

Experiences of Collegiate Student-Athletes Afflicted by Sports Injuries: A Phenomenology

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Abstract. In the competitive realm of collegiate sports, athletes frequently face a myriad of challenges ranging from intense physical discomfort to profound psychological stress, all of which critically influence their performance and overall experience. This study embarks on a comprehensive exploration to elucidate the multifaceted experiences of collegiate student-athletes grappling with sports-related injuries. Utilizing a rigorous phenomenological methodology, this research engaged 12 participants, meticulously selected through purposive and snowball sampling techniques, to unearth the depths of their experiences. The investigation delineated two salient themes: the extensive spectrum of injuries that collegiate athletes endure and the substantial hurdles they face, which align and provide empirical support to the foundational tenets of resilience theory. Given the rich insights garnered regarding the adversity confronted by these athletes, this study staunchly advocates for an amplified focus on longitudinal research dedicated to athlete health sustainability and injury prevention. Strategies encompassing enhanced training protocols, advanced protective equipment, and meticulous risk evaluation are recommended to mitigate future injury risk and foster an environment conducive to athlete resilience and long-term well-being.

KEY WORDS

1. Collegiate student-athletes
2. sports injuries
3. experiences
4. resilience
5. challenges

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1. Introduction

Collegiate student-athletes are significantly affected by sports injuries. These injuries present serious challenges, necessitating effective prevention and support measures within college sports programs (Parker, 2017). Statistics reveal that sports injuries remain a dominant issue, with approximately 8.6 million sports and recreation-related injuries affecting athletes of all levels and disciplines (Carlini, 2019). These injuries range from minor sprains and strains to severe traumas like fractures, dislocations, and ligament tears (Naura, 2020). In the United States, organized sports involve around 30 million children and teenagers, resulting in over 3.5 million injuries annually, with sports injuries accounting for nearly one-third of all childhood injuries, mainly sprains and strains (Hopkins, 2019). Some sports carry higher risks, with

contact sports like football generally associated with more injuries than non-contact sports like swimming (Lauersen, 2016). Moreover, all sports have inherent risks, from contact trauma to overuse or misuse of body parts (Liebert, 2023). Injuries are shared throughout an athlete's career and can significantly impact them physically and mentally (Haugen, 2022). Despite athletes taking preventive measures such as strength training and conditioning, the risk of injury remains inherent in sports participation (Nestel et al., 2017), injuries remain inevitable. In the Philippines, sports serve as a platform to celebrate human physical abilities but also pose risks of severe injuries (Sykioko, 2017). Injuries are inevitable whether engaged in team sports like basketball or solo activities like golf (Blog Manager, 2022). Similarly, individual sports like golf can lead to overuse injuries from repetitive motions, affecting performance and requiring medical attention in sports-related injuries, including those in basketball, account for approximately 20 percent of all injuries treated in hospitals annually (Baron, 2018). Moreover, in our locality, student-athletes face a significant challenge with sports injuries, which are alarmingly prevalent. Statistics indicate that 30 percent of student-athletes in the region experience injuries annually, disrupting their physical health and performance. These injuries also strain team dynamics and performance, highlighting a critical issue in school sports programs, especially in public and private schools.

Further, injured athletes are often compromised, adding to the overall impact of these injuries. In the professional realm, such injuries can significantly shorten career longevity due to the rigorous demands of training and competition (Yang et al., 2022). With the literature concerning the impact of sports injuries on college student-athletes, there needs to be a more comprehensive exploration into sports injuries on collegiate student-athletes. It emphasizes the need for a thorough exploration to inform support systems and interventions for student-athletes (Vasiliev, 2022). At the same time, previous studies on the experiences of collegiate student-athletes afflicted by sports injuries have explored various aspects of their challenges and used longitudinal studies tracking the psychological and emotional trajectories of these athletes' post-injury. Additionally, most existing studies have been conducted within a single locale or university setting, limiting the generalizability of findings across diverse collegiate athletic programs. Moreover, a comparative analysis of respondents across different sports and injury severities needs to be improved, which could provide deeper insights into the nuanced experiences of student-athletes within specific contexts. Thus, understanding the lived experiences of collegiate student-athletes afflicted by sports injuries is urgently needed to expose their personal experiences. Addressing this research gap can inform appropriate support interventions, ultimately enhancing athletic performance.

1.1. Purpose of the Study—The purpose of this study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of collegiate student-athletes who have sustained sports injuries. Employing a phenomenological approach, this research aims to delve deeply into the personal and subjective realities faced by these athletes. By gathering detailed narratives from affected individuals, the study seeks to uncover the multifaceted physical, psychological, and emotional challenges that arise from sports-related injuries. Additionally, the research aims to identify the coping mechanisms employed by these athletes and evaluate the effectiveness of the support systems provided to them. Ultimately, this study intends to contribute to the development of more effective injury prevention strategies, rehabilitation programs, and support structures within collegiate athletic programs, thereby enhancing the overall well-being and performance of student-athletes.

1.2. *Research Questions*—This study aimed to determine the experiences of student athletes who have transitioned to different sports during training. It has a specific research question:

- (1) What are the experiences of collegiate student-athletes afflicted by sports injuries?

1.3. *Significant of the Study*—The significance of this study lies in its potential contributions to both the academic field and practical applications in sports management and athletic training. Understanding the lived experiences of collegiate student-athletes who have sustained sports injuries is crucial for several reasons. First, this study provides insights into the psychological and physical challenges faced by injured athletes. These insights can help educational institutions and athletic programs develop more effective support systems, ensuring that student-athletes receive comprehensive care that addresses both their physical rehabilitation and emotional well-being. Second, by highlighting the common types of injuries and the associated challenges, this research can inform the creation of targeted policies and programs aimed at injury prevention, risk management, and resilience building among student-athletes. Third, the study adds to the body of literature on sports psychology, injury recovery, and resilience. It offers a phenomenological perspective that enriches the understanding of the personal and subjective experiences of injured athletes, which is often underrepresented in quantitative research. Lastly, coaches and trainers can use the findings to adapt their training methods to minimize the risk of injury and to better support athletes who are recovering from injuries. This can lead to improved performance and reduced long-term health issues among athletes.

1.4. *Theoretical Lens*—The framework was anchored in Resilience Theory as proposed by Norman Garmezy (1991). Resilience Theory focuses on how individuals respond to and adapt to adversity, change, loss, and risk. However, this study is delimited only to the individual response triggered by adversity. In this research, the focus was solely on the adversity element and its corresponding response. During data collection, it was found that the injuries experienced by the participants closely aligned with the adversity element discussed in the theory. Additionally, the challenges that emerged as a theme corresponded with the individual response element in the theory. See the following illustration.

2. Methodology

This study used a qualitative design, specifically a phenomenological study. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. Further, Creswell (2007) described a phenomenological study as examining the meaning of several individuals' lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. In other words, it represented a wonder that all the participants had experienced, such as learning a second language in a school system. In this study, phenomenological research significantly helped me understand the experiences of athletes who had suffered sports injuries, as this approach focused on people's experiences within a particular phenomenon. Additionally, the design provided information on the experiences they encountered when experiencing sports injuries. I also consulted an expert, specifically a guidance

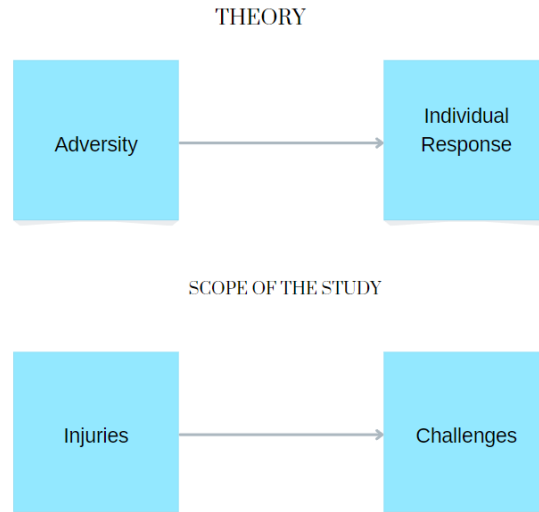


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

counselor, to guide and accompany the participants during the interview sessions. It's also crucial to acknowledge that the researcher employed artificial intelligence technology to meticulously proofread the article, demonstrating an exemplary commitment to ethical standards in today's rapidly advancing AI landscape.

2.1. Research Participants—This study used a qualitative design, specifically a phenomenological study. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. Further, Creswell (2007) described a phenomenological study as examining the meaning of several individuals' lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon. In other words, it represented a wonder that all the participants had experienced, such as learning a second language in a school system. In this study, phenomenological research significantly helped me understand the experiences of athletes who had suffered sports injuries, as this approach focused on people's experiences within a particular phenomenon. Additionally, the design provided information on the experiences they encountered when experiencing sports injuries. I also consulted an expert, specifically a guidance counselor, to guide and accompany the participants during the interview sessions. Participants were chosen based on the researcher's belief in

their ability to contribute meaningfully, specifically targeting athletes with relevant sports injuries. The research question was analyzed through the use of snowball technique, yielding significant insight. The inclusion criteria were college student-athletes aged 18-25 from Davao City who had been afflicted by sports-related injuries, particularly severe and significant ones. Moreover, the study involved 12 participants; six engaged in in-depth interviews and another six in focus group discussions. In alignment with this aim, the study employed purposive sampling, following Creswell's (2014) recommendation, to selectively identify participants with a specific purpose, aiming to gain valuable insights into the research question. Often, multiple interviews were conducted with the participants so that they could fully describe the phenomenon. Depending on the topic under study and the diversity, Creswell (2013) proposed that a reasonable sample size for phenomenological research may range from 3 to 25 participants. Consequently, 12 participants were deemed sufficient for the study.

2.2. *Role of Researcher*—In my research, my role can change significantly depending on what is needed. In this study, my main task was to collect information; I was the main data collector. I actively interviewed twelve athletes using a semi-structured interview guide questionnaire. In addition to interviewing participants, I recorded responses, took notes, organized information, and participated in discus-

sions. Decision-making responsibility was associated with leadership in efforts to gather facts and gain meaningful insights from them. I collected and reviewed participant responses in detail, ensuring a clear and objective analysis. All information is kept secure, and I am committed to safeguarding personal data. I assumed complete accountability for the data gathered and only provided pertinent details to ensure the success of this study.

2.3. *Research Instrument*—I employed a semi-structured interview guide questionnaire to gather data for the study. Prior to the interview questions, the research instrument was thoroughly edited, revised, and validated by two internal and one external professional research

validators. Three study validators examined the accuracy of the questionnaire, and all confirmed its validity with a score of 4.83. In addition, I improved the data collection process by conducting in-depth interviews with six participants and focus group discussions with six other participants.

3. Results and Discussion

I extracted themes from the collected data using responses from the participants. Two main themes emerged from this analysis: the injuries experienced by collegiate student-athletes and their challenges. Among the injuries that athletes face are numerous, ranging from ACL tears to major muscle strains, including severe ice fractures. These activities pose a significant physical challenge, leading to an increased risk of injury. The challenges of recovery must be managed by them alongside their academic and athletic endeavors. These injuries can be minimized and their severity reduced by implementing proper training and preventative measures. Their recovery and return to the game will be greatly aided by the support of the experts and coaches. Additionally, injuries can be a major obstacle for athletes competing in the sport, regardless of their physical and mental capabilities. These injuries usually require a long recovery time, which hinders their training and competitive activities. Pain management and the restoration of full functional capacity are the primary objectives of rehabilitation. They may also experience psychological distress from rejection, which can negatively affect their motivation and mental health. In order to excel in sports, they must adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach to recovery that encompasses both physical and mental aspects. Furthermore, injuries cause significant mental and emotional distress for student-athletes. Another factor to consider is the possibility of repetitive strain injuries, which can reduce anxiety and confidence when returning to play. They are frequently hesitant, and this can impact their performance on the field. Sportspeople may also experience a loss of identity due to injuries, as their performance in sports is closely tied to their self-esteem. The result can be feelings of isolation and depression, which can lead to mental health problems during recovery. Finally, the presence of injuries in athletes can lead to difficulties in maintaining relationships with coaches and teammates due to feelings of neglect or misinterpretation. Additionally, Coaches may favor healthy players, which creates a sense of marginalization for the injured. In addition,

the demands of rapid recovery can stress athletes through high physical exertion, increasing their risk of injury. The difficulty of recovering from performance limitations is causing athletes to experience more frustration before their injuries. Students' health and academic performance can be significantly impacted by elevated stress levels, which pose various obstacles.

3.1. Injuries—Every athlete, no matter how big they may be, is always at risk due to the intensity of their workout. These injuries can range from minor strains and sprains to more serious conditions such as fractures, sprains, and concussions. In addition to other sports, many involve injuries to different body parts, such as fractures caused by muscle strain or damage to ligaments due to running or tennis. In addition, shoulder injuries are more common among tennis players. Sports that require intense preparation, constant motions, and sporadic physical contact are more susceptible to injuries. By utilizing appropriate equipment, warm-ups, and strength exercises, certain risks can be minimized. To support this, Cluett (2022) states that whether you are an elite athlete or a weekend warrior, if you play sports, you have probably faced an injury at some point. Common sports injuries include sprains, strains, swollen muscles, shin splints, rotator cuff injuries, knee injuries, fractures, and dislocations. Playing sports, whether you are a professional athlete, recreational player, or street player, can lead to injuries sometimes. This is because sports can be physically demanding and competitive; your body might get hurt or strained. Acci-

dents or overuse injuries can still happen even if you are not a professional athlete. So, it is essential for everyone who plays sports to be careful, get proper training, and do things to prevent injuries. This way, you can have fun while staying safe and avoiding getting hurt. Additionally, Jaesche (2019) states that sports injuries are commonly caused by overuse, direct impact, or the application of force that is greater than the body part can structurally withstand. There are two kinds of sports injuries: acute and chronic. An injury that occurs suddenly, such as a sprained ankle caused by an awkward landing, is known as an acute injury. Chronic injuries are caused by repeated overuse of muscle groups or joints. This indicates that sports injuries often happen because of too much use, a substantial hit, or when a body part faces more force than it can handle. A study conducted by Chekera (2019) also reported that being injured actually provides athletes with opportunities to learn about themselves. Furthermore, being injured can enhance their level of maturity and help them better manage their bodies. For some athletes, being injured can actually lead to improved functioning to a level greater than before they were injured.

3.2. Significant Challenges—Collegiate student-athletes afflicted by sports injuries face significant challenges, among which the fear of re-injury is paramount. This fear can be debilitating, affecting not only their mental health but also their performance and overall well-being. They are constantly surrounded by the fear of another injury, which can cause them to hesitate and lack confidence on the field, ultimately damaging their athleticism and competitive edge.

Mental pressure can be just as damaging to one's health as physical trauma, causing them to worry about not being able to fully recover. Furthermore, injuries in sports can strain the relationship between student-athletes and coaches. Athletes may fear having to play again until they are fully recovered because if they don't play long enough, their recovery could result in a loss of status or even an academic scholarship. When athletes prioritize their own health over

team success, this pressure can cause them to feel distrustful and resentful towards the team. Nevertheless, coaches may require assistance in managing the delicate equilibrium between the immediate needs of the team and the long-term welfare of their players, which can lead to conflicts and misconceptions. According to Inkyma (2022), student-athletes who sustain sports injuries are confronted with significant interpersonal difficulties. These athletes are not only physically affected by injury but also plagued with a persistent fear of movement that causes frustration and hinders their ability to adjust to change throughout their athletic journey. Additionally, the fear of re-injury affects their rehabilitation and sports performance. The increased fear of injury and psychological barriers

3.3. Experiencing Fear of Re-injury—Athletes may face the possibility of re-injuring themselves due to the uncertainty of rehabilitation, which can prevent them from returning to play. There are also psychological and ethical concerns among student-athletes regarding the possibility of experiencing a new injury while playing sports. Fear of decreased performance, increased recovery, and potential future injury often stem from the concussions and setbacks associated with the original injury. It has the potential to significantly affect the confidence, motivation, and willingness of athletes to partic-

3.4. Developing Strained Relationships with Coaches—Strained relationships with coaches require open communication, where athletes express their concerns and coaches listen carefully, which creates an environment conducive to dialogue. By recognizing differences and understanding perspectives, both parties can work to find common ground and restore trust. Patience, empathy, and a willingness to compromise are important to reduce tensions, which allows for a gradual restoration of a positive working relationship. Clear boundaries and set-

ters cause athletes to become frustrated. Thus, addressing these challenges requires a holistic understanding of the athlete's psychological state, which promotes resilience and empowers them to overcome fear, frustration, and change to reach their full potential. In support of this, Hsun et al. (2016) mentioned that fear, frustration, and physical, psychological, and social changes are among the effects of sports injuries on students, as noted by Athletes who often fear repeated injuries and reduced performance, which affects their participation in rehabilitation. Frustrations stem from failures in training, loss of athletic identity, and challenges in finding timely treatment. Significant changes in social dynamics, self-concept, and academic pursuits are a consequence of these experiences.

ipate in sports activities, impacting their training regimen, competitive behavior, or career trajectory. In addition, physical injuries are often less noticeable compared to mental injuries, but both require medical treatment. Athletes are especially afraid of repetitive strain injuries, which can be detrimental to their recovery. This fear, which is distinct from re-injury anxiety, manifests as worry about further harm and its consequences. Removing these psychological barriers together with physical rehabilitation is important to ensure a smooth return to activity (Butkovic, 2020).

ting realistic expectations make the process even easier, ensuring that coaches and athletes remain committed to improvement. Ultimately, maintaining mutual respect and a shared goal of success serves as the cornerstone for overcoming challenges and strengthening the coach-athlete partnership over time. In addition, navigating strained relationships with coaches can worsen the challenges collegiate student-athletes face with sports injuries. Trust and communication are vital during this period, as athletes seek support and guidance while recovering. Maintain-

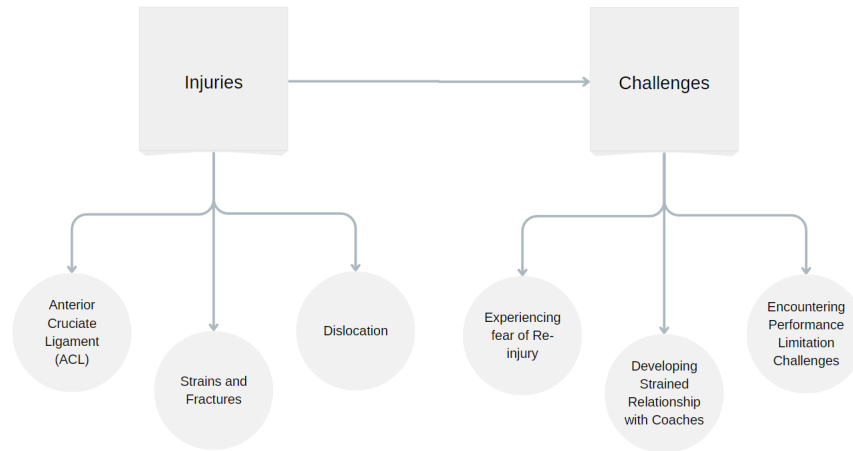


Fig. 2. Emerging Themes on the Experiences of Collegiate Student-Athletes Afflicted by Sports Injuries

ing open dialogue and adhering to rehabilitation plans can help rebuild confidence and facilitate a smoother recovery process (Rogers, 2023).

3.5. *Encountering Performance Limitation Challenges*—When college athletes get hurt, doing well in their sports and classes can be challenging. This is because their injuries limit their ability to move or play. They need to find ways to deal with these problems, like doing exercises to get better or getting support from their coaches and teammates. To address the challenges of recovering from sports injuries, a holistic approach that incorporates physiological, mental, and sociocultural factors is essential. Quality preparation, proprioceptive works over exercises, and useful development designs are crucial for physiotherapy in-

tercessions to restore physical work (Herman et al., 2018). At the same time, mental intercessions such as cognitive-behavioral treatment, mindfulness stretch decrease, and goal-setting methodologies can offer assistance to competitors to overcome mental obstructions and advance a positive attitude that advances advance in restoration (Johnson et al., 2016). Establishing a consistent sociocultural atmosphere within sports groups and communities is crucial to promoting open communication, minimizing injury-related dissatisfaction, and fostering adherence to the norms of attendance and competition (Podlog and Eklund, 2016).

4. Implications and Future Directions

In this section, I deliver a compelling overview of the study, highlighting its groundbreaking findings. Initially, I provide a succinct summary that captures the essence of our research. Following this, I delve into the profound implications our research question has unearthed, shedding light on its significance in the field. To further our exploration and impact, I propose ambitious yet achievable future directions, inviting the reader to envision the boundless possibilities our findings could herald.

4.1. Findings—

The phenomenon of sports injuries among collegiate student-athletes presents a complex interplay of physical, emotional, and interpersonal challenges. This paper delves into the lived experiences of these athletes, aiming to illuminate the myriad ways in which injuries impact their collegiate sports careers and personal lives. Through a qualitative phenomenological approach, insights were garnered from twelve participants hailing from Davao City, revealing a nuanced landscape of adversity and resilience.

Athletic injuries, notably anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tears, muscle strains, joint dislocations, and fractures, emerge as critical incidents in the lives of student-athletes, marking a significant disruption in their athletic and personal development. The occurrence of such injuries is not merely a physical setback but is imbued with psychological and emotional ramifications that extend beyond the playing field. The study identifies a pervasive fear of re-injury among these individuals, a phenomenon that underscores the precarious nature of athletic recovery and the shadow it casts on an athlete's return to play. This fear is not unfounded; it is rooted in the physical memory of pain and the psychological trauma associated with the initial injury.

Equally significant are the strained relationships between injured athletes and their coaches. The study highlights a recurring sense of alien-

ation and misunderstanding, pointing to a critical gap in the coach-athlete dynamic in the context of injury management. This discord can exacerbate the already daunting challenge of recovery, impeding not only the physical healing process but also the athlete's sense of belonging and value within the team.

Furthermore, the athletes' narratives reveal a profound struggle with performance limitations, a reminder of the injury's enduring impact on their athletic identity and aspirations. These limitations, whether temporary or permanent, force a confrontation with vulnerability and the potential recalibration of goals and expectations.

In light of these findings, it becomes evident that addressing sports injuries among collegiate student-athletes requires a holistic approach that goes beyond the physical. Future research should explore intervention strategies that encompass mental health support, effective communication practices between coaches and athletes, and the development of a supportive community that acknowledges and adapts to the specific needs of injured athletes. By fostering an environment that nurtures both physical recovery and emotional well-being, we can aspire to mitigate the challenges identified in this study and support collegiate student-athletes in achieving their full potential, both on and off the field.

4.2. Implications—In delving into the personal accounts of athletes who have undergone significant physical trials, such as ACL tears and dislocations, a striking parallel emerged with the principles of Resilience Theory, as articulated by Garmezy (1991). This academic exploration illuminated that resilience transcends the mere capacity to recover from setbacks. Instead, it encompasses a multifaceted process of adaptation in the face of adversity, loss, and challenges. This theory's analytical lens proved invaluable

in understanding the nuanced limitations and psychological stresses athletes face, including the pervasive fear of re-injury and the complex dynamics in relationships with coaches. The data gleaned from these athletes' narratives—encompassing the initial injuries, the subsequent anxieties, and the impact on interpersonal relationships—echo the foundational elements of Resilience Theory. This congruence not only reinforces the theory's applicability but also highlights its potential to offer profound

insights into the lived experiences of athletes navigating the arduous journey of recovery and adaptation.

4.3. *Future Directions*—This study posits that future research avenues should expansively investigate the enduring consequences of injuries on athletes’ physiological and psychological well-being, encompassing periods post their reintegration into competitive play. Moreover, it advocates for an in-depth exploration into injury prevention strategies. Such investigations might encompass a comprehensive examination of diverse injuries and could potentially include assessments of training methodologies, enhancements in protective gear, or the identification of predisposing risk factors inherent to specific athletes. This multifaceted approach not only aims to mitigate the incidence of sports-related injuries but also contributes significantly towards optimizing the long-term health and performance outcomes for athletes.

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