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NFL Players' Perceptions of Female Athletic Trainers

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OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to investigate one midwest NFL teams' perceptions of female athletic trainers.

DESIGN AND SETTING

A quantitative study with survey research with one NFL team in the midwest. The independent variables for this study were one NFL team from the midwest region. The players were grouped by age, years of experience in the NFL, college experience with a female athletic trainer/past injury, relationship status, and if they have a daughter. The dependent variable for this study is the players' perceptions of female athletic trainers.

PARTICIPANTS

NFL players from one team in the Midwest region (N=78) were surveyed with a response rate of 63%(n=49). 96%(n=47) had received care from a female athletic trainer previously in their career and 4%(n=2) had not. 39%(n=19) of the participants spend an average of zero to one hours in the athletic training clinic every week. 37%(n=18) of participants spend an average of two to three hours per week in the athletic training clinic. 12%(n=6) of participants spend an average of four to five hours in the athletic training clinic during the week. 51%(n=25) have been playing for one to three years. 31%(n=15) have been playing for four to six years. 8%(n=4) have been playing for seven to nine years, and 6%(n=3) have been playing for ten or more years. 61%(n=30) of players are age 20 to 25, 27%(n=13) are aged 26 to 30, 8%(n=4) are aged 31 to 35, and 0%(n=0) or the participants are aged 36 or older. 27%(n=13) of players are single, 41%(n=20) of players are dating, 25%(n=12) of players are married and 4%(n=2) of players are divorced. 20% (n=10) of participants do have

a daughter and 76%(n=37) do not have a daughter.

INTERVENTION

The instrument consisted of 16 questions. The survey questions were grouped by Athletic Trainer Knowledge (question 1), Female Athletic Trainers (questions 2-7), Injury Information (questions 8-9), Relationships (questions 10-14), and Demographics (questions 15-16). A panel of experts determined the face validity of the survey. The content validity was established through the Table of Specifications (ToS). IRB approval was obtained. The surveys were administered by paper via a male staff member in the locker room over a week's time. The surveys were collected immediately after completion in the locker room. Kruskal Wallis tests were used with the grouping variables of the players years in the NFL and the player's relationship status. Chi-Square tests were used with the grouping variables of the player's experience with a female athletic trainer and if the player had a strong relationship with their mother, daughter, or sister. Descriptive statistics including frequency counts and percentages were used for every applicable item. All data was calculated using SPSS 24.0 with an alpha level set at $p=0.05$ *a priori*.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASUREMENTS

The survey was comprised of 16 questions. Questions 1-3, and 5-8 used a 5-point Likert Scale (Strongly Agree⁵, Agree⁴, Don't know³, Disagree², Strongly Disagree¹) to collect ordinal data. Questions 4 and 11 used a 2-point Likert scale (Yes², No¹) to collect nominal data. Question 9 used a 6-point Likert Scale (Zero to One⁶, Two to Three⁵, Four to Five⁴, Six to Seven³, Eight to Nine², Ten or more¹) to collect nominal data. Question 10 used a 4-point Likert Scale (Single⁴, Dating³, Married², Divorced¹) to collect nominal data.

Questions 12-14 used a 6-point Likert Scale (Strongly Agree⁶, Agree⁵, Don't know⁴, Disagree³, Strongly Disagree², Not Applicable¹) to collect ordinal data. Question 15 used a 4-point Likert Scale (One to Three⁴, Four to Six³, Seven to Nine², Ten or more¹) to collect nominal data. Question 16 used a 4-point Likert Scale (Twenty to Twenty-Five⁴, Twenty-Six to Thirty³, Thirty-One to Thirty-Five², Thirty-Six or more¹) to collect nominal data.

RESULTS

100%(N=49) of participants either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that females can uphold the duties of an athletic trainer. It was also found that 96%(n=47) of players have had treatment from a female athletic trainer previously in their career and only 4%(n=2) have not. 100%(N=49) of players also stated they strongly agree or agree to feeling comfortable receiving care from a female athletic trainer. There was a statistically significant difference ($x^2=11.510$, $df=4$, $p=0.021$) in the players thoughts that females are less likely to get a job in professional sports compared to the players previous experience with female athletic trainers. This data showed that 96%(n=47) of players have had previous treatment with a female athletic trainer, and only 4%(n=2) had not had treatment previously from a female. Out of all the players that have received previous care from a female athletic trainer, 10%(n=5) of them did not think that females have a harder time getting positions in professional sports. Which leaves 90%(n=44) that agreed with this statement. The 4%(n=2) of players that have never had experience with a female athletic trainer both agreed or strongly agreed to the statement as well. The 4%(n=2) of players who have never received previous treatment from a female athletic trainer have been in the league between four and six years. There was also a statistically significant difference ($x^2=26.774$, $df=8$, $p=0.001$) in the comparison between the location of the injury determining the players comfort level of receiving treatment from a female athletic trainer and if they have had a

positive relationship with their mother. Of the 73%(n=36) of players that said they strongly agree to having a positive relationship with their mother, 2%(n=1) strongly agree to the statement that the location of the players injury determines their comfort level when receiving treatment from a female athletic trainer, 14%(n=7) agree, 4%(n=2) did not know, 43%(n=21) disagreed and 10%(n=5) strongly disagreed. Of the 16%(n=8) of players that agreed to having a positive relationship with their mother, 6%(n=3) agree to the statement that the location of the players injury determines their comfort level when receiving treatment from a female athletic trainer, 2%(n=1) did not know, 4%(n=2) disagreed, and 4%(n=2) strongly disagreed. Finally, of the 6%(n=3) of players that responded not applicable, 4%(n=2) strongly agree and 2%(n=1). There was a significant difference ($x^2=10.673$, $df=4$, $p=0.030$) in the comparison between the players believing that females are less likely to get a job in professional sports and their positive relationship with their daughter. This significance shows that of the 20%(n=10) of players who have daughters also have a positive relationship with their daughters, the majority of them, 40%(n=6) said that they agreed with the statement that females are less likely to get a job in professional sports than men. From the 76%(n=37) of players who do not have a daughter, 51% (n=21) of them strongly agreed with the statement. There was a statistically significant finding ($x^2=12.710$, $df=3$, $p=0.005$) between player preference to be treated by a male athletic trainer compared to if they have had a positive relationship with their daughter. From the 20%(n=10) of players that strongly agreed to having a positive relationship with their daughter, 50%(n=5) strongly disagreed with the statement that they prefer to receive care from a male athletic trainer. From the 76%(n=37) of players who stated they did not have a daughter, 51%(n=25) disagreed.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the perceptions from the NFL players are positive. Only two players

had not received previous treatment from a female athletic trainer in their college or NFL career. The majority of players stated they did not have a preference in the provider's gender and support female athletic trainers working in a male professional sport. NFL players surveyed even felt comfortable receiving treatment from females no matter the location

of the injury. The study showed that NFL athletes are comfortable and supportive of female athletic trainers being employed in the NFL. This can help diversify the field of athletic training for females, who are underrepresented in male professional sports.

KEY WORDS: *Female Athletic Trainers, NFL Players, Perceptions, Comfort Levels, Underrepresentation of Females*