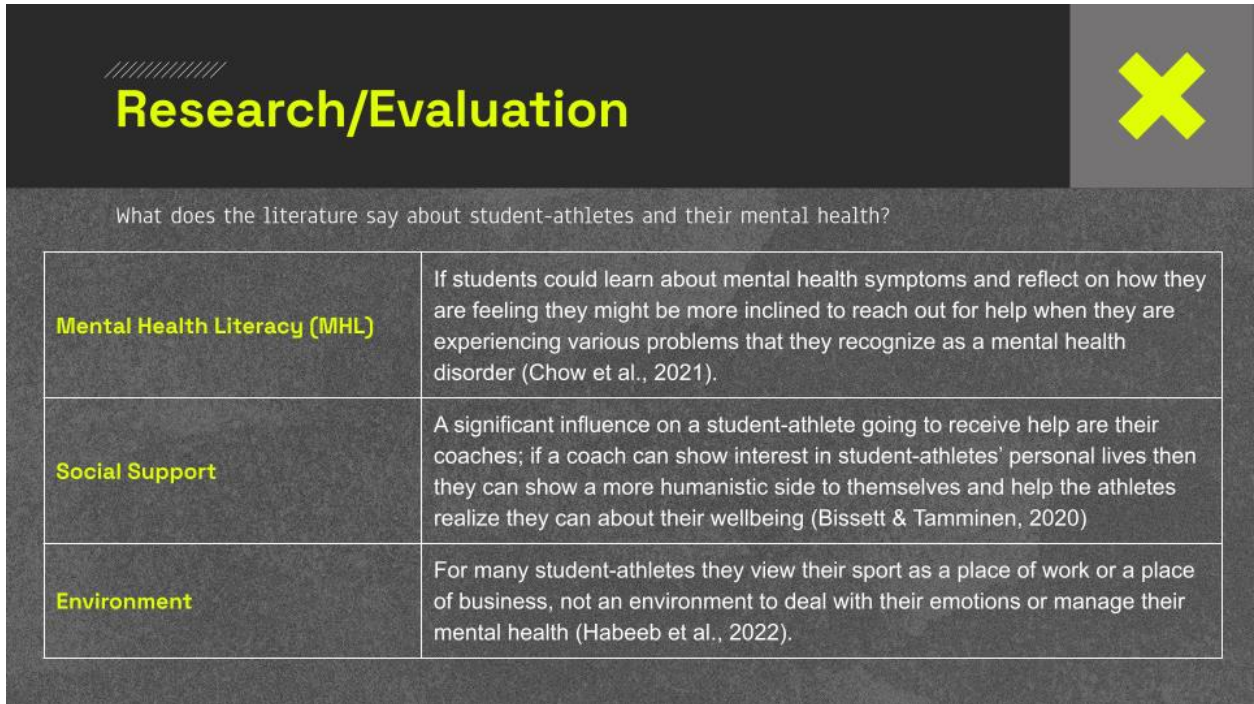
Appendix A

Student-Athlete Wellness Initiative: Overview Presentation



Student-Athlete Wellness Initiative

Training Day 1: Why are student-athletes not utilizing mental health services, what are the major stressors associated with being a collegiate athlete, and what can you do to help?



Research/Evaluation

What does the literature say about student-athletes and their mental health?

Mental Health Literacy (MHL)	If students could learn about mental health symptoms and reflect on how they are feeling they might be more inclined to reach out for help when they are experiencing various problems that they recognize as a mental health disorder (Chow et al., 2021).
Social Support	A significant influence on a student-athlete going to receive help are their coaches; if a coach can show interest in student-athletes' personal lives then they can show a more humanistic side to themselves and help the athletes realize they can about their wellbeing (Bissett & Tamminen, 2020)
Environment	For many student-athletes they view their sport as a place of work or a place of business, not an environment to deal with their emotions or manage their mental health (Habeeb et al., 2022).



Research/Evaluation



What does the literature say about student-athletes and their mental health?

Stigma	How student-athletes are viewed by their team and coaches plays into how they view themselves because they felt as though they would be viewed as "less than" or "not ready to play" if they were seeking out mental health services (Wilkerson et al., 2020).
Accessibility	The time it takes to schedule an appointment is a physical barrier for students due to the fact that there is limited availability for mental health services and they tend to find the process to be difficult to navigate (Broglia et al., 2021).
Sport-Specific Need	It is important for student-athletes to have a variety of resources to accommodate for different needs, including a sport psychologist for the team, counseling center availability, and the programs and services from the university health and wellness center (Ryan et al., 2020).



Major Stressors



What are some specific examples of stressors that your student-athletes have told you about?

- Sleep
- Nutrition
- Grades
- Jobs
- Friends
- Family
- Competitions
- Conditionings
- Practices
- Mental health
- Injuries
- Relationships

In recent years, mindfulness-based interventions have emerged as promising strategies for alleviating the burden of stress in college students specifically student-athletes (Evers et al., 2021).



Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) states that humans have an inherent motivational drive to master their social environment through self-determined actions such as motivation, engagement, performance, and well-being (Gagné et al., 2012).

- Developing Competence
- Autonomy
- Relatedness

Due to the nature of student-athletes, they are used to internalizing their problems but do not have a safe space to express those feelings or learn about what might actually be going on in their head. This wellness initiative will use student-athletes self-determination and motivation as fuel to help direct them to focus on their mental health and wellbeing.



Goal: Enable coaches to meet with their student-athletes on an individual basis to talk about mental health, provide time to reflect on how they are feeling, and get them connected on campus with different programs and resources.



Wellness Practices



Mindful-Based Stress Reduction

Niemiec et al. (2012) found that programs that incorporated mindfulness practices decreased problematic (e.g., stress, pain) and psychopathological behavior (e.g., depressive episodes, anxiety, substance use). By substituting stressors with mindful-based stress reduction activities such as meditation helped the participants decrease or get rid of something that is dysfunctional.



Positive Psychology

Seligman et al. (2005) developed positive psychology which figured out character strengths, which is defined as positive qualities associated with a person's identity which is used as self-development and psychological well-being in individuals. Finding what student-athletes are good at helps them lean into what they enjoy doing and being instead of dwelling on what they are not.





Semester #1

Meeting 01

Physical

Ways to deal with Injuries, stress symptoms, and the importance of cross training

Meeting 03

Emotional

Ways to cope with the pressures and stress of being a student-athlete

Meeting 02

Social

Ways to connect with other students on campus

Meeting 04

Intellectual

Ways to be creative and find passions outside of their sport



Semester #2

Meeting 05

Environmental

Sustainable living habits

Meeting 07

Financial

Scholarship eligibility, saving and budgeting

Meeting 06

Spiritual

Mediation, Reflection, Reading, Religion, Personal Growth.

Meeting 08

Occupational

Major, future careers and goals





Check-In Meeting Break Down



How are you doing?

Start with having a conversation with the student-athlete to see how they are doing and where their mind is at for the meeting.



Topic of the week

Introduce the dimension of wellness and give a brief overview about what it is and why it is important to think about.



Resources available

Encourage the student-athletes to utilize the resources on campus that can assist with that specific dimension of wellness.



Mindful Based activity

End the session with some time for reflection. Spark some interest in how the dimension of wellness is actually applicable in their lives and can be beneficial.



Check-in

		Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
	Student name:					
	Student name:					
	Student name:					
	Student name:					



Check-in

		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
	Student name:				
	Student name:				
	Student name:				
	Student name:				



Goals & Outcomes



Decreases Stigma



Fosters Relationships

Increases Support



Improves Retention

Develops Coping Mechanisms



Strengthens Overall Performance



Alternative resources

What is on campus? Where can student-athletes go for more support?

- **Counseling Center:** Professional therapists
- **Recreation & Wellness:** Group Fitness, Personal Training, Intramural Sports, Club Sports, Wellness Coaching, etc.
- **Alcohol & Other Drugs:** Resources and support for drinking and drug usage
- **Tutoring Center:** Academic support
- **Career Center:** Career navigation and employment opportunities
- **Student Life:** Join clubs, organizations, fraternity and sorority life



Created by Emma Strasberger, 2023

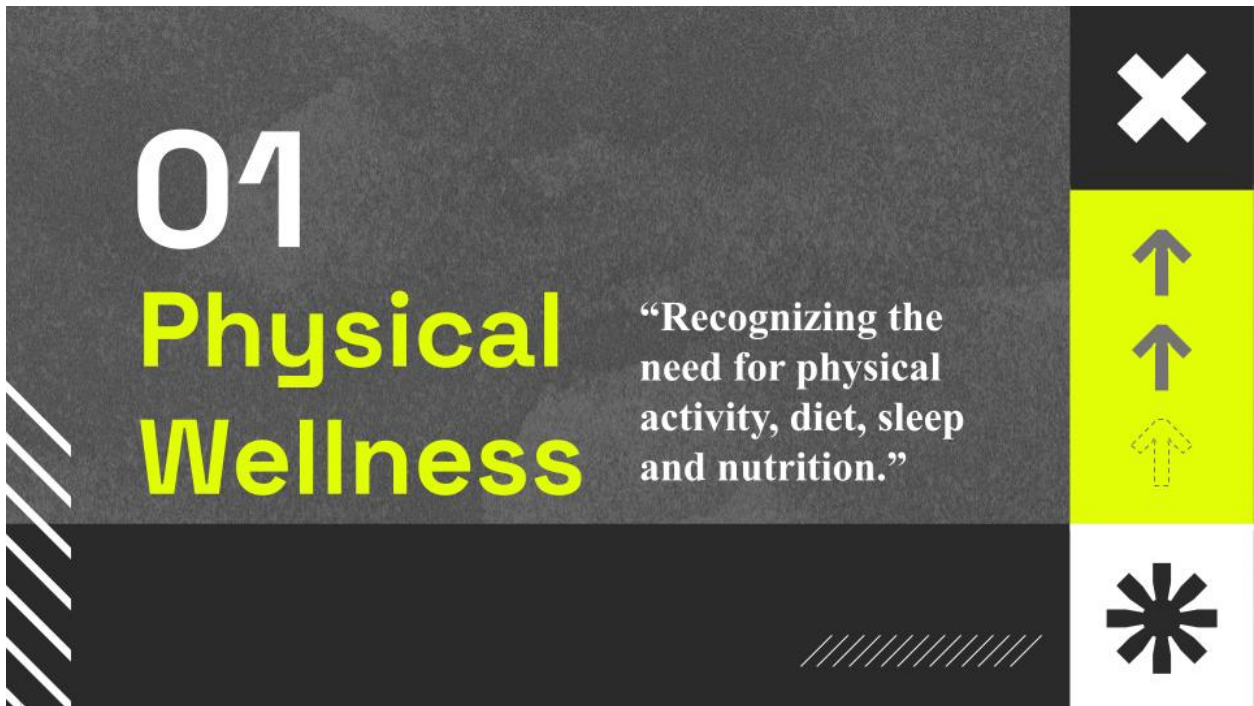
Appendix B

Student-Athlete Wellness Initiative: Eight Dimensions of Wellness Presentation



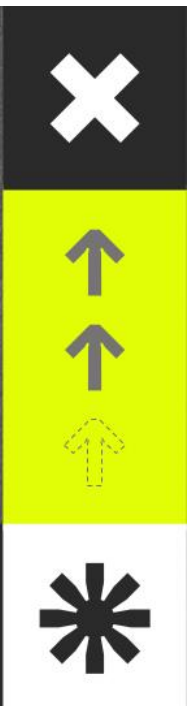
Student-Athlete Wellness Initiative

Training Day 2: Physical, Social, Emotional,
Intellectual, Environmental, Spiritual,
Occupational and Financial Wellness

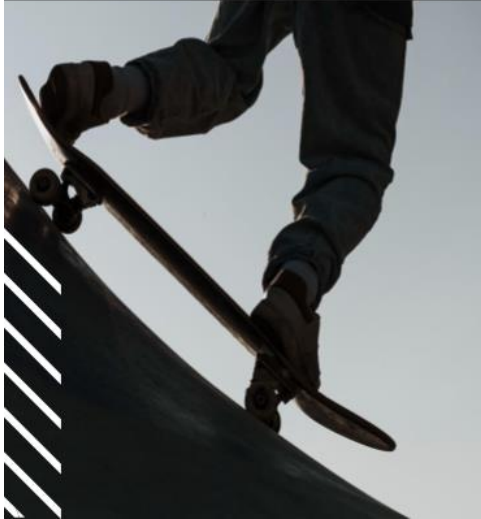


01 Physical Wellness

“Recognizing the
need for physical
activity, diet, sleep
and nutrition.”



Physical Activity, Sleep & Nutrition



Mindful Based Activity- Journaling

Physical Activity: Do you have any injuries that you are concerned with? Do you ever experience chronic or acute pain during practice? Do you feel like your body can handle all of our practices, conditionings, and games?

Sleep: What does your sleep schedule look like? Do you feel well rested after sleeping? What are the benefits of getting enough sleep? Do you ever dream when you sleep?

Nutrition: Do you feel like you eat enough food throughout the day? What do you like to eat on a daily basis? Are you a picky eater? Do you have any food restrictions, if so how has that impacted your experience with eating?

02 Social Wellness

“Developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system.”



Improving Social Wellness



1. Surround yourself with people who you can trust and you know care about you.
2. Communicate clearly when dealing with conflict.
3. Make at least one good friend you can count on.
4. Get involved with a student organization.
5. Be okay being alone

Mindful Based Activity- Exploration

Browse through all of the different student life activities, student organizations on campus, intramural sports team, group fitness classes and pick two that interest you. Think of someone you can invite to attend one of those activities with and reach out to them.

03

Emotional Wellness

“Coping effectively with life creating satisfying relationships.”





Positive Psychology



Mindful Based Activity- Reflection on the times you felt stressed or pressured

Step 1: think of one thing you are stressed about and one thing you look forward to

Step 2: share the two stories out loud

Step 3: direct attention to how it feels to speak, how it feels to talk about something stressful as well as how it feels to share something positive

Step 4: observe your own thoughts, feelings, and body sensations

Step 5: reflect on how it felt to explore these experiences past and future

04

Intellectual Wellness

“Recognizing
creative
abilities and
finding ways to
expand.”





Personality Tests



Choose one of these personality test to learn more about your personal characteristics. Finding out more about your personality can help you cope with stress, navigate difficult situations, and grow as an individual.

[Big 5 Personality Test](#) - Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism with this scientific personality assessment.

[16 Personalities Test](#)- Learn about how your personality can influence different aspects of your life.

05

Environmental Wellness

“Good health by occupying pleasant, stimulating environments that support well-being.”





Unplugging from Technology



Improving Environmental Wellness

1. Make your room a place where you feel comfortable, safe, and at ease in.
2. Keep mementos of things that are important to you.
3. Find time to explore nature.
4. Unplug from technology.

Mindful Based Activity: Spend 5 minutes creating a list on a piece paper of activities you want to accomplish today, this week, and within the next month. Focus on activities that help you clear your mind, ways you can get out in nature, or how to make your personal space more organized.

06

Spiritual Wellness

“Expanding our sense of purpose and meaning in life.”





5 mins of Meditation



Mindful Based Activity

1. Box Breathing technique- breath in for 4 seconds, hold your breath for 4 seconds, breath out for 4 seconds. Taking deep breaths in and out to focus your attention on breathing.
2. Visualization or guided imagery- visualization scripts can be found on YouTube, to help you imagine yourself in a safe environment like a sunny beach or wooden forest.
3. Body Scan or progressive relaxation- Think about each body part starting at your feet and move your way up to your head. How does your body feel in this exact moment? What parts feel tension? If something feels tense go ahead and stretch it out.

07

Occupational Wellness

“Personal satisfaction and enrichment derived from one’s work.”





Career Goals



Mindful Based Activity- Journal

Short term goals: Write out three short term focused goals. What is something you would like to accomplish by the end of the semester?

Long term goals: Write out three long term goals. What do you want your life to look like in 1 year from now, 3 years from now, 5 years from now?

Reflection: How will you achieve your goals? What are the benchmarks used to measure your goals? What do you need help with ex. Resume, Cover Letter, How to find jobs, What can you do with your degree, etc.

08

Financial Wellness

“Satisfaction with current and future financial situations.”





Mindful Money Habits



Here is a time to talk about compliance for scholarships and talk about financial aid. Many students struggle to understand how to take out loans and when to start paying them back.

Mindful Based Activity- Self Reflection without Judgment

Think about all of the purchases you made within the past week or two weeks. Is there an area that you spend more of your money on, are you struggling to pay your phone bills or rent, do you feel you spend enough money on food.

*If it would be helpful download an app on your phone to help start budgeting for next months expenses.



Thanks!

Please fill out the Exit Ticket Survey before you leave.

Visit <https://www.gvsu.edu/studentwellness/> for more information on the eight dimensions of wellness at Grand Valley State University.

Personal Contact: strasbee@mail.gvsu.edu



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Appendix C

Wellness Initiative Post Training Exit Ticket

Post Training- Exit Ticket

To complete this wellness initiative training, please answer the following questions. You may use the notes you have taken during the presentations. Please answer as honestly and truthfully as possible. Your feedback is important and valued for future trainings!

1. Name

2. Email

3. Team name

4. Please list the eight dimensions of wellness with a brief summary or definition.

5. Please check off all of the resources you are currently familiar with on-campus

Check all that apply.

- Counseling Center
- Recreation and Wellness
- Alcohol and Other Drugs
- Tutoring Center
- Student Life
- Career Center

6. Please list which departments from above that you would like to learn more information from.

7. Please explain how you will implement this wellness initiative into your coaching practice?

8. What are three important things you learned from this training?

9. Did you feel better prepared for integrating wellness into your coaching practices? Why or why not?

10. What would help make this training more effective?

11. Any additional questions, comments, or concerns?

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Appendix D

Wellness Initiative Pre-Survey Assessment for Student-Athletes

Pre-survey for Student-Athletes

Please answer as honestly as possible so that we can get to know you a little more!

* Required

1. Name *

2. Email *

3. How often do you feel stressed? *

Mark only one oval.

- All of the time
- Most of the time
- Some of the time
- Rarely
- Never

4. What is your main source of stress? *

1 p

Check all that apply.

- Family
- Friends
- Work
- Medical
- Financial
- Relationship
- Sport related
- School related

5. Have you ever sought help to manage your stress? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

6. If Yes (please specify if you would like)

7. If so, did it help

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

8. What activities do you do for fun or relaxation?

9. Please what type of exercise you do outside of your sport requirements

Mark only one oval.

- yoga
- dance
- Pilates
- running
- biking
- walking
- Kickboxing
- Swimming
- weight training
- other

10. If other, please specify (if you would like)

11. How many hours of sleep do you get each night?

Mark only one oval.

- 1-2
- 2-3
- 3-4
- 4-5
- 5-6
- 6-7
- 7-8
- 8+

12. Do you take naps during the day?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- Sometimes
- Never

13. How many meals do you eat per day?

Mark only one oval.

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4+

14. Do you feel you have a well balanced diet?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- Somewhat
- No

15. Which areas of the 8 dimensions of wellness are you knowledgeable about?

Check all that apply.

- physical
- social
- occupational
- financial
- environmental
- spiritual
- intellectual
- emotional

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