TAKE A TIMEOUT

A skills-based podcast program for coping with mental health challenges as a collegiate athlete

Presented by Alicia A. Dahl, Ph.D., M.S.
Research supported by Abigail Coffey, M.P.H.
University of North Carolina at Charlotte
Topics to Cover

Background
Significance & Innovation
Phase 1: Online Survey
Phase 2: Focus Groups
Phase 3: Podcast Development
Key Take-Aways
PROBLEM: MENTAL HEALTH AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS IS A GROWING PUBLIC HEALTH CONCERN

CHALLENGES: STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH REPORTING MENTAL HEALTH STATUS AND UNDERUTILIZED OR LIMITED MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO STUDENT-ATHLETES
Significance: Increasing mental health concerns among student-athlete populations demanding a need for accessible resources that fit a student-athlete's lifestyle and schedule.

Innovation: Podcasts are an affordable, accessible, and discreet resource for health education and promotion around mental health.
Cognitive & Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (CBT/DBT)

CBT is a form of psychotherapy that treats problems and boosts happiness by modifying dysfunctional emotions, behaviors, and thoughts. Acceptance and validation are added with DBT.
CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Informed by Cognitive & Dialectical behavioral therapy (CBT/DBT)

Objective: Students will develop effective responses to stressors by listening to podcasts that use storytelling to model and navigate through common mental health challenges experienced by student-athletes.

Take a Timeout Study
PHASE 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Objective

To understand the mental health needs of collegiate student-athletes and preferred content and delivery mode of health promotion materials
Eligibility criteria:
- 18 years old, eligible student-athlete during 2018-2020 seasons

Recruitment: through NCAA SAAC reps plus snowball sampling and social media posts

Qualtrics online survey:
- 72 items total: demographics, mental health history, recent mental health status, use of mental health services, impact of COVID-19 on mental health, & the needs and preferences around resources
Results

Sample: N=62 (60 completed, 97%)

- 80.3% women's sports, 19.7% men's sports
- Race/Ethnicity
  - White (n=54, 87.1%)
  - Black or African American (n=6, 9.7%)
  - Asian (n=2, 3.2%)
- Sexual Orientation/Identity
  - 91.7% heterosexual or straight
  - 8.3% LGBT+
- 5 (8%) first-generation college students
- 10 (16.%) transfer students
Results

Prior medical diagnosis of mental health conditions (n=23, 37.1%)

Diagnoses included:
- Anxiety (17.5%)
- Depression (16.3%)
- Eating Disorders (8.8%)
- Bipolar Disorder (3.8%)
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (2.5%)
- Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (1.3%)

Only 2 students were ever hospitalized for their disorder
Results

Figure 1. Distribution of responses to, “What mental health topics do you feel need to be addressed for student-athletes?”

- Managing stress: 91.7%
- Signs of mental distress in ...: 85.0%
- Managing emotions: 81.7%
- Academic/Sports/Life balance: 78.3%
- Coping mechanisms: 75.0%
- Body image: 75.0%
- Eating disorders or unhealthy ...: 73.3%
- General education on mental illness: 65.0%
- Managing time and tasks: 65.0%
- Dealing with defeat: 56.7%
- Discrimination: 55.0%
- Meditation: 35.0%
- Bullying: 26.7%
- Gender identity: 15.0%
Results

Figure 2. Preference for tools/resources for accessing mental health information

- Social media account: 74.6%
- Podcasts on mental health: 72.9%
- A mobile app: 71.2%
- Team training sessions: 59.3%
- Canvas or blackboard: 40.7%
- Video modules: 32.2%
Figure 3. Distribution of responses to, “What method would be best for communicating mental health information to student-athletes?”
Conclusion

The findings of our needs assessment confirmed:
1) student-athletes need accessible mental health resources
2) a podcast delivery method would be acceptable by this population when a sports psychologist is not available or an option
3) coverage of a range of mental health topics is important to make podcast content relatable among the target population
PHASE 2:
FOCUS GROUPS

Objective

To contextualize the needs assessment survey data with the lived experiences of current and recent student-athletes
Methods

Eligibility criteria:
- Prior participant in the needs assessment survey with availability to Zoom during our scheduled sessions

Logistics:
- Held online via Zoom (names edited to ID #)
- Audio recorded for transcription & analysis
- 2 coders reviewed each transcript
- Team met every other week to discuss code application and discrepancies

Focus Group Guide:
- 12 Semi-Structured Focus Group Questions
Results

Sample: N=13 (41 survey participants were invited)
- 84.6% women's sports, 15.4% men's sports
- None of the students attended the same institution
Mental health challenges experienced & frequently mentioned:
- Depression (35.3%)
- Eating disorders (33.3%)
- Anxiety (31.4%)
- Sexual assault was an emergent topic in 3 of the 4 female-only focus groups
Results

Coping mechanisms mentioned in the focus groups:

- reliance on social support (33.6%)
- journaling (18.6%)
- using distractions (15.0%)
- substance use (10.6%)

Additional coping mechanisms discussed by women but not men in the focus groups included alone time (15.0%) and meditation (5.3%).
INJURY AND MENTAL HEALTH

IDENTITY CRISIS
Podcast content suggestions

MAKE THE STORIES RELATABLE

BREAK DOWN THE SITUATIONS WITH INSIDER PERSPECTIVES ABOUT THE CHARACTER'S THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

FOCUS ON MINOR MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES RATHER THAN ONLY TRAGIC OR MONUMENTAL EVENTS

SCRIPT THE SETTINGS TO BE FAMILIAR (E.G., LOCKER ROOMS, DORM ROOMS, FIELD PRACTICE)

TAKE A TIMEOUT STUDY
Objective

To develop and disseminate 26 scripted storytelling podcasts applying CBT & DBT strategies housed on a study website.
PHASE 3: PODCAST DEVELOPMENT

- 26 podcasts were scripted and recorded, with 13 male-focused episodes and 13 female-focused episodes applying CBT/DBT principles.
- Podcast length varied from 7-17 minutes, depending on the complexity of the CBT/DBT skills demonstrated.
- Voice actors were hired and podcast recording and editing was completed at UNC Charlotte.
- A study website was developed by the research team to house the podcasts and track listener data.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Skill</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mindfulness</td>
<td>Observe</td>
<td>Attending to events or emotions without trying to stop them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describe</td>
<td>Applying verbal labels to behavioral and environmental events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participate</td>
<td>Engaging with emotional experience without self-consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Problem Solving</td>
<td>Identify and Overcome: Low risk</td>
<td>Recognizing stressful situations or emotions and formulating a series of options to overcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identify and Overcome: High risk</td>
<td>Recognizing stressful situations or emotions and formulating a series of options to overcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Emotion Regulation</td>
<td>Identify and Label Emotions</td>
<td>Utilizing mindfulness skills to further describe emotional experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Increase Positive Emotional Events</td>
<td>Increasing the number of pleasurable events in one's life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take Opposite Action</td>
<td>Acting in a way that is opposite to the current emotional experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Distress Tolerance</td>
<td>Crisis Survival</td>
<td>Distracting, or self-soothing, to improve the moment, pros/cons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance Skills</td>
<td>Radical acceptance of situation and turning of the mind toward acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willingness vs Willfulness</td>
<td>Willingness is opposition to destructive behaviors, while willfulness is reflective of the negative emotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Self-Empowerment</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Understanding self and ability to overcome mental health challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Service Utilization</td>
<td>Connecting students with mental health services on campus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Welcome to "Take A Timeout", a podcast series aimed to help student-athletes learn strategies on how to cope with mental health challenges and raise their mental wellness using evidence-based practices.

Rooted in Cognitive and Dialectical Behavior Therapies (CBT/DBT), these podcasts are geared towards issues involving: problem-solving, mindfulness, emotion regulation, distress tolerance, and self-empowerment.

Through these scripted podcasts informed by true stories, we hope athletes will learn and engage with the content to help improve skills for coping with mental health challenges within and beyond the sport.

https://www.AthletesTakeATimeout.com/
## IMPLICATIONS FOR CAMPUS PROGRAMMING

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1.</strong> STUDENT-ATHLETES NEED EFFECTIVE AND ACCESSIBLE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT</td>
<td><strong>2.</strong> HEALTH PROMOTION MATERIALS NEED TO BE RELATABLE TO THE STUDENT-ATHLETE EXPERIENCE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study finding: high favorability and acceptability around tools that are readily accessible through mobile devices</td>
<td>Study finding: resources should reflect real experiences, rather than idealistic or overly fabricated content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3.</strong> SOCIAL SUPPORT IS A CRITICAL STRUCTURE FOR STUDENT-ATHLETES NAVIGATING MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS</td>
<td><strong>4.</strong> IDENTITY CRISIS STEMMING FROM SPORT DISRUPTION NEEDS CRITICAL ATTENTION AS A PRECURSOR TO MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study finding: transfer students struggle with establishing strong social relationships</td>
<td>Study finding: injury &amp; COVID-19 disruptions were markers for downward patterns of thoughts, feelings, behaviors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5.</strong> PODCASTS ARE A COST AND TIME-EFFECTIVE TOOL FOR REACHING STUDENT-ATHLETES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study finding: students supported the use of podcasts for sport-related trainings over video modules to allow greater flexibility to complete</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Alicia A. Dahl, Ph.D., MS
ADAHL3@uncc.edu
timeoutstudy@uncc.edu
twitter: @pubhealthdahl