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Occupational Therapy’s Role in Athletic Retirement

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BACKGROUND

- Individuals transitioning out of sport experience a loss of identity, roles, routines and social support which can negatively impact their mental health (Marterella and Smoot, 2017)
- Occupational therapists are able to help individuals transitioning out of sport that face this disruption due to their expertise in occupational performance and psychosocial development (AOTA, 2016).
- Orentlicher et al, (2015) defined occupational therapy’s role in facilitating healthy transitions through promoting and maintaining clients’ health and wellness in occupational performance.

PURPOSE

- A research study was conducted:
- To investigate the impact of athletic retirement for elite athletes and how this transition influences roles, habits, routines and other meaningful occupations.
 - To identify the potential role for occupational therapy within this population


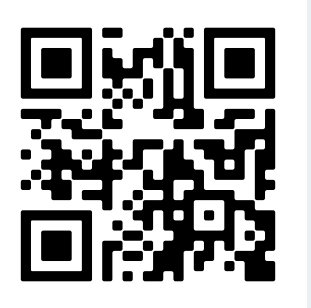

METHODS

A mixed methods research design was utilized for this project to understand the athletic experience of elite athletes as they transition into retirement. Participants were recruited through personal connections and social media. Participants answered a 10-question online survey. Interviews were ~60 minutes.

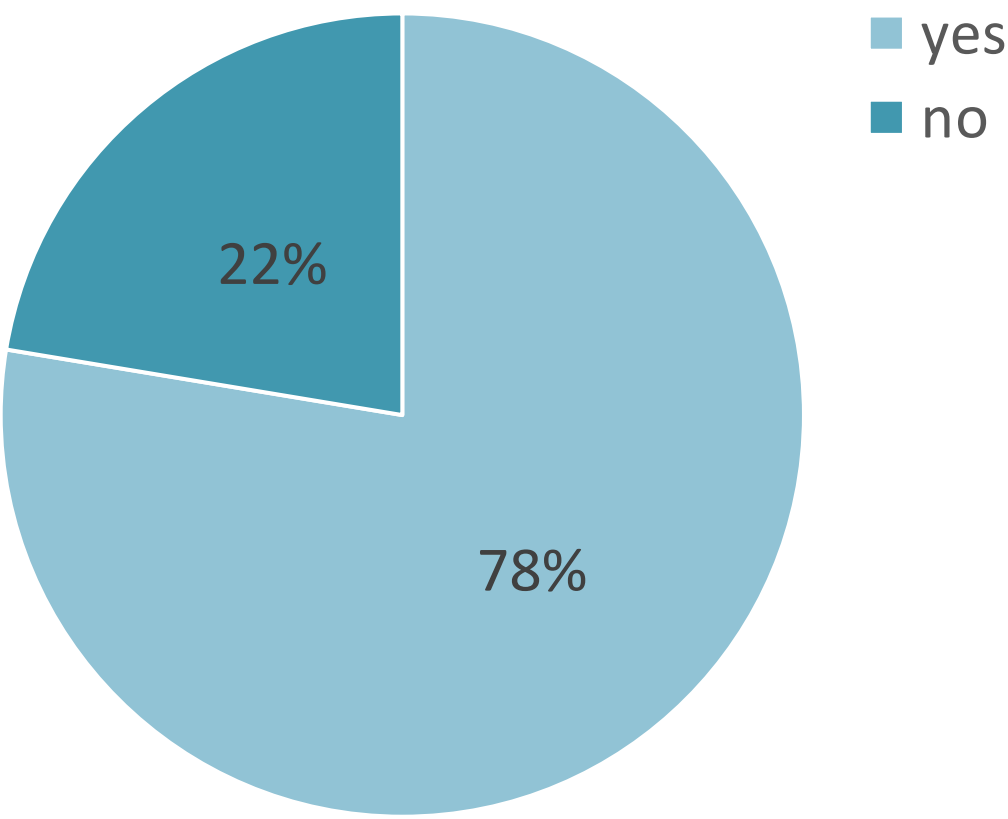
- 67 survey participants
- 12 interview participants (4 males, 8 females; 3 baseball, 2 softball, 2 soccer, 2 track and field, 1 rugby, 1 basketball, and 1 football)

In addition, observations of a focus group consisting of former NFL players were made throughout the capstone experience.

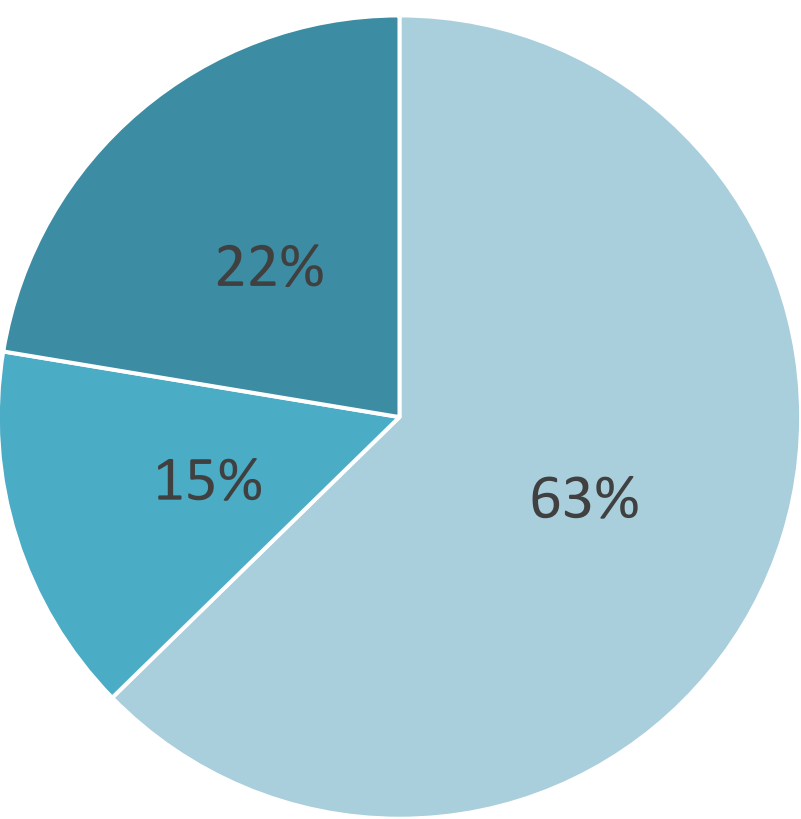
RESULTS

Themes	Sub-themes	Quotes
Occupational adjustment and relearning roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Experiencing grief and loss• Establishing new routines	
Experiencing a crossroads of identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintaining athletic identity• Detachment from sport	
External expectations and pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Team dynamics• Relationship with coaches and trainers	

Experienced MH symptoms



Utilized MH services



References

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2016). Mental health promotion, prevention, and intervention across a lifespan. *Occupational Therapy’s Distinct Value mental health*. <https://www.aota.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/Practice/MentalHealth/Distinct-Value-Mental-Health.pdf>.

Marterella, A., & Smoot, M. (2017). The occupational transition of athletic retirement: An emerging area of practice for the occupational therapy profession. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 71, 259. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2017.71S1-PO2071>

Orentlicher, M.L., Scheffkind, S., & Gibson, R. (2015). *Transitions Across the Lifespan: An Occupational Therapy Approach*. AOTA Press.

- 10 out of 12 interview participants experience a burnout period in which they detached completely from their sport, regardless of a negative or positive athletic experience.
- 9 out of 12 interview participants believe there should be some form of exit course during the last year of playing to prepare for athletic transition.
- 46.3% of survey participants felt unprepared for athletic retirement to some degree.
- 82.2% of survey participants currently identify as an athlete a moderate amount to a great deal.

DISCUSSION

Athletic retirement is a complex process that is unique to each individual, however, there are commonalities. Many interview participants discussed dedicating an overwhelming amount of time to their sport, often comparing it to a full time job. Despite having more “free time” after their sport, participants experienced difficulty establishing new routines. A lack of resources and supports prior to and throughout this transition was also discussed. As athletes navigate through this new stage, occupational therapists can perform a task analysis of anticipated roles, evaluate skills and suggest environmental or tasks adaptation to increase function and participation (Orentlicher et al, 2015).

IMPLICATIONS

- Potential role of OTs in addressing the transition to new occupations and routines after sport (i.e. physical activity, nutrition).
- Potential role of OTs in addressing emotional regulation for athletes that participated in high physical contact sports (i.e.. football, rugby).
- Future research should examine the experiences of coaches and training staff of elite sports teams.

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