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Co-Occurring Psychiatric Conditions Among Athletes Experiencing Prolonged Recovery from Sports-Related Concussion

Author Block: Adam Shunk¹, Vincent Nittoli¹, Erin Snook². ¹*St. Vincent Sports Performance, Indianapolis, IN.*

²*Datalys Center for Sports Injury Research and Prevention, Indianapolis, IN.*

Abstract:

Sports-related concussions are increasingly being recognized as a public health concern with an estimated 300,000 occurring annually. Recovery time from sports-related concussions varies greatly among athletes. The majority (80%-90%) resolve within 7-10 days, with a small population experiencing prolonged recovery. The identification of etiologies, such as co-occurring psychiatric conditions, is critical for improving treatment and management of concussed athletes experiencing prolonged recovery.

PURPOSE: Determine the prevalence rates of co-occurring psychiatric conditions in a population of athletes who were referred for neuropsychological assessment due to a prolonged or complicated recovery resulting from sports-related concussion.

METHODS: A retrospective chart review of 76 athletes (32 females, 44 males) referred for neuropsychological evaluation was conducted. The sample of athletes had a mean age of 16.0 ± 2.9 years (range: 8.1-23.0 years) and was seen for neuropsychological evaluation an average of 4.4 ± 4.7 months after a concussion.

RESULTS: The majority of athletes ($n = 56$; 73.7%) met formal DSM IV-TR diagnostic criteria for one or more psychiatric disorders. Of the 56 athletes with co-occurring conditions, 36 (64.3%) athletes met criteria for one co-occurring condition, 13 (23.2%) met two, 5 (8.9%) met three, and 2 (3.6%) met criteria for four co-occurring conditions. The five most prevalent conditions were adjustment disorders ($n = 27$), attention deficit hyperactivity disorders ($n = 21$), anxiety disorders ($n = 18$), learning disabilities ($n = 10$), and depression/mood disorders, ($n = 9$).

CONCLUSION: The extremely high prevalence of co-occurring psychiatric conditions among this sample of concussed athletes suggests there is a need for athletes experiencing prolonged recovery to be referred for neuropsychological evaluation. Diagnosis and appropriate treatment of co-occurring conditions is an important component of the management of athletes experiencing prolonged recovery from sports-related concussion.

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