

Mental Toughness, Sport-Related Wellbeing and Mental Health Stigma among National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Student-Athletes

Introduction:

Student-athletes are subject to a range of stressors which threaten their wellbeing. These include stressors associated with elite sport performance (e.g., injury, fatigue; [1]) and the pressures of performing a dual-role as students and athletes [2]. Stigma is one of the main barriers for student-athletes seeking psychological support [3], thus it is important to understand how mental toughness (MT) may influence both personal stigma and the relationship between public and self stigma toward help-seeking. MT is a desirable psychological attribute that can help athletes produce consistently high levels of performance and sustain goal-directed behaviour, despite everyday challenges and stressors [6]. Recent evidence suggests that MT could promote improved wellbeing by enabling individuals to overcome adversity [4]. Despite this positive association with wellbeing, it has been suggested that MT may prevent athletes from seeking psychological support as they fear being viewed as weak [5]. There is limited research exploring the relationship between MT and stigma towards mental health concerns and help-seeking.

Aims:

- (i) Investigate the relationship between MT and sport-related wellbeing
- (ii) Identify the relationship between MT and personal stigma towards mental health
- (iii) Understand how MT influences the relationship between public and self stigma toward mental health help-seeking

Hypotheses:

- H₁ – Significant positive relationship exists between MT and sport related wellbeing
H₂ – Significant positive relationship exists between MT and personal stigma toward mental health
H₃ – MT will significantly moderate the relationship between public and self stigma toward help-seeking

Participants:

A sample of 154 student-athletes (female $n = 116$; male $n = 38$) were recruited from multiple National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I institutions and represented a range of sports.

Methodology:

Participants completed an online questionnaire via a survey link emailed to the head coaches of various NCAA Division I teams.

Measures:

- Mental Toughness Index (MTI; [6])
- Sport Mental Health Continuum (Sport MHC-SF; [7])
- Modified Depression Stigma Scale (DSS; [8])
- Self Stigma of Seeking Help (SSOSH; [9])
- Perception of Stigmatization by other for Seeking Help (PSOSH; [10])

Data Analysis:

Spearman's Rank order correlations were used to test the first two hypotheses of the study.
A simple linear moderation analysis was used to test the final hypothesis.

Results:

H₁ was supported with significant positive correlations between MT and both total wellbeing scores, $r_s(152) = .54, p < .001$, and all three wellbeing subscales (subjective wellbeing, $r_s(152) = .48, p < .001$; psychological wellbeing, $r_s(152) = .54, p < .001$; and social wellbeing, $r_s(152) = .44, p < .001$)

H₂ and H₃ were unsupported. No significant relationship was found between mental toughness and personal stigma toward mental health, $r_s(152) = .04, p = .61$. And the moderation analysis suggested that MT does not moderate the relationship between public and self stigma toward mental health help-seeking (Figure 1)

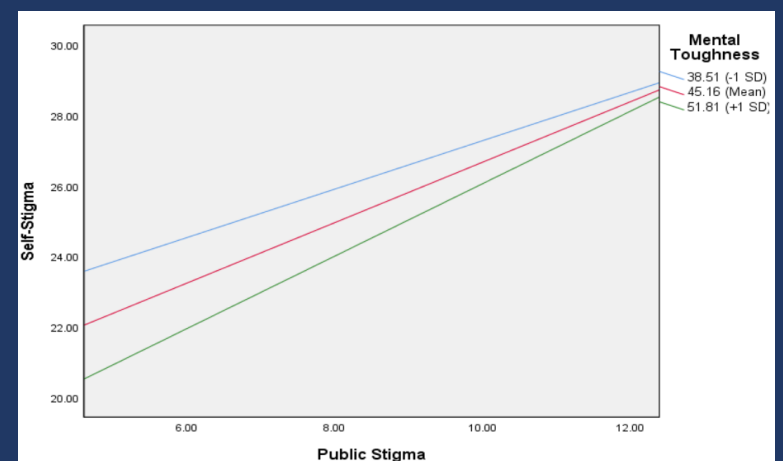


Figure 1 – Output from moderation analysis.

Conclusions:

- This study provides further support for the relationship between MT and wellbeing in the student-athlete population.
- MT is not significantly related to personal stigma. Student-athletes high in MT may not stigmatize those with mental health concerns.
- MT was found to have no influence on the relationship between public and self stigma. However, higher levels of MT were associated with reductions in both types of stigma (Figure 1).
- Characteristics of mentally tough athletes such as, perseverance, and buoyancy, may promote the use of adaptive coping strategies (e.g., seeking support for a mental health concern) thus focusing on solving their problem rather than on any stigmatization from peers.

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