

Abstract

Cheerleading is a sport that has gained popularity throughout young children and college aged students. As popularity increased, complexity increased and began to include things such as tumbling and stunts which require high levels of athleticism. The current problem within cheer is that there are not accurate numbers of participants which can lead to inaccurate injury rates for cheerleading. Although cheerleading requires high levels of athleticism it is not a sponsored sport. Since cheerleading is not a sponsored sport it lacks many resources some of which include certified athletic trainers and coaches. This also means that injuries and participation counts are not always documented and reported. If an individual is injured while participating in the sport and the number of participants documented is less than the actual number of participants it may result in a greater rate of injury suggesting that cheer is more dangerous than it really is. Therefore, accurate numbers are necessary for accurate information and statistics about the injury rates. I have two research questions. The first one is what are the data sources available for high school aged cheer participation. The second one is what are the impacts of different participation estimates on catastrophic sport injury rates in cheer.

For this research, I used two different data sources, those being National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) and Sports Business Research Network (SBRNET). The results showed that participation numbers varied between the two data sources. High school state associations only collect participation from sports they sponsor and many states do not sponsor cheer. SBRNet participation numbers produced lower injury rates compared to injury rates with NFHS participation numbers. In the year of 2020, participation numbers declined most likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. One limitation to this study was NFHS participation numbers are acquired through surveys hence if every high school does not fill out the survey, the numbers are

underestimated. NCCSIR has historically relied on NFHS survey data to determine the number of participants in cheer. If the participation numbers are inaccurate, the injury rates are also inaccurate. In order to make this data accurate, cheer participation surveys should be required to be completed before participating in any events whether it is sideline spirit, halftime and pregame entertainment, or all-star cheer. This information is relevant to clinicians because accurate data of participants and injuries will provide a better understanding of what the rate of injury in cheerleading actually is.