A Needs Assessment to Develop an Educational Sexual Health Intervention for Female Student-Athletes at a Big Ten University

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Background

Understanding the College Student-Athlete Population:
College student-athletes are part of a tight-knit community where close, intimate friendships and relationships are formed between peers and teammates. Elite performance is directly related to the physical, mental, and emotional health of the student-athlete.

Public Health Problem:
Sexual Behavior Risks among College Students:
High-risk sexual behaviors among the general college population are prevalent. Almost half have engaged in oral and vaginal sex within the last 30 days (American College Health Association, 2013). Of these students, only 5.9% (oral) and 52.6% (vaginal) used a condom during these activities. For anal sex, 5.4% of college students had engaged in anal sex within the last 30 days, 30.1% of which used a condom. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), especially HIV and chlamydia, continue to be prevalent among the college (18-24 years old population) (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013). Sexual assault and binge drinking are also major health concerns that are prevalent among this age group (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, 2014).

Sexual Behavior Risks of Female College Student-Athletes:
If the 1.9% unintended pregnancy rate (for individuals who engaged in vaginal intercourse in the last 12 months) translated to the approximately 600 student-athletes in the IU athletic department, about 11 unexpected pregnancies would occur within a year (American College Health Association, 2013). Females may feel subject to extra pressure if she becomes pregnant, since her athletic career may be impacted (Grossbard, Lee, Neighbors, Hendershot & Larimer, 2009). Athletes also consume large amounts of alcohol and participate in binge drinking, which is closely associated with increased risk of unintended pregnancy. Female athletes have a heightened risk of sexual assault and binge drinking. Being an athlete is associated with potentially affecting physical, mental, and emotional health that impacts academic and athletic performance (CDC, 2014; Grossbard, Lee, Neighbors, Hendershot & Larimer, 2007).

Little research and few educational initiatives have targeted the specific sexual health risk behaviors that exist among female student-athletes. Interventions such as education and information need to be provided to enhance safe-sex practices for student-athletes (Reel, Joy, & Helstrom, 2012). At IU, the Student-Athlete Well-Being and Development department provides programs to promote health of the female student-athlete, including areas such as nutrition, stress management, personal development, career searching, and academic performance. Sexual health and related risk behaviors, however, have largely been ignored as a topic of educational significance.

Methods

- The development of an educational intervention targeting female college athletes' sexual behavior must utilize reliable data about female sexual health related risks, as well as a theoretical basis, adequate social support and resources for an educational intervention. Incorporating an educational program in which there is social support and cohesion among athletes, coaches, and staff, healthy behaviors would be likely to develop.

Phase I: Preliminary Needs Assessment (Completed)

- Initial information identified about student-athlete sexual health behaviors and needs.
- Five established surveys identified for sexual behaviors of college students/youth adults:
  - YRBS, ACHA-NCHA, NSSH, CSUES, BBPS
  - Survey questions criticized for usability for current study, compiled into large, grouped, and color-coded document according to content and survey source
  - Questions were modified or eliminated per study delineations.
  - YRBS, ACHA-NCHA, and the researcher’s developed items included
  - CSUES, NSSH, BBPS items eliminated
  - Permission granted for use of ACHA-NCHA questions by Dr. Mary Hoban, lead researcher for the ACHA-NCHA
  - Instrument initial validation (completed)

Phase II: Instrument Development & Refinement (Majority Completed)

- Survey questionnaires refined and new items set and new items

Phase III: Final Survey Instrument (Pilot, Results & Refinement)

- Pre-pilot data analyzed (SPSS quantitative) and thematic (qualitative) to provide findings, conclusions, and recommendations for sexual health educational intervention for female college athletes

Results or Intervention

Design of Educational Intervention: (Social Cognitive Theory)

- Multi-session curriculum
- Gynecological and reproductive health, alcohol use, sexual behavior, STI prevention, pregnancy prevention, other

Curriculum Collaborators (Professional & Social Resources)

- The curriculum development and program delivery involve:
  - IU Health and Wellness Education staff
  - IU Athletics coaches and staff
  - Student-Athlete Well-Being and Development staff
  - IU School of Public Health professor, Dr. Ellis

Conclusions and Recommendations

- The instrument was valid and adapted items were reliable.
- Develop and deliver the educational intervention based on study findings and conclusions.
- Foster environment for social support and cohesion among athletes, coaches, and staff, to enhance study participation, educational intervention, and healthy sexual behaviors
- Replicate a larger study incorporating other Big Ten campuses
- Potential advocacy and adaptation of educational intervention curriculum for other NCAA universities
- Potential future study: compare female athletes’ sexual behaviors, smaller to larger universities

Post-Intervention Data Collection (Summative Evaluation)

- Spring 2015
- Pre-Post comparative analysis to determine if sexual health risks reduced
- Analysis to determine reliability for instrument sub-set and new items

Visuals:

- Phase I: Preliminary Needs Assessment (Completed)
- Phase II: Instrument Development & Refinement (Majority Completed)
- Phase III: Final Survey Instrument (Pilot, Results & Refinement)
- Phase IV: Pre-Intervention Data Collection (Projected: October 1, 2014)

- 40 structured response items, 2 open-ended items
- 26 original items, 15 modified from ACHA, 1 derived from YRBS
- Instrument content areas:
- Demographics, gynecological and reproductive health, academics and athletic performance, alcohol use, sexual behavior, STI prevention, pregnancy prevention, sexual assault, health issues interested in learning more about
- IRR: (form completed, not submitted; pretest pilot results)
- Study withdrawal sheet (in process)

States in which the developed student-athlete sexual health intervention could apply:
(States including Big Ten universities)