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The Effect of Gender and Socioeconomic Factors on Reporting of Concussions among NCAA Student-Athletes

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Introduction

Concussions are traumatic brain injuries that result from “brain shaking” as a result of transmit force to the head. Concussions result in immediate and transient post-traumatic impairment of neural functions which lead to both psychological and physiological symptoms.

As knowledge of the long-term implications of these injuries grows, concussions are becoming an increasing health concern worldwide. One subset, sports-related concussions, are receiving an increasing amount of attention from scientists and health-care practitioners.

More than 3.8 million sport-related concussions occur annually in the United States alone, and some studies suggest that up to 43% of these go unreported and untreated.

Methods

We developed a survey designed to determine the influence of gender and socioeconomic status (SES) factors on the underreporting of concussions among 214 NCAA student-athletes. The survey consisted of questions that measured:

- Gender
- Socioeconomic status
- General knowledge of concussions
- Experience with concussions
- Discrepancies between ideal and actual behavior relating to concussion reporting

Surveys were distributed to Division I, II, and III institutions in each state of the US.

Results

Data collected from the survey suggests:

- Females are more likely to report a suspected concussion to an athletic trainer or coach than males.
- Socioeconomic status had insignificant effect on concussion reporting behavior among athletes.
- All athletes left many concussions unreported and untreated, indicating a potentially significant health threat to them.

Study conducted with funding from the Undergraduate Research & Creative Opportunities grant, and from the Utah State University Honors College.

Conclusion

This study provided an important baseline for athlete concussion reporting behavior in the NCAA; however, our study was limited in the diversity of survey participants.

The next step of this research is to obtain more data from a more diverse sample to determine if race or socioeconomic status have any significant influence on concussion reporting behavior.