



Burnout and Academic Stress in Student-Athletes: A Comparative Survey

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Abstract

Balancing academics with athletic responsibilities can place unique psychological demands on student-athletes, potentially leading to increased burnout and academic stress. This study compares levels of burnout and academic stress between athletes in team sports and individual sports. A sample of 80 collegiate student-athletes (40 per group) completed validated scales measuring emotional burnout and academic stress. Descriptive analysis showed higher average scores in both burnout and academic stress among team sport athletes. Independent samples t-tests confirmed these differences were statistically significant for both burnout ($t = 2.831$, $p = 0.0059$) and academic stress ($t = 3.154$, $p = 0.0023$). These findings indicate that team sport athletes may face greater psychological strain, possibly due to more frequent time conflicts, social demands, and performance accountability. Recommendations are made for targeted interventions and academic accommodations.

Keywords: Student-athletes, burnout, academic stress, team sports, individual sports, t-test, sports psychology, athlete well-being

Introduction

Collegiate student-athletes face the dual challenge of managing academic responsibilities alongside the rigorous demands of athletic participation. While both domains are associated with high performance expectations, their simultaneous pursuit can lead to significant psychological strain. This complex interplay between academics and athletics often places student-athletes at greater risk of experiencing **burnout** and **academic stress**, two closely related constructs that can adversely affect mental health, academic achievement, and athletic performance. Burnout in the athletic context is typically characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion, a reduced sense of personal accomplishment, and a growing devaluation of the sport itself (Gustafsson et al., 2011). When compounded by academic obligations such as maintaining eligibility, meeting grade point average (GPA) thresholds, and adhering to scholarship requirements, student-athletes may experience chronic stress that disrupts both their sporting and academic trajectories. The effects are particularly concerning, as burnout has been linked to dropout from sports, declining motivation, and even symptoms of depression (Humphrey et al., 2000). The type of sport a student-athlete participates in—**team** vs. **individual**—may significantly shape how these stressors are experienced. Team sports often involve stricter schedules, frequent travel, mandatory group practices, and heightened social dynamics, all of which can limit academic flexibility and increase perceived pressure. On the other hand, athletes in individual sports may enjoy greater autonomy in training and scheduling, potentially mitigating some of these stressors, but may simultaneously face solitary performance pressure without the support of teammates (Miller & Kerr, 2002).

Despite growing awareness of mental health issues among athletes, relatively few studies have systematically compared the psychological demands experienced by team sport versus individual sport participants in the collegiate context. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining differences in **burnout** and **academic stress** between these two groups using validated psychological inventories. By understanding the nuanced impact of sport type on student-athlete well-being, this research aims to inform more tailored intervention strategies within university athletic and academic support systems.

Methodology

The study involved a total of 80 collegiate student-athletes between the ages of 18 and 25, recruited from two public universities. Participants were evenly divided into two groups based on sport type: 40 athletes engaged in team sports (such as football, basketball, and volleyball) and 40 involved in individual sports (including tennis, swimming, and athletics). To assess psychological outcomes, two validated instruments were employed. The Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (ABQ) was used to measure emotional and physical burnout, with scores ranging from 0 to 100. Additionally, the Academic Stress Inventory evaluated participants' self-reported academic pressure, workload, and performance anxiety, also on a 0 to 100 scale. Descriptive statistics and independent samples t-tests were used to compare the two athlete groups on both burnout and academic stress.

Results and Findings

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics – Burnout Scores

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	N
Individual	61.81	7.94	40
Team	67.33	9.45	40

Team sport athletes reported a higher average burnout score ($M = 67.33$) compared to individual sport athletes ($M = 61.81$). The difference in standard deviations suggests greater variability in burnout levels among team sport athletes.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics – Academic Stress Scores

Group	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	N
Individual	65.88	6.88	40
Team	72.15	10.53	40

Academic stress levels were higher among team sport athletes ($M = 72.15$) than those in individual sports ($M = 65.88$). The wider spread in scores for the team group indicates more diverse stress experiences within this group.

Table 3: Inferential Statistics – Burnout (Independent Samples t-Test)

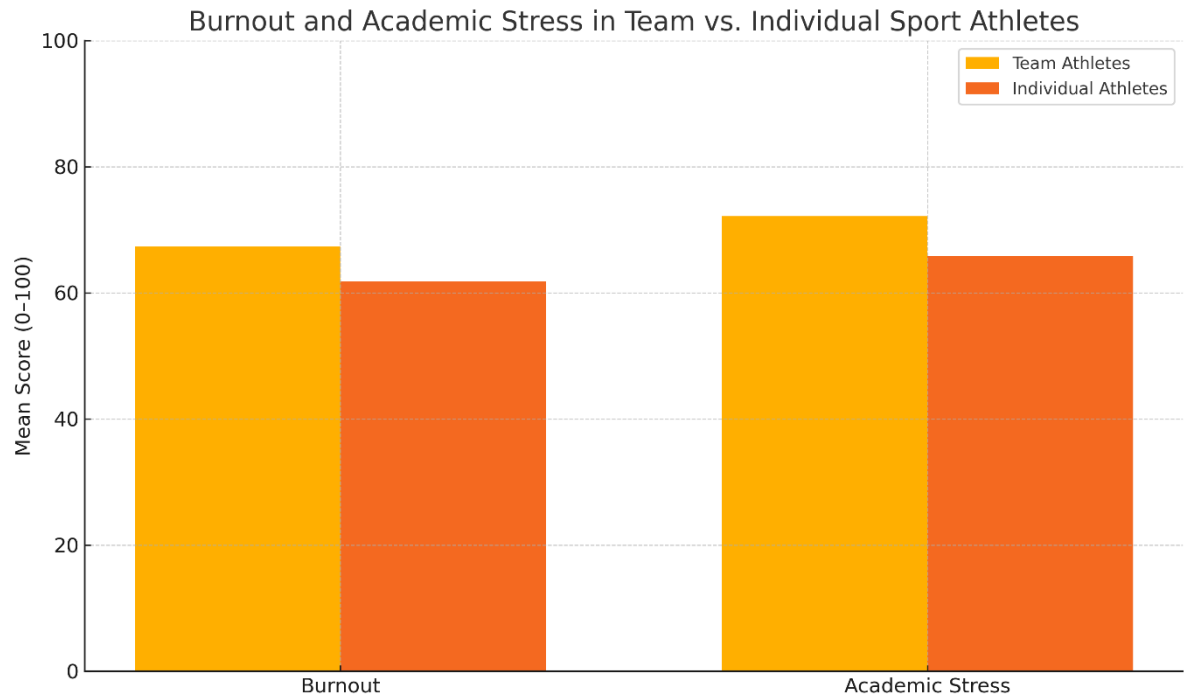
Variable	t-value (df = 78)	p-value	Significance
Burnout	2.831	0.0059	Significant ($p < 0.01$)

An independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in burnout levels between groups. Team sport athletes experienced significantly more burnout compared to individual sport athletes ($p = 0.0059$), confirming a meaningful group effect.

Table 4: Inferential Statistics – Academic Stress (Independent Samples t-Test)

Variable	t-value (df = 78)	p-value	Significance
Academic Stress	3.154	0.0023	Significant ($p < 0.01$)

The difference in academic stress between the two groups was statistically significant ($p = 0.0023$), with team sport athletes reporting higher levels. This reinforces the idea that group-based sports participation may compound academic pressure



DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal a significant psychological disparity between student-athletes participating in team sports and those in individual sports, with the former experiencing notably higher levels of both burnout and academic stress. Specifically, team sport athletes recorded a higher mean burnout score (67.33) compared to their individual sport counterparts (61.81), a difference that was statistically significant ($t = 2.831, p = 0.0059$). This suggests that team-based athletic structures may contribute to elevated emotional and physical exhaustion. Factors such as fixed, coach-led schedules, frequent travel, and heightened peer and coach expectations may increase mental fatigue and reduce athletes' autonomy, all of which are recognized contributors to burnout. Similarly, academic stress was higher among team athletes ($M = 72.15$) compared to individual athletes ($M = 65.88$), also reaching statistical significance ($t = 3.154, p = 0.0023$). These findings align with the view that team athletes often face greater time constraints and collective accountability, which may amplify the stress of balancing academic and athletic demands. In contrast, individual sport athletes, who generally have more flexible training structures, may experience greater personal control and adaptability in managing their dual roles. Taken together, the data support the conclusion that team sport athletes are more vulnerable to both burnout and academic stress due to the compounded pressures inherent in their athletic environment.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights a meaningful psychological distinction between team and individual sport athletes in the collegiate setting. Team sport athletes are shown to experience significantly greater levels of both burnout and academic stress, placing them at heightened risk for adverse outcomes such as mental health deterioration, academic decline, and potential withdrawal from sport. These findings underscore the need for universities and athletic departments to develop targeted interventions that address the specific stressors faced by team athletes. Recommended strategies include time management workshops tailored to team schedules, flexible academic accommodations, structured burnout prevention programs (e.g., mindfulness training and

recovery protocols), and routine mental health screenings integrated into athletic support systems. By proactively addressing these stress factors, institutions can create more resilient, balanced, and athlete-centered environments that promote both performance and well-being.

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