PREVALENCE RATE OF EATING DISORDER BEHAVIORS IN NCAA FEMALE ATHLETES
Ingram, Y & Sachs, M: Lock Haven University, Lock Haven, PA.

Objective: To assess the prevalence rate of NCAA female athletes with eating disorder (ED) behaviors, identify the number of participants reporting treatment for ED, and identify ED behaviors they exhibit. It is necessary to identify accurate prevalence rates to illustrate the need for implementation of an annual ED pre-screening process for female athletes to the NCAA.

Design and Settings: The Eating Attitudes Test (EAT-26) (Garner et al, 1979) was the primary instrument used for analysis; a 26 item likert scale that assesses eating attitudes and behaviors. Additional questions were added to assess the participants’ exercise habits. A cover letter including a URL link was emailed to purposefully selected participants based on the sport in which they played. Subjects: 1,529/3,981 (38%) female athletes representing all 25 NCAA sports from all divisions responded to the survey.

Measurements: A variety of non-parametric statistical tests were run on data. Because of similarities between indoor and outdoor track rosters, participants were combined for analysis. Results: 14.5% of participants recorded scores 20+ on the EAT-26. 18/24 (75%) of the sports had more than 10% of the participants scoring 20 or higher on the EAT-26. 9% of the participants indicating they were treated for a diagnosed ED. Cross country, gymnastics, skiing, tennis, basketball, lacrosse, and swimming/diving all had 15% or more of their participants reporting a past history of ED. Using a Pearson’s Point Biserial Correlation, a significant relationship was found in 68% sports between their EAT-26 score and history of diagnosed ED. 7% of all participants reported both bingeing and purging, 42.5% reported bingeing, and 10.9% reporting purging within the last 3 months. Using a Chi Square Analysis, rifle, cross country, track and field, fencing, ice hockey, equestrian, and rowing demonstrated a significant relationship between bingeing and purging. 40% of the participants reported using at least one of the extreme weight loss methods (fad dieting, extreme calorie counting, extreme exercise, diet pills, vomiting, diuretics, starvation, and laxatives); fad dieting, extreme calorie counting, and extreme exercise were most common. Usage of five or more methods was reported by 4.4% of the sample. Conclusion: The results of this study support the hypothesis that ED are a problem in the majority of NCAA women’s sports. For this reason, the NCAA needs to implement a pre-screening instrument, like the EAT-26, to help identify athletes with ED behaviors. This screening may help prevent some of the problems associated with ED.

Key words: Eating Disorders, female, athlete