CONCUSSION REPORTING FROM THE ATHLETES’ PERSPECTIVE

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OVERVIEW

- We can guess at why athletes avoid reporting concussions, but their input has not been studied!

- We designed this qualitative study as a *pilot* to gather data for our larger NCAA / Dept of Defense grant proposal.
To utilize a qualitative approach to reveal the beliefs and perceptions of student-athletes’ concussion-reporting behavior and the factors that may influence it.

https://concussionu.wordpress.com/why-concussions/
ACCURACY OF REPORTING

- 6% of injuries\(^1\)
- May be much higher\(^2,4-6\)
- Majority in football\(^2,3\)

- How many of you have witnessed an athlete potentially sustain a concussion, but tried to hide it?
There is a significant gap between the number of potential concussive events that likely occur and those that actually get reported – perhaps upward of 50%.\cite{8-10}

Recent research has proven that mandatory educational programs are NOT working to increase reporting.\cite{4,6,8-10}
SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

- Large FBS D1
- Midsize FCS D1
- Community College

- Recruited participants through Athletic Trainers after obtaining IRB approval
**Methodology**

- **Focus groups**
  - Semi-structured interviews
  - Audio recorded and transcribed
  - No coaches present
• Qualitative data reduction:
  – Exploratory
  – Independent coding first
  – Coding hierarchy
  – Data saturation
  – Agreement on final codes
RESULTS

• Six major codes/themes:
  – Knowledge of risk
  – Misconceptions about lasting effects
  – Diagnostic uncertainty
  – Pressure from coaches
  – Social identity
  – Team support
Student-athletes are aware of the risks

“…..it’s a big problem with older people who have played football [and now have] memory loss long term. I’m not trying to not remember my name when I’m 65, 70 years old. So, anything that I can do to prevent that early on, then yes, I would take every precaution.”
“… society doesn’t think football players, when they sign up, don’t realize the risk. But you hear of people who are never able to play, paralyzed. You hear of people committing suicide because of the brain damage. And I think society as a whole doesn’t understand that we know the risk, but we’re willing to go out there because we love the game.”
Greater knowledge does not equate to being more likely to report concussive signs and symptoms.\textsuperscript{8-11}
“When I had a concussion, the bright lights didn’t really bother me. I was just a little bit confused, because I went back on the field. And I lined up on the wrong side for a second, and I just kind of snapped out of it and I was like, “Ok I can still go.” Played the rest of the game and I was just fine. The next day I woke up, I mean I didn’t feel fine, I felt a little bit different, but it wasn’t as serious, like, bright lights weren’t hurting my head and I could watch TV.”
“I’ve only had a serious one, I feel like, like I said earlier, getting your bell rung, you kind of feel like a daze. Like a couple, maybe 30 minutes later you’re fine. You’re back to normal, whatever. Serious is like your head hurts a little bit more. There was this time where I had a serious one. I got knocked out. It was playing soccer, though. … it kept lingering on. ….certain noises just triggered it, bright lights, all that.”
Student-athletes may not be reporting because they do not believe the injury was serious enough.\textsuperscript{5,12,13}
… as athletes, we’re scared to go take that test and have them tell us we can’t play for another five days. I think if they had a test that said, “Hey look, if you’re feeling fine, you can get back on the field” and if they tested us and just told us like, mid game… But if we’re talking always just, “Hey, let’s do this little test like this, but then you’re done for five, like a week or two,” I don’t think athletes are ok with that at all. In all honesty, if I feel like I can’t play, I’ll report it. But if I feel I can continue to play, but I know they’re just gonna cut me as long as they’re gonna cut the next guy, then I’m not gonna report it. I’ll keep my mouth closed.
• “Sandbag”

• Clear description of how to

“It’s easy. It’ll be like, triangle, and then, say, it [the test] will give you all these shapes and then you know you saw the triangle and you’d be like, “nope.” And then you get it wrong. And obviously you don’t get every one wrong, but it’s just that you don’t do as good…”
We are having to rely on student-athletes to self-report their symptoms.\(^\text{14}\)
PRESSURE FROM COACHES

• More positive than negative
• Contrary to some literature\(^8,12,15\)
• Not a factor related to intention to report\(^16\)

[Image: Northern Arizona University logo]
Student-athletes are more likely to report concussive symptoms while playing for a supportive coach.\(^5\)

https://thefootballbrainiacs.com/why-coaching-matters
“... I’m an athlete, I’m a football player. So if that were to go away then, that pretty much, like, my whole future would be changed. I probably wouldn’t even be going to college. I’d probably be working right now to be honest. But, you know, football is just like an outlet just to get out, do your thing.”

“Football is life. I think that you can be an animal on and off the field, but there’s also a respect thing, I guess you could say. Like, everybody has that, every football player, I guess you could say, real athlete, has that kind of… swagger to them.”
Student-athletes may not report due to fear of losing this identity of being a football player.
TEAM SUPPORT

• Brotherhood
• Loss of playing time
Why wouldn’t you report a concussion?

“You wanna help your team out if you’re a starter and it’s fourth quarter, four minutes left… and you’re on defense, and you’re the best one out there … You don’t wanna leave the game because you don’t wanna lose the game by being absent.”
Student-athletes may not be reporting because of fear of letting their team down.\textsuperscript{8,11,12,17-19}
• Psycho-social factors are cultural in nature and are thus very difficult to change.
• Education alone is not working to improve reporting.
• Inherent problem – with what other injury do we ask the injured body part to assess itself to determine whether it is worthy of reporting??
• Need quicker, more objective sideline tests to facilitate greater reporting
  – Much research is being done in this area!

CONCLUSIONS
Thank you!
REFERENCES


