The Effects of Practice Start Times on Athlete Drinking Behavior

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Introduction

Student-athletes represent a high-risk sub-population on college campuses for alcohol misuse. In contrast to their non-athlete peers, student-athletes have a number of restrictions placed on their time. The drinking culture of student-athletes differs from that of other college students with the student-athletes reporting higher levels of binge drinking, heavier drinking, and more drinking related injuries despite having more preventative educational programs available to them (Nelson & Wechsler, 2009). Moreover, research indicates that these alcohol consumption practices vary across type of sport (e.g., football, volleyball, swimming). College athletes also have distinct motives for drinking when compared to their college peers; the most predominate of which includes using alcohol as a means for reward for success in their athletic performance or for hard work (Pitts, Chow, & Donohue, 2018).

PURPOSE: The purpose of this is to examine the drinking habits of student-athletes changes as a function of mandatory practice time (i.e., each team has standard practices at different times of day).

Methods

Participants

The sample for this study was 105 students who participated in intercollegiate, NCAA varsity sports at a Division 1, midsized, Midwestern University. The participants were 72.4% female and 26. 7% male. The participants were predominantly Caucasian/White (90.5%). A wide variety of sports participated in the study.

Procedure

Data was collected through an anonymous online survey using the Qualtrics program. Email invitations were sent to recruit participants and participants using the snowball sampling method. Participants were entered into a drawing for a randomly selected individual to win a $50 gift card.

Measure

Participants were asked: "What time of the day do you usually start mandatory practice for your sport?". The response options were: before 9 am, between 9am-12pm, between 12pm-3pm, and after 3pm.

Those groups all were evaluated against each other using using questions regarding their alcohol consumption through the items: "In a typical week, how many days do you have at least one drink containing alcohol?", "How many drinks do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?", and "During the last 30 days, what is the highest number of drinks that you drank on any one occasion?", all of which prompted a numerical response from the participant.

The Rutgers Alcohol Problem Index (RAPI) was a 23 item assessment that was used to examine the level of drinking problem the participant has and has been made to target young adults, the age group being evaluated. This scale used a numerical response from the participant based on the number of times an item has occurred within the last year.

Results

For the question "In a typical week, how many days do you have at least one drink containing alcohol?" there was a significant difference (p=0.02) between the group that started practice between 9am-12pm and those who started between 12pm-3pm with those who started practice between 12pm-3pm typically drinking 1.28 more days per week than their 9am-12pm counterparts.

A significant difference (p=0.002) was also seen in the question "During the last 30 days, what is the highest number of drinks that you drank on any one occasion?". Again, there was a significant difference between the group that started practice between 9am-12pm and those who started between 12pm-3pm with those who started practice between 12pm-3pm typically drinking 4.86 more drinks during their highest drinking occasion than the 9am-12pm practice group.

The question "How many drinks do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?" and the results for the RAPI showed no significant difference in results between any of the groups.

Discussion

ANOVAs with Turkey HSD follow up tests showed a statistically significant difference between athletes who started mandatory practice between 9am-12pm and those who started practice between 12pm-3pm regarding the number of days a week that the athletes drank and the highest number of drinks an athlete had consumed within the past 30 days. The later practice start time resulted in higher quantities for both of those groups comparatively.

This studies results could have been impacted by a overwhelmingly female population for participation. It is also important to consider that the results could be affected by the sports that practice at different times in the day and how their drinking behaviors deviate from other sports.

This study provides more information on how the time of day mandatory team practices start for intercollegiate athletics affects the drinking habits of the student athletes. Going forwards, coaches should be encouraged to schedule practices at times earlier in the day to try to steer vulnerable student athletes towards drinking less often and in lesser quantities.

Citations

Nelson, T F, and H Wechsler (2001). Alcohol and College Athletes. Medicine and Science in Sports and Exercise, U.S. National Library of Medicine.

Pitts, M., Chow, G., M., Donohue, B. (2018). Relationship between General and Sport-Related Drinking Motives and Athlete Alcohol Use and Problems. Substance Use & Misuse, 54(1), 146-155.

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