

A Study on Mental Health Risks and Safety Management Strategies in Campus Sports Activities

Qiang Gu*

School of Physical Education, China University of Mining and Technology, Xuzhou, 221116, China

*Corresponding author: gglq2008@163.com

Abstract: Guided by the educational philosophy of “health first,” campus sports activities have become an increasingly valued platform for promoting students’ all-round development. However, as the intensity and frequency of student participation in sports continue to increase, issues related to mental health have gradually emerged. Psychological risks such as competition anxiety, self-denial, and social difficulties have become critical hidden dangers that affect both the quality of sports activities and students’ personal development. This study focuses on the manifestations and causes of mental health risks among students in campus sports settings. It examines the psychological vulnerabilities exhibited by students of different grade levels during sports participation and proposes safety management strategies centered on a “mental health-oriented” approach. By constructing a psychological support and intervention system, optimizing the design of sports activities, and enhancing teachers’ response capabilities, the study aims to establish a scientific, systematic, and collaborative mechanism for managing psychological risks in campus sports. The ultimate goal is to achieve an educational model that values both personal development and mental well-being.

Keywords: campus sports; mental health risks; sports safety management; psychological intervention; educational strategies

Introduction

With the ongoing implementation of the “Double Reduction” policy and the rollout of the Outline for Building a Leading Sports Nation, campus sports have evolved from focusing solely on physical training to embracing a broader role in holistic education. In this transition, students have become increasingly exposed to psychological pressures, social burdens, and identity dilemmas during sports activities. As a result, mental health risks are emerging as a key component of campus sports safety management. Based on a review of existing literature and grounded in the practical context of physical education in primary and secondary schools, this study systematically analyzes the types and triggers of psychological health risks encountered by students in sports activities. Drawing on theories from educational psychology and sports management, it proposes feasible and forward-looking safety management strategies. The research not only addresses an urgent practical concern but also contributes to enriching the educational value of school sports and advancing the modernization of educational governance.

1. Current Mental Health Risks in Campus Sports Activities

1.1 Emergence of Mental Health Issues in the Development of Campus Sports

Driven by the Healthy China 2030 strategy and the Ministry of Education’s Guidelines on Strengthening and Improving School Physical Education in the New Era, the organizational framework for campus sports activities has become increasingly robust, and students’ enthusiasm for participating in physical exercise has significantly improved. However, with the growing intensity and competitiveness of participation, students are experiencing greater psychological pressure, making mental health issues an emerging and critical risk point in the safety management of campus sports.

Traditionally, school sports safety has focused primarily on physical injury prevention and facility security, often marginalizing the mental health dimension. In current practice, several prominent problems have emerged: first, physical education goals are often oriented toward athletic performance and skill acquisition, neglecting students’ individual differences and psychological tolerance; second, there is a lack of systematic psychological support mechanisms in sports activity organization, resulting

in student anxiety, withdrawal, or rejection when facing failure, evaluation, or group interaction; third, the educational assessment system's emphasis on athletic performance may trigger excessive competition and psychological stress, increasing the likelihood of mental imbalance ^[1].

Therefore, the intersection of campus sports and mental health risks urgently requires systematic identification and scientific intervention. Promoting psychological safety management has become a critical pillar in advancing high-quality school sports in the new era.

1.2 Typical Manifestations of Students' Psychological Issues During Sports Participation

In the practice of campus sports activities, students' mental health problems manifest in diverse and context-dependent ways, primarily reflected in the following areas.

First, competition anxiety is widespread. Some students experience pronounced anxiety when facing class-level, school-level, or even city-level competitions due to fear of failure or perceived inadequacy. This anxiety may manifest as muscle tension, stiff movements, and distracted attention, thereby affecting both athletic performance and emotional stability.

Second, self-denial and avoidance behaviors are frequently observed. Students who consistently perform poorly in physical education or lack athletic talent often exhibit avoidance of participation, passive engagement, and reluctance to face challenges. Some may even experience feelings of shame and social withdrawal, further weakening their sense of self-efficacy and willingness to participate.

Third, psychological conflicts arising from group interaction pressure must not be overlooked. In team-based activities, some students may develop internalized stress due to role assignments, mistakes, or team evaluations, leading to feelings of isolation, negative attribution, and interpersonal sensitivity, all of which affect their sense of belonging and psychological adjustment.

These typical behaviors not only reflect the psychological challenges students face during sports participation but also impose higher demands on teachers' pedagogical approaches, evaluation systems, and school management.

1.3 Analysis of Psychological Vulnerabilities Among Students at Different Educational Stages

Students at different age stages exhibit distinct patterns of cognitive development, social experience, and psychological adjustment abilities. Consequently, their psychological vulnerabilities during sports participation also vary. Research shows that psychological risks are distributed in a stage-specific manner.

In the upper elementary grades, students are in the early stages of self-awareness development. They tend to be highly sensitive to winning or losing and heavily reliant on peer evaluation. A single failure may trigger self-doubt and emotional instability.

In junior high school, students enter early adolescence, during which physical changes often conflict with self-perception, leading to body image anxiety. In sports activities, physical performance disparities are often magnified, causing some physically weaker students to develop feelings of inadequacy. This can manifest in behaviors such as social withdrawal and declining classroom engagement.

In high school, the pressures of academic advancement and intensified competition significantly increase psychological burdens. As athletic performance becomes tied to comprehensive quality assessments, students may exhibit signs of overcommitment and emotional strain in an effort to gain a competitive edge. Meanwhile, academic demands reduce available time for physical activity, creating a vicious cycle between insufficient exercise and emotional dysregulation, thereby negatively impacting overall mental health ^[2].

Therefore, developing a stage-specific and tiered model of psychological safety intervention is a pressing task in the current management of mental health in campus sports.

2. Types of Mental Health Risks and Their Triggering Scenarios

2.1 Competitive Pressure and Self-Efficacy Frustration

Under the ongoing reform of campus physical education curricula and the integration of sports and education, sports competitions have not only been assigned the educational function of promoting students' holistic development but have also gradually become an important dimension for assessing

students' comprehensive qualities. However, excessive emphasis on competitive results and external evaluations tends to impose heavy psychological pressure on students during sports activities. In particular, some schools, in pursuit of competition outcomes, highly professionalize physical education classes or extracurricular training, neglecting students' individual psychological tolerance and developmental stage differences.

When students perform poorly in highly competitive environments, they are prone to experience self-denial. Research shows that junior high and high school students are highly sensitive to external evaluation; losing competitions or failing to meet expected results is often perceived by students as a direct reflection of personal inadequacy, leading to declines in self-efficacy and reduced achievement motivation. This psychological imbalance not only affects students' sustained engagement in sports but may also transfer to academic confidence and life attitudes, creating broader negative psychological effects.

Moreover, excessive attention to sports achievements from some teachers and parents, combined with reward- and punishment-oriented evaluation mechanisms, further intensifies students' psychological burdens. Some students who fail to meet standards face criticism or neglect, which can easily trap them in a negative cycle of "failure-shame-withdrawal." Therefore, it is necessary to scientifically regulate competitive pressure in campus sports, build supportive environments, emphasize "process-oriented growth" and respect for "individual differences," thereby creating a sports atmosphere that balances psychological safety and physical health.

2.2 Identity Anxiety and Marginalization in Group Interaction

Sports activities inherently possess high levels of sociality and interaction, offering unique advantages in promoting students' social adaptation and enhancing collective honor. However, imbalances in group dynamics can become important triggers of psychological conflicts among students. Especially in poorly organized or lacking humanistic care sports environments, group identity disorders and marginalization experiences frequently occur, representing potential sources of mental health risks.

Common phenomena in physical education classes include some students repeatedly being "left out" during group selection, or occurrences of "strong-weak opposition" or "lack of inclusiveness" in team activities, all of which may cause certain students to feel a lack of belonging within the group. This identity crisis is particularly severe among students with weaker interpersonal communication skills, introverted personalities, or prior negative evaluations. Students who experience long-term group identity loss often display self-denial, social anxiety, resistance to sports activities, and may even develop tendencies toward social isolation and depression ^[3].

The role of physical education teachers in guiding group dynamics during activities is also crucial. When teachers tend to favor high-achieving students or neglect and fail to motivate marginalized students, they may inadvertently reinforce hierarchical divisions within the student group, intensifying psychological pressure on marginalized students. Therefore, strengthening professional training for physical education teachers in student psychological identification and interpersonal structure guidance is urgently needed to transform sports classes into genuinely inclusive and cooperative educational spaces.

2.3 Physical Fitness Differences Triggering Body Image Anxiety

Body image is an extremely sensitive and critical component in the self-cognition development of primary and secondary school students. With the onset of physiological changes during puberty, students increasingly focus on their body appearance, athletic ability, and others' evaluations. Sports activities, especially those involving public testing, competition, or display, easily make physical fitness differences "visible" and amplify their evaluative effects in peer interactions, thus inducing students' anxiety about their body image.

Specifically, students who exhibit "non-mainstream characteristics" in indicators such as weight, height, speed, and agility often lack confidence and are reluctant to participate in group sports activities, sometimes showing clear avoidance behaviors. Research indicates that physically weaker students often experience shame when participating in activities like running or jumping, fearing embarrassment or ridicule. Such long-term negative experiences not only undermine students' physical self-esteem but also hinder the formation of healthy and positive body identity.

More complexly, modern societal aesthetic culture and the infiltration of social media further intensify students' concerns about body image. Some students treat sports activities as an extension of

“body management” or “appearance evaluation,” creating an anxiety chain linking appearance, athletic ability, and social identity.

Schools should focus on guiding students to correctly understand bodily diversity and developmental stage characteristics in physical education design, establish a non-discriminatory and positively reinforcing sports culture, and reduce the psychological burden caused by physical fitness differences. Simultaneously, the evaluation system should de-emphasize “standardized physical fitness” as a sole criterion and shift toward a more inclusive and developmental comprehensive assessment mechanism, fundamentally alleviating students’ body image anxiety and fostering a positive sports self-identity ^[4].

3. Strategies for Constructing Psychologically Healthy-Oriented Sports Safety Management

3.1 Establishing a Sports Mental Health Intervention Support System

The intervention system for sports mental health should feature multi-level and multi-dimensional characteristics. It must rely on the school's hardware and technical facilities while fully utilizing existing social resources and mental health education capabilities. The goal of building this system is not only to identify problems but also to provide long-term intervention mechanisms, ensuring that every student obtains emotional security and psychological support during sports activities.

During the screening phase, schools should regularly conduct mental health assessments for all students, especially under high-pressure sports environments such as before and after important competitions. Schools can use self-developed questionnaires or introduce professional mental health evaluation tools to periodically monitor emotional fluctuations, assess anxiety and depression levels, and promptly identify and address potential issues. Based on assessment results, schools can create personalized sports mental health profiles for students and implement individualized management for high-risk students accordingly.

Intervention efforts should cover psychological counseling, behavioral therapy, emotional regulation, and other aspects. In particular, emotional changes during long-term sports participation easily affect students’ engagement, causing burnout and reduced self-efficacy. Therefore, schools should consider psychological counseling courses and emotional management training to improve students’ psychological self-regulation abilities in sports. Additionally, cooperation with social psychology experts and psychological research institutions can be pursued to introduce more advanced counseling methods and enhance overall intervention quality ^[5].

Long-term tracking and follow-up are also essential components of this system. For students who initially show problems, schools must ensure continuous monitoring and intervention, establishing a sustainable mental health intervention mechanism. Through a data feedback system, teachers and counselors can monitor students’ psychological changes in real time and adjust intervention strategies promptly, ensuring students’ mental health remains under control.

3.2 Promoting Differentiated and Non-Competitive Sports Activity Models

Promoting differentiated and non-competitive sports activity models requires clarifying that the goal of sports activities is to comprehensively improve students’ physical and mental health, rather than merely pursuing competitive results. For students in different physical and psychological conditions, differentiated sports activities can effectively reduce psychological pressure caused by competitive failure, helping students improve both physical fitness and psychological resilience in a relaxed and enjoyable environment.

Differentiation in sports activities primarily reflects the diversification of activity forms. Traditional competitive sports mainly focus on physical skills training, while differentiated models provide varied options based on students’ physical conditions, sports interests, and psychological tolerance, such as team cooperation sports, recreational sports, relaxation exercises (e.g., yoga, Pilates), and mind-body coordination exercises (e.g., dance, Tai Chi). This model can stimulate students’ autonomous choice, reduce dependence on results, and enhance their sense of participation and fulfillment.

Moreover, non-competitive sports activities can effectively reduce psychological burdens by removing pressure related to rankings and competition. For students experiencing high competitive stress, activities without competition formats can help them rediscover the joy of exercise instead of anxiety over winning or losing. For example, organizing “no-score” sports days or health exercise weeks that

emphasize collective cooperation and self-transcendence rather than individual results and victories [6].

To further enhance psychological safety, schools can establish a “sports achievement reward system” that shifts away from the traditional “winner-takes-all” evaluation model by adopting reward mechanisms such as “participation rewards” and “progress rewards,” encouraging students’ psychological growth and physical improvement throughout participation. This approach guides students away from adversarial sports competition and back toward the intrinsic pleasure of exercise and overall physical and mental health.

3.3 Strengthening Physical Education Teachers’ Psychological Identification and Coping Abilities

Physical education teachers play a vital role in campus sports activities; they are not only instructors of sports skills but also observers and mediators of students’ mental health conditions. Strengthening teachers’ abilities to identify and respond to psychological issues can effectively prevent and reduce mental health problems caused by sports activities, and help students adjust their mindset and boost their confidence through appropriate intervention and guidance.

Schools can regularly organize specialized training sessions for physical education teachers on mental health topics such as identifying sports anxiety, emotional management techniques, and psychological adjustment and intervention. Improving teachers’ professional competencies enables them not only to teach basic sports skills but also to sensitively detect students’ psychological changes in class and take timely psychological intervention measures. For example, teachers should observe students’ nonverbal behaviors such as posture, facial expressions, and emotional fluctuations, especially for students showing excessive tension or anxiety. For these students, teachers can use informal conversations to understand their real thoughts and help them release emotional stress.

In addition to routine training, schools can establish psychological communication platforms among teachers, such as regular teacher workshops to share real cases of mental health issues and discuss effective coping strategies. For more complex or sudden student mental health problems, schools should encourage physical education teachers to build close cooperative relationships with school counseling centers, forming a two-way linkage between teaching and psychological support.

In practice, teachers should flexibly adjust teaching strategies according to students’ psychological characteristics. For students prone to anxiety, teachers can reduce tension by implementing relaxation exercises and adjusting classroom atmosphere; for students lacking confidence, teachers can use positive reinforcement and set small goals to help them build self-confidence and experience personal growth through sports activities.

Through these methods, physical education teachers can not only improve students’ physical fitness but also help maintain good mental health, preventing negative emotions and psychological risks arising from sports participation.

Conclusion

Campus sports activities carry not only the task of physical development but also serve as a comprehensive platform for cultivating students’ psychological qualities, social adaptability, and other multidimensional abilities. This paper focuses on the mental health risks associated with sports participation and systematically reviews typical types and high-frequency triggering scenarios, clearly identifying the common psychological hazards and their mechanisms in campus sports. Based on this, the paper proposes three safety management strategies: first, to establish a campus sports mental health intervention support system that strengthens the integration of psychological professional resources; second, to restructure the organization logic of sports activities by promoting differentiated and non-competitive participation models; third, to enhance physical education teachers’ abilities in psychological identification and coping, thereby fostering a deep integration of sports teaching and psychological education.

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