

Sources of Stress in NCAA Division III Athletes: Racism and Mental Health Threats in Competition

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Background

- Student-athletes face stressors that can increase the risk of mental health problems and risk-taking behaviors
- Previous research indicates athletes experience three main types of stress during competition: competitive, organizational, and personal
 - Examples for each: pressure to perform well, injuries, and academics
- Mental Health and Stigma:
 - Many athletes often do not seek assistance due to the stigma associated with mental health
 - Mental health may be perceived as a “weakness” within the athletic subculture
- Racism in Sports:
 - Previous research suggests that athletes of color face racial microaggressions, leading to adverse effects on their mental health
 - Athletes of color may experience various forms of racism, such as racial stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion

Introduction

- The main objective of this study was to investigate the stressors that hinder the performance and mental health of Division III student-athletes during competition
- The study focused on the experiences of BIPOC athletes in relation to experiencing race-based stressors in sports that hinder their mental health, such as racial discrimination and exclusion
- The study examined how variables such as gender, sports type, age, and race affect anxiety levels, common stress factors, coach-athlete-parent relationships (whether positive or negative), and the occurrence of racial microaggressions among student-athletes

Methods

Quantitative survey research was utilized to collect and analyze data from 115 Division III student-athletes at The College of Wooster. The survey consisted of questions from these verified scales:

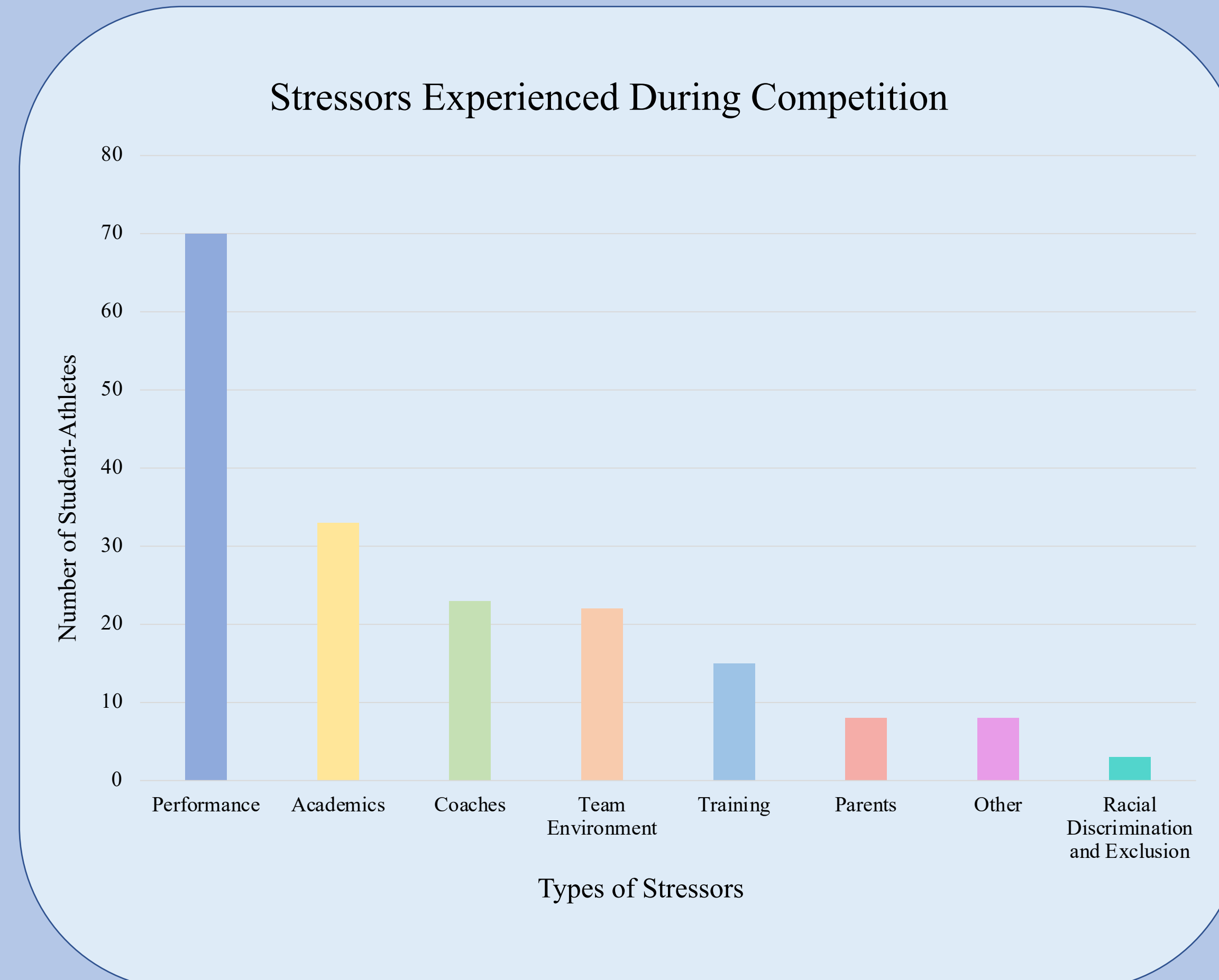
- Sports Anxiety Scale (SAS)
- Positive and Negative Coach-Athlete-Parent Interpersonal Relationships (PNPCAP)
- Athletes Stress Inventory (ASI)
- Racial Microaggression Scale (RMAS)
- Demographics

Further qualitative research of interviewing was conducted to explore whether BIPOC athletes experience race-based stressors

A total of 13 athletes were asked questions based on the following themes: Sport, Competition, Demographics, Team and Teammates, Personal Experiences, and Race

Survey Results

- A high number of participants reported experiencing stress during competition. The results indicate that athletes are most stressed about their performance and academics during competitions



- Overall, the study indicates no statistically significant differences between BIPOC and non-BIPOC athletes on common athlete stressors. However, BIPOC athletes did report greater concerns with negative mood, negative team compatibility, poor well-being, and academic stressors than non-BIPOC athletes
- BIPOC athletes experience higher levels of negative coach-athlete-parent relationships than non-BIPOC athletes
- Non-BIPOC athletes exhibit higher levels of anxiety than BIPOC athletes
- On average, individual sport BIPOC athletes experience more racial microaggressions than team sport BIPOC athletes
- Female BIPOC athletes report experiencing more racial microaggressions than male BIPOC athletes
- BIPOC athletes experience the most stress from racial microaggressions related to being perceived as low achievers, while experiencing the least stress from microaggressions related to sexualization
- Research has found positive correlations between athletes experiencing anxiety and several factors, including common athletic stressors, team compatibility and racial microaggressions, anxiety and a positive coach-parent-athlete relationship, and anxiety and a negative coach-parent-athlete relationship

Interview Results

- BIPOC athletes report:
 - Athletes experience the most stress related to the pressure of performing well in competition and practice, with other sources of stress including comparison to others, insomnia, and low self-esteem
 - Athletes experience significant stress during competition due to factors, such as racial exclusion by teammates, self-doubt, poor performance, comparison to others, academic pressures, leadership responsibilities, and the burden to perform well
 - BIPOC athletes experience varying levels of race-based stress. Research highlights that they encounter the most stress when interacting with coaches and teammates
 - No specific patterns were found in the answers based on the demographic backgrounds of the participants
 - Although not all athletes expressed the same experience, some BIPOC athletes reported feeling that they would be treated differently if they were White athletes

Major Conclusions and Future Directions

Major Conclusions:

- Many student-athletes experience stressors that impair their performance including performance, academics, coaches, team environment, training, parents, racial discrimination, mental health, and injury
- Emphasizing the significance of athletes' associations with teammates, coaches, and parents is crucial. Gender and sports type are vital variables for identifying stressors in athletes
- Identifying as a BIPOC athlete does not necessarily indicate experiencing more stress in sports. Results of this study has proved otherwise
- BIPOC athletes encounter race-based stressors in their sporting milieu, but not all are affected. Team dynamics, competition, and teammates were identified as stressors. Therefore, it is vital to prioritize inclusion and diversity training in athletics to prevent microaggressions

Future Directions:

- Consider a balanced sample size, including more BIPOC athletes in the study
- Explore the experiences of non-binary athletes
- Examine specific time-points during competition that most significantly impair athletes' performance and mental health
- Explore effective coping strategies to help student-athletes effectively manage and mitigate the impact of stress

