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INTRODUCTION

With demands related to their sport, it is reasonable to think that college student-athletes experience more psychological and academic stressors than non-athletes. However, it is not clear whether athletes suffer negative consequences.

- Kinder (2021) found that athletes did not differ significantly from non-athletes in either depression or anxiety.
- Conversely, Edwards and Froehle (2021) found athletes were less likely to report mental health problems, but also less likely to seek treatment when they do.
- Aries et al. (2004) found that athletes have similar academic profiles and that sport participation does not interfere with academic success.

Therefore, it is prudent for universities to understand and plan to combat the psychological and academic risks that athletes experience.

The purpose of this study is to examine psychological and academic differences in college athletes and non-athletes.

METHODS

Participants: College students ($N = 251$) were solicited from a small private university in South Florida.

Materials and Procedure: As part of a larger study, participants filled out a survey created using Qualtrics Online Survey Platform:

- *Brief Resilience Scale (BRS, 6 items)*
 - "I usually come through difficult times with little trouble."
- *Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21; 21 items)*
- *GPA; obtained from official school records*



College student-athletes have higher GPAs but do not differ from non-athletes in key psychological outcomes.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and independent samples t-tests for athletes and non-athletes.

	Athletes ($n = 44$)	Non-athletes ($n = 207$)	t-test
GPA*	3.46 (.58)	3.17 (.71)	$t(232) = -2.35, p = .02$
Resilience [†]	3.13 (.77)	3.34 (.75)	$t(249) = 1.66, p = .10$
Depression	1.86 (.92)	1.93 (.99)	$t(249) = 0.38, p = .70$
Anxiety	1.99 (.94)	2.00 (.97)	$t(249) = -.06, p = .95$
Stress	2.26 (.86)	2.22 (.98)	$t(249) = 0.25, p = .81$

Note. An asterisk (*) indicates a statistically significant difference between groups at $p < .05$. A dagger (†) indicates an effect approaching significance, $†p < .10$.

RESULTS

Five independent samples t-tests were conducted to examine average differences between athletes and non-athletes.

Athletes ($M = 3.46, SD = .58$) had significantly higher GPAs than non-athletes ($M = 3.17, SD = .71$), $t(232) = -2.35, p = .02$.

Non-athletes ($M = 3.34, SD = .75$) reported marginally higher resilience than athletes ($M = 3.13, SD = .77$), although it is important to note that this effect is only marginally significant (i.e., $p < .10$).

Athletes and non-athletes did not differ in depression, anxiety, or stress.

DISCUSSION

The fact that athletes have significantly higher GPAs is not necessarily surprising.

- Many schools require athletes to maintain a minimum GPA to keep their scholarships and roster spots and if they do not maintain that minimum GPA, they are removed from the sport.

A unique finding here is that non-athletes reported slightly higher resilience, even though it is not statistically significant. This is surprising and warrants further exploration.

Researchers interested in this topic should first establish whether there is a difference in resilience across different samples of student-athletes. Then, **focus on causes outside of general well-being variables such as depression, anxiety, and stress.**

Universities should acknowledge and plan for the unique challenges that athletes and non-athletes experience in college.