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Jillia Cook
Wilmington College, jillia.k.cook@wilmington.edu

Erika Smith-Goodwin
Wilmington College

Jennifer Walker
Wilmington College

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Collegiate Student Athletes Show No Gender Bias Towards Athletic Trainers

Jillia Cook; Erika Smith-Goodwin PhD, AT, ATC; Jennifer Walker MA, AT, ATC
Wilmington College; Sport Sciences Department

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to investigate gender bias; collegiate student athletes' preferences towards same sex athletic training coverage.

DESIGN AND SETTING

The study was a descriptive study with survey research at a small division III liberal arts college in southwest Ohio. Paper surveys were distributed during practices, team-meetings and open fields. The independent variable was collegiate student athletes categorized by gender, year in school and sport. The dependent variable was preferences towards a specific gender of their athletic trainer.

PARTICIPANTS

The research was conducted as a convenience sample. 479 student athletes participated with a return rate of 71% (n=341). The sports included; football 19% (n=88), women's soccer 7% (n=32), men's soccer 10% (n=46), cheerleading 3% (n=12), men's and women's cross country 6% (n=29), volleyball 3% (n=13), men's basketball 5% (n=26), women's basketball 4% (n=20), men's and women's swimming 9% (n=45), wrestling 3% (n=15), men's lacrosse 5% (n=25), men's and women's track and field 12% (n=59), baseball 8% (n=39) and softball 6% (n=30). There were 32.8% (n=112) upperclassmen and 65.9% (n=225) underclassmen. 64.8% (n=221) were males and 34.6% (n=117) were females.

INTERVENTION

The instrument contained 20 questions. The questions asked in this survey yielded nominal and ordinal data. In this research study questions 1 through 3 and 18 through 20 were used to collect nominal data. Questions 4 through 17 were used to collect ordinal data. Descriptive statistics (frequency

counts and percentages) were calculated for every applicable item on the survey. Chi Square Test was used with gender and year in school (upperclassmen and underclassmen) as a grouping variable. Kruskal Wallis test was used with sports as the grouping variable. The alpha level was set at 0.05 *a priori*. A panel of experts reviewed the survey instrument for face validity. Content validity was established through a table of specifications (ToS). This study was approved for exempted review by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The data was analyzed using SPSS 24.0.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

Question one through three used a yes² or no¹ scale. A five-point likert scale with choices of Strongly Agree⁵, Agree⁴, Neutral³, Disagree², Strongly Disagree¹ was used for questions 4 through 17. Questions 18-20 were demographics and used scales such as male² or female¹, Freshman⁵ Sophomore⁴ Junior³ Senior² 5th Year Senior¹, and Football¹⁴ Cheerleading¹³ Volleyball¹² Women's Soccer¹¹ Men's Soccer¹⁰ Cross Country⁹ Swimming⁸ Men's Basketball⁷ Women's Basketball⁶ Wrestling⁵ Baseball⁴ Softball³ Men's Lacrosse² Track and Field¹.

RESULTS

59.4% (n=202) of collegiate student athletes do not have a preference on gender with AT sport coverage. Only 7% (n=16) of males say they do have a preference on gender coverage. 26.2% (n=88) of student athletes agree that location/type of injury influence their preference on gender coverage. 58.3% (n=197) athletes disagree or strongly disagree that the gender of the AT influences the quality of athletic training services they receive. 29% (n=99) of student athletes say they do not have more trust with an AT of the same sex. It is statistically significant ($X^2=27.548$, $df=4$, $p=.000$) that 43% (n=50) of

females agree that location does determine the comfort level when it comes to being treated by an opposite sex athletic trainer. 17% (n=38) of males agree that location does determine comfort level when it comes to being treated by an opposite sex athletic trainer. 24% (n=28) of females answered either disagree or strongly disagree with preferring the opposite sex gender cover their sport. 20% (n=23) of females agree or strongly agree with being more comfortable with the same sex athletic trainer, which was statistically significant ($X^2= 12.691$, $df=4$, $p=.013$). Only 9% (n=21) of males agree that they are more comfortable with the same sex AT. 5% (n=9) of males prefer the same sex athletic trainer. There was not a statistically significant difference in upperclassman and underclassman student athlete's preference on gender coverage. However, only 8% (n=9) of upperclassmen either agreed or strongly agreed with having a gender preference on coverage. 42% (n=47) upperclassmen disagree with having a preference of the same sex athletic trainer to cover. 42% (n=35) of football players either strongly agreed, or agreed on preferring opposite sex medical sport coverage.

CONCLUSION

In this study the majority of collegiate student athletes have no preference on the gender of the athletic trainer that covers their sport. Both females and males have little preference of same sex AT coverage. Some female student athletes feel more comfortable with a female AT based on location of their injury. Some female student athletes answered they are more comfortable with a female AT overall. Many male student athletes answered as not being biased against opposite sex athletic trainers. Statistically, gender preference, comfort and trust played a slim role on male student athletes preference of medical sport coverage. This implies that most male student athletes have trust in female ATs, they are comfortable with them, even regarding the location of injury, and most importantly they are agreeable to a female athletic trainer covering their sport. This is a noted change from previous literature (Mazerolle, Burton, Cotrufo) that said bias and gender role stereotyping negatively influenced female athletic trainers when it came to providing services to male sports teams.

KEY WORDS: *Athletic Trainers, Gender Bias, Sport Coverage, Same Sex, Opposite Sex, Sport, Preference*