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Examination of the Psychological Impact of Sports-Related Concussions in the Adolescent Patient

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Objectives: Identify the psychological responses perceived by adolescents during recovery from concussion; (2) Describe the desired types of social support while recovering; (3) Compare responses across high and low socioeconomic (SES) status public high schools.

Design and Setting: A descriptive study with a qualitative design was used to explore the psychological impact of concussion in high school athletes attending high and low SES status, public high schools.

Participants: High school athletes, 13 to 18 years old, who were diagnosed with a concussion within the last two years and have been returned to full participation.

Intervention: Focus group semi-structured interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Main Outcome Measurement: Transcribed interviews were analyzed independently by two researchers for emerging themes and then triangulated. An independent auditor was used to peer-debrief.

Results: Two primary themes emerged within the research: 1) frustration and 2) peer support. 1a) Falling behind in academics created anxiety, which was exasperated by poor

communication between healthcare providers and teachers. This finding was independent of gender and SES. 1b) Coping skills varied among gender and SES. It appeared that females had better coping skills, followed by low SES males and lastly high SES males. When poor coping skills were combined with boredom, frustration followed. Frustration escalated into anger when a healthy outlet was not available (e.g., peers, sports). 1c) Boredom appeared to be the main factor associated with poor compliance to healthcare guidelines. 2) Peer support appeared to be desired in the females and low SES males; however, high SES males preferred isolation.

Conclusions: Although the respondents were returned to full participation, many of them still experienced symptoms of headaches, lack of concentration, impaired study ability, and anger. The psychological distress following concussion appeared to be mediated by appropriate coping skills and enhanced communication to ensure that the patient was receiving the support (social, academic and medical) necessary for positive outcomes.

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Key Words: *concussion, adolescent, focus groups, psychological distress*