

The menstrual cycle and football: The experiences of female African football players

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ABSTRACT

The menstrual cycle is a normal biological process in females. However, it is often the reason why females tend to be excluded from football medicine research.

Consequently, our understanding of the menstrual cycle and football performance is still limited, especially in female African football players. The study aimed to explore female African football players' current and historical menstrual cycle status, menstrual symptoms, lived experiences, and perceptions of the menstrual cycle.

Participants completed demographic questionnaires and the Moos Menstrual Distress Questionnaire. The main findings were that 90% of the players did not use contraceptives, likely due to socio-cultural factors at community level. Most of the players had access to their preferred choice of sanitary product; however, 36% used alternatives such as old rags during their periods, likely because they could not always afford their preferred choice. The most commonly reported symptoms during menses were abdominal cramps (53%), headache (41%), mood swings (41%) and irritability (47%). Further, players reported irritability (48%), mood swings (52%), and breast tenderness (48%) in the week before their period. These symptoms can affect training and competition; therefore, team support personnel should be aware of the menstrual cycle's implications for female African football players and their effect on athletic performance and well-being. Additionally, team support personnel ought to be mindful of female African football players' socio-economic and religio-cultural contexts and their interaction with biological processes such as the menstrual cycle and contraceptive use.