INTRODUCTION

- Mental health is a global issue, with one in four people affected by a mental health disorder in their lifetime.1
- College students are particularly vulnerable to mental health problems and have a challenging time finding coping strategies.
- Previous literature shows that exercise may provide a way to effectively reduce mental health issues.2,3
- It was hypothesized that participation in team sports would significantly lower levels of depression, anxiety, perceived stress, and poor sleep quality in contrast with the comparison group.

METHODS

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS AND SETTING

- 291 college students (71 M, 220 F) from one large public university in China
- 138 participants in experimental team sports group (71 M, 67 F)
  - Mean age of 18.94 years (SD = 1.283)
  - 153 participants in the comparison group (all F)
  - Mean age of 18.34 years (SD = 1.202)

RESEARCH DESIGN

- Quasi-experimental study
- Experimental group: team sports (volleyball or soccer)
- Comparison group: aerobic dance
- Both groups participated in one 90-minute physical education lesson each week over 12 weeks. Students were also instructed to self-run 68 kilometers.
- Four different questionnaires completed via online social media apps at pre-test and post-test

OUTCOME MEASURES

- Anxiety (GAD-7)4
- Depression (CES-D)5
- Perceived Stress (PSS)6
- Sleep Quality (PSQI)7

RESULTS

- There was significant improvement in both depression levels and quality of sleep over time.
- Team sports and aerobic dance both did not lessen the amount of anxiety or perceived stress.
- Depression decreased significantly more in the team sports group compared to the aerobic dance group.

CONCLUSIONS

- On average, both groups had total scores that indicated minimal anxiety at pre-test and post-test.
- Both groups had pre-existing moderate stress and stayed within this range over time.
- Academic pressure is a likely explanation for the slight increase in both stress and anxiety throughout the semester.8,9
- Mild to moderate amounts of stress and anxiety can help elevate academic performance, but too much is harmful to our mental health.10,11
- Both groups had a total score indicating depression at pre-test.8 At post-test, the team sports group score did not indicate depression, while the aerobic dance score did.
- Team sports offer heightened emphasis on group goals and a sense of connection, providing an overall improved mood and encouraging strategies for managing long-term mental health.
- Both groups went from a score of poor sleep quality at pre-test to a score of good sleep quality at post-test.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Assess if abnormally high levels of stress and anxiety levels in college students can be improved by team sports participation.
- Evaluate if moderate levels of stress and anxiety in college students can be improved by eliminating the factor of academic pressure.

REFERENCES