

# Missouri Student-Athletes and Mental Health

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance misuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses. The coalition is comprised of 24 public and private colleges and universities in the state working to prevent high-risk behaviors by implementing evidence-based strategies. To measure progress and obtain data needed for the implementation of programs, PIP created the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors (MACHB) Survey. The MACHB is an annual, online survey that has been implemented each spring since 2007. The survey assesses the roles that alcohol, substances (illicit and prescription), tobacco/nicotine, interpersonal violence, and mental health have on student health and wellness. This brief will focus on Missouri student-athletes and mental health.

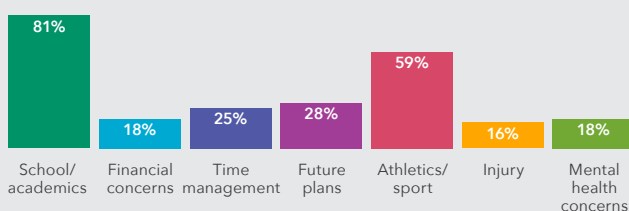
## Background

Student-athletes are a unique college subpopulation given both the academic and athletic demands they face all year round, which can have an impact on well-being, mental health, and stress levels. In 2022, Missouri Partners in Prevention implemented the Missouri Assessment of College Health Behaviors for Athletes (MACHB-A) Survey. The MAHCB-A is a modified version of our annual MACHB exclusively for athletes that assesses sport specific factors such as injury, body image, transitioning out of sport, and motivation to participate in sport.

## Stress

On the MACHB-A, student-athletes are asked to report their sources of stress. A breakdown of sources of stress is shown in Chart 1, with the two highest sources of stress being school/academics (81%) and

**Chart 1: Top Sources of Stress for Missouri Student-Athletes**



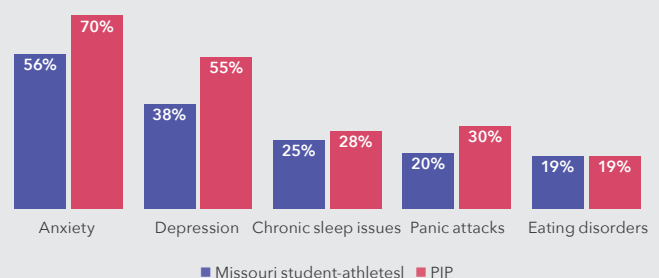
athletics/sports (59%). This further highlights the "student-athlete" dynamic that exists.

When immersed into a team, athletes report having greater well-being and a stronger team identity.<sup>5</sup> Regarding stress, Missouri student-athletes reported that when personal concerns arise, on campus they feel they can go to their friends/teammates (81%) or any coach on the team (45%). This could reflect the immersion, and sense of belonging and community they experience being a part of a "team."

## Mental Health Experiences

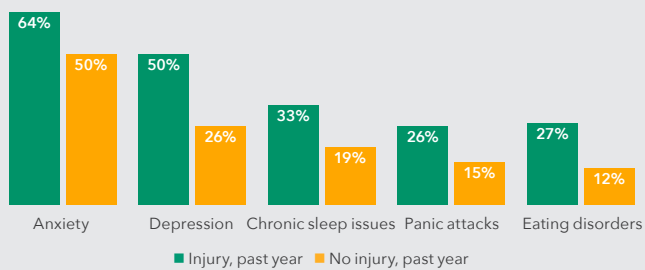
Mental health struggles among athletes are similar to non-athletes.<sup>11</sup> Common mental health concerns experienced in the past 12 months by Missouri student-athletes and non-athletes are shown in Chart 2.

**Chart 2: Mental Health Concerns Experienced (past 12 months)**



Compared to statewide data, mental health concerns experienced in the past 12 months is slightly less among student-athletes. However, research that has shown athletes who experience an injury are more likely to exhibit anxiety<sup>6</sup> and depression<sup>4</sup>. Athletes who sustain an injury pose as a risk factor for disordered eating/eating disordered behavior.<sup>1</sup> When examining the sport specific factor of injury among Missouri student-athletes, mental health concerns are higher among athletes that have experienced injury in the past 12 months versus those who have not experienced injury in the past 12 months (Chart 3).

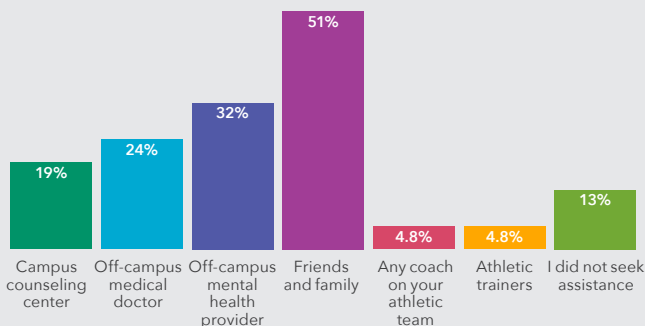
**Chart 3: Mental Health and Injury (past year)**



## Help-Seeking Behavior

Student-athletes are less likely than non-athletes to seek help for mental health concerns due to stigma and sport specific factors such as attitudes surrounding mental health from coaching and leadership staff.<sup>7</sup> Student-athletes have also reported fewer positive attitudes and utilization of mental health support services despite being at a higher risk for some mental health concerns.<sup>9</sup> The top places Missouri student-athletes sought assistance for mental health concern is shown in Chart 4.

**Chart 4: Where Missouri Student-Athletes Commonly Sought Assistance For Mental Health Concerns**



Of the 13% of Missouri student-athletes who did not seek assistance, the top reasons are shown in Chart 5. Looking at chart 5, stigma as a barrier becomes evident. In addition, "I don't have time in my schedule because of practice, games, etc.", highlights the demands student-athletes face regarding time management. According to Chart 1, 25% of Missouri student-athletes endorsed time management as a source of stress.

**Chart 5: Top Reasons for Not Seeking Assistance Among Missouri Student-Athletes**

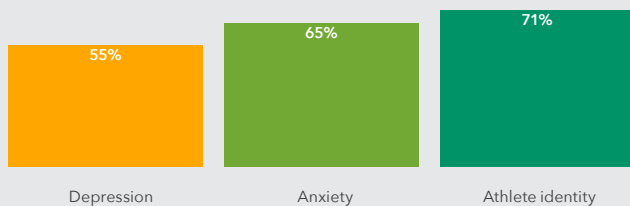


## Transitions and Mental Health Experiences

Student-athletes going through adjustments (e.g. transition), have higher rates of experiencing mental health concerns.<sup>10</sup> Transitions for athletes (e.g., graduating, career ending injuries), can pose a threat to one's athletic identity - the degree to which one identifies as an athlete<sup>3</sup> - and lead to difficulties for an athlete.<sup>8</sup>

According to the MACHB-A, 49% of Missouri student-athletes endorsed feeling unprepared to transition out of collegiate sports and 74% endorsed they would benefit from resources aimed at transitioning out of sport and/or expanding outside their athletic identity. Among those who feel unprepared to transition, 55% reported experiencing depression in the past 12 months, 65% reported experiencing anxiety in the past 12 months, and 71% reported a strong athletic identity - this data is shown in Chart 6. This supports the need for transition resources, which could also benefit overall mental health and well-being given the intersection that exists.

**Chart 6: Mental Health and Athletic Identity Among Missouri Student-Athletes Who Feel Unprepared to Transition**



## Summary

Being a student-athlete is a multifaceted experience; it's a balancing act that comes with demands that can have devastating consequences for overall health and well-being. Mental health can be a taboo topic for the collegiate athletic population due to the stigmas that exist. It's crucial to bring to light the issues that Missouri student-athletes are experiencing to not only help break the stigma, but provide accessible and effective resources for student-athletes mental health & well-being so they can feel supported both on and off the field.

## General Resources

### SAMHSA

Information about co-occurring disorders in mental health

- [samhsa.gov](https://www.samhsa.gov)

### Partners in Prevention

There are many resources available in the "Prevention Toolbox". The mental health topic discusses some best practices

- [mopip.org/topics/mentalhealth.html](https://mopip.org/topics/mentalhealth.html)

### National Institute of Mental Health

- [nimh.nih.gov/health](https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health)

## Athlete Specific Mental Health Resources

### Mind Body Endurance

Eating disorder, disordered eating, body image support for athletes

- [mindbodyendurance.com](https://mindbodyendurance.com)

### Sidelined USA

Support network and mentorship for athletes who have been sidelined from sport due to injury/mental health and struggling with identity, transitions, mental health

- [sidelinedusa.org](https://www.sidelinedusa.org)

### Hidden Opponent

Mental health awareness, support, and education for student-athletes

- [thehiddenopponent.org](https://www.thehiddenopponent.org)

Contact Partners in Prevention at (573) 884-7551.

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For more information, visit [mopip.org](https://mopip.org)

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