


April 2017

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Recommended Citation

Almodóvar, Angel A. Mr. (2017) "Examining burnout in Division I collegiate athletes: Identifying the major factors and level of importance in an athlete's life," *Siegel Institute Ethics Research Scholars*: Vol. 2 , Article 1.
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Examining burnout in Division I collegiate athletes: Identifying the major factors and level of importance in an athlete's life

Cover Page Footnote

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importance in an athlete's life

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Abstract

Burnout is a concept that has been studied within the past 35+ years becoming widely known and recognized around 1980 in various disciplines ranging from the professional workforce, to athletic coaches, to youth sports. The first burnout study conducted within a sport setting focused on coaching burnout, and since then, new developments have occurred concentrating on athletes. Burnout is a term defined as a withdrawal from a particular sport noted by a reduced sense of accomplishment, devaluation or resentment of the sport, with proponents of physical and psychological exhaustion. Thus, the focus of this study is to examine athletic burnout in Division I collegiate athletics. The purpose is to identify the major factors that lead to burnout and the level of importance, or in other words, the factors that have the biggest impact in an athlete's life. The literature identifies which factors lead and contribute to burnout in athletes including psychological and motivational factors, but fails to accurately point out what specific factors contribute the most to dropout, and more importantly, burnout in sport. Therefore, the study presented here intended to solve this issue by presenting what factors that contribute the most to burnout as identified by the data collected from the athletes. The research question presented is what are the major factors that lead to burnout and which of these factors have the biggest impact and level of importance as identified by the athletes? The participants in this study are all Division I student-athletes (males and females, graduates and undergraduates) at Kennesaw State University (KSU) present at the time that this study took place. The methodology will incorporate a Qualtrics online self-administered computer survey. The survey consists of twenty open-ended and closed-type of questions. The hypothesis is that the KSU student-athletes will identify that 50% of their burnout is attributed to the following four factors: Scholarship implications, coaches' pressure, parents' pressure, and the prospect of a lucrative professional career; with scholarship implications

contributing to over 70% of the burnout. The hopes of the findings in regard to this study to be able to ascertain which factor(s) or sources induce the largest level of stress and burnout overall for Division I college athletes, and how to mitigate the impact of these factors in the future. Future studies should expand this study to all divisions in collegiate athletics and across multiple universities.

Introduction

Burnout is a concept that has been studied within the past 35+ years becoming widely known and recognized, in and around 1980, in various disciplines, ranging from the professional workforce, to athletic coaches, to youth sports (Coakley, 1992; Eklund & DeFreese, 2015). The first study conducted within a sport setting focused on coaching burnout (Goodger, Gorely, Lavallee, & Harwood, 2007). Since then, new developments have occurred concentrating on athletes. The reason athletes, particularly Division I athletes, have gained interest is due to their hectic lifestyle and balance between school, training, work, and athletics (Judge, Bell, Theodore, Simon, & Bellar, 2012). Moreover, many factors, sources, and consequences have been identified from the research that can lead to burnout. These factors and sources according to Gould and Whitley (2009) include psychological factors such as: motivation, coping with adversity, responses to training and recovery, the role of significant others, and athlete identity (Barcza-Renner, Eklund, Morin & Habeeb, 2016). Numerous scholars have concluded that burnout results due to increased stress, physical and emotional exhaustion, intense workload, injury, pressure from coaches, as well as performance and parental pressure (Judge et al., 2012; Moen, Federici, & Abrahamsen, 2015). Additionally, burnout has been examined from various viewpoints including a sociological perspective (Coakley, 1992), a stress perspective (Smith, 1986), a commitment perspective (Schmidt & Stein, 1991), and a training perspective (Silva, 1990). Each of these perspectives will be explained in the following section, but first, athletic burnout needs to be defined. Burnout has been defined in various ways, but the original definition was:

“Involving a psychological, emotional, and sometimes a physical withdrawal from an activity in response to excessive stress. . . . When burnout occurs, a previously enjoyable activity becomes an aversive source of stress. . . . Burnout is a complex phenomenon. . . .

One element common to all definitions, however, is an emphasis on burnout as a response to chronic stress” (Coakley, 1992, p. 273).

Maslach and Jackson (1984) gave the most conceptualized definition of burnout and it comprised of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced performance accomplishment. More recently however, burnout defined in a sport setting according to Raedeke (1997) is “a withdrawal from [sport] noted by a reduced sense of accomplishment, devaluation/resentment of sport, and physical/psychological exhaustion” (p. 181). This is the most accepted definition as indicated by the research.

The focus of this study is to examine athletic burnout in Division I collegiate athletics. The purpose is to identify the major factors that lead to burnout and the level of importance, or in other words, the factors that have the biggest impact in an athlete’s life. This study was done by posting a Qualtrics online survey link in the Student Athlete Success Services (SASS) along with using the Enterprise Information Management and Institutional Research (EIM) system to email the survey link to the Division I student-athletes directly (“Kennesaw State University”, 2016; EIM, 2017). This survey was completely voluntary, and although the coaches encouraged their athletes to take the survey, neither coercion nor incentives was used. Moreover, the IP addresses were not collected and the answers were kept confidential in order to increase validity and deter bias. Validity means accuracy, and it is dependent on reliability (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). The hopes of the findings is to be able to ascertain which factors and sources (scholarship factors, the type of sport, parents and/or coaches pressure, the prospect of a lucrative career, overtraining, and other factors) induce the largest level of stress, dropout, and burnout in Division I college athletes.

The issue presented in this study is that although substantial research has been conducted in identifying psychological and motivation factors that contribute to burnout in athletes, the

research fails to point out what specific factors contribute the most to dropout, and more importantly, burnout in sport. Therefore, the importance of this examination is to understand the major sources that contribute to college athletes' burnout in order to help mitigate these factors from affecting athletes in the future. It is estimated that between one and five percent of competitive athletes, in particular collegiate athletes, experience burnout, or at least the symptoms (Dubuc-Charbonneau & Durand-Bush, 2015). Coaches and parents in particular, need to understand what pressures affect Division I college athletes, so that they may intervene and prevent these factors from affecting the athletes' relationships with significant others, their performance, and their grades (Salanova, Schaufeli, Martínez, & Bresó, 2010).

So, why study NCAA Division I athletics? The reason is that "Among the three NCAA divisions, Division I schools generally have the biggest student bodies, manage the largest athletics budgets and offer the most generous number of scholarships. Schools who are members of Division I commit to maintaining a high academic standard for student-athletes in addition to a wide range of opportunities for athletics participation" ("NCAA", 2016). Division I student athletes receive the bulk of the scholarship awards, but also sustain the most amount of pressure to perform and train the most. Thus, it is assumed that NCAA Division I athletes will have the most significant amount of burnout compared to any other division of collegiate or amateur athletics.

The hypothesis for this study is that over 50% of burnout will be attributed to the following four factors: scholarship implications, coaches' pressure, parents' pressure, and the prospect of a lucrative professional career; with scholarship implications contributing to over 70% of burnout as identified by the athletes' answers in the online survey. The hypothesis leads to the question

that this study is trying to answer: What are the major factors that lead to burnout and which of these factors have the biggest impact and level of importance as identified by the athletes?

Literature Review

Burnout

Burnout is a major concern that negatively affects both the physical and psychological well-being of the athletes (Chen, Chen, Kee & Tsai, 2008). In addition, burnout has been correlated with illness/injury, fatigue, a-motivation syndrome, loss of focus, self-doubt, frustration, feelings of incompetence, and mood disturbances (Dubuc-Charbonneau & Durand-Bush, 2015). Burnout as noted above by Raedeke's (1997) definition consists of a withdrawal from sport that is noted by three components: A reduced sense of accomplishment, devaluation in sport, and physical and emotional exhaustion (Smith, 1986; Moen, et. al., 2015). Further, Chen et. al., (2008) states that "the experience of burnout negatively affects both physical and psychological health" (p. 811). Thus, Raedeke (1997) defines these components in the following way:

Emotional exhaustion is characterized by feelings of extreme fatigue, depersonalization represents negative reactions and feelings toward clients and is characterized by an impersonal, detached, and uncaring response toward clients. Whereas depersonalization represents negative attitudes toward clients, reduced personal accomplishment reflects negative evaluations of oneself, particularly regarding one's ability to work successfully with clients (p. 397).

Within the literature, several burnout models have been developed ranging from stress related models such as Smith's (1986) Cognitive Affective model, Schmidt and Stein's (1991) Commitment model, Coakley's (1992) Unidimensional Identity Development and External Control model, and Silva's (1990) Negative Training model. Motivational models include

Raedeke's (1997) Entrapment and Engagement Approach models. Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory is a good way to examine each of these motivational models. Self-determination theory "contends that individuals have three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness); when these needs are met, an individual's motivation is optimized and their psychological well being is maximized" (Gould & Whitley, 2009, p. 21). However, for the focus of this study, only some of these models will be explored.

Stress and motivational models of burnout

Cognitive Affective Model

Burnout according to Cherniss (1980) and Freudenberger (1980) is not only related to stress, but it is a reaction to chronic stress. Burnout is typically associated with job-related stress, but in recent years, the term has begun to appear more frequently in collegiate athletics. At first, it was seen mostly in coaches, but at the moment, it has been ever present in athletes who drop out of sports because the "participation has become too aversive for them to continue" (Smith, 1986, p. 36-37). Due to this, Smith (1986) developed the Cognitive Affective Stress model. This model suggests that burnout is a consequence of chronic stress. Smith's (1986) model is comprised of four components: 1. the situation, 2. cognitive-appraisal, 3. physiologic responses, and 4. coping and task behaviors. The situation, "involves interactions between environmental demands and personal and environmental resources" (Smith, 1986, p. 41). The interactions between external demands, and resources can lead to an imbalance. This imbalance may lead to an overload of stress where demands exceed resources for the athlete, or an underload of stress, where an athlete feels stagnant or bored (Smith, 1986).

The Cognitive Appraisal model is an evaluation of four different elements: appraisal of demands, of the resources available, potential consequences, and personal meanings of those

consequences. When a cognitive appraisal indicates the threat of harm or danger, this in turn leads to the next stage of physiological responses. These responses can lead to symptoms of tension, anger, anxiety, depression, among others. The body handles these physiological responses by trying to cope with the situation with behavioral outputs that can lead to any number of consequences, including decreased performance, interpersonal difficulties, and withdrawal from sport (Smith, 1986; Gould & Whitley, 2009).

Commitment Model

The research on commitment in sport began with Thibaut and Kelley's (1959) Social Exchange Theory (as cited in Schmidt & Stein, 1991, p. 254). This theory is comprised of outcomes and comparison levels. Outcomes "are the rewards and costs a person experiences in an activity. The greater the rewards relative to the costs, the higher the outcomes" (Schmidt & Stein, 1991, p. 255). From an athletic standpoint, rewards can include money, trophies, and level of achievement. However, Social Exchange Theory was found to be missing an explanation of the key difference between athletic dropout and burnout. Due to this, Schmidt and Stein (1991) decided to use Kelley's (1983) Model of Commitment in close relationships.

Kelley's (1983) model differentiates between love and commitment. Love "consists of all factors, stable and unstable, that are positive. Commitment is simply stated as membership stability" (as cited in Schmidt & Stein, 1991, p. 257). This research is directly transferrable to the love and commitment relationship between an athlete and his or her sport. For example, an athlete may stay committed to a sport because they feel that they have to, or because they have participated in sport their whole life and do not have any other options, or simply because of scholarship rewards and parents' and coaches' pressures. In contrast, an athlete's love for the sport is what allows them to enjoy the experience, feel motivated, and engaged in sport.

Entrapment View

Raedeke (1997) developed the sport entrapment perspective of burnout among collegiate athletes. The Entrapment View draws from Schmidt and Stein's (1991) sport commitment model. The entrapment model holds that athletes have three reasons to partake and commit to sport. They are: 1. the athlete wants to, 2. the athlete believes that he or she has to, or 3. a combination of both reasons (Raedeke 1997, Gould & Whitley, 2009). By being entrapped, the athlete feels that they have to participate in sport and that they don't have any other option. This may happen due to the athlete feeling a sense of self-identity tied to athletics, scholarship implications, or because they don't want to let their parents or coaches down. By using the survey questionnaire in this study, this research hopes to identify how often entrapment happens in Division I college athletes.

Unidimensional Identity Development and External Control Model

The feeling of entrapment among athletes may be attributed to a sociological rather than a stress or physiological perspective. This perspective is discussed from Coakley's (1992) model that athletes who are entrapped are more than likely to burnout. After conducting interviews with many adolescent youth athletes, he found that burnout is directly associated to the social organization of intensive sport participation. Specifically, he stated that "burnout is related to control and identity issues-issues that entrap athletes into sports" (Raedeke, 1997). The way organized sport is structured here in the U.S. restricts the control that adolescent athletes have in their lives and in decision making. By sacrificing so much time and effort into their respective sport, their identity becomes unidimensional and they are known simply as athletes, rather than ordinary kids. This causes some athletes to regret missed opportunities outside of sport, and deprives them of a young normal life, due to the fact that they constantly miss other childhood activities. The model thus contends, that the way sport is structured and organized, leads to athletic

burnout in adolescents. Furthermore, society's pressure and focus on sporting success is another contributing factor. Setbacks, such as a young adolescent athlete losing, or experiencing significant injuries may build up frustration, and thus, lead to increased levels of stress that when not intervened properly, may lead to burnout at the collegiate level (Coakley, 1992; Gould & Whitley, 2009; Raedeke, 1997).

Engagement Approach

Transitioning from the entrapment view where the athlete feels that they have to participate in sport even when they may already be experiencing the symptoms of burnout, to the sociological view, where the structure of sport organization in young adolescents leads to increased levels of burnout, we now move to the Engagement model. The Engagement perspective is the polar opposite of burnout. This view contends that the athlete is fully engaged in their particular sport rather than feeling entrapped, and thereby, may lead to the prevention of burnout (Gould & Whitley, 2009; Hodge, Lonsdale & Jackson, 2009). Athlete engagement may be defined as “an enduring, relatively stable sport experience, which refers to generalized positive affect and cognitions about one's sport as a whole” (Hodge et al., 2009, p. 187). When an athlete is not engaged, or not highly motivated, this can lead to feelings of fatigue, stress, and depression (Gustafsson, Kentta, Hassmén & Lundqvist, 2007).

Athlete engagement is the ideal state in sport, where the athlete feels not only dedicated to the sport, but also, self-actualized in their overall wellbeing (Crust, 2007). It is comprised of confidence, dedication, enthusiasm and vigor, which is the paradoxical composition of athlete burnout. Engagement “is characterized by the feeling of being immersed in an activity such as sport” (Martínez-Alvarado, Guillén & Feltz, 2016). This results in the athlete building a bond with the sport, and in turn, having more motivation and dedication in attaining their desired goals within

the sport. In defining the aspects that comprise engagement, in previous research Lonsdale, Hodge, and Jackson (2007) define confidence as ““a belief in one’s ability to attain a high level of performance and achieve desired goals”, while dedication represents “a desire to invest effort and time towards achieving goals one views as important” (p. 472). Vigor can be defined as “a sense of physical and mental liveliness” (p. 472), and enthusiasm is distinguished by “feelings of excitement and high levels of enjoyment” (p. 479)” (as cited in Hodge, et. al., 2009, p. 187). Martínez-Alvarado, et. al., (2016) support these definitions. All of these terms described in athlete engagement characterize an athlete who is in his or her prime, and who does not feel the effects of burnout. Decision autonomy related to an athlete’s sport has positive effects towards engagement in their sport, and thus, has negative effects towards burnout (Martinez-Alvarado, et. al., 2016). But, what happens when an athlete moves from engagement to entrapment and eventually to burnout? What factors lead to the passage of these stages? Little research has been done on this topic and will be explored in this paper.

Negative Training model

The Negative Training model was first introduced by Silva in 1990. This model examines training in athletes that leads to chronic stress. Silva perceived that training leads to stress not only on a physical level, but on a psychological level as well (Gould & Whitley, 2009). Silva believed that the intensity of training led to either positive or negative adaptations. Positive adaptations according to Silva (1990) are desirable and are favorable responses to the amount of training volume. Negative adaptations on the other hand lead to burnout. This occurs when the “training volumes are too high, too intense, and lead to negative adaptation. If this persists, it can lead to staleness and overtraining syndrome, which is a factor conducive of athlete burnout” (Gould & Whitley, 2009). This overtraining syndrome includes “an unexplained, sustained decrease in

physical performance; general fatigue, malaise and loss of vigor; insomnia; decrease in appetite; irritability, restlessness, loss of motivation, and feelings of depression” (Cureton, 2009, p. 32). These are serious side effects that over trained athletes may face if the syndrome is not noticed in time.

Kentta and Hassmén (1998) further developed the idea of overtraining in that athletes overtrain with a purpose of improving their performance. However, this is an individualistic feature and sometimes an athlete reaches an overreached state where the individual does not recover properly (Gould & Whitley, 2009). According to Kentta and Hassmén (1998), “Training volumes below what can be considered optimal do not result in the desired adaptation (i.e. the greatest possible gain in performance), whereas training volumes above the optimum may, among other things, lead to a condition usually referred to as the ‘overtraining syndrome’, ‘staleness’ or ‘burnout’. Hard training can apparently be the formula for both success and failure” (p. 2). The consequences of overtraining include poorer performance, severe fatigue, muscle soreness, overuse injuries, reduced appetite, etc. (Kentta & Hassmén, 1998). Therefore, the understanding of the individual athlete’s body is extremely important in the prevention of burnout. This is why the data gathered in this study is important in ascertaining which factors are the leading sources of Division I athlete burnout.

Psychological factors associated with burnout

Now that we have looked at some of the motivational, stress, and training perspectives of burnout, it is important to briefly examine some of the psychological correlations associated with burnout as presented in past research. Goodger, et. al., (2007) identified five themes associated with psychological correlations with athlete burnout. Two of them have already been discussed in that of motivation and overtraining. The three other psychological themes that Goodger and his

colleagues (2007) identified were: Coping with adversity, the role of significant others, and athlete identity. Goodger, et. al.'s (2007) findings suggest that coping with adversity such as induced stress and high anxiousness within athletes does have a positive correlation with burnout. Furthermore, the role of significant others including coaches and parents had mixed correlations leading to athlete burnout. Although one may think that pressures to perform from coaches and parents would lead to burnout, both coaches and parents also provide critical support and act as the athlete's main support group. Lastly, in regards to athlete identity, the findings were not conclusive and showed no correlation, but there is reason to believe that this factor may have a potentially positive correlation with athlete burnout (Goodger, et al., 2007; Gould & Whitley, 2009).

An additional psychological factor that contributes to an athlete's induced stress is perfectionism. Perfectionists, according to Chen, et. al. (2008), "have a tendency to set extremely high standards for themselves and could be susceptible to burnout because more effort is applied to maintain high standards in performance" (p. 811). Due to high standards, athletes tend to overcompensate and be overcritical of their performance. Additionally, athletes are more susceptible to chronic stress because they are so connected on an emotional and personal level to the games that, when they lose, it affects them to a greater extent. The research suggests that this depends on the type of perfectionism and the context of it. Adaptive perfectionism essentially boosts positive attitudes and leads to success, while maladaptive perfectionism, in contrast, reinforces negativity and increases the fear and risks of failure (Chen, et. al., 2008). The results from Chen, et. al.'s (2008) study show that an increased maladaptive perfectionism leads to burnout, while high scores of adaptive perfectionism is correlated with lower rates of burnout.

Methodology

The method that was used in this study is a Qualtrics online self-administered computer survey. A survey according to Vannette (2015) “is a method of gathering information from a sample of people, traditionally with the intention of generalizing the results to a larger population. Surveys provide a critical source of data and insights for nearly everyone engaged in the information economy, from businesses and the media to government and academics”. The survey consisted of twenty open-ended and closed-type questions. The Principal Investigator (PI) printed the survey link on hard copy paper, and posted it in the Student Athlete Success Services (SASS) Center on the Kennesaw State University (KSU) campus for all of the KSU athletes to take voluntarily (“Kennesaw State University”, 2016). Moreover, the PI also utilized the EIM system at KSU to send the survey link directly to the student athletes via their student emails. The online consent form was the first question on the survey link and the athletes were required to click the radio button giving consent to take the survey. IP addresses were not collected in order to maintain confidentiality. Neither incentives nor coercion was used in order to get the athletes to participate, however, the athletes were encouraged to participate in the survey questionnaire by their coaches.

Online survey

The purpose of this survey, as stated before, was to identify which factors such as: scholarships, coaches, parents, training, etc., have the biggest impact on the level of burnout a Division I college athlete experiences. The findings will hopefully establish which factor(s) or sources induce the largest level of stress and burnout overall for Division I college athletes, and how to mitigate the impact of these factors. The benefits of athletes who participate in this survey questionnaire is that it will help them identify what is personally affecting them in regards to stress, physical exhaustion, and burnout. A questionnaire consists of items that assess one or more

constructs (Adams & Lawrence, 2014). Their answers will provide the athletes and the researcher with a better insight into coping with their level of burnout in a more efficient manner. The survey consisted of two parts; the first is a small set of questions pertaining to demographics, so that the data collected will help identify if an athlete's demographics such as age, gender, ethnicity, or status affects their level of burnout. The second part consisted of the actual burnout questionnaire, which was used to gather information on which factors are ranked and perceived as having the most substantial impact on the athlete's level of exhaustion, devaluation, loss of motivation, perceived stress, staleness, or burnout. The construct in this case is factors that lead to burnout.

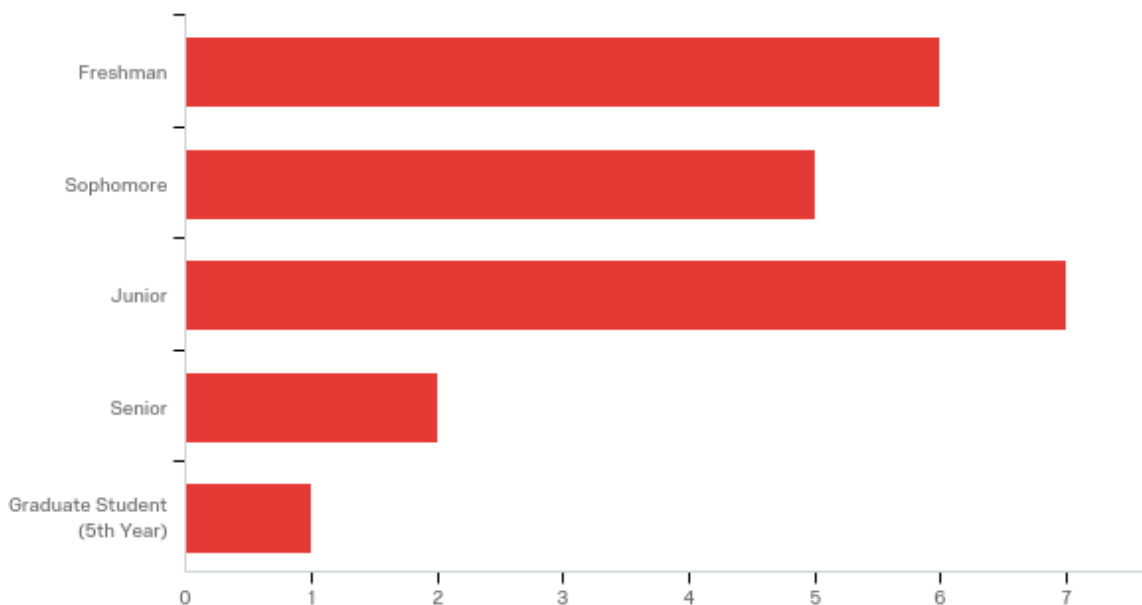
Participants

The participants selected are the Kennesaw State University's Division 1 student-athletes both graduate and undergraduates presently in all athletic programs. The total population for this study is 383 (N). The total male population is 200, while the total female population is 183 (KSU Athletics, 2016). The sample used were the number of student athletes who took the online survey (n=22).

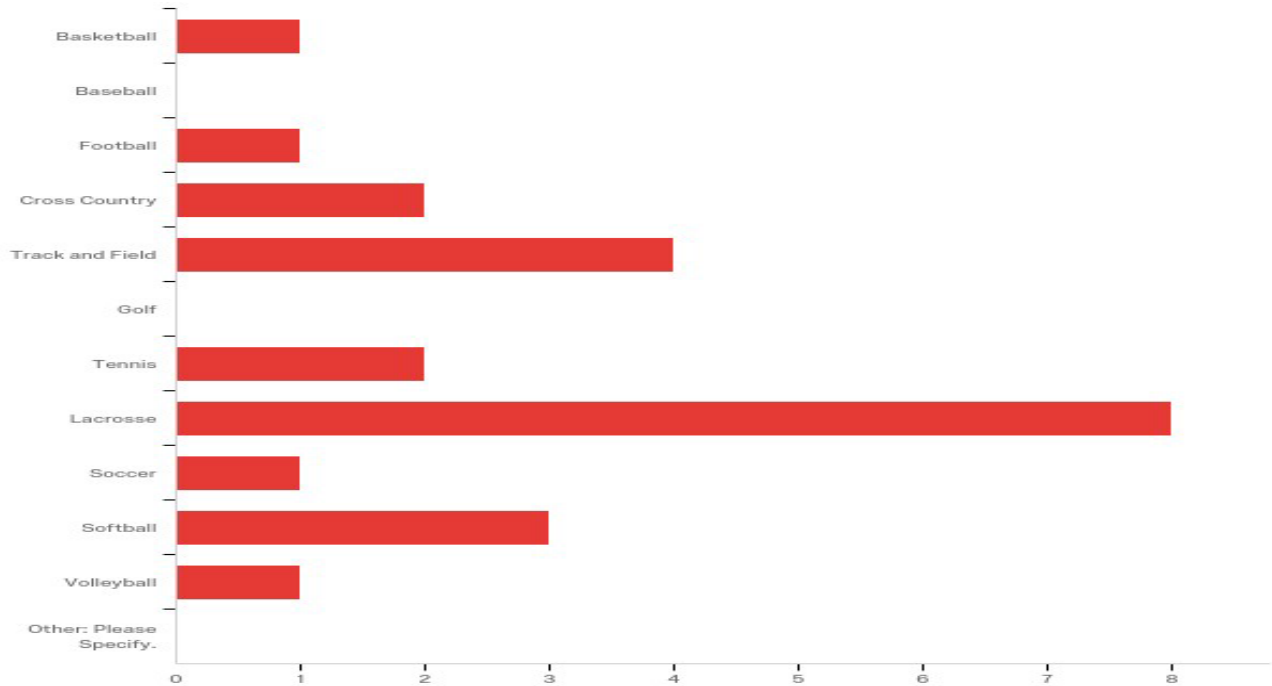
Results and Findings

The online survey questionnaire received a total of twenty-two responses (6% response rate). The age of the respondents ranged from eighteen years old to 25 years old. No participant was over twenty-five years old, and the largest age group was twenty years old (6 respondents). Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of survey respondents were females (18) in contrast to males (3). In regards to race and ethnicity, the overwhelming majority of respondents were white (16) followed by black or African American (4) and over ninety percent were of American nationality. For the results of this survey, the researcher has rounded the numbers and percentages to the nearest whole number.

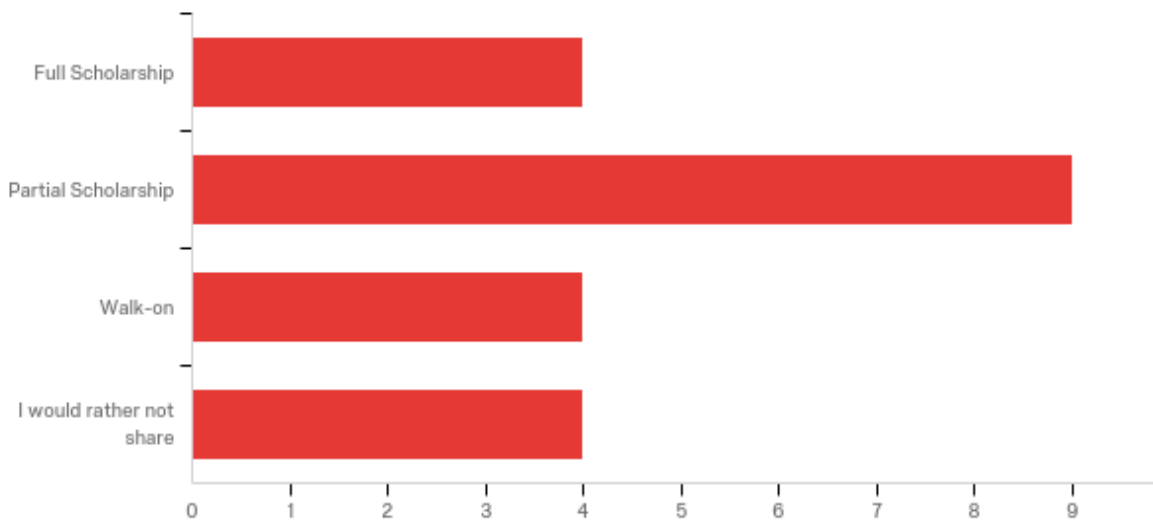
The next broad categories that are important to mention are the university status responses, type of sport responses, and whether or not the respondents have a scholarship or not. First, the most amount of responses came from the junior status category of student athletes (33%). This category represented over thirty-three percent of respondents (7 total) followed by freshman (28%), sophomore (24%), senior (10%), and graduate student (5%).



Second, the type of sports being played by the participants ranged from Basketball to Volleyball. Lacrosse received the overall most amount of responses (38%), and most amount of responses for team sports. Track and Field followed as the individual sport with the most amount of respondents (19%). Below is the range of participants based on type of sport:

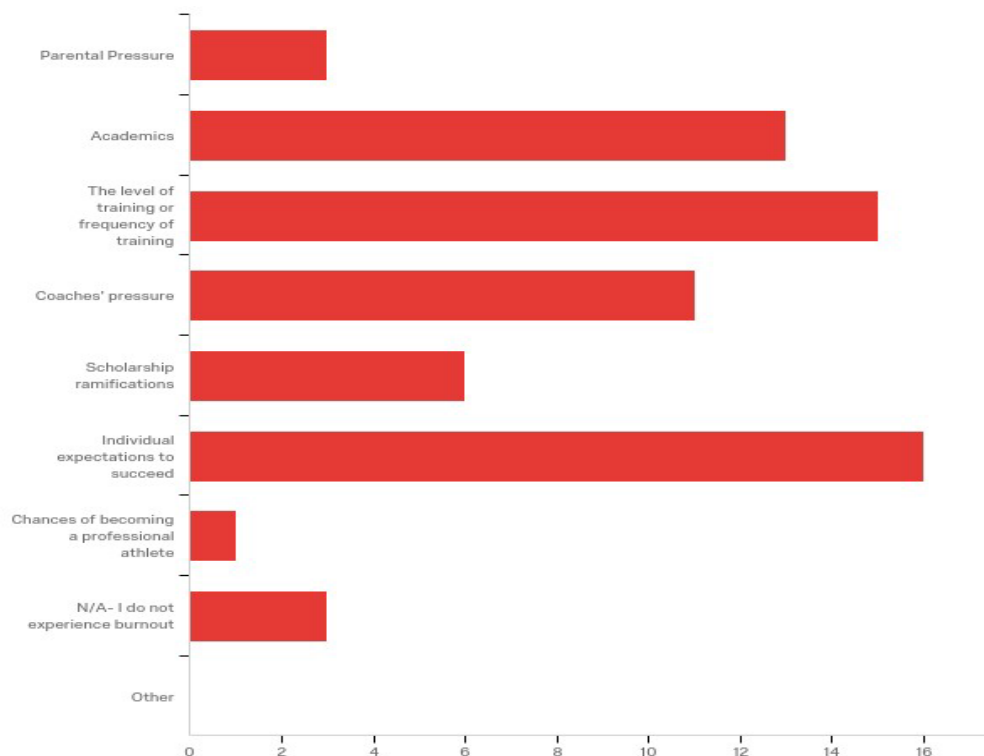


The last important broad category worth identifying is the scholarship variable. These questions depended on whether the survey respondent had a full scholarship offer, partial scholarship offer, or was a walk-on. Of these possible answers, the majority were on partial scholarship (43%), and all other responses (full scholarship, walk-on, and would rather not share) were tied at nineteen percent.



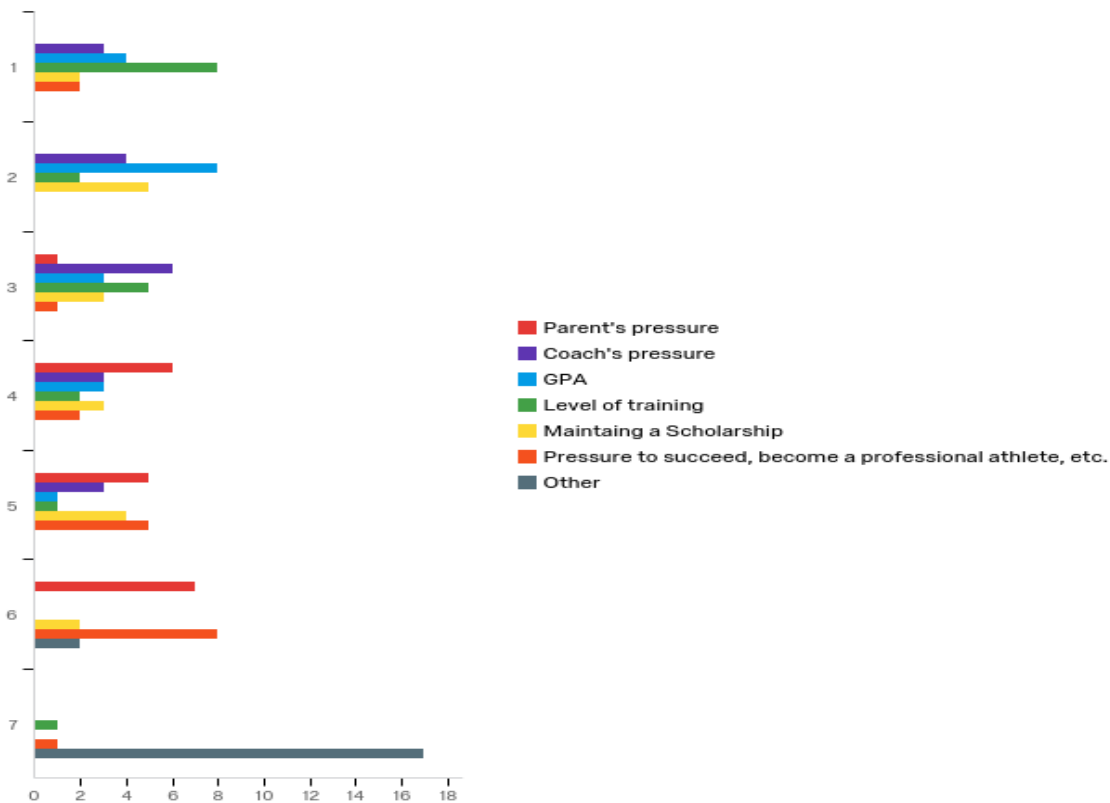
Now that the author has provided some background as to the general responses of the survey questionnaire, it is now imperative to answer the main question posed from this review: What are the major factors that lead to burnout and which of these factors have the biggest impact and level of importance as identified by the athletes? When answering this question, the general findings will first be presented as to which factors were identified as having the most impact on the level of burnout experienced by the athletes, followed by more specific correlations regarding gender, university status, and type of sport.

When the respondents were asked which factors or sources contribute to burnout, the respondents identified individual expectations to succeed as highest (80%) with sixteen total selections. Second factor identified was the level of training, or frequency of training (75%) with a total of fifteen responses. Third identified factor was academics (65%) with a total of thirteen responses, and the last major factor identified was coaches' pressure (55%) with eleven total responses.



Further, after identifying the sources that contribute to their own (KSU athletes) personal level of burnout, the respondents were then asked to identify the factors that they believe have the biggest impact on burnout in general for Division I college athletes. The top factors acknowledged as having the largest impact generally were, Level of training with the highest amount (79%) and a total of fifteen responses, GPA and coach’s pressure both received a total of ten responses (53%). And, trying to maintain a scholarship received eight responses (42%).

Lastly, in order to solidify the answer to the main question posed in this paper, the respondents were finally asked to rank the above mentioned factors from the most significant impact on burnout to the least significant for Division I college athletes in general. The factor that was identified as having the most significant amount of impact was level of training with 42% of responses followed by GPA with 21% of responses. The least significant factor identified was “pressure to succeed and become a professional athlete” with 5% of responses.



Gender

When conducting a study of this nature, one of the most important aspects to differentiate with the participants is gender. For this study as mentioned before, only three participants were males, while eighteen participants were females. Even with this disparity some key similarities were found, as well as one vital difference. The similarities came from Question 21 and Question 22 (Q=Question) of the survey. Both males and females identified the level, frequency, or rigor of training as having the most impact on burnout. Females answered with 81% while males answered with 67%. Furthermore, Q22 asked the respondents to rank the factors as most significant to least significant and both males and females ascertained level of training then GPA as the two most significant factors regarding burnout. Level of training constituted 67% of the answers for males and GPA constituted 33% for males. For females, level of training received 38% and tied for second were GPA and coach's pressure at 19% each.

The key difference found from the results relate to the athletes' awareness of experiencing burnout, and if they are familiar with the symptoms of burnout. Q9 of the survey asks the respondents if they recognize any of the signs and symptoms of burnout. Here the main contrast was that out of the three males, two of them mentioned that they are "Sort of familiar" with the signs of burnout. Making this a majority answer. While thirteen out of the eighteen female answers were "Yes, I'm familiar", the overwhelming majority (67%) answer and 33% were "Sort of familiar". No female mentioned "Not familiar". This hints at the possibility that females are more familiar with the signs of burnout than males. In addition, Q11 asks if the respondents know when they are experiencing burnout. Here, although most of females (47%) answered "Not sure", 41% said "Yes, they are sure" when they are experiencing burnout. Meanwhile, males were not uniform in their answers, and although one respondent answered that they "Do not experience burnout",

none of the respondents answered “Yes, they are sure” when they are experiencing burnout.

University Status

Another important aspect to consider in this type of study, is the current university status of the athlete. For the purposes of this study we will examine athletes starting their collegiate careers (freshman and sophomores) versus athletes in the latter half of their careers (juniors, seniors, and Graduate Students). In this study, eleven participants were freshman and sophomores and ten participants were juniors, seniors, or graduate students. The first significant finding when contrasting these two groups came from Q12: Do you believe there is more pressure to succeed in individual or team sports? The answers from the two groups were surprisingly different. Freshman and sophomores identified individual sports as having more pressure (8 respondents, 73%), and juniors, seniors, and Graduate Students identified team sports (6 respondents, 67%). Moreover, another interesting finding is that freshman and sophomores were more likely to acknowledge that they “Have never experienced burnout” according to Q17: If you do experience burnout, or have experienced burnout in the past, when do you usually experience it? (3 respondents, 27%) than their older counterparts (0 respondents). Furthermore, the student athletes (all groups) referenced in Q17 that they experience burnout mostly during mid-season (6 respondents, 43%). One key similarity between the two groups, however, is that both identified “Level of training” (Q22) as the most significant factor contributing to burnout (45% for freshman and sophomores, and 38% for juniors, seniors, and graduate students).

Team vs. Individual Sports

The final important variable to investigate regarding this study is whether the athlete partakes in an individual or team sport. Individual sports considered were cross country, track and field, golf, tennis, and other while team sports comprised of basketball, softball, volleyball,

baseball, football, lacrosse, soccer, and other. The demographics of the two categories of sports is important toward the findings. The team sports respondents comprised mostly white ethnicity (87%), juniors, and mostly on partial scholarships. The individual sports participants were 50% black or African American, and 50% white. This group also consisted mostly of freshman, and walk-ons. The first significant finding came from Q9. This question identified that team sports members were more familiar with the signs of burnout than their individual sports members' counterparts. Eighty percent of team sports respondents recognized that they are familiar with the signs and symptoms of burnout while individual sports members stated that they are mostly "Sort of familiar" (67%) with the signs of burnout. Continuing with the symptoms of burnout, team sports members displayed more chronic stress than individual sports respondents' do (Q10). Seventy-nine percent of team sports respondents identified experiencing chronic stress while only 17% of individual sports respondents felt the same way.

More in hand with this trend, team sports members are also more likely to know when they are experiencing burnout. Q11 displays that 50% of team sports respondents know when they are experiencing burnout. None of the individual sports respondents identified that they know when they are experiencing burnout. 83% of individual sports respondents acknowledged that they are not sure when they are experiencing burnout. In addition, the perception on pressure to succeed is a pertinent result. Team sports respondents answered fifty-fifty (50%) that equal pressure exists between team and individual sports. The majority of individual sports respondents think individual sports have more pressure to succeed than team sports do (Q12).

Interestingly enough, the results from Q13 were also surprising. In this question, 50% of team sports respondents stated that their main goal or purpose in participating in collegiate athletics is because "They have participated in sports their whole lives". In contrast, individual sports

respondents demarcated “The experience” (Q13) as the main reason for participation (67%). In addition, Q19 asked what factors/sources contribute to your burnout? Here, individual sports respondents stated that the main sources that contribute to their own individual/personal level of burnout were both “Level of training” and “Individual expectations to succeed” tied at 67%. Moreover, team sports respondents identified “Individual expectations to succeed” as the main factor that induces their own level of burnout (86%) followed by “Level of training” and “Academics” tied at 79%. Again, this question sought to investigate what factors KSU athletes identified as contributing to their own personal burnout level.

On the other hand, Q22 asked the participants to rank the factors from most significant to least impactful in general for college athletes. In general, team sports athletes at KSU identified “Level of training” as the most significant factor leading to burnout in Division I college athletes (38%), and “Pressure to succeed and become a professional athlete” as the least significant factor (8%) aside from “Other” (83%). Individual sport athletes also identified “Level of training” as most significant factor (50%) in accordance with Q22, but did not have a least significant factor as 100% of respondents answered with “Other”. This is a clear contrast, as personally, KSU Division I athletes identified “Individual expectation to succeed” as the main source of their burnout, and “Level of training” as the general factor that contributes to burnout across Division I athletes.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this study sought to find out which factors associated with leading to burnout (according to the literature) have the largest impact and level of importance on the effects of burnout in Division I college athletes. The methodology conducted was an interview questionnaire taken by Division I athletes at Kennesaw State University mostly through direct email and survey

links posted in the Student Athlete Success Services (SASS) building. The total population for this study was 383 (N), and the number of participants were 22 (n).

The findings were able to fulfill the purpose of this study and identify which factors are associated with having the largest impact, and level of importance in regards to athletes' burnout. The athletes at KSU identified that the major factors leading to burnout are: individual expectation to succeed (80%), level and frequency of training (75%), academics (65%), and coaches' pressure (55%). Furthermore, the athletes identified "Level of training" as having the most impact on level of burnout (79%), the "Effort to maintain a high GPA" and "Coaches' pressure" tied as second most-impactful factor (53%), and "Maintaining a scholarship" as the third most-impactful factor (42%). The most relevant finding from this study is that the KSU Division I student athletes identified "Level and frequency of training" as the most significant factor associated with leading to burnout.

From these findings, we can clearly state that the hypothesis "over 50% of burnout is contributed to the following four factors: scholarship implications, coaches' pressure, parents' pressure, and the prospect of a lucrative professional career; with scholarship implications contributing to over 70% of burnout as identified by the athletes' answers in the online survey" can only be minimally supported. Only "Scholarship implications" and "Coaches' pressure" were relevant in contributing to the athletes' level of burnout, and neither "Parents' pressure" nor "The prospect of a lucrative career" were identified as relevant factors in this study. Furthermore, "Level of training" was responsible for contributing to over 70% of the burnout identified by the athletes, and not "Scholarship ramifications" as originally hypothesized.

Further Study

There was a significant implication with this study, however. The survey questionnaire failed to ask the participants what major/degree they were pursuing, and if the particular degree led to any level of burnout. This is an important implication, as it is generally accepted and normative that some degrees and majors are more difficult than others. Therefore, would an athlete pursuing a Biology or Business degree feel the effects of burnout sooner, and more often, than perhaps a social science major? Future studies should incorporate and analyze the major/degree variable as attributing to burnout in Division I college athletes.

Future research should also examine the possibility that females' ability to mature faster than males, or have more information about burnout, may signify that they are more familiar with the symptoms of burnout, and thus may be able to realize the effects of burnout at an earlier age than their male counterparts. Based on the answers from Q9, the majority of females are "Familiar" with the signs of burnout, while males are "Mostly familiar" with the symptoms of burnout. This in turn, may assist females to mitigate the impact that burnout will have on their athletic career.

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Appendix A:**Qualtrics Online Survey Questions:****Demographic Questions:**

1. Please acknowledge the online survey consent form.
2. What is your age?
 - a. 18
 - b. 19
 - c. 20
 - d. 21
 - e. 22-25
 - f. >25
3. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Other
4. Please Specify your ethnicity or race:
 - a. White
 - b. Hispanic or Latino
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Native American or American Indian
 - e. Asian/Pacific Islander
 - f. Other
5. What is your nationality?
 - a. American
 - b. International:
 - i. Please Specify:
 - ii. How long have you lived in the U.S?
6. What is your current University status?
 - a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
 - e. Graduate Student (5th YEAR)

Burnout Questionnaire:

7. What sport do you participate in?
 - a. Basketball
 - b. Baseball
 - c. Football
 - d. Cross Country
 - e. Track and Field
 - f. Golf
 - g. Tennis
 - h. Lacrosse
 - i. Soccer
 - j. Softball
 - k. Volleyball
 - l. Other: _____
8. Are you on a scholarship?
 - a. Full Scholarship
 - b. Partial Scholarship
 - c. Walk-on
 - d. I would rather not share
9. Do you know the signs of burnout? (Some symptoms include: Physical and mental exhaustion, emotional withdrawal, reduced sense of accomplishment, chronic stress, depersonalization, devaluation, etc.)
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Sort of
10. Do you experience any of these symptoms at any time?
 - a. Physical and mental exhaustion
 - b. Physical, social, and emotional withdrawal
 - c. Chronic stress
 - d. Loss of motivation
 - e. Reduced sense of accomplishment
 - f. Depersonalization/devaluation
 - g. Staleness (physiological state of overtraining that results in deteriorated performance)
11. Do you know when you are experiencing burnout?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Not sure
12. Do you believe there is more pressure to succeed in individual or in team related sports?
 - a. Individual
 - b. Team
13. What is your main goal or purpose for participating in college athletics?

- a. Free education?
 - b. Prospecting to become a professional athlete?
 - c. The experience?
 - d. Staying in shape?
 - e. You feel that you have to due to your parent's pressure?
 - f. Coaches' pressure?
 - g. You have participated in this sport(s) your whole life?
 - h. Other
14. If you answered other to the question above, please explain the reason.
15. If you do experience burnout, or have experienced burnout in the past, when do you usually experience it?
- a. Preseason
 - b. Mid-season
 - c. Post-season
 - d. Off Season
 - e. Other
16. Why do you think that is? Please explain briefly.
17. What factors/sources contribute to your burnout?
- a. Parental pressure
 - b. Academics
 - c. The level of training
 - d. Coach's pressure
 - e. Scholarship ramifications
 - f. Individual pressure to succeed
 - g. Chances of becoming a professional athlete
 - h. Other
18. If you answered other to the question above, please explain the factor or source.
19. Now that you have identified whether you have experienced burnout or not or the factors that lead to burnout, please identify which factors do you think have the biggest impact on burnout:
- a. Parent(s) have the biggest impact on burnout.
 - b. Coach's pressure has the biggest impact on burnout.
 - c. Trying to maintain a high G.P.A has the biggest impact on burnout.
 - d. The level of training or overtraining has the biggest effect on burnout.
 - e. Trying to maintain my scholarship has the biggest impact on burnout.
 - f. The pressure to succeed, become a professional athlete, etc. has the biggest impact burnout.
 - g. Other
20. Please rank the above factors from most significant impact to least amount of impact.