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Insight Grant 2019

Mental health in Canadian elite athletes

Introduction: Researchers have increasingly focused on the mental health of elite athletes, however, there remains a paucity of research on the mental health of elite Canadian athletes.

Purpose: The purpose of this project is to assess the prevalence of mental health disorders, specifically depression, anxiety, and eating disorders among elite Canadian athletes.

Methods: Canadian national team athletes who were training for the 2020 Summer Olympic Games will complete surveys 4 times throughout the year. Data from Time 1 (December 2019) were analyzed using descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations.

Results: Canadian athletes (N = 192) completed the Time 1 survey. Based on the descriptive results, 41.6% of athletes met the cut-off criteria for one or more mental disorders. Specifically, 33.5% of athletes met criteria for major depressive disorder or subthreshold but clinically significant depression symptoms, 17.8% of athletes met criteria for moderate to severe general anxiety, and 7.6% reported scores indicating high risk of an eating disorder. At baseline, stress and training load were both statistically significant correlates of depression and anxiety, but not of eating disorders.

Discussion: This study presents the first data on the prevalence of mental disorders among elite Canadian athletes and demonstrates that they may be at an increased risk of experiencing a mental disorder compared to the general population.