

Title: Streamlining Mental Health Initiatives for College Student Athletes

Name: Mollie Babich, RN, BSN

Academic Institution: Doctorate of Nursing Practice (DNP) student at Creighton University

Stage in doctoral program: Doctoral candidate, graduation date imminent (5/13/23)

Abstract

Purpose: To determine if threshold cut-off scores, within the SMHAT-1 process, would improve the student counseling staff's process for screening and referring student-athletes to mental health resources.

Background: The literature recommends the use of validated, reliable, athlete-specific evidence-based mental health screening tools. After review, the current behavioral health administration process lacks validity, leveled interventions, and use of additional screening questionnaires. The International Olympic Committee's (IOC) up-to-date, evidence-based athlete-specific mental health screening process, Sport Mental Health Assessment Tool 1 (SMHAT-1), was chosen for pilot implementation.

Sample/Setting: A Midwestern NCAA Division I athletic department and student counseling center.

Methods: The student counseling center psychologist sent the SMHAT-1 Step 1 screening tool to 285 student-athletes and Step 2 screening tool to 58 student-athletes via email through the privacy-secured online platform. Descriptive statistical analysis and qualitative focus groups were used to measure the data.

Results: Because statistical significance was not found between the 2021 and 2022 survey data, this supports that the pilot implementation of the SMHAT-1 screening process yielded similar results in capturing student responses with the additional benefits of containing validated, reliable, athlete-specific evidence-based mental health screening tools within an algorithm-dictated protocol for leveled interventions. The perceived positive outcomes of the process were efficient data entry, a self-explanatory algorithm, simplified procedures for follow-up, and optimized use of screening.

Conclusion: The qualitative data supports sustainability of the SMHAT-1 process due to improved validity, efficiency, transparency, and usability. The student counseling staff perceive this process to be a value-added time-saving workflow that benefits student-athletes and the student counseling psychologists.