

Mental Health and Well-Being of Missouri Student-Athletes

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is a statewide coalition of 21 public and private colleges and universities in Missouri with the mission of building safe and healthy campuses. PIP tracks students' high-risk behaviors and behaviors that promote health and wellness through the annual implementation of the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) survey. By examining student mental health concerns, PIP can track the well-being of Missouri college students of specific subpopulations. This brief focuses on stress, suicidal thoughts, and help-seeking behaviors for Missouri student-athletes.

Background

According to the 2018 MACHB, approximately 9% of Missouri college students endorse that they are members of intercollegiate or varsity athletics. For many NCAA and NAIA student-athletes, part of the college experience is learning how to balance the demands of academics and sport, while also enjoying the social aspects that college presents. The expectations placed on student-athletes and other sport-related stressors can impact the student-athlete experience. However, according to the MACHB, student-athletes across Missouri report similar mental health concerns and help-seeking behaviors as their non-student-athlete peers.

Key Findings

- Report lower rates of overwhelming and unbearable stress
- Report lower rates of mental health concerns
- Report lower rates of suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts

Mental Health and Well-Being

The MACHB asks students to report their levels of stress in the past two weeks. Across Missouri, 26% of college students report that their stress is overwhelming and 4% report unbearable levels of stress. Student-

athletes report lower rates of overwhelming stress as their non-student-athlete peers (21% v. 27%), as well as lower rates of unbearable stress (3.2% v. 4.2%).

The main sources of stress for student-athletes include school and academics (93%), time management (48%), future plans (45%), and financial concerns (41%). One major discrepancy between student-athlete sources of stress compared to their peers who are not student-athletes is their obligations to outside organizations or responsibilities, such as athletic demands and commitments. Sixty percent (60%) of student-athletes report that outside organizations play a role in their stress, whereas 21% of their non-student-athlete peers report that outside organizations are a main source of stress.

The most commonly reported mental health concerns for student-athletes in Missouri include anxiety (38%), major depression (17%), panic attacks (15%), chronic sleep issues (15%), and eating disorders (4.9%). Student-athletes have shown to report lower rates of these mental health concerns than their peers who are not student athletes.

	Student Athletes	Non-Student Athletes
Anxiety	31%	53%
Major Depression	17%	28%
Panic Attacks	15%	25%
Chronic Sleep Issues	15%	19%
Eating Disorder	4.9%	7.5%

For more information, visit pip.missouri.edu

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For these mental health-related concerns, 54% of student-athletes have sought assistance. The three main resources from which student-athletes initially sought assistance for their mental health-related concerns were friends and family (41%), the university counseling center (10%), and an off-campus medical doctor (6%).

Suicide

Compared to their peers who do not participate in college athletics, student-athletes have experienced lower rates of suicidal thoughts in their lifetime (27% v. 43%), suicidal thoughts in the past year (10% v. 21%), and suicide attempts (0.5% v. 1.9%). For these suicidal thoughts or attempts, the primary resources that student-athletes sought assistance from include the university counseling center or an off-campus mental health provider.

In addition, in the past year, 35% of student-athletes have been concerned about a friend having suicidal thoughts or behaviors. Sixty-five percent (65%) of student-athletes reported that they would be likely to very likely to bring up topic of suicide with someone who they think is at risk, and 84% of student-athletes report that they would be likely to very likely to refer someone who discloses that they are thinking about suicide to a local resource.

35% of student-athletes have been concerned about a friend having suicidal thoughts or behaviors.

Programs and Education

Ask. Listen. Refer.

According to the MACHB, 54% of Missouri student-athletes reported that they would be willing to complete an online suicide prevention training program that specializes in the detection, intervention, and referral of friends at risk for suicide. Ask. Listen. Refer. is such a

training that is free and only takes about 20 minutes to complete. For more information or to take the training, visit www.asklistenrefer.org.

NCAA Resources

The National Collegiate Athletic Association's (NCAA) Sports Science Institute¹ is a hub for mental health research and resources specific to student-athletes. Its publication, *Mind, Body, and Sport: Understanding and Supporting Student-Athlete Mental Wellness*², is intended to address the needs concerning student-athlete mental health and well-being and to offer resources on the best practices for supporting student-athletes. An extension of this publication, *Mental Health Best Practices*³, is a valuable resource for athletics and sports medicine departments as well.

NAIA Resources

The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) also works to promote positive mental health for student-athletes through the NAIA Student Wellness Resource Center⁴. This online resource provides the *NAIA Health and Safety: Mental Health*⁵, a publication that lists mental health leaders, best practices and policies, and tools for evaluation for NAIA trainers, coaches, and student-athletes.

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

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References:

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3. Mental Health Best Practices: www.ncaa.org/sites/default/files/SSI_MentalHealthBestPractices_Web_20170921.pdf
4. NAIA Student Wellness Resource Center: www.naia.org/fls/27900/wellness-center/index.html
5. NAIA Health and Safety: Mental Health: www.naia.org/fls/27900/1NAIA/membership/wellness/NAIA_HealthandSafety_MentalHealthResources.pdf

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