

8-5-2024

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NSUWorks Citation

Alyssa L. Moore. 2024. *Understanding Athletes' Experience when Transitioning to Life Beyond Sport: A Pilot Study*. Capstone. Nova Southeastern University. Retrieved from NSUWorks, . (149)
https://nsuworks.nova.edu/hpd_ot_capstone/149.

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Understanding Athletes' Experience when Transitioning to Life Beyond Sport: A Pilot Study

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Introduction

The mental health, physical health, and well-being of student-athletes has become a central topic of discussion over the past few years. I seek to identify the underlying factors affecting the average student athlete's overall health and well-being, specifically during transitions. These periods include but are not limited to the time surrounding starting college, injuries, and post-college.

Guiding Question:

In collegiate student-athletes, is a preventative program to target occupational disruption during transitions, effective in increasing overall health and well-being?

Capstone Site Description

- Site: Nova Southeastern University (virtual)
- Focus Areas: Program Development
- Mentors: Dr. M. Lauren Dell'Arciprete, OTD, OTR/L & Dr. Christina Kane, Ed.D., MS., OTR/L
- Population: Current collegiate student-athletes and former collegiate student-athletes who are currently still in college (Adults ages 19-28)



Summary of Needs Assessment

Athletes need to have a schedule that not only supports their sport but also their academic success and ability to participate in self-care

Athletes often experience identity crises, especially during transitions, and find themselves struggling to understand who they are outside of being an athlete

Another gap was found between student-athletes and their academic success, resulting in burnout and depressive moods

There is a need for a preventative program targeted at decreasing occupational disruption in student-athletes and aid them in being better prepared for transitions.

Literature Review Summary

Rest & Sleep

- The quality of an athlete's sleep is crucial for recovery, physical health, and psychological wellness
- A research study conducted by Grandner et al. (2020), associates decreased sleep duration, sleep quality, and insomnia with overall increased levels of stress, depression, and anxiety in student-athletes.

Decreased Academic Experience & Burnout

- Having a healthy sport-life balance is important for athletes to have a better transition out of sport one day. Voorheis et al. (2023) found this to be one of the main enablers of a positive retirement transition.

Identity

- During transitions out of sport or during injury, athletes lose their perceived identity of who their sport made them. It is common for an athlete's social networks, career ambitions, goals, and sense of self-worth to be directly related to their sport (Voorheis et al., 2023).

Capstone Project Description & Outcomes

Interactive workbook for workshops

- 6 modules of interactive worksheets, education, and resources
- Utilized Lifestyle Redesign concepts
- Awaiting workshop opportunity to pilot

Virtual preventative program

- 100% virtual
- Participants had 2.5 weeks to complete at their own pace
- 11 total participants completed the program

FOTA & AOTA

- Submitted to present short courses at both conferences

Occupational Therapy Journal of Research

- Currently awaiting reviewer scores

Program Results

- Program effectiveness was determined using the Scale of Occupational Disruption (SOD)
- Pre-survey results prior to starting the program, indicated that among 11 occupations, participants reported the highest levels of disruption in the following top five areas: personal relationships (100%), time spent with others (100%), community activities (100%), hobbies (82%), and sleep (100%)
- Post-survey results indicated that participants experienced a 20% decrease in occupational disruption after completion of the program
- 80% of participants saw a decrease in their severity of depression after completion of the program (PHQ)
- 100% of former athletes believe the program would have been beneficial for them during their transition beyond sport

"I am a visual person, this course laid out for me things to help control my life. I would recommend this program for incoming/current student athletes to help better their collegiate career."

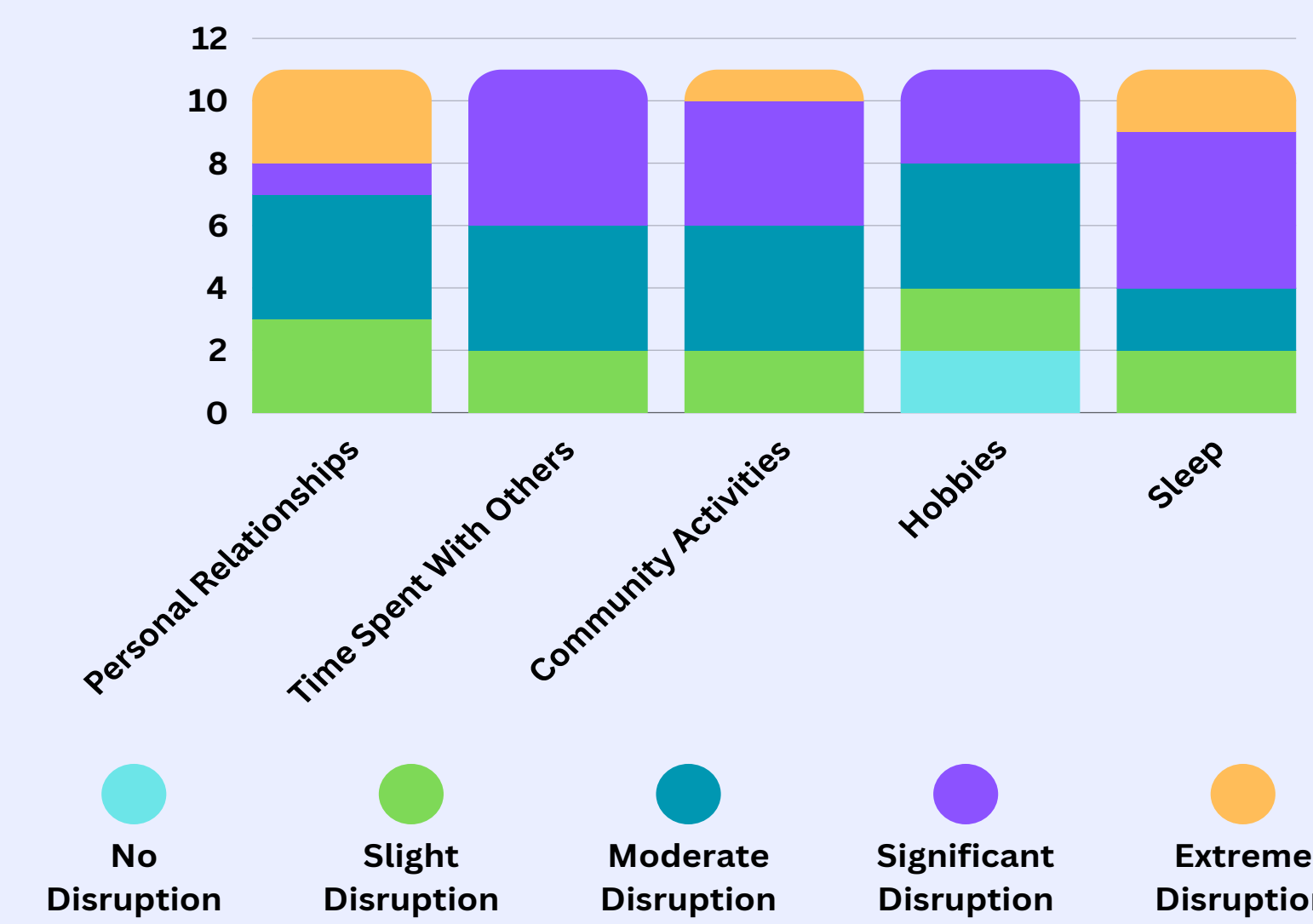
"I really liked this program, and I also really like the sheets that we can use to be able to apply the modules we learned to our everyday lives."

"This program would have been beneficial for me before I left my sport. Transitioning from a life of sports to other aspects of life is difficult with not many resources, especially the psychological and emotional aspect."

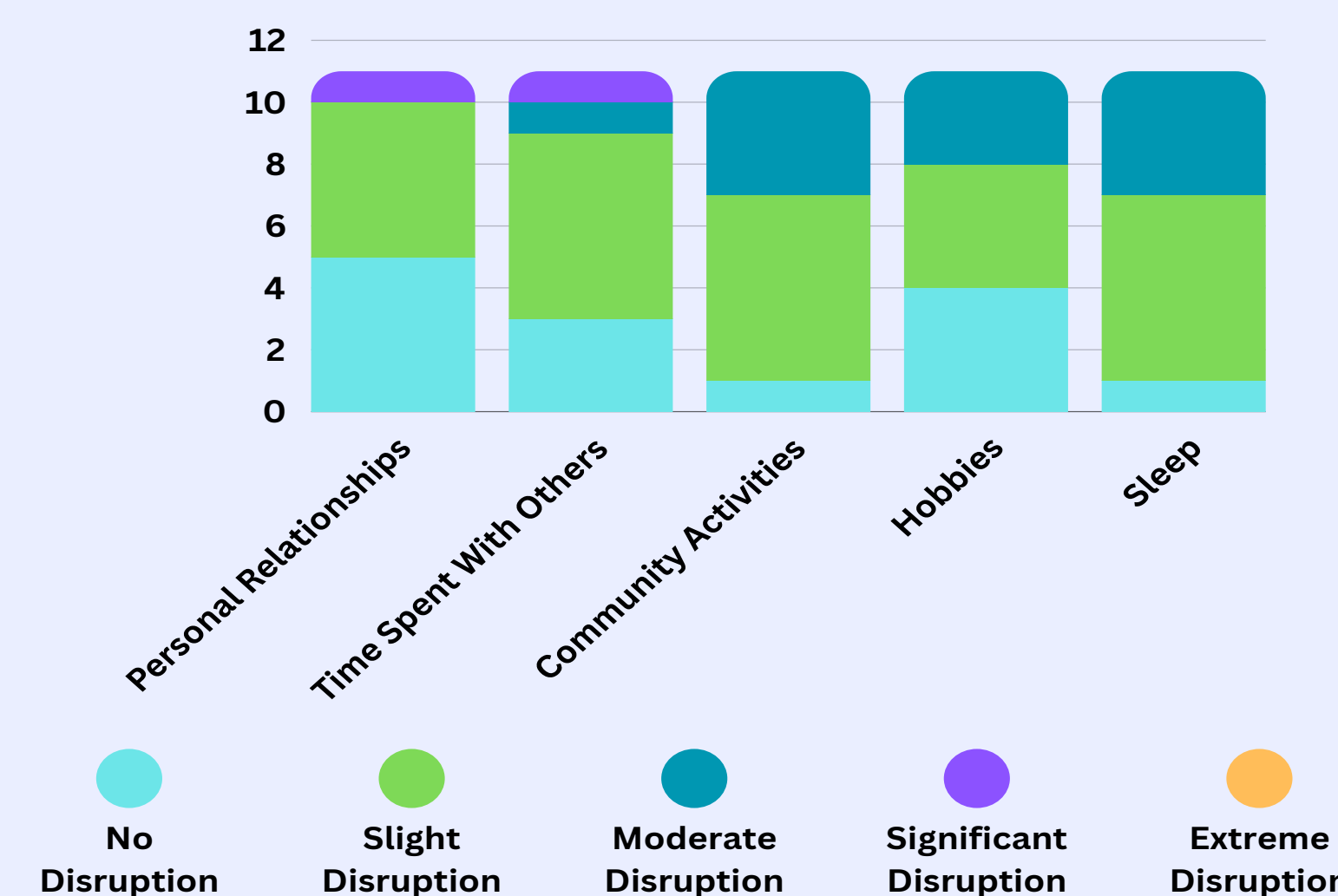
"Great course, I feel that this would have been super helpful in school. This is not something I thought that I needed until the school year was done and had no idea what to do."

"I feel like this program would have been very beneficial while I was an athlete, specifically when beginning my collegiate career. That transition was the hardest for me, establishing a life where I was solely in control of how and where I spent my time and energy."

PRE-SURVEY LEVEL OF DISRUPTION



POST-SURVEY LEVEL OF DISRUPTION



Capstone Goals Achieved

- Assessed the needs of current student-athletes and levels occupational-disruption they experienced
- Created a workbook for athletes transitioning from sport due to injury and graduation
- Developed, implemented, and assessed the effectiveness of a preventative program promoting occupational balance and wellness
- Submitted to a scholarly journal for publication
- Submitted to FOTA and AOTA conferences



Implications for OT Practice

Based on the results, within this population there is a direct correlation between mental health and occupational disruption

Occupational therapists can assist student-athletes through the program and workbook, across multiple stages of transition

By employing occupation-based interventions and assisting athletes, both current and retired, in gaining a deeper understanding of their perceived identity and its impact on their daily activities, we are now statistically demonstrating a significant improvement in bridging the gap between athletes and their overall well-being

Transitioning into college

During injury

Transitioning beyond sport
• Preventatively, prior to transition
• During transition
• Post transition

References & Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincerest gratitude to Dr. Dell'Arciprete, OTD, OTR/L for her guidance and expertise throughout the completion of this capstone project. In addition, I would also like to thank Dr. Kane, Ed.D., MS, OTR/L for her continued support. Lastly, I want to extend my gratitude to Dr. D'Amico, Ed.D, OTR/L, FAOTA for her feedback and expertise while publishing our manuscript.

References Available Upon Request