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Understanding Athletes' Experience when Transitioning to Life Beyond Sport

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Understanding Athletes Experience when Transitioning to Life Beyond Sport

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INTRODUCTION

Individuals can begin participation in sports as young as three years old and may continue into their college years and beyond.

- Engagement in sports may end due to graduation, injury, or by choice, causing the elimination of participation in a life-long occupation.
- This transition from athlete to non-athlete can impact mental health and self-identity.
- Former athletes may experience occupational disruption, a temporary inability to adequately engage in meaningful tasks due to a significant life event.
- Occupational Therapy is not currently included in athletics, despite having the skillset to assist with athlete's transition.



SUMMARY OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

There are two identified needs:

1. Research related to occupational therapy within athletics.
2. Creation of a proactive transitional program to support mental health and redefine their identity.



LITERATURE REVIEW SUMMARY

Mental Health

- Athletes experience feelings of loss and a void upon completion of sports (Knights et al., 2016).
- Athletes admit that when faced with retirement, they realized that their preparatory efforts were inadequate resulting in negative feelings about their own well-being (Coakley, 2006).
- A high prevalence (18% to 39%) of elevated depression and anxiety is seen among retired athletes (Cosh et al., 2021).

Transition

- Transitions can typically be experienced in three different stages: the euphoric "honeymoon" phase, the reorientation phase, and the termination phase (Pettican & Prior, 2010).
- Research shows that when discussing athletes' sport-career transitions four themes arise: (a) how former players understand the sport-career transition experience, (b) systems of support in place to help with the changes experienced, (c) ways to prepare for the transition beyond sport, and (d) self-perceived well-being (Coakley, 2006).

RESEARCH QUESTION

Do athlete's experience occupational disruption when transitioning to life after sports?

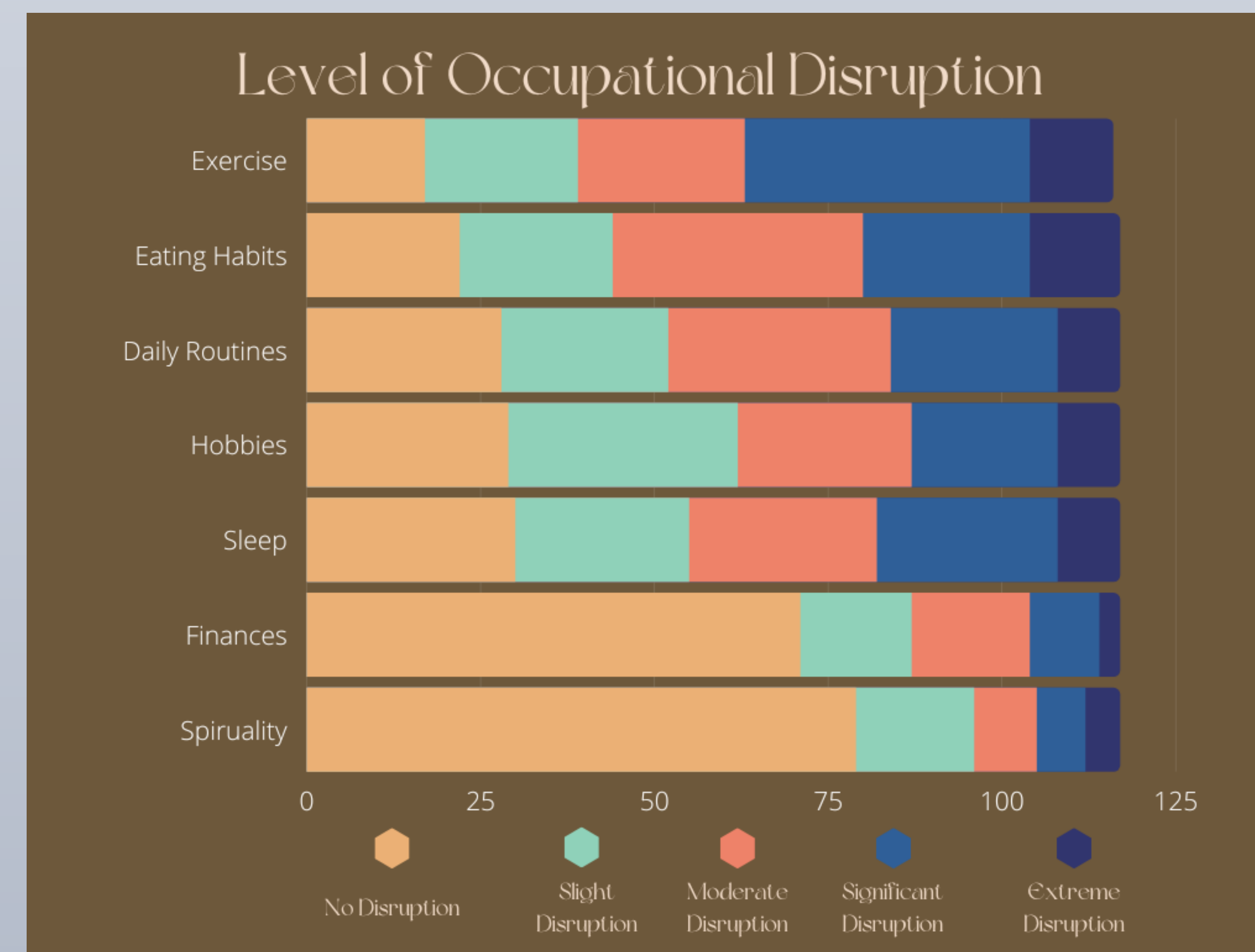
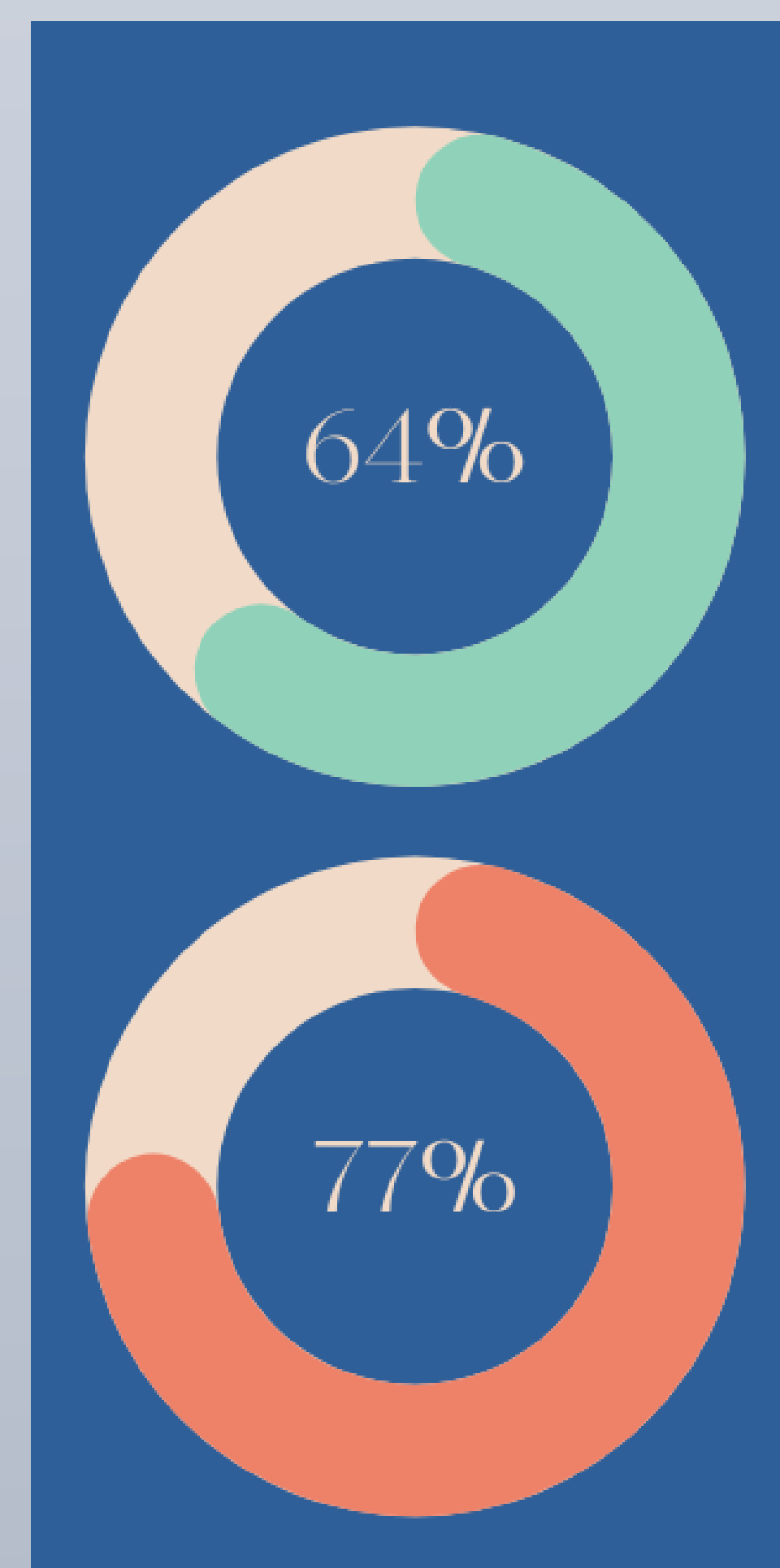
Is there a relationship between mental health (PHQ) and level of occupational disruption (SOD)?

RESULTS

Results demonstrate that, for athletes transitioning from sport, the top 5 occupations that experience the highest level of occupational disruption are Exercise (85%), Eating habits (82%), Daily routines (77%), Hobbies (76%), and Sleep (75%). The areas of occupation that showed the least amount of disruption are Spirituality/Religion (33%) and Finances (40%).

64% of participants stated they felt down or depressed after their involvement in sports ended. (PHQ)

77% of participants stated they experienced occupational disruption in at least 1 area of occupation when transitioning beyond sport. (SOD)



METHODS

The IRB approved study included deploying a survey which included questions from the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-3), Occupational Balance Questionnaire (OBQ-11), and the Survey of Occupational Disruption (SOD) via social media, athlete association websites and newsletters. Participation was voluntary. A total of 116 participants met the inclusion criteria and completed the surveys correctly.

The inclusion criteria for participation included:

- a) They must be a former athlete of any sport, individual or team,
- b) must have performed at the collegiate level or higher and,
- c) must have access to the internet in order to open the survey.



DISCUSSION

Based on the results, athletes are experiencing occupational disruption in almost all areas when they transition from athlete to non-athlete, which has a direct correlation to their mental health. This supports the creation and promotion of an occupation-based preventive transitional program to assist athletes before their athletic role shifts. This may decrease suicide rates and promote overall well-being for athletes as they embrace their new purpose

athlete
PURPOSE BEYOND SPORT

REFERENCES & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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References Available Upon Request