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The Dark Side of Student-Athletes' University Life: How Academic Stress and Burnout Affect Athletes' Engagement in Sports

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Abstract: Student-athletes often face the dual challenge of balancing academic demands with sports commitments. While moderate stress can foster growth and resilience, excessive academic pressure may lead to burnout and a decline in participation in sports. This study aimed to explore how academic stress and burnout influence the level of sports engagement among non-elite university student-athletes. A descriptive-correlational design was employed with 1,486 student-athletes (64% male, 36% female), aged 18-24 from various universities in Iligan City, Philippines. Respondents were selected based on their competitive experience and years of participation. Standardized survey instruments measured academic stress, burnout, and sports engagement, and responses were analyzed to determine patterns and associations. Findings revealed that academic stress produced mixed effects on sports engagement. While some stress factors, such as self-perception and performance pressure, contributed positively to motivation and participation, heavy workloads and high expectations diminished engagement. Burnout consistently lowered sports engagement, with dimensions such as cynicism, exhaustion, and inadequacy showing strong negative impacts. The results highlight the dual role of academic stress, acting as both a motivator and a barrier depending on its intensity and the athlete's coping strategies. Burnout, however, emerged as a uniform risk factor, undermining enthusiasm, energy, and commitment to sports. To sustain student-athletes' engagement, schools and athletic programs must balance academic rigor with support systems that reduce burnout risks. Strategies such as academic flexibility, stress management initiatives, and mentorship can help student-athletes thrive in both academic and athletic domains.

Keywords: Student-Athletes, Academic Stress, Burnout, Sport Engagement

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