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Study: 80% of college athletes victims of hazing

Initiations included kidnappings, beatings, alcohol abuse

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[ALFRED, New York](#) (CNN) -- Eighty percent of college athletes have been victims of hazing -- making the behavior as common in the National Collegiate Athletic Association as it is in fraternities and sororities, according to a new study.

"Students reported to us they had been kidnapped, beaten or tied up and abandoned," said Edward G. Coll Jr., president of Alfred College, which carried out the survey, with cooperation from the NCAA, early this year.

Some 2,027 student athletes were surveyed at 224 NCAA schools. The worst hazing was found on football teams, but swimming, diving and lacrosse all ranked high.

"Two-thirds of the students were forced to do humiliating or degrading things to join teams. It ranges from wearing silly clothes to being yelled, cursed or sworn at, to being branded, tattooed or forced to shave their heads," said Coll.

Only 12 percent of students reported they themselves had been hazed. "Yet, when we looked at behaviors themselves, our researchers found a far different story," said Coll.

The survey defined hazing as "any activity expected of someone joining a group

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that humiliates, degrades, abuses or endangers, regardless of the person's willingness to participate.

"This does not include activities such as rookies carrying the balls, team parties with community games, or going out with your teammates, unless an atmosphere of humiliation, degradation, abuse or danger arises."

Other study findings:

- When projected to the national population, more than 250,000 college athletes experienced some form of hazing to join a team.
- One in five was subjected to "unacceptable and potentially illegal hazing." Some were kidnapped, beaten or tied up and abandoned. They were also forced to commit crimes -- destroying property, making prank phone calls or harassing others.
- Half were forced to participate in drinking contests or alcohol-related hazing.
- Two in five consumed alcohol on recruitment visits. "For many of our athletes, hazing to join a college team begins while they are still in high school," Coll said.
- Two in three were subjected to humiliating hazing, such as being yelled or sworn at, forced to wear clothing intended to be embarrassing, or were deprived of sleep, food, or hygiene.

Positive alternatives insufficient

Only one in five participated solely in "positive initiations," such as attending a skit night or team roast, doing volunteer community service, taking an oath or signing a contract of standards, or completing a ropes course or team trip.

Concluded Coll: "This finding indicates that the positive activities we provide to our student athletes simply are not challenging enough to meet their needs for initiation rites."

Students either dismissed the hazing or felt they had no choice.

- 60 percent said they would not report hazing
- 48 percent said: "It's not a problem; sometimes accidents happen."
- 26 percent said: "Administration wouldn't handle it right and make it worse."
- 6 percent said they were "not comfortable talking to coach or athletic director, no one else to tell"
- 4 percent said: "Teammates would make my life so miserable, I'd have to leave school."

'We're putting their lives in danger'

Though men reported they were more likely to participate in dangerous behaviors, women also reported they were involved. Their initiation rites tended to involve alcohol, Coll said.

Football players were most at risk for dangerous and potentially illegal hazing.

"We can no longer treat hazing as strictly a fraternity- sorority problem," Coll said. "We must acknowledge that it pervades intercollegiate athletics to an astounding and dangerous degree."

"It's appalling," Ronald Stratton of the NCAA said. "We are asked to be entrusted with their care when they come. We recruit student athletes to our member institutions. And to this degree if we're putting their lives in danger either emotionally or physically, our athletic administrators should take responsibility for that."

Hazing is a crime in 41 states

Coll urged schools to "send a clear anti-hazing message" in educational programs and policies and in their enforcement. He also recommended that schools should "expect responsibility, integrity and civility on the part of athletes, team captains, coaches and administrators."

Finally, he recommended that the school offer "positive team- building initiation rites, overseen by trained coaches or other adults."

Hazing is a crime in 41 states, though many of the states limit their definitions, often excluding humiliation as an element.

Alfred University undertook the study after a hazing incident last year, in which four first-year football players were hospitalized for alcohol poisoning, said Alfred spokesman Mike Hyde.

The team's record last year was 6-5. The private university about 90 miles south of Rochester is best known for its liberal arts and ceramic engineering programs, he said.

The study was funded by Riedman Insurance Co., based in Rochester, New York. The company insures colleges and universities.

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