Campus Sport Experience as Catalyst for College Student Adjustment and Well-Being

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Being the first time living away from family and friends, adjustment to a new environment itself and the demands of college life can be challenging to many students. Further, well-being of students are gaining increased attention in modern society as, tragically, suicide is the second leading cause of death after traffic accidents among the college student age group (CDC, 2015). Accordingly, colleges and universities are continuously increasing their spending on student well-being to prevent mental health problems.

Along with the numerous physical and psychological benefits of participation in sport (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013), research in sport management highlights the social-psychological benefits of spectator sports (Wann, 2006). However, investigation of sporting experiences is insufficient in the context of college student well-being (cf. Beyers & Goossens, 2002; Miller & Hoffman, 2000). Hence, the purpose of this study was to elucidate the relationships among participant and spectator sport experiences on college student adjustment, college life satisfaction, and overall well-being.

We examined a conceptual model to investigate the relationships among the variables. The model fit the data well ($\chi^2[\text{df}=142]=333.35$, CFI=.95, SRMR=.05, RMSEA=.07). Both achievements in physical activity classes ($\beta=.22$) and positive emotions experienced by spectatorship ($\beta=.34$) significantly influenced college adjustment. College adjustment ($\beta=.59$) and achievements in physical activity classes ($\beta=.16$) significantly influenced college life satisfaction. College adjustment ($\beta=.67$) and college life satisfaction ($\beta=.18$) significantly influenced overall life well-being.

Indirect effects provided interesting insights to the model. While the indirect effect from physical activity to college satisfaction was significant ($\beta=.14$) along with its direct effect, only the indirect was significant ($\beta=.21$) for the path from spectatorship to college satisfaction. For the paths on overall well-being, only the indirect effects were significant comprising large portions of the total effects ($\beta=.25$ out of .33 for physical activity on well-being; $\beta=.31$ out of .37 for spectatorship on well-being). Nonetheless, in spite of all other significant indirect effects (ps<.02), mediation of satisfaction between spectatorship and well-being was not significant (p=.67).

Results indicate sport experiences on campus are imperative factors of college students’ adjustment and that college adjustment was the most influential mediating variable on college life satisfaction and overall well-being. The results are in line with previous research (Eime et al., 2013; Miller & Hoffman, 2009; Wann, 2006). Comparing the total effects, paths from physical activity had a larger effect on college satisfaction and paths from spectatorship had a larger effect on well-being. Furthermore, we extend the discussion of campus sport experiences in terms of intrapersonal and social determinants of college and overall life well-being.

Colleges and universities can better integrate the physical activity curriculums with mental health services based on the associations between physical activity and psychological benefits. Benefits based on social functionality of group-based experiences can open discussions to cultivating a better social capital on campus through sports. In this, we highlight the mediating role of adjustment and different path effects based on our model. Additional theoretical implications and practical implications for individual and social level mental health services and campus environment will be discussed in the presentation.