

The Effects of College Athletics on Students with ADHD: A Comparison of Academic Success, Social Wellbeing, and Anxiety between Off-Season, In-Season, and Non-Athletes

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Introduction

Social Well-being: Among children, individuals with ADHD report significant deficits in relationships and peer interactions (Lopez-Williams et al., 2005). In children who have ADHD, high athletic performance is an indicator of positive peer interactions (Lopez-Williams et al., 2005). Therefore, success on a collegiate athletic team could have the same indication.

Anxiety: The comorbidity rate of anxiety and ADHD is 25% (D'Agati et al., 2019; Reimherr et al., 2017). By having ADHD and being a college-athlete, there are a variety of potential stressors that could lead to an anxiety-related diagnosis.

Academic Performance: Non-athletes with ADHD report worse depression, worse academic adjustment, higher severity of mental health concerns, and higher stress levels than student-athletes with ADHD (Lund, 2019). While the number of stressors that student-athletes face is quite large, college athletics can offer structure, increased academic support, social networks, and accessible mental health resources (Lund, 2019) that could result in better academic performance.

Direction of Study

This study examines the relationship between the three factors above in relation to in-season athletes, off-season athletes, and non-athletes to examine how athletic status relates to the possible academic and social benefits of being a collegiate student-athlete for one with ADHD.

Hypothesis

I hypothesize that in-season athletes with ADHD will have the best academic performance scores, lowest anxiety levels, and highest social wellness scores, followed by the off-season athletes with ADHD, and then the non-athletes with ADHD.

Method

Participants: 263 College students from Wooster and BGSU

Materials:

- State-Trait Anxiety Inventory
- Adult ADHD Self-Report Screening Scale for DSM-5
- Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
- Academic Success Inventory for College Students

Procedure:

- Students were recruited to take an anonymous online survey through emails, word of mouth, and a QR code flyer.
- Participants with and without ADHD were recruited

Results

1. Team sport athletes have higher academic success scores than the athletes that play both an individual and team sport.
2. Those with ADHD and/or symptoms of ADHD appear to have higher academic success scores than those without ADHD nor symptoms of ADHD.
3. In-season athletes appear to have lower academic success scores compared to off-season athletes.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Academic Success and Athlete Status

Athlete Status	N	Mean	S.D	S.E.
In-season	38	74.29	26.44	4.29
Off-season	34	88.88	22.55	3.87
Non-athlete	55	83.47	19.88	2.68
Total	127	82.17	23.23	2.06

4. There were no statistically significant results found for social-wellbeing and anxiety levels between any participant groups.

Discussion

The results contradict my hypothesis, and the results suggest that student-athletes with ADHD perform worse academically when they are in-season. Additionally, students with ADHD and/or symptoms of ADHD perform better academically than those without ADHD nor symptoms of ADHD. Lastly, team sport athletes perform better academically than the athletes that play both an individual and team sport.

Limitations

1. Degree of athletic demands vary based on division, team, sport, and school.
2. Wooster is a homogeneous environment.
3. The type of student that takes these surveys may be already academically inclined.
4. Number of people without ADHD nor symptoms of ADHD (n=15).
5. The mixed reliability of the ADHD symptoms screener because it is a self-report assessment.
6. There was a high number of first year participants (39%).

Future Directions

1. Compare student-athletes competing at the Division I, II, and III level.
2. Examine how student-athletes with ADHD feel about seeking academic accommodations.
2. Investigate how academic performance changes over the years for student-athletes with ADHD.