



RESEARCH ARTICLE



A mixed-methods examination of a mental health awareness program in elite ice hockey

Jordan S. Lefebvre ^a, Siobhan Henderson^b, Alexander Salomie^c, Nancy L. Heath^b and Gordon A. Bloom ^b

^aSchool of Human Movement and Nutrition Sciences, University of Queensland, Saint Lucia, Australia;

^bFaculty of Education, McGill University, Montreal, Canada; ^cCanadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

ABSTRACT

In partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division, the purpose of this study was to conduct a post-season evaluation of the effectiveness of a mental health and suicide-awareness program called Talk Today, delivered to elite adolescent male hockey players and their support staff. The study was conducted using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design that began with a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase. In total, 105 participants (49 athletes, 56 staff) completed online questionnaires and 12 (6 athletes, 6 staff) participated in qualitative interviews. Results integrated quantitative and qualitative findings to examine participants' perceptions of acceptability of the program, acquisition and application of knowledge, and perceptions of stigma following the program. Findings revealed that 78% of athletes and 90% of staff reported high levels of satisfaction with the program, 85% of athletes and 87% of staff felt they acquired knowledge on mental health including access to resources, and 68% of athletes and 87% of staff felt they could provide more effective support to individuals with mental health issues. Participants felt the program helped them to identify, approach, and support someone experiencing mental health issues. Additionally, participants reported lower levels of personal stigma in comparison to levels of public stigma towards persons with mental health problems. Overall, results suggest a high level of openness to a mental health and suicide-awareness program among elite male adolescent athletes. Given that this group typically holds negative attitudes towards mental health, these findings are promising for the future implementation of such programs.

ARTICLE HISTORY


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KEYWORDS

Stigma; elite sport; male adolescents; support staff

In recent years, a growing body of research has focused on the mental health of athletes (e.g., Henriksen et al., 2020; Schinke et al., 2018). Although participation in organised sport has been associated with many positive outcomes such as enhanced well-being and social and emotional functioning (Bloom et al., 2020; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009),

CONTACT Jordan S. Lefebvre  jordan.lefebvre@mail.mcgill.ca  Department of Kinesiology and Physical Education, McGill University, 475 Pine Avenue West, Quebec, Canada H2W 1S4

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