

Athletes' Perception on How Psychological Effects of Anterior Cruciate Ligament Reconstruction Influences Their Decision to Return to Sport

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ABSTRACT

Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) injuries remain a common injury amongst student athletes. While some athletes return to play (RTP) and some do not, many athletes make the decision to not RTP. **PURPOSE:** This research study aimed to determine reasons why athletes choose to RTP or choose not to RTP. **METHODS:** Athletes from multiple universities were emailed a survey about their experience with Anterior Cruciate Ligament Reconstruction (ACLR) and subsequent rehabilitation. **RESULTS:** Thirteen student-athletes participated in the voluntary survey. Seven athletes reported having ACL Reconstruction; all of responses with ACLR reported were female. Athletes varied in sport participation: soccer (42.9%), basketball (28.6%), softball (14.3%), tennis (14.3%). Out of the seven athletes with reported ACLR, 71.4% of athletes indicated they did RTP, while 28.6% did not RTP. When asked about fear of returning, on a scale of 1-5 (1 being, 'not scared at all', 5 being 'terrified'), 60% answered they were at a level four upon returning to competition, while the remaining 40% indicated they were at a level two. Of the 7 athletes that did RTP, 60% said they felt back to pre-injury levels in biomechanics and sport-specific movements. Results indicated that some athletes feel they could have had more support from their rehabilitation team. The survey confirmed the theory that student-athletes suffer from mental stresses associated with their ACL injury and while their physical body heals, their mental stresses are not always addressed. While some most student-athletes regain function and athletic performance, there remains apprehension to continue training and competition. **CONCLUSION:** Athletes should be given the opportunity to discuss the psychological challenges that come with ACLR. If athletes can openly address and seek help with the mental stresses associated with ACL injury, more student-athletes can feel better supported to RTP.