

Prevalence of Common Mental Disorders and Its Correlation with Mental Toughness among Professional South African Rugby Players

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Abstract : Objectives: The primary objective of the study was to determine the common mental disorders (CMD) identified by professional South African rugby players and its correlation with their mental toughness, as a first step towards developing such a programme within a larger research project. Design: Survey research, within the theoretical perspective of field theory, was conducted, utilising an adaptation of an already existing mental health questionnaire. The aim was to obtain feedback from as many possible professional South African rugby players in order to make certain generalizations and come to conclusions with regard to the current mental health experiences of these rugby players. Methods: Non-randomized sampling was done, linking it with internet research in the form of the online completion of a questionnaire. A sample of 215 rugby players participated and completed the online questionnaire. Permission was obtained to make use of an existing questionnaire, previously used by the specific authors with retired professional rugby players. A section on mental toughness was added. Data were descriptively analysed by means of the SPSS software platform. Results: Results indicated that the most significant problem that the players are experiencing, is a problem with alcohol (47.9%). Other problems that featured are distress (16.3%), sleep disturbances (7%), as well as anxiety and depression (4.2%). 4.7% of the players indicated that they smoke. 3.3% of the players experience themselves as not being mentally tough. A positive correlation between mental toughness and sound sleep (0.262) was found while a negative correlation was found between mental toughness and the following: anxiety/depression (-0.401), anxiety/depression positive (-0.423), distress (-0.259) and common mental disorder problems in general (-0.220). Conclusions: Although the presence of CMD at first glance do not seem significantly high amongst all the players, it must be considered that if one player in a team experiences the presence of CMD, it will have an impact on his mental toughness and most likely on his performance, as well as on the performance of the whole team. It is therefore important to ensure mental health in the whole team, by addressing individual CMD problems. A mental health support programme is therefore needed to be implemented to the benefit of these players within the South African context.

Keywords : common mental disorders, mental toughness, professional athletes, rugby players

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