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INTRODUCTION

Research has shown that student athletes tend to drink alcohol more often, drink larger amounts, and experience higher levels of intoxication when compared to their non-athlete peers (Zhou & Heim, 2014). Athletes reported that they use alcohol as a way to cope, and many tend to experience negative results from drinking (Yusko et al., 2008). Due to this, athletes have a paradoxical relationship with alcohol since playing sports provides health benefits while unhealthy drinking habits do the opposite. The purpose of the study was to examine the impact of athletic status on drinking behaviors related to COVID-19 stress.

METHOD

Participants

- $N = 517$; Mean age = 24.17, $SD = 7.77$; 77.6% cisgender women
- Eligibility: Be 18+ years old, consumed 1+ drinks in the previous month, current student at the host institution
- 95.36% non-athlete, 4.64% athlete
- 60.4% White, 33.7% African-American/Black, 7.7% Asian, 1.3% Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander, 1.9% Native American, 2.7% Other, 7.7% multiracial (participants could choose more than one option)

Materials

Drinking Behaviors (created by the researchers)

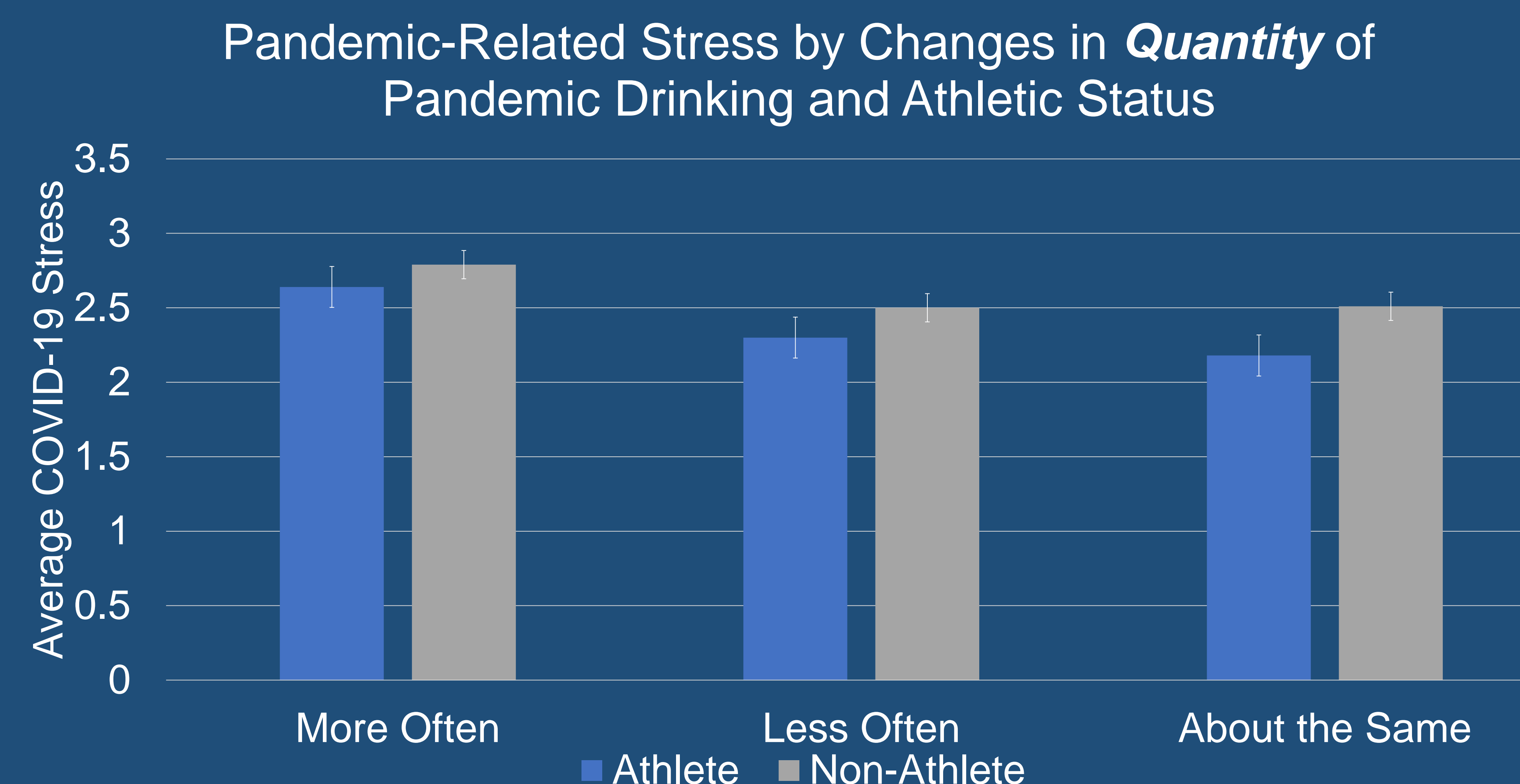
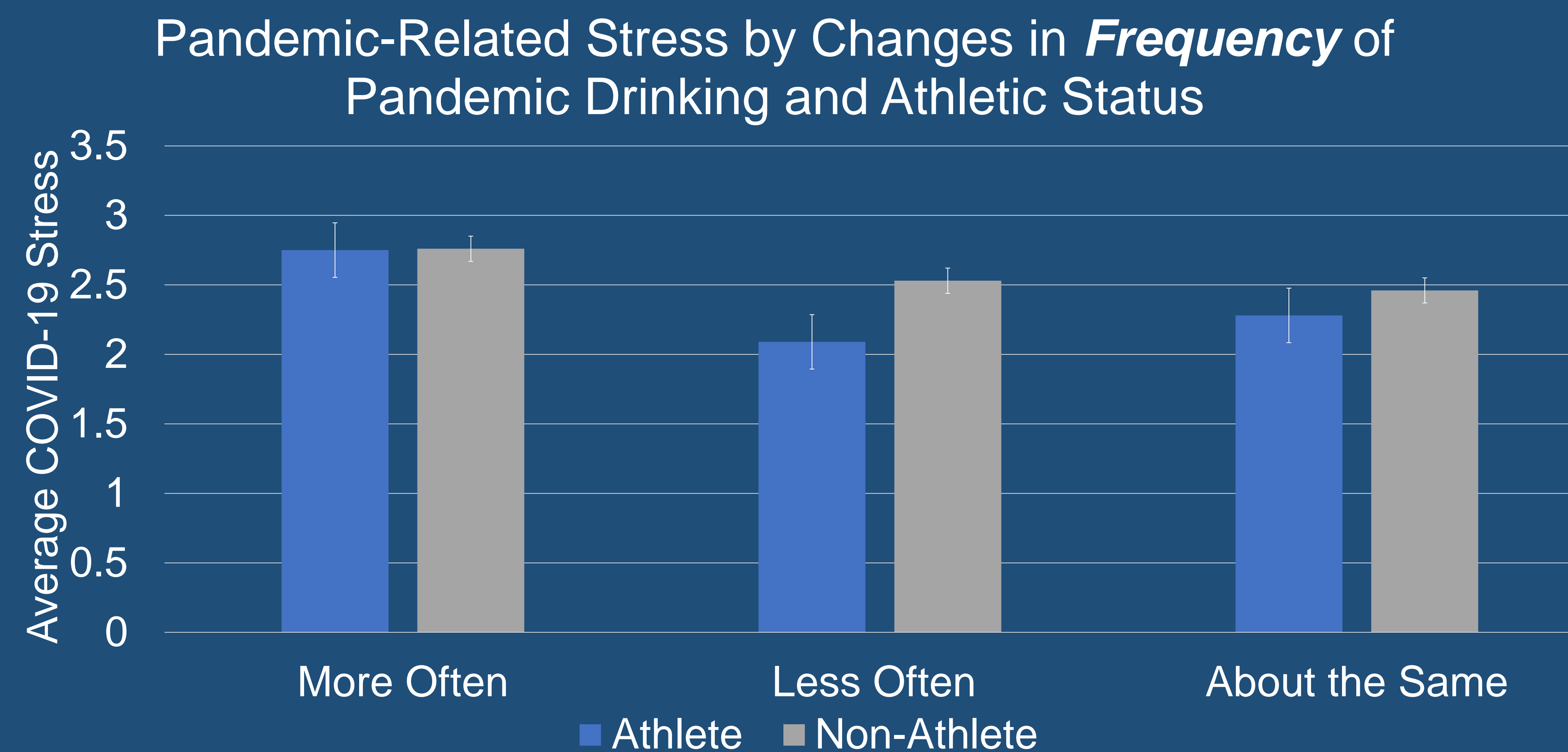
- 2 items measuring drinking quantity and frequency changes during the COVID-19 pandemic
 - E.g., “Compared to before the pandemic, would you say you are drinking (1) *more often*, (2) *about the same*, (3) *less often*?”

COVID-19 Stress Measure (Ellis et al., 2020)

- 8 items measuring COVID-19 Stress
 - E.g., “To what extent are you worried about the COVID-19 crisis?”
 - 4-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*very much*)

Procedure

- Participants were recruited via student announcements and the Psychology research pool
- Data were collected via online survey October through December December 2020.
- Two-way (2x3) ANOVA statistical analyses were run to analyze data in SPSS v. 27
 - Outcome = COVID-19 stress
 - Predictors = athletic status, change in drinking, interaction between the two



RESULTS

Findings indicate that there was no significant interaction between the drinking behaviors of athletes and non-athletes during the COVID-19 pandemic. The relationship between changes in drinking frequency during the pandemic and pandemic stress did not vary across athletic status, $F(2, 511) = 0.44, p = .644$. The relationship between changes in quantity of drinking during the pandemic and pandemic stress did not vary across athletic status $F(2, 511) = 0.22, p = .802$. In addition, none of the main effects were significant.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	η^2
Athletic Status	0.795	1	0.795	1.986	.159	.004
Change in Drinking Quantity	2.319	2	1.160	2.897	.056	.011
Athletic Status x Change in Quantity	0.353	2	0.176	0.440	.644	.002
Error	204.554	511	0.400			

DISCUSSION

The findings show that the relationship between changes in drinking behaviors during the pandemic and COVID-19 stress did not vary across athletic status (i.e., the interaction between the variables was nonsignificant). Similarly, when examining whether stress as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with changes in frequency of drinking amongst students regardless of athletic status, no relationship was found. So, both athletes and nonathletes did not exhibit a change in drinking behaviors due to COVID-19 induced stress.

Study limitations included an imbalance in the number of participants for each athletic status group. Data were collected on athletes, but results may vary depending on athlete types (e.g., Division I versus intramural athlete). In the future, researchers should recruit across multiple institutions to generate a larger sample of athletes, both to increase the power of the original examination, and to have sufficient data to drill down into athlete type (e.g., Division 1 versus intramural, team sport versus individual, etc.).

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