

Female Varsity Athlete Sources of Stress and Coping Mechanisms

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ABSTRACT

Recent research suggests that university female athletes report higher levels of stress in comparison to their male counterparts (Arsenault & MacDonald, 2017). Given these higher reported stress levels, it is important to better understand how females differ from males with respect to their stressors. In addition, investigating methods of coping with such stressors is of further relevance. The purpose of this study is to better understand the sources of stress and coping mechanisms of female university student-athletes. A total of 10 female student-athletes participated in the study. Participants were in their 4th or 5th year of eligibility with an average age of 21 years (SD=0.63). Athletes represented the sports of ice hockey, field hockey, rugby, soccer and basketball. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with each participant and addressed the topics of sources of stress and coping mechanisms. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using a thematic analysis methodology, which allowed for identification of important themes. The sources of stress section yielded a variety of themes related to how stress appears throughout the career of a varsity athletes while the coping with stress section identified actual and preferred mechanisms athletes view as useful in dealing with their different sources of stress. Discussion of the results focused on the major sources of stress and coping mechanisms identified by student-athletes while providing broader recommendations for athletes, coaches, and varsity programs to best serve their female student-athlete population.

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INTRODUCTION

There is overwhelming evidence indicating organized sport as one of the most popular forms of physical activity among youth across the world (Gardner, Magee & Vella, 2017). Additionally, there are no apparent differences in participation rates between males and females for youth in organized physical activity (CANPLAY, 2016). Research has validated that by participating in organized physical activity, individuals will encounter numerous positive outcomes. These positive effects include pleasure from social interaction or gaining satisfaction from participating and developing in physical activity settings (Laverie, 1998). These positive effects are notably resulted from recreational settings but also perceived in more competitive environments including varsity athletics.

Interuniversity athletics offers an additional layer of development by combining the participation of competitive athletics while furthering an individual's education. Such settings provide an abundance of opportunities for individuals to experience positive personal growth (Potuto & O'Hanlon, 2007). Furthermore, varsity athletics offers an intense level of commitment and dedication to an individual's education and athletic career. This specific population at the university level is similarly referred to as emerging adults (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adulthood is a distinct period when individuals try to uncover their independence and direct their life path. Research has demonstrated by combining athletics and education in this particular population, all student-athletes report facing many stressors (Cosh & Tully, 2014).

Understanding sources of stress and what alludes to student-athletes feeling stressed is essential in knowing how to facilitate the role that stress plays on student-

athletes. Latest studies into varsity athletics have demonstrated an overarching theme that females reportedly have higher levels of stress in comparison to males (Arsenault & MacDonald, 2017). To efficiently move forward with varsity athlete stress research it is necessary to first qualitatively understand what are the sources of these stressors and similarly of further importance, what are the methods of coping with such stressors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies have revealed that people participate in sports for many different reasons. These motives include enjoyment and social interaction, positive affect, competition, health and fitness, sense of achievement and personal satisfaction (Laverie, 1998). In other words, research validates that the incentive to participate in sports may be determined by the relationship between the individual and the activity. An initiative created by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute called Kid's CANPLAY measures multiple factors associated with Canadian physical activity levels among youth. The research conducted reported that throughout the years of 2014 to 2015, 77% of Canadian children aged 5 to 19 years participate in organized physical activity, with no participation differences between males and females (CANPLAY, 2016). While the CANPLAY youth athlete data demonstrate high levels of sports participation and the positive effects of doing so, research has also provided a different perspective when considering the repercussions of committing to sports - in particular, competitive sports (Webb & Forrester, 2015).

The majority of athletic settings face a list of significant demands. These demands include repetitive and exhausting training, frequent travels and competitions, injuries, pressures to win and avoid losses, internal competitions between teammates, media pressures, and sometimes burnouts (Lu, Hsu, Chan, Cheen, & Kao, 2012). These strains on an athlete are precursors to early dropout (Latorre-Román, Pinillos, & Robles, 2018), and can lead to adverse affects of decreased mental health and wellbeing (Gardner, Magee, & Vella, 2017). Dropout rates are highly influenced by athletes lack of control over situations like being cut from a team, conflicting with coaches or failing to adapt to

transitions in the sport (MacCosham, Patry, Beswick, & Gravelle, 2015). Research by MacCosham, et al. (2015), suggests that in order to avoid dropout amongst competitive athletes, they must adopt strategies that allow them to balance sport with other important aspects in their lives. This approach will potentially decrease the likelihood of athletes dropping out by placing more positive perception on the sport involvement. Moreover, it is the athlete's responsibility to associate sport experiences as opportunities to experience positive personal growth. In doing so, an athlete puts greater emphasis on governable aspects to their growth and less fixation on uncontrollable matters.

Striving for personal development through sport takes into account the personal and social advantages and exhaustive training disadvantages of sports participation. These associations are also applicable in the varsity athletics environment. Intercollegiate athletics were established in American history due to physical activity being embraced as a vehicle for character development (Putney, 2009). The growth that athletes encounter goes far beyond strength training and honing the skills to the sport. The development builds upon the features that contribute to the core constitution of the individual. A varsity athlete is subjected to an environment that encourages physical and educational development. Through these processes varsity athletes unavoidably benefit from overall personal development.

Participation in varsity athletics is notably similar to findings previously reported by the Kid's CAN PLAY (2016) initiatives that stated there are no apparent differences in participation rates between males and females. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the years 2009-2010 reported that 43% of the student-athlete population across all three divisions was female with the remainder 57% of student-

athletes being male. (Yiamouyiannis & Hawes, 2015). These percentages hold significant value when considering the large participation rate in intercollegiate athletics. For instance, U SPORTS, the national brand for university sports in Canada reported that each year, over 12,000 student-athletes from 56 universities strive for national championships in 12 different sports. (Ridout, 2018). Considering the large population of student-athlete participation and arguably equal rates between males and females verify the dominant reputation varsity athletics imposes on individuals and their efforts to strive for varsity athletic status. In other words, research has validated the ambition to acquire varsity athleticism due to the positive association between student-athlete participation and personal development. (Alahmed, Yusof & Shah, 2016).

The valuable impact of athletic participation on university students offers a variety of skills that include leadership, teamwork, work ethic, taking responsibility for oneself, and personal and educational development. A study conducted by Pututo and O'Hanlon (2007), surveyed student-athletes from across 18 different National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) universities who had spent sufficient time as a varsity athlete and completed over 85 credit hours towards graduation. The surveys asked the student-athletes to describe and evaluate their experiences to enhance the overall student-athlete experience. The findings demonstrated that university students participate in sports at the varsity level because it instills values independent of those derived from other aspects of the university while enhancing life skills and their overall university experience (Pututo & O'Hanlon, 2007). Student-athletes value the experiences they gain from participating in sports at a varsity level and view these involvements as beneficial to their academic, athletic and personal undertakings.

The enhancement of particular life skills to university athletes coincides with the principles theorized by Arnett (2000) to the emerging adulthood population. Emerging adulthood speaks of ages 18-25 years and represents a period between adolescence and adulthood. This can be further distinguished as relative independence, a time when individuals explore various life directions (Arnett, 2000). Throughout an individual's time of emerging adulthood, they will gain life experiences that will impact their growth and help them navigate their life path. University students experiencing emerging adulthood while partaking in a varsity sport is a particular population that strives to succeed in academics, sport, and their independence. This combination of commitments suggests an exciting area of study considering the influx of responsibility, demanding schedule, and increased workload, all of which contribute to stress.

Stress has generally been recognized as a one-dimensional construct that represents the level of external pressure and worried response associated with physiological arousal (Lazarus, 2000). Gustafsson, Sagar and Stenling (2017) published a study in the *Scandinavian Journal of Medicine and Science in Sports* that used a variable-oriented approach, which focuses on the concepts rather than the individual as the key unit of investigation, to understand the prevalence of psychological stress amongst a widespread range of 258 athletes participating in a variety of sports. This study demonstrated that psychological stress, along with burnout, in a general population of athletes is induced by the fear of failure. While combining sport and education, Cosh and Tully (2014), report all athletes indicated encountering a number of stressors. There have been themes identified through research that relate to the stress placed on student-athletes such as: scheduling, fatigue, coaches, and finances. Moreover, research has demonstrated

that stress can be perceived as an inevitable outcome when combining academics and athletics, how individuals tend to deal with such stress is more uncertain.

Understanding stress is one thing, but knowing how to mediate the role that stress plays on student-athletes is another. Weinstein and Ryan (2011) conducted a study that explores a conceptual review of stress following the self-determination theory (SDT) framework. SDT attempts to understand personality and motivation and speaks to many stress-related issues. The research in this field suggests that less stress and better-coping methods amidst demanding events lead to greater independent functioning, better mindfulness, and many other factors. Such results illustrate the significance for each student-athlete to be knowledgeable in what coping strategies are most active.

The role of coping can be further understood by Grgurinović & Sindik (2015), who studied athletes' mental toughness, and the psychological state athletes encounter when persevering through difficult circumstances, which aligns as a characteristic to stress and coping with stress. Literature illustrates that to relieve stress students must adapt mindful attributes through enhancing their self-regulation of thoughts, attention, and emotion (Holzel et al., 2011). Furthermore, identifying that stress is distinctive to the athlete and not all athletes experience or cope with stress the same way is useful in understanding coping methods further. Kaiseler and Polman (2010), conducted a study that assessed stress, appraisal and coping in males and females through a golf-putting task. A common finding demonstrated that females reported being more often concerned with task execution while males with the outcome. Such research suggests that male and female athletes may use different coping strategies because they are stressed in different situations (Kaiseler & Polman, 2010).

Considering a simple athletic task discovered distinct coping strategies, it is important for coping to be reviewed and further considered at a more competitive level. A study piloted by Hanton, Neil, Mellalieu, and Fletcher (2008) investigated the influence of competitive experience and performance status upon athletes. The research reported that competitive athletes with high levels of experience rely more on problem-focused and emotion-focused coping than less experienced athletes. Alternatively, it has been proposed that many student-athletes report having very few coping mechanisms to overcome their stressors (Cosh & Tully, 2015). Skinner, Edge, Altman, and Sherwood have defined coping mechanisms in 2003 as:

“Coping is an organizational construct used to encompass the myriad actions individuals use to deal with stressful experiences ” (Skinner et al., 2003).

Collectively, coping mechanisms are expressed in a vast amount of ways, which highlights the importance of conducting further research.

As previously mentioned by Kaiseler and Polman (2010), males and females have reportedly confronted and dealt with stress in different ways. Current results have demonstrated a consistent theme that female student-athletes report experiencing more stress in comparison to male student-athletes (Kaiseler, Poolton, Backhouse & Stanger, 2017). Moreover, an honours research thesis conducted by Arsenault and MacDonald (2017), which investigated the importance of coach-athlete relationships while creating positive university sports experiences discovered that females reported having higher levels of stress in comparison to males. These results in sex differences could be related to some different variables. Wilding (2014) conducted a three-year longitudinal study comparing a male and female athlete competing in the same sport and found that the

female participant's enjoyment was less stable than that of the male participant; the female also experienced burnout earlier than the male.

These recurring outcomes in female varsity athlete stress and inadequate coping methods demonstrate the overarching themes throughout varsity athlete research. Conversely, this research does not provide definitive answers as to how or why this is. This develops the desire to understand further what alludes to these conclusions and how can these findings be well understood. The purpose of this study is to better understand the sources of stress and coping mechanisms of female varsity athletes.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 10 participants were recruited through word of mouth or a recruitment email. (Appendix A) The participant was required to be a female student-athlete who is currently in their 4th or 5th year at the University of Prince Edward Island and competes on a varsity team sport. This inclusion criterion allowed for participants to have been experienced varsity athletes who have participated in different student-athlete roles. The sample partaking in the study resulted in female varsity athletes from the following sports: 1 soccer, 3 rugby, 4 hockey, 1 basketball and 1 field hockey player. All athletes were within an age range of 20-22 years with a mean age of 21 years (SD=0.632). Athletes had been playing their sport for a minimum of 5 years and an average of 12.2 years of participation (SD=5.072). All participants within the study were considered full time students and averaged 4.6 courses in the fall semester and 4.4 courses in the winter semester. On average participants recorded spending 12.9 hours per week studying (SD=9.061), 3.4 hours playing their sport (SD=0.996), and 8 hours practicing (SD=2.896).

Materials

The materials used in this study consisted of an audio recorder, consent form, a letter of information (Appendix B), demographic form (Appendix D) and an interview guide (Appendix C). The interview guide was created by using information gathered from qualitative research that suggested using a semi-structured open-ended format to allow for an appropriate flow to the interviews (Cosh & Tully, 2015). Pilot testing the potential questions in two different interviews with student-athletes allowed for

modifications to be made and the proper format created. The demographic form asked the participant's name, age, year of eligibility, what sport they play, and for how many years have they participated in that sport. The form also asked for a brief background on the participant's sport, the number of courses taken per semester and how many hours a week they spend practicing, studying and playing. The letter of information provided the participant with the details and expectations of the study and the consent form asked for the permission of the participant through a signature.

Procedure

When an individual agreed to participate in the study, a location and meeting time was arranged between the researcher and the participant. The meetings took place in an area of convenience agreed upon by the two parties, but had to be a distraction free environment.

At the beginning of the data collection session, the participant was asked to read the letter of information and sign the consent form. After agreeing to participate, the participant completed the demographic form. When the participant felt comfortable with the expectations and format of the study, the data collection procedure began and the audio- recorder was started.

The session began by the researcher asking the participant questions from the interview guide. The guide was structured into three parts in order to allow an appropriate flow to the interview; brief summary, stress sources, and coping mechanisms. The questions being asked were properly worded to encourage the participant to voice their thoughts and opinions. The interview portion of the procedure took on average 8.8 minutes to complete ($SD=3.82$). Finally, the participant was asked for any additional

comments. When the interview was completed and the data was transcribed (Appendix E), the participant received an email transcript of their interview. The participant was given the opportunity to review and make any changes to their interview and return the transcript back to the researcher. Once the researcher collected the final drafts, the data analysis began.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process began after a week of no modifications made from the participants. The interviews were read over on multiple instances with point form notes being written on every response throughout all interviews. A thematic analysis was used on the qualitative data to help identify, analyze, and reveal themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An excel spreadsheet was created with the x-axis representing the 10 participants in the study against the y-axis with the 10 interview questions to help organize comments from each interview. The researcher began to organize responses by writing point form notes of the answer into the designated cell (ie., participant 1:question 2, experienced increased stress by participating in varsity athletics). This note taking system jumpstarted the analysis and helped keep data organized and begin to identify themes and distinct quotes.

Following the preliminary data being recorded into the excel spreadsheet the researcher divided the collected data into two parts of response: sources of stress and coping mechanisms. Below the two sections was an aggregated theme bracket that was used as a cell to demonstrate the overarching themes within the interview responses. This data was used to revisit all 28 pages of the transcribed interviews to initiate the process of drawing out conclusions.

RESULTS

The results of this study are divided into two sections. Part I includes the data collected in the first portion of the interviews regarding sources of stress. The section will be further broken down to highlight the topics asked and covered in the first portion of the interview guide. Each section discusses the master themes that were developed throughout the data analysis process. Part II follows a similar format but includes the data collected from the topics covered in the second portion of the interviews on coping mechanisms and uncovers the master themes discovered.

Part I

Varsity Athlete Stress Level

Participant's responses when asked if varsity level athletics had lead to increased or decreased stress for them were similar with various reasoning. There were 6 comments made by participants stating that the act of being a student-athlete has increased their overall stress levels. "I think that varsity level athletics has definitely led to increased stress for me. 100%. It comes with all the demands of practicing everyday, time management, being present at practice. Not only do you have to be there - but you have to focus, you worry about it even when you're not on the court" (Participant 8) All participants who experienced reportedly increased stress levels due to being a student-athlete made a connection to either social or school related time management issues. "A lot of time is spent at hockey... that could be hours that I spend studying" (Participant 6)

Although 6 participants reported having increased stress levels while being a student-athlete, 2 participants that reported having decreased levels. "Playing a varsity sport I get to release the stress that I normally have with school" (Participant 3). Another 2

participants reported that being a student-athlete did not influence their level of stress.

“My season is only 2 months long, and so my stress levels don’t really change”

(Participant 2).

Varsity Athlete Career Stress Level

All participants in the study reported that their stress levels or how they manage their stress levels had changed over the course of their varsity career. A common theme was that as the individual progressed through their varsity career, they became more familiar with the student-athlete lifestyle and better understood what it entailed. “I think I was more stressed in my first years due to the atmosphere. I was coming in from high school and going to university, which was a completely different environment. But I’m in my fifth year at the moment and I think I’ve adjusted to the stress and I know how to handle it better than I previously did. I think I’ve experienced it for the past 5 years, I know how to prioritize school and athletics when I need to. And I’m also more familiar with the schedule and practice times and tournament times so that if something is coming up I know to get a project done before hand or when I can and can’t work” (Participant 9). Additional comments made by participants demonstrated how early years was a large change, which caused a lot of stress. “In first year you’re coming in and you’re brand new and you have 5 classes and you’re not sure how to manage it alongside being involved in the community...your team expects a lot of you on and off the court” (Participant 8). Due to the unfamiliarity in the new university experience it was deemed to be more stressful than the later years of varsity participation.

A small portion of the participants mentioned they found their stress progressively increasing as they approach the end of their career due to the unpredictability of their

future with their sport and their education. “As the years go on, school gets harder and you’re trying to figure out what you want to do with your life” (Participant 1).

Most Stressful Varsity Athlete Aspect

Participants were asked what they found the most stressful aspect of being a student athlete to be and the responses were divided into two master themes: pressure and management. Pressure was driven from factors such as school, coaches, teammates and performance. “The stress to perform, there’s a lot of pressure this year to carry the team, so its super stressful sometimes when everyone depends on you” (Participant 2). While other participants found the most challenging aspect was the pressure to find success in both their academics and athletics. “Being a student and an athlete and just trying to adequately fulfill both sides of the equation” (Participant 9). Management themes involved student-athlete demands, school work and time elements. Participants reported this with comments such as “Definitely time management and balancing the work load of school while also having to be prepared for being a varsity athlete” (Participant 10).

Varsity Athlete Seasonal Stress Level

When asked if participants were more stressed during certain parts of their sport season results indicated that participants were either more stressed during preseason or towards the end of the season during playoffs. Four participants reported that preseason stress had a lot to do with making sure you are prepared for the season ahead and adjusting to the new team dynamic and your potential new role. “I am more stressed during the beginning (preseason) because there are expectations at the start of the year” (Participant 5). Conversely, 6 participants reported that approaching the end of a term and school demands becoming larger and games having more value influenced participants to

report higher levels of stress during playoff season. “I think as playoffs start and as the games start becoming more and more important. That is when you have to be on top of your game, and with school as well you have to make sure everything is done on time and there is a lot of studying on the bus that starts to happen during the end of the year” (Participant 6).

Influence of Support on Varsity Athletes Stress

Majority of participants referred to their influence of support to be increased or decreasing their stress levels. Participants indicated that their support, meaning their family, peers, teammates and coaches, decreased their stress with exception to 4 participants reporting that their coaches increase their stress levels. “My coach increases my stress levels but my teammates, my family and my friends definitely decrease my stress levels. Family, friends and peers aren’t the ones putting pressure on me. I feel like my teammates understand because they are in the same boat as me and feel that stress and everyone can talk about it” (Participant 1). Other participants indicated their coach was one of the best supporters in their life and has helped them deal with their stress. “My coaches are super supportive they are always checking in with all of us making sure we get all our school work done or making sure people are going to study hall. They know we are students before we are athletes so they really want to make sure that we are succeeding in both parts and not just the sport” (Participant 2).

Part II

Varsity Athlete Stress Management

Ways in which participants reportedly manage their stress was divided into two categories that stem from physical to emotional or mental coping methods. Half of the

participants reported that going to practice or being physically active in any way helps them relieve some of their stress. “I like to be physically active so it doesn’t have to be in my sport but if I’m super stressed about hockey or school then going to the gym helps” (Participant 10). Another popular theme in the responses was talking to peers or somebody they trust about the stress they are experiencing. “Talking to my friends about it (stress) and making sure I’m on top of my school work so I don’t leave it to the last minute and get even more stressed out” (Participant 1).

Additionally, 2 participants mentioned that as they progressed throughout their university student-athlete career they started emphasizing the importance of being organized and suggested certain methods to help while attempting to manage stress. “I like to stay on campus all day. I go in early and I shoot basketball, go to classes and finish my school work then I go to practice and focus on that but after practice I don’t like there to be any work left from the day. I don’t have any emails or anything left to do in the lab, I just like that once I’m done practice I get some ice and go home. I’ll eat, relax, sleep and just unwind from the day, I like to make sure I get stuff done during the day and then de-stress before bed” (Participant 8).

University Support

Participants were asked if they felt as though the university as a whole provides enough resources for student-athletes to find success in their degrees and to further explain their reasoning. There was a lot of positive feedback with regards to the implementation of a study hall on campus in the recent years. Participants agreed that study hall was an important and useful tool for student-athletes to take advantage of but ultimately it does not cater to all individuals studying methods. “I think it has improved

this year with the study hall sessions” (Participant 7). Furthermore, participants mentioned they felt as though over the course of their career the university had made improvements but there are still steps to be taken. “I still think there is a long way to go in terms of the resources you can reach out to when you’re stressed. I tried to make an appointment with a student counselor and sometimes it would take 2-3 weeks. I think when students are stressed at that time and need help at that time - it’s not necessarily there” (Participant 6)

Ideal Support Systems

Overall, all participants were able to reflect on their own experiences and take into consideration their needs as a student-athlete. From there, participants were able to bring forth ideas or suggestions that the university or community could provide to student-athletes to help fulfill those needs and ultimately improve the systems of support. Responses from the participants covered two themes: school support and other support. School support represented concepts such as study hall, professor meetings, advising and learning time management skills. “I think starting in first year it is really important to have a first year advisor. For instance, I don’t know where to park, what do I do? I’m struggling with a course... I think I might want to do dentistry – help me plan my program. Figuring things out that way and having that support there and having someone you could literally ask anything to” (Participant 8). Additionally, participants suggest other areas that need adjustment in order to benefit the student-athlete population. These suggestions included an after season check-in, sport psychologists, and optional practice times. “Something to distress where you’re not constantly worried about performing in practice or that you are not constantly missing out on study time. Having an optional

practice where, if you can go - then you can, but if you cant go then its not frowned upon" (Participant 9).

Majority of athletes who were partaking in a team sport with a short season such as field hockey, rugby and soccer have reported that they experienced a lack of support once their season concludes but their academic semester is still carrying on. "Having a follow up after season is needed. I think after the season is when most people go down hill. When you're not in season you're not as prepared or organized" (Participant 2). To help solve relatable issues, participants suggested having a sport psychologist as a readily accessible resource that would benefit them especially in times of need when their coaches or teammates are not available.

DISCUSSION

Student-athletes participate in sport at a varsity level because they view their involvement beneficial to their academic, athletic and personal life (Pututo & O'Hanlon, 2007). The combination of athletic and academic commitments provides an interesting area of study considering the influx of accountability, difficult schedule, and increased workload, all of which contribute to stress. Research conducted by Arsenault and MacDonald (2017) reported that female student-athletes report having higher levels of stress in comparison to male student-athletes. The purpose of this study was to better understand the sources of stress and coping mechanisms for female varsity athletes. This was accomplished by conducting 10 semi-structured interviews with female university student-athletes competing on a team sport of ice hockey, rugby, basketball or field hockey and currently in their 4th or 5th year of eligibility. This discussion is organized into Part I, Part II and a general discussion that includes the current studies recommendations, limitations and future directions.

Part I

Part I of the study focused on the results from the first portion of the interviews, which observed sources of stress. These results provided a better understanding as to what is causing female student-athletes to feel stressed and will help provide a foundation moving forward with stress research. First of all, the majority of female student-athlete participants connected their increased level of stress to the large time commitment demanded of student-athletes. However, not all participants felt that way, as some participants reported that being a student-athlete lowered their stress levels, by having the sport they love as a tool to distress about their academics. Additionally, participants

reported that being a student-athlete allows individuals to develop a supportive community with their teammates and coaches while furthering their education which helps lower their stress levels.

Ultimately, participants' stress levels were unique to each individual, with 6 participants reporting that the experience of being a student-athlete had increased their overall stress. This highlights that stress is distinctive to each individual, which serves as a guiding point for the remainder of the interview questions. Individuals who experience increased or decreased stress levels due to being student-athletes were then able to identify what causes certain emotions. Being mindful of stress levels enables a better understanding of what makes an individual stressed.

Analyzing varsity athlete stress levels over the course of their career was used as an insightful question to encourage participants to reflect on their stress over multiple years and understand what has or has not changed. The responses indicated that all participants experienced a change in their stress levels over the course of their varsity careers. Half of the participants reported they found themselves more stressed during their first and second years of eligibility. Additionally, participants found that overtime they improved their time management skills, which helped decrease their stress levels in their later years. Research suggests that time management is important for athletes at the university level, especially for students who want to improve their future planning abilities and experience greater academic achievement (Ustun, Ersoy & Berk, 2017). Participants accredited their improvements to becoming more familiar with their schedule, gaining a stronger relationship with their coach and teammates and discovering study and workout routines that were most accommodating to their lifestyle.

Although a smaller portion of participants had a different affiliation with their stress levels during their varsity athlete careers, it is still deemed valuable to understand how so. There were 2 participants that felt as though their education got progressively harder every year and found their stress levels increasing as they began approaching the end of their student-athlete career. As mentioned in the results, participants found it hard dealing with the unpredictability of their athletic future and the competitiveness of furthering their education at a graduate level or finding a job after graduation. Research validates that the majority of student-athletes' competitive athletic careers will conclude once their eligibility expires and that student-athletes often face difficulty leaving behind their athletic identity upon the conclusion of their varsity careers (Nite, 2012). These implications emphasize the importance of time management and of educating student-athletes on future endeavors outside their sport, particularly how to carry over the skills gained from being a student-athlete and incorporate them into their community and everyday life.

University student-athletes face unique stressors that can contribute to compromised well-being (Beauchemin, 2014). The most stressful aspect of being a student-athlete was an important area to cover for participants to be in tune with the sources causing their stress and be mindful of their wellness. Two themes were identified: pressure and management. Participants who correlated their stress to pressure reported that the main source of their stress stemmed from school, their coaches, teammates and lastly the pressure to perform. Baumeister (1986) defines pressure as the factors or combination of factors that increase the significance of performing at high levels in given situations. These sub-themes of pressure are all aspects of a student-athlete's environment

and the surroundings in which they are immersed, all of which are out of the individual's immediate control with exclusion to self-pressure. Understanding where pressures come from is important in identifying how to handle these pressures effectively. When student-athletes combine the pressures from their environment along with the pressures they put on themselves, it can result in a very intense level of expectations that are not healthy for any individual. In addition to pressure, the most commonly reported aspect of stress was the act of management.

Management covers a widespread area of student athlete demands, schoolwork, emotions and time. Moreover, management tends to hold the more controllable aspects within a student-athlete's life. These results are encouraging, considering that a main stressor in many student-athletes lives are aspects governable to the athlete. This information is useful to coaches and professionals moving forward to help educate future student-athletes on how to balance these management aspects and improve their well-being.

Participants reported their stress to increase during pre-season and again during playoffs of their sport seasons. This was unsurprising, considering the expectations coming into a new season and the value on games towards the end of a season. These results coincide with outcomes mentioned previously regarding the most stressful aspects of being a student athlete that highlights the aspect of pressure. Similarly, preseason and playoffs both provide a substantial amount of pressure on a student-athlete and how a student-athlete handles that pressure often decides how successful they will be. These timelines are useful to the student-athlete to be mindful of their stress levels.

Likewise, levels of stress were further evaluated by identifying whether the

participant's support systems, family, friends, teammates and coaches increase or decrease their stress. All participants deemed their support to have no influence on their stress or decreased their stress with exclusion to their coach. Studies have demonstrated a lack of trust from student-athletes in their coaches can lead to a decrease in wellbeing. On the other hand, a positive, healthy relationship between student-athletes and their coaches has shown to increase student-athlete happiness (Andrassy, Svensson, Bruening, Huml, & Chung, 2014). Ultimately, the relationship a student-athlete incurs with their coach can have a major affect on their intercollegiate success and influence their overall experience.

Overall, this study demonstrated a greater amount of participants reporting their coach decreased their overall stress. This result is favorable and emphasizes the large role the 'coach-athlete relationship' plays in regards to stress. Furthermore, Wilson and Pritchard (2005) reported student-athletes who experience high levels of stress are more likely to practice bad health habits. This was the driver within the study to consider the following portion in the discussion covered in Part II of the interviews about coping mechanisms amongst student-athletes.

Part II

Part II of the study covered understanding what coping mechanisms to stress were used by the student-athlete participants. These results help mediate the role stress plays in a student-athletes life and provide a better understanding on how to best handle stress. The literature acknowledges that the inability to manage stress has been shown to reduce sport performance and overall well-being, whereas coping can generate positive emotions (Cosh & Tully, 2015). Participants represented their stress management in two areas of physical and mental or emotional coping methods. Physical methods of coping to stress

incorporate the training portion that comes along with being a student-athlete while other participants mentioned performing physical activity on their own time aside from the team atmosphere. Many participants stated that playing varsity athletics and training alongside the team is time to disregard the stress they may be experiencing and just focus on the enjoyment of their sport and the people involved in it. Additionally, participants suggested going for walks or runs on their own time allows them to de-stress from both their athletic and academic stressors.

Mental or emotional methods for coping with stress involved talking to trusted individuals in their life, for instance the individual's parents. Previous studies support this coping mechanism: Cosh and Tully (2015) discovered that parents were crucial in enabling athletes to overcome their stressors and assist in successfully integrating sport and education. Additionally, student-athletes tend to lean on individuals in their life that can relate or understand the stress they are feeling, for instance their teammates or other student-athletes in their life. "My teammates understand what I am going through" (Participant 1). Through this method of communicating their stress, student-athletes become mindful of how they are feeling and better identify what is causing the stress, which ultimately helps them cope and manage their stress.

Participants demonstrated two main methods of coping that can be broadly expressed as verbalizing methods and distractive methods. Verbalizing their thoughts and feelings towards people they trust helped the participants mitigate the heaviness stress created. A distractive method is a technique used to ignore the participant's stress for a certain period of time, which can be done by being physically active with or without their team. Both of these methods reportedly worked for the participants and also develops an

intriguing area of study for further research about whether or not having a balance between the two methods would serve as an optimal coping mechanism.

The following portion of coping mechanisms provides results on whether or not the university provides enough resources for student-athletes to find success in their degrees. Participants found it useful that student-athletes were given access to a study hall, a designated time for individuals to meet a couple times a week to complete homework, study for a test, or work on assignments. Although this option may have worked for some student-athletes it was not accommodating to everyone considering that some participants felt as though they could not work on their academics in a large group setting. Overall, participants felt as though over the course of their varsity career they had seen improvements across the university campus in terms of support but they have expressed that they believe there are still steps towards a more resourceful environment to be taken. Participants mentioned that the increasing awareness around mental health initiatives have started important conversations about taking better care of an individual's mental state. These initiatives are supported through previous studies that have demonstrated across various populations that facilities look to improve their access to care by having greater mental health services more readily accessible to communities (Eaton et al., 2017). Such steps are promising for the future of mental health organizations and effective coping methods in student-athlete populations.

The final topic covered by the researcher and participants spoke of recommendations for the university moving forward. Results demonstrated two major themes of support that were later categorized into school support and other support. School support recommended having assigned advisors for each sports team with the role

of helping the student-athletes organize schedules and provide direction for their educational and athletic future. Participants spoke highly of how much they would value having an advisor that is familiar with the various student-athlete commitments and help them navigate the challenges of time management. Other support opinions that were suggested from participants included having team sport psychologists and also implementing post-season follow up times with their coach. These supports would be used in ways to enhance their athletic achievement by practicing mental and physical aspects of their game.

Recommendations

The results from this study can also be interpreted as informative and useful ideas moving forward for student-athletes, coaches and universities. Firstly, it is important that student-athletes become familiar with their schedule. This may involve printing out course outlines and writing down important dates for assignments, papers, tests and projects. Additionally, familiarize with practice schedules, game times and other athletic commitments. This information is all useful when it comes to prioritizing certain obligations. Moreover, establish a trustworthy relationship that can be used to relay information of stress. It was demonstrated in the study that this was useful in terms of coping with the stress placed on the participants.

Suggestions for coaches moving forward are to start by being mindful of the team climate. It is important to understand that all athletes are unique and always try to provide an environment that is accommodating to all personalities. With that being said, implementing a buddy system may be effective in housing the needs of each athlete. The buddy system involves pairing up a less experienced student-athlete with a veteran in

times of need. For instance, have the buddies sit on the bus together, study together, warm-up together. These interactions stimulate a bond that may be beneficial to both parties. The goal of this implementation would be to have the buddy system benefit the cohesiveness of the team and allow for rookie athletes to become more aware of their role and potentially put less strain on the coach-athlete relationship.

Universities can make improvements by having advisors on campus that are readily accessible to their student-athletes and are flexible according to the student-athletes schedules. This coincides with Cosh and Tully's research (2015), which considered the time restraints and scheduling demands of student-athletes and the difficulties they encounter in their efforts to have a well-balanced schedule. Student-athletes mentioned that they often had difficulty trying to find an appropriate time to meet with an advisor on top of their academic and athletic demands. Furthermore, results from this study have demonstrated that student-athletes would appreciate and benefit from the university incorporating an educational session that provides advice on how to effectively manage time and balance the demands associated with being a student-athlete.

Limitations

Several limitations existed within this study that included sample size and the representation. As mentioned, the study consisted of 10 female varsity athletes that were all from the University of Prince Edward Island. The inclusion criteria for this study focused solely on athletes that were on a team sport and in their fourth or fifth year of eligibility. This was beneficial to the study because it allowed for viewpoints on team dynamics and also allowed for participants to reflect on their experiences and time as a student-athlete. This can also be seen as a limitation due to the exclusion of individual

sports such as track and field, swimming and cross-country that may have provided a new and different perspective to sources of stress and coping mechanisms. Additionally, because the participants were in their later years of eligibility, they may have overlooked what caused their stress or what coping methods they may have used in their initial years of participation. Lastly, another restraint to the study may have occurred throughout the interview process. The relationship between the researcher and the participant may have influenced the responses given and the participant may have felt pressured to respond in a certain way or how they perceived the researcher wanting them to respond.

Future Directions

This study serves as a foundation for other possible directions to be taken and further investigated. Considering throughout the study, coaches had reportedly increased stress for 4 participants and it was recommended that the coach could potentially change this by putting greater emphasis on team climates and implementing buddy systems. Buddy systems will strive to put greater importance on the interpersonal relationships amongst the team and help the younger athletes identify with team leaders and potentially better understand their team role. In the future, the buddy system can be assessed to see if it influences coach-athlete relationships within the team, and if so, is that effect in a positive or negative manner.

Another potential direction for this study to take further is to see whether implementing educational sessions on proper time management skills is beneficial to the student-athlete population. Female student-athletes reported within this study that they would have benefited from opportunities to further foster their athletic and academic commitments and often times were unsure how to balance the physical and social

challenges of being a student-athlete.

CONCLUSION

This study helped better understand the sources of stress and coping mechanisms amongst female varsity athletes. From the use of a semi-structured open-ended interview guide, the research was able to conduct one-on-one interviews with 10 female varsity athletes from the University of Prince Edward Island that are currently participating in their 4th or 5th year of eligibility. This qualitative approach allowed for the participants to provide detail and further explore the sources of their stress and what coping methods being used.

The results of this study demonstrated that all female varsity athletes reported a change in their stress over the course of their career, whether that be increased or decreased. Participants also revealed two major themes of coping: verbalizing or distractive methods. These results will help female varsity athletes, and potentially other relative populations become aware of what the sources of their stress may be and ultimately acquire skills and methods to efficiently regulate the role their stress plays. Additionally, these results will benefit the surroundings of varsity athletes and allow coaches, universities and support teams become more cognizant of the student-athlete well-being and optimize the environment of female varsity athletes.

Focusing future research on the coach-athlete relationship as a source of stress or how incorporating educational seminars on time management skills benefit student-athletes are two valuable areas to investigate further. Such investigations will aim to provide positive environments in a notably competitive atmosphere that varsity athletics creates. By continuing research and exploring the varsity athlete domain, communities can strive to gain optimal settings that encourage varsity athletic participants to achieve

physical, educational and personal growth from an interuniversity environment.

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Appendix A

Recruitment email

Dear XXXXX

My name is Emma Martin and I am returning to the University of Prince Edward Island as a 5th year student with a Bachelor of Science in Kinesiology. I am currently working on my Honours conversion research project under the supervision of Dr. Dany MacDonald, which aims to gather information from female student athletes. The purpose of this study is to understand stress amongst female student athletes. Based on this, I am looking for female student athletes who are enrolled as a full time university student. The interview is expected to take no more than 1 hour. If you or someone you know may be interested, please contact Emma at ekmartin@upei.ca or at 1-902-940-4482.

Thanks for your time,

Emma Martin, BScK

5th year researcher

Department of Applied Human Sciences

University of Prince Edward Island

Dany MacDonald, PhD

Associate Professor

Department of Applied Human Sciences

University of Prince Edward Island

Email: danymacdonald@upei.ca

Phone: 902-566-6482

Appendix B

Letter of Information

The information below describes a research study and invites you to volunteer to participate in the research being conducted. You are free to keep a copy of this form.

The purpose of the present study is to gather information from approximately 10 female student athletes about their thoughts and feelings towards stress.

The researchers for this study are Emma Martin and Dr. Dany MacDonald from the University of Prince Edward Island. The requirements for participation in this research project are female university athletes who are currently full time students and members of a Canadian varsity sport. The data collection will take place at a time and location agreed upon by the researcher and participant. During the data collection, participants will be asked to complete a demographic information form. They will then be asked a series of broad questions pertaining to stress and asked for their thoughts throughout the interview process. The participant's thoughts will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Once the data has been transcribed, participants will be sent a copy of their transcript by

email for review. This will provide participants with a weeklong opportunity to add or withdraw any comments made during the data collection process. Once data collection is complete, data will be pooled together to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of students. Each participant will be given an identification number to further ensure anonymity, as it is possible that individual quotes may be used in the reporting of results. As a reminder, participation in the study is completely voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time without consequence. For participants who withdraw, data collected up until that point would be destroyed. In the case that a participant decides to withdraw from the study it is requested to be within 3 weeks after receiving the transcription of their interview. Participant information will help us to better understand student's perceptions on stress and allow researchers to make necessary changes to meet the needs of female student athletes.

All the information collected will remain confidential to the researchers listed below. Throughout the study, data will be stored in a secure, password-protected computer in a room that is locked at all times when no one is present. At no point in this study will participant's information be shared with others.

There are no physical, psychological, economic or social risks associated to participation in this study. If you are interested in participating you can contact the researcher, Emma Martin at (902)-940-4482, or by email at ekmartin@upei.ca.

This research project has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Prince Edward Island. I understand that I can contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902) 620-5104, or by e-mail at reb@upei.ca if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.

Emma Martin, BScK

Department of Applied Human Sciences

University of Prince Edward Island

Email: ekmartin@upei.ca

Dany MacDonald, PhD

Associate Professor

Department of Applied Human Sciences

University of Prince Edward Island

Email: danymacdonald@upei.ca

Phone: 902-566-6482

Participant Informed Consent Form

I have read the letter of information and understand the purpose of the present research study. I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions or discuss the project with the researcher(s) and my questions/concerns have been answered to my satisfaction. I also understand that all of the information collected will remain confidential to the research team and that anonymity of my identity will be ensured. However I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and quotes may be used in the dissemination of results. I am aware that I will be given a transcription of the interview by email and a one-week period to review and withdraw any comments and return back to the researcher. I understand that I can keep a copy of the signed and dated consent form. Finally, I realize that participation in this research is voluntary and I can withdraw from this study at any moment or choose to not answer any question posed without consequences and that any data collected to that point will be destroyed. I understand that if at any point during data collection or the question period I wish to withdraw from the study, the collected data will be destroyed. Finally, in the case that I decide to withdraw from the study I understand that it must be within 3 weeks after receiving the transcription of the interview.

This research project has been approved by the Research Ethics Board of the University of Prince Edward Island. I understand that I can contact the UPEI Research Ethics Board at (902)620-5104, or by e-mail at reb@upei.ca if I have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this study.

I consent to participate in this research project.

Participant Name

Signature

Date

Name of researcher or research assistant

Signature

Date

If you wish to receive a summary of the results, please check the box below and provide your contact information.

Yes, I would like to receive a summary of the results

E-mail address:

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Associate Professor

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Appendix C
Participant Demographic Form

INSTRUCTIONS: Please fill in the following questionnaire to help provide us with some relevant background information about yourself.

Name: _____

Year of eligibility: _____

Age: _____

Sport: _____

Years of participation in sport: _____

A brief background on your sport. (ie: years of participation, why you started playing etc.): _____

Number of courses per semester: Fall _____ / Winter _____

On average how many:

hours per week do you spend practicing: _____

hours per week do you spend studying: _____

hours per week do you spend playing your sport: _____

Appendix D

Interview Guide

- Can you provide general information/background with respect to your specific sport? (ie: number of years played, level, position...)
-
- Do you believe that varsity level athletics lead to increased or decreased stress for you?
 - Has your level of stress changed over the course of your varsity career?
 - What do you find the most stressful aspect of being a student athlete to be?
 - Are you more stressed during certain parts of the season?
 - Do you feel as though your support (coaches, teammates, family, peers) increases or decreases your stress levels?
-
- What are some ways in which you manage your stress?
 - Do you think the university provides enough resources for student athletes to find success in their degrees? Why or why not?

- Considering your needs as a student-athlete, what types of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a university athlete?
-

- Is there anything else that you would like to discuss as it relates to stress during participation in varsity athletics?

Appendix E

Interview 1

Researcher: I just want to start off with asking a similar question as to what is on your demographic form. Can you provide me with a general background/information with regards to your specific sport so number of years played, level, position?

Participant: So I started playing soccer when I was four, and I'm not sure what position, I just played for fun. So as I got older age 12 I guess, I played defense and then ages 12 or 13 I played provincial, I played that until I was 18 and then I started training for Canada games and so I played defense up to Canada games and then I switched to playing midfield on the wing. After Canada games I went to Holland college for two years and played there and I played striker and then after Holland college I came to University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) and I've been here for 3 years playing wing and during the summer I play premier league.

Researcher: Do you believe that varsity level athletics lead to increased or decreased stress for you?

Participant: I definitely say increase, I feel like at Holland college I didn't find there to be that much pressure because the league was different but then as soon as I hit AUS there are a lot of better players and I don't know I just found it really stressful. Trying to be one of the best players that I could be. I don't know, I find it a lot of work and trying to focus on school and soccer at the same time is kind of stressful at times.

Researcher: Has your level of stress changed over the course of your varsity career?

Participant: I would say its gotten higher, again, I just want to be the best that I can be and sometimes its hard playing varsity. As the years go on school gets harder and you're trying to figure out what you want to do with your life. Just all that is a big stressor

Researcher: What do you find to be the most stressful aspect of being a student athlete to be?

Participant: I honestly find there is a lot of pressure and that's where I get stressed. There's a lot of pressure on my team to succeed by my coach and stuff. I don't know, I find that stresses me out, if I have a bad game I get really down on my self and not that its hard to come back from it, but in a way it is and I don't know I find that stressful. And depending on the week, if I have a lot of homework or something to do I find that to be, like if I'm away on the weekend with 2 games its kind of like where am I finding the time to do this homework? I just find trying to stay on top of that stuff can be stressful at times too.

Researcher: Are you more stressed at certain points of the season?

Participant: Umm, no not necessarily. I don't think so. Especially, because we have a short season.

Researcher: Do you feel as though your support so things like your coaches, peers, teammates, and family do they increase or decrease your stress levels?

Participant: I feel like my coach kind of increases my stress levels but like my teammates, my family and my friends and stuff they definitely decrease my stress levels. Because, they aren't the ones putting pressure on me so I feel like my teammates they understand because they are kind of in the same boat as me they feel that stress and everyone can talk about... I feel like you don't really go to your coach and be like "You're stressing me out!!"

Researcher: Okay, perfect. Umm what are some ways in which you manage your stress?

Participant: Umm, I feel like talking to my friends about and making sure I'm on top of my school work so I don't leave it to the last minute and get even more stressed out. I feel like being organized and my friends, and I don't know I like to go outside and go for walks or go for a run. I feel like being around my friends makes me less stressed.

Researcher: Do you think the university provides enough resources for student athletes to find success in their degrees? Why or why not?

Participant: I actually don't know the answer to that question because I've never seek sources for that. I know that like the profs are pretty understanding that if you're going

away for a weekend or something they're pretty good towards that but yeah I don't know I've never really looked for resources or anything.

Researcher: Considering your needs as a student athlete, what types of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a university athlete.

Participant: I don't really know because I find if you do need help with something you can go to your professors and they are usually pretty understanding about it. I was thinking if there is something for just athletes but then I don't think that is really fair. Yeah I don't really know if there is anything I can think of.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to discuss as it relates to stress during participation in varsity athletics?

Participant: No not really.

Interview 2

Researcher: Can you provide general information/background with respect to your sport so number of years you've played, position you've played, level etc.

Participant 2: So I'm in my 4th year, I'm on the UPEI women's rugby team I've played every year so 4 years. And my position is fullback. Started playing when I was in grade 11, so 6 years.

Researcher: Okay, Do you believe varsity level athletics has lead to increased or decreased stress for you?

Participant 2: I guess it depends like in school I don't get too stressed out so having a sport kind of relieves the stress. Like going to practice I like don't have to think about school or anything. But like I guess sometimes it is stressful like im just thankful that my season is only like 2 months because if it was longer it would probably get more stressful like with midterms and stuff it can get stressful I think like overall its probably like my stress levels just stay the same.

Researcher: Has your level of stress changed over the course of your varsity career at all? Over the 4 years?

Participant 2: Probably like in my first and second year I was a lot more stressed, cause I was like 'oh my god' you just don't know what its like, especially taking only 4 courses um like first and second year rugby and this year I'm taking 5 and I don't even notice a difference because I'm just like more used to it now and you know how to handle your workload now more so like definitely less stressed than I was in first and second year

Researcher: What do you find the most stressful aspect of being a student athlete to be?

Participant 2: Just like the stress to perform I guess, there's a lot of like pressure this year to like career the team, so its super stressful sometimes when everyone kind of like depends on you,

Researcher: Are you more stressed during certain parts of your season?

Participant 2: Probably playoffs I guess, just because it all rides on that one game – its make or break. You win – you move on, you lose – you're done. So this week there is a lot of emotions at practice so - probably playoffs.

Researcher: Do you feel as though your support so your coaches, your teammates, your family, your friends. Do they increase or decrease your stress levels?

Participant 2: Definitely decrease. When I hangout with my friends I'm like oh my god yes, I don't have to think about rugby or school or anything for like a little bit. But having my sister on my team definitely helps like we can both kind of not be stressed together for a little bit but. Teammates its kind of hard because you're with each other everyday for so long that like whenever it comes time to studying I don't really want to study with them I want to get away from rugby for just a little bit. But my coaches are like super supportive they are always checking in with all of us making sure we get all our school work done or making sure people are going to study hall or just that kind of stuff, so they are like super supportive. They know we are students before were athletes so like just really want to make sure that we are succeeding in both parts and not just the sport.

Researcher: What are some ways in which you manage your stress?

Participant 2: Working out, like if I'm super stressed then I'm going to go do a light workout then get back to the books just like make sure I'm taking consistent breaks while I'm studying or doing my work. Make sure I'm eating healthy. I find most people when they are super stressed eat bad and that would probably lead to more stress.

Researcher: Do you think the university provides enough resources for student athletes to find success in their degrees? Why or why not?

Participant 2: I think that they are working towards being better um like the study hall that they implemented this year definitely a help but they always stress how important it is to be a student before but then you hear stories how they let athletes play when they're not supposed to so its kind of like do they really want us to succeed or do they just really want to see us succeed in sport? They have to find that balance between letting players play and like with bad marks or you have to figure out if you want your student athletes to be students first or athletes. So I definitely think they are working towards it – they do notice the all Canadians, with the breakfast and that kind of stuff so – they could always be better

Researcher: considering your needs as a student athlete, what kinds of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a university athlete?

Participant 2: I know like STFX, for their rugby team, its mandatory to go to study hall, its just like practice, if they don't go to study hall they don't play. So, I don't know its one thing to make it – but not follow it like for my coaches I know last year we had problems with people like grades and stuff and this year they enforce things but they don't follow up on it. Like actually making people do things, I know rugby season is hard because there is a lot of stuff going on with your school and stuff, blah blah blah just like guess actually making them do it, our season is only 2 months so and follow up after season I think that is when most people go down hill is when you're not in season so you're not as prepared or organized. So actually treating our sport like a full – like off season is still in season – like were still training for the next season so think like having it all year round would be way more beneficial cause that's when peoples grades start to go down is when they aren't in rugby season.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to discuss as it relates to stress during participation in varsity athletics?

Participant 2: I just know that people on our team like last year got super stressed – I don't know having someone to talk to – kind of like Leigh's role. People just get so stressed out cause they don't have anyone to vent to because they don't want to talk to the team because its probably about the team is the reason they're stress. So I guess having somebody else there to have as a support. You don't want to talk to the coaches either, I guess you can talk to your family and stuff but like having that other person would be ideal – Leigh is probably that guy now.

Interview 3

Researcher: Alright, to start off can you just provide a general background with respect to your sport so number of years played, level, position...

Participant 3: I played rugby for 8 years. Started in high school in grade 10, I usually play forward like 7, 6 or 8 position. I've played varsity, went and played team Atlantic one year, been to camps and stuff.

Researcher: do you believe that varsity level athletics lead to increased or decreased stress for you?

Participant 3: During my time at university probably decreased. Because being active and like getting to release that stress that I would normally have with school like I wouldn't normally get if I was playing a varsity sport so by being able to play a varsity sport and getting to go out for a few hours a day to just play around kind of relieves a lot of stress from school.

Researcher: Has your level of stress changed over the course of your varsity career?

Participant 3: Yes, first year and in my first few years it was very stressful cause I didn't know how to manage my time with being in a lot of courses with rugby 2 hours a day, everyday for 2 months straight basically. Definitely now, like my 5th year doesn't really

count cause I'm not in many courses but like last year I was in a full course load and playing rugby and did the best year and the best I had done in school. So I think over the course of time it helps and you really figure it out.

Researcher: What do you find the most stressful aspect of being a student athlete to be?

Participant 3: Definitely like to do well in school but there's definitely that added pressure, and stressful to do well in your sport and to be successful as a team. There's always that thought of 'oh I want to win an AUS championship' and you want to make your team proud, yourself proud but also your school so it's kind of stressful that way too.

Researcher: Are you more stressed during certain parts of your season?

Participant 3: Yeah definitely towards the end, mainly the second half. Being together for 2 hours everyday can sometimes get a little catty. Attention is running high and you can get sick of one another. And that's kind of like when some people start to stop caring. Like when you care a lot and you start to notice people not care kind of like gets you mad and stuff. The 2nd half of the season I'm more stressed out, and playoffs are coming too so.

Researcher: Do you feel as though your support so your coaches, teammates, family, peers do they increase or decrease your stress levels?

Participant 3: I think it like depends on the person. Like my friends I know that they are always there to talk or if I have something to ask about they're always there to help me out. Same with my family. Umm coaches probably not so much, like before when we had our old coach Shannon she was always helping like you need to get your school work done there's that here for you, like our current coaches aren't so concerned about that so. Umm teammates I think some of them definitely increase and some of them don't. umm, like some of them are just frustrating because they just don't care, don't do it, and not fully committed to the program, but then others are there and make it easy for you because they remind you that its okay and that we will get through it.

Researcher: What are some ways in which you manage your stress?

Participant 3: I like to go for runs to get mind off of things. I like to be alone, get away from everybody and everything, or talking to my sister or one of my friends

Researcher: So do you think the university finds enough resources for varsity athletes to find success in their degrees? Why or why not?

Participant 3: Yes and no, I guess. I don't know... going through business, I feel like some programs are really close knit and the faculty really helps them but like those cases yes, I know that Kennedy is in family science and the teacher emailed everybody making sure everyone had all their courses picked out and making sure everything was OK. But like I understand that is a smaller faculty but business is kind of like you're thrown into it

and no one, like if you're close with a teacher they can help you out but other than that no not really.

Researcher: Considering your needs as a student athlete what types of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a varsity athlete?

Participant 3: I definitely like in the first years you really need to have days that are required for first and second years to help them with their school, like what Donnie does with the study hall. Like coming from high school its so different. Even if you are the smartest one in your high school you're still going to struggle bit with university, I think just having someone there to help you learn how to study, or just force you to read your books and do your readings really helps. Because once you get in your further years you kind of figure it out yourself but I think its important to have that In your first few years.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to discuss as it relates to participation in varsity athletics?

Participant 3: No

Interview 4

Researcher: Hi Niki, can you provide general information/background with respect to your specific sport? So number of years played, position, level..

Participant: I started playing rugby in grade 12, played 8 man in grade12 then I started playing university, I played second row for three years then this year I started playing little bit 8 man little bit second row. I also played in the summer, every summer since grade 12, most recently on the club team um which happened to win.

Researcher: Umm, so do you believe that varsity level athletics has lead to increased or decreased stress for you?

Participant: Umm, probably increased. There is much more time commitment, more stress to perform.

Researcher: Has your level of stress changed over the course of your varsity career?

Participant: I think so yeah, because as you go through the years you want to do better in school because you're trying to get into grad schools or whatever and you become more involved in your sport, you want to compete better for your team.

Researcher: What do you find the most stressful aspect of being a varsity athlete to be?

Participant: Probably the time, you always have something to do but then its like oh wait I have to go to practice at 4. Or I cant do anything because I have to go away this weekend, umm and then you're also like I have to workout everyday so that's probably the main thing. You don't have time to work – don't have money.

Researcher: So are you more stressed during certain parts of your season?

Participant: I don't think so, its pretty consistent. Maybe a little more around semis but not a significant amount.

Researcher: Do you feel as though your support so your friends, family, teammates, coaches. Do they increase or decrease your stress levels?

Participant: My friends definitely decrease it, we always try and have a girls night once a week. We just started doing that this year and its very relaxing very nice. Umm, sometimes coaches can stress you out, sometimes your teammates can stress you out on the field but other than that.

Researcher: Why do you think that?

Participant: Just a little too intense at certain times. I know at practice on times someone said "This week we are athlete-students not student-athletes" and said miss class to come to practice and I said nope, sorry I have exams.. sorry.. sorry I'm not in business.

Researcher: What are some ways in which you manage your stress?

Participant: Not very well, going out on the weekends. Just taking the time to relax – but then at times you feel guilty for doing it. Umm buying food.

Researcher: Do you believe the university provides student athletes with enough resources to find success in their degrees and why or why not?

Participant: Umm, no. Well they try to do that study hall – but it didn't make sense for me because I have questions about physiology and he can't help me with that so I didn't even go. Um, they always say that there is stuff there but I think it's the same for everyone like the help centers and whatever maybe free tutors but I don't think anyone uses them.

Researcher: Considering your needs as a student athlete what types of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a university athlete.

Participant: Umm, sport psychologist. All I need is just time. Time to study, but that's kind of on me to do and if I ever needed help I would go to my professors because im not in very general courses. Umm maybe like an actual study hall that books a classroom- not allowed to talk with just our team. Because we do have a big team.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to discuss as it relates to stress in varsity athletics?

Participant: I guess maybe sometimes practices can be stressful. There was some tension on the field this year a little more than usual. So the interpersonal relationships were a little stressful but not significantly cause sometimes you're just like oh shut up but...sometimes it's the coaches would put you in a shitty mood.

Interview 5

Researcher: Could you provide general information/background with respect to your specific sport? So number of years played, level, position.

Participant 5: I've been playing hockey for about 18 years, I've been a goalie for 16 of them, I've played competitively basically straight through till I started playing female hockey in second year bantam. Until I graduated and I went and played for a junior team at Notre Dame in Saskatchewan and the year after I started playing here at UPEI and this is probably my last year.

Researcher: Do you believe that varsity level athletics lead to increased or decreased stress for you?

Participant 5: I think it's increased a lot, umm well I mean with regards to our team. 2 of the last 4 goalies have quit. And I don't think I was treated very well in the past 3 years here, so. That caused stress because I just wanted to play and I was never given the opportunity to do so.

Researcher: Has your level of stress changed over the course of your varsity career?

Participant 5: When Kristy left (another goalie) it went down a bit because like I knew I was going to be dressing every game which was a plus but I still didn't get to play which sucks.

Researcher: What do you find the most stressful aspect of being a student athlete to be?

Participant 5: I feel like the experience of being a student-athlete itself, like for me its kind of an outlet but the most stressful thing is not being able to control when you play and how often you play. Stuff like that I guess.

Researcher: Are you more stressed during certain parts of the season?

Participant 5: More so at the beginning I guess because there are expectations coming in and usually they are not fulfilled.

Researcher: Do you feel as though your support so your coaches, teammates, family, peers... do they increase or decrease your stress levels?

Participant 5: I would say everything decreases expect the coaches increase. Umm, well like I seen how Bruce treated sunshine and I have never been treated like an equal in that sense and yeah I played one game in my first year and I lost in overtime and I never got

to see the ice again for the rest of the year. And like this year, the same thing happened with Camille. She lost in OT against the same team and she still saw the ice, just comparing her first year to how my first year is going right now it's just not cool.

Researcher: What are some ways in which you manage your stress?

Participant 5: I have a lot of friends outside of the team so I just don't stuff that doesn't involve hockey, or talk to my teammates.

Researcher: Do you think the university provides enough resources for student athletes to find success in their degrees? Why or why not?

Participant 5: I think they do, there is a lot of academic support. We know we have Dany, who is someone we can go talk to if we ever had issues. Umm I don't think our schedule is too crazy that it makes things unattainable.

Researcher: Considering your needs as a student athlete what types of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a varsity athlete?

Participant 5: I don't know I feel like for me I don't really use any of them, but knowing that they are there is always useful. So academic wise if I ever ran into an issue I know that there is help there and if I ever wanted to talk to somebody, there is that support.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to discuss as it relates to varsity athletics.

Participant 5: I feel as though your coach has to be consistent in that they treat everyone the same and if not those people end up getting stressed and I'm pretty sure that's the reason why Kristy left and why Courtney left, and the reason why I almost left. An I mean I get that university sport isn't always fair because they are going to play the best but at the same time you have to treat everybody equally and yeah whether that means you sit because you aren't at the level they want you to be or that you play because you are, so it just has to be consistent throughout.

Interview 6

Researcher: Can you provide general background with respect to your sport, so number of years played, level, position

Participant 6: Ok, so I started with ringette at age 5 and I played for quite a bit of time, I played for probably 5 years then my mom put me in hockey at age 11 or 12. And then yeah I played at the bottom, like the worst hockey you can play and then in bantam I played bantam A, and then I played AA and then 3 years of junior hockey after that which is PWHL in Ontario. Then Bruce recruited and now I'm in university.

Researcher: Do you believe that varsity level athletics has lead to increased or decreased stress for you?

Participant 6: I think a little bit of both, I think hockey is a really good coping mechanism to stress, like when you're on the ice, or at workout its kind of a way to like put the world away and just focus on where you are at the time. I also feel like hockey is big time, like a lot of time is spent at hockey which could be led to hours that could be studying, but all in all hockey is a super good for stress, especially in university it kind of keeps you on track of everything.

Researcher: Has your level of stress changed over the course of your varsity career?

Participant 6: Yes, I think obviously as the years go on the school gets harder and stress becomes more significant but I think as the years go on you get better at time management and kind of like managing your time between hockey and school and in the long run after university is a really good thing to have, like a really good skill.

Researcher: What do you find the most stressful aspect of being a student athlete to be?

Participant 6: Most stressful aspect, I think to perform. You not only have to spend 2 plus hours a day doing your sport, but on top of that your school work. But you have to make sure you're on top of the game, especially being one of the higher years you have to set an example on the ice and off the ice so the girls can follow you in a good way.

Researcher: Are you more stressed during certain parts of your season?

Participant 6: Yeah for sure, during exam season obviously. I think obviously as playoffs start and as the games start becoming more and more important. That is when you have to be on top of your game, and with school as well you have to make sure everything is done on time and there is a lot of studying on the bus that starts to happen during the end of the year.

Researcher: Do you feel as though your support, so your coaches, your teammates, your friends, family... do they increase or decrease your stress?

Participant 6: Definitely decrease, being far away from home I definitely had to develop a family here. And that's the girls on my team, roommates, Bruce (coach) that's definitely a factor in my support system here. I feel as though I have more of a support system here than I do back in Ontario so, they definitely lessen my stress levels as a student athlete, and id say the same for my coaches and teammates.

Researcher: What are some ways in which you manage your stress?

Participant 6: I think there are definitely some positive and negative ways that everyone manages their stress. I think that working out and being on the ice is a good coping way to manage my stress, and even working out aside from hockey. Umm, but I also think

that there are substances that are used and what not that when I'm stressed out that I go to as well. But in relation I think that's what makes me more stressed so I try to go to the more positive ways instead of the negative ones for sure. I think sleep and diet also plays a factor in your stress too so I think there are a lot of different coping ways.

Researcher: Do you think the university provides enough resources for student athletes to find success in their degrees? Why or why not?

Participant 6: I think they do, they definitely try and its been a lot better in the last 5-10 years but I still think there is a long way to go in terms of the resources you can reach out to when you're stressed. And I know that even I tried to make an appointment with a student counselor and sometimes it would take 2-3 weeks. I think when students are stressed at that time and need help at that time its not necessarily there. So I think the school has to do a lot better job at making those facilities available to the students, and not necessarily student athletes but everyone in the school.

Researcher: Considering your needs as a student athlete what types of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a student athlete?

Participant 6: I think definitely in terms of spending more time with girls that are more academically driven is a huge factor. I also think that this year or maybe even next year, our coach Donnie has taken on the idea of a study hall so I think that needs to be taken advantage of from more girls on the team. In order to force you study for a certain

amount of hours in a day. But yeah I think support systems and reaching out and really important for a student athlete to be successful.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to discuss as it relates to stress during participation in varsity athletics?

Participant 6: I think its very underrated the amount of stress that a student athlete goes through, I think for a lot of people sport can be a super positive thing in their life. But I think a lot of girls, and males struggle with stress from not only school and hockey but also mental illness and stuff on the side. So I think for the incoming years it's going to be very important for those facilities to be there for student athletes, and all students.

Interview 7

Researcher: Can you provide background/general information with respect to your specific sport so number of years played, level, position?

Participant 7: Played 16 years, I always played at a high level, played girls throughout since atom, played on NS, 1 year u15, 2 years u17... I was the wrong age for Canada games so I didn't play Canada games for hockey and played midget triple a, and then I played here ever since

Researcher: Do you believe that varsity level athletics has lead to increased or decreased stress for you?

Participant 7: Some ways increase but I think throughout my years of schooling, even high school athletics has helped me in time managing all my sports and academics. So I feel like if I wasn't in university sports id almost put more stress on myself because id have so much time to overthink my academics. In certain weeks I think it adds stress but in more often than not it will reduce stress. Hockey gives me time away from my schooling to reduce the stress of school.

Researcher: Has your level of stress changed over the last 4 years/over your varsity career?

Participant 7: Yeah definitely, my first year I was very stressed throughout my whole year. I only took 4 classes in my first semester but after that I've taken 5 ever since. And this year I found them not nearly as stressful... so when things come up I don't stress anymore, I know ill get them done after or like I know with my umm experiences that I will get the work done. It may seem like I wont, but I'm going to get it done. So I feel like this year I have a lot less stress on myself and I have been doing better so I feel like less stress has helped with my marks.

Researcher: What do you find the most stressful aspect of being a student athlete to be?

Participant 7: Organization I guess cause I find the weeks that I don't plan my week ahead of schedule cause I'm continuously thinking of oh I didn't get this done or I need to do this. But when I have it planned I know oh Thursday ill get this done and if it doesn't get done Thursday then I have time slotted it for Friday so I feel like organization is the main stressor and like time management is a stressor but if I'm organized then time management takes care of it self. So organization is the biggest.

Researcher: Are you more stressed during certain parts of the season?

Participant 7: I don't think so, I know during big games and playoffs a lot of people get more stressed over that but I try to take the mindset that oh its just another game. I have to go play like I did before, I know there is more pressure on it but if I look at the pressure I tend to play worse, I wont perform the way I want to perform in the game so I find I'm not really more stressed at certain parts of the season I just play like it's the same type of game.

Researcher: Do you feel as though your support so your coaches, teammates, family peers... do they increase or decrease your stress?

Participant 7: They decrease them, I tend to look at my parents more for support through stressful situations but I know that if I needed it everyone around me here would help me and has helped me in times that I cant go home or times when my parents cant be here for support. I feel like our team especially has a support system, like Bruce and Donnie want

you to be an athlete but know that school comes first. Like if I had to miss a practice, Bruce would be okay with it... like he understands so I feel like the support system would decrease it too.

Researcher: What are some ways in which you manage your stress?

Participant 7: Umm, I find going to practice relieves a lot of my stress, I try not to allow hockey to be one of my stressors so I try to keep that as a fun aspect of my life. Also, I find talking to my parents or close teammates helps... I feel like if I didn't have the teams support with some of my stressors I would have to go through the stress without anyone which I think would be a lot harder so I think talking it through helps me relieve stress and the aspect of just being on the ice helps put the academics aside and just think about hockey.

Researcher: Do you think the university provides enough resources for student athletes to find success in their degrees? Why or why not?

Participant 7: I think it has improved this year with the study halls and getting those surveys done and in turn have programs in place for athletes so I think that's all good. But me personally, I find that I can manage school without the extra stuff but I know that some athletes do need it and it is good that its there incase they do need it, and there's money for tutoring and everything so the students don't feel like they cant do it because they don't have the money or the support... its all there. So, I think the school does it

well, and considering it's a small school... everyone knows everyone... like I can walk down the hallway and talk to my prof if I need to. If I were at Dal my professor wouldn't even know who I was, so I find the small community is great here too.

Researcher: Considering your needs as a student athlete what types of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a student athlete?

Participant 7: Can you give me an example?

Researcher: For instance, in an ideal world maybe you would have one-on-one tutoring available to you every single day or something like that, so like to you, considering your needs what would be ideal support system?

Participant 7: Available times to meet with professors because for me I like to know exactly what are expected of me. So if I wasn't able to meet with the professor then it would be difficult because I'm the type of person that needs to know what it is, then this is what you need. Also, tutoring is a big thing. I find I don't need it a lot, but if I were in need I think that is something that should be available. Like even athletes on the team, I find, for instance you can help me cause you're higher age, I can help the rookies with courses that I have taken so I find having an open team for support is a big thing because even bring questions to practice helps because I used to bring stuff all the time for chemistry and things. So having athletes on your team that have taken those courses

before helps and I think an ideal thing is having the upper years openly help with the schooling.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to discuss as it relates to stress in participation in varsity athletics?

Participant 7: No not really, I find our school does it really well. They don't put a lot of pressure on it; they want you to be an athlete and a student. They don't expect you to just be an athlete. I don't know I find other schools they might push the athletics a little bit more where ours is evenly based. I think it's a good atmosphere with our school.

Interview 8

Researcher: Can you provide general information/background with respect to your specific sport so number of years played, level, position?

Participant 8: So I've played in the Atlantic University Sport (AUS), this is my 5th season. I've played 15 years of basketball ever since little mini tigers and shooting around with my parents. I play a guard position, out on the wing, and shoot and drive a lot, run the lanes and that's kind of my role.

Researcher: Do you believe that varsity level athletics has lead to increased or decreased stress for you?

Participant 8: I think that varsity level athletics has definitely led to increased stress for me. 100%, it comes with all the demands of practicing everyday, time management, being present at practice, like not only do you have to be there but you have to focus, you worry about it even when you're not on the court, you think about you know when you're a rookie role is understanding that you're brand new and there is a social aspect to being on a team and making friends, impressing the coach and then your role kind of changes to being a role player on your team, and then it changes to being a leader towards the end of your career, but I think all of those roles come with added stress for sure in different ways, like the social and physical challenges, training in the off season and mental prep as well. So, definitely added stress.

Researcher: Does your level of stress change over the course of your varsity career?

Participant 8: I don't think it's changed I just know how to manage it a little bit better. Umm, you know in first year you're coming in and you're brand new and you have 5 classes and you're like not sure how to manage it and being involved in the community your team expects a lot of you on and off the court, a lot of different team activities and stuff but like I said it kind of progresses to different roles but similar stress. But I have just found how to manage it in some ways and just distress with your team, or like make jokes with your team to relieve some tension or just little coping mechanisms that you develop over the years to deal with that

Researcher: What do you find the most stressful aspect of being a student athlete to be?

Participant 8: I think the most stressful thing is upholding expectations I think, its really good to have high expectations for yourself and for other people to believe in you that you can do it but I think most of the pressure comes from yourself like you want to push yourself as hard as you can and the stress comes internally. Yeah if you have a good game its like you know like how do you do it again? Like when everyone is keying in on you or if you have a bad game, how do you bounce back? Not only personally but also as a team in general, like how do you be a leader? How do you do your role? How do you contribute the most effectively? Yeah I don't know I would say the most stressful thing are those internal stressors. I don't think anyone externally tries to put added stress on you, they know that you are a varsity athlete and no one intends to put all this pressure but I think it mostly comes from myself.

Researcher: Are you more stressed during certain parts of your season?

Participant 8: I think I am most stressed in preseason, it's a new team, and it's a new year you're coming off your training off-season and you want to do well. But I think as the season moves on I kind of settle in a little bit and I settle in to my role, I like the girls know you more as a – in the leadership position I'm in now its stressful cause its like are the rookies ok? Is everyone clicking? You worry about that. But as the season goes on people kind of just mesh naturally and that kind of social aspect gets easier and then the physical training eases a little bit. So more stressful at the start of the season and then

pick up around playoffs because that is something you work for your entire season type thing but yeah mid season I'm pretty chill.

Researcher: Do you feel as though your support so your coaches, your teammates, family, friends... do they increase or decrease your stress?

Participant 8: My teammates definitely decrease; it's almost a way to diffuse your stress. Like everyone kind of it diffuses it on to each other like someone is having a bad day like no worries some else is there to pick you up. Not all 16 girls are having a bad or stressful day at once like we all kind of lean on each other and that's super helpful. Like I said, we honestly make a lot of jokes in practice. Like Segway into the coaching part he adds a significant amount of stress to the girls for sure, whether you play or you don't play, he kind of does divide the team in that the white team are girls that will play and the top 7 will get significant minutes and the bottom 7 wont. But even if you don't play you still have to go hard, he still gets upset with them, he adds stress to both groups. He is just very unorganized before games and during the week Thursday, Friday, the girls get a little stressed because we don't have a good report, we don't feel prepared so added stress from coaching staff for sure, and just in general the way they talk to us or the way they talk to young girls who are still developing and trying to shape who they are as women and we have these older coaches who are uneducated and just treat us not right. And some days it just feels like you put up with it for so long that's how it is but when you step back and actually think about it it's just so wrong. In terms of parents my parents have always been super supportive, I find we actually have an issue with one parent of a

player, who is really borderline verbally abusive in the games and not necessarily to her but to people that will threaten her. She's a beauty, she's awesome but anyone that is scoring a lot or taking a lot of shots, or possessions, or opportunities away from her... like even if they're doing well he feels threaten by that and verbalizes it on the court so that is really stressful too to have someone on your case like that, like he comes to every single practice and just feeling like he is there judging and watching you is stressful. And peers are a good resource too because they don't necessarily know, they aren't there with you every single day so its better to talk to them and explain your situation fully and diffuse that stress on to them because they don't know anything unless they are your really good friend they might already know but they aren't there every single day so sometimes its help to talk it out and realize oh maybe I'm exaggerating or its just talking to other people is helpful too

Researcher: What are some ways in which you manage your stress?

Participant 8: I like to stay on campus all day, I go in early and I shoot basketballs and then stay all day, go to classes and finish out my work all day and then go to practice and focus on that but after practice I don't like there to be any work left from the day and I don't have any emails or anything left to do in the lab I just like that once I'm done practice I get some ice and go home, eat, relax, sleep and just unwind from the day, I like to make sure I get stuff done during the day and then de-stress before bed. In first or second year I would go to the library after or worry about assignments and push them off and say oh ill do that tomorrow but if u really manage and get things done during the day

then you can find times to go home throughout the day sometimes and go take a nap or that's really great too. Just in practice, taking deep breaths and some key words I say are "its not about me" like its about them, like our coaches, its really hard to explain the dynamic but sometimes they will just be in a really bad mood and take it out on us. You just have to say like they are super irrational so it's hard to explain - you just cant. Some girls just get super stressed because they don't understand but the fact is he is our coach, and we wont understand because some days he has good days and some days he has bad days too, but we just kind of verbalize to each other its not about us – he could be having a bad day. I think the last thing is trying to make little jokes in practice helps so much because it makes it less serious; it's only a game, its only practice. Its not the end of the world, it just helps a lot. Making everyone laugh is a huge remedy for sure.

Researcher: Do you think the university provides enough resources for student athletes to find success in their degrees? Why or why not?

Participant 8: That's a good question; I'm trying to think of all the services. I feel like on the mental side there is some good support for sure, bit I think the more we talk about it the less people will feel like its big deal to talk about it. Or if you're feeling stressed as being a student athlete I think they are a good support. I've gone a few times and talked to people and I had a weird situation that I didn't know how to handle and so I went and talked to them and they were so supportive and really nice. In terms of physical, we have a nutritionist who is pretty good and we have a trainer as well, so they are really supportive and have a common goal. I think profs are pretty helpful and the tutor system

is pretty good. I actually think I have found my way pretty well, I've relied a lot on these services and I think they are really helpful and beneficial. And they implemented a few new programs, like Donnie has that tutoring, study hall thing which is really helpful. With the exception of our coaches everyone else is on board.

Researcher: Considering your needs as a student athlete what types of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a university athlete?

Participant 8: I think starting in first year maybe a first year advisor, someone you could ask about anything. I don't know where to park... what do I do? I'm struggling with this course, I think I might want to do dentistry – help me plan my program. Figuring things out that way – having that support there and having someone you could literally ask anything to or someone on your team who is maybe an alumni or graduate, like I could ask answer a lot of the questions for first years that are in sciences or maybe help them plan. Talking to someone who has the experiences because I can remember being so lost in first year, like what is moodle, what is UPEI login. Just like getting on your feet cause the season starts first day of school. It all happens so quickly its trying to figure out the best habits like should I copy notes in class, on my laptop or write them down? Its little things like that its super helpful. Help you get your feet on the ground. Of course, people who give mental health support and people who bridge the gap and asks how you are actually doing- and someone you can talk to. It doesn't have to be a psychologist or a psychiatrist or you don't need a referral, it's just someone you can talk to even if your

dog just died or something mildly happen. A trainer is good, Physio services are great, and nutrition was beneficial.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to discuss as it relates to participation in varsity athletics?

Participant 8: Some natural things that come in game or practice you stress out and you make a mistake but I think like as long as you have the right supports around you. I mean you've made it this far, you're on the team you're a varsity athlete that's a huge accomplishment. Take pride in that, if you get overwhelmed. We all do, we all feel like that. If we have the right supports, our coach, teammates, captains... mental, emotional and physical support... those all things help and knowing you can rely on those things. It took me a while to realize that its okay to ask for help your not broken you just need a bit of support.

Interview 9

Researcher: Can you provide general information/ background with respect to your specific sport so number of years played, position, level?

Participant 9: I've played field hockey since grade 7, in junior high, close to 11 years. I played in the summer too. I start every game; I'm a wing player –mid fielder.

Researcher: Do you believe that varsity level athletics has lead to increased or decreased stress for you?

Participant 9: I think it lead to increased. Because the competition level is expected to be higher, it puts added stress because you're expected to work harder alongside anything going on in your life (school and social)

Researcher: Has your level of stress changed over the course of your varsity career?

Participant 9: It has, I think I was more stressed in my first years due to the atmosphere, I was coming in from high school and going to university was a completely different environment. But I'm in my fifth year at the moment and I think I've adjusted to the stress and I know how to handle it better than I previously did. I think I've experienced it for the past 5 years, I know how to prioritize school and athletics when I need to. And I'm also more familiar with the schedule and practice times and tournament times so that if something is coming up I know to get a project done before hand or when I can and can't work.

Researcher: What do you find the most stressful aspect of being a student athlete to be?

Participant 9: It's always that balance of school and athletics because you're considered a student athlete but your coach obviously favours athletics and I mean your professors and probably yourself too favour the school side cause that's why you're in university. So I

think its always trying to find that balance and I guess fulfill both sides of the equation.

Um, because sometimes it's hard for coaches to understand that you're a student first and athletics is important to you but when it comes to your grades those are more important.

Researcher: Are you more stressed during certain parts of the season?

Participant 9: Yes, I would say so. I think it varies. At the beginning of a season I'm usually stressed because I go from a summer of working to suddenly balancing school and athletics um and then it's the stress of new people coming on to the team and trying to find that cohesiveness and umm maybe you're meeting a new coach or your schedules aren't the same but once that adjusts I find my stress goes away or at least subsides to an extent and when it comes to crunch time so exams or championships then the stress increases.

Researcher: Do you feel as though your support so your family, coaches, peers, teammates... do they increase or decrease your stress?

Participant 9: I think they don't increase or decrease it, I find they don't really effect it. A lot of my stress stems from myself and pressures I put on myself, if I told my coach I couldn't attend practice because I needed to study for a test, she would understand... like I know she would. And I know my parents understand and my peers never really have an effect when it comes to school. My teammates understand because were all on the same boat, and my friends outside of sport don't really have that knowledge so they don't

really care if that makes sense. But I find a lot of my stress stems from my own expectations of myself and not outside sources.

Researcher: What are some ways in which you manage your stress?

Participant 9: Being a student athlete I find exercise helps a lot so being active is a way to sort of stress relieve... taking time to do things that aren't school or sport related so doing things that I would enjoy, hanging out with friends are good distractions, just doing what you can to not think about your stress.

Researcher: Do you think the university provides enough resources for student athletes to find success in their degrees? Why or why not?

Participant 9: No I don't, I just think when it comes to student athletes the athletics department focuses on the athlete not the student athlete. I think this year they have been better with study hall but i find there aren't necessarily tutors available to student athletes to kind of work around their schedules, different people specializing... everyone has different degrees. I find with their busy schedules the university isn't going to accommodate to, at least with my experience.

Researcher: Considering your needs as a student athlete what types of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a university athlete?

Participant 9: In a perfect world, I think it would be having time set aside for your studies without the added stress that you're missing practice or something... having some sort of schedule or balance or a team scheduled time to go and study. Something to distress where you're not constantly worried about performing in practice or that you're not constantly missing out on study time.. maybe have an optional practice where if you can go then you can but if you cant go then its not frowned upon.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to discuss as it relates to participation in varsity athletics?

Participant 9: I don't think so! Thanks

Interview 10

Researcher: Can you provide a general background/information with respect to your specific sport so number of years played, level, position?

Participant 10: So I played hockey, I started when I was 5. I've played for 16 years throughout hockey Pei and now at UPEI and I am a forward. Growing up I played on the 'Triple A' teams and played with Hockey PEI too.

Researcher: Do you believe varsity level athletics has lead to increased or decreased stress for you?

Participant 10: I think decreased stress because you use your teammates as coping methods.

Researcher: Has your level of stress changed over the course of your varsity career?

Participant 10: Yes I feel like depending on how the team is doing and how you're doing individually it fluctuates given the situation.

Researcher: What do you find the most stressful aspect of being a varsity athlete to be?

Participant 10: Definitely, time management. And managing the work load of school and also having to be prepared for being a varsity athlete. Fitness, practice and games are very time consuming as well.

Researcher: Are you more stressed during certain parts of the season?

Participant 10: I think at the beginning is more stressful, because you don't know where you stand and everyone is fighting for a spot.

Researcher: Do you feel as though your support so your coach, teammates, peers, and family do they increase or decrease your stress?

Participant 10: Definitely decrease because I feel like any of those people I could go to if I had a problem.

Researcher: What are some ways in which you manage your stress?

Participant 10: For me, I like to be physically active so it doesn't have to be in my sport but if im super stressed about hockey or school then going to the gym helps.

Researcher: Do you think the university provides enough resources for student athletes to find success in their degrees? Why or why not?

Participant 10: Yeah I think so, I know we are lucky that there are a tutoring system in place and the athletic department and school use that if need be and I know that there is mental help there too so its nice to know that its there incase you need it.

Researcher: Considering your needs as a student athlete, what types of support systems would be ideal to help you navigate the challenges of being a university athlete?

Participant 10: I think even if we had someone come and talk to us about time management because they stress that that's a big issue coming in as a student athlete but we've never really been taught how to manage our time we just kind of have to do it through experience.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to discuss as it relates to stress during participation in varsity athletics?

Participant 10: I don't think so.