

The Impact Athletic Trainers Have on Post-Injury Mental Health Concerns with Secondary School Athletes

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ABSTRACT

Mental health has always been part of an individual's life concerns. Recently, it has become of a bigger topic as the stigma surrounding it has decreased and people have talked more openly about it. **PURPOSE:** As the knowledge of mental health has grown, it is important to analyze any impact that injuries have had on athletes. It is known that time-loss injuries may lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental health concerns in those who heavily identify with their athletic personality especially at the high school level. Of importance, is the role that having an athletic trainer may have in decreasing the level of mental health concern in the injured athlete. **METHODS:** This research surveyed former high school athletes that aged 18 and older. Consisting of 15 questions, this instrument collected data on participant demographics, opinions using Likert scale questions as well as open-ended options for a mixed method approach. **RESULTS:** 37 respondents reported having competed in secondary school sports including but not limited to volleyball, football, golf, swimming, softball, water polo, soccer, cheer, and dance. 100% state that they sustained an injury which resulted in them losing 24 hours of participation including game and/or practice time. These injuries ranged from simple sprains and strains to concussions, dislocations, as well as chronic injuries including tendinopathies with over 50% occurring in the lower extremity. 72% reported having a licensed or certified athletic trainer at their school with whom they worked to recover from the injury. While there was no statistical significance between those with and those without an athletic trainer ($p=.273$), 59% of all respondents noted that the time loss injury brought more stress upon themselves. 73% also stated that after the injury they found themselves thinking about what they would have done differently to prevent the injury. While 76% noted they felt lonely or like an outcast post-injury, there again was no statistical significance based on the presence of athletic trainer ($p=.385$). **CONCLUSION:** This study has highlighted the mental health concerns with secondary school athletes that have sustained a time-loss injury. While not noted statistically, having a licensed or certified athletic trainer on site to assist with rehabilitation of these injuries may impact the individual not only physically but mentally as well. This study lays the groundwork for further research as well as the establishment of mental health support for these athletes.