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Burnout to balance: wellness strategies for university student-athletes

Del agotamiento al equilibrio: estrategias de bienestar para estudiantes deportistas universitarios

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Abstract

This study investigated the level of burnout and the recovery strategies practiced by university student-athletes at Batangas State University The National Engineering University. Specifically, it assessed burnout across five core dimensions: emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, sport devaluation, physical fatigue, and mental disengagement. Using a descriptive-exploratory research design, the researchers employed a validated, researcher-made questionnaire composed of both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. A total of 105 student-athletes from seven ball game sports were selected through purposive sampling. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were interpreted through thematic analysis. The results revealed a high overall level of burnout among the participants, with physical fatigue and emotional exhaustion emerging as the most prominent symptoms. While most athletes reported relying on basic recovery strategies such as rest, sleep, and social interaction, few practiced structured psychological recovery methods like mindfulness, counseling, or mental training. Based on their responses, student-athletes strongly advocated for institutional wellness interventions, including structured recovery programs, stress management workshops, and access to sports psychology services. These findings emphasize the need for athlete-centered and evidence-based wellness strategies that holistically address the mental and physical demands placed on university student-athletes. By responding to the lived experiences and expressed needs of athletes, institutions can better promote sustained performance, psychological resilience, and overall well-being in collegiate sports.

Keywords: burnout, recovery strategies, student-athletes, wellness interventions, university sports

Resumen

Este estudio investigó el nivel de agotamiento y las estrategias de recuperación practicadas por los estudiantes-atletas universitarios de la Universidad Estatal de Batangas – La Universidad Nacional de Ingeniería. Específicamente, se evaluó el agotamiento en cinco dimensiones clave: agotamiento emocional, disminución del sentido de logro, desvalorización del deporte, fatiga física y desconexión mental. Se utilizó un diseño de investigación descriptivo-exploratorio, mediante un cuestionario validado elaborado por los investigadores, compuesto por ítems tipo Likert y preguntas abiertas. Un total de 105 estudiantes-atletas de siete deportes colectivos fueron seleccionados mediante muestreo intencional. Los datos cuantitativos se analizaron mediante estadísticas descriptivas, mientras que los datos cualitativos se interpretaron mediante análisis temático. Los resultados revelaron un alto nivel general de agotamiento entre los participantes, siendo la fatiga física y el agotamiento emocional los síntomas más destacados. Si bien la mayoría de los atletas manifestó recurrir a estrategias básicas de recuperación como el descanso, el sueño y la interacción social, pocos utilizaron métodos estructurados de recuperación psicológica como la atención plena, el asesoramiento o el entrenamiento mental. Según sus respuestas, los estudiantes-atletas abogaron firmemente por intervenciones institucionales de bienestar, que incluyan programas estructurados de recuperación, talleres de manejo del estrés y acceso a servicios de psicología deportiva. Estos hallazgos enfatizan la necesidad de estrategias de bienestar centradas en el atleta y basadas en evidencia, que aborden de manera integral las demandas físicas y mentales que enfrentan los estudiantes-atletas universitarios. Al

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responder a sus experiencias vividas y necesidades expresadas, las instituciones pueden promover un rendimiento sostenido, resiliencia psicológica y bienestar general en el deporte universitario.

Palabras clave: agotamiento, estrategias de recuperación, estudiantes-atletas, intervenciones de bienestar, deporte universitario

Introduction

In the context of university sports, athlete burnout has emerged as a growing concern within both psychological and physiological domains. Globally, student-athletes experience the combined pressures of academic achievement and athletic performance, which often place them at higher risk for stress-related conditions. Reports from collegiate sports associations reveal that a substantial proportion of student-athletes encounter symptoms of fatigue, reduced motivation, and emotional strain during their academic and athletic careers, indicating a significant mental health concern within higher education settings.

Athlete burnout, as defined by Madigan et al. (2022), is a multidimensional syndrome characterized by emotional and physical exhaustion, a reduced sense of accomplishment, and sport devaluation. These symptoms often arise from chronic stress, high-performance expectations, and insufficient recovery periods. Within the university environment, such conditions are prevalent among student-athletes who are required to balance demanding academic responsibilities with intensive training schedules (Glandorf et al., 2023).

University student-athletes operate under dual-role expectations to perform successfully in both their sport and academics. This dual responsibility heightens their vulnerability to psychological distress and physical fatigue, particularly when institutional support and coping resources are inadequate (Fahrner & Burk, 2023). Recent studies have shown that continued exposure to stressors without proper coping mechanisms may lead to disengagement, loss of motivation, and eventual withdrawal from sport participation (Linnér et al., 2021).

Contemporary research further indicates that burnout among student-athletes is influenced by the interaction of environmental, personal, and academic stressors. Mihajlovic et al. (2023) and Woods et al. (2022) emphasize that limited time for rest, recovery, and self-care intensifies fatigue and decreases well-being. Moreover, academic

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pressure and social expectations can exacerbate the sense of imbalance, resulting in decreased athletic satisfaction and mental disengagement. These findings highlight the need for continuous monitoring of student-athletes' mental health to sustain performance and prevent premature burnout.

Given these considerations, the present study aims to determine the level of burnout experienced by university student-athletes across five dimensions: emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, sport devaluation, physical fatigue, and mental disengagement. It also seeks to identify the recovery strategies commonly practiced by these athletes and examine their implications for maintaining well-being and performance stability. By addressing the extent and characteristics of burnout within this population, this research contributes to the growing body of evidence that supports holistic and sustainable approaches to athlete development in higher education (Gerber et al., 2024).

Conceptualizing Athlete Burnout

Athlete burnout is a widely recognized psychological syndrome that arises from prolonged and unmanaged exposure to both physical and emotional stress in the context of sustained sport participation. It typically manifests when the demands placed on an athlete consistently outweigh their capacity to recover, adapt, or feel a sense of fulfillment. According to Ruíz Barquín et al. (2024), athlete burnout consists of three core dimensions: emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of personal accomplishment, and sport devaluation. These dimensions collectively describe the mental fatigue, disillusionment, and diminishing motivation that athletes experience, often resulting in decreased performance and disengagement from sport.

Recent scholarship has expanded this framework to reflect the evolving pressures of contemporary athletic environments. Specifically, researchers have emphasized the inclusion of physical fatigue and mental disengagement as key indicators of burnout, especially in high-intensity, achievement-driven contexts like collegiate athletics (Sasso et al., 2022). University student-athletes, who juggle academic responsibilities with rigorous training and competition schedules, are particularly susceptible to this multidimensional form of burnout.

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Moreover, athlete burnout is increasingly understood not as an isolated or abrupt psychological event, but as a progressive and systemic process. It is shaped by a complex interplay of factors, including imbalanced workloads, perceived lack of control or autonomy, performance pressure, and insufficient coping mechanisms (Pawsey et al., 2021). This evolving understanding calls for holistic strategies that not only reduce stressors but also enhance athletes' psychological resilience and recovery practices. Recognizing burnout as a layered and dynamic condition is essential for developing effective prevention and intervention programs in university sports settings.

Prevalence and Impact of Burnout in University Athletes

The university environment represents a uniquely high-risk setting for the development of burnout among student-athletes. Unlike professional athletes who often have dedicated support systems and recovery time, student-athletes are expected to navigate dual roles—as full-time students and competitive athletes—often without adequate institutional adjustments or resources. The continuous balancing act of meeting academic expectations while enduring intensive training schedules and competitive pressures contributes to chronic physical and emotional stress. This strain is frequently compounded by limited recovery periods, inadequate sleep, and psychological fatigue.

Research by Moore et al. (2024) highlighted the elevated prevalence of burnout in collegiate sports, identifying emotional exhaustion as the most frequently reported symptom among student-athletes. Such exhaustion erodes motivation, reduces focus, and often precedes broader forms of disengagement. The consequences of athlete burnout extend far beyond athletic performance. As noted by Harris & Maher, (2022), burnout negatively affects academic engagement, mental health, and general life satisfaction, ultimately threatening the holistic development of young athletes.

Additionally, the psychological burden of burnout can be exacerbated when athletes perceive a lack of support from coaches, faculty, or the institution itself. In such cases, student-athletes may experience increased feelings of isolation, heightened stress, and a greater likelihood of withdrawing from sport or underperforming academically (Simons & Bird, 2022). These outcomes reflect a deeper systemic issue—suggesting that burnout is not merely an individual failure to cope, but a consequence of institutional

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cultures and structures that fail to accommodate the comprehensive needs of student-athletes. This recognition calls for a shift in how universities conceptualize and respond to burnout—framing it not solely as a mental health issue, but as a structural challenge requiring coordinated, campus-wide wellness interventions.

Recovery Strategies for Managing Burnout

Recovery plays a pivotal role in mitigating the effects of burnout and restoring the well-being and performance capacity of student-athletes. In the high-pressure environment of university sports, recovery serves as a counterbalance to chronic stress—providing physical, psychological, and emotional restoration. As Clemente & Tchounwou (2022) emphasize, recovery is not a unidimensional process limited to rest or reduced physical exertion; it encompasses a multifaceted approach that includes mental and emotional regulation, proactive coping, and environmental support.

Physical recovery strategies, such as adequate sleep, proper nutrition, hydration, and periodized training plans, remain foundational. These allow the body to repair, adapt, and prepare for subsequent performance demands. However, focusing solely on physical recovery neglects the mental and emotional toll that academic pressures, performance anxiety, and social expectations exert on student-athletes. Research by Han (2024) has shown that psychological recovery methods—including mindfulness-based stress reduction, guided imagery, breathing techniques, and cognitive reframing—significantly alleviate symptoms of emotional exhaustion and enhance focus, motivation, and self-regulation.

Despite the growing evidence supporting psychological recovery practices, many student-athletes either lack awareness, access, or encouragement to use such techniques. Institutional wellness programs often prioritize physical conditioning while leaving psychological support to optional or reactive services. As a result, athletes may default to passive rest, such as sleep or screen time, which may offer temporary relief but fail to address the deeper cognitive and emotional dimensions of burnout. This gap is particularly evident in university settings with limited mental health resources or where stigma around psychological help-seeking persists.

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Athletes who consistently follow structured and individualized recovery routines—which include both physical and psychological components—are more likely to experience improved mental clarity, emotional resilience, and sustained motivation (Pennington & Castor, 2022). These benefits contribute not only to performance sustainability but also to long-term athlete development and life satisfaction. For recovery to be truly effective, it must be intentionally and systematically embedded within athletic programs. This includes training coaches to recognize early signs of burnout, integrating recovery education into athlete development programs, and fostering a culture that values recovery as much as training. By reframing recovery as a proactive and essential component of athlete wellness, institutions can help prevent burnout before it undermines the athlete's physical health, academic progress, or sporting career.

The Role of Institutional Support and Coach Involvement

Institutions and coaches play a crucial and interdependent role in shaping the recovery environment and overall well-being of student-athletes. While athletes may bear the physical and emotional weight of balancing sports and academics, the quality of institutional and interpersonal support systems often determines their ability to manage stress and prevent burnout. Research has consistently shown that student-athletes who perceive strong support from coaches, athletic staff, and the university experience lower levels of burnout, higher academic engagement, and greater overall life satisfaction (Crocker & Duncan, 2020).

Coaches, in particular, serve as gatekeepers of the athlete experience. Their behavior, leadership style, and communication approach significantly influence how athletes interpret and respond to performance pressure. Autonomy-supportive coaching—which includes offering athletes choices, showing empathy, and providing constructive feedback—has been linked to enhanced motivation and emotional well-being. In contrast, controlling or unsupportive coaching styles can intensify psychological strain, increase emotional fatigue, and heighten the risk of sport devaluation and disengagement. When coaches actively validate athletes' emotions, promote open dialogue, and encourage psychological recovery practices, they foster a climate of trust and resilience that protects against burnout.

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On a broader level, institutional structures and resources are equally essential in sustaining athlete well-being. Access to sports psychologists, academic counseling, mental skills training, and time management seminars can empower athletes to navigate both personal and competitive challenges. Wellness initiatives such as regular mental health screening, peer support groups, and recovery education workshops offer proactive strategies for stress regulation and performance sustainability. However, these resources are often inaccessible or underdeveloped, particularly in state universities or institutions in developing countries, where funding and awareness may be limited.

As Pires et al. (2024) emphasize, the absence of formal, integrated wellness systems creates a dangerous paradigm where the burden of managing burnout falls almost exclusively on the athlete. Without institutional scaffolding or consistent coach involvement, athletes are left to cope reactively—often after symptoms have already escalated. This systemic shortfall not only jeopardizes the health of individual athletes but also undermines the broader goals of sport development, academic success, and institutional accountability.

Finally, preventing burnout and promoting athlete recovery must be seen as a shared responsibility—requiring collaboration between athletes, coaches, administrators, and university health services. Embedding wellness principles into the culture of athletic programs and treating recovery as a strategic priority—not an afterthought—can transform the student-athlete experience from one of survival to one of thriving. This institutional shift is essential for creating sustainable, supportive environments where athletes can excel in both sport and life.

Toward Holistic Wellness Interventions

The rapidly evolving landscape of collegiate athletics demands a paradigm shift from performance-centric approaches to athlete-centered wellness models that address the full spectrum of physical, psychological, emotional, and social needs. Traditional strategies have often focused narrowly on physical conditioning and injury prevention, overlooking the mental and emotional toll of competitive sport. In response, scholars and practitioners have begun advocating for holistic wellness interventions—comprehensive

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programs that view athlete well-being as foundational to both performance and personal development.

Gerber et al. (2024) stress the importance of integrated intervention models that combine physical recovery protocols with evidence-based psychological practices, including stress management workshops, cognitive-behavioral interventions, mindfulness training, and emotional regulation strategies. These interventions are not only effective in mitigating burnout symptoms such as emotional exhaustion and mental disengagement, but also enhance athletes' mental resilience, self-awareness, and ability to cope with adversity both in and out of sport. When integrated into regular athletic programming, these wellness interventions can serve as a proactive buffer against the cumulative demands of training, competition, and academic pressures.

However, for wellness interventions to succeed, they must be culturally and contextually tailored to the lived realities of the athletes they aim to support. Programs designed in Western contexts may not translate seamlessly into different cultural settings, where values, coping styles, and institutional resources differ significantly. This is particularly relevant in the Philippine university system, where wellness infrastructure is still emerging and the culture of mental health advocacy within sports is nascent. Despite growing recognition of athlete mental health challenges, research and implementation of localized wellness models remain limited, especially in state universities with constrained budgets and heavy student-athlete workloads.

This research gap signals both a challenge and an opportunity. Without localized models, Filipino student-athletes may continue to experience high levels of burnout without access to appropriate support systems. At the same time, the absence of existing frameworks presents an opening for scholars, coaches, and university administrators to develop and pilot culturally sensitive wellness programs that reflect the unique dynamics of the Philippine educational and athletic landscape. These programs should integrate community-based support, coach education, and institutional policy reforms to ensure that psychological care is not a privilege but a standard component of athlete development.

Eventually, moving toward holistic, inclusive, and evidence-based wellness interventions is essential for sustaining not only athletic performance but also the long-

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term health and life satisfaction of student-athletes. By embedding such models within the structural fabric of university sports programs, institutions can cultivate a generation of athletes who are not only competitive but also resilient, well-supported, and mentally prepared for the demands of both sport and society.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-exploratory research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to investigate the level of burnout and the recovery strategies among university student-athletes. The descriptive (quantitative) component quantified burnout levels across five core dimensions: emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, sport devaluation, physical fatigue, and mental disengagement (Lomas et al., 2025). This design was chosen to obtain a structured understanding of the extent and distribution of burnout symptoms among participants.

Simultaneously, the exploratory (qualitative) component aimed to uncover the commonly practiced recovery strategies that student-athletes use to cope with these symptoms. Open-ended responses were analyzed thematically to capture insights into behavioral patterns and coping mechanisms not easily identified through closed-ended instruments. This dual strategy allowed the researchers to gather both measurable data and subjective experiences that reflect the lived realities of student-athletes.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods ensured a well-rounded understanding of the burnout phenomenon and the recovery practices employed within the university sports setting. This mixed approach aligns with previous studies in athlete mental health research that emphasize the importance of combining statistical assessment with narrative insight to inform context-sensitive wellness interventions.

Participants, Sampling Technique, and Sample Size

The participants of this study were university student-athletes from Batangas State University The National Engineering University (BatStateU TNEU), who were actively involved in varsity-level ball game sports during the Academic Year 2024–2025. A total of 105 student-athletes participated in the research, representing approximately 85

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percent of the university's total varsity roster. This ensured that the sample was sufficiently representative of the institution's athletic population, encompassing both male and female athletes from multiple team sports.

The sports disciplines and number of participants were as follows:

- Basketball Men = 15
- Basketball Women = 15
- Volleyball Men = 15
- Volleyball Women = 15
- Softball = 15
- Baseball = 15
- Futsal = 15

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability technique appropriate for studies in sports science and health research when specific participant characteristics are integral to the research objectives. The inclusion criteria required that participants be officially enrolled, actively training, and had competed in university-sanctioned events during the study period. This approach ensured that respondents were directly exposed to the physical, psychological, and academic pressures associated with competitive university athletics.

The purposive sampling method was particularly appropriate for capturing the perspectives and experiences of student-athletes most at risk for burnout due to their dual academic and athletic responsibilities. The inclusion of both male and female athletes across seven varsity sports promoted diversity and strengthened the generalizability of findings within the university context.

In terms of demographic profile, the participants' ages ranged from 18 to 24 years, with an average age of 20.6 years. The group included 62 males (59.0 percent) and 43 females (41.0 percent). Regarding academic standing, 27 participants were first-year students (25.7 percent), 31 were in their second year (29.5 percent), 28 were in their third year (26.7 percent), and 19 were in their fourth year (18.1 percent). As for sports experience, 38 athletes (36.2 percent) had 1–2 years of experience, 44 athletes (41.9 percent) had 3–4 years, and 23 athletes (21.9 percent) had 5 or more years of organized competition experience.

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This distribution demonstrates that the sample accurately reflects the diversity of the BatStateU TNEU varsity population in terms of gender, age, academic level, and athletic experience, thereby ensuring representativeness and reliability in assessing burnout and recovery patterns among student-athletes.

Instruments

To effectively gather data aligned with the objectives of the study, a researcher-developed questionnaire was utilized. The instrument was structured to assess both the level of athlete burnout and the recovery strategies practiced by student-athletes. It was designed in two main parts: (1) a quantitative scale adapted from established burnout measures, and (2) an open-ended qualitative section for identifying recovery strategies.

Part I: Burnout Assessment Scale

The first section of the questionnaire assessed the level of burnout among university student-athletes. This included five dimensions relevant to the collegiate context:

- Emotional exhaustion
- Reduced sense of accomplishment
- Sport devaluation
- Physical fatigue
- Mental disengagement

Each dimension was measured using five items, rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The items were carefully constructed based on theoretical underpinnings from the Athlete Burnout Questionnaire (Raedeke & Smith, 2001) and adapted to the university sports setting to ensure contextual relevance for collegiate athletes. The adapted items reflected behavioral, cognitive, and emotional indicators of burnout in collegiate athletics and were pilot-tested among 20 student-athletes for clarity and appropriateness.

The internal consistency reliability of the instrument was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Results demonstrated high reliability across all five dimensions: emotional exhaustion ($\alpha = 0.91$), reduced sense of accomplishment ($\alpha = 0.88$), sport devaluation ($\alpha = 0.87$), physical fatigue ($\alpha = 0.90$), and mental disengagement ($\alpha = 0.89$).

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The overall reliability coefficient of the burnout assessment scale was $\alpha = 0.89$, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Part II: Recovery Strategy Identification

The second section included a semi-structured qualitative component designed to explore the recovery strategies personally practiced by the participants. This part asked athletes to describe their approaches to managing stress and fatigue through prompts such as: “What specific activities or habits help you recover after intense training or competition?” and “How do you manage emotional and physical fatigue during the season?” Responses provided insight into both physical and psychological recovery mechanisms, including rest, sleep, nutrition, mindfulness, social interaction, and informal peer support. This qualitative section complemented the quantitative data by providing contextual understanding of athletes’ self-directed recovery behaviors and coping mechanisms.

The Validation and Pilot Testing

The questionnaire underwent content validation by a panel of three experts in the fields of sports science, psychology, and physical education. Their feedback ensured that the instrument was appropriate for the target population, both in content and language. Additionally, a pilot test was conducted with 10 student-athletes who were not included in the final sample. Minor adjustments were made based on their responses to improve clarity and response accuracy.

The final version of the instrument was administered in printed format during scheduled training sessions, ensuring a controlled environment and minimizing external distractions.

Data Analysis

The data gathered in this study were analyzed using a mixed-method approach, combining quantitative statistical analysis for the descriptive component and qualitative thematic analysis for the exploratory component. This approach allowed for a comprehensive interpretation of burnout levels and recovery strategies among university student-athletes.

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Quantitative Analysis

The responses from the burnout assessment scale were encoded and analyzed using descriptive statistics via SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). The following statistical measures were computed for each of the five burnout dimensions:

- Mean: to determine the central tendency of responses.
- Standard deviation: to assess the variation or spread of scores.
- Frequency and percentage: to describe the distribution of responses.

To interpret the levels of burnout symptoms, a verbal interpretation scale was used as follows:

4.20–5.00 – Very High

3.40–4.19 – High

2.60–3.39 – Moderate

1.80–2.59 – Low

1.00–1.79 – Very Low

This analysis provided a clear profile of the average burnout experience across the sample, highlighting which dimensions (e.g., emotional exhaustion, physical fatigue) were most prominent and which were less critical.

Qualitative Analysis

The open-ended responses on recovery strategies were subjected to thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Responses were manually coded and grouped into recurring categories that reflected patterns in the strategies student-athletes employed to manage burnout.

Emerging themes were categorized into:

- Physical recovery (e.g., rest, sleep, hydration)
- Psychological recovery (e.g., mindfulness, mental breaks, music)
- Social support (e.g., bonding with teammates, family time)
- Informal coping (e.g., screen time, hobbies, spiritual practices)

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The qualitative data enriched the quantitative findings by providing context to the lived experiences of burnout and highlighting individualized recovery practices not captured in scale items.

Data Integration

The results from both the quantitative and qualitative analyses were triangulated to draw deeper insights and formulate context-specific wellness interventions. This integration ensured that the proposed strategies were both evidence-informed and grounded in the realities of the student-athletes' environment.

Ethical Statement

This study adhered to ethical principles in the conduct of research involving human participants. Prior to data collection, the purpose, scope, and procedures of the study were clearly explained to all participants. Written informed consent was obtained from each student-athlete, affirming their voluntary participation and right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly observed. Participants were assured that their responses would be used exclusively for academic purposes and reported only in aggregate form, with no identifying information disclosed. Data were stored securely and accessible only to the researchers.

The study posed minimal risk to participants and was conducted with full respect for their dignity, autonomy, and well-being. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the academic research committee of the institution prior to implementation.

Results

This section presents the findings of the study based on the three stated objectives: (1) to determine the level of burnout experienced by university student-athletes, (2) to identify the recovery strategies commonly practiced by student-athletes, and (3) to propose intervention strategies that promote wellness and mitigate burnout. Both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to capture a comprehensive view of the student-athletes' burnout experiences and their coping mechanisms.

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Level of Burnout Among Student-Athletes

To determine the level of burnout among student-athletes, responses to the structured questionnaire were analyzed based on five core dimensions: emotional exhaustion, reduced sense of accomplishment, sport devaluation, physical fatigue, and mental disengagement. Descriptive statistics were computed to evaluate the mean scores and provide a general interpretation of their burnout profiles.

Table 1. Level of Burnout Among Student-Athletes by Component

| Component | Mean | Standard Deviation | Verbal Interpretation |
|---------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Emotional Exhaustion | 3.95 | 0.61 | High |
| Reduced Sense of Accomplishment | 3.54 | 0.68 | High |
| Sport Devaluation | 3.30 | 0.66 | Moderate |
| Physical Fatigue | 4.12 | 0.55 | High |
| Mental Disengagement | 3.45 | 0.72 | High |
| Overall Mean | 3.67 | | High |

Table 1 shows that the highest burnout dimension was physical fatigue ($M = 4.12$), followed by emotional exhaustion ($M = 3.95$), and mental disengagement ($M = 3.45$). These results suggest that student-athletes experience significant physical and emotional strain from their dual academic-athletic commitments. The overall mean score of 3.67 indicates a high level of burnout across the sample, warranting the need for immediate recovery and wellness interventions.

Recovery Strategies Practiced by Student-Athletes

To address the second objective, the study explored the recovery strategies commonly used by student-athletes. Responses to the open-ended items were coded and grouped thematically. Frequencies and percentages were used to highlight common patterns.

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Table 2. Common Recovery Strategies Practiced by Student-Athletes

| Recovery Strategy | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------|----------------|
| Sleep and rest | 90 | 85.71% |
| Social interaction with peers/family | 76 | 72.38% |
| Listening to music/watching media | 64 | 60.95% |
| Light exercise or active recovery | 59 | 56.19% |
| Personal hobbies (e.g., journaling) | 48 | 45.71% |
| Mindfulness or deep breathing exercises | 32 | 30.48% |
| Talking with coach or counselor | 18 | 17.14% |

As shown in Table 2, the most frequently practiced recovery strategies included sleep and rest (85.71%), social interaction (72.38%), and entertainment or media consumption (60.95%). Fewer student-athletes reported engaging in structured psychological strategies such as mindfulness (30.48%) or seeking guidance from a coach or counselor (17.14%), suggesting underutilization of formal psychological recovery methods.

Proposed Wellness Interventions for Burnout Prevention and Recovery

To fulfill the third objective, participants were asked to recommend strategies they believe would help address burnout and promote holistic recovery. Their suggestions were grouped into practical, programmatic, and institutional-level interventions.

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Table 3. Student-Athlete Suggested Interventions to Address Burnout

| Suggested Intervention | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|---|-----------|----------------|
| Structured rest and recovery programs in training | 88 | 83.81% |
| Time management and academic-stress workshops | 75 | 71.43% |
| Access to sports psychologists or mental health services | 63 | 60.00% |
| Improved communication and emotional support from coaches | 58 | 55.24% |
| Peer support and team-building sessions | 46 | 43.81% |
| Mindfulness and stress-reduction sessions during training | 39 | 37.14% |

Student-athletes overwhelmingly recommended the integration of rest and recovery protocols into their regular training (83.81%) and the implementation of academic stress management workshops (71.43%). Other notable suggestions included greater access to mental health professionals, improved coach-athlete communication, and structured opportunities for team bonding and psychological resilience building.

Discussion

This study explored burnout levels and recovery strategies among university student-athletes, specifically those involved in ball game sports at Batangas State University – The National Engineering University. The findings offer valuable insights into the physiological and psychological toll of collegiate sports participation, while also underscoring gaps in current wellness practices and institutional support systems. The integration of both quantitative and qualitative data allowed for a nuanced understanding of how student-athletes experience and cope with burnout, and what interventions they believe could enhance their well-being and performance.

The results indicate a high overall level of burnout among the student-athletes, with physical fatigue and emotional exhaustion receiving the highest ratings. These findings align with prior research that highlights the physically demanding nature of university-level sports, especially in disciplines that require daily practice, frequent

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travel, and high-stakes competition (Moore et al., 2024). The elevated physical fatigue may also be attributed to inadequate recovery periods, overlapping academic obligations, and pressure to consistently perform.

Emotional exhaustion, the psychological depletion resulting from sustained effort, emerged as a critical concern. According to Mihajlovic et al. (2023), emotional exhaustion is often the first sign of burnout and can lead to withdrawal from sport and diminished academic performance if left unmanaged. Mental disengagement was also rated highly, suggesting that athletes are becoming cognitively detached from their sport, possibly due to monotonous training routines, overwhelming expectations, or lack of intrinsic motivation. Together, these dimensions reflect a potentially precarious balance between ambition and overload—a theme echoed in Linnér et al. (2021), who found that elite student-athletes frequently struggle with maintaining motivation and mental sharpness under constant pressure.

Interestingly, sport devaluation was rated only as “moderate,” implying that although student-athletes feel tired and emotionally drained, they have not yet developed a negative or indifferent attitude toward their sport. This is a promising sign, indicating that burnout has not yet reached its most severe stage. However, if left unaddressed, moderate devaluation can evolve into chronic disengagement or dropout, as suggested by (Trifković, 2022).

In examining the recovery strategies practiced by student-athletes, it became evident that basic physical recovery methods—such as sleep and rest—are prioritized, while structured psychological strategies remain underutilized. The prominence of social interaction as a coping mechanism indicates that peer and family relationships play a vital role in the athletes’ emotional regulation and mental recovery, corroborating findings by Murray et al. (2023) that social support buffers the effects of athlete burnout.

However, the underuse of mindfulness techniques, relaxation strategies, and counseling services raises concern. These methods have been shown to enhance resilience, reduce anxiety, and promote emotional stability in high-performance athletes (Han, 2024). Their absence from the mainstream recovery behaviors of student-athletes points to a lack of access, awareness, or perceived relevance—especially within resource-constrained institutional settings such as state universities. The limited engagement with

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coaching staff for emotional support (only 17.14%) also reveals potential communication gaps or a culture that prioritizes physical output over psychological well-being. This is consistent with findings by Ye et al. (2024), who noted that coach behaviors significantly influence athlete mental health outcomes, and that emotionally intelligent coaching can mitigate symptoms of burnout.

The interventions suggested by the athletes themselves offer valuable direction for institutional policy and program design. The most commonly recommended strategies—structured rest and recovery sessions, stress management workshops, and access to mental health professionals—point to a growing awareness among student-athletes of the need for balance and psychological care. These recommendations echo the holistic models of athlete development proposed by researchers such as Gerber et al. (2024), who advocate for integrated mental and physical training regimens, and Sasso et al. (2022), who call for coach-led wellness support systems.

Furthermore, the call for coach training in emotional communication and team-building programs reflects athletes' desire for a more supportive and cohesive athletic environment. This aligns with the findings of Pires et al. (2024), who emphasized the importance of cultivating team cultures where vulnerability is accepted and mental health is normalized. Institutional policies that prioritize only competitive outcomes and neglect wellness dimensions risk contributing to long-term burnout, disengagement, and even mental health crises.

Lastly, the study surfaces an important gap in the Philippine collegiate sports context: the absence of culturally and contextually adapted wellness models. While international literature offers various frameworks for recovery and resilience, their direct application to state universities in Southeast Asia may be limited by cultural, economic, and infrastructural differences. This underscores the urgency for localized, evidence-based interventions that are affordable, feasible, and rooted in the lived experiences of Filipino student-athletes.

Limitations of the Study

This study, while providing valuable insights into the burnout experiences and recovery strategies of university student-athletes, is not without limitations. First, the

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scope of the research was confined to athletes from Batangas State University – The National Engineering University who participated specifically in ball game sports. As such, the findings may not fully capture the experiences of athletes from other disciplines, such as track and field, swimming, or martial arts, nor are they generalizable to student-athletes in other state or private universities.

Secondly, the use of self-reported data through questionnaires introduces the possibility of response bias. Participants may have consciously or unconsciously overreported or underreported their symptoms of burnout or the strategies they employ for recovery. This risk is heightened by the subjective nature of psychological self-assessment and the influence of social desirability in answering sensitive questions.

Moreover, the study employed a cross-sectional research design, which limits the ability to determine causal relationships or observe changes in burnout and recovery patterns over time. A longitudinal approach would offer more comprehensive insights into how athlete burnout evolves across a competitive season or academic year.

The qualitative component of the study, while exploratory in nature, was based solely on open-ended survey responses. This limited the depth and context of the data, as responses were often brief and lacked elaboration. More robust qualitative methods such as interviews or focus group discussions could have enriched the findings by capturing the nuanced lived experiences of the athletes.

Finally, the study did not account for several institutional and environmental factors that may significantly influence athlete well-being, including coaching styles, academic pressure, access to recovery resources, and the presence or absence of institutional mental health support systems. These factors warrant exploration in future studies to develop more holistic and effective wellness interventions.

Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence that burnout is a pressing concern among university student-athletes at Batangas State University – The National Engineering University, particularly those engaged in high-demand ball game sports such as basketball, volleyball, softball, baseball, and futsal. The descriptive findings reveal consistently high levels of physical fatigue, emotional exhaustion, and mental

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disengagement, pointing to the cumulative impact of balancing academic, athletic, and personal demands. While burnout has long been recognized in elite sports, this study confirms that student-athletes in state universities are similarly vulnerable, often without the same level of institutional support or resources available in more competitive or better-funded settings.

The prominence of physical and emotional exhaustion suggests that existing training regimens and academic schedules do not sufficiently account for athletes' recovery needs. Meanwhile, mental disengagement—often a precursor to motivational decline and withdrawal from sport—indicates that psychological well-being is not being adequately addressed within the current structure of university athletics. Notably, although sport devaluation scored lower, its presence signals a risk of growing detachment from one's sport if burnout symptoms are left unmanaged.

The exploratory findings further demonstrate that while student-athletes utilize fundamental recovery strategies such as rest, sleep, and social support, their use of formal psychological recovery techniques—including mindfulness, guided relaxation, and professional counseling—remains limited. This underutilization may stem from a lack of access, limited institutional promotion of mental health services, or persisting stigma around emotional vulnerability in sports. Such gaps in recovery practices place student-athletes at greater risk for chronic burnout, injury, and reduced academic and athletic performance.

Importantly, the athletes themselves provided thoughtful and actionable recommendations, emphasizing the need for structured rest within training programs, time management and academic stress workshops, access to mental health professionals, and more supportive relationships with coaches and peers. These athlete-driven suggestions validate the notion that effective wellness interventions must be grounded in lived experience, context-sensitive, and inclusive of both physical and mental dimensions of recovery.

In conclusion, the study highlights the urgent need for higher education institutions—particularly state universities—to adopt evidence-informed and athlete-centered wellness frameworks. These should address not only the physical conditioning of athletes but also their psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and holistic

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development. Institutions must recognize that the long-term success of student-athletes depends not solely on performance metrics but on the systems of care that support their overall well-being. Future research and policy efforts should focus on developing contextualized wellness programs that are sustainable, scalable, and aligned with the unique needs and constraints of collegiate athletic settings in the Philippines and similar contexts.

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