Perceptions of Hazing among Intercollegiate Athletes

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Hazing continues to be an ongoing problem in athletics (Crow & Macintosh, 2009). At least one student has died from a hazing initiation each year since 1970 (Nuwer, 2005). The purpose was twofold. First, was to examine behaviors and activity involvement of hazing in interscholastic athletics and intercollegiate athletics. Second, was to determine whether hazing is accepted more at high schools than colleges. One hundred and twenty student-athlete participants at a northwest regional NCAA Division II university (57 males and 63 females from football (51), volleyball (16), cheer (11), women’s soccer (19), men’s basketball (6), and softball (17) completed a 46-question survey. Answers were collected anonymously to reinforce honest answers from the athletes. The results were examined qualitatively and reported by the subgroups of sport; high school or college; and male or female.

It was found that dangerous and illegal activities are being done at both the interscholastic and intercollegiate level of athletics concurring with existing literature. Illegal included kidnapping teammates, stealing school property, under aged drinking, and forced sexual acts. Forced sexual acts included but were not limited to sexual harassment, rape, or abuse. The students reported participated in these activities because they were fun at the time but they didn’t understand or consider the legal repercussions. At the high school level the most common types of dangerous or illegal activities were playing drinking games and destroying or stealing property. At the college level the most common types of dangerous or illegal activities were playing drinking games and drinking alcohol during recruitment.

Results from this study were similar to those reported by Hoover, Pollard, and Myers (2000) and Allan and Madden (2008). Football was identified as the sport with the most dangerous hazing activities in these studies. Hoover et al. found that 23% of high school students participated in substance abuse as a form of hazing compared to our finding of 35%. Hoover et al. (2000) also found that 51% of college students participated in substance abuse as a form of hazing. Allan and Madden (2008) found 54% of college students participated in substance abuse compared to our finding of 57.5%. Hoover et al. (2000) found 14% of students that took the survey said they were not hazed but 48% admitted to participating in hazing activities. In this study only 5.8% of participants stated that they were hazed in college but 87% of student-athletes marked that they had participated in at least one hazing activity.

Interestingly, the student-athletes in both interscholastic and intercollegiate athletics accepted hazing as appropriate. The student-athletes internalized hazing participation by not considering what they were doing as hazing. Ninety-five percent of students said that they had not been hazed in high school and 85% said they had not been hazed in college but 87% of student-athletes had been hazed. It was felt that hazing activities in high school were less appropriate than in college.