

Team Building and Peer Mentorship: Avenues to Improve Collegiate Athletes Academic and Psychosocial Well-being

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Background

Athletics is beneficial in character refining, providing of structure, and the experience of individual success.

Yet, athletics can also be very detrimental to an individual without the right view of self, a healthy support system, and a lack of coping skills.

Collegiate athletes experience the same academic pressures and young adult struggles as other college students, while also balancing the pressure to perform and a rigorous schedule.

Collegiate athletes are often overlooked as a vulnerable population.

Athletic participation can have a negative impact on an athlete's psychosocial well-being; however, this outcome is rarely discussed (Moore, 2016).

Literature shows higher levels of depression, suicide attempts, alcohol and substance use, and eating disorders correlating with college athletic participation (Moore, 2016).



Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how team building and peer mentorship influences mental health, substance use, and academics among female college athletes.



Methods

Data was collected at the summation of the soccer season for two consecutive years, 2015 and 2016, from a small, private university in the suburban South.

Athlete's self-reported through surveys struggles related to depression, negative self-image and/or identity, and substance use.

Grade point average was received through university records.

The following methods were applied in between the two consecutive years:

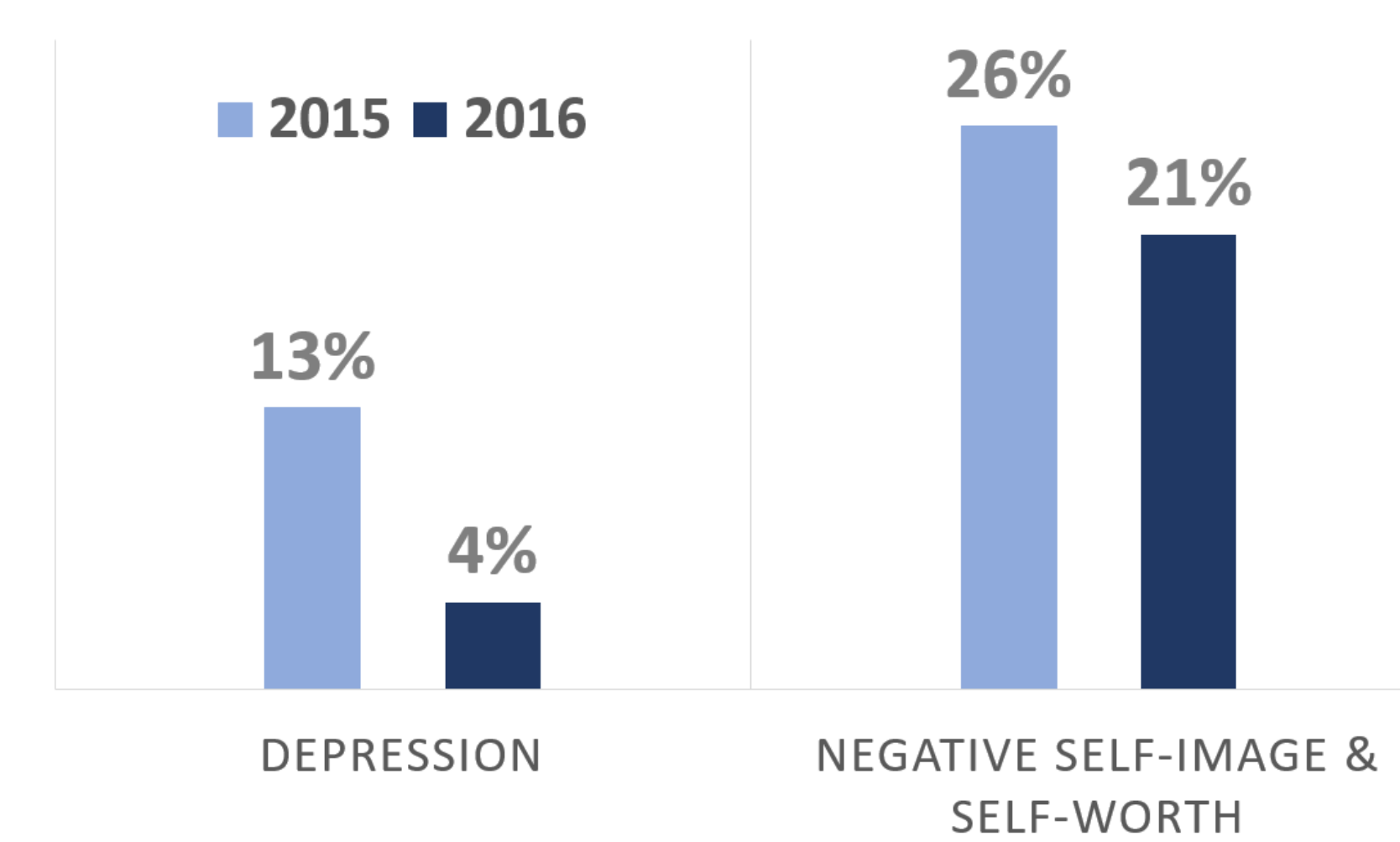
- 1. Team building day before the start of season.** This day focused on the athlete as a whole. External circumstances that could potentially affect the athletes' success on and off the field were addressed. Team bonding activities were used to strengthen communication, leadership, and teach problem solving techniques.
- 2. Freshmen transition groups.** Done to aid Freshmen in the transition into a new environment and the integration into the team as a whole.
- 3. Formation of Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, and Senior Leadership Teams.** Consisting of regular meeting times to discuss individual and class concerns as well as giving each class a voice to the direction of the team.
- 4. The creation of "Families".** Designated groups consisting of at least one member from each class and facilitated by a Senior Leader. Groups met regularly for scheduled activities and group bonding activities.
- 5. Increased collaboration between Senior Leadership Team and Coaches.** Dealt with how to best implement changes within the team and address problem areas with individual players as well as the overall team.

Results

Athletes Characteristics [%]

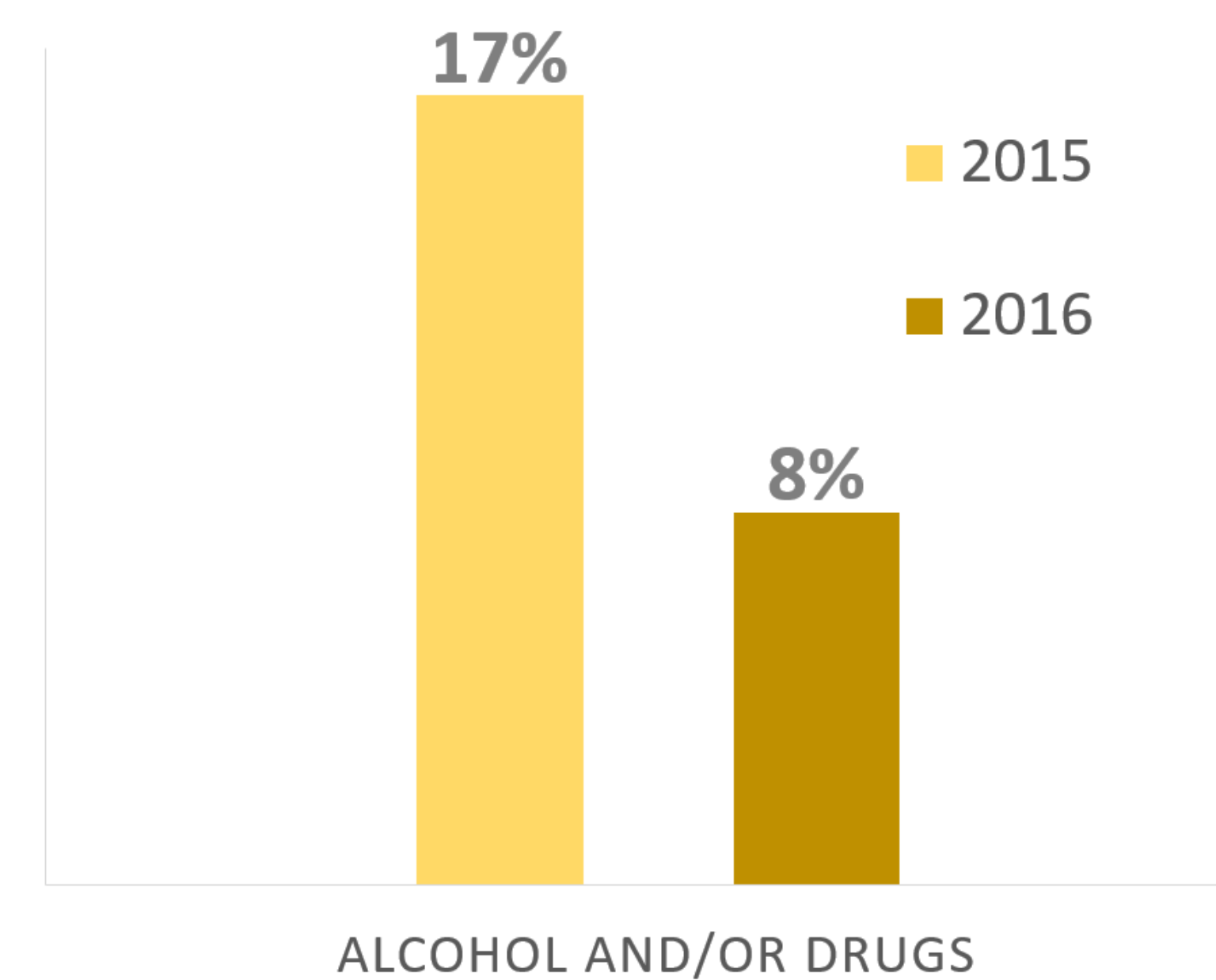
Freshman	8
Sophomores	6
Juniors	9
Seniors	0
Out-of-state to In-state Ratio	14:9

MENTAL HEALTH



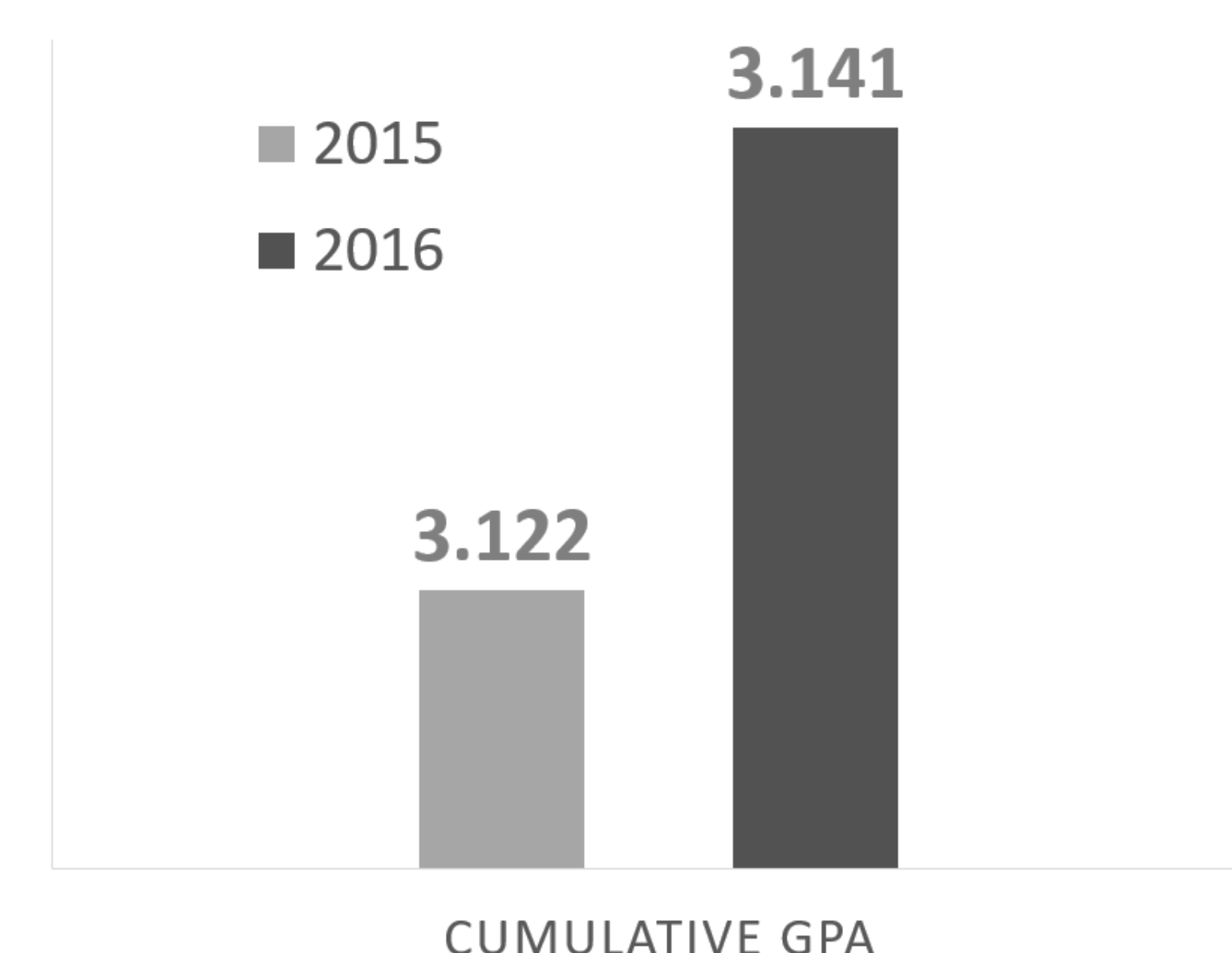
A -69% change in depression and a -19% change in negative self-image & self-worth.

SUBSTANCE USE



A -52% change in substance use.

ACADEMICS

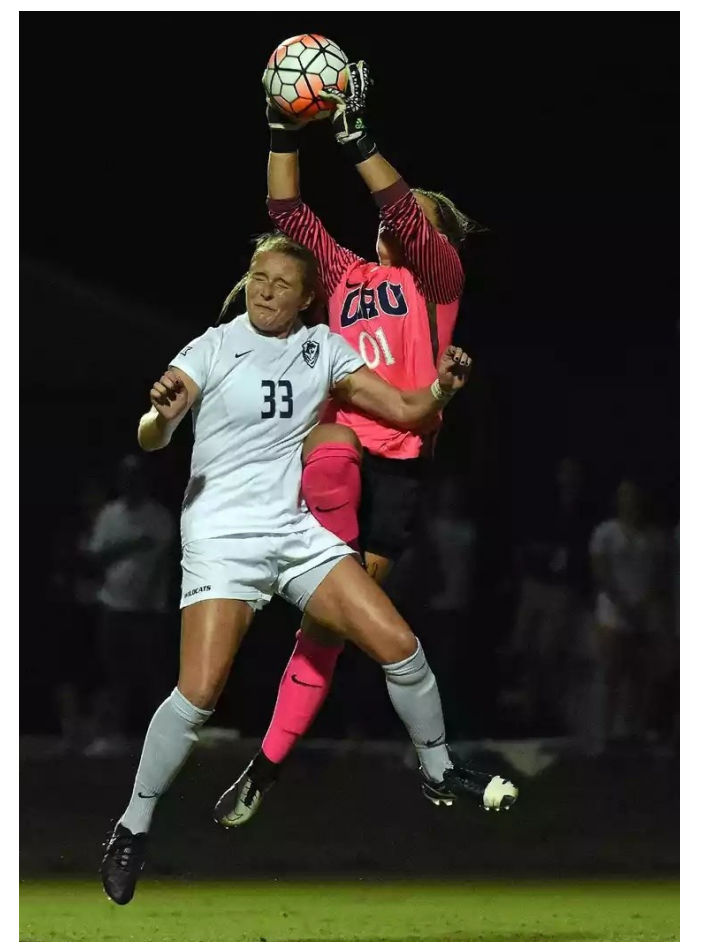


A <1% increase in GPA and a -0.06 in Standard Deviation.

Conclusions

The results conclude that the integration of social practices into collegiate athletics may benefit athletic programs and lead to even greater decreases in mental health related struggles, substance use, and improvement in overall GPA range.

While the study is limited by its small sample size, by the factor of maturation over time, and additional factors that were not taken into consideration, it appears that team building and peer mentorship strengthen the individual college athlete both mentally and academically.



This may better enhance the well-being of the individual athlete and program as a whole.



Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the athletes and coaching staff at Oral Roberts University.



Reference

Moore, M. A. (2016). Taking a timeout to ensure well-being: social work involvement in college sports. *National Association of Social Workers*, Volume 61(3), 267-269.

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