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Athletic Trainers Provide a Positive Outlet to Athletes' Injuries and Mental State During Summer Travel Baseball Season

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OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to investigate the presence of athletic trainers with summer travel baseball teams, as well as the empathy they may have received from those ATs. David and Larson define empathy as "a skill that combines the health care professional's commitment to understanding the patient's experience followed by the ability to communicate the meaning of the patient's experience by listening attentively and reflecting it back to the patient."

DESIGN AND SETTING

This study used a survey (Survey Monkey Link) to investigate participants of a southern Ohio baseball organization (N=28). The independent variables of this study are the age and field positions (pitchers and field positions) of the participants. The dependent variable of this study was the participant's perceptions of AT presence and empathy.

PARTICIPANTS

This survey was distributed to a southern Ohio baseball organization. A total of N=28 surveys were distributed with a return rate of 78.6% (n=22). The participants were selected by convenience sampling to participate in this study. In regards to demographics, 59.1% (n=13) were 18 years-old at the time of taking the survey and 40.9% (n=9) were 19 years-old. The participants were also questioned about their primary position when taking the field defensively. Of the respondents, 54.5% (n=12) were pitchers and 45.5% (n=10) were field position players. Out of the (n=22) respondents, all (100%) stated that they are playing varsity baseball for a college or university in their 2020 season. This study was approved for exempted review by an Institutional Review Board.

INTERVENTION

A panel of experts determined the face validity of this study. The content validity has been established through the Table of Specifications. Chi-Square tests analyzed field position and prior experience with ATs as the grouping variables. The alpha level was set at $p=.05$ *a priori*.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENT

Questions 1 and 2 collected nominal data with "Yes²" or "No¹" questions. Questions 3 through 10 collected ordinal data using a Likert Scale of 1 through 5 (Strongly Agree⁵, Agree⁴, Neutral³, Disagree², Strongly Disagree¹). Questions 11 through 14 were demographical questions. Question 11 stated "I am ___ years old" with the answers of (18 and 19). Question 12 asked if the participant is currently attending a college or university with the answers of "Yes²" or "No¹" and question 13 asked, if they are attending a college or university, if they are also playing varsity baseball for said college or university. Lastly, Question 14 asked the participant's primary playing position (pitcher or field position), while playing for the travel baseball organization's 2019 summer team.

RESULTS

59.1% (n=13) of the participants have played for a travel team prior to the summer of 2019 and had an AT present while playing for that team ($X^2=5.018$, $df=1$, $p=.025$). 27.2% (n=6) of the participants did not have an athletic trainer present for their previous summer league travel teams. 95.5% strongly agree that having an AT was beneficial to the team and organization during the summer. 95.4% (n=21) stated that they strongly agreed or agreed with the following empathy-based questions: the athletic trainer cared about my

feelings when I was injured, I could trust the athletic trainer to provide quality sports health care, and I felt comfortable reporting my injuries to the athletic trainers. All likert scale questions in this study received either positive or neutral responses. 40.9% (n=9) did not have an athletic trainer for past travel baseball teams.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that athletic trainers have already been integrated into the setting of travel team baseball. However, there is still an absence of ATs in almost half of the population in this study. It is a positive sign that the athletes in this study are receptive to

reporting their injuries and feeling comfortable in the presence of the AT while participating in travel team athletics. Participants in this study also thought highly of their AT experiences in regards to empathy. The high percentage of agree and strongly agree responses regarding empathy and AT presence portray the positive outlet ATs provide to the athlete's injuries and mental state during their season. With travel team organizations providing athletes with high performance demands, the athletic training population should view a rise in ATs providing sports health care to athletes that participate in travel team athletics.

KEY WORDS: *Athletic Trainer, Empathy, Healthcare Professional, Mental Health, Professional Socialization, Rehabilitation*