Identification and Navigation of Mental Health Stressors in Collegiate Female Athletes

A Dissertation

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By

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my two biggest supporters in my life, my mother Jill Marinaro, and my father John Marinaro. Thank you for your constant love and support. From a young age you have both taught me that I could achieve anything I put my mind to, and I have learned to embrace that. From the numerous hours on the soccer field, to the grueling hours spent at the kitchen table doing homework, you both never complained, but instead pushed me to become the best version of myself. Your constant devotion to my success throughout my life has been unwavering. Thank you for this opportunity to extend my academic abilities and engage in this challenging yet rewarding process.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my beautiful sister, Julianne Marinaro. As far back as I can remember I have always looked up to you. You played soccer, so I played soccer. You played lacrosse, so I played lacrosse. You went to school for education, so I did as well. You have been my role model since day one, and I have always strived to be half as good as you, and for you to be proud of me. Thanks for being the best older sister a girl could ask for.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my fiancé Michael Ciavarella. You have been my biggest recent supporter. Whether it was shoulder massages at my desk, or date nights out to celebrate my achievements you have always managed to acknowledge and applaud my victories no matter how big or small. You have been there to wipe the frustrating tears off my cheeks, tell me how smart I am, and how I can accomplish anything. Thank you for being my constant rock, and the best dog dad to our favorite fur ball, Ollie. Most importantly, I cannot wait to steal your last name.

Without this amazing support system from my family and fiancé, this dissertation would not have been completed. I want to thank you all for the role you played in this process. I hope I make you all as proud as you make me.

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Abstract

Identification and Navigation of Mental Health Stressors in Collegiate Female Athletes

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Mental health is a national priority and encompasses many elements, such as cognitive, behavioral, and emotional wellbeing. Moreover, collegiate female athletes are exposed to numerous mental health stressors, that when left untreated, can lead to further mental health complications and athlete burn-out. The expectation to prosper in the classroom as well as on the field can cause an accumulation of one or many mental health issues within an athlete. The purpose of this qualitative case study is to identify mental health stressors that female athletes experience at the collegiate level, as well as the supports and barriers that they encounter while trying to navigate these mental health stressors. This qualitative case study will draw attention to the issues in mental health that collegiate female athletes are facing as well as recognize the hurdles and current resources that are available to support them. The following research questions will guide this study:

1) How do female athletes describe the mental health stressors that they have experienced during their collegiate years?

2) What barriers do collegiate female athletes experience when navigating mental health stressors?

3) How do coaches describe their capacity to provide collegiate female athletes with supports to navigate mental health stressors?

This study is significant because it will provide vital information regarding prevalent mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experience, as well as highlight the supports and

barriers they have access to. Furthermore, this study is significant because the findings have the potential to benefit numerous stakeholders. Subsequently, this study will highlight the need for proper tools, supports, and resources that will allow for female athletes to overcome, as well as control mental health stressors that they may experience during college. Finally, this study is significant because the identified mental health stressors that may be shared by the collegiate female athletes who participate in this study may be transferable to male collegiate athletes, as well as non-athlete college students.

Key words: mental health, stressors, student athletes, social constructivism, focus group, case study

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Research

Mental health is a national priority (Pyramid Healthcare, 2017) and encompasses many elements, such as cognitive, behavioral, and emotional wellbeing. The ability to be able to think, regulate feelings and behave are all attributed to mental health, and it can either positively or negatively affect everyday life and relationships (Thirunavurakasu et al., 2013). Research by Belkin and McCray (2019) indicates that the effects of mental health have many direct and indirect effects on the lives of those who have been identified as having a mental health issue. Moreover, according to Bhugra et al. (2013):

> The state of strong mental health implies that the individual has the ability to form and maintain affectionate relationships with others, to perform in the social roles usually played in their culture and to manage change, recognize, acknowledge and communicate positive actions and thoughts as well as to manage emotions such as sadness. (p. 3)

Having a robust state of mental health will allow for an individual to feel at peace, as well as be able to function in society both socially as well as caring for one's own basic needs. Although a wide range of studies and information have contributed to the work addressing the major concerns surrounding mental health challenges (Newman et al., 2016), issues of mental health have had a negative connotation and stigma in both athletic and social environments (Bauman, 2016). Within athletic environments, mental health challenges have shown to be a significant component of the everyday life for collegiate female athletes (Barcella, 2017). When a collegiate female athlete experiences a disruption in mental health, she can endure feelings of low self-esteem, an inability to manage time, and an inability to cope with adversity (Newman et al., 2016).

Due to a change in environment, numerous health stressors impact both collegiate athletes and their counterparts who are not athletes in myriad ways (Woltring et al., 2021, p. 128). According to Egan (2019), "athletes experience the same stressors as their nonathlete peers, such as coping with symptoms of anxiety, mood disorders, challenges with eating behavior or substance use, gender-based violence or sexual assault, racism, and harassment or violence based on sexual orientation" (p. 539). Although all students experience mental health stressors while in college, the stressors experienced by student athletes can be more intense and impactful (Egan, 2019). As a student athlete progresses in his or her collegiate athletic career, the expectation of peak performance rises, therefore requiring additional and more intense training hours (Newman, et al., 2016). This increase in dedication places immense pressure on the student athlete to perform at optimal levels.

Athletes and their performance are often visible to society through various social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok (Sanderson et al., 2015). These social media outlets allow for individuals all over the world to view athletes in their sports and daily lives, thus increasing their chances to be bullied, threatened, harassed and/or criticized (Sanderson et al., 2015). When put in this position, athletes become more susceptible to body image and eating disorder issues (Reid & Weigle, 2014). In addition to exposure through social media, the expectation to perform at optimal levels and secure a winning record, has placed immense pressure on student athletes (Crocker et al., 2021). This pressure comes from several stakeholders such as other athletes, coaches, higher education professionals, family members, and fans (Egan, 2019). The amount of pressure put on these student athletes from a plethora of stakeholders can cause an athlete to experience mental health issues.

Besides high expectations from oneself, coaches, and parents, the possibility of athletic injury can also add to the overbearing pile of stress experienced by collegiate athletes (Stokowski et al., 2019). Injury can then result in loss of playing time, loss of a starting spot, and isolation from teammates and peers. Injury often transpires from over training in hopes of bettering oneself. Coaches and players often think that "more is better" and continue to pile on the workload (Etzel, 2006). Even though coaches and athletes have the same goal of bettering and progressing the athlete, both parties, "appear to be ill-informed about training, overtraining, recovery, and the pervasive impact of over training" (Etzel, 2006, p. 522). The lack of knowledge regarding training often leads to overtrained athletes, which, "can be associated with undesirable health, academic, and performance outcomes" (Etzel, 2006, p. 522). These disadvantageous results in one's health, academics, and/or athletic performance can contribute to the onset of mental health stressors that collegiate athletes experience.

Female collegiate athletes are faced with many challenges and hardships during their athletic experience (Barcella, 2017). Therefore, having the proper tools and skills to maintain a positive mental health status, as well as the ability to regain control of a positive mental health status after sustaining a disruption is imperative. Using acquired skills will allow for an individual to return to his or her homeostasis to successfully resume and accomplish daily tasks and activities (Vidic et al., 2017). This study will provide findings that can provide female collegiate athletes with resources to properly identify and navigate mental health stressors.

The Problem Statement

Collegiate female athletes are exposed to numerous mental health stressors, that when left untreated, can lead to further mental health complications and athlete burn-out (Putukian, 2016). The expectation to prosper in the classroom as well as on the field can cause an accumulation of

one or many mental health issues within an athlete (Parker et al., 2016). Unfortunately, the appropriate resources and supports are not available to these student athletes. Moreover, stakeholders such as coaches, teammates, and professors usually do not have the capacity to identify mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes may experience, therefore being unable to provide proper support (Nicholls et al., 2016).

Purpose and Significance of the Problem

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to identify mental health stressors that female athletes experience at the collegiate level, as well as the barriers and supports that they encounter while trying to navigate these mental health stressors. Throughout a female athlete's career, she is at risk of several mental health issues due to the immense stressors piled on by oneself, society, coaches, professors, and peers. When mental health issues are not treated appropriately, they can lead to more severe health problems (Belkin & McCray, 2019). This qualitative exploratory case study drew attention to the issues in mental health that collegiate female athletes are experiencing while highlighting the hurdles and resources that are available to support them.

Significance of the Problem

Unlike athletes years ago, athletes today encounter alternate stressors, and "the differences are seen in a growing number of complex and more intense mental health challenges" (Bauman, 2016, p. 135). Due to the change in complexity and force of these mental health stressors amongst collegiate athletes, the supports available to these athletes need to increase in intensity sustenance as well. This study provided vital information to collegiate athletes, coaches, and higher education professionals regarding prevalent mental health stressors that collegiate

female athletes experience, as well as highlighted the supports and barriers they have access to. In addition, collegiate female athletes may directly benefit from the findings of this study as it called attention to the mental health challenges that student athletes contend with while trying to balance both academic responsibilities and athletic obligations, encouraging them to leverage supports available at their colleges.

This study is significant because the findings have the potential to benefit numerous stakeholders. For example, individuals such as coaches, professors, administrators, and academic advisors can benefit from this study because it can provide valuable information that can help them better understand how mental health stressors impact female collegiate athletes, which they can use to help athletes identify, evade, and cope with mental health stressors (Short & Short, 2005). Additionally, this study can help the above identified stakeholders by providing information on potential barriers that may prevent collegiate female athletes from getting help (Clement & Arvinen-Barrow, 2019). Furthermore, this study is significant because it provides detailed research on potential supports that can be implemented at the university level to help collegiate female athletes navigate mental health stressors (Generes, 2022).

This study drew attention to the need for proper tools, supports, and resources that will allow for female athletes to address, navigate, and overcome mental health stressors that they may experience during college. While many mental health supports are available to athletes, accessing and utilizing these resources can be an issue for athletes (Bjnorsen & Dinkel, 2017). Moreover, “research demonstrates college students often do not recognize or admit personal mental illness symptoms or are unaware of available mental health services” (Moreland, et al., 2018, p. 59). Adding to this, the stigma associated with mental health treatment can also act as a barrier for the athlete (Moreland et al., 2018). Perceptions and stigma created by teammates and

coaches may impact an athlete's determination to seek help as well as report that she has accessed mental health supports. This study sought to break the negative sigma against mental health stressors as well as identify and knock down the barriers that prevent athletes from pursing help. Lastly, institutions may lack sufficient and appropriate resources for student athletes. Resources should be "tailored to the student athlete in terms of confidentiality, convenience, and cultural sensitivity" (Moreland et al., 2018, p. 59). Even if an institution can provide resources for a collegiate student athlete, the individual providing the care for the athlete may be underqualified, and too busy to provide the needed care (Moreland et al., 2018). Institutions must ensure that they have qualified, readily available resources for student athletes so that they can receive proper treatment and help for navigating and coping mental health stressors.

Finally, this study is significant because the identified mental health stressors shared by the collegiate female athletes who participated in this study may be transferable to male collegiate athletes, as well as non-athlete college students. Specifically, since male collegiate athletes have similar schedules as female collegiate athletes; they undergo similar stressors (Stokowski et al., 2019). Additionally, non-athletic college students are also exposed to stress, such as adapting to being away from home, upholding high academic achievement, and acclimating to new social environments (Crocker et al., 2021). College students, regardless of year in school, often deal with pressures related to finding a job or a potential life partner" (para 2). Since numerous types of college students experience stress, the results gathered from this study may be able to help aide all college students in identifying and navigating mental health stressors.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been identified with the intent to explore the mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experience. Additionally, these research questions seek to understand the obstacles experienced by collegiate female athletes when they experience mental health stressors and the resources available to them.

1. How do female athletes describe the mental health stressors that they have experienced during their collegiate years?
2. What barriers do collegiate female athletes experience when navigating mental health stressors?
3. How do coaches describe their capacity to provide collegiate female athletes with supports to navigate mental health stressors?

The Conceptual Framework

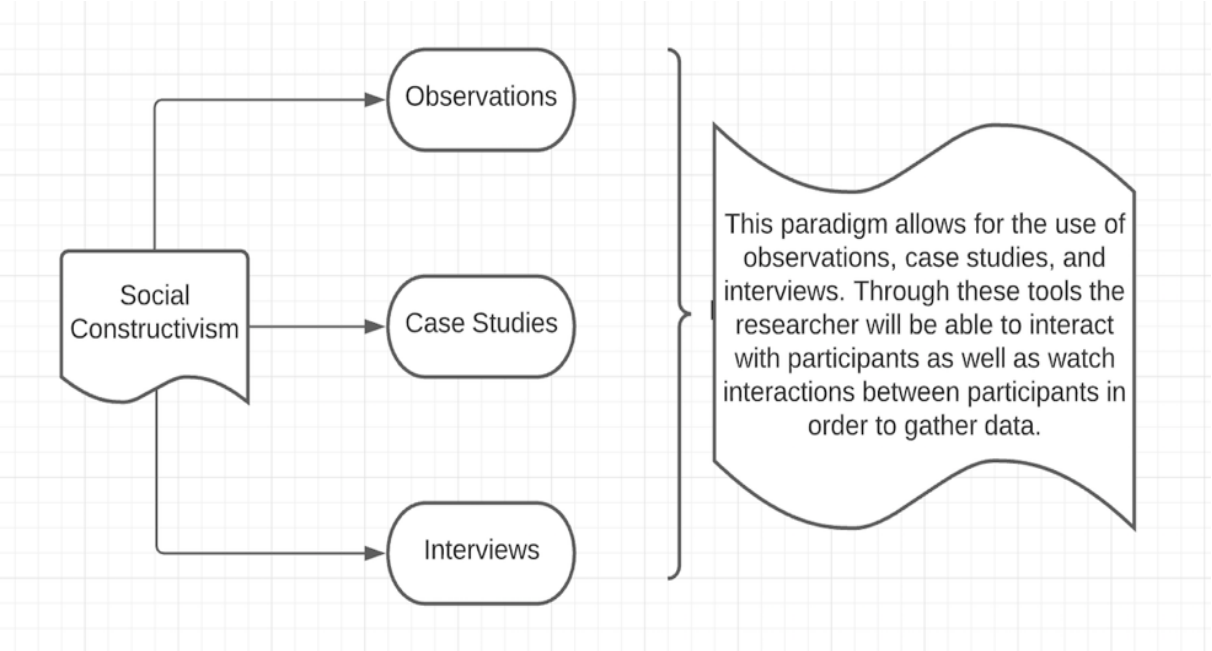
Researcher Stance

Renowned authors, Ravitch and Riggan (2017) identify and describe conceptual frameworks as, “an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters, and why the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous” (p. 16). I believe that this qualitative case study highlighted the importance of mental health in collegiate female athletes when seen through the lens of social constructivism. Social constructivism “emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding” (Kim, 2001, p. 2). Social constructivism uses collaboration between individuals to secure understanding. According to Vygotsky (1978), to fully comprehend a phenomenon, cognitive growth must first occur between individuals before it can occur within an individual. Therefore, the collaboration between individuals is essential for intellectual growth.

Figure 1.1 below illustrates the conceptual framework through social constructivism.

Figure 1.1

A Visual Representation Outlining Social Constructivism



A researcher stance is a positionality that an individual adopts when conducting a research study (Capper, 2019). This individual, or researcher, embraces a world view that will guide him or her through the study, while accumulating pertinent data. When thinking about the essential components of my researcher stance, I believe that my researcher stance is influenced by numerous vital ingredients, such as my epistemological, ontological, and axiological perspectives.

Qualitative inquiry is grounded by constructivism, and "explores what it assumes to be a socially constructed dynamic reality through a framework which is value-laden, flexible, descriptive, holistic, and context sensitive" (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312). Using a constructivist epistemological approach, my research study employed the qualitative method of a case study. Social constructivist epistemology and interpretivist epistemology not only explain how I come

to “know” something, but they are also the driving force that has fueled my research topic. Social constructivist epistemology and interpretivist epistemology align symbiotically with my ontological view in that I believe reality transpires from an individual’s experience and social interaction. Through the use of social constructivism, collaboration with participants transpired within this proposed study. Moreover, this paradigm provided me with essential qualitative tools such as case studies and interviews, required to investigate my research questions and formulate my dissertation. Additionally, using these epistemologies, I was able to interact with this study’s participants using a homogenous focus group and one-on-one interviews.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), axiology allows for the researcher to “acknowledge that research is value-laden and that biases are present in relation to their role in the study concept” (p. 20). Furthermore, axiology encompasses an individual’s values and beliefs. When thinking about my axiology, I believe that hard work, dedication, and sacrifice lead to success. I believe this because I have experienced the benefits of hard work, dedication, and sacrifice throughout my life both academically, and athletically. My unwavering grit to be successful in school, by earning good grades, has allowed for me to enroll in this prestigious doctoral program at Drexel University. Additionally, although I was and still am a talented soccer player, numerous sacrifices had to come about for me to achieve my goal of securing a full scholarship to a Division I college. I missed countless social gatherings with friends, school events, football games, birthdays, and family celebration to attend soccer practices, games, and tournaments. My axiological stance that hard work, commitment, perseverance is essential for success was a driving force for this research study.

Experimental Base

Being a former Division I collegiate athlete at the University of Delaware, I had first-hand experience of the struggles associated with balancing both athletics and academics. Playing a sport at a high-level, collegiately, causes immense stress on an individual. Besides the pressures of performing well and securing a starting position, I also had to focus on my performance in the classroom. To be eligible to play, I had to maintain a specific GPA (grade point average), and if I dropped below this precise number, I would be ineligible and unable to participate in my sport. Thus, my scholarship would be terminated or reduced. This became a real battle, especially during the fall season, due to the numerous hours training in the weight room, and on the soccer field. Many times, due to competitions, I would miss class. Being absent from class put me at a disadvantage because I would miss pertinent information being taught. Not only would I have to track down individuals in my class to receive missed work, but many times I would have to take an exam while on the road. Taking an exam, in a packed coach bus, full of giggling soccer players was not ideal. Missing classes and taking exams in alternate locations added to my stress, and negatively affected my performance on the field.

Missing classes often and having to maintain a high GPA required me to put in extra time studying and completing homework, which impacted my social time. Considering I only had four years of college, I wanted to make the most of my college years, so I would reduce the number of hours I slept to increase my socialization time. When the body does not receive the proper number of hours it needs to recover and rest, injuries often occur. If I happened to get injured, additional levels of stress would be added to my ever-growing list of responsibilities. Injuries caused reduced practice time, which in-turn diminished the number of minutes I was able to play in games and threated my starting position.

While being a collegiate female athlete, there are numerous levels of stressors that impact mental health. These stressors can influence one another, which can create higher levels of stress amongst an individual. With this being said, identifying and treating these mental health stressors is crucial, so that the original stressors do not manifest into more serious mental health concerns. It is the hope that this study highlighted the importance of mental health in collegiate female athletes.

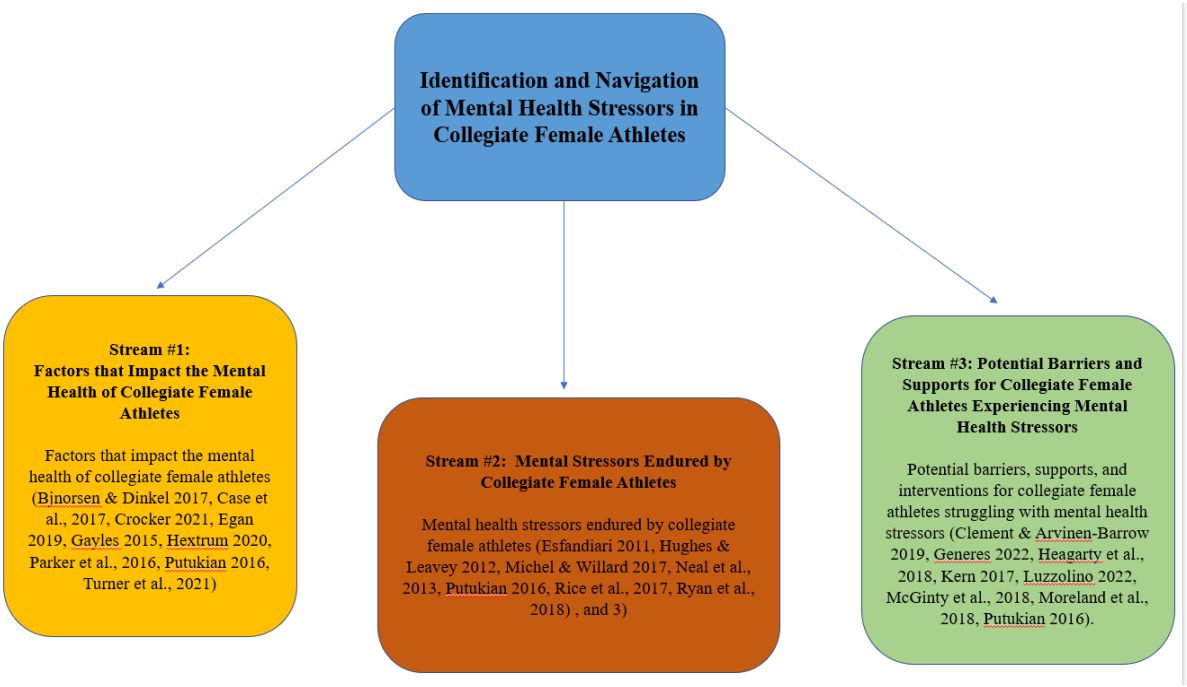
Researcher Organization of the Literature Review

Graphic Representation

The following graphic highlights the three literature streams that will provide context surrounding this dissertation study.

Figure 1.2

A Visual Representation Outlining the Three Research Streams



Note: Figure 1.2 created by the author based upon the three streams of literature.

Research Streams

The literature review is organized by three research streams that supported the exploration of the study focused on factors that impact the mental health of collegiate female athletes, mental health stressors endured by collegiate female athletes, and potential barriers and supports for collegiate female athletes experiencing mental health stressors. Mental health stressors can be seen in an entire student body as well as specifically "in student-athletes attending a university or college" (Neal, et al., 2013, p. 716). The first research stream is centered on the importance of mental health in collegiate female athletes. Collegiate athletes are expected to be able to adapt seamlessly to a new environment (Barcella, 2017). In addition, they are required to balance several aspects of college life such as, new, and more challenging schoolwork, extracurricular clubs and activities, social activities, and sports (Putukian, 2016). Furthermore, these individuals are also expected to be able to make healthy, safe, and legal decisions, along with being experts on managing their time.

The second literature stream entails the identification of common mental health stressors amongst collegiate female athletes. These mental health stressors include grades, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, injuries, and alcohol use/misuse. The pompous mental and physical demands that are piled on student athletes can increase their risk of engaging in risky behaviors as well as their predisposition to certain mental health issues (Rice et al., 2016). Even though physical activity is linked to positive mental health, when engaged in the oversupply of high intensity exercise mental health can be compromised (Hughes & Leavey, 2012).

The third literature stream addressed potential barriers and supports that assist collegiate female athletes in navigating mental health stressors. Due to the constant increase in mental health issues, collegiate female athletes need proper supports so that they can identify and

navigate the above-mentioned mental health issues. In fact, collegiate athletes are "a special and unique student population requiring support for their academic, personal, and athletic needs and issues" (Broughton & Neyer, 2001, p. 47). Many student-athletes are embarrassed to come forward about disruptions in their mental health and will ignore the signs (Clement & Arvinen-Barrow, 2019). Additionally, many athletes are concerned about how their coaches and teammates will view them after they have come forward (Generes 2022). Athletes often fear that they will lose playing time or a starting spot if they are identified as having mental health issues, so instead they keep quiet, and ignore the problem hoping it will dissipate (Clement & Arvinen-Barrow, 2019).

Definition of Terms

There is a wide range of important terms that are discussed throughout this dissertation including:

Anxiety

Can be defined as feelings of tension as well as apprehension. Additionally, anxiety is an emotional state that is connected heightened autonomic nervous system activity (Spielberger, 2010).

Athlete

A person who participates in sports, exercises, and games requiring physical stamina, strength, and agility (Jones & Greer 2011).

Barriers

Something that blocks a person or thing from getting or achieving something. Barriers can be les, laws, policies, or materials that is intended to block success of achievement (Ishaq & Bass, 2019).

Coach

Coaches are individuals that take full responsibility for his or her players, teaches individuals about the sport through practices and games (Constandt et al., 2018). The coach is the teacher, organizer, competitor, leader, friend, and mentor (Short & Short, 2005). According to Short and Short (2005), "the main responsibility of the coach is to enable the athlete to attain levels of performance not otherwise achievable" (p. 29).

Collegiate

Individuals who are enrolled at the college level (Watts et al., 2022).

Depression

"Characterized by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-worth, disturbed sleep or appetite, feelings of tiredness, and poor concentration. Depression can be long lasting or recurrent, substantially impairing an individual's ability to function at work or school or cope with daily life" (World Health Organization, 2017, p. 7).

Eating Disorder

Is an illness "Complicated psychiatric illnesses in which food is used to help deal with unsettling emotions and difficult life issues" (Michel & Willard, 2017, p. 2).

Mental Health

The state of mental health implies that the individual can form and maintain affectionate relationships with others, to perform in the social roles usually played in their culture and to manage change, recognize, acknowledge, and communicate positive actions and thoughts as well as to manage emotions such as sadness (Bauman, 2016).

Mental Health Challenges

Mental health challenges interrupt an individual's ability to be able to think and feel. Additionally, mental health challenges influence an individual's mood as well as their ability to socialize with others in society (Reynolds et al., 2020).

Mental Illness

Conditions that influence an individual's thinking, feeling, mood, and behavior, which affects an individual's ability to function in society as well as relate to others. These conditions can be long-lasting (chronic) or can occur sporadically (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2021).

Soccer

Is a sport in which ten field players and one goalkeeper play on the field. The players play with a round hard ball using their feet to kick the ball into their opponent's goal (Lim et al., 2020).

Stakeholder

An individual or individuals that are directly involved and affect or are affected by an organization's objectives (Leisyte, & Westerheijden, 2014).

Stressors

Are challenges that can be either internal or external which upset the homeostasis of an individual. Stressors affect an individual's physical and psychological well-being and need specific actions to return to a balancing state (Hamaideh, 2011).

Support

"To bear or hold up (a load, mass, structure, part, etc.): serve as a foundation for." (Dictionary.com, n.d., para 1).

Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are things that a researcher and reader can assume are true about the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), and a few assumptions lie beneath this study. First, the researcher assumed that participants would answer and consent to the study. This means that the researcher had more than enough participants to take part in the study. Second, the researcher assumed that the selected participants would be a representative sample of collegiate female athletes across the country. The information gathered from the sample on mental health stressors should be transferrable to student athletes at other institutions. Third, it is assumed that the participants would fully understand the questions asked by the researcher and provide honest in-depth answers. And lastly, it is assumed that the researcher was able to code the collected data accurately without her bias impacting the results. In addition, the researcher ensured that she did not look to validate a specific theme or themes that she expected when gathering the information. This could have prohibited her from identifying other possible themes.

Limitations

There are several limitations related to this study. The first limitation is related to time constraints, and unfortunately "time constraints can affect your research negatively" (Admin, 2016, p. 1). More specifically, time could have been a limitation because the sport being examined will be in season, and student athletes may be extremely busy, being unable to provide adequate time towards the study. Additionally, time may have been a constraint for the researcher, as she conducted the dissertation research, while coaching, and teaching.

A second limitation of the study relates to the small sample size, which included between six to eight collegiate female athletes, and three to four coaches. This small sample size could have been a limitation because it encompasses one site as well as one sport (Rahman, 2020).

Small sample size may be an issue because it "raises the issue of generalizability to the whole population of the research" (Rahman, 2020, p. 105). Since the site being used consisted of thousands of individuals, it is impossible to study mental health issues amongst all collegiate athletes. The selected female collegiate student athletes may have provided different results than if the entire student athlete population was involved in the study, however the findings of this study are still extremely important and relevant in identifying and highlighting mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes.

Summary

Chapter 1 identified key components of the study such as the introduction and the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose statement, the significance of the study, the conceptual framework, three indispensable research questions, and the limitations of the study. Chapter 2 includes the literature review as guided by three research streams. Following the literature review, Chapter 3 presents the research methodology, which includes the research design and rationale, site and population, data collection and analysis methods and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 of the dissertation will entail the findings, results, and interpretations of the study. Finally, Chapter 5 will contain both conclusions and recommendations obtained from the study.

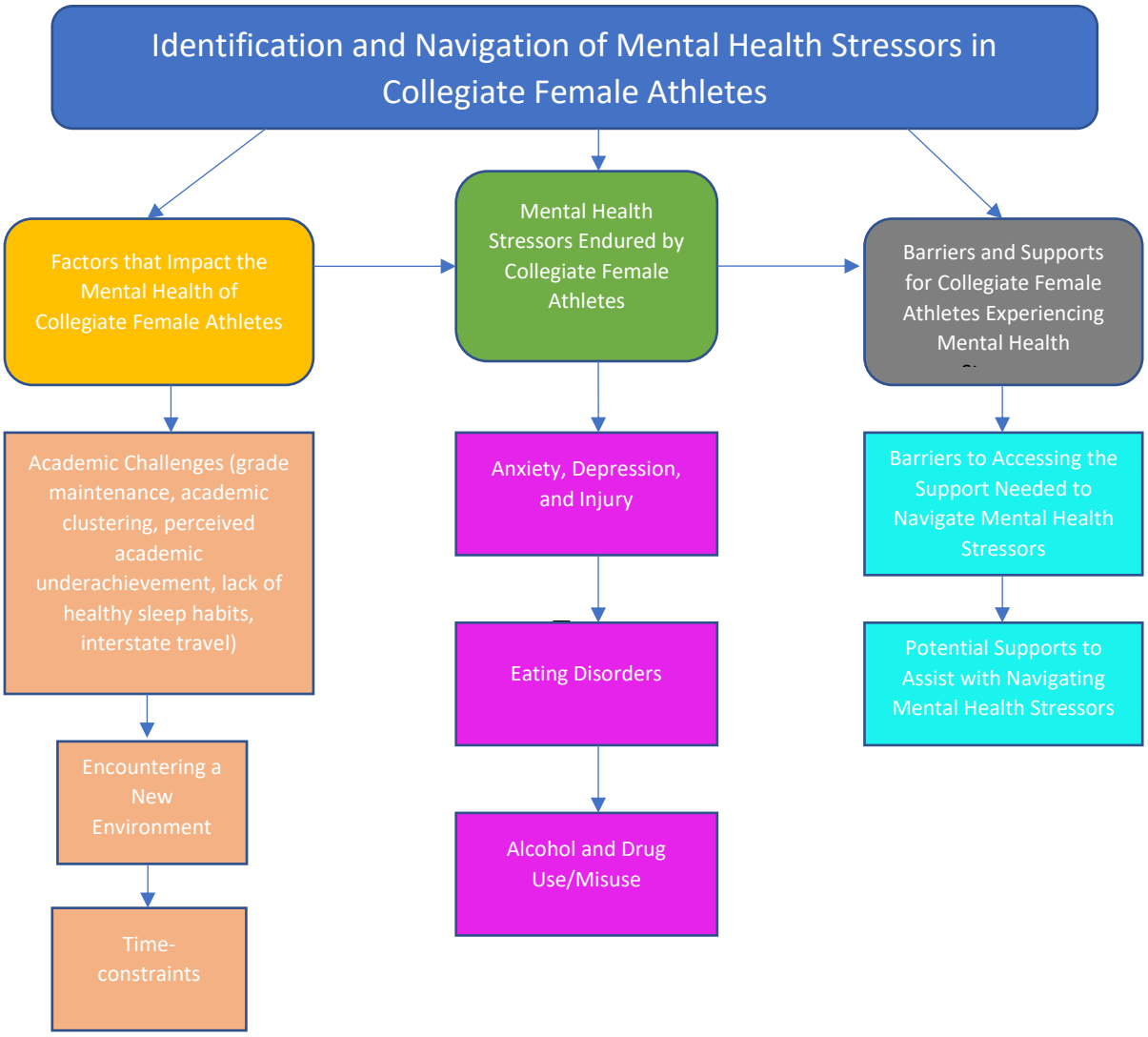
Chapter 2: The Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was to examine and identify relevant scholarly literature focused on the mental health stressors that female athletes endure during their collegiate athletic experience. For the purpose of this review of the literature, the scholarly literature relevant to the topic of mental health stressors encountered by collegiate female athletes is organized by three literature streams: 1) Factors that impact the mental health of collegiate female athletes (Bjnorsen & Dinkel 2017, Case et al., 2017, Crocker 2021, Egan 2019, Gayles 2015, Hextrum 2020, Parker et al., 2016, Putukian 2016, Turner et al., 2021), 2) Mental health stressors endured by collegiate female athletes (Esfandiari 2011, Hughes & Leavey 2012, Michel & Willard 2017, Neal et al., 2013, Putukian 2016, Rice et al., 2017, Ryan et al., 2018) , and 3) Potential barriers, supports, and interventions for collegiate female athletes struggling with mental health stressors (Clement & Arvinen-Barrow 2019, Generes 2022, Heagarty et al., 2018, Kern 2017, Luzzolino 2022, McGinty et al., 2018, Moreland et al., 2018, Putukian 2016).

The first literature stream defined the components of mental health, and how it is important to keep a positive mental health state, as well as the issues that can arise when a collegiate female athlete's mental health is disrupted. The second literature stream identified key mental health stressors that female athletes experience during their college athletic careers, such as anxiety, depression, injuries, eating disorders, and the use of drugs and alcohol. Finally, the third literature stream highlighted the barriers that prevent collegiate these athletes from receiving proper treatment, as well as the potential interventions, suggestions, tools, and services that are in place to help athletes navigate and cope with the mental health stressors they have experienced. Figure 2.1 below illustrates the streams and substreams in a literature flow chart.

Figure 2.1

Illustration of the Streams and Substreams in a Literature Flow Chart



Note: Figure 2.1 designed by author.

Stream 1: Factors that Impact the Mental Health of Collegiate Female Athletes

The first literature stream addressed the significance of maintaining positive mental health in collegiate athletes. This first stream organized the literature into three substreams which include: 1) Academic challenges, 2) Encountering a new environment, and 3) Time-constraints. To perform well in the classroom, on the field, in one's career, and in relationships, positive

mental health and well-being is vital (Egan, 2019). Additionally, research conducted by Crocker et al. (2021) concluded that "student-athletes are at an increased risk of displaying symptoms of poor mental health, which is especially problematic as student-athletes have reported even less comfort with help-seeking than non-athletes" (p. 2). Injuries, pressure to perform in the classroom and on the field, pressure to improve performance, and management of relationships within the team are all contributors to an athlete's high risk of obtaining poor mental health (Crocker et al., 2021). To secure positive mental health and well-being collegiate athletes must be able to balance their academic responsibilities as well as their sport responsibilities.

Academic Challenges

One of the biggest obstacles that collegiate female athletes encounter is the ability to excel in the classroom while competing in a collegiate sport (Crocker et al., 2021). A study by Putukian (2016) found that collegiate athletes must deal with strenuous academic challenges, as well as athletic demands that require both substantial time and physical requirements. Putukian's findings were consistent with findings by Parker et al. (2016) who shared that adding athletic demands to an already strenuous academic environment may intensify the pressures encountered by collegiate athletes. The balance and weight of academic and athletic obligations aide to a collegiate female athlete's mental health stressors.

For collegiate athletes, numerous hours are devoted to developing their athletic talents, which often negatively impacts the development of their academic growth due to time constraints (Hendricks & Johnson, 2016). According to Yukhymenko-Lescroart (2021), student athletes devote as much as "38.5 hours on school-related activities and 34 or more hours on sport-related activities per week" (p. 1). This is a substantial amount of time committed to both

academics and athletics, and thus the expectations of optimal performance in the classroom as well as on the field has become almost unattainable (Putukian, 2016).

Grade Maintenance

The pressure of maintaining the minimum required GPA to be able to continue competing in the sport and remaining eligible to scholarship funding, may contribute to mental health stressors experienced by collegiate athletes (Case et al., 2017; Love & Rufer, 2021). Moreover, if an athlete does not perform well in the classroom, his or her participation and contribution in sport as well as academic eligibility can be negatively impacted. As a result, employment opportunities and career goals after graduation are potentially limited (Turner et al., 2021).

Since collegiate athletes may be accepted into a university based on their athletic ability as opposed to academic history and grades, being able to maintain academic eligibility is a chief concern of collegiate athletes, coaches, and academic advisors (Case et al., 2017). To participate in their sport, collegiate female athletes must be full-time students, meet specific academic eligibility standards, and make unremitting academic progress toward their degree (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2021). If a collegiate female athlete does not fulfill these requirements, she can become unqualified to partake in her sport and lose her academic scholarship (Yukhymenko-Lescroart, 2021). Additionally, because some collegiate athletes have goals of continuing to use their athletic abilities past college, they need to remain on the field to be seen by potential scouts as well as keep their academic eligibility at a certain level (Case et al., 2017).

Academic Clustering

One major component of academics that greatly influences a collegiate athlete's academic experience is the use of academic clustering. Academic clustering is when a large

percentage of collegiate athletes enroll in the same major (Case et al., 2017). Typically, these majors require fewer academic demands than other majors. In addition, course requirements do not always coincide with the athlete's original academic goals but are pursued because it is an easier pathway to completion which enables the collegiate athlete the time to focus more on his or her sport (Garver et al., 2021).).

As a result of academic clustering, collegiate athletes are sacrificing their academics aspirations for athletics (Cremin & Anderson, 2019). Additionally, the use of academic clustering hinders an individual's ability to develop more diverse cognitive skills since they are not being challenged (Cremin & Anderson, 2019). The underdevelopment of cognitive skills due to academic clustering is problematic in the labour market, thus making collegiate athletes less valuable after graduation (Cremin & Anderson, 2019). A study conducted by Paule-Koba (2019) surveyed collegiate athletes regarding their career aspirations and their current major and found that 32% of athletes were enrolled in majors that were not affiliated with their career goals. This large percentage of collegiate athletes being enrolled in a major not aligned with their career goals was most influenced by coaches and academic advisors (Paule-Koba, 2019). In fact, a coaches' influence over academic scheduling greatly attributes to academic clustering and underachievement in collegiate athletes (Beron & Piquero 2016). Unfortunately, coaches tend to succumb to academic clustering to keep their athletes eligible and on the field in hopes of securing a winning season (Case et al., 2017).

Perceived Academic Underachievement

Collegiate athletes have been categorized into the negative stereotypes of unintelligent and unengaged individuals, therefore, professors as well as classmates tend to not take collegiate athletes seriously regarding their cognitive abilities (Garver et al., 2021). Moreover, collegiate

female athletes encounter the classification of underachieving in academics which often gives them the connotation of being a “dumb jock” (Hextrum 2020). When identifying and classifying academic underachievement, a collegiate athlete’s educational pathway and major selection is compared to his or her perceived cognitive abilities (Hextrum, 2020). This means that collegiate athletes are often placed into majors that are not challenging compared to other majors and educational pathways (Case et al., 2017). Unfortunately, this labeling of a collegiate athlete can cause a “stereotype threat” which in turn impacts the athlete’s ability to perform well academically (Garver et al, 2021). Being labeled and stereotyped as inane due to academic underachievement by others can be mentally daunting on an athlete’s mental state.

Lack of Healthy Sleep Habits

A significant source of stress for collegiate athletes is caused by the lack of sleep resulting from the responsibility of balancing two full-time jobs consisting of academics and athletics (Egan, 2019). Obtaining healthy sleep habits is vital for one’s cognitive ability, cardiovascular, metabolic, and cerebrovascular health (Ramar et al., 2021). Research shows that adequate sleep greatly impacts one’s academic and athletic performance (Turner et al. 2021) and is essential for peak performance in sport, cognitive function, and mental health (Crocker et al., 2021). Recently, the NCAA Inter-association Task Force on Sleep and Wellness and the International Olympic Committee has taken note of these issues and announced that universities should start encouraging athletes to conquer healthy sleep habits, “as sleep has significant implications for overall health and athletic and academic performance” (Turner, et al., 2021, p. 76). Late night practices and early morning training sessions offset an athlete’s sleep schedule negatively impacting the circadian rhythm of the athlete, thus creating sleep issues (Turner et al., 2021).

Interstate Travel

The inter-state travel for competitions and games frequently results in athletes missing classes due to an inflexible schedule (Parker et al., 2016). Not only does the requirement of inter-state travel greatly impact athletes' success in the classroom, but it also creates a great deal of mental stress on the athlete (Love & Rufer, 2021). Due to missing classes, athletes are responsible for any missed work and often scramble to find adequate resources to help them catch up on missed notes, classwork, and assignments (Love & Rufer, 2021). Many collegiate athletes have reported that they have sacrificed their education for their athletic role by missing classes to travel for games and competitions, which is overwhelming for the athlete, forcing them to feel the need to select athletic success over academic success (Crocker et al., 2021).

Encountering a New Environment

Due to numerous reasons beyond one's personal characteristics, collegiate athletes may not be fully ready for the evolution from high school to college life (Woltring et al., 2021). In fact, the shift from high school to college can be stressful and challenging, as collegiate athletes must adjust to athletic, academic, social, and personal pressures that differ from their high school years (Crocker et al., 2021). When adapting to this new environment, collegiate athletes must learn to manage their time and "balance their extracurricular activities with the demands of college coursework, explore their newfound freedom, and make choices regarding their personal behavior regarding sexuality, alcohol, and drug use" (Edwards & Froehle, 2020, p. 3). Furthermore, first-year student athletes can experience extreme loneliness, homesickness, depression, and grief (Bruffaerts et al., 2018).

Collegiate athletes embark on numerous challenges throughout their careers including the ability to adapt effortlessly to their new environments (Woltring et al., 2021). Besides being able

to quickly adapt to a new environment, these individuals are also expected to be able to succeed in the classroom with new and more challenging schoolwork, as well as fit in social activities, clubs, and sports (Huml et al., 2019). On top of the above stated responsibilities, the ability to make healthy, safe, and legal decisions, is also expected. The abundance of new responsibilities in a new environment often lead to enormous stress, creating issues in an individual's mental health (Crocker et al., 2021). Rice et al. (2016) states, "the intense mental and physical demands placed on elite athletes are a unique aspect of a sporting career, and these may increase their susceptibility to certain mental health problems and risk-taking behaviours" (p. 1334). Numerous responsibilities, both academically and athletically, in addition to a new environment causes much stress on a collegiate female athlete thus affecting her mental health status.

Collegiate athletes may be lacking a stable support system when transitioning and acclimating to this new college life environment (Crocker et al., 2021). Consequently, the support system that was once readily available to collegiate athletes back home may no longer be an option if the collegiate athlete is attending college geographically distanced from their home (Crocker et al., 2021). Bjornsen and Dinkel (2017) found that because coaches spend numerous hours with their athletes during practices, games, and team traveling, coaches are a main support system for collegiate athletes. In fact, collegiate athletes rely on not only coaches, but also teammates, advisors, and other individuals at their college institutions to help them succeed in both the classroom and field. Although the high involvement of a coach in a collegiate athlete's life can be positive, the need for a collegiate athlete to rely on coaches for their support system may be detrimental to their mental health, especially if the athlete has a poor relationship with her coach (Davis et al., 2018).

Time-Constraints

Collegiate female athletes are challenged with numerous time constraints such as practices, games, recovery, study, family, and sociability, all which control a schedule of activities to be achieved (Burlot & Joncheray, 2018). A collegiate athlete's role as an athlete and a scholar has numerous obligations and expectations which consume numerous hours of an athlete's day, thus creating mental stress due to lack of time (Edwards & Froehle 2021; Egan 2019; Wendling et al., 2018). Physical exhaustion, pressure to perform in competitions, as well as the many hours dedicated to practice, travel, and competition often leave collegiate athletes with restricted time and vigor to pursue educational demands and leisure activities (Wendling et al., 2018). Research conducted by Egan (2019) discovered that time demands for collegiate athletes have been increasing. A study conducted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) concluded that collegiate athletes have experienced a rise in the time dedicated to both athletics and academics from 2010 to 2015 (Egan, 2019.) Because the expectations and demands for success have changed over the last few years, collegiate female athletes must spend more time training, which leaves less time for studying, spending time with family and friends, and hobbies (Burlot & Joncheray, 2018). This lack of time mixed with anxiety to perform well in the athlete's selected sport enhance an athlete's susceptibility to mental health issues (Edwards & Froehle, 2020).

Due to time constraints, collegiate female athletes spend most of their time with their teammates as opposed to other individuals outside of athletics (Scott et al., 2019). The vast amount of time spent with teammates, and no other individuals, can cause an athlete to experience peer pressure from teammates (Scott et al., 2019). Peer pressure is a phrase that is used to explain the harmful and destructive impact that collegiate female athletes can have on

each other, which implies that peer pressure may cause an athlete to change her "natural behavior" and engage in risky behaviors (Roberts, 2019). Peer pressure from teammates can cause collegiate female athletes to perform poorly in academics, because "when one's peers do poorly, a corresponding reduction in one's own performance results" (Levine et al., 2014, p. 527). Athletes may be less likely to succumb to peer pressure from their teammates if they had ample time to socialize with individuals other than their teammates (Levine et al., 2014).

Collegiate female athletes do not encounter the same experience and benefits from the college as their non-athletic peers (Huml et al., 2020). Due to lack of time, collegiate athletes are unable to engage in the type of activities and experiences that their peers who are not part of a college athletic team do, which can be detrimental to their personal development (Gayles, 2015). This lack of participation in various activities and experiences by collegiate athletes is due to their intense schedule of practices, weightlifting sessions, and competitions, leaving them with little time to pursue any additional interests. In addition, this forces collegiate athlete to gravitate toward other athletes, creating social isolation from the general student population (Huml et al., 2019).

Dedication to sport is a primary factor behind a prosperous athlete. Although an athlete must dedicate him or herself to their sport to be successful, collegiate athletes can become too invested in his or her sport therefore creating undesirable experiences and consequences (Gayles, 2015). Extreme participation in sport can pull an athlete away from campus thus decreasing their ability to interact with peers and faculty (Stevens et al., 2000). Due to time constraints as well as academic and athletic obligations, athletic administrators must create ample opportunities for collegiate athletes to engage with their peers (Gayles, 2015).

Due to sports schedules, academic requirements, and personal obligations, college athletes experience numerous time constraints. In fact, even though the NCAA allows up to 20 hours every week of participation in sport, numerous studies have shown that the actual participation in sport regularly exceeds those hours (Huml et al., 2019). Interestingly, a study by Hardin and Pate (2013) found that, although freshman collegiate athletes are aware of the time demands of their sport, they were surprised about the little free time they were awarded. The enormous time commitment a collegiate athlete must dedicate towards his or her sport has shown to negatively affect academic performance, prohibit the ability to attend social events, and impact time management skills (Huml, 2019). And unfortunately, research has shown that not all athletes are able to adjust better and manage their time (Hardin & Pate, 2013). Since collegiate athletes are constrained for time, and have a hard time with time management, many athletes end up changing their major due to pressures from coaches, peers, and family members, which in turn decreases their future income as well as their graduation rate (Gomez et al., 2018).

This research stream covered important factors of mental health for collegiate female athletes, as well as identified numerous challenges encountered by athletes. Collegiate female athletes face many academic challenges such as maintain grades, academic clustering, academic underachievement, and inter-state travel. These separate components of academic challenges all play a vital role in impacting an athlete's mental health. This stream was vital to the literature review because it identified the importance of mental health in collegiate female athletes. Finally, this stream was essential to the literature review because it addressed research question number one, as well as sets the stage for the second literature stream which focuses on mental health stressors that are endured by collegiate female athletes, such as anxiety, depression, injuries, eating disorders, and drugs and alcohol.

Stream 2: Mental Stressors Endured by Collegiate Female Athletes

The second literature stream addressed the mental health stressors endured by collegiate female athletes. This second stream organized the literature into three substreams which include: 1) Anxiety, depression, and injury, 2) Eating disorders, and 3) Alcohol and drug use/misuse. According to Neal et al. (2013) "the full range of mental health concerns found in the general student population can also be seen in student-athletes attending a university or college" (p. 716). Moreover, the most competitive years for an athlete happen to occur while adolescents are at the highest risk of succumbing to mental health disorders (Woltring et al., 2021). Subsequently, collegiate female athletes combat "workplace stressors" which entail, "pressures of increased public scrutiny through mainstream and social media, limited support networks due to relocation, group dynamics in team sports and the potential for injuries to end careers prematurely" (Rice et al., 2017, p. 1334).

Depression, anxiety, injuries, eating disorders, and use/misuse of alcohol and drugs, are amongst the top mental stressors for collegiate female athletes (Madrigal & Robbins, 2020). Although physical activity is important for numerous reasons, when an individual engages in frequent intense physical activity, such as at the collegiate level, it can compromise an individual's health (Hughes & Leavey, 2012). In addition, since collegiate sports take up an abundance of time, individuals can lose personal autonomy and disempowerment (Yao et al., 2020). Hughes and Leavey (2012) reported that "high athletic identity has been linked to psychological distress when this function of identity is removed, and to overtraining and athlete burnout" (p. 95). Additionally, psychological distress is often linked with affective disorders such as major depressive disorder (Hughes & Leavey, 2012). Moreover, career ending injuries, failure to perform well, and retirement from sport also add to a collegiate athlete's mental health

deprecation (Yao et al., 2020). Furthermore, individuals involved in collegiate sports are more vulnerable to other susceptibilities such as binge drinking, drinking and driving, un-safe sexual activity, increase in risk-taking behaviors, and disordered eating (Hughes & Leavey, 2012).

Anxiety, Depression, and Injury

Anxiety, depression, and injury are three of the most common mental health issues that are identified in collegiate female athletes (Garver et al., 2021). According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association, one of the most predominant mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experience is depression (Ryan et al., 2018). This is mainly because collegiate female athletes are burnt out and mentally exhausted from their sport (Ryan et al., 2018). Research conducted by Montejo-Lambaren (2019) found that "psychological and situational factors were related to athlete burnout, and competitive anxiety in sports could have detrimental effects on performance and significant relationship with burnout in athletes" (p. 734). When ignored, or left untreated, anxiety and depression can cause further mental health issues, possibly resulting in the athlete taking one's own life (Montejo-Lamnaren, 2019).

Collegiate female athletes can experience feelings of sadness and frustration due to poor performance in the field and classroom (Putukian, 2016). These frustrated feelings are normal, as collegiate athletes want to excel both academically and athletically, but feelings of penetrating and long-lasting sadness are not normal and can be characterized as clinical depression (Esfandiari, 2011). An athlete can experience clinical depression at any time during one's career, but it is most often reported when an athlete is injured, failure occurred in competition, or she is nearing the end of her collegiate experience (Putukian, 2016). Additionally, stress, anxiety, and depression can cause an "increase muscle tension and coordination that can increase the risk for injury" (Putukian, 2016, p. 1).

Because a collegiate athlete dedicates herself to her sport, she often will define herself solely as an "athlete." When the label "athlete" is suddenly taken away from the individual, the individual can be startled or confused, and other mental health issues can erupt, such as depression (Yao et al., 2020). A quantitative study conducted by Edwards and Froehle (2021) identified that approximately 17-18% of collegiate athletes struggle from depression. Out of this percentage of collegiate athletes battling with depression, 10-15% of these athletes need counseling and other supports to safely navigate this mental health stressor (Edwards & Froehle 2021). Additionally, Cox et al. (2017) carried out a quantitative study that used 950 NCAA Division 1 athletes and concluded that 33.2% of collegiate female athletes experience feelings of depression throughout their collegiate athletic careers.

Throughout an athlete's career, she may experience struggles with anxiety before, during or after a competition or game. Feelings of anxiety can accumulate from numerous factors. As stated by Wesney (2020), "some of these external factors could be fans and spectators, time, competitive level, setting, and consequences, whereas some internal factors could be investment, uncertainty, self-confidence, and letting oneself down or others" (p. 1). Some level of anxiety is normal in an athlete due to the numerous competitions, games, and practices, as well as the overwhelming thirst to perform well and succeed, but when the anxiety starts to overwhelm female athletes, then there is a serious issue (Wesney, 2020). Although anxiety can be witnessed through a variety of different forms, an individual has a clinical issue with anxiety when he or she fears going to practice, avoids sports all together, or only attends a sporting event if pressured or forced (Esfandiari et al., 2001).

Injury plays a significant role in the stress of collegiate female athletes (Sullivan et al., 2020). Collegiate athletes succumb to injuries often and the "psychological response to injury

can include normal as well as problematic responses" (Putukian, 2016, p. 1). Injury can include anything from a slight setback to a career ending tragedy (Beidler, et al., 2021). Hughes and Leavey report, "the injury experience of an elite athlete has been likened to the grief process observed following bereavement, with an estimated 10–20% of athletes warranting clinical intervention, with suicide a cause of concern" (2012, p. 95). When a collegiate athlete experiences an injury, regardless of the size, their positive mental health status can be disrupted.

Numerous factors can contribute to an athlete's injury before the injury even appears. Research conducted by Esfandiari (2011) concluded that psychological factors can greatly impact an athlete's susceptibility to injury. An athlete's temperament, emotional state, life stressors, and ability to cope with stressors are all psychological factors that can increase an athlete's vulnerability to injury. Additionally, stress experienced by a collegiate athlete can cause "attentional changes, distraction and increased self-consciousness that all can interfere with performance and predispose an athlete to injury" (Putukian, 2016, p. 1). Collegiate female athletes are not only stressed about experiencing an injury, but having re-occurring issues with the injury, or re-injuring themselves again Beidler et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to monitor collegiate athletes to help them manage their mental health stressors such as anxiety and depression, so that they are less susceptible to injury.

Eating Disorders

The intense demands of collegiate athletics as well as the stressors of the college environment, put collegiate female athletes at advanced risk for developing an eating disorder (McLester et al., 2014). When collegiate female athletes encounter too much stress, they often turn to an unhealthy coping mechanism, such as eating disorders (Ryan et al., 2018). The need to be physically fit, but also appealing to the eye has created a jump in female athletes to surrender

to the slippery slope of developing an eating disorder (Ryan et al., 2018). In addition, collegiate female athletes are likely to engage in abnormal eating habits as well as unhealthy weight control practices (Quinn and Robinson 2020).

When investigating individuals that have reported issues with eating disorders, Michel and Willard (2017) found that, "between 5 million and 10 million girls and women" have some sort of eating disorder (p. 1). Furthermore, research gathered by Ryan et al. (2018) concluded that 25% of collegiate female athletes admitted to having an eating disorder. These statistics are important as they can be linked to injuries within an athlete, therefore impacting a collegiate female athlete's mental health status.

Unhealthy eating habits is a critical issue, especially within the collegiate female athlete population (Michel & Willard, 2017). Eating disorders encompass a range of unhealthy weight control mentalities and actions that can be impacted by unsettling emotions as well as distressing life issues (Hobart & Smucker, 2000, Michel & Willard, 2017). These disorders incorporate three main categories known as bulimia, anorexia nervosa, and binge-eating (Ryan et al., 2018).

A qualitative study conducted by Arthur-Cameselle et al. (2017) investigated the prevalence of eating disorders amongst collegiate female athletes. Using interviews, Arthur-Cameselle et al. was able to determine that due to numerous performance pressures, collegiate female athletes engage in eating disordered behaviors more when compared to their peers not participating in collegiate sports. This increase of happenstance amongst collegiate female athletes is due to enormous pressure from the athlete herself, her coach, and her teammates (Arthur-Cameselle et al., 2017). The research by Arthur-Cameselle et al. (2017) was similar to a study conducted by Scott et al. (2019) which showed that an athlete's teammates can negatively impact an athlete's eating habits through peer pressure and modeling. A third study by Quinn and

Robinson (2020) surveyed collegiate female athletes across thirty different colleges and found that collegiate female athletes are more prone to eating disorders due to teammate and coach pressure as well as the pressure to perform well in sport.

The need to be physically fit may influence a collegiate female athlete to take on an eating disorder. Physical fitness is an important component of competing in collegiate sports (Rhi et al., 2019). Collegiate female athletes are conditioned daily through grueling practices as well as gut-wrenching weight room sessions (LaSance, 2020). Fitness tests are assigned and conducted, as well as the documentation of each athlete's weight and body mass index (Rhi, et al., 2019). This high-stress and aggressive environment can cause eating disorders to appear within an athlete (Ryan et al., 2018). Moreover, collegiate female athletes capitulate to eating disorders because they allow for outside sources such as peers, teammates, media sources, and coaches to influence their body shape and perception (Ryan et al., 2018). Furthermore, collegiate female athletes also permit societal and internal pressures to be thin and athletically successful to influence their actions and food consumption (Wells et al., 2015). Collegiate female athletes, competitive by nature, may become trapped within an eating disorder, because the athlete is willing to do whatever it takes to get ahead of the competition (Arthur-Cameselle, et al., 2017).

Alcohol and Drug Use/Misuse

The massive pressures encountered by collegiate female athletes to balance both athletics and other responsibilities can subsidize to unhealthy coping behaviors such as alcohol and drug use (Knettel et al., 2021). One of the main reasons why alcohol is used and misused is due to the possibility of underlying issues within the athlete, such as depression or anxiety (Edwards & Froehle, 2021). To regulate emotions, athletes often succumb to the use and abuse of substances, which is a concerning response (Putukian, 2016). Instead of getting help from the resources that

are available for collegiate female athletes, these individuals tend to self-medicate by engaging in underage drinking or an overabundance of alcohol (Druckman et al., 2015). When comparing collegiate athletes to their peers who are not athletes, it was reported that collegiate athletes consume more alcohol, report being drunk more often, and engage in greater harmful alcohol-related consequences (Zale et al., 2022). Although alcohol is a depressant, meaning that it slows down one's nervous system and can result in an individual having irrational decision-making skills, it can also cause an individual to "loosen up" and be less uptight and stressed (Carvalho et al., 2019).

There are myriad reasons why the use of alcohol by collegiate female athletes is prevalent (Zamboanga, 2021). Research conducted by Carvalho et al. (2019) concluded that individuals who use and misuse alcohol are attempting to achieve short-lived mood elevation and stress relief. Similarly, Zamboanga et al (2021) identified 50% of collegiate female athletes engage in alcohol to deal with their stressors, while Wardell et al. (2020) noted that the ingestion of alcohol was used to avoid stressful situations as well as states of depression.

Collegiate female athletes undergo various unfavorable and difficult outcomes due to their drinking (Pitts et al., 2018), which can be an added mental stressor. Unfortunately, the use of alcohol encourages collegiate female athlete to participate in perilous behaviors which impact their academic and athletic performance as well as effects their social, mental, and physical health (Pitts et al., 2018). Collegiate female athletes testified to suffering from a vast range of alcohol/drug consequences when compared to their peers (Pitts et al., 2018).

When engaging in alcohol use, collegiate female athletes risk losing their athletic scholarships and eligibility to participate in collegiate athletics, as well as possible legal and/or university citations (Zamboanga, et al., 2021). Engaging in both risk athletic and academic

standings, as well as the negative impact on mental, physical, and social health adds to the mental stress of a collegiate female athlete. The use of alcohol by collegiate female athletes puts an athlete's entire future and health at risk.

This research stream covered specific mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experience. Collegiate female athletes face many mental health stressors such as anxiety, depression, injury, eating disorders, and alcohol use/misuse. These mental health stressors greatly impact an athlete's mental health status. This stream is critical to the literature review because it highlighted specific mental health stressors that can disrupt a collegiate female athlete's positive mental health state. Finally, this stream is pertinent to the literature review because it set the stage of the third literature stream which addressed barriers and supports for collegiate female athletes experiencing mental health stressors.

Stream 3: Barriers and Supports for Collegiate Female Athletes Experiencing Mental Health Stressors

Providing collegiate female athletes with proper supports to identify and navigate mental health issues is crucial (McGinty, et al., 2018). Because many collegiate athletes are embarrassed and hesitant to disclose disruptions in their mental health, they are less likely to pursue help when compared to their peers who are not athletes (Putukian, 2016). Additionally, athletes are often labeled and stereotyped as being strong and invincible to experiencing mental health issues (Esfandiari et al. 2011). The stereotype of being impenetrable to experiencing mental health stressors makes collegiate athletes feel that they must meet this expectation of being extremely tough minded and less vulnerable to life's stressors (McGity et al., 2018). On the contrary, collegiate athletes face numerous stressors that predispose them to additional stressors and

mental health issues (Moreland et al., 2018), and could benefit from supports to navigate the barriers they face.

Barriers to Accessing the Support Needed to Navigate Mental Health Stressors

Collegiate female athletes are faced with numerous barriers that may prevent them from securing proper supports to help them navigate and cope with mental health stressors (Moreland et al., 2018). One barrier that collegiate female athletes contend with is the notion of how their coaches and teammates will view them after sharing that they are struggling with mental health issues (Moreland et al., 2018). Because of such disclosure, athletes often fear that they will lose playing time or a starting spot if they are identified as having mental health issues, so instead they keep quiet, and ignore the problem (McGinty et al., 2018). Unfortunately, ignoring mental health stressors creates a plethora of other issues and health problems (McGinty et al., 2018) for collegiate athletes.

The lack of education regarding mental health stressors experienced by collegiate female athletes is another barrier to supports. Neal (2013) reports that "some student-athletes, however, are unaware of how a stressor is affecting them; even if they are aware of potential psychological concerns, some will not inform anyone" (p. 716). The absence of educated individuals alongside the issue with collegiate athletes being able to identify their mental health stressors as well as shame to come forward may cause collegiate female athletes to continue to suffer from mental health stressors indefinitely (Hegarty et al., 2018). This is a concern, because when left un-treated, mental health stressors can transform into larger and more serious issues (Hegarty et al., 2018).

Collegiate athletes are a prominent at-risk group for experiencing mental health stressors, yet they underutilize accessible mental health supports (Sudano et al., 2017). According to

Hegarty et al. (2018), “research has shown that athletes historically do not use their university mental health services” (p. 2). In fact, as little as 10% of collegiate athletes experiencing mental health stressors seek out treatment (Hegarty et al., 2018). This underutilization of mental health services is due to two main issues which includes lack of education of athletic staff and uneducated coaches (Hegarty et al., 2018). Cox et al. (2017) concluded that 25.7 % of collegiate female athletes were unaware of how to access mental health treatment at their college, and 44.5% of collegiate female athletes had not obtained mental health instruction from their athletic department. Athletic staff are often deficient in identifying and treating mental health stressors and psychological issues in collegiate athletes (Bisset et al., 2020). Additionally, coaches are un-informed on how to properly identify mental health stressors as well as identify when their collegiate athlete is struggling (Hegarty et al., 2018).

Potential Supports to Assist with Navigating Mental Health Stressors

Providing appropriate supports for collegiate female athletes to navigate and cope with mental health stressors is imperative (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020). Unfortunately, there is a lack of resources available to collegiate female athletes that can help them to navigate mental health stressors. Sudano et al. (2017) explain in their work that, “NCAA Mental Health Best Practices suggests that qualified mental health clinicians should be easily accessible to student-athletes, which includes being accessible through establishment of a self-referral process” (p. 265). However, although providing easy access to mental health clinicians should be attainable, many colleges and universities do not have this support (Sudano et al., 2017). If the individual providing the support for the collegiate athlete is near the training room, then collegiate athletes will be able to self-refer themselves (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020). Additionally, The NCAA Best Practices (2017) suggests that the individual providing the mental health services should have an

"office space within or proximate to athletics department facilities' to increase the clinician's visibility and accessibility" (p. 265). Providing collegiate athletes with close and available mental health services may promote and encourage them to seek help navigating their mental health stressors.

Another beneficial support for collegiate female athletes navigating mental health stressors is the consistent interaction with their athletic trainers. Athletic trainers have a strong relationship with their athletes, and can often identify mental health issues, or overhear their athletes discussing the issues (Clement & Arvinen-Barrow, 2019). To properly recognize mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes, athletic trainers need to be educated on the signs and symptoms of mental health stressors so they can properly identify athletes (Clement & Arvinen-Barrow, 2019).

Having health services integrated into the athletic training room is beneficial for athletes because athletes often visit their athletic training room daily (Sports Science Institute, 2022). Furthermore, having an individual that is trained and on site for the athletes may encourage the normalization of athletes seeking help for their mental health stressors (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020). Universities provide immense resources for collegiate athletes and their physical health (Kern, 2017). Athletic departments include trainers, weight room coaches, and nutritionists, "yet only a fifth of those colleges have a mental-health provider who works in the athletic-training room" (Kern, 2017, p. 325). Embedding health counselors into the training rooms can allow for student-athletes to receive treatment without having to "trek" across campus for help (Hong et al., 2018). In addition, "putting the psychologist in the same room as the physical therapist can also 'normalize' help-seeking, reducing the stigma surrounding mental illness" (Kern, 2017, p. 325).

In addition to the implementation of mental health services in the athletic training room, colleges and universities can employ mental health pre-screening for collegiate athletes. To combat mental health stressors, “early identification and management of stress-related problems or mental health symptoms is an effective means to facilitate intervention in an earlier illness phase” (Rice et al., 2018, p. 852). Screening should be completed by all collegiate athletes to determine if the athlete is experiencing or susceptible to mental health stressors (Hazzard et al., 2020). One major pre-screening tool that can be used to detect depression is known as the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression (CES-D) (Hong et al., 2018). Other pre-screening tools include, “the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) for depression, the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item Scale (GAD-7) for anxiety, the SCOFF for eating disorders/disordered eating, and the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)” (Hong et al., 2018, p.55). In addition to pre-screening, mental health counselors should offer collegiate female athletes with a multi-disciplinary team which should include a physician, clinical psychologist, and athletic trainer (Hong et al., 2018). This team should work as the athlete’s support system and should meet regularly, as well as solidify referral processes as well as one main location for the collegiate athlete to receive help (Hong et al., 2018). Incorporating pre-screening tools as well as a multidisciplinary team are great ways to keep collegiate athletes mentally healthy (Rao & Hong, 2020).

This third literature stream described the barriers that are in place that prevent collegiate female athletes from getting the proper help that they need, as well as the potential supports to that can help collegiate female athletes address mental health stressors. More specifically, this research stream highlighted several reasons why collegiate female athletes may not seek and/or receive treatment for their mental health stressors, as well as supports, interventions and

suggestions that should be implemented to help collegiate female athletes identify, navigate, and cope with mental health stressors.

Summary

It is crucial that female student athletes can identify specific aspects of their mental health, as well as keep a positive mental health status throughout their collegiate athletic careers. Mental health is a critical stakeholder in one's life and can in turn affect other aspects of life. If a mental health stressor is not identified and treated, female athletes can struggle with her schoolwork, social life, and athletic commitments. In addition, if the mental health stressor is ignored, the issue can fester and result in other issues such as injuries, burn-out, or termination of one's athletic career. Being able to acknowledge a disruption in one's own mental health, as well as have the ability to receive help to navigate the issue or issues is essential, so that the athlete can experience a positive and healthy collegiate athletic career, therefore having the proper mental health supports and services easily accessible to the athlete is paramount. What follows is Chapter 3 which details the research methodology of the study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

This qualitative case study identified common mental health stressors amongst collegiate female athletes. The barriers that prevent these athletes from receiving the proper help as well as the supports that they use to ameliorate the mental health stressors they experience were highlighted. Mental health is a massive element of collegiate female athletes' everyday lives, (Thirunavurakasu et al., 2013). When a collegiate athlete combats a disruption in mental health, they can endure feelings of low self-esteem, an inability to manage time, and an inability to cope with adversity (Egan, 2019.) Given this, the data gathered from this case study answered the following research questions:

1) How do female athletes describe the mental health stressors that they have experienced during their collegiate years?
2) What barriers do collegiate female athletes experience when navigating mental health stressors?
3) How do coaches describe their capacity to provide collegiate female athletes with supports to navigate mental health stressors?

This chapter emphasized the research methodology components regarding how the study was carried out. More specifically, this chapter encompassed a description of the research design and rationale, site and population description, research methods, and data collection and analysis procedures. Finally, the methodological limitations, and ethical considerations were also addressed.

Research Design and Rationale

This research study employed a qualitative design using an exploratory case study approach through the lens of constructivist epistemology. As stated by Patton (2001), "qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-

specific settings, such as ‘real world setting [where] the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest’” (p. 39). Qualitative research allows for information and knowledge to be diffused through social interactions between the researcher and his or her subjects. Additionally, in qualitative research, relationships transpire through the knower and the known (Yilmaz, 2013). The use of a qualitative research design allowed for the researcher to identify common themes amongst the participants (Yilmaz, 2013). The relationships between the researcher and the subjects in this study were generated and harnessed by creating a comfortable atmosphere in which empathy ensues.

The specific qualitative research approach this study used was an exploratory case study. Case studies are tools that can be used within qualitative research and are essential for understanding phenomena (Starman, 2013). Furthermore, an exploratory case study allowed for the researcher to gain an in-depth description of a social phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Moreover, the exploratory case study approach provided a pathway for the researcher to examine and define each individual person involved in the study, a group of people, a specific problem, a phenomenon, or event (Starman 2013). Additionally, through an exploratory case study approach the researcher obtained rich, in-depth data about a phenomenon from a small population of people (Yin, 2014). Finally, an exploratory case study allowed for the researcher to gain insight into a specific phenomenon and prove that further research is needed on a larger scale (Aki Tamashiro et al., 2021). More specifically, the researcher asked general questions that opened the door for further research and investigation into the phenomenon.

A qualitative exploratory case study is the most appropriate research design and approach for the study as it involved a small, yet diverse sample that allowed for an in-depth analysis to be presented (Menon, 2019). An exploratory case study allows for flexibility as well as

thoroughness when developing interventions, assessing programs, and investigating health science research (Baxter & Jack, 2008). In addition, an exploratory case study provides a pathway for exploring a small geographical location (Stride Right University) as well as a restricted number of people (women's soccer team and their coaches at Stride Right University) as participants of the study (Zainal, 2007). Moreover, case studies allow for the researcher to study a "real-life phenomenon through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships" (Zainal, 2007, p. 2).

The use of an exploratory case study is essential for this study because it allowed the researcher to investigate links between the gathered research, therefore building a theory from the research (Yin, 2014). Additionally, an exploratory case study is appropriate for this study because "exploratory case studies set to explore any phenomenon in the data which serves as a point of interest to the researcher" (Zainal, 2007, p. 3). The exploratory case study approach allowed for the researcher to investigate the specific problem and research questions through triangulation of one-on-one interviews, a focus group, and artifacts which are research methods that were used for this study. Based on the aforementioned reasons, using an exploratory case study to acquire pertinent information regarding the mental health of collegiate female athletes is most appropriate (Starman, 2013).

Population and Site

Population and Sample Description

According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), it is standard "in qualitative research to study a few individuals or a few cases. This is because the overall ability of a researcher to provide an in-depth picture diminishes with the addition of each new individual or site" (p. 209). All individuals that participated in this study were coaches or female soccer players from Stride

Right University (pseudonym) in Northwest Pennsylvania. More specifically, and for the purposes of this study, a collegiate female soccer player is an individual who is enrolled at Stride Right University and plays on their soccer team, and a coach is an individual who coaches the female soccer team at Stride Right University.

The specific sample population that was targeted as participants for this study met one of the follow criteria: 1) currently a female collegiate soccer player at Stride Right University and 18 or older or 2) currently a coach for the female soccer team at Stride Right University. There are currently forty female soccer players enlisted on the team, and four soccer coaches. For this study, the sample included six to eight female soccer players 18 or older in addition to three to four coaches of the female soccer team at Stride Right University.

Convenience sampling (Stratton, 2021) and snowball sampling (Stratton, 2021) was used to select participants for the study. Convenience sampling is a common type of non-probability sampling used in qualitative research that allows for the researcher to announce the study to a population, and the participants respond to the researcher if they wish to participate (Stratton, 2021). This type of sampling is popular because it is cost-effective and simple (Stratton, 2021). Snowball sampling is another type of non-probability sampling in which participants are recommended to the researcher (Stratton, 2021). Snowball sampling is a useful method because it allows for the researcher to gain participants from a population which may be difficult to reach (Etikan et al., 2016).

Table 3.1 below depicts the pros and cons of convenience and snowball sampling.

Table 3.1

Pros and Cons of Convenience and Snowball Sampling

Table 3.1 (Continued)

Type of Sampling:	Pros:	Cons:
Convenience Sampling	• Cost effective • Simple • Easy to implement • Saves time when gathering data • Research data is readily available	• May not provide a representative result • Researcher bias may occur • Easier to provide false data
Snowball Sampling	• Quick and easy to find samples • Ability to reach small groups • Ability to obtain primary data • Little work for the researcher to implement	• Nonrandom results • Can take time • Respondents may be hesitant to provide names/contact information • Possible loss of control

Site Description

A single site was used to implement the study and effectively connect with the participants. Founded in 1866 and recognized as one of the top Division II universities in the nation, Stride Right University will serve as the chosen site for this research study. Stride Right University consists of roughly 7,600 students and is in Pennsylvania. Within this student body, there are twenty-two NCAA Division II intercollegiate sports for both males and females.

This site was chosen for numerous reasons. First, Stride Right University was chosen because this institution has a women's soccer team, as well as coaches that fit the description of the population. Additionally, the school is easily accessible to the researcher. The researcher lives within an hour of the athletic complex, making it easy to travel to campus where the participants will be located for data collection. Additionally, this location was chosen because it is a prestigious Division II school that values both academics and athletics. Finally, this site was chosen because the researcher has personal ties to Stride Right University which will allow for the use of convenience and snowball sampling.

Site Access

To carry out the research study ethically and responsibly, the researcher obtained permission to access the research site. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), numerous germane steps must be followed to successfully carry out a qualitative study. These essential steps include, "seeking permission from the board, developing a description of the project, designing an informed consent form, and having the project reviewed" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 210). The researcher sent a site access letter to the head women's soccer coach at Stride Right University (Appendix A) to gain approval and the approval letter was included with the Drexel's Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application.

Research Methods

One-on-One Interviews

This qualitative case study employed three methods of data collection. The first type of data collection method was semi-structed one-on-one interviews, which was used to gather information from the collegiate female athlete participants. One-on-one interviews are a "data collection process in which the researcher asks questions to and records answers from only one participant in the study at a time" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 2018). Furthermore, "interviews consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interviewer or interviewee to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail" (Gill, 2008, p. 291). Due to the flexibility of semi-structed interviews, this type of data collection allowed for the discovery of new findings and information amongst the participant and researcher. Moreover, "qualitative methods, such as interviews, are believed to provide a 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena than would be obtained from purely quantitative methods, such as questionnaires" (Gill, 2008, p. 292). Additionally, one-on-one interviews are

great tools for investigating sensitive issues such as mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes and allowed for the researcher to connect with individuals by allowing the participants to share their ideas and experiences comfortably and privately. The researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix H) to guide the semi-structed interviews.

Instrument Description for Collegiate Female Athlete One-on-One Interviews

The one-on-one interviews consisted of 22 open-ended questions as included in the interview protocol (Appendix H). These questions sought to understand the lived experiences and mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experience, as well as the supports available to help them navigate and cope with mental health stressors. Furthermore, the questions asked in the one-on-one interviews gathered information from the collegiate female athletes on how supports can be improved to help all athletes better navigate mental health stressors. Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes using Zoom (zoom.us).

More specifically, the interview questions were categorized into six specific sections as follows: 1) demographic information, 2) academic/major information, 3) knowledge of mental health stressors, 4) experience with mental health stressors, 5) navigating mental health stressors, 6) supports and suggestions for navigating mental health stressors. The section containing demographic information contained questions that gathered background information about the collegiate female athlete, such as their background in their sport, as well as their age. The second section of questions explored the participant's academic background regarding her major. The next section of questions investigated the participant's knowledge of mental health stressors, asking the participant about what she thinks are some of the top mental health stressors. The fourth section of questions asked the participant to describe her experience with mental health stressors as well as barriers that prevented her from getting help. Next the researcher asked

questions that addressed the skills needed to navigate mental health stressors. The section focused on questions that investigated the supports at Stride Right university as well as the participant's experience with accessing and utilizing the support.

Participant Selection

Six to eight collegiate female athletes ages 18 or older were selected from the forty collegiate female soccer players at Stride Right University through a recruitment email (Appendix B) sent to the collegiate female athletes by the women's head soccer coach. The researcher then wrote and sent the head women's soccer coach the recruitment email so that he could send it out to his team. These participants were selected using both convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling provided the researcher with participants who were conveniently available to participate in the study. Participants who fell into this type of sampling were collegiate female soccer players that immediately responded "yes" to participating in the study. If the six to eight collegiate female athletes were not secured after using convenience sampling, the researcher was planning to use snowball sampling to acquire the rest of the participants. After obtaining the six to eight collegiate female athletes to participate in the study, the researcher used the SignUpGenius (signupgenius.com) online scheduling application to attain Zoom meeting times for the individuals participating in the one-on-one interviews. The participants selected a day and time that worked for her. SignUpGenius is a free online tool that allowed for the researcher to post times to meet with the participants. Additionally, SignUpGenius has a private setting that allowed the researcher to hide the participant's name so they could not see who else had signed up to partake in the study. SignUpGenius allowed for an easy and quick way to find an agreeable time to conduct the one-on-one interviews. Once the participants confirmed a time for the interview, they received a

formal invitation (Appendix D) through email from the researcher that restated the importance of the study, as well as the date, time, and copy of the consent form (Appendix F). Consent was given verbally to the researcher at the start of the Zoom session.

Identification and Invitation

After receiving approval by Drexel IRB, the researcher sent out a recruitment email (Appendix C) to the women's head coach which he then sent to all forty collegiate female soccer players which introduced and discussed the study at hand. The email encompassed the research topic and stressed the importance of their participation in the study. Additionally, the email addressed any risks associated with the study, (Appendix F). The researcher then used SignUpGenius to create a schedule for the participants to sign up. The participants were able to select a day and time for the Zoom meeting. The researcher sent a follow up email to each individual through a formal invitation (Appendix E) that addressed the meeting date and time for the interview. Furthermore, the formal invitation encouraged the participants to bring to documents and artifacts that related to the study to the interview. These included things such as personal journals, mental health flyers, mental health brochures, mental health websites for the university, mental health magazines from around campus, etc. Participants emailed the artifacts to the researcher at the conclusion of the meeting. Additionally, participants were required to bring their driver's license to the Zoom meeting to ensure that they were at least 18 years of age.

Data Collection

When collecting the data, the researcher took notes with a paper and pencil as well as recorded the interview using Zoom, so that the researcher could refer to the recording for any details that may have been missed during the note-taking process. Zoom is a secure reliable video platform that the researcher used to record the one-on-one interviews. The researcher used

her Drexel Zoom account which is password protected and encrypted. The researcher was positioned directly in front of the camera so she could clearly see the participant's facial expressions and body gestures. It was important that the researcher was able to see the participant's non-verbal gestures and body language, because body language can be used to enrich verbal communication providing the researcher with additional information (Damanhouri, 2018). After completing handwritten notes as well as recording the interview, the researcher thanked the participants for their time. When doing this, the researcher also reminded them of the confidentiality and safety of their responses by informing them that their names will not be used in the study, and a pseudonym was assigned to each one of them. Furthermore, the researcher told the participants that the cloud Zoom recording was stored in the password encrypted OneDrive cloud platform that was only accessible to the researcher and her Supervising Professor.

Focus Group Interviews for Collegiate Coaches

The second type of data collection method that was used to collect data for this study is a focus group interview, which consisted of three to four coaches of the collegiate women's soccer team at Stride Right University. There are abundant ways to collect qualitative data, but it is pertinent to elect the correct avenue to address the identified research questions. Subsequently, since the researcher is using a constructivist view, the materialization of interactions between members in the study, as well as relationships between the researcher and the participants is critical. When conducting a case study, using interviews, more specifically focus group interviews, can allow for the access to in-depth detailed information for the study, as well as foster and nurture vital relationships amongst all members in the study. Over the last 20 years, "focus group interviews have been a method for collecting qualitative data and have enjoyed a

surge in popularity in health care" (McLafferty, 2004, p.187). Moreover, "focus groups can be used to collect shared understanding from several individuals as well as to get views from specific people" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 218). In addition, Creswell and Guetterman (2019) highlight that "focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among the interviewees will likely yield the best information and when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other" (p. 218). Likewise, focus group interviews are useful because they allowed for the researcher to gain rich information from individuals in a short period of time.

Instrument Description

The focus group interview protocol (Appendix I) was used to carry out the study. The focus group interview protocol included 19 open-ended questions. These questions sought to understand the top mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes from the coaches' perspective, as well as the supports available to them to help them navigate and cope with mental health stressors. The focus group interview was able to provide the researcher with additional in-depth information because, "focus groups provide space for clarifying questions and allow a face-to-face dialogue" (Brandl et al., 2018, p. 1). Additionally, the focus group allowed the participants to interact with each other and reveal information, issues, and concerns that may not have been addressed had the researcher chose to stick with one-on-one interviews. Additionally, focus group interview fostered and stimulated discussion of functional solutions. 90 minutes was allotted to conduct the focus group interview.

The questions were categorized into six specific sections and will be labeled as 1) relationship with Stride Right University and mental health, 2) academic/major information 3) mental health questions, 4) supports provided by coaches 5) supports available on campus, and 6) suggestions for navigating mental health stressor questions. The section consisting of the

relationship with Stride Right University and mental health questions contained questions that gathered background information about the coaches, such as their background in their mental health, as well as their age, and the number of years they have been at Stride Right University. The second section of questions explored academic majors amongst collegiate female athletes. The next section of questions investigated the participant's knowledge of mental health stressors, asking the participant about what he or she thinks are some of the top mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experience. Next the researcher asked questions that addressed the supports provided by coaches to collegiate female athletes battling mental health stressors. The fourth section focused on questions that investigated the supports located on campus at Stride Right university. Lastly, the researcher moved onto questions that asked the participant for suggestions on how to improve supports for collegiate female athletes. These questions sought to address and answer research question number three.

Participant Selection

As stated by Krueger and Casey (2002), "a good focus group has the following characteristics: carefully recruited participants, interacting in a comfortable environment, led by a skillful moderator, followed by systematic analysis and reporting" (p. 4). When selecting participants for the study, the researcher contacted each coach of the collegiate women's soccer team at Stride Right University. Three to four coaches of the collegiate women's soccer team at Stride Right University were selected through a recruitment email sent by the researcher (Appendix C). After obtaining three to four coaches of the women's soccer team to participate in the study, the researcher used SignUpGenius to attain meeting times for the individuals participating in the focus group interview. The researcher then selected a common time that worked for all coaches.

Identification and Invitation

After getting approval by the IRB, the researcher then sent out recruitment emails to all four coaches discussing the study at hand (Appendix C). The email encompassed the research topic and stressed the importance of their participation in the study. Additionally, the email addressed any risks associated with the study (see Appendix G). From the respondents, the researcher then used SignUpGenius to create a schedule for the participants to sign up. The participants were able to select a day and time for the meeting. The researcher then chose a common day and time for the focus group interview based on the participants' availability. The researcher then sent a follow up email to everyone through a formal invitation (Appendix E) that included the date and time for the focus group interview which took place through Zoom. Furthermore, the formal invitation encouraged the participants to bring to documents and artifacts that related to the study to the interview. These include things such as personal journals, mental health flyers, mental health brochures, mental health websites the university, mental health magazines from around campus, etc. Verbal consent was obtained by the researcher at the beginning of the Zoom session.

Data Collection

The focus group interview took place virtually using the researcher's encrypted Drexel Zoom account. When collecting the data, the researcher took notes with a paper and pencil as well as recorded the interview using Zoom, so that the researcher could refer to the recording for any details that may have been missed during the note-taking process. Zoom is a secure reliable video platform that the researcher used to record the one-on-one interviews. The researcher used her Drexel Zoom account which is password protected and encrypted. The researcher was positioned directly in front of the camera so she could clearly see the participant's facial expressions and body gestures. It is important that the researcher was able to see the participant's

non-verbal gestures and body language, because body language can be used to enrich verbal communication providing the researcher with additional information (Damanhouri, 2018). After completing handwritten notes as well as recording the interview, the researcher thanked the participants for their time. When doing this, the researcher also reminded them of the confidentiality and safety of their responses by informing them that their names were not used in the study, and a pseudonym was assigned to each one of them. Furthermore, the researcher told the participants that the cloud Zoom recording was be stored in the password encrypted OneDrive cloud platform that was only be accessible to the researcher and her Supervising Professor.

Artifacts

In addition to conducting one-on-one interviews and a focus group interview, the researcher also gathered artifacts to triangulate her data. Artifacts are another type of qualitative research data that do not encroach upon the participants involved in the study (Edwards & I'Anson, 2020). Additionally, artifacts are, "a ready-made source of data that is easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 162). Documents and artifacts are a good source of data because, "they are easily accessible and free and contain information that would take an investigator enormous time and effort to gather otherwise" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 182). The researcher sought to obtain both personal documents and popular culture documents. Personal documents are documents that describe the participant's actions, experiences, and beliefs. Personal documents can include things such as journals, diaries, and letters (Edwards & I'Anson, 2020). Popular culture documents are resources that are created for the public to entertain or persuade the public (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Instrument Description

The researcher collected artifacts that related to the study, such as personal journals, mental health flyers, mental health brochures, links to mental health websites for the university, mental health magazines from around campus, etc. Participants were asked to share artifacts, if available, during their one-on-one interview or their focus group interview, as well as email the artifacts to the researcher's Drexel email address so that the researcher could document it into the Artifact Matrix (Appendix J) and store it in Drexel OneDrive. After uploading the artifacts, the researcher immediately permanently deleted the email containing the artifacts. Additionally, the researcher collected artifacts on her own by visiting the athletic building, weight room, mental health building, cafeteria, and university recreation center in search of mental health flyers and brochures.

Identification and Invitation

Prior to carrying out both the one-on-one interviews, and focus group interview, the researcher asked the participants to bring artifacts with them to their meeting in their formal invitation (Appendix D and E). These artifacts included things that relate to the study, such as personal journals, mental health flyers, mental health brochures, links to mental health websites for the university, mental health magazines from around campus, etc. All the artifacts that were brought to the interviews were emailed to the researcher and stored in Drexel OneDrive. After storing the artifacts in Drexel OneDrive, the email containing the artifacts was permanently deleted. The researcher also visited specific spots around campus such as the athletic building, weight room, mental health building, cafeteria, and university recreation center in search of mental health flyers and brochures. These artifacts were then logged into the Artifact Matrix (Appendix J).

Data Collection

Finding relevant and pertinent artifacts is the first step in this data collection process. When collecting artifacts, the researcher had to keep an open mind because artifacts can encompass a wide range of materials. After securing the artifacts, the researcher assessed their authenticity. When assessing the authenticity of an artifact, the researcher was able to identify its "origins and reasons for being written, its author, and the context in which it was written" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 176).

After collecting artifacts from both the participants as well as the on-campus locations mentioned above, the researcher logged the artifacts into the Artifact Matrix (Appendix J). This matrix organized the artifacts into the location they were obtained from and what types of activities happen there, the type of artifact, the design of the artifact, the gerund (or process code), the information that the artifact provides, listed contact information for help navigating mental health stressors, and additional resources for individuals struggling with mental health stressors. After completing the matrix, the researcher was to be then able to code the artifacts.

Data Collection and Procedures

Data Collection Process

After receiving approval from the Drexel IRB, the data collection commenced. The researcher extended invitations through email (Appendix B and C) to members of the team and coaches to participate in the study. After receiving responses from the collegiate female athletes and coaches, the researcher then formulated a focus group as well as the on-one-on interviews. The researcher began conducting one-on-one interviews with six to eight collegiate female soccer players 18 years or older, and they were scheduled based on availability of the athletes as well as the researcher. These one-on-one interviews took place through Zoom. After completing

the interviews with the collegiate female athletes, the researcher then conducted the focus group interview that consisted of three to four coaches of the women's soccer team at Stride Right University. This focus group interview took place through Zoom. Artifacts were collected during the one-on-one interviews and focus group interview and emailed to the researcher at the conclusion of the Zoom interviews. Additionally, the researcher visited the Mental Health Building, Recreation Center, and Athletic Weight Room to collect additional artifacts pertaining to the study.

Table number 3.2 includes the dates and steps needed for the researcher to successfully complete her dissertation study.

Table 3.2

Proposed Timeline for Dissertation Completion

Item:	Jun.	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Proposal approved by SP	**X**										
Send to Proposal Comm.	**X**										
Proposal Presentation	**X**										
Update Proposal	**X**										
Drexel IRB Submission	**X**										
Drexel IRB Approval		**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**					
Participant Invitations					**X**						
Collect/Analyze Data							**X**	**X**			
Results Completed/ Chapters 4 & 5								**X**			
Revise Chapters 4 & 5									**X**	**X**	
Defend Dissertation										**X**	

Data Analysis and Procedures for Each Method

There are several essential steps that need to be taken when analyzing qualitative data. According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019) these six steps include:

> (1) preparing and organizing the data for analysis, (2) engaging in an initial exploration of the data through the process of coding it, (3) using the codes to develop a more general picture of the data, (4) representing the findings through narratives and visuals, (5) interpreting the meaning of the results by reflecting personally on the impact of the findings and on the literature that might inform the findings, and finally (6) conducting strategies to validate the accuracy of the findings. (p. 237)

These six essential steps used to analyze data guided the researcher through her study as she analyzed the data gathered from the one-on-one interviews and focus group.

One-on-One Interviews

When conducting the one-on-one- interviews with the collegiate female athletes, the researcher recorded the meeting using the Zoom platform. Recording the interview allowed for the researcher to refer to the meeting for help with transcribing as well as additional notes. This Zoom recording was used from the researcher's Drexel Zoom account which is password protected and encrypted. The Zoom cloud recording was stored on the password protected and encrypted Drexel OneDrive cloud-based platform that was only accessible to the researcher and her Supervising Professor.

After the one-on-one interview session was concluded, the researcher used her Zoom recording and field notes to create an initial transcription. The researcher used numerous colored highlighters as she read through the transcriptions and wrote notes in the margin of the transcription. After reading through the transcription, the researcher compiled the highlighted

words and phrases into categories using In Vivo Coding. According to Saldana (2016), “in Vivo Coding has also been labeled ‘literal coding,’ ‘verbatim coding,’ ‘inductive coding,’ ‘indigenous coding,’ ‘natural coding,’ and ‘emic coding’” (p. 137). In Vivo Coding allowed for the researcher to select specific phrases and words said directly by the participants in the transcript. This type of coding provided the researcher with specific evidence creating thick, rich descriptions in the findings and result section of the study.

Following the In Vivo Coding, the researcher created a wordle which formed a visual of the key words and phrases. In addition to the wordle, the researcher also compiled the words and phrases into categories. Furthermore, the researcher then used Axial Coding, which allowed for her to investigate the identified codes to see if any overlapping took place. Axial Coding “extends the analytic work from Initial Coding and, to some extent Focus Coding. The goal is to strategically reassemble data that were ‘split’ or ‘fractured’ during the initial coding process” (Saldana, 2016, p. 308). Additionally, “grouping similarly coded data reduces the number of In Vivo, Process, and/or Initial codes you developed while sorting and relabeling them into conceptual categories” (Saldana, 2016, p. 309). The researcher was able to remove codes that repeated, as well as select the most important codes. The researcher then condensed categories if needed. In addition to the initial coding, the researcher also analyzed the Zoom recording data by computer using a computer software called ATALS, to ensure that the transcription is 100% accurate. The use of computer analysis allowed the researcher to “store, analyze, sort, and represent or visualize the data” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 240). ATLAS assisted the researcher in making codes, connecting information between the transcriptions, and identifying patterns between the interview notes. This program allowed the researcher to, “organize text, graphic, audio, and visual data files, along with coding, memos and findings” (Creswell &

Guetterman, 2019, p. 241). Once finished with transcription and ATLAS, the data gathered from the one-on-one interviews was stored on Drexel's cloud-based OneDrive platform which is password protected and encrypted and only accessible to the researcher and her Supervising Professor.

Focus Groups

When conducting the focus group interview with the coaches, the researcher recorded the meeting using the Zoom platform. Recording the interview allowed for the researcher to refer to the meeting for help with transcribing as well as additional notes. This Zoom recording was used from the researcher's Drexel Zoom account which is password protected and encrypted. The Zoom cloud recording was stored on the password protected and encrypted Drexel OneDrive cloud-based platform that was only accessible to the researcher and her Supervising Professor.

After the focus group interview session was concluded, the researcher used tape-based analysis. Tape-based analysis is when the researcher listens to the recording of the focus group interview and generates a condensed transcript (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). Tape-based analysis is beneficial because "the researcher can focus on the research question and only transcribe the portions that assist in better understanding of the phenomenon of interest" (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009, p. 2). Additionally, the researcher used group data and group interaction data to code the data and describe current themes.

When coding the information gathered from the focus group, the researcher used constant comparison analysis. When using constant comparison analysis, the researcher completed three major steps (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). First the researcher used Open coding to chunk the information gathered into small components. Each small unit then received a code and descriptor. After completing the first round of coding, the researcher then used Axial coding to

group the codes into categories. Finally, the researcher completed a final stage of coding known as Selective coding, which allowed for her to choose one or more themes that represented the information in each one of the groups. The researcher then compared the data gathered from the focus group interview to the one-on-one interviews.

The data gathered from the focus group were stored on a password protected and encrypted cloud-based OneDrive platform through Drexel. Only the researcher and her Supervising Professor would have access to the drive.

Artifacts

After securing the artifacts, and assessing their authenticity, the researcher then coded and cataloged the artifacts. The researcher asked participants to email the artifacts to her so that they could be uploaded Drexel OneDrive. The researcher then used the Artifact Matrix (Appendix J) to organize the collected artifacts.

First the researcher started to code the artifacts using Process codes. Process codes are applicable for all qualitative research and is used to communicate an action from the data (Saldana, 2016). Next, the researcher used thematic analysis to form pattern recognition across the artifacts. After the first round of coding, the researcher then used Codeweaving to integrate the primary codes of interest into a direct narrative to examine their interrelationship. Additionally, the researcher used codes from the one-on-one interviews as well as the focus group interview to organize the data. This allowed the researcher to use the constant comparative method to compare identified themes amongst the one-on-one interviews, focus group interview, and artifact collection. To keep the gathered information safe, the data was stored in a password protected and encrypted cloud-based OneDrive platform through Drexel, which was only accessible by the researcher and her Supervising Professor.

Methodological Limitations

There were several potential methodological limitations involved in this research study. The first potential limitation is credibility. Credibility can be defined as "trustworthy" sources (Self, 2014). Additionally, credibility "refers to whether the participants' perceptions match up with the researcher's portrayal of them" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 202). Specific to this research study, various methodological limitations fall under credibility, such as sample size, researcher bias, and participant trustworthiness. The researcher chose to investigate mental health stressors at Stride Right University, which is a mid-sized university, therefore it provided her with a small population of students to choose from in order to make her sample size. This small sample size may have influenced the data's results to be applied to a more generalized population.

Another possible methodological limitation in the study is the researcher may have held a personal bias view due to her background, which could have affected the study's legitimacy. To combat these biases, the researcher kept a reflective journal (Khokhotva, & Elexpuru-Albizuri, 2021). Furthermore, the researcher assumed that the participants answered the questions honestly and openly during the one-on-one interviews and focus group interview. For the participants to remain honest and open, the researcher ensured confidentiality such as assigning pseudonyms and keeping the data stored on the password encrypted OneDrive Drexel platform that was only accessible to the researcher and her Supervising Professor.

A final possible methodological limitation is confirmability, which addressed that the researcher's findings and interpretations are directly taken from the data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Confirmability is another area in which bias could come into play if the researcher took the quotes out of context or misinterprets the data. To avoid this, the researcher used

triangulation using literature, artifacts and one-on-one interviews and a focus group interview. Furthermore, the researcher conducted check ins throughout the interviews to ensure that the data being gathered is accurate.

Ethical Considerations

When conducting a study, it is crucial to address ethical considerations (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). First approval from Drexel's IRB was secured prior to the commencement of the study, so that all human subjects were protected during the research study (Creswell & Guetterman). Obtaining IRB approval was essential for the research to progress as well as to safeguard the female athletes involved in the study. Next as gathering data through qualitative research requires a significant amount of trust between the researcher and the participants, several key issues needed to be tackled, such as "informing participants of the purpose of the study, refraining from deceptive practices, sharing information with participants, being respectful of the research site, reciprocity, using ethical interview practices, maintain confidentiality, and collaborating with participants" (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 231). To protect the participants and preserve confidentiality, the researcher assigned pseudonyms to the participants when analyzing the data. Additionally, to secure participants' trust for a study, the researcher explained the importance and purpose of the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). To protect the data gathered from the participants, the data was kept in a password protected encrypted cloud-based OneDrive platform through Drexel on a password locked laptop, which was stored in the researcher's locked home office.

Summary

This chapter identified and discussed the study's numerous critical components, more specifically how the study will be conducted using a qualitative exploratory case study.

Additionally, this chapter highlighted the importance and the selection of one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and artifact collection to obtain crucial information as it relates to the study. Using one-on-one interviews and focus group interviews, the researcher can gather lived experiences from the participants about mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes. Furthermore, this chapter explained how the data would be collected and analyzed from the identified research methods. Finally, this chapter concluded with methodological and ethical considerations that must be considered when conducting the study. Following this chapter, Chapter 4 and 5 will ensue, which will address the findings, results, interpretations, conclusions, implications, and recommendations of the study.

Chapter 4: Findings, Results, and Interpretations

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to identify mental health stressors that female athletes experience at the collegiate level, as well as the barriers and supports that they encountered while trying to steer through these mental health stressors. Due to numerous stressors from oneself, coaches, professors and peers, a female athlete faces various mental health issues throughout her collegiate career. When left untreated, or inappropriately treated, mental health stressors can lead to more serious health issues (Belkin & McCray, 2019). This qualitative exploratory case study drew awareness to the issues in mental health that collegiate female athletes have experienced while emphasizing the impediments and resources that are offered to support them.

The stories and experiences shared by the collegiate female athletes, and the collegiate coaches in addition to the artifact collection were used to develop the findings for this research study and were not only vital in understanding mental health stressors that these athletes undergo, but also the supports and barriers that they confront. By analyzing the feelings, thoughts, and experiences of these participants, this research study provides suggestions for collegiate female athletes who combat mental health stressors. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do female athletes describe the mental health stressors that they have experienced during their collegiate years?
2. What barriers do collegiate female athletes experience when navigating mental health stressors?
3. How do coaches describe their capacity to provide collegiate female athletes with supports to navigate mental health stressors?

This chapter highlights the findings, results, and interpretations that surfaced from the triangulation of data collection using semi-structed one-on-one interviews with collegiate female athletes, a focus group interview with collegiate coaches, and the collection of artifacts from participants, as well as the Health/Wellness Center.

Research Design Overview and Methods Used

A qualitative exploratory case study design was used to gain a greater insight of the participants' experiences with mental health stressors. As stated by Nassaji (2020), "Qualitative research can be broadly defined as a kind of inquiry that is naturalistic and deals with non-numerical data" (p. 427). Furthermore, "Qualitative data seeks to understand and explore rather than to explain and manipulate variables. It is contextualized and interpretive, emphasizing the process or patterns of development rather than the product or outcome of the research" (Nassaji, 2020, p. 427). The specific use of an exploratory case study allowed for the researcher to examine each individual person involved in the study, as well as gather in-depth data about a phenomenon from a small population of people (Yin, 2014). Moreover, the exploratory case study allowed for the researcher to acquire insight into a specific phenomenon and prove that further research is needed on a larger scale (Aki Tamashiro et al., 2021). By using this approach, the researcher was able to magnify the mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experience as well as the supports and boundaries that they contend with. Three data collection methods were used to gather all the data effectively and efficiently for this study: 1) semi-structed one-on-one interviews, 2) a focus group interview, and 3) artifact collection.

Semi-structured one-on-one interviews are one of the key data collection methods used for qualitative research (Denny et al., 2022). Therefore, the researcher conducted six semi-structured one-on-one interviews with collegiate female athletes that lasted approximately 60

minutes in length. Semi-structured interviews encompass “pre-set, open-ended questions, with further questions emerging from the discussion” (Denny et al., 2022, p. 1116). These semi-structed one-one-one interviews plunged deeply into the experiences of collegiate female athletes and mental health stressors. In addition to the semi-structed one-on-one interviews, the researcher also conducted a focus group interview with the collegiate coaches. A focus group is a discussion that is “facilitated by a researcher, who will have guidelines to the focus group. Data collection consists of group interaction as well as discussion content” (Denny et al., 2022, p. 1116). The researcher was able to record both the semi-structured one-on-one interviews as well as the focus group interview so that she could transcribe them verbatim. This helped the researcher identify patterns, themes, and shared experiences among the athletes and coaches, which helped to make connections to explain the phenomenon. Lastly, artifacts were used to enhance the research gathered pertaining to mental health stressors and the supports that were offered by Stride Right University.

Participant Overview

Due to the busy schedules of the collegiate female athletes and coaches, all semi-structed one-on-one interviews and the focus group interview took place online using the virtual platform, Zoom. To protect the identify of all the participants, pseudonyms were used for the collegiate female athletes and coaches. Each participant met the requirement of being at least 18 years of age and being a collegiate female athlete or coach at Stride Right University. The following table offers contextual data of the collegiate female athletes (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1

Pseudonyms and Contextual Data for Collegiate Female Athletes

Participant:	Pseudonym:	Age:	Gender:	Playing Soccer for how long:	Major
Collegiate Female Athlete #1	Julianne	21 years old	Female	16 years	Psychology
Collegiate Female Athlete #2	Toni	22 years old	Female	17 years	Started as Undecided then went to Sports management
Collegiate Female Athlete #3	Jill	20 years old	Female	13 years	Biology Allied Health
Collegiate Female Athlete #4	Nicole	20 years old	Female	15 years	Public Relations
Collegiate Female Athlete #5	Lexi	20 years old	Female	16 years	Communications and Business
Collegiate Female Athlete #6	Michelle	19 years old	Female	16 years	Started as Business Administration then went to Marketing

In addition to the collegiate female athletes receiving pseudonyms, the collegiate coaches also received pseudonyms. The following table provides relative data of the collegiate coaches at Stride Right University.

Table 4.2

Pseudonyms and Relative Data for Collegiate Coaches

Participant:	Pseudonym:	Age:	Gender:	Years at Stride Right University:
Collegiate Coach #1	John	45 years old	Male	17 years
Collegiate Coach #2	Mike	32 years old	Male	3 years
Collegiate Coach #3	Lauren	26 years old	Female	9 months

In supplement to the above tables, the following table depicts the classification of the five artifacts that were collected during the study at Stride Right University. This table identifies where the artifact was obtained from and the type of artifact.

Table 4.3

Contextual Data for Artifact Collection

Artifact	Location obtained	Type of Artifact
Artifact #1	Obtained from the Health and Wellness Center at Stride Right University. Students are able to use this location to promote health and wellness, as well as speak with counselors, and wellness coordinators to help them navigate any mental health stressors that they are experiencing.	Flyer located on the Bulletin Board of the Health and Wellness Center
Artifact #2	Obtained from the Counseling office located in the Health and Wellness Center at Stride Right University. In this location, students are able to make an appointment to meet one on one with a counselor to help them navigate any mental health stressors that they are experiencing.	Flyer located on the Bulletin Board of the Counseling Center
Artifact #3	Obtained from the Counseling office located in the Health and Wellness Center at Stride Right University. In this location, students are able to make an appointment to meet one on one with a counselor to help them navigate any mental health stressors that they are experiencing.	Flyer located on the Bulletin Board of the Counseling Center
Artifact #4	Obtained from the Health and Wellness Center at Stride Right University. Students are able to use this location to promote health and wellness, as well as meet with counselors, and wellness coordinators to help them navigate any mental health stressors that they may be experiencing.	Flyer located on the Bulletin Board of the Health and Wellness Center
Artifact #5	This artifact was an online website. There are numerous tabs that are available for students to click on based on what mental health stressors they are dealing with.	Online Website

Coding Methods

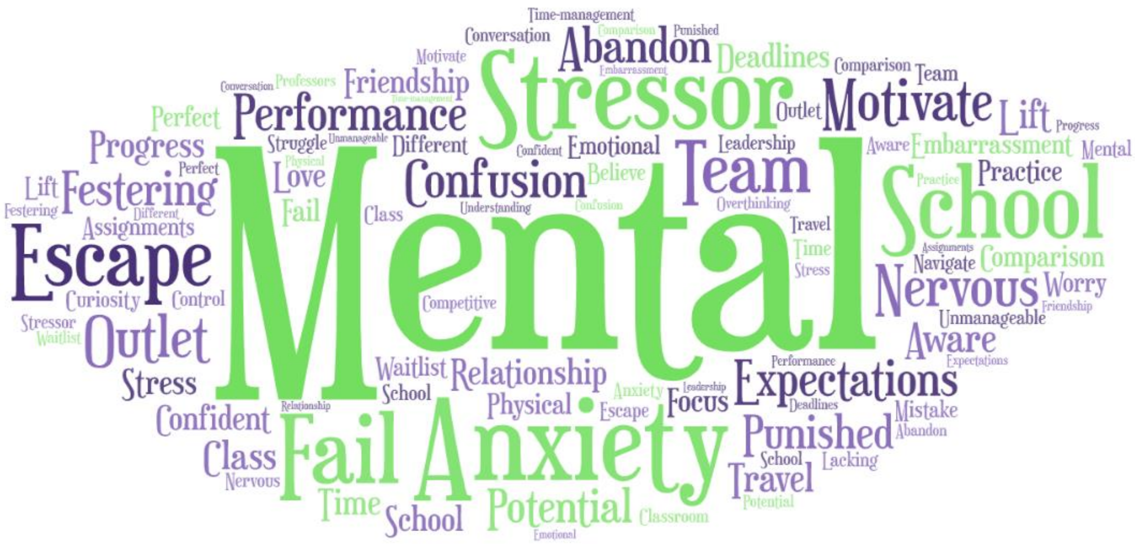
After gathering the data, the researcher transcribed verbatim all the semi-structed one-on-one interviews and focus group interview and modified them for precision so that she could start the coding process. The researcher used several colored highlighters as she read through the transcriptions and wrote notes in the margin of the transcription. Alongside the transcriptions, the researcher used ATLAS which assisted the researcher in making codes from the transcriptions, connecting information between the transcriptions, and identifying patterns between the interview notes. ATLAS provided the researcher with visual data files, organization of the text, audio files, and coding (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). The researcher assembled the highlighted words and phrases into categories using In Vivo Coding. Saldana (2015) affirms that, "qualitative codes are essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story that, when clustered together according to similarity and regularity (a pattern), they actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections" (p. 8). This type of coding not only allows for thick rich descriptions of the findings but allowed for the researcher to pick out specific words and phrases said by the participants in the transcription.

For the first cycle of coding, the researched used In Vivo Coding, Open coding, and Process codes to start to transform connections through the collegiate female athletes, collegiate coaches, and artifact collection. In Vivo coding was used for the semi-structed one-on-one interviews and allowed for the researcher to emphasize the participants' voices by using their exact words and phrases from the transcription and is also known as "literal coding" and "verbatim coding" (Saldana, 2016). This type of coding enables the researcher to collect thick, rich descriptions. In addition to the In Vivo coding, the researcher used Open Coding for the first round of coding with the focus group interview to chunk the information gathered into small

components. Each small unit received a code and descriptor. The researcher then used Process codes to organize the information from the artifacts. Process codes are commonly used qualitative research and is used to communicate an action from the data. By participating in the first round of coding, the researcher focused on the exact words from the participants in order to avoid bias. The first round of coding can be seen in a wordle created by the researcher in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1

Wordle Depicting Themes Pulled from the Transcripts and Artifact



For the second cycle of coding, the researcher used Axial Coding, Codeweaving, Selective coding, and constant comparison analysis. Axial coding allowed for the researcher to identify any overlapping that took place during the first round of coding and facilitated the codes to be placed in groups. The researcher then kept the most important codes, condensed categories, and removed the codes that repeated. the focus group interview to the one-on-one interviews. After completing the first round of coding in the focus group interview, the researcher then used

Codeweaving to integrate the primary codes of interest into a direct narrative to examine their interrelationship. Furthermore, the researcher used codes from the one-on-one interviews as well as the focus group interview to organize the data, which allowed for her to use the constant comparative method. Selective coding was used to choose themes that represented the information in each one of the groups. The researcher then was able to compare the data gathered from the semi-structed one-on-one interviews, focus group interview, and artifact collection. To keep the gathered information safe, the data will be stored in a password protected and encrypted cloud-based OneDrive platform through Drexel, which will only be accessible by the researcher and her Supervising Professor. The table below exemplifies the different codes that transformed from the first and second cycles of coding methods used by the researcher.

Table 4.4

Coding Table

Type of Data Collection	**First Cycle of Coding (In Vivo, Open Coding, Process Codes)**	**Second Cycle of Coding (Axial Coding, Codeweaving, Selective Coding, Constant Comparison Analysis)**	**Themes Developed**
Semi-structured One-on-One Interviews	"I couldn't breathe" "I don't even know any mental health counselors" "Mind consuming" "Festering in my mind" "Confidence gets torn down" "My coaches didn't really know how to speak to female athletes" "Mental block to soccer"	Mistakes Unaware Health Counselors Festering Confidence Confusion Coaches Pressure Mental Expectations Talking Stressed Academic stressors Un-informed Anxiety Performance-anxiety	Stressors Barriers Ideas/Suggestions

Table 4.4 (Continued)

	"Best player possible" "They don't understand" "Anxiety is socially instilled" "You don't see outside" "You're so much better than that" "Performing up to expectations" "We would still be playing if you didn't do that" "You're in your head" "Snowball effect" "Scatter brained" "I didn't do as well as I wanted to" "Meeting place" "We need more information" "Talk to the team about mental health" "Be more understanding" "We are human" "Can't make the deadline" "We are traveling" "I couldn't tell you where it is located" "It's physical and mental"		
Focus Group Interview	"Literal stress" "Big events" "Small events"	Counseling Center Staff availability Relaxation workshops Visualization workshops	Stressors Supports at College Staff Supports

Table 4.4 (Continued)

	"I don't think any of them are not stressed" "Inability to self-evaluate" "Because I am in my head" "There's always an excuse and there's always anxiety" "It's about performance" "There's way too much and it's very hard for them not to stress" "They put on a bit of a façade" "It's really easy for us to see" "Being able to look at a player and say something is not right" "Hope they will have a conversation with you" "Performance anxiety" "Tremendous amount of weight to be perfect" "Fear of failure" "Relationships change" "Comparative kind of performance" "We wear a lot of hats" "There's not enough sports psychologists" "We need to have professionals available" "I would try to provide help but I am not qualified for that"	Knowing your collegiate athletes Wearing a lot of hats Wellness center Athletic Trainer Trained Staff	Barriers

Table 4.4 (Continued)

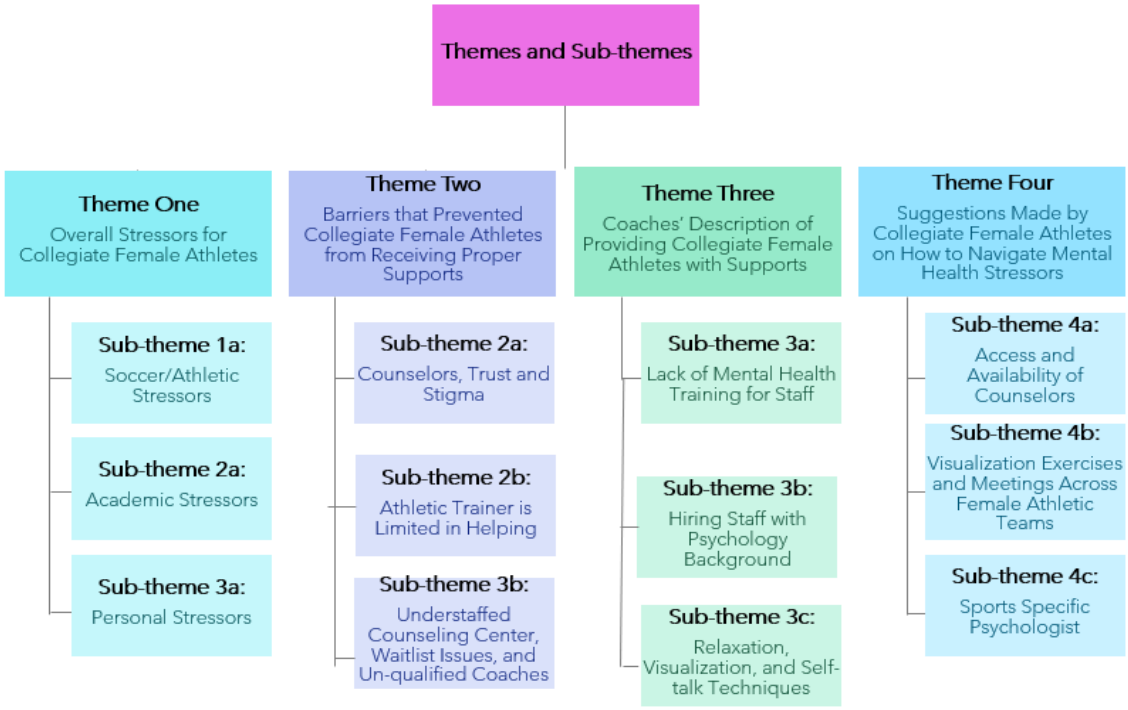
	"We have a counseling center" "We have an athletic trainer" "The athletic trainer can buffer that and get them in right away" "The center is grossly understaffed" "Guide them in the process" "There's a wellness center" "We did visualization and relaxation exercises "		
Artifact Collection	Continuing over time, supporting, reflecting, accommodating the whole person, processing, trusting, and changing, stress reducing, counseling, talking, communicating, reflecting, accommodating, understanding, exploring, processing.	Trust Support Talk Reduce Stress Change Reflect Counselor Listen	The use of Counselors Ability to Reflect and Trust The Ability to Change and Stress Reduce

Findings and Discussion

As a result of analyzing the data through the numerous coding methods used, the researcher was able to create four primary themes that developed from the semi-structed one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, and artifact collection. The themes were: 1) Overall Stressors, 2) Barriers that Prevented Collegiate Female Athletes from Receiving Supports, 3) Suggestions Made by Collegiate Female Athletes on how to Navigate Mental Health Stressors, and 4) Coaches' descriptions of providing collegiate female athletes with supports. Figure 4.2 below illustrates the major themes with their corresponding sub-themes.

Figure 4.2

Graphic Summary of Themes and Subthemes



Theme One: Overall Stressors for Collegiate Female Athletes

There were numerous statements identified in the transcript that fell into this first theme of, "Overall Stressors." This theme consisted of various stressors experienced by the student athletes such as soccer/athletic stressors, academic stressors, and personal stressors. A few direct quotes pulled out by the researcher demonstrate the type of statements and key ideas that were filtered into this theme.

Sub-theme One: Soccer/Athletic Stressors

In the transcript, a lot of the experience's participants shared attributed to "soccer/athletic stressors" which focused on the numerous mental health stressors they experienced such as performance anxiety, playing time, adaptation, injury, and time-management. Julianne described

the “mental block” that she experienced playing collegiate soccer, because she wanted to be the best player possible. She expounded on the impact that a simple mistake can have in a female athlete’s life. She stated:

> I think for me, if I make a mistake, or when I would make a mistake, it would be all mind consuming, if it was in practice or if it was in a game. Our last season I caused the PK. That put us down one to zero versus Westchester. Then in class all I would think about was like if I did this differently or that differently. It was like I wasn’t even in class. It would just make me think about it, and then I would just talk myself through it.

Toni shared an example of her anxiety during preseason and the pressure she felt to achieve the success she had from her prior years. Toni had received numerous awards her junior year such as All-American, and Player of the Year. She said:

> Just the anxiety of coming back and feeling the need to do those things again, and just trying to figure out how to navigate it. I remember the first week of preseason I literally felt like I just couldn’t breathe all the time for a week, because I was so nervous about exceeding expectations or living up to what I did the year before.
> I felt like I had imposter syndrome where I was like I just got that on accident, and it was just a great year, and I couldn’t do that again. And not believing in myself and my abilities.

Furthermore, Jill explained her stress with player standards and the unevenness of them. She stated:

> I would say my first year I got a good amount of starts. I felt like I worked for it. There were moments when I struggled because he was especially nitpicky with me, and everyone would notice it, even my roommate. They all notice that he specifically got on me. He said he had the same standards for everybody, but I know that’s not true, because he definitely had higher standards for a few other players too, but especially me. He would just pinpoint any little detail.

Jill continued to share her experience with the player standards by stating:

> I love having high standards for myself, and for him to see me like that, but when other players would be getting little compliments, and good comments here and there, while I’m always getting, that has to be a better touch or pass there kind of stuff. Yeah, the details are really important to all of us on the team, but that especially messes with my mental health.

> There was this one game in particular. I was not playing well at all. I couldn't get my touch. I couldn't connect a pass. I just couldn't figure it out. I ended up staying in the whole half. He was screaming at me the whole time. So, I stressed myself out. I had a whole breakdown at halftime. Just hearing that in the back of my mind, while I know myself that I am doing poorly is really stressful. It's like well I can't do anything right. \

> He was screaming at me the whole time, so I stressed myself out and had a whole breakdown at half time. Just hearing that in the back of my mind, while I know I am doing poorly is really stressful. It's like well I can't do anything right.

This pressure from coaches to perform well on the field can be a major mental health stressor for collegiate female athletes. Additionally, being one of the best players on one's club team, and then coming to college where there are numerous excellent players can also be a stressor. Nicole stated:

> I would say it's a lot of anxiety and having trouble performing. It is different from the high school level/ club level to the collegiate level and trying to come in with players just as good as you. A lot of people encounter almost an embarrassment of confusion, because they have been the best player on every single team their entire lives. Then they come in, and it's almost a little bit of embarrassing, and I think people take it one of two ways. You can work towards becoming better and fully taking part in that process, or you can become very full of anxiety, worries, and curiosity as to why you're not performing well. I think a lot of people begin to question who they are as person, like if they still like the sport.

Lexi highlighted the importance of time-management when trying to navigate all the responsibilities of a collegiate female athlete. She said:

> I think a lot of people are stressed over the fact that not only do we have class every day, but we have, lift 2-3 times a week on top of practice every single day, and that can get can be a lot. I think it definitely that is a stressor at our university. We do have mandatory study hall times which are nice for people that get below a certain GPA.

These numerous athletic/soccer stressors experienced and explained by these collegiate female athletes provide the researcher to insight on how stressful playing a collegiate sport can be. The ability to be able to perform under un-fair standards, fear of making a mistake, playing poorly, and coming into a new environment where one player better than the next can be unbearable for some female athletes, causing them to crumble.

Sub-theme Two: Academic Stressors

In addition to anxiety within oneself, participants explained the difficulty of balancing school and athletic responsibilities. Not only did these collegiate female athletes address the attention issues in the classroom, but also the responsibility keep up with the schoolwork when traveling. Toni stated:

> Sometimes it is really hard to separate the two. I feel like on game days, I would remember not even focusing in class specifically because I was trying to get into the zone for games. Or even if we had a competitive practice that we knew was coming up, it's almost like I'm in class, but I'm not really focusing because I want to perform well in practice. I want to perform well in games. So, on those days I just remember lacking in the classroom.

Nicole explained the struggle of balancing soccer and academics. She said:

> Between academics and athletics, it's really hard to balance the two. Then, if you're frustrated, say on the soccer on the field, you're frustrated with that, and have anxiety with that I think it's going to relate back to your schoolwork, because then you're busy worrying about if you're going to get playing time. Or if you're messing up, you're not happy with how you're playing, and you're not focusing on your schoolwork, so it kind of goes like hand in hand.

Having professors understand that these students not only have an academic responsibility but also an athletic responsibility is a main issue. Toni stated:

> I think it's hard for professors at times because you have athletes who really need extra time, and then you have athletes who take advantage of needing extra time to do things. So, you really get a mix at our university of professors who really care and understand what it is to be a student athlete, and then you get the other side where you're taking advantage of being a student athlete.

Julianne further expounded on the need for professors to be informed about what a collegiate athlete is. She said:

> Just being aware that we're human beings as well. So maybe we were up all night trying to finish this assignment, but then we had a game and we had to travel, so maybe just extending deadlines.
>
> Traveling is the worst part, and that's the part that professors don't understand, because especially when we were going to the NCAA Tournament. We were traveling and staying

> for three days. Assignments would be due on a certain day. It's like I don't have Wi-Fi on the bus. I have it here, but I can't send it in.

Lexi talked about the struggles of the transition into college from high school. She stated:

> I have never been a very stressed student until I kind of got to college, and my level. I know freshman year I had a very, very hard freshman year. Just like development and coming over to the college atmosphere. I was homesick. I was so homesick that really decreased my playing with just managing my time. We have so many classes, or just overwhelmed in general. It does affect the way that you play because you're not focused on one thing specifically at that time, because you have so many other things that you're thinking about.
>
> Not only are you not as focused in the classroom, but if you're not playing well either, you're definitely going to have some of those things to think about in class. I think it just affects everything. It's like a circle. It's just like a pattern. If you're not doing well athletically, then, it'll transfer into academics. It just like keeps going.

Michelle added:

> I would say time management has to be like at the top of all that because in general, when it comes to any major especially when you're in season, like during the fall for me, you're constantly trying to find time to get work done. You have to eat, and then you're to another class, and then you have practice. It's just it becomes like so much when you're trying to figure out. Where do I fit in all of this in? I personally didn't do as well in some of my classes because it was during season. I didn't do as well as I wanted to in my one class, but I passed.

These numerous academic stressors experienced and explained by these collegiate female athletes provide the researcher with understanding on how demanding playing a collegiate sport while pursuing academics can be. The demanding schedule of being a student-athlete greatly impacts a collegiate female athlete's ability to perform in the classroom, therefore impacting her attention span and grades.

Sub-theme Three: Personal Stressors

Besides athletic and academic stressors, collegiate female athletes also experience personal stressors. Jill explained her experience with struggling to keep and foster a relationship with her significant other as well as her friends. She said:

> I think that anxiety impacted my social life immensely because of how I put soccer before everything. I realized how many times I've cancelled on friends or missed opportunities because I wanted to be better in this aspect.
> But the anxiety of thinking of how it was hard for other people to understand, like people who aren't athletes to realize that I'm not just like choosing something over them, because I don't like who they are, as a person or like them as a friend, but because this is something that I want to do personally. So, I think just the anxiety of not feeling like people understand or accept that part of me.

Toni harped on the notion that when a mistake occurs on the soccer field, it can trickle into your social life. She stated:

> I think it makes you less confident in your social life when you mess up in your soccer life, because that is your life. Your confidence gets torn down if your harp on the mistake too long, and then socially your just anxious because you don't know if you're good enough to even be talking to people. It is just a whole snowball effect in my opinion.

Nicole addressed the impact that soccer and playing time had with friendships on the team. She said:

> I think that I've noticed, at least with being on the team people who are really anxious about their performance and stuff like that kind of isolate themselves, and they won't really socialize or talk to other people about it, especially if they're not getting the same time, or the same treatment. I would say, someone might isolate themselves, and kind of distance themselves from their friends, who might be getting playing time or seeing the program a different way.

Michelle expanded on Nicole's answer as to how playing time can impact relationships within the team. She said:

> I've received more playing time than many people that are in my room. At first, I noticed they were so happy for me. But as we got older and playing time still didn't really change, I noticed that they had a little more anger; that they weren't, receiving the same thing that I was. It got to the point where, people were talking behind each other's backs.
> So, I think socially it kind of becomes a divide between starters and people that are on the bench, or do not get a lot of playing time.

Lexi explained how her injury from soccer affected her relationships with her friends. She stated:

> I actually just tore my ACL. I did it in the summer a month before we went back. I also didn't have a good freshman year, like I said. I didn't perform to my best. I did notice socially I was straying away from the closest people in my life, just because I felt like I had so much built inside of me. The first thing that I did was kind of run away and not face the issues. I feel like socially I just wasn't attracted to wanting to speak up, and

> wanting to talk to people. I feel like that affected me socially, and the friendships that I've created and family members that I've created it definitely affected that.

These direct quotes from the participants highlight specific athletic/soccer stressors, academic stressors, and personal stressors that these collegiate female athletes endure. As witnessed by the quotes embedded the above paragraphs, these stressors greatly impact the mental health status of each collegiate female athlete.

Theme Two: Barriers that Prevented Collegiate Female Athletes from Receiving Proper Supports

The second theme recognized by the researcher was, "Barriers that prevented the collegiate female athlete from receiving supports." The researcher felt that this theme was evident in the transcript because the athletes spoke about several issues and obstacles that prevented them from accessing mental health supports. This theme included absence of counselor availability, lack of knowledge of the location of the counselors, waitlist issues, stigma against mental health, limited athletic trainer availability, and unqualified coaches.

Sub-theme One: Counselors, Trust, and Stigma

When interviewing the collegiate female athletes, it was noted in the transcripts that every single athlete interviewed had no idea where the mental health counselors were located, or who they were. Julianne stated:

> I think that more information is needed. I don't think I even know where they are, and I know that people who have tried to contact them. It's either been like waitlisted, or it's just to me as a psychology major, being waitlisted for a mental health crisis is kind of just that like hurts me because it's like, but what if they need is you?

Toni also talked about being unaware of who her counselor was. She said:

> I honestly don't even know who the counselor is. So, I remember my roommate meeting like services one time, and they literally told her the next appointment was like a month and a half two months away. Yeah, the wait list is an issue as well.

Although Jill acknowledged that there were counselors she stated:

> I don't know anything specifically about the mental health counselors. I have heard of the mental health counselors, but I haven't talked to them at all specifically. I know that there are specific counselors and counseling you can go to, but I'm not really sure who they are and how to contact them.

Jill also explained that since she was unaware of the counselors, she usually vented to her roommates who were on her team. She did however acknowledge that talking to her roommates could be a barrier. She said:

> When it comes to teammates, I feel like you definitely can't say everything, even if you're so close with them. That's definitely like a barrier. Because how are they going to use that information? Is it going to get back to coach somehow?

Michelle addressed the issue that mental health has yet to be normalized. She stated:

> I know that I've always grown up thinking to have mental health issues is just to make me like weaker. I've always been a competitive person, so I've always been like, I can't have any mental health issues. But it's normal. Everyone's going to go through something at some point in their career. I think it just needs to be normalized and people have to try and be more open about it.

Sub-theme Two: Athletic Trainer is Limited in Helping

Nicole talked about her teammates' relationship with her athletic trainer and how individuals would access him for support, but in a limited capacity due to his training and other obligations. She stated:

> I know a lot of people went to our athletic trainer sometimes if they were going through stuff and he would talk to you, but he can't give you, all of the knowledge and the help properly like people who are in that field could as a sports psychologist or a sports counselor person could. He was also busy trying to deal with injuries.'

Michelle also spoke about seeing her athletic trainer when she was encountering mental health stressors. She said:

> I know I can go to my trainer, but the main reason he is there is to help with physical issues and injuries, so it is hard. I feel like when I got to him about mental health, I feel like I am taking him away from the job that he was hired to do.

Sub-theme Three: Understaffed Counseling Center, Waitlist Issues, and Un-qualified Coaches

Coach John was in agreeance with the collegiate female athletes about issues regarding the mental health counselors. He said:

> You know we have a counseling center which, to my knowledge, is grossly understaffed. Even when we send typically, we have a major issue, you know we'll ask a student athlete, do you want to talk? You know normally the process that we talk to our athletic trainer, who also has a counseling background, and we say, you know we'll let's get you with them. Speak to him, and then he will kind of guide you where you need to go, so he'll take that first. He will then go to the counseling center and usually try to get them in, and they typically do. But they're weeks behind.

Coach John also introduced the issue that coaches are not properly equipped to deal with players who are mentally unstable. He stated:

> The University gives you a two-hour training session and say, okay, well, our coaches are now equipped to deal with the mental health issues that they, may come across with their student athletes. I mean, we're fortunate in our program that we have someone like Coach Lauren who has a background and does a very good job with this, and understands it, and can articulate things very well, and has the patience to do so. Most programs are not in that situation. Schools have to do a better job if they're you know the NCAA is going to treat this seriously, and schools are going to treat this seriously and really recognize that there is a problem when we need help. This is something you have to put money behind. You have to find a way to provide the resources. Coaches should not be in a position to deal with players who may not even be mentally stable to be college athletes, you know, or to deal with someone who's you know I mean, I don't know what I would do if a kid came in and say, hey, look I want to hurt myself. I know the steps I would take to try to provide help, but I'm not qualified for that.

Coach Lauren also talked about how coaches are being asked to fill in the role of a "mental health counselor." She explained:

> I think the hardest thing, and, like we've discussed it as a coaching staff is, we wear a lot of hats, and there are hats that we are not qualified to wear, but we're being asked to wear. I do really think that mental training and mental health, are two hats that we've been asked to wear without any idea of what really needs to be done. I mean, the profession is still pretty new. There's not enough sports psychologists out there to be at every single school, or even, I would say, every single conference.

These barriers are significant reasons as to why collegiate female athletes are not seeking help for mental health stressors, which in turn can lead to further mental health complications and

issues. All interviewed collegiate female athletes were unaware of where to locate mental health counselors and services which is a big concern. Additionally, many of the athletes that were interviewed had no idea on how to get ahold of these services if they needed them. Furthermore, these services are understaffed creating a huge waitlist issue.

Theme Three: Coaches' Descriptions of Providing Collegiate Female Athletes Supports

After conducting the one-on-one interviews and focus group interview, the researcher was able to gather valuable data from the transcript regarding the coach's descriptions of providing collegiate female athletes with skills to navigate mental health stressors. When reading the transcripts, the researcher was able to identify three main sub-themes which consisted of the lack of mental health training for staff, hiring staff with psychology/counseling background, and implementing relaxation techniques.

Sub-theme One: Lack of Mental Health Training for Staff

One main sub-theme that emerged in the transcripts was the lack of mental health training for staff. During the focus group interview with the coaches, it was evident that there was an absence of training for coaches on how to help their players navigate mental health issues. Coach John explained that schools and the NCAA need to do a better job with mental health stressors. He said:

> Maybe the NCAA has to come up and say, look with your resources you have to find some type of mental health training outlet for your student athletes via the center additional counseling center hours, something beyond just giving it to our training session to coaches and assume that they're going to be able to handle some of these situations.
>
> Schools are currently spending a lot of money to provide national name, image and likeness resources. So, kids can make millions of dollars. But we're not going to provide them with mental health counseling?

Furthermore, Coach Lauren stated:

> I think, the hardest part for me is really my background comes with like mental training, so I'm way more able to help an athlete with imagery, with self-talk, with you know, mindset mental toughness, resilience. Just give them ideas on how they can improve it, and you know, along the same lines as Coach John, when somebody comes in and talks us and says, hey like I'm having a mental health crisis that's again where my training kind of ends, and then process begins.

This coach also emphasized the idea that every athletic department should have counseling available for student athletes. Having a counselor in the athletic department would allow for coaches to "take the hat off and pass it to someone who is qualified." Having a counselor in the athletic department will cost additional money, so Coach Lauren mentioned that alternate interventions should be taught to coaching staff. She said:

> I know people don't always want to spend more time in training sessions, or they don't want to spend more time learning about something, but just really simple, quick easy interventions, and access to more resources that can help a team.

Additionally, Coach John said:

> I also think these problems are far deeper rooted where you, having just an assistant, with the psychology background, or an athletic trainer with a counseling background, that's just not enough. So, for me, personally, you know, I think you know that we can advocate for the student athletes and work with the athletic department and say, okay, we need to do something more than what we're doing. Especially if the problem continues to be one, that is that, you know, seems to continue to grow, which I think it will be. I think I just don't think it, I think the generation of kids have a really difficult time dealing with most things, and I think soccer what used to be fun when you get to college and it's competitive, it's no longer fun anymore. It's fun for the kids to play, but you know what I mean. So, I think we as coaches, we can advocate more for the athletes in this realm, but you have to do it at a level that's going to provide additional support, not just being fortunate enough to come across, you know, a resume from a talented assistant coach who has accounts with background. That's just you know what I mean, the lottery. So that's not going to happen for everybody. So, you do have to advocate more for the student athletes with administration and say, look, this is a real big need, and we can't handle it as coaches. We need more resources. We need more help. We need more staffing to help provide.

Sub-theme Two: Hiring Staff with a Psychology Background

A second sub-theme that developed in the transcripts was the hiring of staff with a psychology/counseling background. This theme identified two important individuals who have

relationships with the collegiate female athletes. One individual that was identified as having a psychology/counseling background was the athletic trainer. Throughout the transcripts, many collegiate female athletes attested to using the athletic trainer as a support for her mental health stressors. Toni said:

> Our athletic trainer has a degree in psychology, and it was known at our school that if you need anyone to talk to you can go to him. He's a great resource. He's always in the training room and available.

Additionally, Julianne stated:

> We do have our trainer, where you can go to him if you're having like any kind of mental health stuff. If you're having depression. You can go to him, but he's there to help with physical stuff, so it's hard. Sometimes it feels like oh, I'm taking him away from his own job, where he doesn't feel that way. He would help any of us if he needed to. But he has so many other assets. It's not even just us. He does wrestling too. He does baseball. So, it's another kind of waitlisted situation.

Lexi was also in agreeance about the support from the athletic trainer by saying:

> I'm very, very, very close to my trainer since I have to see him literally every day and he also has a psychology degree. I like talk to him a lot. I know he's there if I need to talk to him.

In addition to the hiring of an athletic trainer with a psychology background, the coaching staff also hired an assistant coach with a psychology background which provided additional support for the collegiate female athletes. Jill said:

> I know specifically this year we got another assistant coach. She's actually female, and she has a background in psychology, and she started doing mental health talks with us. It has been great. We kind of didn't do it as much during the year, because obviously everything gets way busier. She did a lot of those, and it was really helpful.

Coach John stated:

> I think on my end, bringing Coach Lauren on board, and one of the things you know in that, including her soccer background in her knowledge, having a not only a strengthening condition, but also a psychology background was a huge bonus, because it's something that I don't feel as a head coach is my strength or my wheelhouse.

Sub-Theme Three: Relaxation, Visualization, and Self-talk Techniques

The final sub-theme that transpired in the transcripts was the implementation of relaxation, visualization, and self-talk techniques. Jill explained the importance of engaging in these techniques taught to her by her assistant coach. She said:

> She was teaching us skills on how to talk to ourselves and instead of saying, don't make a bad pass next time you say, I'm going to make a better pass this time, or whatever. It was very helpful, because when you use a negative connotation to things it ends up possibly resulting in another mistake, as opposed to being optimistic towards your next play if you messed up the last one. So that was really helpful, and I kind of hope that we did more of that during the season, but it really becomes super stressful. I don't even know if I would have had time for it as much. I mean I feel like we could.

Toni also emphasized the importance of Coach Lauren's background in mental health. She said,

> Coach Lauren was brought on to the staff, and she specialized in mental health and in the lifting area, and that was a big reason our coach brought her on, so we could be introduced to things like that, and I think those things helped.

Coach Lauren justified her background in psychology as an asset by saying:

> My background comes with mental training, so I'm way more able to help an athlete with imagery, with self-talk, with you know, mindset mental toughness, resilience. Just give them ideas on how they can improve.
>
> I think, a bit of an anomaly as a coach who has a background in sports psychology and is also coaching. So, I have the ability to give our team workshops. In fact, we did a self-talking confidence workshop this fall as we got into season. But other schools and other teams within our department don't have access to that, and so in a perfect world, I would say they need to have somebody who can help them with those things.

Coach Mike also harped on the fact that an assistant coach was hired with a psychology degree which in turn gave the collegiate female athletes another outlet for dealing with mental health stressors. Jill addressed the positive mental health work that Coach Lauren did with the female athletes. She said:

> We did kind of like mental health management skills. It wasn't really learning about anxiety or depression. But it was how to manage things before a game. Things like writing down self-affirmations, or things that you're going to do in the game specifically, which was really good, because it wasn't just talking about anxiety. It was making something positive out of it, too.

According to the quotes pulled from the transcripts, the hiring of a collegiate female coach that has a background in psychology was extremely beneficial. Not only did the collegiate female athletes have another outlet to explore when they are experiencing mental health stressors, but they also got to engage with skills to navigate mental health stressors.

Theme Four: Suggestions Made by the Collegiate Female Athlete on how to Navigate Stressors

The final theme created by the researcher was, "Suggestions made by the collegiate female athlete on how to navigate mental health stressors." This theme addressed things such as counselor availability and access to counselors, visualization exercises, access to a sport's specific psychologist and mental health group, and meetings across collegiate female teams.

Sub-theme One: Availability and Access to Counselors

Each collegiate female athlete that participated in the study accounted for not knowing where the mental health counselors were located, and this is a big issue. When speaking with the athletes, numerous girls said it would be beneficial if the mental health counselors checked in with the athletes and showed their faces. Julianne said:

> I think, having them just even coming, if the counselors, not all of them, because they're busy. But if, like one or two, or even just the administrator came and talk to the team about mental health. Like hey, this is just a little bio, like a little flyer of all the counselors that we have available times that you could get in. I know that's hard to do because I know there's not enough. There's like a case load issue, so it's there's so many different faucets of it. But in a perfect world they would come talk to the players. The players would notice they were there. They'd schedule appointments that fit in our times.
>
> Coaches would be able to also know information, because I know that, like Coach John knows and coach our assistant coach, Lauren, she knows sort of the stuff about it, but there's never a clear sheet of paper. Never a clear room number or phone number. It's just their services if you need it. It's like, okay?

Toni also agreed with the counselors coming to see the female athletes. She stated:

> Showing their face more and becoming more of an outlet for the students. I think that's what I would say, just because I can't really picture it, because I don't even know who they are if they were there. And if there is someone there, obviously, I would say, show their face more and just be more involved, and open to conversation with everyone.

Jill also noted that it would be beneficial for the counselors to be present with the female athletes. She said:

> If they make time to actually show their face, so that they are involved with women in sports. So even just any team that they go visit then you actually have a sense of connection why you're here, and then you could be even more comfortable to go and talk to them. They can always provide an outlet just to talk to somebody.

In addition to the above collegiate female athletes, Lexi explained:

> I think they should just be more recognizing of us. I feel like personally I haven't taken the therapy route because I'm like scared to make that first move. I feel like I'm not telling people reach out to me, but I'm just saying reaching out and branching out to other people in general, and just being like you're not alone, and if you need the support come, get it. I feel like I'd like a little push for not only me, but other people that feel the same way. I think it's important.

The above quotes from the collegiate female athletes clearly underline the fact that counselors are not known and are absent in the lives of these athletes. These collegiate female athletes suggested that it would be beneficial for counselors to come speak with the athletes as well as form some sort of relationship with them so that they would be more apt to seeking help when faced with mental health stressors.

Sub-theme Two: Visualization Exercises and Meetings Across Female Athletic Teams

Although visualization exercises were mentioned in the transcripts, numerous collegiate female athletes advocated for an increase in these trainings. Toni said:

> I think maybe doing a few sessions on visualization. I think those things helped, but I think actually bringing them onto the field would be good.
> Maybe just talk a little more and have a few more sessions on specific things. Maybe doing polls on what everyone is feeling and try to find something that's similar and focus on that specifically.

Jill was in agreeance with the visualization workshops, by saying, “that was really helpful, and I kind of hope we did more of that during the season.”

Even though visualization exercises were taught and used by the assistant coach, the collegiate female athletes recognized that these exercises were not conducted regularly. These athletes requested that these mental exercises be conducted more frequently so that they could transfer their skills onto the soccer field to help battle mental health stressors.

Another idea conjured up the collegiate female athletes was conducting meetings across collegiate female athletic teams. Toni said:

> I think it would be nice to have all the female sports teams come together and maybe do, whether it's like a monthly conversation, or a weekly conversation. And if you're going through something, you all kind of like an AA meeting or a NA meeting, you go in and you talk. But the thing that makes like those meetings so special is you're all going through the same thing, but it's not just the people on the soccer team, because 99% of the soccer team lives together. You have those conversations at your houses, or when you leave the field, but they're not as serious as if you're sitting across from someone who is in volleyball or basketball or field hockey coming from a different perspective and realizing that it's not just on a specific team, and it's across the entire university, with every athlete. I think, just being able to talk about it together in a different setting outside of the field.

Michelle added to the idea of implementing meetings across collegiate female athletic teams by saying:

> I think something that would be good would be having a kind of laid-back type of, not an official meeting, but a gathering of some sort, where as many student athletes can come, and we all can just talk to each other about stuff. I know, like there's a Diversity Committee at Stride Right University, and they talk about mental health stuff all the time, but to get specifically all student athletes, I feel like that will be really beneficial. Sometimes you don't want to talk to your sport, you want to see who on different sports teams you can relate to, and that to that extent you don't want to talk to an adult. Sometimes they put on a lot of fun events. They'll set up a bouncy. Sometimes they just do random things and that's for mental health. I feel like, if we could actually make something somewhat mandatory, I feel like it would be beneficial as much as some people may think it's stupid.

Julianne expounded on the idea of creating meetings across collegiate female athletic teams when she stated:

> I think, having some kind of meeting place like chairs turned in a circle type thing which is your team first. Where coaches aren't there like maybe a neutral party is there? Just so someone can keep the meeting going, so it's not just silence, but just to know what your own teammates are thinking at the time. Because I know sometimes you think oh, I'm the only one that's thinking this. But maybe like this girl, you don't really talk to on your team, maybe she's feeling the same way, so you can bond over that. And then you're not as like alone, or you don't feel as like silly for thinking the way you do.
>
> Then, once you have like that kind of team structured, then maybe you can talk to other female athletes. Other female teams just to see if not to see if, but just to kind of bounce ideas off of each other, where maybe you're the only one on your team that felt that way. But now somebody on like the tennis team is going to the same thing you are. So now you have an outlet outside of your own team. So, you just keep building community. So, you're not stuck in your own community.
>
> Because I know there's some girls that like don't really fit in. I was close with a lot of the girls on the team. But there's just sometimes there's one or 2 girls that don't necessarily fit in like not that no one's ever mean to them, but they just don't really click, so maybe having other female athletes to talk to when you're in the athletic buildings, or it comes to the game, someone who understands your time limits to, and even in your classes. I'm sure that would help.

The creating of meetings across all collegiate female athlete sports was a common suggestion made by the athletes. This meeting and incorporation of different sports could allow for collegiate female athletes to bond with individuals that they normally don't get to see. Furthermore, this type of meeting would foster the idea that mental health stressors are normal and occur on different levels and in different sports.

Sub-theme Three: Sport's Specific Psychologist

Another idea thought up by the collegiate female athletes that participated in this study was the hiring of a sport's specific psychologist. Lexi stated:

> I think having a specific person there for mental health would be awesome. That's something we don't have. It could be a personal athletic type of therapist who could just be there for you. That would be the best option. It needs to be somebody who specifically has studied mental health.

Furthermore, Nicole acknowledged that there needs to be specific counselors. She said:

> Maybe having options of places we could go to, or even having, honestly, like counselors, for each team, or specific sport, counselors at schools. We have people we could talk to, but I don't know if they necessarily understand like sports or understand sports from a psychology point of view.

Coach Lauren also echoed the need for someone specific for collegiate athletes to speak to. She said:

> I think in an absolutely perfect world, I believe every single athletic department should have some type of counseling available only for student athletes, and I'm not even talking about mental training. I'm talking about mental health, depression, anxiety, problems with sleeping, even things like alcohol and drug abuse, because I think those things get overlooked a lot of times like oh that doesn't happen to athletes. It does. In fact, it's probably a little bit more prevalent sometimes, and they're not aware of it. So in a perfect world, I would say we need to have professionals available, so we can take the hat off and pass it on to somebody else.

Although a sport's specific psychologist would require more staffing and money, the collegiate female athletes and coaches found this to be an excellent support that they would like to instill. Having someone sport specific would allow for easy access to the person, as well as provide the collegiate female athletes with someone who is dedicated to their success of navigating and overcoming their mental health stressors.

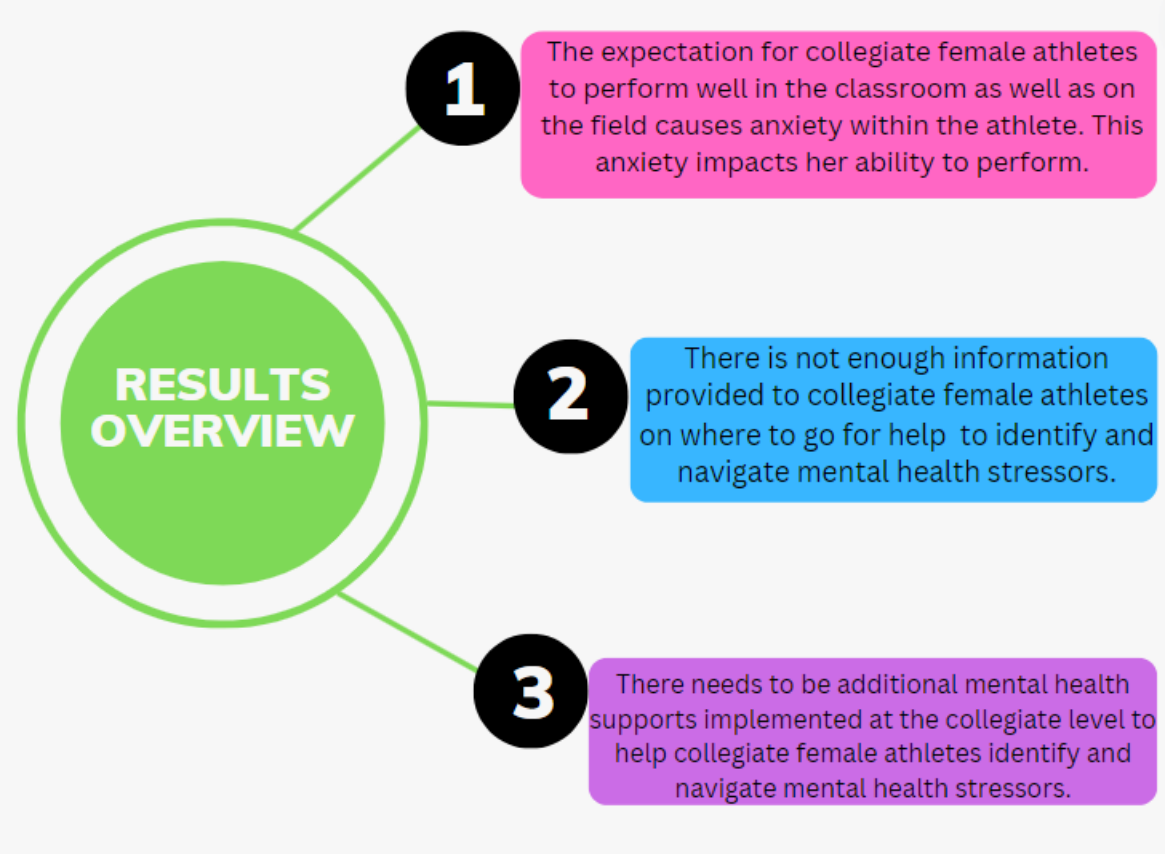
Results and Interpretation

This section contains the results of the study. The results are based on the themes and sub-themes that were collected throughout the data and include an interpretation of each finding. Three results have been labeled and will be examined as they related to the relevant literature and research questions which drove this qualitative research study. The results supported in this section will deliver the framework for the conclusions and recommendations section. The first result talks about the pressure felt by collegiate female athletes to perform well in both the classroom and on the soccer field. The second result addresses the lack of knowledge and

information given to the collegiate female athletes so that they can access supports to navigate mental health stressors. The third result highlights the need for implementation of mental health supports so that collegiate female athletes can identify and navigate mental health stressors. Figure 4.3 represents the results of the research study.

Figure 4.3

Results Overview



Result One: Expectation to Perform Well in the Classroom and Field Can Cause Anxiety and Stress

According to Johnston et al. (2021) "mental health is a prevalent issue, with approximately one in four people worldwide are affected by a neurological or mental disorder throughout their lifetime" (p. 791). Additionally, "College students are particularly vulnerable to

mental health problems given the pressures they frequently endure" (Johnston et al., 2021, p. 791). Collegiate female athletes have two key roles. They must maintain their commitment to the university by balancing the roles of student and athlete (Lopes Dos Santos, 2020). All participants involved in the study shared their experiences and provided specific examples of how sports in conjunction with academics have caused mental health stressors. Specifically collegiate female athletes described feelings of "anxiety," more specifically "performance anxiety" and "stress." Johnston et al. (2021) identified anxiety as being a prevalent mental health stressor witnessed in collegiate female athletes and defined anxiety by stating "Anxiety is another mental illness that many college students struggle with, defined as excessive worry occurring most days of the week for at least six months" (p. 791). Additionally, "people with anxiety can experience both physical and psychological symptoms that can interfere with school, work, and their daily life" (Johnston et al., 2021, p. 791). Furthermore, the anxiety experienced by these collegiate female athletes was characterized and specifically labeled as "performance anxiety." As found in the literature, individuals who participate in collegiate sports "are often under scrutiny not just by teammates but also by fans, and the consequences for failed or diminished athletic performance can be personal (embarrassment, loss of confidence, etc.)" (Rowland & van Lankveld, 2019, p. 2). Therefore, collegiate female athletes feel the pressure to perform well both during practices and training sessions to receive adequate or substantial playing time. These collegiate female athletes not only put pressure on themselves, but also experience it from coaches, fans, and others which in turn causes an abundance of anxiety classified as performance anxiety. Because collegiate female athletes are dealing with several extra responsibilities, such as coach player relationships, team dynamics, and concern of injuries, their levels of stress and anxiety are higher than regular college students (Cutler & Dwyer,

2020). Subsequently, due to athletic demands and lack of time, the anxiety experienced by collegiate female athletes in their sport trickle into their academics. Research by Lopes Dos Santos (2020) found that collegiate athletes were most stressed about their academic performance and success due to lack of time management. The researched gathered by Lopes Dos Santos directly correlates with the findings of this research. Numerous collegiate female athletes enrolled in this research study dwelled on the lack of time they had to complete assignments and study due to practice, weight room sessions, games, and traveling. The demands of being a collegiate female athlete leaves the athlete with little to no time to complete their academic demands, such as completing papers and preparing for exams, therefore negatively impacting their academic performance, resulting in even more anxiety.

In supplement to anxiety experienced by the collegiate female athletes in their sport, feelings of stress were also identified as a major mental health stressor. According to Kavushansky (2019) "Cognitive theories indicate that stress impairs performance by increasing attention to negative thoughts, a phenomenon also known as threat-interference" (p. 1). The collegiate female athletes that participated in the study identified feelings of stress when reflecting on mistakes that they made during a practice or a match. They further explained that this mistake often "festered" in their mind which distracted them on the soccer field thus stimulating additional mistakes. Moreover, a mistake made on the soccer field often carried over into the classroom taking their mind away from concentrating in class, which in turn impacted their ability to pay attention to the lecture or material being taught that day. When distracted in class, the collegiate female athletes often fell behind in their studies. When a collegiate female athlete's demands "are perceived as exceeding the athlete's capacity, this stress can be detrimental to the student's mental health and physical health as well as sport performance"

(Lopes Dos Santos, 2020, p. 4). Likewise, Lopes Dos Santos' research (2020) uncovered that collegiate female athletes had trouble managing their sport alongside studying when academic stressors were at their highest. The expectation to sustain both high levels of academic and athletic performance increase the likelihood of triggering mental health issues (Lopes Dos Santos, 2020). The stress of performing well in one's sport as well as in the classroom creates turmoil within the athlete, thus creating an abundance of stress.

Result Two: Lack of Mental Health Literacy and Knowledge of Supports for Collegiate Female Athletes

A second result that arose from the research study was the lack of mental health literacy and knowledge of supports for collegiate female athletes. Out of the six collegiate female athletes interviewed, not one individual knew who the mental health counselors were, or where they could be located. This is a huge issue because mental health counselors should be readily available for students especially collegiate female athletes due to the numerous mental health stressors that they encounter. According to the research conducted by Cutler and Dwyer (2020) collegiate female athletes have inadequate mental health literacy meaning that they are incapable of detecting mental health stressors within themselves such as anxiety and stress. Additionally, collegiate female athletes come across numerous barriers that prevent them from receiving the proper help such "lack of mental health resources, lack of time, lack of mental health knowledge, and proper institutional protocols" (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020, p. 208). In addition, research conducted by Castaldelli-Maia (2019) found that one of the major barriers that prevented collegiate female athletes from seeking help with mental health stressors was "lack of mental health literacy." According to Castaldelli-Mia et al. (2020) mental health literacy is "knowledge and beliefs about mental health disorders that aid their recognition, management or prevention"

(p. 6). Furthermore, collegiate female athletes also face the issue of lack of availability of individual mental health treatment services at the college or university as well as not having an established relationship with a mental health counselor (Castaldelli-Maia et al., 2020). This issue was talked about in the semi-structed one-on-one interviews with the collegiate female athletes in that they did not know where to find the mental health counselors. Subsequently, the collegiate female athletes enrolled in this study also acknowledged the fact that they did not have a standing relationship with any of the counselors and felt that the counselors could not relate to them because they are a student-athlete (Castaldelli-Maia et al., 2020).

Shea et al. (2019) also addressed the numerous barriers that collegiate female athletes suffer when experiencing mental health stressors. One main barrier that was uncovered was an athlete's "lack of knowledge about available mental health services and difficulty accessing services due to financial, geographical, or time constraints" (Shea et al., 2019, p. 628) Moreover, Shea et al. (2020) emphasized that, "Although many college students have access to campus health services, logistical barriers such as 'not having time,' 'inconvenient counseling center hours,' or 'long waiting list' might still deter them from seeking mental health counseling" (p.628). Likewise, Cox et al. (2017) determined that 25.7 % of collegiate female athletes were unaware of how to access mental health treatment at their college, and 44.5% of collegiate female athletes had not obtained mental health instruction from their coaches or athletic department. The findings uncovered by Cox et al. (2017) correspond with the findings of this research study because the collegiate female athletes stated that they were unaware of how to obtain mental health services.

Result Three: The Need for Implementation of Mental Health Supports

When engaging in both the semi-structed one-on-one interviews with the collegiate female athletes as well as the focus group interview with the collegiate coaches, it was evident

that there needs to be additional supports for collegiate female athletes dealing with mental health stressors. Both the coaches and athletes addressed the numerous issues with the current services that are provided which included but are not limited to lack of information and waitlist issues. According to the literature, there are numerous implementations that universities can employ to health collegiate female athletes identify and navigate mental health stressors. First and foremost, health literacy needs to be increased amongst coaches, players, and additional athletic personnel. The sporting network should be "psychologically safe, with no repercussions for seeking help" (Currie et al., 2021, p.1243). Furthermore, "services should be readily available, and athletes positively encouraged to use them" (Currie et al., 2021, p.1243). Prevention plans need to be in place that address "high-risk" periods that a collegiate female athlete may experience mental health stressors such during an injury or when approaching the end of her collegiate career (Currie et al., 2021).

To combat mental health stressors, "early identification and management of stress-related problems or mental health symptoms is an effective means to facilitate intervention in an earlier illness phase" (Rice et al., 2018, p. 852). Early screening needs to be completed by all collegiate female athletes to predict if the athlete is experiencing or is predisposed to mental health stressors (Hazzard et al., 2020). There are various pre-screening tools that universities can use to detect mental health stressors such as the Center for Epidemiologic Studies-Depression (CES-D), "the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) for depression, the Generalized Anxiety Disorder 7-item Scale (GAD-7) for anxiety, the SCOFF for eating disorders/disordered eating, and the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT)" (Hong et al., 2018, p.55).

In addition to prevention services, universities also need to instill specific treatments for collegiate female athletes enduring mental health stressors. Some recommendations that are

made by Currie et al. (2021) are the implementation of mental health support services at student and athletic events, execution of athlete-centered specific treatment centers that are known to the athlete, and integration of mental health counselors in the athletic community that promote holistic healthcare. Having health services positioned in the athletic training room is advantageous for athletes because athletes often visit their athletic training room daily (Sports Science Institute, 2022). Furthermore, having an individual that is trained and on site for the athletes may encourage the normalization of athletes seeking help for their mental health stressors (Cutler & Dwyer, 2020). The collegiate female athletes and coaches that participated in the research study stated how it would be beneficial to have a sports specific counselor that would be in the athletic building for easy access. This suggestion made by the participants directly correlates with the literature found. Although universities provide resources for collegiate athletes and their mental health, universities need to make the resources more accessible to collegiate female athletes (Kern, 2017). Even though athletic departments include several individuals that can help collegiate female athletes identify and navigate mental health stressors such as sport coaches, weight room coaches, and trainers, according to Kern (2017) only one fifth of universities have a mental health counselor in the athletic building. Incorporating mental health counselors into the training rooms can provide for student-athletes with treatment without having to search across campus for assistance (Hong et al., 2018). In addition, “putting the psychologist in the same room as the physical therapist can also ‘normalize’ help-seeking, reducing the stigma surrounding mental illness” (Kern, 2017, p. 325). In addition to a mental health counselor, instilling a multi-disciplinary team consisting of a physician, clinical psychologist, and athletic trainer would be beneficial in assisting collegiate female athletes with navigating mental health stressors (Hong et al., 2018). This team would

suffice as the athlete's support system. This team would meet consistently in a main location and determine a proper referral process for the collegiate athlete to receive help (Hong et al., 2018). Incorporating pre-screening tools, easy access to mental health counselors, as well as a multidisciplinary team are great supports that can keep collegiate female athletes mentally healthy (Rao & Hong, 2020).

Summary

Chapter 4 encompassed the many findings, results and interpretations from the data gathered by the researcher through one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and artifact collection. Numerous pertinent themes emerged through the coding of transcriptions. The researcher was able organize the codes into four main themes with sub-themes which were overall stressors (soccer/athletic stressors, academic stressors, and personal stressors, barriers that prevented collegiate female athletes from receiving supports (waitlist, athletic trainer is busy taking care of injuries, stigma against mental health, unaware of where to go, and trust of who to talk to), coaches' description of providing collegiate female athletes with skills to navigate mental health stressors (lack of mental health training for staff, hiring staff with psychology background, and implementation of relaxation, visualization, and self-talk techniques), and suggestions made by collegiate female athletes on how to navigate mental health stressors. Each theme and sub-theme were presented in the chapter with direct quotes from the transcript.

After the completion of the themes, the researcher was able to gather three main results from the study in conjunction with information gathered from the Chapter 2 Literature Review. The three key results from the study were the expectation to perform well in both the classroom and on the field, the lack of knowledge for supports for collegiate female athletes, and the need for implementation of mental health supports. The researcher was able to consider similarities,

differences, and new findings based off the data collected when compared to the literature gathered. The completion of Chapter 4 will allow for the researcher to be able to provide conclusions, implications, and recommendations of the study which will take place in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to identify mental health stressors that female athletes experience at the collegiate level, as well as the barriers and supports that they encounter while trying to navigate these mental health stressors. Throughout a female athlete's career, she is at risk of several mental health issues due to the immense stressors piled on by oneself, society, coaches, professors, and peers. By applying a qualitative case study approach, the researcher was able to obtain an in-depth insight the phenomenon being explored. Today's athletes contend with alternative mental health stressors than athletes years ago, and "the differences are seen in a growing number of complex and more intense mental health challenges" (Bauman, 2016, p. 135). Due to the shift in complexity and influence of these mental health stressors amongst collegiate athletes, the supports offered to these athletes need to increase in strength sustenance as well.

By conducting this qualitative case study, the researcher will enhance the literature by accenting the specific experiences that collegiate female athletes and collegiate coaches have had encountered with mental health stressors. This study delivered crucial information to collegiate athletes, coaches, and higher education professionals regarding prevailing mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experience, as well as highlighted the supports and barriers they have access to. The researcher identified three pertinent literature streams to better comprehend the mental health stressors, supports, and barriers collegiate female athletes experience. The *first* stream presented the importance of mental health in collegiate female athletes, and addressed the numerous factors that impact their mental health status (Bjnorsen & Dinkel 2017, Case et al., 2017, Crocker 2021, Egan 2019, Gayles 2015, Hextrum 2020, Parker et al., 2016, Putukian 2016, Turner et al., 2021). This stream provided the reader with insight and context into the importance

of maintaining a positive mental health status as a collegiate female athlete. The *second* theme identified significant mental health stressors that female athletes experience during their college athletic careers, such as anxiety, depression, injuries, eating disorders, and the use of drugs and alcohol (Esfandiari 2011, Hughes & Leavey 2012, Michel & Willard 2017, Neal et al., 2013, Putukian 2016, Rice et al., 2017, Ryan et al., 2018). The *third* and final theme highlighted the barriers that prevented collegiate these athletes from receiving proper treatment, as well as potential interventions, suggestions, tools and services that are in place to help athletes navigate and cope with the mental health stressors they have experienced (Clement & Arvinen-Barrow 2019, Generes 2022, Heagarty et al., 2018, Kern 2017, Luzzolino 2022, McGinty et al., 2018, Moreland et al., 2018, Putukian 2016).

To carry out this research study, the researcher recruited six collegiate female athletes from Stride Right University to participate in semi-structed one-on-one interviews that lasted approximately 60 minutes through Zoom. Additionally, the researcher recruited three collegiate coaches from Stride Right University to participate in a focus group interview through Zoom which lasted approximately 90 minutes. Furthermore, the researcher collected data through the accumulation of artifacts which were secured from the collegiate female athletes and Health/Wellness Center. Data were then collected from the six semi-structed one-on-one interviews and focus group interview and transcribed verbatim, and the artifacts were organized into the Artifact Matrix (Appendix J). After collecting all the data, the researcher then participated in numerous cycles of coding methods such as In Vivo Coding, Open Coding, Process Codes, Axial Coding, Codeweaving, Selective Coding, and constant comparison analysis to determine the major themes found throughout the data.

Four key themes transpired from the data analysis process and are as follows: 1) Overall Stressors, 2) Barriers that Prevented Collegiate Female Athletes from Receiving Supports, 3) Suggestions Made by Collegiate Female Athletes on how to Navigate Mental Health Stressors, and 4) Coaches' descriptions of providing collegiate female athletes with supports. The results from the study were identified in connection with the literature and were discovered from the findings of the data. The results were:

1. The expectation for collegiate female athletes to perform well in the classroom as well as on the field causes anxiety within the athlete. This anxiety impacts her ability to perform.
2. There is not enough information provided to the collegiate female athletes on where to go for help to identify and navigate mental health stressors.
3. There needs to be additional mental health supports implemented at the collegiate level to help collegiate female athletes identify and navigate mental health stressors.

The conclusion of this study draws from the research questions and the qualitative case study findings discussed in Chapter 4. The analysis of the research conclusion incudes suggestions for functional use and recommendations for future research to further expand on the findings described in this study.

Conclusions

Research Question 1: **How do female athletes describe the mental health stressors that they have experienced during their collegiate years?**

Based on the experiences shared by the collegiate female athletes during the semi-structed one-on-one interviews, collegiate female athletes experience numerous mental health stressors. Each individual was able to share a specific experience during their collegiate career

where they faced one or many mental health stressors. As found in both the literature and the data gathered from the semi-structed one-on-one interviews, injuries, pressure to perform in the classroom and on the field, pressure to improve performance, and management of relationships within the team are all contributors to a collegiate athlete's high risk of obtaining poor mental health (Crocker et al., 2021)

One of the main mental health stressors that was discussed by the collegiate female athletes as well as found in the literature was anxiety, more specifically performance anxiety. The collegiate female athletes spoke about their anxiety to perform well in practices, games, weight room sessions, and class. Their experience with performance anxiety coincides with Wesney (2020) when he described the numerous factors that could contribute to performance anxiety such as, "fans and spectators, time, competitive level, setting, and consequences, whereas some internal factors could be investment, uncertainty, self-confidence, and letting oneself down or others" (p. 1). He further explained that although some anxiety can be normal in a collegiate female athlete, when there is an overwhelming amount of anxiety for the athlete to perform, the anxiety can overwhelm the athlete and cause serious mental health issues (Wesney, 2020).

In addition to performance anxiety on the field, the collegiate female athletes also spoke about how time-management was a major mental health stressor. The collegiate female athletes explained how it was difficult to complete assignments for class due to sports schedules, which included practices, games, travel requirements, and weight room sessions. Just like the collegiate female athletes addressed in their semi-structed one-on-one interviews, the literature also stated that there is a massive time commitment a collegiate athlete must dedicate towards her, and it can greatly affect academic performance, prohibit the ability to attend social events, and impact time management skills (Huml, 2019). Furthermore, not all athletes are able to manage their

time, and end up having to switch majors (Gomez et al., 2018). This was also identified in the semi-structed one-on-one interviews when two athletes admitted to changing their major.

Research Question 2: What barriers do collegiate female athletes experience when navigating mental health stressors?

The collegiate female athletes as well as the coaches described numerous barriers that prevent a collegiate female athlete from accessing supports to identify and navigate mental health stressors. Every single collegiate female athlete that engaged in the research study admitted to not knowing where the mental health counselors were located, and not knowing who those individuals were. Both the collegiate female athletes and the literature acknowledge that health literacy and being unaware of where to locate supports is a huge issue. Collegiate female athletes are a renowned at-risk group for suffering mental health stressors, yet they underutilize available mental health supports (Sudano et al., 2017). Furthermore, Hegarty et al. (2018), concluded that not only do collegiate female athletes not use the mental health services at their university, only 10% of collegiate athletes experiencing mental health stressors seek out treatment. This lack of support use is because of the absence collegiate female athletes are unaware of how to access these supports. Research conducted by Cox et al. (2017) determined that 25.7 % of collegiate female athletes were unaware of how to access mental health treatment at their college, and 44.5% of collegiate female athletes had not received mental health education from their athletic department.

In addition to not knowing where to go, the collegiate female athletes as well as the coaches identified the waitlist issue to be a significant barrier when trying to achieve supports for navigating mental health stressors. One collegiate female athlete explained her teammate's experience with trying to receive help from a counselor, and the wait was about a month and a

half to two months. Additionally, the collegiate coaches explained how the mental health counselors are grossly understaffed and are weeks behind in supporting collegiate female athletes and their mental health stressors. According to the Center for Collegiate Mental Health 2021, the nationwide average ratio for mental health counselors to students is about 1:120. At Stride Right University, the ratio of mental health counselors to students is approximately 1:1700. There is a huge difference between the nationwide average ratio and Stride Right University's ratio therefore supporting the coaches' statements declaring that the counselors are completely understaffed.

Research Question 3: How do coaches describe their capacity to provide collegiate female athletes with supports to navigate mental health stressors?

Based on the experiences provided by the collegiate coaches, the coaches are limited in the supports that they can provide to help collegiate female athletes navigate mental health stressors. When speaking with the collegiate female athletes, they explained that they felt comfortable seeking help from their coaches due to a positive relationship with their coach. Research conducted by Powers et al. (2020) found that "social support in general, and from the coach in particular, reinforces the idea that better understanding the coach–athlete relationship may help predict athletes' mental health" (p. 174). Additionally, when the "coach– athlete relationship is strongly related to athletes' basic psychological needs and has the potential to be helpful during physically, psychologically, and emotionally challenging times" (Powers et al. 2020, p. 174). Although the collegiate female athletes that were interviewed found that their coaches were a great outlet to speak to about any issues that they may be experiencing, their qualifications do not uphold. Coaches undergo a training on mental health, but they are only able to help the athletes with a surface level support system. Coaches are not qualified to help

collegiate female athletes with serious mental health stressors and are required to pass the baton to the mental health counselors. The issue with this transfer of responsibility is that the counselors are bombarded with other students and athletes that are experiencing mental health stressors, so a waitlist issue ends up forming. Additionally, when speaking with the coaches, they were unaware of all of the supports that the Wellness Center provides. Artifacts, such as flyers, were gathered from the Wellness Center that offered students numerous activities to participate in to alleviate stress, anxiety, depression, addiction, etc.. Unfortunately, these supports were not tailored to the collegiate female athlete population, nor were they communicated very clearly. If the supports available are not being communicated to the athletic coaches and players, then they are pointless.

Implications and Recommendations

This qualitative case study gathered insight from collegiate female athletes and coaches to understand the mental health stressors that female athletes experience at the collegiate level, as well as the supports and barriers that they encounter while trying to navigate these mental health stressors. The following recommendations are separated into two vital sections, practice and future research. The practice section will discuss implementations that colleges and universities can instill to help collegiate female athletes and coaches identify mental health stressors, as well as additional supports that can be adopted to help collegiate female athletes deal and cope with their mental health stressors.

The future research section will focus on ideas for supplementary research that can relate to this study. The recommendations are specific to collegiate female athletes at Stride Right University since this type of participant and location was the focus of this study. However, other

universities can implement these ideas and adapt them for male and non-binary collegiate athletes since athletes of all genders may experience similar stressors across the United States.

Practice

Additional hiring of mental health counselors. Universities need to focus on the mental health of collegiate female athletes on their campuses. According to Ketchen et al. (2019) "Poor mental health hinders students' academic success; untreated mental health issues may lead to lower GPAs, discontinuous enrollment, and too often, lapses in enrollment" (p.1). Furthermore, a university's "investment in student mental health is important for the social, educational, and economic well-being of students, their campuses, and broader society" (Kethen et al., 2019, p. 1). Both academic and economic benefits can occur when a university invests time and resources in supports for collegiate female athletes (Ketchen et al., 2019). The need for accessible and available mental health counselors is pertinent. All the participants stressed the need for the mental health counselors to be easily accessible and available. They discussed how they were unaware of where to find the mental health counselors because they did not make themselves easily accessible to the collegiate female athletes. Lexi explained:

> I think they should just be more recognizing of us. I feel like personally I haven't taken the therapy route because I'm like scared to make that first move. I feel like I'm not telling people reach out to me, but I'm just saying reaching out and branching out to other people in general, and just being like you're not alone, and if you need the support come, get it. I feel like I'd like a little push for not only me, but other people that feel the same way. I think it's important.

By hiring more mental health counselors, it would lessen the caseload of each counselor, therefore making him or her more available to reach out to collegiate female athletes and make themselves more easily accessible and available. Universities should follow and instill UT's Counselors in Academic Residence (CARE) program. This program implants mental health counselors within each department at the college. This allows the counselor to become a member

of that department thus creating relationships with students and staff. Therefore, the help being provided is “local, and counselors are knowledgeable about the stressors, climate, dynamics, and resources within that unit” (Ketchen et al., 2019, p. 6).

The participants also described how there is a significant waitlist issue when trying to access a mental health counselor. This is an issue because some mental health stressors can be time sensitive, and an athlete cannot wait weeks or months to receive support. Julianne explained her teammate’s experience with trying to receive support for a mental health stressor. She said:

> I know that people who have tried to contact them. It's either been like waitlisted, or it's just to me as a psychology major, being waitlisted for a mental health crisis is kind of just that like hurts me because it's like, but what if they need is you?

Coach John also addressed the waitlist issue and explained how there needs to be additional hires for the counseling center. He said:

> You know we have a counseling center which, to my knowledge, is grossly understaffed. Even when we send typically, we have a major issue, you know we'll ask a student athlete, do you want to talk? You know normally the process that we talk to our athletic trainer, who also has a counseling background, and we say, you know we'll let's get you with them. Speak to him, and then he will kind of guide you where you need to go, so he'll take that first. He will then go to the counseling center and usually try to get them in, and they typically do. But they're weeks behind.

By hiring more mental health counselors, the waitlist could be reduced because there would be more individuals available to support collegiate female athletes that are experiencing mental health stressors. Moreover, but adopting UT’s CARE program, waitlist issues could be alleviated.

Implementation of consistent visualization exercises and meetings across collegiate female athletic teams. Implementing consistent visualization exercises for collegiate female athletes as well as creating mental health meetings across female athletic teams could be additional successful supports to help collegiate female athletes navigate mental health stressors.

During the semi-structured one-on-one interviews, the collegiate female athletes explained how they had engaged in visualization exercises during the pre-season. During these exercises, led by their assistant coach, the athletes learned about positive self-talk. Toni said:

> I think maybe doing a few sessions on visualization. I think those things helped, but I think actually bringing them onto the field would be good.
> Maybe just talk a little more and have a few more sessions on specific things. Maybe doing polls on what everyone is feeling and try to find something that's similar and focus on that specifically.

The collegiate female athletes really enjoyed these exercises and felt that they were beneficial, but unfortunately, they did not continue them throughout the season. The athletes explained that incorporating these visualization exercises throughout the season and year could help them to cope with mental health stressors.

In addition to the visualization exercises, the collegiate female athletes also stressed the importance of creating mental health meetings between female athletic teams. Creating meetings between the teams would allow for collegiate female athletes to speak with athletes on other teams who may be experiencing the same mental health issues. Michelle said:

> I think something that would be good would be having a kind of laid-back type of, not an official meeting, but a gathering of some sort, where as many student athletes can come, and we all can just talk to each other about stuff. I know, like there's a Diversity Committee at Stride Right University, and they talk about mental health stuff all the time, but to get specifically all student athletes, I feel like that will be really beneficial.

Creating a meeting between different female athletic teams would provide collegiate female athletes with strong "social support." A strong social support system can help collegiate female athletes navigate through challenging physical, psychological, and emotional times as well as address an athlete's psychological needs (Powers et al. 2020).

Hiring and assignment of a mental health counselor or a sports specific psychologist that is in the athletic building. Hiring and assigning a mental health counselor or a sports

specific psychologist to serve collegiate female athletes would be a beneficial support. The individual should be located right in the athletic building so that collegiate female athletes could easily have access to the support. Sudano et al. (2017) gathered information about mental health services and found that the "NCAA Mental Health Best Practices suggests that qualified mental health clinicians should be easily accessible to student-athletes, which includes being accessible through establishment of a self-referral process" (p. 265). Furthermore, Cutler and Dwyer (2020) added that the individual that is providing support needs to be near the athletic training room so that collegiate female athletes will be able to self-refer themselves. Additionally, The NCAA Best Practices (2017) suggests that the individual providing the mental health services should have an "office space within or proximate to athletics department facilities' to increase the clinician's visibility and accessibility" (p. 265). Providing collegiate athletes with close and available mental health services may promote and encourage them to seek help navigating their mental health stressors. Moreover, when speaking with the collegiate female athletes, they explained that they would feel more comfortable talking to someone about their mental health stressors if that person was familiar with them and their sport. Lexi stated:

> I think having a specific person there for mental health would be awesome. That's something we don't have. It could be a personal athletic type of therapist who could just be there for you. That would be the best option. It needs to be somebody who specifically has studied mental health.

Coach Lauren echoed Lexi's idea of instilling a specific mental health counselor of some sort into the athletic building by saying:

> I think in an absolutely perfect world, I believe every single athletic department should have some type of counseling available only for student athletes, and I'm not even talking about mental training. I'm talking about mental health, depression, anxiety, problems with sleeping, even things like alcohol and drug abuse, because I think those things get overlooked a lot of times like oh that doesn't happen t athletes. It does. In fact, it's probably a little bit more prevalent sometimes, and they're not aware of it.

The hiring of a mental health counselor or sport psychologist and positioning him or her near the athletic training room could help collegiate female athletes identify and navigate mental health stressors. This support could allow for collegiate female athletes to easily access support and therefore prevent their mental health stressors from progressing into a more serious health condition.

Future Research

There is a seeming need for future research. While this research study has acquired insight into the mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experience as well as the supports and boundaries that ameliorate them, the findings were based exclusively on the voices of the six collegiate female athletes and three collegiate coaches. It would be advantageous to expand this study by using a larger sample size of participants that are enrolled in different sports (both team sports and individual sports) as well as including various institutions.

One could analyze the mental health stressors discovered through different teams and colleges to see if they are the same or different with more culturally diverse athletes. Since there is already limited research out there on collegiate female athletes and mental health stressors, hearing the voices of many more entities could add even more authenticity to the results found. Therefore, more research is required to be able to provide collegiate females with skills and supports to identify and navigate mental health stressors. Prospective research questions that could be used for future research are as follows:

1. How do collegiate female athletes that participate in individual sports describe the mental health stressors that they have encountered during their collegiate career? How do collegiate female athletes that participate in team sports describe the mental health stressors that they have encountered during their collegiate career?

2. How are the mental health stressors similar or different between colleges?

3. In general, what are some practical ways athletic buildings can better support collegiate female athletes identify and navigate mental health stressors?

Summary

This study provided valuable information regarding the mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experience as well as the supports and boundaries that are available to them. This study is significant because it provided vital information regarding prevalent mental health stressors that collegiate female athletes experienced, as well as highlighted the supports and barriers they have access to. Additional collegiate female athletes that were not involved in the study can benefit from the findings of this dissertation research study since it called attention to the mental health challenges that student athletes struggle with while balancing academic obligations alongside athletic commitments, encouraging them to leverage supports available at their colleges. This study emphasized the need for proper tools, supports, and resources that will allow for female athletes to overcome, as well as control mental health stressors that they may experience during college. Finally, this study allowed for collegiate female athletes and coaches to share their experiences with mental health stressors which can allow for the information to be transferable to male collegiate athletes, as well as non-athlete college students.

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Appendix A

Site Permission Letter

Drexel University
Date: TBD

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Dianna Marinaro, and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Drexel University. I am seeking permission to recruit participants for my dissertation study at your university. The purpose of this study is to explore mental health stressors that female athletes experience while in college, as well as identify obstacles and resources available to them. The research will entail individual interviews with collegiate female athletes and focus groups with coaches, as well as an artifact collection of available resources on campus to support female athletes with navigating mental health stressors.

I will invite individuals from your organization to participate in this study. As mentioned above, the individuals will participate in a one-on-one Zoom interview lasting approximately 60 minutes or a Zoom focus group interview lasting approximately 90 minutes. For purpose of data collection, I will not start until each participant has given their consent to allow me to record the one-on-one interviews and focus group interview and take handwritten notes through the process. The recordings and interview transcripts will only be reviewed by myself and my supervising professor, and then only for purposes of identifying key themes, findings, and results. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, all participants will remain anonymous and will be identified only by pseudonym.

The research participants will not be advantaged or disadvantaged in any way. They will be reassured that they can withdraw their permission at any time during this study without any penalty. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study. The participants will not be paid for this study. I therefore request permission in writing to conduct my research at your university. The permission letter should be on your university's headed paper, signed and dated, and specifically referring to myself by name and the title of my study.

Please let me know if you require any further information. I look forward to your response as soon as is convenient.

Best regards,

Dianna Marinaro, Doctoral Candidate

Drexel University School of Education

Dmm565@drexel.edu

Appendix B

Invitation to Participate in Dissertation Research Study for Collegiate Female Athletes

DATE TBD

Dear Student A,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a dissertation study that I am conducting on mental health stressors experienced by collegiate female athletes. The purpose of this study is to explore mental health stressors that female athletes at your university experience, as well as identify obstacles and resources available to help navigate these mental health stressors.

If you agree to participate, you will participate in a one-on-one Zoom interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. For purpose of data collection, I ask that I be permitted to video record, and take handwritten notes throughout the interview process. The recordings and interview transcripts will only be reviewed by myself and my supervising professor, and then only for purposes of identifying key themes, findings, and results. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, all participants will remain anonymous and will be identified only by pseudonym.

If you are available to participate, I can be reached at 631-521-4755 or by email at dmm565@drexel.edu. If you have questions, I am available to provide more information.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

Dianna Marinaro, Doctoral Candidate

Drexel University School of Education

Appendix C

Invitation to Participate in Dissertation Research Study for Coaches

DATE TBD

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study that I am conducting on mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes. The purpose of this study is to explore mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes at your university, as well as identify obstacles experienced by athletes and resources available to them.

If you agree to participate, you will participate in a focus group interview lasting approximately 90 minutes that will take place using Zoom. For purpose of data collection, I ask that I be permitted to video record and take handwritten notes throughout the interview process The recordings and interview transcripts will only be reviewed by myself and my supervising professor, and then only for purposes of identifying key themes, findings, and results. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, all participants will remain anonymous and will be identified only by pseudonym.

If you are available to participate, I can be reached at 631-521-4755 or by email at dmm565@drexel.edu. If you have questions, I am available to provide more information.

Thank you for your time. I look forward to your response.

Best regards,

Dianna Marinaro, Doctoral Candidate

Drexel University School of Education

Appendix D

Formal Invitation to Participate in One-on-One Interview for Research Study for Collegiate Female Athletes

DATE TBD

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to formally invite you and thank you for agreeing to participate in a study that I am conducting on mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes. The purpose of this study is to explore mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes at your university, as well as identify obstacles experienced by athletes and resources available to them.

As a reminder, since you agreed to participate, you will partake a one-on-one Zoom interview lasting approximately 60 minutes.

If available, please have documents and/or artifacts that pertain to the study ready to virtually share at your interview. These include things such as personal journals, mental health flyers, mental health brochures, mental health websites for your university, mental health magazines from around campus, etc. You will be able to upload to the Zoom chat or you can email them to me at dmm565@drexel.edu.

As a reminder, here is you time, date, and Zoom login information for your interview:

Time:_____

Date:_____

Zoom link and password:_____

If you have questions, I am available to provide more information. Thank you for your time. I look forward to meeting with you.

Best regards,

Dianna Marinaro, Doctoral Candidate

Drexel University School of Education

Appendix E

Formal Invitation to Participate in Focus Group Interview for Research Study for Coaches

DATE TBD

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to formally invite you and thank you for agreeing to participate in a study that I am conducting on mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes. The purpose of this study is to explore mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes at your university, as well as identify obstacles experienced by athletes and resources available to them.

As a reminder, since you agreed to participate, will partake a Zoom focus group interview with up to 4 people in total. The focus group is expected to last approximately 90 minutes.

If possible, please bring documents and/or artifacts that pertain to the study to your interview. These include things such as personal journals, mental health flyers, mental health brochures, mental health websites for your university, mental health magazines from around campus, etc. You can also email them to me at dmm565@drexel.edu.

As a reminder, here is you time, date, and location for your interview:

Time:_____

Date:_____

Zoom link and password:_____

If you have questions, I am available to provide more information. Thank you for your time. I look forward to meeting with you.

Best regards,

Dianna Marinaro, Doctoral Candidate

Drexel University School of Education

Appendix F

Consent to Participate for Collegiate Female Athletes

Drexel University

Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

To be reviewed with the participant prior to commencing the interview or focus group. Verbal consent is to be obtained.

1. Title of research study: Identification and Navigation of Mental Health Stressors in Collegiate Female Athletes

2. Researcher: Dianna Marinaro

3. Why you are being invited to take part in a research study

You are invited to take part in a research study. Your participation will deepen the researcher's understanding of her proposed dissertation topic through the lens of qualitative interviewing. This qualitative case study aims to identify common mental health stressors amongst collegiate female athletes. In addition, the supports and boundaries that prevent these athletes from receiving the proper help as well as the supports that they use to ameliorate the mental health stressors they experience will be highlighted.

4. What you should know about this study

Whether or not you take part is up to you.
You can choose not to take part.
If you decide to not be a part of this research no one will hold it against you.
Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

5. How many people will be studied?

There will be 6-8 participants.

6. What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will participate in approximately 60-minute semi-structured Zoom interview. Participants will be selected for the one-on-one interviews or focus group based on their availability. Interviews will be planned at convenient and quiet location that allow for confidentiality. Interviews will be video recorded through Zoom. The information will be transcribed verbatim; and this data will be used to aide to the study.

You may also be asked to share documents and artifacts that relate to the study, such as personal journals, mental health flyers, mental health brochures, mental health websites for your university, mental health magazines from around campus, etc. All artifacts and documents you provide will be photographed and the originals returned to you.

7. Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

8. Will being in this study help me in any way?

There are no benefits to you from your taking part in this research. Beyond the researcher's learning through an applied experience, there are no known benefits to others from your taking part in this research. Although there are no known benefits to others, the research may benefit others such as collegiate athletes and higher education professionals (coaches, professors, and mental health counselors.)

9. What happens to the information collected?

Efforts will be made to limit access to your personal information. Your name and other identifying information are confidential, you will only be identified by a pseudonym. The data collected will be stored in a password protected laptop on a password encrypted Drexel OneDrive. The only individuals that will have access to the information will be the researcher and her supervising professor.

10. What else do I need to know?

This research study is being done by a Drexel University student for a dissertation to understand common mental health stressors amongst collegiate female athletes. In addition, researcher wants to understand the supports and boundaries that prevent athletes from receiving the proper help.

Appendix G

Consent to Participate for Coaches

Drexel University

Consent to Take Part in a Research Study

To be reviewed with the participant prior to commencing the interview or focus group. Verbal consent is to be obtained.

1. Title of research study: Identification and Navigation of Mental Health Stressors in Collegiate Female Athletes

2. Researcher: Dianna Marinaro

3. Why you are being invited to take part in a research study

You are invited to take part in a research study. Your participation will deepen the researcher's understanding of her proposed dissertation topic through the lens of qualitative interviewing. This qualitative case study aims to identify common mental health stressors amongst collegiate female athletes. In addition, the supports and boundaries that prevent these athletes from receiving the proper help as well as the supports that they use to ameliorate the mental health stressors they experience will be highlighted.

4. What you should know about this study

Whether or not you take part is up to you.
You can choose not to take part.
If you decide to not be a part of this research no one will hold it against you.
Feel free to ask all the questions you want before you decide.

5. How many people will be studied?

There will be 3-4 participants.

6. What happens if I say yes, I want to be in this research?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will participate in a 90-minute focus group interview. Participants will be selected for the focus group interview based on their availability. Interviews will take place through Zoom and be recorded. The information will be transcribed verbatim; and this data will be used to aide to the study.

You may also be asked to share documents and artifacts that relate to the study, such as personal journals, mental health flyers, mental health brochures, mental health websites for your university, mental health magazines from around campus, etc. All artifacts and documents you provide will be photographed and the originals returned to you.

7. Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

8. Will being in this study help me in any way?

There are no benefits to you from your taking part in this research. Beyond the researcher's learning through an applied experience, there are no known benefits to others from your taking part in this

research. Although there are no known benefits to others, the research may benefit others such as collegiate athletes and higher education professionals (coaches, professors, and mental health counselors.)

9. What happens to the information collected?

Efforts will be made to limit access to your personal information. Your name and other identifying information are confidential, you will only be identified by a pseudonym. The data collected will be stored in a password protected laptop on a password encrypted Drexel OneDrive. The only individuals that will have access to the information will be the researcher and her supervising professor.

10. What else do I need to know?

This research study is being done by a Drexel University student for a dissertation to understand common mental health stressors amongst collegiate female athletes. In addition, researcher wants to understand the supports and boundaries that prevent athletes from receiving the proper help.

Appendix H

Semi-Structured One-on-One Interview Protocol for Collegiate Female Athletes

Time of Interview: TBD

Date: TBD

Place: Stride Right University

Interviewer: Dianna Marinaro

Participant: Collegiate female athletes on the Stride Right Women's Soccer Team

Questions:

Demographic Questions:

1. Please state your name and age.
2. How long have you been playing soccer?
3. What made you pursue soccer at the collegiate level?

Academic Questions:

4. What major and professional goals did you have in mind before attending Stride Right University?
5. What is your current major, and how did you choose this major?
6. Is your current major different than the major that you had chosen before attending Stride Right University?
   A. If your major has changed, why did it change?
7. What are the most common majors on your team?
   A. Why do you think this is the case?

Mental Health Stressor Questions:

8. What do you believe are the main mental health stressors that female athletes at Stride Right University in the northeast region of Pennsylvania encounter?
   A. Why do you think this is the case?

9. What sort of impact do you think these stressors have on your life athletically?

   A. Academically?

   B. Socially?

Experience with Mental Health Stressors Questions:

10. Tell me about a time you were experiencing mental health stressors?

11. When you are feeling these mental health stressors how are you accessing supports?

12. What barriers have you experienced that have prevented you from getting the help and support you needed when experiencing mental health stressors?

Skills to Navigate Mental Health Stressors Questions:

13. What do you think would be a good way for schools to provide female athletes at Stride Right University with the skills to navigate mental health issues?

14. What do you think would be a good way for coaches to provide female athletes at Stride Right University with the skills to navigate mental health issues?

15. What do you think would be a good way for mental health counselors to provide female athletes at Stride Right University with the skills to navigate mental health issues?

16. What do you think would be a good way for faculty members to provide female athletes at Stride Right University with the skills to navigate mental health issues?

Support Questions:

17. What supports are currently available at your school to help female athletes navigate and cope with mental health stressors?

18. Have you had experience with any of these supports?

19. How would you describe the experience that anyone you know has had with these supports?

Suggestions for Navigating Mental Health Stressors Questions:

20. What would you have to change for college athletes to have/adopt better mental health management skills?

21. What do you think would happen if student athletes learned skills to better navigate mental health stressors?

22. What suggestions could you make that would provide student athletes at Stride Right University with skills to navigate mental health issues?

Appendix I

Semi-Structured Focus Group Interview Protocol for Coaches

Time of Interview: TBD

Date: TBD

Place: Stride Right University

Interviewer: Dianna Marinaro

Participant: Higher education professionals (coaches, mental health counselors and faculty members)

Questions:

Relationship to Stride Right University and Mental Health:

1. Please state your name and age.
2. How long have you worked at this University?
3. What is your experience helping female athletes navigate mental health stressors?

Academic Questions:

4. What supports are available to help collegiate female athletes choose an academic major?

5. What are the top three majors on your team?

    A. Why do you think this is the case?

6. During your experience working as a collegiate coach at Stride Right University, have you witnessed specific majors taking precedence amongst your athletes?

    A. If so, what were/are these majors?

7. During your experience working as a collegiate coach at Stride Right University, have you witnessed athletes changing their major during their collegiate years?

    A. If so, what are some of the reasons as to why these athletes changed their major?

Mental Health Questions:

8. How would you define mental health stressors?

9. What are ways that you can identify mental health stressors in collegiate female athletes?

10. What do you believe are the main mental health stressors that female athletes at Stride Right University in the northeast region of Pennsylvania encounter?

    A. Why do you think this is the case?

11. What sort of impact do you think these stressors have on female collegiate athletes athletically?

    A. Academically?

    B. Socially?

Supports Provided by Coaches:

12. What do you think would be a good way for coaches to provide female athletes at Stride Right University with the skills to navigate mental health issues?

Supports Available:

13. What supports are currently available at your school to help female athletes navigate and cope with mental health stressors?

14. What supports do you currently provide to help female athletes navigate and cope with mental health stressors?

15. How do these supports align today's athletes and their mental health issues?

16. How could the current supports be improved?

Suggestions for Navigating Mental Health Stressors Questions:

17. What would you have to change for college athletes to have/adopt better mental health management skills?

18. What could you personally change in order to help collegiate female athletes navigate mental health stressors?

19. What suggestions could you make that would provide student athletes at Stride Right University with skills to navigate mental health issues?

Appendix J

Artifact Matrix

Categories	Artifact #1	Artifact #2	Artifact #3	Artifact #4
Location Obtained & What happens at this Location	Obtained from the Health and Wellness Center at Stride Right University. Students are able to use this location to promote health and wellness, as well as speak with counselors, and wellness coordinators to help them navigate any mental health stressors that they are experiencing.	Obtained from the Counseling office located in the Health and Wellness Center at Stride Right University. In this location, students are able to make an appointment to meet one on one with a counselor to help them navigate any mental health stressors that they are experiencing.	Obtained from the Counseling office located in the Health and Wellness Center at Stride Right University. In this location, students are able to make an appointment to meet one on one with a counselor to help them navigate any mental health stressors that they are experiencing.	Obtained from the Health and Wellness Center at Stride Right University. Students are able to use this location to promote health and wellness, as well as meet with counselors, and wellness coordinators to help them navigate any mental health stressors that they may be experiencing.
Type of Artifact	Flyer located on the Bulletin Board of the Health and Wellness Center	Flyer located on the Bulletin Board of the Counseling Center	Flyer located on the Bulletin Board of the Counseling Center	Flyer located on the Bulletin Board of the Health and Wellness Center
Design of Artifact	This artifact was an informational flyer that addressed numerous health issues such as substance abuse including alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and vaping. It provided short descriptions of workshops that are available to	This artifact was an informational flyer that promoted and offered Mindfulness Group Learning. This flyer had information about the benefits of mindfulness, as well as a picture demonstrating an individual	This artifact was an informational flyer that provided students with an overview of the services that are provided by the Counseling and Psychological Services to students at Stride Right University.	This artifact was an informational flyer that advertised doodling. The artifact had numerous doodles all over the page which was pleasing to the eye. The artifact also listed the numerous reasons for

	students, and how to contact counselors and wellness coordinators.	participating in mindfulness.		instilling doodling in one's daily life.
Information Included on Artifact	Included evidence-based practices and workshops to help students cope with addicting substances. Each workshop provided a short description of what to expect if the student were to attend.	Included vital information about mindfulness group learning. This artifact highlighted the key aspects and benefits of mindfulness which included: 1. Being emotionally calmer. 2. Awareness and acceptance of the present moment. 3. Clear and creative thoughts. 4. Take responsibility for your well-being 5. Develop your own stress management. 6. Trust your felt sense. 7. Learn pain management and anxiety reduction skills. 8. Cultivate kindness and compassion for yourself and others. Additionally, this flyer	Included information on individual and group counseling that are available to students with are experiencing depression, stress, anxiety, family problems, relationship problems, academic problems, alcohol and drug use issues, understanding self, identity-related concerns, domestic violence/dating, and violence/sexual violence. Additionally, this flyer defined what a counselor is and the credentials that he or she needs to entail to fulfill this role. Psychiatric services, initial evaluations and consultations, individual counseling, group therapy,	Included research-based information regarding the importance and benefits of doodling backed by research conducted at Harvard University. This flyer listed the numerous benefits of doodling such as: 1. Helps regulate mood regulating. 2. Improves memory recall. 3. Sparks creativity and authenticity. 4. Improves problem solving. 5. Improves memory. 6. Helps process emotions. 7. Alleviates stress, relaxes doodler. 8. Helps you learn more effectively. 9. Can improve big picture thinking. 10. Makes you a better listener.

		provided the activities that would take place if a student were to engage in mindfulness group learning, such as meditation, breathwork, body scans, gentle yoga, and stress reduction practices.	crisis intervention, community referrals, alcohol/drug counseling, and psycho-educational presentations are also available to students. Finally, the flyer explains what group therapy entails, as well as the many benefits that it entails, and how to join group therapy.	11. Boosts mood. 12. Makes you more productive. 13. Helps you concentrate. 14. Stops brain from slipping into inattentive state.
Contact Information for Help	Contained both a phone number and email address to contact	Contained the location of the Mindfulness Group Learning sessions, as well as the day/times. Also provided a phone number.	Besides the information to contact the Counseling and Psychological Service Center, there was also contact information for a main individual who is in charge of Group Therapy. This individual's direct phone number was listed.	Contained a location, date, and time for the doodling activity. This artifact did not provide any phone number or email address for further support.
Additional Resources for Help	Each workshop contained numerous dates/times for students to attend. Also provided email addresses and	There was only a location as to where the group would take place and a phone number. There was no email address for	There was a location, email, and two phone numbers to contact for help regarding the services that the Counseling and	This flyer only provided a location, date, and time for this wellness activity. It did not provide the students with

	phone numbers for further assistance.	further assistance.	Psychological Center offer.	ways to contact any counselor or wellness coordinator.
Gerund **(Process Code)**	Continuing over time, supporting, reflecting, accommodating the whole person, processing, trusting, and changing.	Learning, talking, listening, healing, breathing, trusting, accepting, processing, and feeling.	Counseling, talking, listening, understanding, supporting, exploring, processing.	Doodling, boosting, improving, problem solving, processing, listening, relaxing, thinking, and concentrating.
Additional **Notes**	This flyer provided numerous interactive workshops for students to engage in.	This flyer summarized the importance of engaging in group activities to promote overall wellness and cope/navigate mental health stressors.	This flyer provided students with pertinent information about one-on-one counseling as well as group counseling through the Counseling and Psychological Center located at Stride Right University.	This flyer provided students with numerous benefits of doodling as an outlet to deal with mental health stressors, but did not have additional contact information if a student wanted to reach out to a wellness coordinator and/or counselor.

Categories	**Artifact #5**	**Artifact #6**	**Artifact #7**	**Artifact #8**
Location **Obtained &** **What happens** **at this** **Location**	Online at Stride Right University Counseling and Psychological Services.			

Type of Artifact	Online Website			
Design of Artifact	This artifact was an online website. There are numerous tabs that are available for students to click on based on what mental health stressors they are dealing with.			
Information Included on Artifact	The tabs on this website include: 1. Local counseling resources 2. Student services resource 3. Crisis numbers 4. Warm lines (if you need to talk but are not in crisis) 5. General resources 6. COVID 19 resources 7. Suicide prevention 8. Mindfulness, yoga, and stress reduction 9. Sleep 10. Mood/behavior tracker 11. Post-traumatic stress disorder 12. Therapist locators 13. Drug and alcohol counseling resources			

	14. Eating disorders resources 15. Religious counseling resources 16. LGBTQIA resources			
Contact Information for Help	A student needs to click on each tab to access contact information for the specific need.			
Additional Resources for Help	Each tab provided information for the student to access further help.			
Gerund (Process Code)	Stress reducing, counseling, talking, communicating, supporting, reflecting, accommodating.			
Additional Notes	This online website provided numerous outlets for students to receive help.			