Sport Psychology of the Female Athlete

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AMERICAN OSTEOPATHIC ASSOCIATION

OMED 18 come together

Disclosures

- None

Shira A. Oretzky, Ph.D.

- Clinical And Sport Psychologist
- Sport History
- Doctoral Dissertation
  - The Effects of Yoga on Elevated Depressive and Somatic Symptoms in Young Adults
- San Diego State University
  - Liason to SDSU Athletics
- Private Practice- La Jolla, CA
- San Diego Psychological Association
  - Board of Directors
- San Diego Sport Psychology Associates

Mental Health Stigma and Athletes

- There has been a lot of stigma around mental health, especially in the sports culture
- Athletes are taught to tough it out, act strong, persist through pain
- This may work for a little distress but not for more serious issues
  - *There is a difference between pushing through discomfort and playing with a broken leg*
- Athletes are much more comfortable reaching out for help around physical health complaints and injuries than around mental and emotional challenges

Mental Health Statistics for Athletes

- Athletes experience mental health issues at about the same rate as non athlete peers but reach out for help at much lower rates.
  - In a random sample of approximately 7,000 students at nine colleges and universities in 2014, use of mental health services was much lower among intercollegiate athletes as compared to students overall. Among students with significant depression or anxiety symptoms, **only 10% of athletes used mental health services**, as compared to **30% of students overall.**[1]

- *Student-athletes are often missing the care that would be beneficial.*

Mental Health Statistics for Athletes Versus Non-Athletes

Have you ever felt so depressed that it was difficult to function?

(Yes, in the last 12 months)

	STUDENT-ATHLETE	NON-ATHLETE
Female	27%	36%
Male	20%	29%
White	23%	32%
Black	23%	33%
Other	29%	37%

Within gender and within race differences are statistically significant, chi-square, $p < .01$

Have you ever felt overwhelming anxiety?

(Yes, in the last 12 months)

	STUDENT-ATHLETES	NON-ATHLETES
Female	52%	61%
Male	33%	43%
White	45%	57%
Black	34%	48%
Other	46%	54%

Within gender and within race differences are statistically significant, chi-square, $p < .01$

Figure 1 ACHA NCHA-II Mental Health Statistics [2]

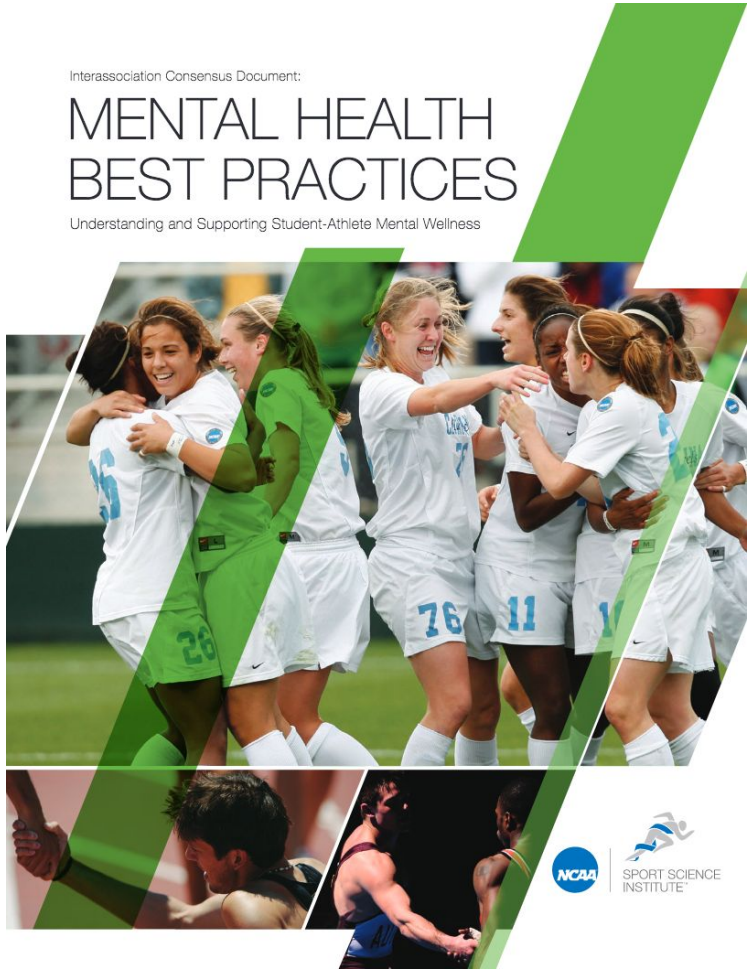
Mental Health and Wellness Initiatives

- Professional Sports Leagues such as the MLB and the NBA, and the USOC and Team USA are implementing mental health & wellness initiatives to better address:
  - The role of the mind in health and performance: *Optimal Health = Physical + Mental*
  - The importance of players overall well-being

Mental Health and Wellness Initiatives

- **NCAA Best Practices Guidelines:** Understanding and Supporting Student-Athlete Mental Wellness [3]
  - Mental health is a part of athlete health, not separate from it
  - Promoting health enhances performance
- **4 Best Practices:**

1. Clinical Licensure of Practitioners Providing Mental Health
2. Procedures for Identification and Referral of Student-Athletes to Qualified Practitioners -MHEAP and Routine Referral
3. Pre-Participation Mental Health Screening
4. Health Promoting Environments that Support Mental Well-Being and Resilience



Mental Health and Wellness Initiatives

- **San Diego State University**
  - Collaboration between:
    - Athletics Medicine
    - Counseling & Psychological Services
  - Student-athlete mental health and wellness initiatives
    - In accordance with NCAA Best Practices
    - Treatment team approach to provide the best care
    - Proactive approach- early identification and Tx
  - Task Forces- Mental Health, Disordered Eating
  - SAC

Mental Health Continuum

Figure 2 Mental Health Continuum [4]

Protective Factors from Sport

- Increasing number of females participating in sports.
- Participating in sports can help females develop confidence, leadership, and team building skills.
- 94% of women in the C-suit played sports
- 52% of women in the C-suit played sports at the university level

Figure 3 Women, Sport, and Leadership [5]

Athletes and Mental Health: The Hidden Opponent | Victoria Garrick | TEDxUSC

Prominent Issues Facing Student-Athletes

- What issues do you think student-athletes most frequently present to sport psychologists?
  - Anxiety
  - Depression
  - Sleep Issues
  - Performance Pressures and Concerns
  - Injuries
  - Disordered Eating
  - Confidence
  - Burnout
  - Substance Abuse
  - Relationships with Coaches, Teammates, Significant Others, and Family

Recognizing Signs of Distress

Physical Signs (may be the most obvious)	Mental Signs
• Changes in appetite or weight • Changes in sleep-difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much • Dragging at practice • Physical complains not related to sports injury- headaches, GI complaints • Overuse injuries, unresolved injuries, or continually being injured	• Difficulty with focus/concentration • Forgetfulness • Difficulty making decisions • Negative thinking or negative self-talk • All or nothing thinking
Psychological Signs	**Behavioral Signs**
• Agitation • Excessive worry • Significant fluctuations in mood • Lack of interest or pleasure • Suicidal thoughts- talking about death, dying, or going away	• Withdrawing from teammates or daily activities • Substance use • Out of control behaviors, getting in trouble, acting irresponsible, lying • Significant decreases in academic and or athletic performance

General Assessment for the Mental Health of Athletes

- What type of questions would you typically ask athletes to assess for mental health?
- What do you do with the information? Referrals?
- *As a doctor you are often the first line. It is much safer and less stigmatized to go to a doctor than a psychologist.*

PHQ-9

Patient Health Questionnaire- 9

PHQ-9 Diagnostic tool for mental health disorders for healthcare professionals. [6]

PATIENT HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE-9 (PHQ-9)

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems? *(Use "✔" to indicate your answer)*	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly every day
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3
3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or sleeping too much	0	1	2	3
4. Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3
5. Poor appetite or overeating	0	1	2	3
6. Feeling bad about yourself — or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3
8. Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed? Or the opposite — being so fidgety or restless that you have been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3
9. Thoughts that you would be better off dead or of hurting yourself in some way	0	1	2	3

FOR OFFICE CODING 0 + _____ + _____ + _____

=Total Score: _____

If you checked off any problems, how difficult have these problems made it for you to do your work, take care of things at home, or get along with other people?

Not difficult at all	Somewhat difficult	Very difficult	Extremely difficult
☐	☐	☐	☐

Psychophysiology and Athletic Performance

- The Psychophysiological Principle: “Every change in the physiological state is accompanied by a change in the mental/emotional state, conscious or unconscious, and conversely every change in the mental-emotional state conscious or unconscious, is accompanied by an appropriate change in the physiological state.”[7]

The Autonomic Nervous System

- **Sympathetic- Fight, Flight, or Freeze**
  - Mediates the stress response
  - Activates or alarm reaction
  - Energizes
  - Survival mechanism

- **Parasympathetic- Rest and Digest**
  - Mediates the relaxation response
  - Deactivates
  - Restores, replenishes, recovery

The Autonomic Nervous System

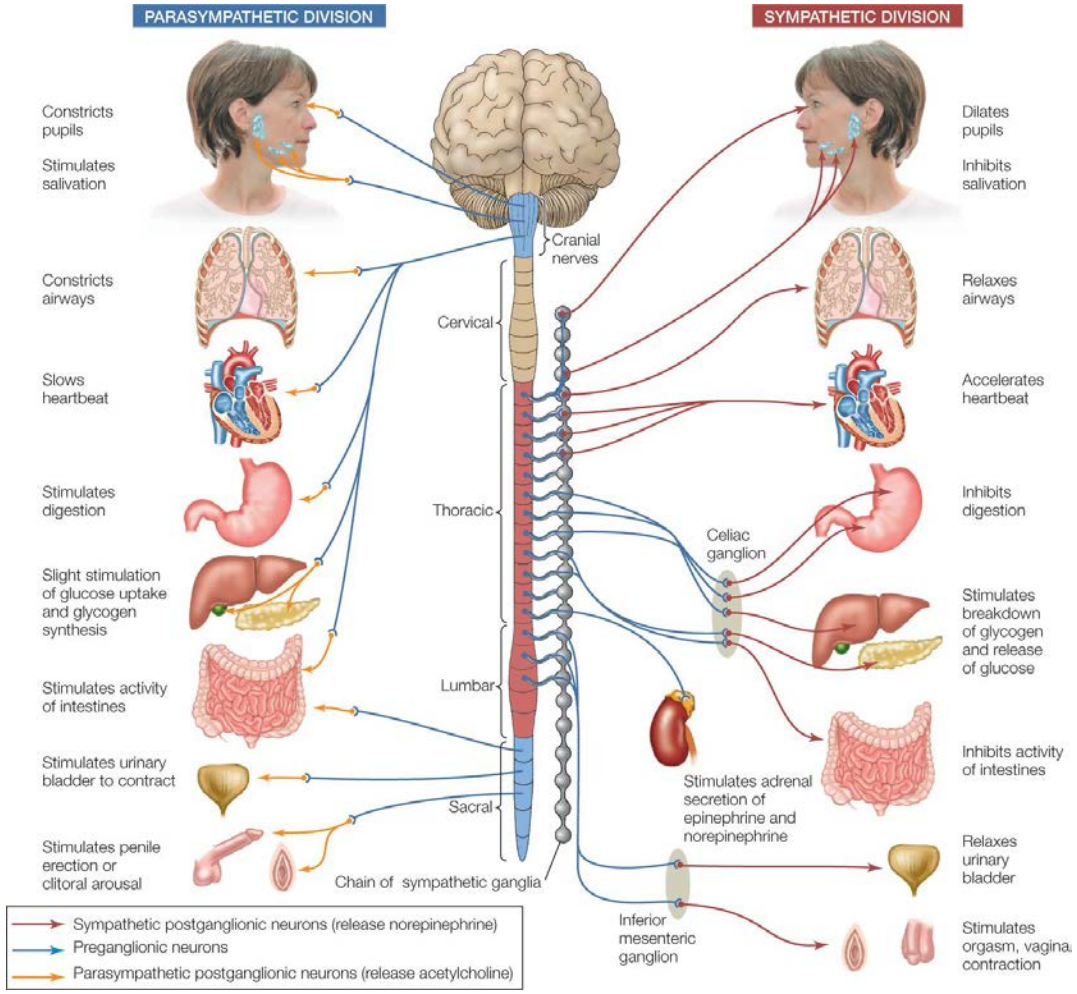


Figure 4 Autonomic Nervous System [8]

Biofeedback

- **What is biofeedback?**

  HRV Biofeedback involves using a computer-based training system to increase participant's self-awareness of physiological responses to stress **(heart rate, respiration, temperature, muscle tension)** and learn how to regulate these responses more effectively and efficiently, thereby reducing the effect they have on performance.

  During biofeedback training, an athlete is taught how to breath at his/her resonant frequency of approximately **5-7 breaths per minute** which synchronizes the heart rate, blood pressure, and respiration. This enables increased psychophysiological (mind-body) functioning when a person is in a resting state. In turn this can help with pre-competition preparation, recovery, general stress management, focus during a task, and improved performance.

Biofeedback for Optimal Sport Performance

- **Two key mental skills are needed for consistent successful performance in high performance environments:**
  - The ability to self-manage activation
  - The capacity to effectively focus
- **Biofeedback training provides psychophysiological feedback to the athlete, helping them to develop:**
  - Improved self-awareness
  - Greater ability to self-regulate psychophysiological processes
- **Biofeedback training helps athletes to:**
  - Reduce anxiety
  - Improve attention
  - Enhance Performance

Biofeedback

- **Modalities**
- Heart Rate
- Respiration Rate
- Hand Temperature
- Muscle Tension (EMG)
- Respiratory Sinus Arrhythmia- The change in heart rate that occurs along with respiration.
- Heart Rate Variability- the rhythmic change in heart rate. Measured by the difference between the fastest and slowest heart rate.

Heart Rate Variability (HRV) and Performance

PHYSICAL	MENTAL	EMOTIONAL
Increased oxygen flow to your muscles and cells	Improved cognitive abilities	Increased mood and mental state
Decreased blood pressure	Improved focus and concentration	Decreased performance anxiety
Decreased physical sx of stress- ie. headaches, stomach aches		The ability to remain calm even during stressful situations
Decreased muscle tension		Improved Confidence
Improved sleep		
Improved motor coordination		
Increased immune system functioning		
Faster reaction times		

HRV Training + Mental Skills Training for Optimal Performance

- **HRV training can be combined with:**
  - Mindfulness
    - Awareness, Acceptance, Action
  - Performance Cue Statements/Positive Self-talk
  - Visualization
  - Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Questions

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Thank you!

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