

## The Relationship Between Stress Mindset and Prior Injury in College Student-Athletes

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### ABSTRACT

Stress has often been associated with negative outcomes for both physical and mental health. However, there is also evidence that stress can yield positive outcomes, including health improvements and increased performance. Stress mindset, or how one evaluates or views the nature of stress, helps explain how stress can result in such extreme positive and negative outcomes. College students in the United States experience high levels of stress and have been found to view stress as more debilitating than enhancing. Stress also appears to play a role in athletic injury risk. An individual with particular risk factors, such as a previous injury, is more likely to appraise a situation as stressful, resulting in physiological or attentional changes that increases their level of risk for sustaining an injury. Research suggests that previous injuries can put an athlete at risk for another injury, however, research has also found previous injuries can result in significant growth and positive outcomes following the injury. One potential explanation for these two vastly different outcomes could be how the athlete views stress, such as an injury. **PURPOSE:** The aim of this study was to examine the relationship between stress mindset and previous injury in a college student-athlete population. **METHODS:** Current college student-athletes ( $N=87$ ) over the age of 18 completed demographic information, previous injury history, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), and Stress Mindset Measure (SMM) via Qualtrics, an online survey tool. A Spearman rank-order correlation was performed to assess the associations between stress mindset, perceived stress, and previous injury, as measured by total number of sport injuries, number of sport injuries over the previous 12 months, and the number or practice or competition days missed or modified due to injury. **RESULTS:** No significant relationship was observed for stress mindset and total number of sport injuries ( $r_s(84) = -.008, p = .939$ ). Likewise, no significant relationship was also found for stress mindset and injuries over the past year ( $r_s(82) = -.053, p = .632$ ). No significant relationship was found for stress mindset and injury days missed ( $r_s(81) = .002, p = .983$ ). Stress mindset was not related to previous injury in this study. However, the PSS was significantly positively related to the total number of sport injuries ( $r_s(76) = .229, p = .044$ ). **CONCLUSION:** No statistically significant relationship was found between stress mindset and previous injuries in current college student-athletes, consistent with findings from the only other study to date to examine the concept of stress mindset in conjunction with sport injury. However, a statistically significant relationship was found between perceived stress and total number of injuries, providing further support to the large body of research linking amount of stress and injury. Although the relationship between stress mindset and previous injury was nonsignificant in the present study, it is still possible that stress mindset may play a role in an athlete's response to an injury, which was not assessed in this study. Thus, future research should explore how one's stress mindset impacts an athlete's response to an injury.