**Article #5 Review**

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**Research Investigation**

 The goal of this article was to ascertain the experiences of Muslim student athletes who participate in the fast of Ramadan. Ramadan is considered a “holy month” for the Islamic community where individuals refrain from eating and drinking from dawn until sunset with the goal of bringing them closer to God. The only exceptions from Ramadan are for those prevented by illness, old age, pregnancy, and women during their monthly cycle. Though there are many studies which have focused on the physical effects of Ramadan on the body, few have looked into the effects that the fast has on college athletes or whether or not they are supported by their institutions as they observe this religious event (Amjad et. al, 2024).

The authors of the article stress that awareness of student athlete experiences with Ramadan is of utmost importance as 25% of the worlds’ population are Muslim and it is considered one of the fastest growing religions in the world. Based off of the American national average one could assume that around 5,700 Muslim student athletes compete in NCAA sports (Amjad et. al, 2024). In parts of the world where Islam is dominant, much of the communities daily schedule is oriented around Ramadan. However, in the United States, where Christianity is the dominant religion, there is little done to accommodate the change in student athletes’ schedules. For example, those fasting will often wake up earlier to eat a large meal before sunrise (suhoor) and stay awake much later in order to eat after sunset (iftar). In other parts of the world, critical tasks would take place near meals and reprieve would be provided to take into account the fast of Ramadan (Amjad et. al, 2024).

**Theory & Research Methods**

**Qualitative Research Study**

The studies design was a qualitative research study whereby 12 Muslim college athletes were interviewed and videoed. Participants were made up of 8 men and 4 women around the age of 19 years old. Participants came from seven different universities in seven different states. Study participants were obtained through 1) a convenience sample, which was obtained by e-mailing athletic trainers who worked with Muslim college athletes, and 2) social media “recruiting” posts marketed to athletic trainers who worked with Muslim college athletes.

**Data Collected and Analyzation Strategy**

 The interview was “semi-structured” and included questions which would allow the researchers to have insight into participants feelings, experiences, or obstacles during their participation of Ramadan while being involved in college sports. A multi-analytic research team then coded responses into “common themes and categories” (Amjad et. al, 2024). Before executing the research study, the interview questionnaire was reviewed for both “face and content validity” and then a pilot test of the questionnaire was provided with two former Muslim athletes (Amjad et. al, 2024). Eight questions were chosen with some additional follow up questions (if needed for more details). According to the article, “Data analysis consisted of 4 progressive phases, 1) establishing initial code domains, 2) extracting core ideas, 3) cross-analyzing multiple participant interviews via themes and categories, and 4) identifying the frequency of participant cases per category (Amjad et. al, 2024). The main themes identified included both intrinsic and extrinsic challenges, support received while participating in Ramdan, and the significance of participating in the fast of Ramadan. If an idea related to all but one participant it was considered “general”, if it related to greater than half of all participants it was considered “typical”, less than half “variant”, and if less than 2 participants related to an idea it was considered “rare” (Amjad et. al, 2024).

**Conclusions of the Article**

Intrinsic challenges included physical, mental, and emotional challenges. Some of the physical struggles included difficulty getting enough protein and calories needed to sustain their bodies while competing at the collegiate level. Often times, Muslim athletes reported losing sleep as they had to get up early and stay up late in order to properly follow Ramadan and get enough food to maintain their lifestyle. Time constraint was also a huge obstacle for these students.

 Student athletes also felt that their athletic trainers lacked the adequate knowledge of Ramdan that is needed to support them properly. For example, if athletic trainers had more knowledge of Ramadan, they could accommodate their athletes with training schedules that take into account 1) training load during fasting time, 2) temperature and environmental factors, 3) nutritional or weight requirements, 3) fasting requirements, 4) medical situations, and other factors to name a few. They could also arrange training sessions after the athletes’ largest meal and provide supplement recommendations that would assist them while they are in this time period of a restricted diet.

Extrinsic challenges included resources, knowledge, and curiosity of others. Lack of resources included anything from access to prayer services, lack of college transportation, and lack of campus assistance. Lack of knowledge and curiosity of others was consistent as athletes had to juggle not only the difficulties of adhering to Ramdan guidelines, but also answering a myriad of questions from others and often disrespectful comments.

 Support was examined through sport specific support, community support, and the support that Muslim college athletes wish they received. The majority of participants expressed a desire for flexible course schedules in order to help them maintain their requirements with athletics and Ramadan prayer schedules in addition to a nutrition program which would help them adhere to Ramdan regulations.

The ”significance” for participating in Ramadan varied from the influence of participants family, the benefits to their relationship with God and their faith, and how it helped to provide a sense of discipline. The majority of participants all agreed that the significance of Ramdan far surpassed any of the challenges that they faced.

The consensus after obtaining the data was that those involved in athletics should do a better job of supporting their Muslim athletes while they are participating in the fast of Ramadan. In order to do this, those involved should have a greater knowledge of Ramadan in order to best support their athletes and to strategize ways that they can accommodate schedules (as mentioned previously in relation to timing physical activity/practice etc) and give nutritional guidance during this lengthy period of fasting. Other forms of support that athletic trainers could provide include advocating for their students with universities. For example, requesting that exams be administered after the allowed meals. Universities and faculty have a very minimal understanding of the effects that Ramadan has on their student athletes including dehydration, fatigue, hypoglycemia, and a lack of mental presence. Athletic trainers can also point their athletes in the direction of community support groups.

**Final Summary & How I Plan to Handle Religion & Sports**

The article exposed a critically important deficit in American Sports. The United States is very diverse and with diversity comes the burden of understanding culture. Ramadan is just one of many cultural practices that can affect collegiate athletes and it is important to be well versed in 1) the requirements of the religious ordinance, 2) the effects on the athlete and 3) ways to better assist them during religious practice. I am not sure if a course exists for athletic trainers and coaches on world religions and the impact that the practices have on athletes, but this is definitely something that is needed in a country as diverse as the United States.

My plan moving forward with my own high school track athletes and potentially future college athletes, is to get to know each team members’ religious background and do my own research from there. If the majority of students are Christian, but a small few happen to be Muslim and/or Mormon, it is important for me to delve into my own research on their religions, religious holidays and practices, to ensure that I can best support them. Again, I would like to see more literature and courses provided to coaches and administrative staff that organizes this information (including the current research on struggles and support) so that there is less leg work to be done and coaches can be more efficiently prepared.

**References**

Amjad, M., Cavallario, J. M., Harris, N. A., & Welch Bacon, C. E. (2024). Muslim Collegiate Student-Athletes’ Experience With Fasting During Ramadan While Participating in Sport. *Journal of Athletic Training*, *59*(5), 474–486.