

External Pressures on Injured Athletes' and Their Effects on Mental Health and Return to Play

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Context: Student athletes face many challenges in and out of their sport. Along with practicing and playing to their best ability, they have to worry about keeping up with schooling. Once a player is hurt and out of play, they add the pressure of getting back into play on their plate. Along with their own internal pressure, athletes may experience pressure from outside sources. These sources could include friends, family, coaches, and parental guardians. External pressures could play a role in how an athlete returns to play. This research can help us understand whether the external pressures end up causing the athlete more mental, emotional, or physical harm with re-injury. The purpose of this study is to determine whether the injured athletes feel any external pressure to return to play before they fully heal and if the external pressure affects their mental health. **Methods:** Participants were recruited by the university asking for their participation in this study. The survey was distributed through the university's mass email system and was hosted by Qualtrics. To be included in this survey the participants must be a student or faculty member of the university. Participants must also have participated in a high school or collegiate sport and have sustained an injury that put them out of play. The survey included general demographic information (age, gender, race, education, what sport they played, and what injury they sustained). The survey also included questions regarding the external pressures the athlete experienced during their injury. These external pressures include parent/guardian, coaches, and friends. **Results:** 91 participants consented to do the survey. Out of those 91 participants, 41 (45.05%) did not complete the survey. This survey is done on a scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Out of the 50 participants that completed the survey, 29 (58%) stated that they felt external pressure during their time of recovery. 30 (60%) of participants stated that during their recovery their mental health declined. When asked if the external pressure the participants felt caused them to return to play before they were mentally ready 15 (30%) agreed, 10 (20%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 25 (50%) agreed. 25 (50%) agreed that they pushed through pain and other symptoms because of external pressures. **Conclusions:** The study found that during the injury most athletes experienced external pressures and a decrease in mental health. Out of the 91 participants who consented to the survey only 50 (54.94%) completed the survey. This could be due to some athletes not experiencing an injury that put them out of play. Determining which external pressures contribute to decreased health will increase the awareness of mental health in student athletes related to injury.