

How ice hockey culture affects concussions

Objective: To explore if and how the prevalence of concussions and their subsequent assessment and management is affected by the culture surrounding ice hockey.

Method: Literature review

Results: There is a culture of risk in ice hockey, where pain and injury are seen as normal part of an athlete's life, and athletic performance is valued over the health and safety of the athlete. Masculinity and aggressive play are appreciated and embraced in ice hockey. If a player doesn't play due to injury, their masculinity and athleticism may be questioned. The culture in ice hockey can exacerbate the concussion issue by two different mechanisms. The culture can contribute to off-ice attitudes which complicate concussion assessment and management, and aggressive on-ice behaviour which can lead to concussions. Players fail to report concussion symptoms for fear of not being allowed to play. The ideals of a tough, masculine athlete are so strong that they can prevent concussed athletes to come forward about the emotional and psychosocial symptoms of concussion.

Conclusion: The masculine, aggressive, culture of risk in ice hockey affects both the prevalence of concussions and the assessment and management of concussions. Violent on-ice behaviour leads to more concussions and the downplaying of symptoms compromises concussion management. In order to combat the concussion problem in ice hockey, these cultural factors need to be acknowledged.

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