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Psychological Distress Among High-Risk Youths First-Year in Collegiate Sport

Cassidy Janay Jenkins
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Cassidy J. Jenkins

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Review Committee
Dr. Arcella Trimble, Committee Chairperson, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Charles Diebold, Committee Member, Psychology Faculty
Dr. Michael Plasay, University Reviewer, Psychology Faculty

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Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2015

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Clinical Psychology

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Abstract

It is well documented that students from low socioeconomic backgrounds face a significant degree of deficiencies in college opportunity. Previous researchers have shown an estimated 1 in 5 student athletes given the opportunity to compete at the college level come from low socioeconomic backgrounds and encounter more adjustment issues than other students because of the psychological barriers they face. Using Pearlin's theory of psychological distress and Selye's GAS as the foundation, this study explored the extent to which the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress in first-year high-risk student athletes. Data were collected from 132 first-year high-risk student athletes via an online survey. The survey included Health & Human Service SES questionnaire, Sport and Academic Commitment Questionnaire, and the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale. Multiple regression analysis revealed that sports commitment differences and academic differences were shown not to predict psychological distress. However, the results consistently showed the student athlete has time discrepancies with sport and academics and on average has moderate to severe psychological distress levels. The results are key to continuing the conversation of student athletes' psychological distress levels and establishing better interventions that specifically address the challenges of being a high-risk student athlete. If specific interventions target high-risk student athletes' mental health, they can be better served and more prepared to make the most of the college experience.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late grandfather, Luther C. Hayes (Pops), and late cousin Brandon C. Anderson. Although you guys are unable to be here physically, I know you are here in spirit, watching my journey unfold. I am thankful to have such beautiful guardian angels.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Louise Hayes, and parents Allen and Sharon Jenkins. You all have always been supportive and encouraging, and I appreciate the love that is never-ending. To my brother and Sister-in-law, Narada and Nyrenda Jenkins, I am thankful for your support and always pointing out my positive attributes.

The dissertation is also dedicated to the rest of my family, aunts (Debbie, Jeanine, Terry, Trisha), uncles (June, Bryan), and cousins (Melissa, Timothy, Derek, Andrew, TJ, Greg). I always tell people my family is not like other families; we all love, enjoy, and appreciate each other no matter what happens in life. I am greatly blessed to call you all my family, thank you for being present and always being honest and supportive.

To the rest of my extended family and friends who have always supported me from afar or close by, I appreciate your love and understanding of the journey one takes when completing a doctorate. Although I may not have a lot of time to stay in communication, you all are always on my mind, thanks for your understanding and love.

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I would also like to acknowledge the expertise of committee member Dr. Charles Diebold and his meticulousness in quantitative analysis. The analysis can prove to be a daunting task, but with your guidance, I was able to accomplish something great. I appreciate your thoroughness and directiveness. I could not have accomplished the great dissertation feat without you and Dr. Trimble, thank you guys so much!

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Chapter 1: Introduction of the study

Introduction

Many student athletes are given the opportunity to attend college only through their involvement in interscholastic sport. National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Goals Study (2016) reported an estimated one in five student athletes given the opportunity to compete at the college level come from low socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds. The study also reported that of 490,000 student athletes in the NCAA, more than 47% of first-generation students strongly agreed they would not have attended college had they not been an athlete (NCAA, 2016). However, despite the enthusiasm to attend college through sport opportunity, many face obstacles that prove to be challenging to overcome such as mental health challenges and barriers that derive from being in a low SES.

Specific factors have frequently characterized low SES as not just low income (family of four income less than $24,750; for families/households with more than four, add $4,420 for each additional person), but low SES parental occupation and education, large family size, member of a minority group, and a one parent household (Health & Human Services, 2018). Young individuals from low SES backgrounds are also considered high-risk youth. Although a college education is a privilege for many people, it may not be the case for high-risk youth. Youth from low SES backgrounds often have barriers such as a lack of available resources and the prevalence of psychological challenges. Savits-Romer (2012) stated that high-risk youth also lack college readiness,

are first-generation attendees, have low postsecondary aspirations, are limited financially, and may have little to no social networks to aid in future planning.

In addition to limited resources, increasing evidence shows a link between low SES and negative psychological outcomes that influence academic achievement (McLaughlin & Sheridan, 2016). Jury et al. (2017) pointed to one of the reasonings for the gap between high SES and low SES, indicating that students not only have fewer opportunities to succeed in a university context but also face psychological barriers such as economic stress that further hinder academic achievements. Psychological concern can lead to psychological distress in an athlete and produce clinical issues such as anxiety, depression, and substance abuse (Hwang & Choi, 2016). Research showing specific challenging factors involved with transitioning in sports, particularly the pressures of a time commitment for both college sport and college academia and its effect on the psychological well-being of the athlete, has received little attention in the past in current literature (Pearson & Petitpas, 2013). Further, the literature does not specifically address the special population of a student athlete who is considered to be a high-risk youth. A need exists to address how the dual demands (time commitment of sport and academia) of being a collegiate athlete affect those that are considered to lack college readiness prior to entering a collegiate program (e.g., high-risk youth).

In Chapter 1, I provide an overview of the intended research study. The study begins with background information on collegiate student athletes, high-risk youth, first-year college students, and the psychological challenges that first-year high-risk student athletes may face. The study continues with a detailed description of Pearlin's theory of psychological distress describing the transitional challenges of the high-risk student

athlete and Selye's general adaptation syndrome (GAS) theory depicting perceived lack of balance as a point of distress in the high-risk student athlete. Further, the problem statement, the specific purpose of the study, and then the research question and hypotheses are discussed. Next, the nature of the study, and the definitions that guide this study are explained. Further, the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations are noted. Finally, the significance of this study and how it may contribute to the field are discussed along with providing a summary to highlight the main areas that are discussed throughout this chapter.

Background

Collegiate Student Athlete

The NCAA defines a *student athlete* as a student who participates in a competitive sport that is organized by the educational institution in which he or she is enrolled (NCAA, 2016). With more than 490,000 student athletes in the NCAA alone, each student has several challenges that are different from those of a traditional college student (NCAA, 2016). Currently, college sports and the NCAA organization are receiving significant attention from several investigations and lawsuits from former NCAA student athletes (McCants & Ramsay v. NCAA & UNC, 2015). The former student athletes filed a lawsuit, stating that they spent more than 40 hours per week on athletics with little time to keep up with academic commitments (McCants & Ramsay v. NCAA & UNC, 2015). The lawsuit stated they were deprived of meaningful education. Although the NCAA restricts student athletes from practicing more than 20 hours per week (NCAA, 2014), a disconnect exists because it does not consider every aspect of the athletic commitment which leaves many loopholes for coaches and athletic staff to take

advantage (Kissinger, 2010). A research study found that, on average, student athletes reported spending 40 plus hours per week on sport commitment, which is considered a full-time job, leaving little space for their academic commitment (Epstein, 2014).

Therefore, student athletes face a dilemma, many responsibilities, and stressors due to the dual demands of competing on a high level in sport and competing in the classroom for eligible grades (Gayles & Hu, 2009). Rothschild-Checroune, Gravelle, Dawson, and Karlis (2013) defined *dual demand* as the combination of sport commitment (e.g., meetings, film review sessions, conditioning, practice, playbook studying, endorsement activities, and games) and academic commitment (e.g., classes, tutoring, study sessions, homework, and assignments). The stress of a student athlete involves distinctive challenges related to balancing (a) athletic and academic commitments; (b) relationship demands such as coaches, teammates, family and friends; (c) athletic success or the lack thereof and emotional health; (d) physical health or injury and the desire to keep competing; (e) social activities with athletic and academic responsibilities; and (f) the ideas of future aspirations and the time to contribute to future career after sports (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Jury et al., 2017; Melendez, 2010; Savitz-Romer, 2012; Tinto, 1993). However, regardless of the balancing challenges, student athletes are new young adults that are expected to make tangible steps toward a future, succeeding in every aspect that goes along with being a student athlete.

First-Year College Students

To successfully counsel these new young adults, one must be aware of the lifestyle change a collegiate student athlete goes through in their first year. Once the high-risk student athletes sign the athletic scholarship contract, they are committing to

accepting a new identity and with this new identity comes a new lifestyle (Kimball, 2007). The transition from high school to college presents many complex emotions, from anxiety to excitement, wondering what it is like to be a college student and, further, a collegiate athlete. However, the major challenge for incoming college athletes is learning how to balance those emotions in the face of balancing academics, athletics, relationships, and social roles and responsibilities (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Melendez, 2010; Tinto, 1993). Only 5% of high school athletes can fill an open roster spot at a college (Gayles & Baker, 2015). The transition from high school to college can be a challenging and complex experience for first-year students, particularly for a special population such as high-risk youth and student athletes (Gayles & Baker, 2015). The first-year transition from high school to college includes adapting to the academic and social norms of the institution, adapting to a new environment that is different from the low SES background, all while having time constraints on time and energy due to the responsibilities of athletic participation (Feldman, 1994).

In the academic domain, student athletes are expected to be enrolled in a full course load of classes and make a certain grade point average (GPA) to stay eligible. If the student athlete is on an athletic scholarship, they must maintain a certain GPA to stay eligible for the scholarship. Any semester that fails to meet the GPA satisfactory requirements and progress results in the student losing their eligibility and in turn their college scholarship and sport participation (Melendez, 2010; Tinto, 1993). In the athletic domain as previously mentioned, student athletes must spend full time job hours upholding their athletic requirements. The demands in the academic and athletic domains also leave little room for social involvement (Terenzini, 1994; Tinto, 1993).

In a study, qualitative methods were used to examine the demands of within career transitions of student athletes (Pummell, Harwood, & Lavallee, 2007). They identified several categories involved in the process of transitional experiences of athletes, including a source of stress and motivation of the transition (Pummell et al., 2007). Researchers concluded that further within-career transition research is needed for athletic departments to design programs that mitigate negative influences (Pummell et al., 2007). Future research should examine the processes of adaptation between successful and unsuccessful transitions at all stages of the athlete's development; and future research should also study athletes who have less access to stress coping resources such as those from low SES (Pummell et al., 2007). The pressures of being a first-year student athlete can be difficult to handle but maybe even more so for those who already come from a challenging background such as high-risk youth (Jury et al., 2017).

High-Risk Youth

High-risk youth are young individuals who come from a low SES background. A college degree is out of reach for many but even more so for those who come from low SES backgrounds. In addition to the economic barriers that students face in their access to college, more evidence shows that after they enter college, their SES continues to influence their college experiences, academic achievement, and graduation rates (Jury et al., 2017). Considering the growing importance of a college degree today, giving students the best opportunity to succeed is important. However, students from low SES background are also a population known to lack college readiness due to several reasons.

Growing up in the low SES category correlates to worse health outcomes, impaired psychological well-being, and impaired cognitive and emotional development

throughout the lifespan (Hackman, Farah, & Meaney, 2010). SES status has been shown to influence neural development that may relate to the academic disparities between middle and higher SES versus low SES academic achievement (Rosen, Sheridan, Sambrook, Meltzoff, & McLaughlin, 2018). Researchers have concluded that low SES students' academic achievement is of a greater deficit than high SES student academic achievement (Jury et al., 2017).

A qualitative study regarding college readiness within the high-risk population suggested that inequities exist with college readiness of high-risk youth due to many factors, such as mental and behavioral barriers, environmental risk factors, and ecological factors negatively shaping college readiness (Savitz-Romer, 2012). The above qualitative study showed how the students' future identities and choices across developmental stages are predicated on several factors including school experience, peer experience, and parental expectations (Savitz-Romer, 2012). As explained in the student athlete section, the high-risk youth who choose to attend college through sport have a challenge with balancing their school experience, peer experience, and parental expectations. Although those challenging factors are important to assess, the study mentions, but does not consider, how the mental and behavioral aspects shape the student's experiences (Savitz-Romer, 2012).

According to Dembo et al. (2008), high-risk youth who experience emotional and psychological issues are at greater risk of having behavioral issues and higher levels of co-occurring mental health problems. Exposures to individual, school, peer, family, and environmental risk factors increase mental and behavioral relapses; however, initially not all risk factors predict risk (Dembo et al., 2008). Results have shown that two-thirds of

high-risk youth experience mental and behavioral relapses through time. The study stated that future research should address the within-group differences (e.g., high-risk youth who are student athletes) to understand better how to treat mental and behavioral issues (Dembo et al., 2008). In addition, the mental and behavioral risks can be triggered with the exposures of being a high-risk youth and concurrently being a student athlete that is transitioning to the pressures of a college sport for the first time (Jury et al., 2017). Lu, Hsu, Chan, Cheen, and Jang-Rong (2012) suggested that college student athletes have unique life stressors that warrants close attention.

Psychological Distress

Student athletes are developing young adults and must find ways to deal with the many challenges they face as young adults, high-risk youth, first-year college students, and student athletes (Yusko, Buckman, White, & Pandina, 2008). They have unique life stressors that need to be addressed (Etzel, 2009; Lu et al., 2012). The student athlete faces the same challenges as their nonathlete peers. However, in athletic settings, they face even more harsh demands such as repetitive and exhausting training, frequent travels to and from game settings, injuries, pressures to succeed and fail in academic and sport competition, competition between teammates, media pressures, and sometimes burnout (Etzel, 2009; Johnson & Ivarsson, 2011). The added dimensions of burdens make college student athletes' lives stressful which is an essential issue to explore (Loughran & Etzel, 2008).

According to Selye's GAS theory (reviewed later), stress can be with eustress or distress (Selye, 1983), and when it becomes unpleasant distress, it can negatively affect every commitment including sport performance and academic performance (Comeaux &

Jayakumar, 2016). A study developed a valid measure that is specific to the stressors of collegiate athletes (Lu et al., 2012). The study accurately assessed life stressors with the measure and found that athletes who had higher levels of stress also experienced physical, mental, and academic attrition (Lu et al., 2012). The student athletes reported concerns about life-related problems (substance abuse), emotional adjustment issues, academic skill difficulties, relational issues, and concerns with regard to athletic retirement and future career (Etzel, 2009). Gebre and Taylor (2017) suggested that minority populations (e.g., those with low SES) may particularly have issues with adapting to the college environment and they often face conditions that increase their risk for adjustment difficulties such as psychological distress. Individuals coping with the adverse experience depends on their perception of the event or experience (Selye, 1983). Negative perceptions mean the high-risk student athlete views the experience or event as challenging or threatening, questioning their ability to cope successfully, which leads to psychological distress (Cohen, 2004). Psychologists who work with this population must be familiar with the developmental, academic and athletic lifestyle issues that the young adults generally face to successfully counsel these individuals (Loughran & Etzel, 2008). The tremendous pressures of being a student athlete coupled with the challenges of coming from a low SES background can bring the well-being of high-risk students into question (Dembo, Wareham, Poythress, & Meyers, 2008). Therefore, it is important to understand to what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress among high-risk students during their first year of college.

Problem Statement

Many high-risk student athletes develop psychological difficulties due to the pre-existing stressors of being from a low SES background combined with the stressors of being a first-year collegiate student athlete. Gayles and Baker (2015) stated that many high-risk student athletes struggle mentally and behaviorally once they transition from high school to college sport (e.g., anxiety, depression, eating disorder, academic struggles). Pummell et al. (2008) suggested that more studies are needed to examine the athletic transitions of student athletes who are high-risk youth. Rothschild-Checroune et al. (2013) also claimed that further studies should quantitively track the dual demands, such as the amount of time student athletes actually spend with specific communities (sport community and academic community). Therefore, gaps in literature pointed to quantitative studies explaining specific challenging factors (e.g., dual demands such as balancing time commitment of sport and academia) of transitioning to the collegiate sport and its influence on the mental health of athletes' who are considered to come from high-risk low SES background.

A few of the challenging factors considered in this study derives from the dual demands placed on the athlete; high-risk youths' (college freshman) perceived time needed (independent variable) and actual time spent (independent variable) on both college sport and college academia. The pressure of time commitment for both sport and academia significantly increases at the college level, and success in both commitments are considered nonnegotiable (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). A recent qualitative study explored the time demands placed on student athletes, concluding that a major conflict of interest exists, and student athletes spend more time on sports commitment

each week than a full-time job requires (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). The challenging pressures of time commitment with the added stressors of first-year students trying to integrate into college life and being considered high-risk can negatively affect one's psychological well-being (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013).

This study addressed the gap by specifically focusing on high-risk student athlete and exploring to what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress. The literature that has been reviewed along with Pearlin's theory of psychological distress (reviewed later) and Selye's GAS theory (reviewed later) support the expectation that high-risk student athletes will inevitably face changes that can lead to psychological distress if the event or situation is perceived as a negative experience. However, what is yet to be empirically determined is whether the balance of academic and sport time commitment predicts psychological distress for the high-risk student athlete.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to measure psychological distress, analyzing the difference between one's perceived time needed to be successful and actual time spent for both sports commitment and academic commitment in high-risk student athletes after transitioning to college sport. This study intended to address the discrepancies in the perceived time needed and actual time spent on both sport and academic commitment and its effect on the psychological distress among high-risk youth. The independent variables, sports commitment difference and academic commitment difference, were defined as actual hours spent on sport and actual hours spent on academic commitment and the athletes' perceived hours needed for both sport and

academic commitment. The dependent variable, psychological distress, was measured by the Kessler psychological distress scale (K10) and defined as anxiety or depression that has affected the athletes' level of functioning. The criteria of high-risk were defined as youth from low SES using the Health and Human Service low SES scale.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

RQ: To what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress.

H_0: The difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment does not predict psychological distress.

H_a: The difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment does predict psychological distress.

Theoretical Frameworks

This study was based on Pearlin's theory of psychological distress (Aneshensel & Avison, 2015; Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan, 1981) and Selye's GAS model (Selye, 1983).

Pearlin's Theory of Psychological Distress

Pearlin's theory of psychological distress suggests that all humans are in a particular state of perpetual change due to the situations and the stressors that come along with them to help them evolve (Pearlin et al., 1987). Young adults might experience distress as the individual acts to achieve dreams formed in adolescence (Pearlin et al., 1981). The factors that motivate individuals to develop are the circumstances and stressors they experience in life; these stressors can be moving out of the house, leaving

to university, starting a new journey, and others (Pearlin et al., 1981). The individual's resolution of challenging situations is shaped by the vulnerability and strength of the individual. The four elements of Pearlin's theory of psychological distress are individual character (gender, race, intelligence, background personality); skills for coping with stress (how well they work under pressure, skills to deal with pressure); availability of social support network (supportive peoples, family, friends); and nature and timing of stress (level of stress; Pearlin et al., 1981).

This theoretical framework was appropriate for this study because stressors are not only isolated events but are often interconnected and dependent on hierarchy status's (low SES) or a combination of chronic hardship (perceived imbalance of academia and sport commitment; Aneshensel & Avison, 2015). The chronic stressors may eventually lead to psychological distress such as symptoms of depression and anxiety (Aneshensel & Avison, 2015).

Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome

Selye developed the GAS model that suggests how someone responds to stress could result in positive and negative outcomes based on cognitive perceptions of the physiological or psychological experience (Selye, 1983). Stress, as described by the GAS model, is a physiological response pattern consisting of three stages (alarm, resistance, and exhaustion) that could lead to diseases or even death (Selye, 1983). Stress is a defense mechanism that can be experienced as eustress (positive) or distress (negative), and the perception predicts physiological and psychological outcomes (Selye, 1983). The GAS model originally considered only stress to derive from the physiologically based

construct, but later researchers added stress to involve psychological concepts (Selye, 1983).

Stress is considered a significant life event or change that demands response, adjustment, or adaptation. The GAS model hypothesizes that change is inherently stressful, life situations demand the same level of adjustment across the population, a common threshold of adjustment exists, and exhaustion results in disease (Selye, 1983). When confronted with stress (negative stimulus), the alarm response will initiate the sympathetic nervous system to deal with the stressor (Selye, 1983). The resistance response then alerts the fight or flight reaction to the stressor, accommodating the response to return the body to homeostasis which can lead to adaptive diseases such as psychological distress (Selye, 1983). The GAS theory correlates with Pearlin's theory in that stress is a significant inevitable life event or change that demands a response, adjustment, or adaptation (Selye, 1983). Pearlin's theory of psychological distress and Selye's GAS model offers guidance on the high-risk student athletes relevance of stress and the state of changes after encountering the stressors of transitioning to collegiate sports.

Nature of Study

This study examined the extent to which the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predicts psychological distress during the first year of collegiate sports. This study used the one-group posttest design in which one group is exposed to a treatment or condition (at least one semester of sport and academic commitment) and measured afterward to see if there were any effects. Surveys were used to collect the data regarding all the variables.

Consequently, this study used regression analysis to determine the extent to which the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress. The participants were surveyed on how much time is allocated to each commitment and how much time they perceive is needed on each commitment.

The population being explored were incoming freshmen student athletes who are considered to come from low SES via Health and Human Services SES questionnaire. The SES questionnaire was designed to address covariates exposures, cohort studies, and designed to be self-explanatory (Health & Human Services, 2018).

The objective was to test the high-risk student athletes self-reported differences between time commitment to sport and academia as compared to the perceived time needed and its effects on psychological distress using the Kessler psychological distress scale (K10). The K10 scale is a 10-item five-level response questionnaire intended to measure psychological distress with questions about anxiety and depressive symptoms a person has experience in the most recent months (Kessler et al., 2003).

Focusing on high-risk student athletes distress levels during the first-year transition to collegiate sports is consistent with Pearlin's theory of psychological distress that suggest all humans are in a state of perpetual change which causes distress. Focusing on high-risk student athlete's perception of the time commitment needed versus time commitment spent aligns with Sely's GAS theory that perception predicts stress and affects the psychological experience. First-year student athletes' psychological distress levels was examined after at least one semester of college. The study tested whether psychological distress was prevalent and whether there was a discrepancy between the

time needed and time spent. This quantitative analysis may assist in pinpointing the amount of distress added after transitioning to collegiate sport due to the dual demand of time commitments.

Definition of Terms

These terms are defined as they are used throughout this research study:

Actual time: The number of hours the student athlete spends on meetings, film review sessions, conditioning, practice, playbook studying, endorsement activities, games, classes, tutoring, study sessions, homework, and assignments.

Adjusting and adapting to college: The student's ability to meet every demand of the athletic commitment, academic commitment, and social demands of attending college (Feldman, 1994).

Dual demands: The combination of sport commitment (e.g., meetings, film review sessions, conditioning, practice, playbook studying, endorsement activities, and games) and academic commitment (e.g., classes, tutoring, study sessions, homework and assignments; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013).

General adaptation syndrome (*GAS*): How someone responds to stress could result in positive and negative outcomes based on cognitive perceptions of the physiological or psychological experience (Selye, 1983).

High-risk youth: Lack college readiness, are first-generation attendees, have low postsecondary aspirations, are limited financially, and may have little to no social networks to aid in future planning (Savits-Romer, 2012).

In-career transition: The transitions that occur during the athletic career, such as the transition from high school to college (Pummell et al., 2008).

Low SES: Low income (family income less than 42,380), low-status parental occupation and education, large family size, member of a minority group, and one parent household, considered high-risk (Health & Human Services, 2018; Savits-Romer, 2012).

Perceived time: The number of hours the student athlete realized they need to spend on meetings, film review sessions, conditioning, practice, playbook studying, endorsement activities, games, classes, tutoring, study sessions, homework, and assignments.

Psychological distress: A term used to describe the general psychopathology of an individual with a combination of depressive symptoms, anxiety, and perceived stress (Ohayashi & Yamada, 2012).

Stress: Physiological response pattern, defensive mechanism of three stages (alarm, resistance, and exhaustion) that could result in diseases of adaptation or death (Selye, 1983).

Student athlete: An individual that participates in the interscholastic sport in combination with being involved in an academic setting, such as attending a college or university (Gaston & Baker, 2015).

Theory of psychological distress: All humans are in a particular state of perpetual change due to the situations and the stressors that come along with them to help them evolve (Pearlin et al., 1987).

Assumptions

This research was based on a few assumptions. First, I assumed that all the participants were first-year high-risk student athletes. The second assumption was that all the participants honestly responded when answering the surveys regarding the perceived

time needed to be successful, actual time spent for both sports commitment and academic commitment, and Kessler's psychological distress scale (K10). Finally, the third assumption is that all participants were voluntarily signing consent forms after fully understanding the requirements of the study.

Scope and Delimitations

All the participants were required to be first-year high-risk student athletes. The research study was restricted to only theses participant because the literature reviews, specifically pointed to students who lack resources and are transitioning to college sport as being the source of chronic stress that can lead to psychological distress (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Jury et al., 2017; Pearson & Petitpas, 2013; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). The research also determined that the balance of sport and academic commitment is a challenging factor (Pearson & Petitpas, 2013; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). Thus, the focus of this research was to determine these variables in first-year high-risk student athletes. Also, this research did not restrict the ages of the high-risk student athletes. Instead, all first-year high-risk student athletes, regardless of their age, was asked to participate because the fact they are in the first year of college sport is more important than their age during these years.

Limitations

This study may have been limited by several factors throughout the research process. First, the data collection process consisted of self-reported survey questions, and it is possible that the participants did not answer every question truthfully. There were several reasons for the discrepancy. The participants may have lacked understanding of the question or sought to portray a certain image. If the participants understood the

purpose of the study, they could have provided answers according to what they believe they should have said, influencing the study analysis. To possibly avoid these limitations, the participants were instructed to answer every question as honestly as possible, and their answers were anonymous. The weight of truthful answers were also explained to the participants, making sure they understood the importance of answering every question with honesty. Finally, the participants were instructed to ask for any help if they did not understand the questions on the surveys. Second, the research study examined the perceived time needed, which was dependent on the student athletes recalling their experience from the previous semester. The validity of the study relied on the athletes successfully recalling how many hours they have spent on sport and academic commitment and how many hours they believe they should have spent on sport and academic commitment.

Significance

The current study expanded on the gap in prior research and explored challenges of high-risk student athletes and the challenging factors of the time commitment of sport and academia after transitioning to a collegiate sport. The goal was to explore whether the difference between one's perceived time needed, and the actual time spent on sport and academic commitment predict psychological distress. The study focused primarily on first-year collegiate student athletes who are high-risk youth and compared psychological distress after they have transitioned to college sports. Neal et al. (2015) suggested the following:

> Many student athletes report higher levels of negative emotional states than non-student athletes and have been identified as having higher incidence rates for

> sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, mood disturbances, short tempers, decreased interest in training and competition, decreased self-confidence, and inability to concentrate. (p. 238)

The evidence of college student athletes possibly being at risk for psychological disturbances and mental illness are of great concern for colleges and the athlete (Gayles & Baker, 2015). Evidence also suggests that high-risk youth are at risk for psychological disturbance and mental illness, which is another concern for colleges and the student athletes who are considered high-risk (Gayles & Baker). Although research has shown the prevalence of psychological disturbance, it lacks the study of time commitment factors that may increase psychological distress of high-risk youth after transitioning to the collegiate sport. Neal et al. (2015) suggested that one of the essential elements in helping student athletes is early recognition of a potential problem and addressing those concerns more effectively.

The study can provide positive social change with first analyzing the difference of perceived time needed and actual time spent on both sports commitment and academic commitment after transitioning to collegiate sport for the high-risk student athlete. Helping to understand better the level of psychological distress and the challenges of time commitment will also assist athletic departments and college support services to be more direct and effective with psychological services. These findings may represent a useful starting point for future research to design and develop intervention studies to help mitigate psychological distress for high-risk youth who are making the transition to collegiate student athlete.

Summary

For most youth, graduating from high school brings many promising opportunities and new levels of experiences. However, for high-risk students, this task of transitioning from high school to the first year in college can bring new psychological challenges. High-risk youth face many challenges from multiple negative influences such as traumatic experiences that may increase their risk behaviors and mental health (Kingston et al., 2016). In addition to facing the many challenges of being high-risk youth, those who are student athletes face added new dimensions of psychological challenges with which they must cope with events and issues (e.g., balancing academia and sports time commitment, the pressure to achieve, new environment, injury). Those challenges combined with the typical demands of the adolescence developmental process places them at risk for psychological distress. Researchers have demonstrated a significant degree of study on student athletes but not enough on psychological distress, the balance of sport and academia time commitment, or the differences between the population such as those who are considered high risk. Therefore, conducting a study was vital to determining whether the balance of time commitments adds psychological distress to the high-risk athlete who is already considered to lack appropriate resources to cope with the collegiate transition successfully.

Chapter 1 explained the background information on the collegiate student athlete, high-risk youth, psychological distress, and the first year of college challenges high-risk student athletes may face. The problem that this research explored was high-risk student athletes developing psychological difficulties due to the combined stressor of being a collegiate student athlete while coming from a low SES background. The primary

purpose was to measure psychological distress, analyzing the difference between one's perceived time needed to be successful and actual time spent for both sports commitment and academic commitment in high-risk student athletes after transitioning to college sport. Next, the research question and hypothesis explored to what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress. The theoretical framework was based on Pearlin's theory of psychological distress, which suggests that all humans are in a particular state of perpetual change due to the situations and the stressors that come along with them to help them evolve. The theoretical framework was also based on Selye's GAS, which suggest how someone responds to stress could result in positive and negative outcomes based on cognitive perceptions of the experience.

Next, the study was conducted using a one-group posttest design. The study also assumed that all participants were first-year high-risk student athletes and answered every question honestly. However, the delimitations and limitations of the study were the limiting factors of a self-reported questionnaire and the possibility of internal validity being questioned. Many of the limitations were addressed prior to conducting the research, which may have reduced or remove the limitations altogether. Finally, the study contributed to the prior gap in research by exploring the challenges of high-risk student athletes and the challenging factors of the time commitment of sport and academia after transitioning to a collegiate sport.

In Chapter 2, I provide an in-depth discussion of the available literature on the collegiate student athlete, high-risk youth, psychological distress, and the first year of college challenges high-risk student athletes may face. Also, the literature review search

strategies and the theoretical foundation has been discussed. I also briefly discuss the literature related to similar variables due to the lack of research on the combination of variables discussed in this research study. Finally, Chapter 2 ends with a conclusion based on all the available literature.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

More than 7.7 million youth participate within high school sport with many aspiring of receiving a scholarship to compete at the next level (Gaston & Baker, 2015). Many of the athletes participate in sports year-round and are dedicated to their sport (Gaston & Baker, 2015; Haslerig, 2017). However, only a small percentage of those athletes, slightly more than 400,000, are the chosen few who get the opportunity to participate in college sports (Rubin & Moses, 2017). Many of those chosen are high-risk youth that come from low SES backgrounds with sports as one of the few options available to attend college (Lu et al., 2012). Because attending college and receiving a degree has become increasingly required to enhance an individuals' opportunity to thrive or survive in society (Lu et al., 2012), high-risk student athletes view college sport as an avenue to elevate themselves socially and financially (Gayles & Baker, 2015).

Although students from low SES have the opportunity to attend college through sport participation, they often lack college readiness and endure psychological challenges that present barriers in adjusting to college life (Jury et al., 2017). Adjustment or adaptation to college refers to the ability of students to meet the multifaceted demands of attending a college such as remaining in college, enjoying psychological well-being, and performing well academically and athletically (Melendez, 2010). With the current societal climate increasing the need for success at the college level, adjustment to the transition is pivotal in enhancing the student athletes' opportunities in college and to future success in society (Jury et al., 2017).

Although it is clear to many that college athletics are an excellent opportunity to attend college, numerous studies on how challenging these experiences can be for student athletes. Haslerig (2017) and Sudano et al. (2016) explained that college athletes enter with high aspirations and expectations, but those are quickly diminished once they begin to experience certain challenges specific to being a college student athlete. Rubin and Moses (2017) suggested that because of the unusual health, athletic, and time demands placed on these students, they have different college experiences than everyone else attending college. Wilson and Pritchard (2005) advised the transition to college is stressful for anyone, but evidence suggests that student athletes have even higher levels of stress than their counterparts due to the dual demands placed on them with athletic, social, and academic responsibilities. Bjornsen and Dinkel (2017) explained in a national study that a successful transition to college sport is at many times limited because of the competing demands of school and sport. Potuto and O'Hanlon (2007) found that student athletes are treated as athletes first and students second and the discrepancy in priorities may limit success in balancing both sport and academic leading to challenges at the college level.

College athletes, particularly in revenue-producing sports, have consistently underperformed in academic responsibilities compared with their fellow nonathlete counterparts (Haslerig, 2017). These athletes enter this role of a college athlete, and high demands are placed on their time which results in underperformance in academics, frequent isolation from the rest of the student population, and adverse mental health outcomes (Haslerig, 2017). Academic success and other factors suffer due to the challenge of balancing the academic requirements and sports requirements (Rothschild-

Checroune et al., 2013). Time management is a significant factor in the student athlete being able to balance each requirement and have success as an athlete (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). However, a national collegiate basketball conference called the Pacific Atlantic Conference (Pac-12) conducted a study on their athletes and found a willingness to overperform towards accomplishing the athletic time demands but a reluctance to sacrifice athletics for academics (Penn Schoen Berland, 2015).

The surmounting pressure to perform well on both athletic and academic demand has increased problems for athletes and their mental health (DiRamio & Payne, 2007). The student balances performing academically, while contrarily, they attempt to balance sport commitments and social relationships (DiRamio & Payne, 2007). Cosh and Phillip (2014) explored the stressors encountered by student athletes when combining both sport and education. Student athletes are expected to undertake education in accordance with their sport, but limited research has explored the influence of combining the two pursuits (Cosh & Phillip, 2014). Meanwhile, the number of mental health issues continue to rise with anxiety and depression, drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders, bipolar personality disorders, and schizophrenia (DiRamio & Payne, 2007). Jennings, Henderson, Erla, Abraham, and Gillum (2018) focused on how college student athletes cope with stress. The researchers found that stress is a common concern, but the students lacked appropriate coping behaviors to manage the stress which could be contributing to the mental health outcomes (Jennings et al., 2018). Also, Gaston and Baker (2015) explained that the demands placed on these students could leave little room for social involvement which research suggested is associated with gains in cognitive and affective personal development. For an incoming first-year student athlete,

these challenges can become overwhelming (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005), even more so for those who come from adverse backgrounds.

As previously mentioned, a significant percent of athlete's that college coaches recruit are from low SES backgrounds and often lack college readiness and endure psychological challenges that present barriers to effectively coping with stress (Spieler et al., 2007). Previous research has shown that students with low SES have fewer opportunities to succeed at the college level and encounter more adjustment issues compared to other students because of the psychological barriers they face (Jury et al., 2017). Nevertheless, research is limited to the specific experiences of student athletes that may already lack the resources available to be successful at the college level (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012). The transition from high school to college for student athletes may bring about psychological distress such as anxiety and depression (Gayles & Baker, 2015). However, this current research study presents another perspective for student athletes, understanding the experience of those from low SES backgrounds; who are at risk of psychological distress from a physical, psychological, and social context of transition (Pearson & Petitpas, 2013).

This chapter begins by detailing the literature review search strategies and explaining the theoretical foundation, which includes Pearlin's theory of psychological distress and Selye's general adaptation syndrome. Following these sections, a review of the past literature on each of the variables that are relevant to this study, which includes, high-risk youth, first-year college student, college student athlete, and psychological challenges will be discussed. Finally, this chapter will end with a detailed summary section of the discussed literature.

Literature Research Strategy

The articles that were used for this literature review were peer-reviewed and scholarly. Databases that were used include PsychINFO, PsychARTICLES, SAGE Journals, ERIC, Education Source, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. There are several keywords specific to this topic that I used to create the library search inquiries: *college athlete*, *intercollegiate athlete, first-year college student, college freshmen, college student, college transition, competitive sport, factors, mental health, psychological distress, wellbeing, high-risk youth, at risk student, student attrition, academic achievement, access to education, coping behavior, psychosocial, and cognitive*.

Reviewing literature utilizing the identified keywords involved Boolean Operators and Truncation. Boolean Operators define the relationship between words or groups of words using "and," "or," "not" (book). Truncation aids in finding variations of the identified keywords by adding a truncation symbol (*) to the root of a word (book). Utilizing Walden library psychology database, I used the truncation and Boolean operators of "*college athletes*" and "*transitioning to college*"; "*college athletes*" and "*psycholog**"; "*college athletes*" and "*factors*"; "*college athletes*" and "*development*"; "*college athletes*" and "*psychosocial*"; "*college athletes*" and "*cognitive development*"; "*college athletes*" and "*academic achievement*"; "*college athletes*" and "*psychological distress*"; "*college athletes*" and "*wellbeing*"; "*college athletes*" and "*high-risk youth*"; "*college athletes*" and "*coping behavior*".

Theoretical Framework Foundation

Pearlin's theory of psychological distress

Pearlin's theory of psychological distress suggested that all humans are in a perpetual state of change due to the stressors they face that help them evolve (Pearlin et al., 1981). He believed individuals have a lifetime full of continuous change where they might experience periods of stability based on four key elements: individual characteristics, the range of skills, social support, and timing of stress (Pearlin et al., 1981). The individual's characteristics (i.e., gender, races, intelligence, background, personality, and education) predict a persons' stability (Pearlin et al., 1981). The individual's range of skill predicts how they cope with stress or the change that occurs. If the person lacks specific skills, it can affect stability during stressful events (Pearlin et al., 1981). Next, social support or the lack thereof can be a source of stress and affect stability (Pearlin et al., 1981). Last, the nature and timing of the stress such as expected or unexpected changes can predict stability (Pearlin et al., 1981).

Pearlin's theory reflected his idea of stress as a continual process, and that development can be predicated on social factors (Pearlin, Schieman, Fazio, & Meersman, 2005). In other words, the stress process is based on a series of societal changes that can be anticipated as a result of a social clock and a individuals' distress level depends on the four key elements (Aneshensel & Avison, 2015). Pearlin believed that early adulthood is a time in life where major changes in role behaviors should occur as the individuals' responsibilities in society evolve (Pearlin et al., 2005). However, the change in stability that happens according to the social clock can negatively affect lives (Aneshensel & Avison, 2015). As an example, early adulthood is the time to experience childhood

ambitions, and a person's lifestyle can be changed at any time. Those periods of changing lifestyle can be accompanied by adverse psychological effects depending on the four key elements that predict stability. Additionally, the reduction of social support and a lack of self-esteem during a societal change may render a negative psychological impact in which may have otherwise been conquered if key elements for stability were present (Pearlin et al., 2005).

Pearlin's theory sets the framework for this study because high-risk student athletes face major barriers and life changes when transitioning to collegiate sports that may cause psychological distress to occur if certain key elements for stability are not present (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Pearson & Petitpas, 2013). As well, Pearlin's theory introduced the idea of chronic stress as an interconnected experience to SES. He suggested stressors are not only isolated events but are often interconnected and dependent on hierarchy statuses, such as a low SES, or a combination of enduring hardship like the perception of workload imbalance (Pearlin et al., 1981). However, he agreed that life requires stressors to help people evolve and the responses to the social clock require one to change behavior or mature (Pearlin et al., 1981).

The high-risk student athlete goes through a change in lifestyle that warrants maturity. They may to lack proper coping skills and the development of individual characteristics appropriate for mediating stress properly (Savitz-Romer, 2012). However, they are new young adults who are required to take on adult roles and become immediately responsible for balancing the new roles successfully (Haslerig, 2017). The expected response to the social clock (adult roles) requires them to have changes in behaviors to responsibly participate in societal requirements (Pearlin et al., 1981).

However, if those changes do not occur the individual will experience chronic stress such as symptoms of depression and anxiety (Aneshensel & Avison, 2015). In other words, the individual characteristics, the coping skills, the timing of stress, and social support of the student athlete may affect how they handle the newly acquired lifestyle of being a college student athlete. Thus, Pearlin's theory was used to address how the new demands (i.e., sport and academic commitment) of being a collegiate athlete affect those that are considered to lack key elements for stability (i.e., high-risk youth).

Selye's General Adaptation Syndrome

In Physics, stress was originally referred to as a state of events, the interaction between a force, and the resistance to counter that force (Selye, 1983). However, Selye was the first to incorporate the term stress into social psychology by describing it as a "nonspecific response of the body to any demand" (Selye, 1983, p.3). He believed in the relationship between stress and disease and stated that stress is a physiological response pattern that if prolonged can lead to diseases and death (Selye, 1983). The connection between stress and disease led him to create a stress model called GAS. The GAS model suggested an event that threatens an individual's well-being leads to a three-stage response (alarm, resistance, and exhaustion; Selye, 1983).

According to Selye (1983), the alarm stage begins with the body first reacting to the stressor with a "fight-or-flight" response. In the alarm stage, the sympathetic nervous system is stimulated, attempting to combat or avoid the stressor (Selye, 1983). Next, the body enters the resistance stage by focusing its attention on the stressor, remaining alert, reducing harm, or accommodating the stressor (Selye, 1983). The parasympathetic nervous system will enter homeostasis and return other functions in the body to normal

levels or accommodate the stressor (Selye, 1983). A failure to produce homeostasis leads to the exhaustion stage which means accommodating the stressor is pushing the body beyond capacity (Selye, 1983). The body is then susceptible to disease or death if it becomes exhausted by the stressor due to lack of available resources (Selye, 1983). Additionally, the GAS model suggested that stress response is based on the individuals' cognitive interpretations of the stimuli (Selye, 1983). If the individual cognitively views the stressor in a negative way, the body will go into the exhaustion stage, and a negative physical or physiological experience will occur (i.e., depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, heart disease).

Therefore, Selye's theory related to this study by offering guidance on high-risk student athletes relevance of stress and the state of changes after encountering the stressors of transitioning to collegiate sports. Lu et al. (2012) suggested college student athletes have unique life stress and face major life events when they enter college that warrants close attention. Selye (1983) stated that events which threatens well-being would lead to stress, but the perception of the event will determine the stress levels. The new act of balancing all the requirements for both sport and academia along with other factors (i.e., low SES students lack college readiness) can lead to high-stress levels (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). However, according to the GAS model, high-stress levels will only occur if the high-risk student perceives the college athlete challenges as a threat. Thus, this study was used to explore the hypothesis that if the first-year high-risk student athlete perceives there is a lack of time to succeed in their new requirements, psychological distress may be present.

High-risk Youth

Many researchers have suggested that class infuses daily life, establishes self-concepts, emotions, tastes, and influences life opportunities (Shoshana, 2019). It is well documented that students from low SES backgrounds face a great degree of deficiencies in academic opportunity and emotional adjustment to college (Stone, Walton, Clark, & Ligertwood, 2016). According to Wyatt and Mattern (2011), a student's SES levels are determined by parent's income and level of education and low SES students generally enter college at lower rates. Low SES students are considered high-risk and less likely to attend a postsecondary institution than higher SES students (Stone et al., 2016). Attending college represents a realistic option for upward social mobility, but high-risk youth are least likely to take advantage of the opportunity (Sokatch, 2006).

Postsecondary Expectations and College Readiness

The negative association between low SES and student academic achievement has been well documented (Archambault, Janosz, Dupere, Brault, & Andrew, 2017). Jury et al. (2017) proposed high-risk youth have multiple identities that interact with their SES and the discrepancies in early experiences hinder preparation for college. In addition, high-risk youth face many barriers to the access of college which leaves this population to represent only 8.15% of the college student population (Jury et al., 2017). Also, in poor neighborhoods, the dropout rates for low SES students remain high compared to better advantage students (Archambault et al., 2017).

Much research has shown accessing higher education is a challenge for low SES students and even more so, underrepresented in successfully graduating (Athanases, Achinstein, Cury & Ogawa, 2016; Jury et al., 2017; Savitz-Romer, 2012). Wyatt and

Mattern (2011) analyzed college entrance data sets to determine the characteristics of low-SES students who attend college. The researchers suggested only 58.4 percent of high-risk youth that graduate from high school goes on to attend a postsecondary institution with 44% attending a two-year institution. Wyatt and Mattern (2011) advised that high-risk youth are least likely to attend high schools that have rigorous academic course work to help prepare them for college-level work which limits Readiness. Therefore, low-SES students are often at an educational disadvantage relative to other traditional students (Wyatt & Mattern, 2011). However, the study found that if low-SES students complete advanced academic courses, they are more likely to attend a four-year college (Wyatt & Mattern, 2011).

Previous research has also shown that in accordance with rigorous academic curriculum, low SES communities lack resources that set clear expectations towards college such as comprehensive counseling, faculty/family involvement, and intensive academic and social supports (Jennings et al., 2014; Knight & Marciano, 2013; Reynolds et al. 2006). However, the above characteristics needed to set clear expectations towards college have been shown in environments experienced by affluent youth. Affluent youth are encouraged towards an alignment with college expectations, such as doing well in the rigorous academic course and receiving ample support from within their social networks (Bozick, Alexander, Entwisle, Dauber, & Kerr, 2010). However, for low SES students, the corresponding experiences are less consistent with pointing them toward college (Reynolds, Stewart, MacDonald, & Sischo, 2016). These valuable characteristics that set clear expectations are necessary to align students with the college-going culture and

provide resources that decrease the imbalance of college readiness for low SES students (Fry & Taylor, 2013).

Several empirical studies have shown that more academic preparation is needed to increase college access for students from underserved communities (Mehan, 2012). Athanases et al. (2016) explored college-going culture and underrepresentation of low-SES students in higher education. The results showed a need for better resources for low SES stating that a distinction should be made between college talk and college-level academic discourse (Athanases et al., 2016). The results suggested schools supporting low SES youth may need a program of engaged learning that is rigorous, meaningful, and easily accessible that promotes a college-going culture (Athanases et al., 2016). There are a disproportionate number of low SES students that require remediation in college (Lascher, 2011). This factor may be a key to understanding the trend of low SES students who attend college but are less likely to graduate. To examine the college readiness of low SES students a further look at the academic preparation, classroom interactions, and learning opportunities are needed. In addition, a look at the influence outside of the classroom that inhibits college preparedness is also needed to increase low SES student's college success (Lascher, 2011).

High-risk youth are also influenced by their family, friends, and communities. Youth adjust their thinking in relation to social class status experiences such as level of aspirations which are formed and altered through interpersonal constructs of another's expectations and self-reflection (Reynolds, 2016). According to Archambault et al. (2017), early childhood experiences set the stage for later patterns of behaviors and attitudes. However, people also continue to respond to changing contexts and

circumstances throughout the life course (Archambault et al., 2017). Bozick et al. (2010) explored a random sample of 790 youth and the connection between their expectations regarding college and if their perception is shaped by outside influences. Bozick et al. (2010) believed that success criteria and life goals are more understood from the youth's immediate social group and less clear from heterogeneous experiences and role models. Bozick et al. (2010) found year after year, environment cues reinforce young people's place in the social hierarchy and the difference in influence are quite large.

An individual's position within the social structure shapes their life experiences and is an intergenerational process (Goyette, 2008). The social development is seen in privileged youth that are primed for college all their lives; they eventually attend the best schools and take more advanced courses (Goyette, 2008). Also, the peer networks often consist of fellow youth like themselves who expect to attend college or those who have attended and succeeded (Goyette, 2008). However, the situation for disadvantaged youth is more complicated. Disadvantage youth grow up in economically distressed neighborhoods that likely have undemanding schools or schools that lack resources to educate proficiently, they see few to no peer or family connections who have attended college and succeed to a top profession through academic accomplishment (Reynolds, 2016). Therefore, it is harder for disadvantaged youth to have the influence necessary without specifically focused assistance programs (Archambault et al., 2017). Even more so, disadvantaged youth often come from a single-parent household with the parent likely struggling financially and may never encourage the youth to attend college (Archambault et al., 2017; Bozick et al., 2010). However, general societal norms project education as one of the highest tools for upward social mobility and easily accessible for all social

classes. Thus, many disadvantaged youths receive conflicting experiences about educational prospects because the available resources and influence pointing toward college are more conducive for upper SES than lower SES (Bozick et al., 2010; Reynolds, 2016).

Therefore, high-risk youth plans for college may be less stable and can produce less favorable outcomes. Goyette (2008) explained low SES have a weak developmental foundation towards the expectation of college with 60 percent of participants in their study having declined postsecondary expectations by the 11th grade. However, Morgan (2015) found that location in the social structure was more of a determinant for college expectation than academic and interpersonal experiences. Morgan (2015) suggested that by the age of 10 many youths understand the importance of postsecondary education, but one's social-structure leaves a deeper imprint on determining habits, preferences, mental health, and one's understood place in the social order. Morgan (2015) concluded that youth who are consistently prepared and have well-aligned ideas about college that are reinforced throughout the lifespan have no need to adjust their concepts, but low SES youth whose experiences is contrary must shift deeply ingrained programming to accomplish postsecondary education.

Therefore, if students from low SES want to attend college there may be challenges ahead that impacts their attendance or the ability to succeed. According to Wyatt and Mattern (2011), high-risk youth were less likely to attend college in households where neither parent had a college degree. Savitz-Romer (2012) suggested high-risk students have complex risk factors that are shaped by individual, familial, school, and community experiences that influence their personal development creating

barriers to entering college. Furthermore, a qualitative study regarding college readiness within the low SES population suggested that inequities exist with college readiness of high-risk youth due to mental and behavioral barriers, environmental risk factors, and ecological factors negatively shaping college readiness (Savitz-Romer, 2012). Savitz-Romer (2012) phenomenological study interviewed low-income, 1st generation students at 11 different urban schools to access their college readiness. The researchers found that students from low SES most common concern of transitioning to college were low postsecondary expectations, unrealistic professional aspirations, and a lack of accurate information about educational requirements (Savitz-Romer, 2012). The common themes amongst all participants of that study were student apathy, lack of college knowledge, compounding personal issues, financial concerns, and inconsistent family support and encouragement (Savitz-Romer, 2012). Similar to Ganss (2016) and Bowman (2012) studies, the most common concern was the students low and misinformed expectations (Savitz-Romer, 2012).

In addition to the barriers they face in accessing college, evidence showed they face additional barriers after entering higher education (Jury et al., 2017). For some high-risk youth, transitioning to the college experiences is equivalent to traveling to another country (Stone et al., 2016). The low SES continues to influence their college experience, academic achievement, and graduation rates (Jury et al., 2017). After entering college, previous research showed SES being an indicator of low educational attainment. According to Lee, Daniels, Puig, Newgent, and Nam (2008), the likelihood of high-risk youth completing a bachelor's degree or higher is decreased because of their SES.

Several influencing factors are attributed to the decrease of degree attainment. As previously mentioned, high-risk youth are less prepared for college although they have the most to gain from attending college (Niu, 2015). Niu (2015) examined academic attainment and its correlation to family SES utilizing a longitudinal education study. Niu (2015) observed that high-risk youth experience less success, are less likely to graduate, and more likely to drop out compared to higher SES students. Research has shown that after controlling for academic and financial factors students are still at greater risks of dropping out which indicates the complexity of SES influences (Niu, 2015). A common theme amongst the participants of the study was low SES students might not possess the information or skills necessary to maximize their opportunity to succeed in college (Niu, 2015).

In contrast, Browman, Destin, Carswell, and Svoboda (2017) explored several factors that might contribute to success for those high-risk students who succeed at the college level. Browman et al. (2017) examined 102 undergraduate students and found higher levels of academic success if the student perceived education as a connection to a desirable future, stable employment, and respectable income. Similar to Bowman et al. (2010) and Hagan (2018) studies, if the high-risk student perceives SES mobility is correlated to education and desired socioeconomic future, it influences their academic resilience. The study also recognized that psychological factors could influence the academic outcomes of students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds (Browman et al., 2017).

The connection between perception and academic resilience is vital because research shows low SES students can have success at the college despite the barriers to

entry. However, as previously mentioned, for many high-risk student athletes the perception of college is simply a requirement for athletic participation (Cosh & Phillip, 2014; Haslerig, 2017; PSB, 2015). Their education comes secondary to a desirable professional athletic future causing a discrepancy in academic resilience (Haslerig, 2017). Self-perception is a contributor to college success but one of the barriers many low SES students and athletes face at the college level which hinders the college experience and causes mental and behavioral struggles (Jury et al., 2017).

The realization of college expectation discrepancies and lack of college readiness shows the essential need for questions about the role of expectation in educational attainment (Goyette, 2008). Although certain postsecondary expectations may seem obtainable for some youth, it is important to consider college readiness and exert expectations accordingly. Thus, the purpose of this quantitative research study was to address how the demands of college academics in conjunction with college athletics is affecting the psychological distress levels in high-risk youth.

First-Year College Student

The first year of college is the most influential period in which the student's attitudes, beliefs, adjustments, and future success in higher education is established (Connolly, Flynn, Jemmott, & Oestreicher, 2013). However, the first-year is met with many positive and negative experiences beginning with the initial transition. The initial transition to college involves successfully navigating unfamiliar peer networks and new academic demands while also experiencing the fundamental cognitive, social, and biological changes associated with movement into adulthood (Rogers et al., 2018). The combination of these shifts means that the social context must also fit the individual's

needs, leading to a person-environment fit (Rogers et al., 2018). Therefore, the transition experience to college is a sensitive period that involves the co-occurrence of major development and ecological shifts (Rogers et al., 2018). Clark (2008) qualitative research explored student's perception of their college transition utilizing focus groups from diverse settings and concluded that the process for most was complex and poorly planned. Data revealed that first-year students face internal and external challenges throughout the entire year which derives from inside and outside of college (Clark, 2008). However, those who succeeded did so with related strategies reflecting four broad themes: overcoming challenges, seizing the opportunity, adapting, or pursuing a goal (Clark, 2008).

Yet, specific research has shown that the transition to college could be vastly different experiences for traditional students who have adequate preparation versus non-traditional students who lack preparation or experience a greater degree of transitional stressors (Grant & Dweck, 2013). For first-year traditional students, the transitional experience consists of a complicated blend of academic, social, and cultural challenges (Grant & Dweck, 2013). However, first-year non-traditional students who are low-income, at-risk, first generation, and student athletes experience a vastly different overwhelming transition to college (Gayles & Baker, 2015). For those who are student athletes, the experience includes the art of balancing academic, athletic, and social roles and responsibilities while also resolving the transition experience that includes social adjustment, loneliness, and stress (Gayles & Baker, 2015). For those who are high-risk, they often have greater difficulty adjusting to college than traditional students due to the cultural norms frequently reflecting white, middle-class values (Bowman, 2010; Hagan,

2018). In addition, Karabenick (2013) suggested that the difficulty for high-risk students lies in the barriers associated with making the transition from high school, lacking resources that support success, lack of other minorities in the university program and in the staff and faculty.

Ganss (2016) qualitatively explored the transitional experiences of 10 low SES first-year college students and examined the barriers. Based on the participant's interviews several themes emerged, but the most notable barrier to successful transition was the emotional and social effects. The participants repeatedly alluded to a gap in expectations and the reality of college life, academically and socially; even more so, Ganss (2016) found that changes in external conditions, social connections, and college expectations negatively affect first-year low SES more than traditional first-year students. The disconnection of the low SES is experienced in expectations of academic rigor, study habits, and co-curricular involvement (Ganss, 2016). Ganss (2016) and Pummell (2007) both found that if the first-year students continued to experience the disconnection, it might eventually lead to the student dropping out of college.

Although most universities do provide some form of first-year student acclamation, but non-traditional students reported a lack of preparation for existing and future challenges they specifically face that is different from a traditional student (Karabenick, 2013). However, Clark (2008) suggested that many students perceive they are left alone to deal with challenges when in actuality the students were unreceptive to the orientation information until it becomes personally relevant. Regardless, the first year in college is a critical period because the student is establishing mental and behavioral patterns that will follow them throughout their studies (Nelson & Clarke, 2015). Research

has shown the importance of studying cognitive variables in relation to academic success because many results reveal the importance of the first two semesters in college (Wright, Jenkins-Guarnieri, & Murdock, 2012). The first-year experience is filled with challenges that bring emotions of anxiety and depression which can lead to an unsuccessful transition (Nelson & Clarke, 2015).

There are numerous studies on the transition process of first-year college students and the reasoning for the high-stress levels. Pummell et al. (2007) suggested the transitioning to college process of the first-year student involves concurrently transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. Pummell et al. (2007) acknowledged that for anyone the transition from adolescence to adulthood is one of an immense change at the biological, educational, psychological, and social levels and move through a period of attachment to self-identity and developing independence from attachments. Kneeland and Dovidio (2019) stated individuals generally experience high levels of mental health problems in early adulthood and transitioning to college represents a stressful period. Clark (2008) found that most students agree that the transitional process is stressful because it includes the need to develop survival skills such as money and time management; self-discipline towards tasks and obligations; taking responsibility for physical, financial, and academic well-being; and developing a clearer understanding of expectations, present goals, and future aspirations. Bowman (2010) advised that successfully accomplishing this life transition is having a positive psychological functioning. However, students vary in their ability to cope and adjust to new challenges with some students facing far more challenges (Bowman, 2010). Ganss (2016) stated that many students experienced feelings of fear, nervousness, and surprise, believing they

enrolled with limited accurate expectations of the change. Although first-year college students encounter different stressors when they enter college, they have also reported consistently high levels of stress throughout the first semester (Kneeland & Dovidio, 2019).

Kneeland and Dovidio (2019) examined distress and depression in first-year college students because the transition to college is associated with higher levels of distress, depression, psychological well-being, and social anxiety leading it to represent a time with an overall increase in psychopathology. The longitudinal study investigated 89 first-year students using self-reported questionnaires on how beliefs predicted their mental health at the end of the first semester (Kneeland & Dovidio, 2019). Kneeland and Dovidio (2019) found that the students who had more flexible expectations also experienced lower levels of depression but students with less flexible expectations experienced adverse mental health outcomes.

Bowman (2010) also conducted a longitudinal study among first-year students at eighteen different colleges and the experiences that affect their psychological well-being. The study showed responses to life transitions affect psychological well-being, and even more so, those from low SES are at greater risk of experiencing adverse outcomes from the transition to college (Bowman, 2010). Bowman (2010) reported that several experiences have effects on the first-year student's transition to college: experiences with diversity, social interactions, forming relationships with other students, and interactions with faculty and staff. In addition, Pummel et al. (2007) addressed specific transition experiences of first-year collegiate athlete's and found the effects of performance expectations, training intensity, interpersonal relationships, relocation and academic

demands were sources of transitional stress. Pummell et al. (2007) also pointed to other studies which found that outside of athletic interaction, academic status is a significant source of transitional stress, but there are not many studies on athletic within career transitions.

Bowman (2010) findings suggested it is critical that colleges work toward facilitating a successful transition for the positive well-being of their students (Bowman, 2010). The research has also shown clear adverse outcomes for students having heavy workloads while attending college, such as student athletes (Bowman, 2010). The first-year student athlete has a considerable heavy workload that requires them to become responsible adults immediately, fulfilling demands equivalent to two full-time jobs while going through the vulnerability of transitioning from adolescence to adulthood (Bowman, 2010; Hagan, 2018). The heavy workload diminishes the time needed for success in college and ultimately leading to a greater risk of dropping out (Bowman, 2010). The connection between the adverse outcomes of unexpected transitional experiences and how it can affect first-year students is vital because MacNamara and Collins (2010) and Pearson and Petitpas (2013) found that transitional challenges would exist, but pre-emptive work to counteract those challenges may help first-year athletes successfully navigate. It is important to identify individuals who are likely to experience future preventable difficulties, help to acquire resources (i.e., knowledge, attitudes, skills) that can reduce difficulties through administrators and counselors who understood their experience (Kimball, 2007; Mayol et al., 2017; Pearson & Petitpas, 2013). The first-year students must have the proper adaptation skills to successfully transition to living in the new environment while integrating all aspect of college life (Kimball, 2007). Pearson and

Petitpas (2013) found that athletes who rated high on general adaptation skills were better prepared to transition successfully. However, the gap in the literature is the need to address the psychological concern for those who are also considered at risk before the transition occurs (Pearson & Petitpas, 2013). There are not many studies on athletic within career transitions and no studies on within career transitions of those who are at-risk (Pummell et al., 2007). Researchers agreed future studies should examine the within career transitions of those who have a less great degree of deficits compared to resources (Pummell et al., 2007). Thus, more research needed to be conducted looking at psychological distress levels in first-year student athletes that have a greater degree of deficits compared to resources.

Collegiate Student athlete

Athletic and Academic Time Commitment

Once the first-year high-risk student enters college and commits to collegiate sports, their perception of independence is likely to change (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018). Student athletes have made substantial emotional investments in the sport prior to entering college, but they have not encountered the emotional demands required at the college level (Huml, 2018). As previously explained, the transition to college comes with a set of challenges one must overcome but adding college sport to the list of responsibilities creates an identity shift for the student athlete (Kelly & Dixon, 2014). Participation in college sports requires a great deal of time and effort to meet the mandatory demands of practices, meetings, training, film sessions, long travel hours, and games (Cooper, 2016; Kimball, 2007). The student athlete is required to spend over 40 plus hours on the sport which is above standard requirements of their academic program

(Kimball, 2007). Also, during the off-season, student athletes are still required to spend over 20 plus hours on their sport (Haslerig, 2017). The time commitment leaves little room to fulfill other mandatory obligations such as academics, causing an imbalance in both the academic and athletic communities.

However, to be a part of college sport, the student athlete must embrace the culture which involves showing both sport and academic commitment as a central life interest. A central life interest means the endeavor is a significant role that is viewed as a priority and produces positive emotional states (Kimball, 2007). However, handling two central life interests have been shown as problematic and a source of stress (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2018). Yet, if the student athlete focuses on either of the two commitments while neglecting the other, it could be quite difficult for them to continue with the sport (Martinelli, 2016; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). However, when the student athlete is serious about a sport, it mostly comes at the expense of academic interests. A few studies have reported that a large percentage of student athletes feel pressured to succeed athletically, which supersedes academic interest (Haslerig, 2017; Huml, 2018; Mayol et al., 2017). Even in the case of an academically gifted student, the balance of athletics and academics requirements can cause significant tension (Huml, 2018).

Cosh and Phillip (2014) explained that overwhelming pressures to succeed in sport leads to athletes feeling as if their primary academic goal is just to pass. Student athletes are expected to undertake education in accordance with their sport, but Cooper (2016) suggested limited research has explored the impact of combining the two pursuits. Although being a student athlete has its benefits, the commitment can create a level of

physical and mental exhaustion if time is not monitored effectively (Cooper, 2016). Rothschild-Checroune et al. (2012) sought to reveal how exactly the interactions between sport and academia affect time management. Time management was a common challenge reported with less time to spend on daily living chores, sleeping, non-structured activities, part-time jobs, internships, and academics (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012). They found that first-year student athletes demanding sports schedule engaged them more with athletics which ultimately had a negative impact on academics (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012). It was reported that more time was spent during the season on sports activities than on related academic activities (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012).

Penn Schoen Berland (PSB) consulting firm conducted a study and found that the lack of time and the ability to succeed academically were the two major concerns and challenges of student athletes. The student athlete participants stated they had a desire to succeed and had enough available resources to do so but lacked time to take advantage of the opportunity (PSB, 2015). According to Rothschild-Checroune et al. (2012), when the time came to do schoolwork, the student athlete lacked the energy to focus on academics due to the time commitment of the sport. The time commitment of the sport reduced the amount or quality of engagement in other activities (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012). In the Cosh and Phillip (2014) study, athletes repeatedly represented themselves as sacrificing educational success to integrate the two pursuits and simply just wanted to pass. The interviews also repeatedly mentioned time as a barrier to the successful integration of the two pursuits of sport and education. Majority of the interviewees suggested time was either fixed and externally controlled or limited and externally controlled. According to PSB (2015), approximately 82% of the athletes stated they

missed classes for competition, missed study sessions due to late running practices, and reported being too exhausted to study effectively or devote enough time to academics.

The number one factor that hindered the athlete's ability to succeed in both sport and academics was available time. In the study, 71% of the student athletes mentioned lack of sleep from the athletic demand as the number one factor preventing them from academic commitments (PSB, 2015). Student athletes reported waking up for 5am practices while also staying up late to finish homework and attend tutoring sessions (PSB, 2015). Rothschild-Checroune et al. (2012) study qualitatively assessed student athletes time and found that student athletes reported being too tired to study after traveling for away games and spending entire weekends devoted to the sport. The time constraints of sport requirement and first-year stressors may reduce student athlete's academic engagement which also negatively affects academic success (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012). Rothschild-Checroune et al. (2012) study suggested the new environment of college life adds stress with student athletes learning to adjust to non-structured schedule while also having the impact of time commitments for sports.

Cosh and Phillip (2014) explained the common theme highlighted amongst interviewees in their study were time-management, fatigue, attendance-monitoring, and financial concerns as barriers to successfully integrating both sport and education. The findings were similar to Haslerig (2017) and Rothschild-Checroune et al. (2013) study results. Cosh and Phillip (2014) stated it was evident throughout that the interviewees had a desire to achieve academically despite prioritizing sport but sacrificing academic goals which lead to psychological concerns and challenges. Physical exhaustion and psychological exhaustion were repeatedly mentioned in several studies, deriving from the

non-stop stress of competing athletically and succeeding academically (Cosh & Phillip, 2014; Mayol, 2017; PSB, 2015). Rothschild-Checroune et al. (2012) suggested further studies to quantitively track the amount of time student athletes actually spend with specific communities. Melendez (2010) also suggested future studies should employ larger and more randomized samples to help improve the generalizability of the results (i.e., focusing on several potential areas of focus such as time management). The student athlete should consider the time demands of joining a collegiate sport and understand doing so could impinge on time spent on other essential activities (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012).

Social and Career Development

The student athletes also have social activities that factor into the challenging nature of being a collegiate athlete. The student athletes sport, academic, and social communities are distinct worlds that may overlap or influence each other and compete for time (Martinelli, 2016). It takes serious commitment to remain a member of the sport community, and with limited hours in the day, there is no time to waste if one is to fulfill all duties required or needed to be a successful college student athlete and prepare for future aspirations. The university life produces adapting challenges and balancing the individual worlds can be overwhelming for a young person (Cooper, 2016; Martinelli, 2016). PSB (2015) found that around 3 out of 4 student athletes feel they do not have the opportunity to engage in social experiences, such as academic activity and friendships outside of sport, due to athletic obligations. PSB (2015) participants reported feelings of frustration and a sense of not being normal college students.

Previous research has shown that engagement in social communities has a positive and significant impact on student athletes similar to the general student population (Gayles & Hu, 2009). PSB (2015) examined athletes also believe that engaging with others outside of sport would help ease athletic stress and make the transition to college easier. However, as stated above, a part of the unique challenges student athletes face is the issue of social engagement and lack of time toward career development (Cosh & Phillip, 2014; Martinelli, 2016; PSB, 2015; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). According to Martens and Lee (2008), student athletes experience lower levels of career development than non-athletes and engage in less career education. However, only a small percentage seek help with outside resources such as the college's career center (Martens & Lee, 2008). Even more surprising, Martens and Lee (2008) found that basketball and football players average college readiness is at a ninth-grade level, while Lally and Kerr (2015) found college athletes scored in the bottom 25 percentile on the career development inventory. The discrepancy in college readiness and lack of career development can limit the success of the athlete not only while attending school but also post-graduation.

Several opinions have been proposed on the lack of career development for student athletes (Martens & Lee, 2008). Navarro (2015) suggested that on average, less than 3% of student athletes continue to professional sports, which means college is responsible for preparing most student athletes for careers external to the professional sport. Navarro (2015) found that student athletes agree that career development is important yet being a student athlete can limit career exploration such as internships or specialized majors. NCAA rules also require the student athlete to choose a major by

sophomore year and often the athletes opt to the less time-consuming majors (Navarro, 2015). The athlete opting for a less time-consuming major is shown in academic clustering and their lack of ability to articulate career development in an aspired field (Navarro, 2015). PSB (2015) suggested that around 66% say athletic time commitments limit opportunities for specialized majors, paying jobs, internships, or other student development. Similarly, 70% of participants have the desire to study abroad but reported athletic commitment prevents them from doing so (PSB, 2015). The researchers qualitatively found that the athletes would prefer more help to manage the different aspects of being a student athlete so they can take advantage of all available opportunities (PSB, 2015).

Another explanation several researchers give for the inadequacies in social and career development is athletic identity. Athletic identity is the degree to which the student classifies their role as an athlete and a cognitive structure that processes self-related information (Chang, Wu, Kuo, & Chen, 2018). Typically, athletes have participated in their sport from a very young age, and a significant portion of the athlete's life has been centered on the athletic role (Kelly & Dixon, 2014). Even more so, the athletic role may have been centered around a social construct (i.e., family, friends, teammates, and coaches) and positively regarded due to the social connections (Kelly & Dixon, 2014). According to Menke and Germany (2018), the 'self' is often emphasized by the aspects of identity that are positively regarded, but it also causes a decrease in the connection to other aspects of identity (i.e., social and academic identities). Therefore, a strong athletic identity can have a positive effect on sport success, but a negative effect on academic resilience and career aspirations outside of professional sports.

Melendez (2010) explored the relationship between athletic identity and the adjustment to college for student athletes. They found those who become more dependent on their athletic identity may find the social, emotional, and academic demands of college life difficult to negotiate and in turn struggle to meet the demands of combining other identities (Melendez, 2010). Cooper (2016) also suggested the over-emphasis on the athletic identity over other identities has contributed to poor academic, psychosocial, emotional, and physical outcomes in college. According to Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018), the majority of incoming student athletes reported having a strong athletic identity and that identity is reinforced by the amount of college sport requirements. The increase in athletic identity negatively effects career development and social engagement. Hardin and Pate (2013) also suggested that athletic identity has been consistently negatively correlated to academic success and career and social development. A negative correlation has also been found between athletic identity and GPA; as students have a higher degree of self-reported athletic identity, they also are more likely to possess a lower GPA (Watson, 2016).

For college athletes, Comeaux and Harrison (2011) suggested more interactions with faculty and non-athlete peers to enhance academic and social development. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018) suggested future studies should seek participation from non-white athletes to gather racial perspective and extend or dispel the current findings. However, regardless of background, student athletes who can engage in educationally purposeful activity, such as social clubs or career development, have an increase in personal self-concept, learning, and communication skills (Gayles & Hu, 2009). The interaction with students other than their fellow athletes has been shown to lend desired

cognitive and affective outcomes (Gayles & Hu, 2009). However, student athlete's social community and future development compete for time with their athletic and academic commitments.

Navarro (2015) suggested developing an enhance understanding of the multiple pressures facing student athletes population so they can be better assisted. Lu et al. (2012) also suggested future studies should focus on diverse groups of student athletes who may encounter more specific challenges to balancing the athletic, academic, and social worlds (i.e., low SES challenges and first-year student athlete challenges). Thus, more quantitative research needed to be conducted looking at how the dual demands (time commitment of sport and academia) of being a collegiate athlete psychologically affect high-risk youth.

Psychological Distress

As the literature review shows, for many high-risk student athletes, the journey to success at the collegiate level is more complex because they come from backgrounds very different than the college environment (Gill, 2008). Although high-risk youth use athletics as one avenue to college, many people do not think of student athletes as a vulnerable population, thus diminishing their high-risk and student athlete challenges. However, this is far from the case. Hwang and Choi (2016) suggested collegiate athletes face increasingly higher psychological stressors than non-athletes before and after transitioning to life on a university campus. Similarly, McLaughlin and Sheridan (2016) stated increasing evidence shows a link between low SES and negative psychological outcomes that impact college success for high-risk youth more so than other students.

Thus, high-risk student athletes are more psychologically vulnerable to distress than their counterparts.

High-Risk Youth Distress

Before entering college, high-risk youth experience unique stressors that impact their well-being, leading to the disproportionally high possibility of mental and physical disorders after entering college. Previous research has shown low SES students compared to high SES students are more likely to exhibit higher levels of mental and behavioral issues such as emotional distress, well-being, sense of belonging, motivation, and fear of failure (Jury et al., 2017). According to Miller, Chen, and Parker (2011), mental health disorders appeared to be correlated to social status and continue into adulthood. Myers et al. (2015) also showed an increased risk for adult depression as a predictor of childhood adversities and trauma. There is a need for more research on the effects of high-risk youth adversities and its prediction of negative mental health outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder (Myers et al., 2015).

According to Flannigan et al. (2017), very little research has been done to understand the population of high-risk youth, along with strategies to support their specific needs. Flannigan et al. (2017) collected data on two groups of 90 high-risk youth, examining their demographics, living arrangements, legal issues, student attendance, and other co-morbid diagnoses. Both groups experienced a high-number of co-morbid mental health diagnoses with the most common being learning disability (LD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), delayed cognitive ability, reactive attachment disorder, and other diagnoses (Flannigan et al., 2017). Flannigan et al. (2017) suggested high-risk youth have complex needs and vulnerabilities which include not just health and

behavioral problems but poor relationships, social isolation, and adverse life events. Those complex needs are psychological barriers that inhibit high-risk youth from having success at the college level. According to Niu (2015), they are more likely to feel embarrassed about their educational experiences, achievement, and have lower self-reported well-being. When high-risk youth feel less comfortable or supported, they experience higher levels of stress and do not perform up to their potential (Niu, 2015). The emotional distress is also demonstrated in the higher levels of physiological stress markers (Niu, 2015), affecting every aspect of their college experience. However, although high-risk students are more likely to have emotional distress such as depression, they reported having less opportunity to express their negative college experiences (Niu, 2015). However, Flannigan et al. (2017) and Niu (2015) suggested early diagnosis has been shown to facilitate support and protect against adverse outcomes.

Miller et al. (2011) also suggested that future research should address the timing and co-occurrence issues in high-risk youth (i.e., transitioning, academics, athletics). Miller et al. (2011) studied a data set of individuals exposed to socioeconomic disadvantage examining their psychosocial stress in childhood and vulnerability to chronic disease in adulthood. Miller et al. (2011) found that early stress leads to poor self-regulation skills, immediate gratification, and unhealthy choices leading to chronic distress. The early-life experiences shape the ways in which high-risk youth respond to challenges and the strategies used for regulating desires and emotions (Miller et al., 2011). The experiences modulate disease-relevant behavioral and biological process in dynamic ways (Miller et al., 2011). The co-occurrence of issues and a lack of material

resources reflects in the college transitioning process and continues to affect the college experience (Miller et al., 2011).

According to Aneshensel and Sucoff (2006), any research on young individual's mental health should also consider the effects of socioeconomic and demographic environments. Young individuals growing up in poverty have more than likely been exposed to multiple risks simultaneously which places them at higher risk for health problems (Miller et al., 2011). There is abundant evidence that early-life stress exposure can disrupt adaptive behaviors (Aneshensel & Sucoff, 2006; Jury et al., 2017; Miller et al., 2011; Stone et al., 2016). Savitz-Romer (2012) study showed how these high-risk students rely heavily upon their school counselors, coaches, and administrators for support since their postsecondary knowledge and networks are limited. Therefore, several factors that may strengthen the psychological experiences of high-risk youth are meaningful relationships, support during life transitions, a sense of "being heard," and a network of support programs to address mental health issues and stabilization (Flannigan et al., 2017).

Student Athletes Psychological Distress

Previous research has shown that although high-risk youth rely heavily upon administrative support, an alarming number of college athletes, whom many are considered high-risk, tend to avoid seeking counseling (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). Studies suggested at least 10% of college athletes suffer from severe psychological and physiological problems that warrant counseling, but an alarming number avoid counseling so the percentage may be higher than reported (Gaston & Baker, 2015; Melendez, 2010; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). Though, student athletes are less likely than

non-athletes to seek mental health (Sudano et al., 2017). Jennings et al. (2014) and Sudano et al. (2017) found that student athletes compared to their non-student athletes acquire more stress due to the varying levels of responsibilities. The non-athletes have the everyday burden of having to do well in school to succeed which leads to constant stressors of academic nature, personal, social, and moral pressures but non-athletes have the addition of sport responsibility including that of maintaining eligibility to keep college scholarship (Jennings et al., 2014).

Spieler et al. (2007) examined several distinct differences between successful and less successful athletes on various psychological characteristics. Spieler et al. (2007) identified the ability to cope effectively with unforeseen events and distractions as a significant difference between successful and less successful athletes. Coping is defined as a process of continually changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage internal and external demands that are considered as exceeding one's own abilities (Spieler et al., 2007). Coping with adversity is the ability to remain emotionally stable and positive during negative situations no matter the issue (Spieler et al., 2007). However, Lu et al. (2012) suggested future research should focus on diverse groups of student athletes who may confront more specific challenges such as high-risk youth, but lack resources to cope effectively. Unfortunately, a large portion of first-year high-risk students have issues in coping with the lifestyle change of being a collegiate athlete (Giurgiu & Damian, 2014; Spieler et al., 2007).

Researchers suggested the ability to cope with adversity allows for athletes to continue the utilization of other psychological skills that are needed to be successful in balancing the demands of being a student athlete, such as task focus, thought control,

positive focus, and orientation (Spieler et al., 2007). Similar to Spieler et al. (2007) suggestions of coping with adversity, Lu et al. (2012) identified that athletes who were able to cope effectively experienced physical, mental, and academic resilience. Wayment and Walters (2017) also found a relationship between achievement of goals, well-being, and athletic involvement which also includes intrapersonal constructs such as a sense of control, self-efficacy, motivation, strategy formulation, and persistence; and that task goal, such as a balanced schedule of tasks, were significantly associated with well-being and psychological needs.

Students athletes deal with extensive time demands not experienced by others leaving them feeling stressed and overwhelmed (DiRamio & Payne, 2007). DiRamio and Payne (2007) exploratory study investigated the relationship between sports activities, self-efficacy, and stressful disposition of college student athletes and found low scores on self-efficacy with high scores on stressful disposition. The student athletes reported feelings of being overwhelmed and were more likely to feel stressed and "out of control" (DiRamio & Payne, 2007).

Sudano et al. (2017) also found extensive time demands placed on the student athlete leaves many with issues of anxiety disorders, eating disorders, depression disorders, and other mental health issues. In addition to the mental and emotional health, many also experience physical health concerns such as lack of sleep, fatigue, continuous tension, headaches, digestive problems (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). According to Sudano et al. (2017), up to 21% of student athletes experience distress such as depression, and the percentage is higher for those who are in their first year. Giurgiu and Damian (2014) explored the source of stress for first-year student athletes and found that they are at

greater risk to develop negative mental health disorders mainly because they are entering a lifestyle very different than they are accustomed. Hwang and Choi (2016) qualitatively explored how certain factors such as demographics, social context, physical condition, and personal characteristics predict stress in student athletes and results showed that the stressors were mostly related to academics, physical well-being, and social contexts. The most common theme amongst Hwang and Choi (2016) participants was that student athletes might have higher stress due to balancing commitments of academics and sports.

In a qualitative study, researchers examined 71 college athletes with the theoretical framework of the GAS theory of stress and how their bodies responded to stress (Jennings et al., 2014). Jennings et al. (2014) study showed knowledge deficits in positive coping strategies, and it was apparent that the athletic demands required of student athletes increased their stress levels and caused a wide variety of symptoms such as anxiety, loneliness, depression, hopelessness, headaches, sleep disturbances, colds, and even suicidal thoughts.

Lu et al. (2012) conducted a focus group to develop a valid measure that is specific to the stressors of collegiate athletes. After data screening 333 college athletes, Lu et al. (2012) found that athletes who had higher levels of stress also experienced physical, mental, and academic attrition. The participants expressed concerns with academic skill difficulties, emotional adjustments, interpersonal relationships, and career searching in addition to sports-related issues (Lu et al., 2012). Lu et al. (2012) believed an explanation of the specific stressors has to deal with unsuccessful adjustment to college and athletics.

In accordance with time demand challenges and adjustment issues, Melendez (2010) suggested that high athletic identity (e.g., prioritizing sport) was a source of stress as well because it was negatively correlated with interest in academic achievement and hindered other developmental forces. The findings reported that those who scored high on athletic identity also scored low on personal-emotional adjustment scores (Melendez, 2010). The scores suggested that high athletic identity may negatively influence student athletes intrapsychic states, degrees of psychological distress, and somatic complaint levels during their adjustment to college (Melendez, 2010). The results suggested that strongly athletically identified student athletes should be considered "at-risk" for poor academic and emotional adjustment to college (Melendez, 2010).

The current literature focused on explaining the challenges of high-risk youth and freshman athletes and the importance of better serving this population to help make the most of their college experience (Gayles & Baker, 2015). As previously stated, students from low SES face psychological barriers such as developmental and emotional discrepancies. Therefore, research was needed on the effects on high-risk youth and being a first-year student athlete (Cooper, 2016). Future research should include a quantitative analysis of clinical outcomes for student athletes (DiRamio & Payne, 2007; Sudano et al., 2016). The research also suggested that a sense of cooperation, community, and support help to facilitate well-being in athletes (Flannigan et al., 2017; Wayment & Walters, 2017). First-year of college years is the ideal time to form lifelong healthy habits which recognized the need for further education and wellness promotion interventions for first-year high-risk student athletes dealing with the pressures of multiple stressors (Jennings et al., 2014). Thus, based on the literature, this study was important because it

quantitatively explored the effects of combining sport and academic commitment on the psychological wellbeing of first-year student athletes who are high-risk.

Summary

The current literature focused on explaining the challenges of first-year high-risk student athletes and the importance of better serving this population to help make the most of their college experience (Gayles & Baker, 2015). The student athlete is placed in a situation where they must manage their time sensibly to succeed in both communities (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). As students' progress through athletic and academic careers, they must learn to adapt to the balance of sport and academic to have success at the college level. However, high-risk student athletes face specific barriers to success compared to traditional students (Haslerig, 2017; MacNamara & Collins, 2010).

The literature showed high-risk youth have complex needs and vulnerabilities which include not just health and behavioral problems but poor relationships, social isolation, and adverse life events that impact college success (Savitz-Romer, 2012; Stone et al., 2016; Wyatt & Mattern, 2011). Literature also showed that the role of athletic demands required of student athletes increased stress levels and caused a wide variety of symptoms such as anxiety, loneliness, depression, hopelessness, headaches, sleep disturbances, colds, and even suicidal thoughts (Jennings et al., 2014; Kimball, 2007; Mayol et al., 2017; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). However, high-risk student athletes encounter psychological barriers to coping effectively with the pressures required to be a successful student athlete such as balancing sport and academics (Flannigan et al., 2017; Jury et al., 2017).

The challenge of time management is not easy to overcome, and priorities should be addressed with each student athlete (Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). The literature review repeatedly alluded to the scant research in sport-related stressors to athletes who are combining both sport and education (Cosh & Phillip, 2014; Navarro, 2015; PSB, 2015). Melendez (2010) suggested developing a more balanced "student athlete identity" stressing both academic and athletic pursuits which may play a key role in the improvement of the college adjustment experience for student athletes. However, many of the studies pointed to more research being needed on student athletes who have endured a greater degree of deficits, such as low SES, and how they psychologically handle the pressures of being a collegiate athlete (Lu et al., 2012; Martinelli, 2016).

A reoccurring theme of studies reporting on high-risk youth, particularly those from low-income areas, lack college readiness, lack resources for success, and have a prevalence of mental and behavioral issues that may hinder college adjustment (Jury et al., 2017). The unique population of high-risk youth needs pre-emptive work to intervene and set them on a path of success (Jury et al., 2017; Stone et al., 2016). Those who are student athletes get the chance to attend postsecondary institutions but still have the deficits of those who are high-risk (Jury et al., 2017). Therefore, more studies are needed on identifying specific sources of stress in balancing responsibilities that significantly affect student athletes and are different from the factors affecting traditional students — in particular, focusing specifically on incoming freshmen who are unprepared to successfully deal with the stressors (Wilson & Pritchard, 2005).

Thus, this current research was needed to explore to what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and

academic commitment predict psychological distress in freshmen high-risk college athletes. If the results are significant, it could provide insights for college coaches, administrators, and counselors who work closely with freshmen high-risk student athlete with more awareness of the psychological challenges they will encounter and help facilitate growth and development. Research showed if the student athlete is supported through tasked motivated goals, such as a balanced schedule, they may have a sense of support, positive perception, and essentially positive mental health (Wayment & Walters, 2017). Therefore, research can possibly help anticipate the psychological problems of transitioning to sport for high-risk youth and help the athletes plan, make proper preparations, and precipitate less stress (Pearson & Petitpas, 2013).

In chapter 3, the research design and rationale, methodology including the population, sampling and sampling procedures, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, and instrumentation and operationalization of constructs are discussed. Additionally, the data analysis plan and threats to external and internal validity are explained. Finally, the ethical procedures for the study has been detailed.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Introduction

The primary purpose of this quantitative study was to measure psychological distress, analyzing the difference between one's perceived time needed to be successful and actual time spent for both sports commitment and academic commitment in high-risk student athletes after transitioning to college sport. This study intended to address the discrepancies in the perceived time needed and actual time spent on both sport and academic commitment and its effect on the psychological distress of high-risk youth.

Existing research has shown limited research regarding psychological distress in student athletes who come from backgrounds that lack resources (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Jury et al., 2017; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). Previous studies have shown limited research regarding how time commitments affect the student athlete's well-being (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Melendez, 2010; Savitz-Romer, 2012; Tinto, 1993). Researchers have also pointed to more quantitative studies needed to examine the athletic transitions of student athletes who are high-risk. Therefore, this study addressed the gap by specifically focusing on how time commitments affect student athletes who are considered to come from high-risk backgrounds.

This chapter begins by providing details regarding the selected research design and the rationale behind it. The population and sampling procedures are described in detail including an explanation of the power analysis used to determine the sample size for the study. Further, the procedures for recruitment, participation, informed consent, and data collection from first-year high-risk student athletes are discussed. Data collection occurred by using one instrument (K10), a self-reported time commitment

questionnaire, SES questionnaire, and collecting demographic information from each of the students. The next section explains the demographic information, SES questionnaire, and self-reported time commitment questionnaire that was collected and a description of the K10 instrument along with reliability and validity information for the K10. The data analysis plan is explained in addition to restating the study's research questions. Finally, threats to validity and ethical procedures for the study are discussed.

Research Design and Rationale

The study used a quantitative research design. The research question dictated the research methodology and the data collection process. Quantitative analysis uses deductive reasoning that begins with a hypothesis and the objective is to quantitatively asses the research question to determine if statistical evidence supports or rejects the hypothesis (Bernard, 2012). Quantitative research is an attempt to understand how prevalent a phenomenon is by looking for predictable results to a larger population (Goertzen, 2017). The purpose of a quantitative design is to learn more about a population through observed occurrences that affect that population (Goertzen, 2017). In this research, a quantitative method was utilized over all other research designs because descriptive and inferential research analysis was exercised to analyze the associations among variables (Bernard, 2012).

Further, to use a quantitative design, the variables must be able to be measured to produce numbered data for statistical analysis (Bernard, 2012). Therefore, an established instrument was utilized along with predetermined methods for analysis and interpretation of the results. This research design is consistent with previous research suggestions on student athletes' challenges, barriers of high-risk youth, psychological challenges, and

first-year college student challenges (Dembo et al., 2008; Etzel, 2009; Gayles & Baker, 2015; Jury et al., 2017; Lu et al., 2012; Melendez, 2010; Pummell et al., 2007; Terenzini, 1994; Tinto, 1993).

In this study, the research was focused primarily on the psychological distress levels of first-year high-risk student athletes and comparing psychological distress levels to time commitment discrepancies after they have transitioned to college sports and college academics. Further, the study specifically focused on determining the extent to which the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment (independent/predictor variables) predict psychological distress (dependent/criterion variable) by administrating K10 scale and time commitment questionnaire; thus, it used a postpositivist view. Further, the research used a one-group posttest design because it sought to determine whether a specific condition influenced an outcome through providing a specific condition (at least one semester of collegiate sport and academia) to a group and analyzing the post K10 scale. A quantitative research approach employs designs that are experimental, descriptive, or causal-comparative (Goertzen, 2017). Goertzen (2017) also suggested a quantitative approach involves a postpositivist worldview, experiment design, and posttest measures. Regression analysis was also conducted on the research data obtained.

Methodology

Population

In the United States, the Health and Human Services (2018) characterized low SES as low income (family of four income less than $24,750; for families/households with more than four, add $4,420 for each additional person), low-status parental

occupation and education, large family size, member of a minority group, and one parent household; the youth from low SES are also considered high-risk. Further, high-risk youth lack college readiness, are first-generation attendees, have low postsecondary aspirations, are limited financially, and may have little to no social networks to aid in future planning (Savits-Romer, 2012). The NCAA Goals Study (2016) reported an estimated one in five student athletes given the opportunity to compete at the college level come from low SES backgrounds. In the NCAA, a large alarming percentage of student athletes live below the federal poverty line (National College Players Association, 2017), 16% of student athletes are first-generation students, and 66% are on a need-based aid (NCAA, 2016).

These low SES first-year student athletes was considered for the research regardless of age, region, race, or gender category so that any student who comes from low SES background is included. It was believed that opening the research to the larger population of any first-year low SES student athletes in this manner allowed for a more representative sample.

Sampling and Sampling Procedures

The sampling method used for this research was a purposive sampling method that invited college student athletes who met both Items 1 and 2 and at least one or more of the remaining criteria:

1. First-year college enrollment in either community college or 4-year college with at least one semester completed at time of participation (excluding community college students who transferred to 4-year college).
2. Participate on an organized college athletic team.

3. Low family income (family of four income less than $24,750; for families/households with more than 4, add $4,420 for each additional person).
4. On need-based college financial aid (i.e., receiving federal student aid or grants based on financial status).
5. Low-status parental occupation (i.e., clerical, service, blue-collar, unemployed, part-time).
6. Low-status parental education level (less than a high school diploma, high school diploma, some college).
7. Large family size (household size of 5 or more).
8. Member of a minority group (African American, Hispanic, Native American).
9. One-parent household (within the past 5 years).
10. First-generation college student (neither parents attended college).

Sample size planning depended on the specific statistical test, the alpha level, the power level, and the expected population effect size (or smallest effect size of practical importance). For multiple linear regression there were two effect sizes that needed to be considered; one is the size of the squared multiple correlation (R^2), the other was the predictor effect size (semipartial-r^2, sr^2). Also, for multiple linear regression, the number of predictors and their expected intercorrelations affected the power analysis. There were at least two predictors—the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment. Demographic variables (sex and ethnicity) and total number of low-SES related criteria were screened as potential

covariates related to K10 scores, so the maximum number of potential predictors might be five. Literature was not found to inform expected correlations between the two primary predictors or between these and K10 scores, so medium effect sizes as operationalized by Cohen (1988) was used for sample size planning. Specifically, a medium $R^2 = .13$ and a medium $sr^2 = .055$. Using these parameters for up to five predictors, alpha = .05, and power = .80, the target sample size is 127. If such a sample size was difficult to obtain, a sample size of 100 could have been sufficient at power = .70 based on Stevens's (2002) minimum power criteria.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Once approval was obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I placed an advertisement for participation (see Appendix A) on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. A link to access the questionnaires were included in each of the advertisements. I also utilized websites such as SurveyMonkey website to create and distribute the survey. As previously noted, first-year high-risk collegiate student athletes were the target of the questionnaire and Demographics information was asked prior to accessing the informed consent (see Appendix B). Since the participants were over the age of 18, they could legally acknowledge the informed consent to participate without needing parental consent. The informed consent (see Appendix C) included information on the purpose of the study and the procedures to participate in the study. The names of the participants was not requested due to the anonymous nature of the questionnaire.

Additionally, the consent explained the risks and benefits of being in the study, the voluntary nature of the study, the approximate time it took to complete the

questionnaire, and a few sample questions. Further, the consent form included procedures to make sure the participants understand the process of keeping their information anonymous. Finally, contact information for the researcher was provided in the event the participants have questions or concerns regarding the study. The participants were aware their information and responses were voluntary and anonymous if they chose to submit the questionnaires. It also explained that at any point in time they could discontinue participation.

The inclusion criteria was explained in all advertisements or invitations to participate and as items following acknowledgement of informed consent in SurveyMonkey to ensure eligibility. Those not eligible by response to the screening items were not linked to the remaining survey items.

The survey website SurveyMonkey was utilized to administer the questionnaires to first-year high-risk collegiate student athletes. The survey included the SES questionnaire, Sport and Academic Commitment Questionnaire, and the Kessler Psychological Distress scale (K10) along with demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, athletic status) was put together in one cohesive questionnaire.

The target sample size was 127 participants (minimum 100) with complete data. Once adequate sample size was achieved the surveys were closed and data was then transferred to the statistical software program IBM SPSS for data analysis. All transferred data was password protected, and the only person that had access was the researcher and the dissertation committee members.

Instrumentation and Operationalization of Constructs

Three questionnaires for the high-risk student athletes was administered online, the academic and sport time commitment-needed items, K10, SES scale along with relevant demographics (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, athletic status).

Demographics. The student's demographics and inclusion criteria were asked before informed consent. The inclusion criteria were used to excluded those who did not qualify from the survey. I used the demographic questions to gain information on the participant's gender, age, ethnicity, and athletic status. One or more demographic variables could have been used as covariates in the regression.

Socioeconomic Status Questionnaire. The participants SES was recorded by using SES questions combined with suggested Health and Human service SES criterion questions (see Appendix D). The questionnaire measured the social economic level of participants. It was designed to address covariates for usage in cohort studies. The questionnaire was also designed to be self-explanatory and self-administered. The information included, if the student is on need-based aid, the highest level of parental education completed, family size, single or two parent household, parental total annual income, and parental occupation. This information was used to ensure that all the participants met the inclusion criteria of low SES backgrounds in accordance with the health and service SES requirements. The SES questionnaire took approximately three minutes to complete.

Sport and Academic Time Commitment Questionnaire. The sport and academic time commitment questionnaire measured the differences in time spent on sport and academic commitment and the perceived time needed on sport and academic

commitment. The questionnaire was recorded through a self-explanatory questionnaire (see Appendix E). It asked the participants how much actual time they spend on sport commitment and academic commitment, and how much time they perceive is needed on sport commitment and academic commitment. The questionnaire was used to capture the actual amount of time the participants spend on sport commitment and academic commitment, and if there was a discrepancy in the time the participants perceive they need on sports commitment and academic commitment. Additionally, sport and academic time commitment questionnaire was used because this research aimed to determine if the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sport and academic commitment predict psychological distress. The difference in actual time and perceived time was compared to the student athletes' psychological distress levels to see if there are any psychological effects. The sport and academic time commitment questionnaire took approximately three minutes to complete.

Kessler Psychological Distress Scale. The Kessler Psychological Distress scale (K10; see Appendix F) allowed this research to explore to what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sport and academic commitment predict psychological distress by measuring the students distress levels after their transition to collegiate sport and academics. The K10 was created in 2002 by RC Kessler to yield a global measure of distress based on questions about anxiety and depressive symptoms that a person has experienced in the most recent 4-week period (Kessler, Barker, Colpe, Epstein, Gfroerer, & Hiripi, 2003). According to Kessler, Andrews, Calpe et al. (2002), the K10 is a brief, simple, and reliable instrument to detect mental health condition in the population. The K10 has also been widely used in

assessing psychological distress among the general and clinical population from different backgrounds (Easton, Safadi, Wang, & Hasson, 2017). The usage of the K10 is a self-reported measure that collects information on the participant's current condition utilizing a Likert scale rating system. Responses were on a five-point scale as follows: 1 (*none of the time*), 2 (*a little of the time*), 3 (*some of the time*), 4 (*most of the time*), and 5 (*all of the time*; Kessler, Andrews, Calpe, et al., 2002). Student athletes' psychological distress scale were compared after completing at least a semester of collegiate sport and academics. The study stated whether a change in the outcome or dependent variable has taken place. Post K10 scores were regressed on academic and sport time commitment-needed difference scores. The K10 took approximately three minutes to complete.

Scoring. The K10 scale consisted of ten questions with five response anchors for each question. The questions included: during the last 30 days about how often did you feel tired out for no good reason, feel nervous, feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down, feel hopeless, feel restless or fidgety, feel so restless you could not sit still, feel depressed, feel that everything was an effort, feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up, and feel worthless (Kessler, Andrews, Calpe, et al., 2002)? A mean composite scale, ranging from 1-5, was calculated, which allowed interpretation of the scale score on the same response metric of the items. For descriptive purposes only, frequencies were provided corresponding to K10 severity categories (Kessler, Andrews, Calpe et al., 2002) of 1-1.9 (*likely to be well*), 2.0-2.4 (*likely to have a mild mental disorder*), 2.5-2.9 (*likely to have a moderate mental disorder*), 3.0-5.0 (*likely to have a severe mental disorder*). This scale took approximately three minutes to complete.

Reliability and validity. Dr. Kessler and other researchers at the Harvard Medical School completed extensive research on the development, implementation, and testing of the scale. The collaborative health and well-being survey were used to test the reliability of the K10, and results showed it to be moderately reliable with a weighted kappa score of.74. Structural validity was established by using confirmatory factor analysis to show evidence of comparative fit indices, and root mean square error of approximation (Pereira, 2017). A principal axis factoring (PAF) oblimin rotation method was used to identify the factor structure (Pereira, 2017). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) assumed the value of .917 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (Pereira, 2017).

Data Analyses Plan

After transferring data from SurveyMonkey to IBM SPSS, it was checked for missing data. Any case with missing data on time spent on sport commitment, perceived time needed for sport commitment, time spent on academic commitment, or perceived time needed for academic commitment was removed from further analysis. Any case with missing data on four or more K10 items was removed from further analysis. Cases with missing data on three or fewer K10 items used case-specific mean across the valid items for the item-missing data to compute K10 composite scores and reliability.

Sport commitment and academic commitment difference scores were each calculated as actual time spent minus perceived time needed so that negative values represented a deficit. Both difference score variables and the K10 composite variable were checked for outliers (greater than ±3.29 standard deviations [Tabachnick & Fidell,

2007]) and robustness to normal distribution criteria (skewness values within ±3 and kurtosis values within ±10 [Kline, 2016]).

Sex, age, and ethnicity were examined as potential covariates and if found statistically significantly related to K10 scores could have been included in the regression screening and analysis. Multivariate outliers were examined following Tabachnick and Fidell's (2007) procedure of regressing the set of predictors and the criterion on a random variable. Cases with Mahalanobis values exceeding the critical chi square value at alpha = .001 for *df* equal to the number of variables and that are severely discontinuous from the distribution of other cases were considered a multivariate outlier and removed from further analysis. Multicollinearity were examined by inspection of variable tolerance values less than .20. Linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity of residuals were examined by visual inspection of a scatterplot of standardized predicted values with standardized residual values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007)..

After checking for assumption violations and assuming there are no violations, the regression output contained the model summary, R, R squared, adjusted R squared, and the standard error of the estimate. Next, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) table produced the sum of squares, degrees of freedom, mean square, F-ratio, and significance. Then, the coefficients table indicated how much the dependent variable varies with the independent variables. Afterward, the output gave a test for the statistical significance of each of the independent variables, and if p values were less than .05, then it could have been concluded that the coefficients are statistically significant (Williams et al., 2013). The research question for this study is restated below:

RQ1 - To what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress.

H_0: The difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment does not predict psychological distress.

H_1: The difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment does predict psychological distress.

Last, all the research data collected was stored on a computer only accessible through a secure password. There was also a memory stick holding a backup of the data which was stored in a locked cabinet. All the computer and memory stick data will be stored for five years before it is destroyed.

Threats to Validity

Threats to External Validity

In quantitative research, external validity is essential in generalizing the study's conclusion among the entire population (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2015). Although external and internal threats are inevitable, precautions were taken to minimize these threats. The sampling method used for this research was a simple random sampling method where a group of participants was selected from the first-year high-risk student athletes' population. Each participant was chosen by chance which allowed every member of the population (regardless of which low SES criteria the student is categorized by) to have an equal chance of being included in the sample. However, although efforts were made to gain representation of the population throughout the entire United States, I was not confident the results were not specific to a certain area. Utilizing the internet

sources allowed for a representative sample possibly being obtained. The study was generalizable in the population of first-year high-risk student athletes.

Threats to Internal Validity

Internal validity is essential because the results should accurately reflect what the researcher is studying (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2015). The objective of internal validity is making sure that the independent variables perceived sport and academic commitment difference accurately reflect the study's results on the dependent variable. Internal threats within the study were the self-administered questionnaires and K10 survey. The students were expected to provide accurate answers; however, the truthful responses may have not occurred if the participants were attempting to portray a certain image to the researcher or the participants were unaware of the correct answer. The participants were given multiple opportunities to be considered eligible to participate to minimize the threat of unknown parental information. Also, the response to the survey was anonymous (assigned identification numbers will be given in the case of removal request) to minimize this threat to internal validity. The anonymous surveys did minimize the threat to internal validity. However, the assigned identification numbers gave the researcher a way to identify the students while also keeping the student's responses anonymous.

Ethical Procedures

Walden University's IRB approved student's proposal before any data collection from student has occurred to ensure the study was within ethical guidelines. It is essential that ethical guidelines are adhered too in a study when human participants are used. In this study, the risk to the participants was minimal. The population being explored were

first-year high-risk collegiate student athletes who did not need parental consent because they were over the age of 18 and considered adults. The study did not violate ethical procedures because the population was not considered a vulnerable population such as minors or subordinates of the researcher, the study was not conducted in researchers own workplace, nor was it constituted as a sensitive topic. Furthermore, to make sure ethical boundaries were not violated anonymous online questionnaires was used to ensure the student's privacy and reduce ethical concerns.

Each potential participant was informed through a consent form on the intention of the study and what their participation requires. This was to ensure the participants were able to reach an informed decision about whether to participate in the study without coercion. A copy of the informed consent was given to each participant with information that only pertains to the participant's requirements and studies intentions. The consent form included the purpose of the research, the procedures to be followed, and the confidentiality of information including maintaining anonymity throughout the study. The consent form also provided the participants with an identification number which the consent form informed the participants of the right to use that identification number to discontinue participation in the study at any time. The collected data was secured in a password-protected file and on a password-protected jump-drive that will be stored on a computer’s hard drive for five years which follows ethical guidelines.

Summary

The primary purpose of this quantitative study was to measure psychological distress, analyzing the difference between one’s perceived time needed to be successful and actual time spent for both sport commitment and academic commitment in high-risk

student athletes after transitioning to college sport. This study intended to address the discrepancies in the perceived time needed and actual time spent on both sport and academic commitment and its effect on the psychological distress of first year high-risk youth. The primary purpose of this chapter was to provide a detailed explanation of the selected research design and methodology of the research study.

The population for this research included low SES student athletes that are in their first year of collegiate sports throughout the United States. The sampling method used for this research was a simple random sampling method where a group of participants was selected from the first-year high-risk student athlete population. The target sample size for this research was 127 (minimum 100) participants with complete data. Once approval was obtained from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I placed an advertisement for participation on social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. A link to access the questionnaires was included in each of the advertisements. I also utilized websites such as SurveyMonkey website to create and distribute the survey. First-year high-risk collegiate student athletes were the target of the questionnaires. The student athletes could legally sign the informed consent to participate without needing parental consent because they are over the age 18. All transferred data was password protected, and the only person that has access is the researcher and the dissertation committee members.

Three questionnaires were administered online, the academic and sport time commitment-needed items, K10, SES scale along with relevant demographics (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, athletic status). The response to the survey were anonymous to minimize the threat to internal validity. Each questionnaire packet had an identification

number assigned. In the case of a participants requesting removal from study, they could have presented the identification number and the packet could have been removed from the study. Therefore, Walden University's IRB did approve the study because the risk to the participants were minimal.

In Chapter 4, the process of data collection are discussed along with providing the time frame for data collection and the recruitment and response rates. Discrepancies, if any, in the data is also presented along with an explanation of how representative the sample was of the population of interest. The statistical analysis is presented with information on how I evaluated the assumptions for multiple regression and the results of the study. Tables, graphs, and figures are used to display the results as well.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Individuals from low SES have been shown to be at risk of psychological distress from a physical, psychological, and social context of transitioning to college (Pearson & Petitpas, 2013; Wayment & Walters, 2017). Although many are given an opportunity to attend college through sport participation, anticipated and unanticipated challenges occur (e.g., lack of college readiness, lack of coping skills to adjust) that can bring about psychological difficulties such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders, loneliness, hopelessness, and suicidal thoughts (Haslerig, 2017; MacNamara & Collins, 2010; Martinelli, 2016; Pummell et al., 2007).

Past literature has demonstrated that stress is a common concern among student athletes in general, and students lack appropriate coping behaviors to manage the stress (Jennings et al., 2014; Kimball, 2007; Mayol et al., 2017; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). Previous studies have demonstrated that student athletes have even higher levels of stress because of the dual demands placed on them with athletic responsibilities and academic responsibilities (Flannigan et al., 2017; Jury et al., 2017; Myers et al., 2015). In addition, researchers have also made the connection between early stress, leading to poor self-regulation skills, immediate gratification, and unhealthy choices leading to chronic distress (Lu et al., 2012; Martinelli, 2016; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2013). However, what the current literature is lacking is research on identifying specific sources of stress (i.e., balancing sports and academics) for student athletes who have a greater degree of deficits and are unprepared to successfully deal with the stressors such as high-risk youth

(Jury et al., 2017; Stone et al., 2016; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). Therefore, this was the focus of this study.

In this chapter, I discuss the purpose, research question and hypotheses, and data collection techniques. In addition, I present the results, which include survey collection, participant data, descriptive statistics of the scales, and the research question and hypothesis testing. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

The primary purpose of this quantitative study was to measure psychological distress, analyzing the difference between one's perceived time needed to be successful and actual time spent for both sports commitment and academic commitment in high-risk student athletes after transitioning to college sport.

The research question and hypotheses for this study were:

RQ1: To what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress.

H_0: The difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment does not predict psychological distress.

H_1: The difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment does predict psychological distress.

Data Collection

Data was collected over a 1-week period in June 2019. The data was collected via an online survey geared toward high-risk student athletes on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook using SurveyMonkey and the audience panel. The following three scales were used: Health & Human Service SES questionnaire, Sport and Academic Commitment Questionnaire, and the Kessler Psychological Distress scale (K10) to determine to what

extent the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress. In addition to these three measures, demographic information was collected (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity).

A total of 136 surveys were collected from first-year high-risk student athletes. The social media sites and audience panel used were selected due to the assumption that it would produce the greatest response rate of college athletes because it allowed for target specifiers. Due to individuals clicking the survey to read the consent form, the response rate was lower than expected but still satisfactory at 42%. That is, there were 323 individuals who clicked on the survey, and 136 participants completed the surveys.

Results

Data Collection

All 136 participants were transferred to SPSS for data analysis. The data were checked for accuracy by ensuring that there were no typos due to transferring the data between SurveyMonkey and SPSS. Accuracy was also confirmed by ensuring the data were within the proper minimum and maximum ranges. Frequencies were run to determine whether any data were missing. There were no missing data. The data were then checked for the presence of outliers, and four cases were removed due to outliers resulting in a final valid *N* of 132 for analysis. Next, data cleaning occurred by checking the assumptions, and no assumptions were violated. Demographic information is discussed next.

Participant Demographics

Demographic data was collected on gender, age, and ethnicity (see Table 1). Males and females were nearly equally represented. The participants ages ranged from 18 to 21 years old with mean of 19.3 (*SD* = 0.99). Approximately one-third of the participants were African-American and another one-third were Caucasian.

Table 1

Demographic Data

Variable	*n*	%
Gender		
Female	68	51.5
Male	64	48.5
Age (years)		
18	33	25.0
19	49	37.1
20	33	24.2
21	18	13.6
Ethnicity		
African American	45	34.1
Asian	21	15.9
Caucasian	43	32.6
Hispanic	15	11.4
Native American	3	2.3
Other	5	3.8

Descriptive Statistics of the Scales

Health and Human Service SES Scale. The Health and Human Service SES Scale measures the social economic level of participants by asking if they are on need-based aid, the highest level of parental education completed, family size, single or two parent household, parental total annual income, and parental occupation (see Table 2). Most participants were on a need-based aid. Majority (64.4%) of the participants parents' highest level of education completed was some college, bachelor's degree, or higher. The

participants family size ranged from 0 to 18 with majority family size consisting of mean of 5.2 (*SD* = 3.1). The participants mostly came from two-parent households (62.1%). Of the 98 participants responding to the household income item, slightly more than one-fourth (26.5%) reported parental income as less than $24,750 and about 3 in 10 reported household income between $38,011 and $42,430, which was the highest income category of participants.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics: Categorical Variables (N = 132)

Variable	*n*	%
Need-based college financial aid		
Yes	96	72.7
No	36	27.3
Parental highest level of education		
Less than a high school diploma	5	3.8
High school diploma or equivalency (GED)	39	29.5
Some college or vocational degree/license	37	28.0
Bachelor's degree	29	22.0
Master's degree	16	12.1
Doctorate, professional (MD, JD, DDS)	3	2.3
None of the above	3	2.3
People currently living in household		
0	3	2.3
1	5	3.8
2	10	7.6
3	18	13.6
4	26	19.7
5	28	21.2
6	13	9.8
7	8	6.1
8	6	4.5
9	3	2.3
10	6	4.5
11	1	.8

12	1	.8
14	1	.8
17	2	1.5
18	1	.8
Single parent or two-parent household (within the past 5 years)		
Single	51	37.9
Two-Parent	85	62.1
Parents' total family income		
Under $24,750	26	19.7
Between $24,751 and $29,170	18	13.6
Between $29,171 and $33,590	11	8.3
Between $33,591 and $38,010	14	10.6
Between $38,011 and $42,430	29	22.0
Do not know/not sure	28	21.2
Decline to respond	6	4.5

Sport and academic commitment. Participants were asked how much actual time they spend on sport commitment and academic commitment, and how much time they perceive is needed on sport commitment and academic commitment. The mean for sport commitment perceived time spent was 25.94 hours (*SD* = 9.78) and needed was 21.65 hours (*SD* = 10.82), indicating more time spent on sports than rated as needed. The mean for academic commitment perceived time spent was 21.90 hours (*SD* = 9.54) and needed was 25.90 hours (*SD* = 11.32), indicating less time spent on academics than rated as needed (see Table 3). The difference between time spent and time needed was calculated for both sport and academic commitment. The mean for sport commitment difference was 4.29 hours (*SD* = 9.98), indicating, on average, a surplus spent. The mean for academic commitment difference was 4.00 hours (*SD* = 7.60), indicating a deficit spent. Table 4 presents the frequency of sport commitment difference with most participants' reporting a surplus spent (*n* = 80, 60.6%) compared to academic commitment difference with a majority reporting a deficit spent (*n* = 89, 67.4%).

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of Sport and Academic Commitment and Spent-Need Differences

Variables	Sport spend	Sport need	Academic spent	Academic need	Sport spent-need	Academic spent-need
Mean	25.9470	21.6515	21.9015	25.9015	4.2955	-4.0000
Median	26.0000	21.0000	20.0000	25.5000	5.0000	-4.5000
SD	9.78105	10.82687	9.54208	11.32980	9.98987	7.60173
Skewness	-.107	.197	.441	.259	.170	-.309
Kurtosis	-.945	-.699	.414	.155	.529	.667
Minimum	4.00	1.00	.00	.00	-20.00	-28.00
Maximum	46.00	45.00	51.00	59.00	39.00	18.00

Table 4

Deficit, Equal, and Surplus Spend in Sport and Academic Commitment Differences

Variable	*n*	%
Sport commitment difference		
-1.00 deficit spend	36	27.3
.00 equal spend	16	12.1
1.00 surplus spend	80	60.6
Academic commitment difference		
-1.00 deficit spend	89	67.4
.00 equal spend	16	12.1
1.00 surplus spend	27	20.5

A crosstabulation of sport and academic deficit, equal, and surplus spent is shown in Table 5. Those with a surplus sport spent were more likely to have a deficit in academic spent. This is visually displayed in Figure 1.

Table 5

*Academic * Sport Deficit, Equal, and Surplus Spent Crosstabulation*

Variable		Sport		
Academic		Deficit spent	Equal spent	Surplus spent
Deficit spent	count	29	11	49
	expected count	24.3	10.8	53.9
	adjusted residual	2.0	.1	-1.9
Equal spent	count	3	2	11
	expected count	4.4	1.9	9.7
	adjusted residual	-.8	.0	.7
Surplus spent	count	4	3	20
	expected count	7.4	3.3	16.4
	adjusted residual	-1.6	-.2	1.6

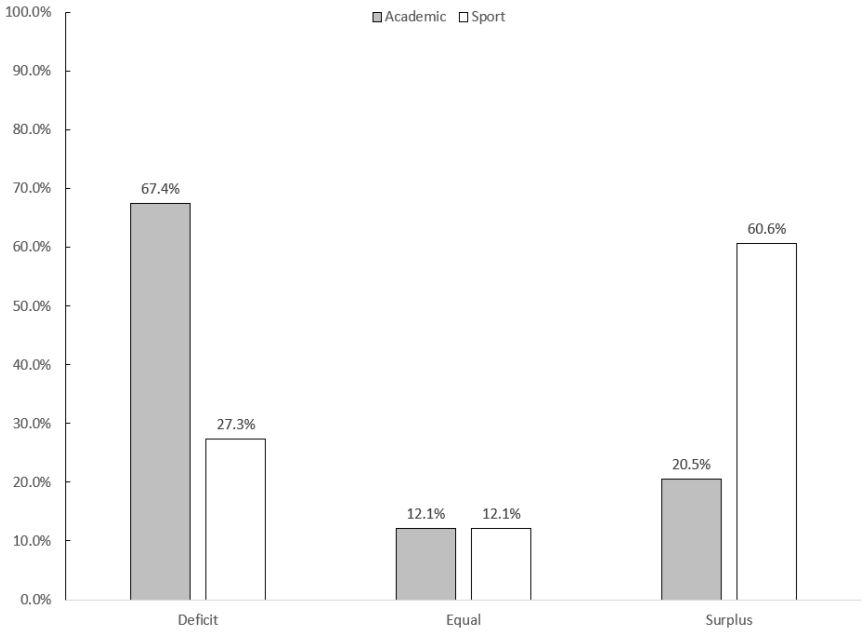

Figure 1. Deficit, equal, and surplus spent in sport and academic commitments.

Kessler Psychological Scale. The Kessler Psychological Distress scale measured the student's distress levels after their transition to collegiate sport and academics by asking questions about anxiety and depressive symptoms that the participant had experienced in the prior 4-week period. The scale consists of 10 items with the responses

being on a 5-point Likert scale. The higher the student's response, the stronger the prevalence of psychological distress. The response varies with each question: however, a response of 1 indicates "*none of the time*" whereas a response of 5 indicates "*all of the time*."

The K10 scale score was highly reliable with Cronbach's α = .87 with an average inter-item correlation of .41 (see Table 6). The K10 mean was 2.70 (*SD* = 0.75) and normally distributed with very low skewness and kurtosis values. For descriptive purposes K10 scores can be categorized into four severity of distress levels: 1-1.9 (*likely to be well*), 2.0-2.4 (*likely to have a mild mental disorder*), 2.5-2.9 (*likely to have a moderate mental disorder*), 3.0-5.0 (*likely to have a severe mental disorder*). According to this schema, nearly two-thirds (65.6%) of the participants were likely to have a moderate or severe mental disorder (see Table 7).

Table 6

K10 Descriptive Statistics

Variable K10	
Mean	2.7036
Median	2.7000
Std. Deviation	.75334
Skewness	.285
Kurtosis	.304
Minimum	1.00
Maximum	5.00
Cronbach's α	.87
Avg. item correlation	.41

Table 7

K10 Severity Frequency and Percent

K10 range	Severity	*n*	%
1.0 – 1.9	*Likely to be well*	22	16.79
2.0 – 2.4	*Likely to have a mild mental disorder*	23	17.56
2.5 – 2.9	*Likely to have a moderate mental disorder*	39	29.77
3.0 – 5.0	*Likely to have a severe mental disorder*	47	35.88

Covariate screening. Sex, age, and ethnicity were screened as potential covariates related to K10 scores. Females had higher K10 scores than males, but the difference was not statistically significant (see Table 8), and the correlation between age and K10 scores was nearly zero. As shown in Table 9, K10 mean scores were nearly equal across ethnic groups and did not statistically significantly differ, $F(5, 125) = 0.37$, $p = .869$. These results indicated that sex, age, nor ethnicity needed to be controlled as covariates.

Table 8

K10 Correlations with Sex and Age

Variable	Sex	Age	K10
Sex		-.139	.126
Age	.112		.038
K10	.151	.668	

Note. Upper diagonal contains Pearson correlations; lower diagonal contains *p* values.

Table 9

K10 Scores by Ethnicity

	M	*SD*	*N*
African American	2.70	0.63	44
Asian	2.53	0.86	21
Caucasian	2.77	0.79	43
Hispanic	2.81	0.85	15
Native American	2.53	0.21	3
Other	2.74	1.04	5

Research Question and Hypothesis Testing

To address the research question - To what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress – a multiple regression analysis was used. First, regression diagnostics were performed. There was no substantive collinearity between the sport commitment difference and academic commitment difference, $r(129) = .226$ and tolerance = .949 indicating only 5.1% shared variance between the two predictors. Minimum and maximum values of standardized and studentized residuals should be within ±3.29 (i.e., alpha = .001); standardized and studentized residuals varied between -2.28 to 2.99 and -2.30 to 3.01, respectively. The histogram (Figure 2) and normal P-P plot (Figure 3) of standardized residuals both acceptable normal distribution with no outliers. The P-P plot shows there was some slight deviation from normality between the observed cumulative probabilities between 0.3 and 0.5and between 0.7 and 0.9. Regression assumptions were met and provide confidence in the validity of the regression results.

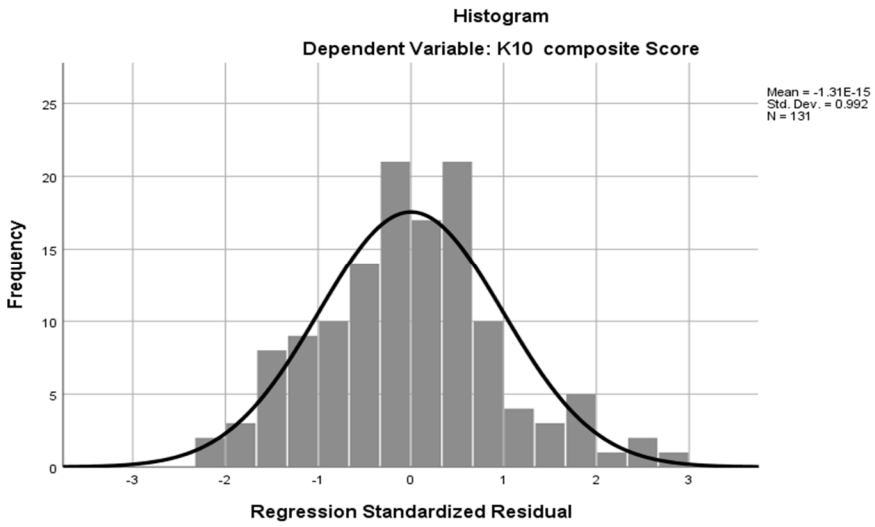

Figure 2. Histogram of regression standardized residuals.

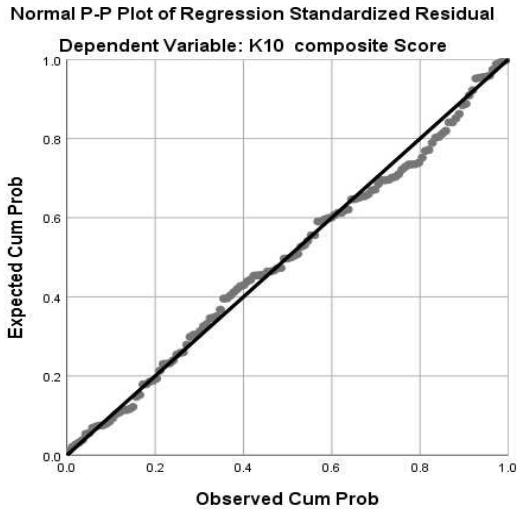

Figure 3. Normal P-P plot of regression standardized residuals.

The regression of K10 scores on sport commitment difference and academic commitment difference was not statistically significant, $F(2, 128) = 0.11$, $p = .897$, and the null hypothesis could not be rejected. Less than 1% of the variance in K10 scores was

accounted for by the two predictors. Table 10 provides a summary of the regression results.

Table 10

Results of K10 Scores Regressed on Sport and Academic Commitment Differences

Variable	*B*	95% CI for *B*	*t*	*p*
Constant	2.684	[2.519, 2.849]	32.21	< .001
Sport commitment difference	0.003	[-0.010, 0.017]	0.46	.647
Academic commitment difference	-0.002	[-0.019, 0.016]	-0.02	.855

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative study was to measure psychological distress, analyzing the difference between one's perceived time needed to be successful and actual time spent for both sports' commitment and academic commitment in high-risk student athletes after transitioning to college sport. The research question was addressed by conducting multiple regression analyses using SPSS. The assumptions were not violated, and the regression did not show statistically significant results in that the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment did not predict psychological distress.

In chapter 5, I provide a summary of the findings, the interpretation of those findings, and the limitation of the study. Further, I explain the recommendations, future research, and implications for social change. Chapter 5 ends with a conclusion to the research study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this research study was to measure psychological distress, analyzing the difference between one's perceived time needed to be successful and actual time spent for both sports commitment and academic commitment in high-risk student athletes after transitioning to college sport. It was important to conduct this study because the evidence of college student athletes possibly being at risk for psychological disturbances and mental illness are of great concern. This research can help future researchers to design and develop intervention studies to help mitigate psychological distress for high-risk youth who are making the transition to collegiate student athlete. If this occurs, interventions may help increase the student's mental health and success before and after graduation.

Summary of Findings

Data was collected in the course of a 1-week period in June 2019. The data was collected via an online survey geared towards high-risk student athletes on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook using SurveyMonkey and the audience panel. The following three scales were used: Health & Human Service SES questionnaire, Sport and Academic Commitment Questionnaire, and the Kessler Psychological Distress scale (K10). In addition to these three measures, demographic information was collected (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity).

A total of 136 surveys (132 surveys were used) were collected from first-year high-risk student athletes. All participants were first-year high-risk students with almost

an equal number of females to males. The majority age limit of the participants was 19 years and mostly African Americans.

When looking at the results from all three of the scales, the Health and Human Service SES scale showed that most participants were on need-based aid, parental education was high school diploma or GED with a family size of five, and a two-parent household with income between $38,011 and $42,430. The Sport and Academic Commitment questionnaire showed that most of the participants spend more time on sport (26 hours) than they perceive needed to be successful (22 hours) but spend less time on academics (21 hours) than they perceive needed to be successful (26 hours). Finally, the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale indicated that the average participant was likely to have a moderate mental disorder.

The research question: To what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress - was addressed by using multiple regression. The regression of sports commitment difference and academic differences was shown not to predict psychological distress. Even after controlling for demographics, the sport difference and academic difference were not statistically significant. This means that although participants report a discrepancy in both sport and academics, neither are the sole cause of psychological distress in the first-year high-risk student athletes. Whether the athlete spent more time in sports than needed, or less time in academic than needed, each group had moderate to severe psychological distress levels for varying reason that will be discussed later.

Interpretation of Findings

The theoretical framework for this study was Pearlin's theory of psychological distress and Selye's GAS model. Pearlin's theory suggests that all humans are in a particular state of perpetual change due to the situations and the stressors that come along with them to help them evolve (Pearlin et al., 1987). In other words, the factors that motivate individuals to develop are the circumstances and stressors they go through in life, and the individual's resolution of challenging situations is shaped by the vulnerability and strength of the individual (Pearlin et al., 1981). For example, young adults might experience distress as the individual acts to achieve dreams formed in adolescence; these stressors can be moving out of the house, leaving to university, starting a new journey, and so forth (Pearlin et al., 1981). If the young adult does not successfully adapt to these changes, it may eventually lead to psychological distress such as the symptoms of depression and anxiety (Aneshensel & Avison, 2015).

Furthermore, Selyes's GAS model suggests how someone responds to stress could result in positive and negative outcomes based on cognitive perceptions of the physiological or psychological experience (Selye, 1983). In other words, the young adult will go through inevitable changes that can negatively affect their life, and stress may occur depending on the cognitive perception of the event. Additionally, if the person lacks specific skills, it can affect stability during these stressful events, leading to psychological distress such as depression and anxiety (Pearlin et al., 1981). That is, the individual characteristics, the coping skills, the timing of stress, and social support of the student athlete may affect how they handle the newly acquired lifestyle of being a college student athlete.

Past research has shown that high-risk student athletes face major barriers and life changes when transitioning to collegiate sports that may cause psychological distress to occur if certain key elements for stability are not present (Gayles & Baker, 2015; Pearson & Petitpas, 2013). However, research also showed high-risk youth lack the appropriate coping skills to appropriately handle the developmental changes or transitions to college (Morgan, 2015; Savitz-Romer, 2012; Wyatt & Mattern, 2011). Additionally, the challenges they face as first-year students and college athletes add another dimension of pressures to handle such as learning how to balance academics, sports, and social commitments (Browman et al., 2017; Niu, 2015). Bowman (2010) suggested students having heavy workloads while attending college, such as student athletes, have shown clear adverse health outcomes. Pearson and Petitpas (2013) found that athletes who rated high on general adaptation skills were better prepared to transition successfully. However, the gap in the literature is the need to address the psychological concern for those who are also considered at risk before the added time commitment of both sport and academics (Pearson & Petitpas, 2013).

The current study looked at the experiences of first-year high-risk student athletes. Although there were no studies to address first-year high-risk student athletes specifically, there are many studies on high-risk youth and student athletes, respectively. Wyatt and Mattern (2011) suggested high-risk youth were less likely to attend college in households where neither parent had a college degree. However, NCAA (2016) conducted a study and found that 1 out of 5 student athletes given the opportunity to compete at the college level come from low SES backgrounds; which means a large percentage are a high-risk youth. In this current study, the majority of the participants

came from households were parental highest level of education completed was high school diploma or GED. Furthermore, although Archambault et al. (2017) and Bozick et al. (2010) suggested high-risk youth often come from single-parent household with the parent likely struggling financially, in the current study it was found that majority of the high-risk athletes come from two-parent households, with a family of 5 making between $38,011 and $42,430. This result is in line with high-risk youth parental income being considered low for a 5-family household. However, these results do not confirm a majority of high-risk youth come from a single-parent household; they come from two-parent households. The results of the two-parent household differing in this study could be due to the inclusion criteria required a broader understanding of high-risk youth than previous studies that focused specifically on high-risk youth from low-income category. The participants in this study come from a diverse income background but meet other inclusion criteria to be considered high-risk youth.

Another component of this study was specifically looking at the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment for first-year high-risk student athletes. Haslerig (2017) conducted a study and found that during the season and off-season, student athletes are still required to spend over 20 plus hours on their sport. The time commitment leaves little room to fulfill other mandatory obligations such as academics, causing an imbalance in both the academic and athletic communities (Haslerig, 2017). Further, Rothschild-Checroune et al. (2012) suggested further studies are needed to quantitively track the amount of time student athletes actually spend with specific communities. Therefore, in the current study, the results were consistent with the literature showing the tracked amount of time

majority of first-year high-risk student athletes spend is on average 26 hours of sport and on average 22 hours on academics. The results consistently showed the student athlete has time discrepancies with sport and academics. The athlete in this study spends at least 4 hours more on sport than was perceived as needed and believed 4 hours more was needed to spend on academics. This research also has similar results as Rothschild-Checroune et al. (2012) who sought to reveal how exactly the interactions between sport and academia affect time management and found there was a challenge that required student athletes to spend less time on academics to fulfill sport obligations. Overall, this research study confirmed past research studies that suggested first-year student athletes demanding sports schedule engaged them more with athletics and less with academics (Gayles & Hu, 2009; Haslerig, 2017; Rothschild-Checroune et al., 2012).

Finally, the research study explored to what extent does the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress in first-year high-risk student athletes. Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2018) suggested that student athletes have two central life interests, which have been shown as problematic and a source of stress. Further, Cosh and Phillip (2014) conducted a qualitative study on student athletes' responsibilities and stated it was evident throughout that the interviewees had a desire to achieve academically despite prioritizing sport but sacrificing academic goals which may have led to psychological concerns and challenges. However, in the current study, it was found that the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment does not predict psychological distress.

These results contradict past literature, which suggested the time management of student athletes may lead to psychological distress (Flannigan et al., 2017; Myers et al., 2015). There may be several reasons for the contradiction and not statistically significant results. According to Jury et al. (2017), low SES students are more likely to exhibit higher levels of mental and behavioral issues because of childhood adversities and trauma. Those childhood adversities and trauma continue to affect the child's mental health as they enter adulthood, which includes transitioning to the college environment (Myers et al., 2015). Also, the psychological distress levels are interesting because there could be a variety of other college environmental issues involved besides the imbalance of sport and academic time commitment. Current literature suggested high-risk youth experience unique stressors during their college experience that impact their well-being, leading to the disproportionally high possibility of mental and physical disorders (Flannigan et al., 2017; Myers et al., 2015). Therefore, the participants in this study may have pre-existing moderate to severe distress levels before entering college sports and academics or experienced other college environmental challenges that affected their well-being. These factors could be why the results presented the average participant as having moderate to severe mental health distress levels but sports and academic commitment difference not being a statistically significant factor.

However, although the results were not statistically significant, they are in line with past literature which suggested an alarming amount of student athletes suffer from severe psychological problems that warrant counseling (Miller et al., 2011; Sudano et al., 2017). This research also has similar results as Kneeland and Dovidio (2019), who found that many first-year students experience high levels of psychological distress consistently

throughout their first year. Overall, this research study contradicted sport and academic balance as being a predictor of psychological distress but confirmed past research studies that suggested a large number of student athletes experience psychological distress for varying reasons. In the case of high-risk student athletes, they may enter college with mental health difficulties that continue throughout adulthood (Jury et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2008).

Limitations of the Study

There were some limitations to this study. First, the sport and academic difference discrepancy may not have been statistically significant for several study limitation reasons. Previous literature suggested future studies should focus on diverse groups of student athletes who may encounter more specific challenges to balancing the athletic, academic, and social worlds (Giurgiu & Damian, 2014). This is paramount because although sport and academic time discrepancy may affect the general population of student athletes, it may not be the specific factor for high-risk student athletes psychological distress levels.

Furthermore, the current study K10 scores were reported after a full year of sports and academics for high-risk student athletes, but there was not a baseline to compare a change in distress levels. Previous literature suggested high-risk youth enter college with mental health disorders which appear to be correlated to social status and continue into adulthood negatively affecting their self-regulation, coping skills, and college success (Jury et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2008; Savitz-Romer, 2012). Without a quantitative baseline marker to show if a change had occurred from before they entered college until after their first year, it is difficult to indefinitely rule out the sport and academic time discrepancy

not having an effect on psychological distress levels being that stress levels were high before they entered college.

Additionally, the students were expected to provide accurate answers, but because the study were self-administered questionnaires, participants may not have answered truthfully. The untruthful answers could have occurred due to the possibility that it was difficult for them to remember the exact number of hours spent on sports and academics, they incorrectly remembered the level of psychological distress, or they may not have remembered the correct answers regarding the parental information that was asked. This underreporting or incorrectly recalling information could have impacted the way they answered each question.

Finally, in this study, the student athlete was not asked to provide the name of the sport played. The results could vary depending on the type of sport played and the demand for the sport. One sport may require a different number of hours or have athletes with varying characteristics that may produce different results.

Recommendations

The results of this study provide information on the extent to which sport and academic time commitment effect psychological distress levels in high-risk student athletes. Based on the findings, future research should be conducted to narrow down more specific effects on student athletes psychological distress levels to help create interventions that mitigate the prevalence of mental health disorders within this population. Future research could also look at the student athletes psychological distress levels, and the balance of sport and academics difference based on the type of sport played to analyze if there is a change of distress level.

It is recommended that future quantitative research is conducted with high-risk student athletes who are in their first year to explore the specific reasons or a combination thereof, that may be causing the mental health challenges towards this population. This direction of research could help create a program to help coaches and administrators understand the importance of and be more aware of the psychological challenges their student athletes will encounter and ways to help facilitate growth and development outside of the sport commitment. This could be the first step in improving the college success rates of high-risk student athletes.

Additionally, it is recommended that future mixed-methods research is conducted on high-risk student athletes to explore ways to balance their time commitment schedule (aside from mental health challenges). Researchers could find ways of developing a more balanced schedule for student athletes so they can take advantage of the social, academic, and sport opportunities of being a college athlete. This could increase overall college readiness, career development readiness, and graduation success rates.

Lastly, this research study should be conducted again on a larger scale to determine if sport and academic commitment difference truly do not affect the psychological distress levels of student athletes. Also, future research should utilize a pre and posttest study comparing psychological distress levels once they enter college and then again after one or two semesters or quarters of college sport and academics to determine if a true change in the high-risk youth psychological distress levels has occurred.

Implications for Social Change

This study is significant because there is a lack of information and research on the extent to which the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict psychological distress in student athletes. There is also a lack of information and research on student athletes who encounter a great degree of deficits, such as high-risk youth who already have pre-existing challenges. The lack of information and research is of concern because evidence shows that high-risk youth are at risk for psychological disturbance and mental illness, which can affect their college success (Archambault et al., 2017; McLaughlin & Sheridan, 2016; Stone et al., 2016). Even more so, evidence shows student athletes are at risk for psychological disturbances, especially within the first year, that can affect college success (Gaston & Baker, 2015; Melendez, 2010; Wilson & Pritchard, 2005). The results of this research can be used to help create better programs geared towards this particular population; thus, creating a more balanced college environment that contributes to the success levels of student athletes.

The results can also be used to create interventions to aid in mitigating mental health disorders in student athletes, which could not only lead to better well-being but also increase success during college and after graduation. According to Flannigan et al. (2017), positive relationships, support, a sense of "being heard," and support programs that address mental health issues and stabilization strengthen psychological levels. Positive well-being can help high-risk students increase their chances of college readiness, college career development, and college graduation rates because they were given the tools necessary to cope with their commitments successfully.

Furthermore, the results from this research study and the research recommendations could have a larger impact on the gap between low-income students and high-income students. According to Stone et al. (2016) and Athanases et al. (2016), low SES students are less likely to take advantage of the opportunity to attend college, and when they do have higher dropout rates and underrepresents in successfully graduating compared to high-income students. Also, Spieler et al. (2007) suggested the ability to cope with adversity allows for students to be successful during the challenges of being a student athlete. The results of this research and the recommendations could be the key to continuing the conversation of student athletes psychological distress levels and establishing better interventions that specifically address the challenges of being a high-risk student athlete.

Additionally, research showed if the student athlete is supported through tasked motivated goals, such as a balanced schedule, they may have a sense of support, positive perception, and essentially positive mental health (Wayment & Walters, 2017). Therefore, research can possibly help anticipate the psychological problems of transitioning to sport for high-risk youth and help them as college athletes plan, make proper preparations, and precipitate less stress (Pearson & Petitpas, 2013). College coaches, administrators, and counselors who work closely with freshmen high-risk student athlete can have more awareness of the psychological challenges they will encounter and help facilitate growth and development.

Conclusion

Many low SES students are given the opportunity to attend college through competing in sport but encounter many challenges that impact not only their college

readiness, academic success, and graduation rates but also their total well-being (Hwang & Choi, 2016; Pearson & Petitpas, 2013; Savits-Romer, 2012). Although the prevalence of mental health challenges of low SES students is known, there is lack information on how the added identity of being a first-year college student athlete (combining sport and academic commitment) affect their psychological distress levels. This is problematic because psychological distress is known to affect academic achievement levels and dropout rates (Etzel, 2009; Johnson & Ivarsson, 2011). High-risk student athletes deserve the opportunity not only attend college but successfully navigate sport and academic demands and complete college with a degree to enhance their social status.

A review of the literature shows a great degree of qualitative studies on low SES students and student athletes time commitments. However, no quantitative research was conducted on the balance of sport and academic time commitment and its effect on psychological distress levels. Further, although there was research on student athletes, there were no studies that specifically addressed this special population of student athletes who are considered to be a high-risk youth and have added mental challenges that affect the academic success (Hackman et al., 2010; Jury et al., 2017). Therefore, it was this lack of information that made it vital to conduct this research study.

Using a quantitative research approach, a survey research design was employed to collect data from first-year high-risk student athletes. Included in the survey were questions regarding psychological distress levels and perceived time needed compared to perceived time spent in both sport and academic. Multiple regression was used to analyze the research data to determine the extent to which the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment predict

psychological distress. The results were not statistically significant in that the difference between the perceived time needed and actual time spent in both sports and academic commitment did not predict psychological distress. Although, results did show that high-risk student athletes believe they spend more time in sports than needed and less time in academic commitment than needed to be successful. Furthermore, psychological distress levels were moderate to severe throughout both compared groups that included a diverse demographic population.

In following with Selye's GAS model and Pearlin's theory of psychological distress, stress is a significant inevitable life event or change that demands a response, adjustment, or adaptation (Pearlin et al., 1981; Selye, 1983). Young adults are in a perpetual state of change which requires proper coping mechanisms to respond, adjust, or adapt successfully (Pearlin et al., 1981). High-risk youth encounter a significant amount of challenges in the initially that inhibit their ability to properly adjust to the changes of transitioning to college successfully, which could be the reason for the high K10 scores. The lack of coping skills required to transition successfully can lead to a negative perspective on the transitional change which points to Selye's theory that distress happens if the person has a negative cognitive perception of the change (Selye, 1983). The information gained from this research study not only extends the research in the discipline due to it being the only study of its kind, but it also demonstrates the possibility that there may be another cause for the high psychological distress levels of first-year high-risk student athletes. Furthermore, it could also strengthen the understanding that high-risk youth require specific intervention before entering college to improve their psychological distress levels and success after transitioning. Thus, improving the

understanding regarding high-risk student athletes which can ultimately better serve this population to help make the most of their college experience.

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Appendix A: Online Advertisement

Social Media Advertisement:

Hello, my name is Cassidy Jenkins, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am currently completing my dissertation research and looking for participants for the study. I would like to extend an invitation to college student athletes who live within the United States and meet the following criteria: low income background (family of four income less than $24,750; for families/households with more than 4, add $4,420 for each additional person), low-status parental occupation and education, large family size, member of a minority group, and one parent household. If you fall into this category and are interested in participating, please click the link below to read more detailed information regarding the study and to provide consent to participate. The total time to complete the survey is about 9 minutes. Also, if you know anyone who may be interested please forward the link so they may participate in the study as well. Thank you for your time and support.

Link:

Twitter Advertisement:

Hello, I'm looking for college student athletes who are interested in participating in a study. It will take about 9 minutes to complete. Please clink the link to see if you meet the criteria. If you know anyone who may be interested, please forward the link so they may participate in the study as well.

Link:

Walden Participant Pool Advertisement:

Hello, my name is Cassidy Jenkins, and I am a doctoral student here at Walden University. I am currently completing my dissertation research and looking for college student athletes who are interested in being participants for the study. If you know anyone who may fall into this category and are interested in participating, please forward the link below. The link will provide them with more detailed information regarding the study and to provide consent to participate. The total time to complete the survey is about 9 minutes. Thank you for your time and support.

Link:

Appendix B: Inclusion Criteria

You must be a college student athlete who meet both items 1 and 2 and at least one or more of the remaining criteria (Please check applicable boxes**):**

- € 1. First-year college enrollment in either community college or 4-year college with at least one semester completed at time of participation (excluding community college students who transferred to 4-year college)
- € 2. Participate on an organized college athletic team
- € 3. Low family income (family of four income less than $24,750; for families/households with more than 4, add $4,420 for each additional person)
- € 4. On need-based college financial aid (i.e., receiving federal student aid or grants based on financial status)
- € 5. Low-status parental occupation (i.e., clerical, service, blue-collar, unemployed, part-time)
- € 6. Low-status parental education level (less than a high school diploma, high school diploma, some college)
- € 7. Large family size (household size of 5 or more)
- € 8. Member of a minority group (African American, Hispanic, Native American)
- € 9. One-parent household (within the past 5 years)
- € 10. First-generation college student (neither parents attended college)

Appendix C: Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study about psychological distress in college student athletes. The researcher is inviting individuals that meet both items 1 and 2 and at least one or more of the remaining criteria:

1. First-year college enrollment in either community college or 4-year college with at least one semester completed at time of participation (excluding community college students who transferred to 4-year college)
2. Participate on an organized college athletic team
3. Low family income (family of four income less than $24,750; for families/households with more than 4, add $4,420 for each additional person)
4. On need-based college financial aid (i.e., receiving federal student aid or grants based on financial status)
5. Low-status parental occupation (i.e., clerical, service, blue-collar, unemployed, part-time)
6. Low-status parental education level (less than a high school diploma, high school diploma, some college)
7. Large family size (household size of 5 or more)
8. Member of a minority group (African American, Hispanic, Native American)
9. One-parent household (within the past 5 years)
10. First-generation college student (neither parents attended college)

This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part. This study is being conducted by a researcher named Cassidy Jenkins, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to analyze psychological distress, analyzing the difference between one's perceived time needed to be successful and actual time spent for both sports' commitment and academic commitment in student athletes after transitioning to college sport.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Fill out surveys which take approximately 9 minutes to complete.

Here are some sample questions:

- Is the household a single parent or two-parent household?

- How many hours do you spend on sport commitment (e.g., meetings, film review sessions, conditioning, practice, playbook studying, endorsement activities, and games) in per week?
- During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel hopeless?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as becoming upset. Being in this study would not pose a risk to your safety or wellbeing. However, if you do become anxious, depressed or experience any negative emotions from the study please reach out to the university counseling services or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255). The challenges of balancing sport and academic commitment is a known issue within collegiate sports. Furthermore, many face college entry barriers and combined with challenges of being student athletes can present psychological issues one must cope with on a daily basis. The study can provide positive social change for colleges, universities, and athletes with addressing potential issues so future researchers can choose appropriate interventions to help athletes succeed at the next level.

Payment:
This is not a paid survey and there are no required payments to participate in the study.
Privacy:

Reports coming out of this study will not share the identities of individual participants. Details that might identify participants, such as the location of the study, also will not be shared. Even the researcher will not know who you are. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by a password-protected file and on a password-protected jump-drive that is stored on a computer's hard drive. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via Cassidy.Jenkns@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately

about your rights as a participant, you can call the Research Participant Advocate at my university at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter an expiration date.** Please print or save this consent form for your records.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study well enough to make a decision about it, please continue by clicking "Next".

Appendix D: Demographics and Socioeconomic Status Questionnaire

Demographics:

Gender: _____ Age: ____ Ethnicity: _____

Socioeconomic Status:

1. **Are you on need-based college financial aid** (i.e., receiving federal student aid or grants based on financial status)**?** _____
2. **What is the highest degree your parents have earned?**

   __ Less than a high school diploma

   __High school diploma or equivalency (GED)

   __Some college or vocational degree/license

   __Bachelor's degree

   __ Master's degree

   __ Doctorate, Professional (MD, JD, DDS)

   __ None of the above, please specify other: _____
3. **How many people are currently living in your household, including yourself?**

   ___

   a. **Of these people, how many are children ≤18 years old? ___**
   b. **Is the household a single parent or two-parent household (within the past 5 years)? _____**
4. **Which of these categories best describes your parents total combined family income for your household for the past 12 months? This should include income (before taxes) from all sources, wages, rent from properties, social security, disability and/or veteran's benefits, unemployment benefits,**

workman's compensation, help from relatives (including child payments and alimony), and so on.

__ <$24,750

__$24,751-<$29,170

__$29,171-<$33,590

__$33,591-<$38,010

__$38,011≥$42,430

__Do not Know/Not sure

__ Decline to respond

5. **What is your parent(s) occupation? _____**

Appendix E: Sport and Academic Commitment Questionnaire

1. How many hours do you spend on sport commitment (e.g., meetings, film review sessions, conditioning, practice, playbook studying, endorsement activities, and games) in per week?

2. How many hours do you think is needed on sport commitment in per week?

3. How many hours do you spend on academic commitment (e.g., classes, tutoring, study sessions, homework, and assignments) in per week?

4. How many hours do you think is needed on academic commitment in per week?

Appendix F: Kessler Psychological Distress Scale

These questions concern how you have been feeling over the past 30 days. Click a circle below each question that best represents how you have been.

1. During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel tired out for no good reason?				
1. None of the time	2. A little of the time	3. Some of the time	4. Most of the time	5. All of the time
2. During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel nervous?				
1. None of the time	2. A little of the time	3. Some of the time	4. Most of the time	5. All of the time
3. During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel so nervous that nothing could calm you down?				
1. None of the time	2. A little of the time	3. Some of the time	4. Most of the time	5. All of the time
4. During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel hopeless?				
1. None of the time	2. A little of the time	3. Some of the time	4. Most of the time	5. All of the time
5. During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel restless or fidgety?				
1. None of the time	2. A little of the time	3. Some of the time	4. Most of the time	5. All of the time
6. During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel so restless you could not sit still?				
1. None of the time	2. A little of the time	3. Some of the time	4. Most of the time	5. All of the time
7. During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel depressed?				
1. None of the time	2. A little of the time	3. Some of the time	4. Most of the time	5. All of the time

8. During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel that everything was an effort?				
1. None of the time	2. A little of the time	3. Some of the time	4. Most of the time	5. All of the time
9. During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel so sad that nothing could cheer you up?				
1. None of the time	2. A little of the time	3. Some of the time	4. Most of the time	5. All of the time
10. During the last 30 days, about how often did you feel worthless?				
1. None of the time	2. A little of the time	3. Some of the time	4. Most of the time	5. All of the time