Estimating the prevalence and incidence of suspected concussions among Colby College football and rugby players

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Abstract

The estimated annual incidence of sport-related concussions in the United States is 1.6-3.8 million. Sports are second only to car accidents as the leading cause of head injuries. The actual incidence and prevalence of concussions in youth sports is poorly defined. This study aimed to determine the incidence of concussion related symptoms (i.e. suspected concussions) experienced by football and rugby players at a small liberal arts college over the course of the fall sports season. An anonymous survey was administered to 91% (n = 64) of current football players and 96% (n=46) of current rugby players. Thirty-nine percent (n = 40) of athletes surveyed experienced a suspected concussion during the fall 2012 season. Seventy percent (n=28) of athletes who experienced head injury symptoms did not report them to either coaches or health professionals. No significant relationship was found between gender and concussion incidence, sport and concussion incidence, or gender and reporting rates. These data suggest that the actual concussion incidence at small colleges may be grossly under-reported. This has significant public health implications for the safety of young athletes involved in contact sports. Parents, coaches, trainers, and medical staff should be trained in the signs and symptoms of concussion and encourage all athletes who experience symptoms or head trauma to be evaluated for concussion.