

Does being a College Athlete have an Increased Effect on Mental Health Compared to Non-Athlete College Students?

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INTRODUCTION

College can be a stressful transition for many students as they move away from home and are faced with new academic stressors. College athletes also undergo new responsibilities and a time-demanding schedule that often includes daily practices or workouts. In broad terms, mental health is one's emotional, psychological, and social well-being. Through every stage of life, it drives day-to-day actions and choices ("What is Mental Health?" 2020). Thus, this study aimed to assess if being an athlete in college negatively impacts the mental health of college students compared to non-athlete college students.

METHODS

Data was gathered using a google form survey including demographic information, the PHQA-9 Questionnaire, the GAD-7 Questionnaire, athletic involvement, and mental health treatment knowledge and implementation. The form was distributed through UD affiliated student emails. Participants were first-fifth year students living on campus that fit into one of the three study groups – college athletes, club affiliated college athletes, and non-athlete college students. Non-UD students and UD students that do not live on campus (i.e., commuter students) were excluded from the study. Thirty UD undergrad students were recruited. Twenty athletes composed the experimental group and ten non-athletes served as the control for this study.

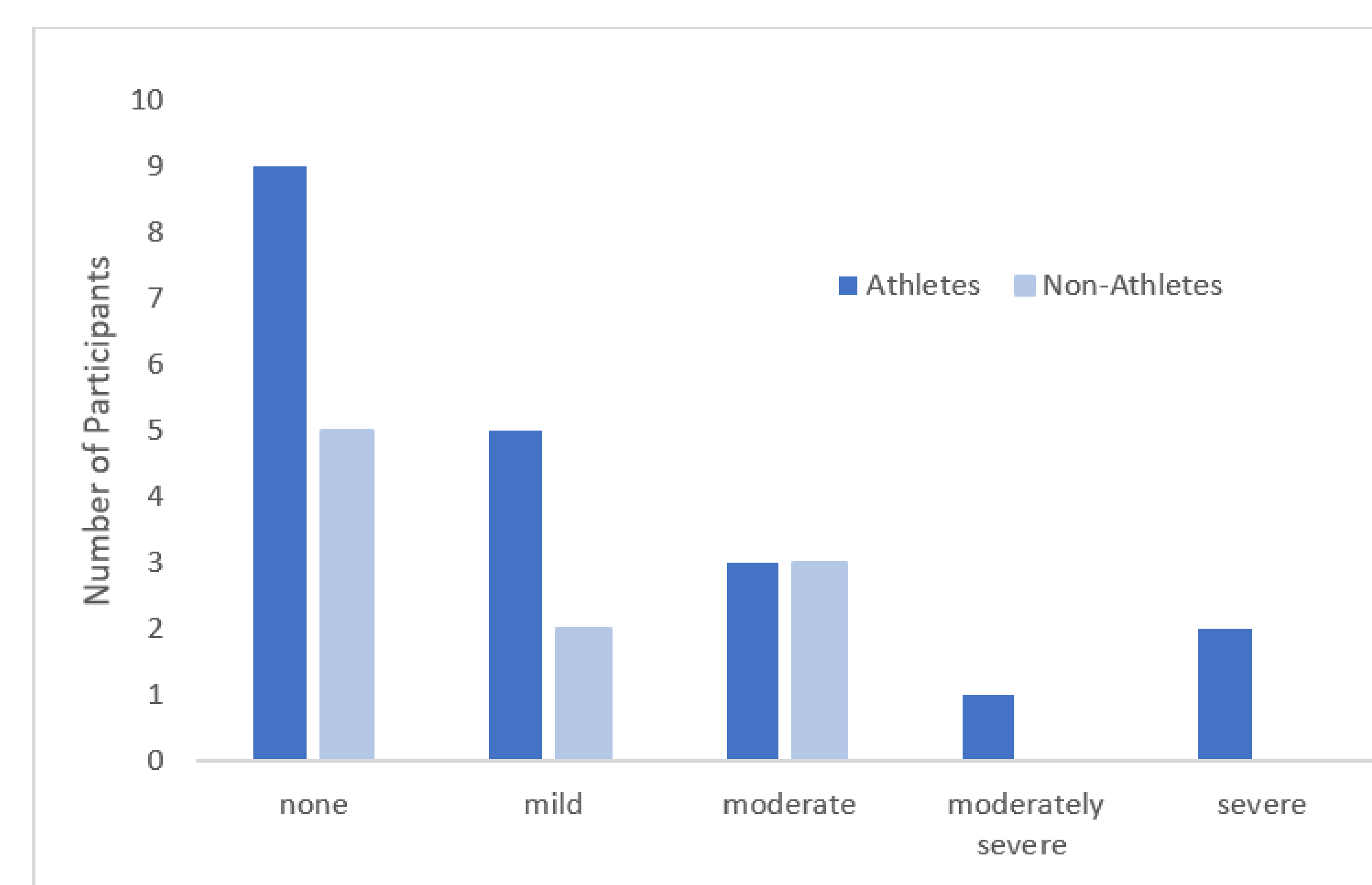
RESULTS

- No significant difference was found between depressive symptom scores of UD student athletes and non-athletes ($t[28]=0.42$; $p=0.70$)
- No significant difference was found between anxiety symptom scores of UD student athletes and non-athletes ($t[28]=0.34$; $p=0.77$)
- UD college athlete participants (collegiate athletes and club athletes) had reports of higher activity and more frequent workouts and/or practices than non-athlete participants ($t[28]=9.55$; $p=6.69E-7$).

Characteristic	Athletes, n=20	Non-Athletes, n=10
Sex		
Female	15	8
Male	5	2
Race/Ethnicity		
White	16	8
African American/Black	1	1
Native Hawaiian	1	1
Asian American/Asian	2	
School Year		
First-year	1	1
Second-year	4	
Third-year	9	4
Fourth-year	5	5
Fifth-year	1	
Mental Health Diagnosis		
Yes	4	4
No	16	6

Figure 1

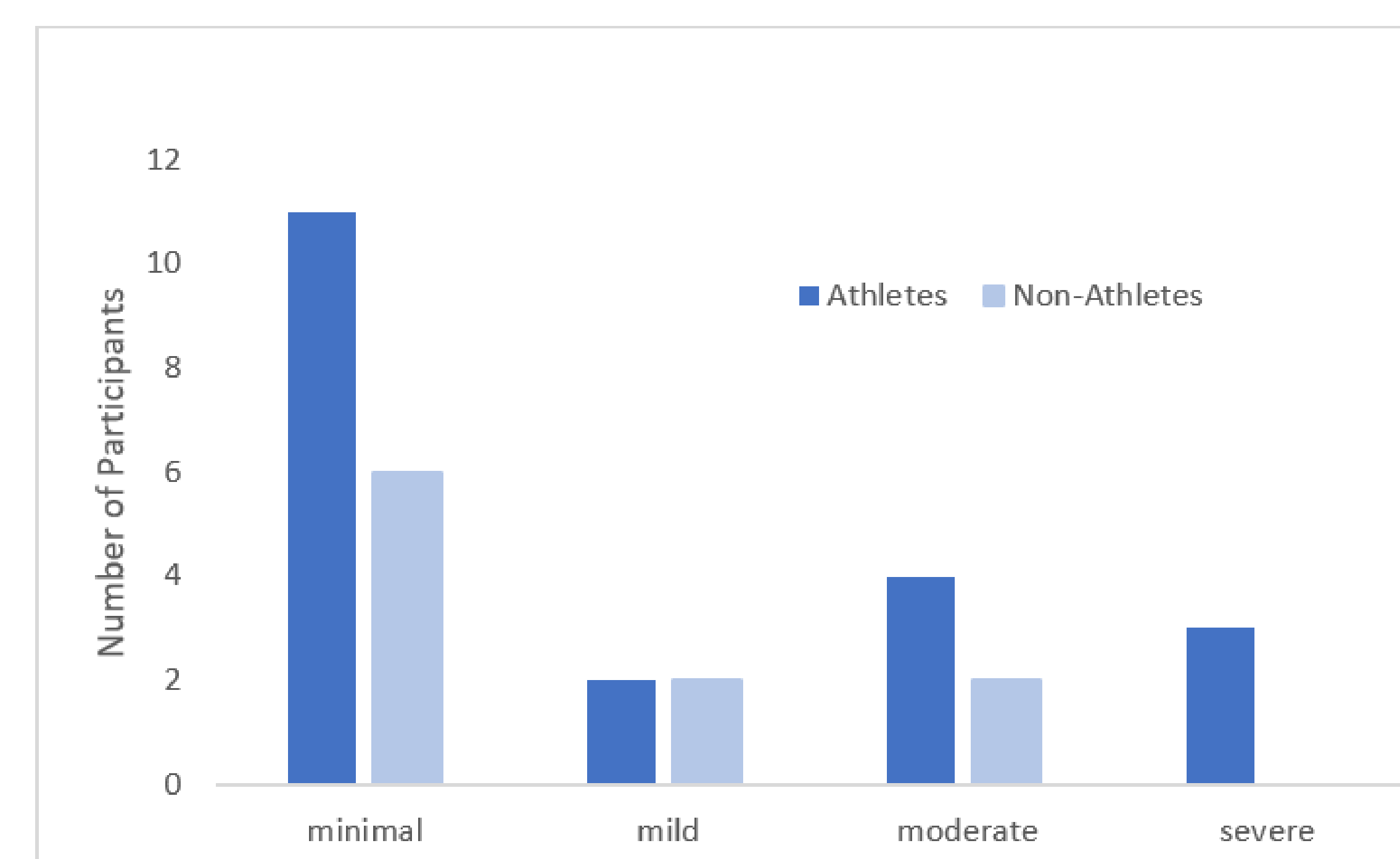
Depression Symptoms of UD Athletes and Non-Athletes



Depression symptom categories calculated using the Patient Health Questionnaire-9: none (0-4), mild (5-9), moderate (10-14), moderately severe (15-19), and severe (20+).

Figure 2

Anxiety Symptoms of UD Athletes and Non-Athletes



Anxiety symptom categories calculated using the Generalized Anxiety Disorder-7 Questionnaire: minimal (0-4), mild (5-9), moderate (10-14), severe (15-21).

CONCLUSIONS

Being an athlete in college does not appear to have a negative impact on the mental health of college students. Although college athletes may experience additional stressors due to their athletic involvement, the study's results present a maintenance of mental health in comparison to non-athlete college students.

College athletes reported implementing coping strategies and treatment for mental health (if necessary) regularly to combat the stressors of being an athlete in college, thus, exhibiting resilience.

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