

TITLE: Early Sports Specialization and Risk of Injury

BACKGROUND: Sports specialization is defined as intense year-round training (usually 8 months or more) in a single sport with the exclusion of other sports. This is common for professional and collegiate-level athletes, and is becoming more popular in high school athletes as well. This can be attributed to pressures of obtaining competitive scholarships, joining elite travel teams, and desires to play at the professional level. With early sports specialization, athletes are training at higher intensities at a younger age. This can have detrimental effects on the mind and body, specifically overuse injuries.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to determine whether there is a correlation in athletes who specialize in one sport at a young age and their likeliness to sustain more injuries in comparison to multi-sport athletes, or athletes who specialize at a later age.

METHODS: A student survey of 18 questions will be distributed to fourteen colleges/universities throughout the state of Tennessee. These surveys will go to the athletic department to be administered electronically to student athletes who will have the opportunity to fill out the survey. The athletes will be asked about the sports they have played and any injuries obtained. Each injury is categorized by the joint that is affected and the number of times it has occurred. Data will be collected and analyzed based on age, gender, and sports. Survey participants that indicate non-sports related injuries or under the age of 18 will be excluded.

DISCUSSION: Our study can help add to existing research that supports or denies the specialization of young athletes. We hope to find a middle ground where athletes are still able to reach their specific sports-related goals while minimizing the incidence of injuries. Under the appropriate conditions and the right timing of training, sports specialization can be helpful to athletes. Initial contact has been made with potential athletic programs for participation, and survey distribution will begin after IRB approval.