مجلة دامو لعلوم الرياضة
DAMU JOUNRAL OF SPORT SCIENCE (DJSS)
ISSN-L: 3005-8244, ISSN-P: 3005-8236
DOI Prefix: 10.64002

The Most Common Sports Injuries among Football Players at the University of Telafer: A Statistical Analysis

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Received date:18/07/2026 **Accepted date: 25/08/2026** **Published date: 25/10/2026**

Abstract

Background: Injuries in sports are a major hindrance to sports performance and development, especially in football, considering the high physical demands of the sport, thereby increasing the risk of musculoskeletal injury. Therefore, it is important to understand the injury patterns and factors of sports injuries among university football players to design effective injury prevention strategies. Purpose of the Study: This study aimed to investigate the extent of common sports injuries among soccer players at the University of Telafer, Nineveh Governorate, Iraq, and to investigate the relationship between the occurrence of sports injuries and some variables, such as the players' ages, years of playing experience, and playing positions. Methodology of the Study: A descriptive study design was employed for this study. The study population comprised 135 university football players, while 105 of them were included in the study. Statistical analysis of the data was done using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25.0. A scientific literature review, experts, and injury recording forms were used to design the injury questionnaire. Results: The most common injuries recorded were bruises, muscle strains, ligament sprains, foot fractures, nasal fractures, and shoulder dislocation. The results revealed that there is no significant association between age and years of playing experience in relation to injuries, except in the case of foot fractures. Similarly, there is no significant association between playing position and injuries, but there is a significant association in the case of injuries to the lower extremities in players of offensive positions. The results of this study emphasize that it is important to implement injury prevention strategies in football players of universities to reduce injuries and improve their performance. Conclusions: Based on the results of this study, it is concluded that football players of universities are likely to suffer injuries due to inadequate warm-up exercises, lack of physical fitness.

Keywords:

University Of Telafer, sports injuries, football players, injury prevalence, playing position, injury prevention.

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https://doi.org/10.64002/1rm5tg17

1. Introduction

Sports injuries are commonly defined as physical complaints or musculoskeletal conditions sustained during sports participation that result in pain, reduced performance, medical attention, or time lost from training and competition (Fuller et al., 2006). Sports injuries are all conditions that occur when any part or the whole of the body is subjected to an excessive force, resulting in exceeding the limits of endurance (Erol and Karahan, 2006).

Sports injuries have unique characteristics in each sport. Those involved in contact sports, fast-paced sports, and competitive sports have higher injury rates compared to other branches (Polat et al., 2010). Sports injuries are most common in team sports, with football being the most prevalent (Kalyon, 2000).

As in many other sports, football also carries the risk of injury for players of all age groups, from professional to amateur (Ekstrand et al., 2013).

Football (soccer), in particular, is considered the most popular and physically demanding sport in the world and is characterized by its intricate physical, technical, and tactical requirements that expose players to various types of acute and chronic injuries. According to (Ekstrand et al., 2011), football is associated with one of the highest injury incidence rates among team sports, with 8.1 injuries per 1,000 hours of play in competitive matches. This is because football is characterized by high-speed running, rapid changes of direction, and physical contacts, all of which exert considerable musculoskeletal demands on footballers, especially on the lower extremities such as the ankle, knee, and thigh regions (Hawkins & Fuller, 1999).

It has been reported that performing stretching and flexibility exercises before sports and physical activity, which help to increase the range of motion of the joints and the length of the muscles, and performing stretching and flexibility exercises during the cool-down period after the activities, reduces the likelihood of injury (Salcı et al, 2014).

Football is one of the sports with the highest incidence of sports injuries (Walden et al., 2011). In addition, football is a sport where physical collisions are frequent. The high incidence of physical collisions has made football a field where sports injuries are common (Dick et al., 2007). Therefore, defining sports injuries and identifying the causes of these injuries is very important in preventing sports injuries (Braham et al., 2004).

Injuries in football sports may not only be associated with medical factors but may also have psychological and socioeconomic implications. For example, injured athletes often experience low motivation and fear of injury (Amiri et al., 2025). Which may be attributed to psychological factors and may contribute to low peak performance and delayed return to play (Sheean et al., 2023).From a public health perspective, these injuries result in significant medical costs, prolonged rehabilitation and loss of athletic performance (Turnbull et al., 2024).Consequently, a thorough

At the collegiate level, injury patterns may differ from those of professional football due to differences in training loads, coaching supervision and facilities. Previous studies have pointed out that improper warm-up procedures, bad physical condition and lack of accessibility to physiotherapy are the major causes of injury in student-athletes (Li et al., 2025). Furthermore, academic pressure and limited time for recovery, can exacerbate MFI and stress such as perception of fatigue (MICF).

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It has been shown that injuries negatively affect the performance of footballers and that lower injury rates are associated with success in national and international matches. Therefore, avoiding injuries is extremely important (Arnason et al., 2004; Eirale, 2013;Hägglund et al., 2013).

Both biomechanically and physiologically, football places significant demands for its athletes. Soccer requires a high exposure to intensive activities with ,start and stop action like sprinting, tackling, jumping and rapid changes of direction that can result in both acute and overuse injuries (Aiello et al., 2023). Epidemiological data consistently demonstrate that the large majority (80–90%) of injuries are sustained to the lower extremities because of long distance running, rapid accelerations and decelerations, or during physical contact (Gurau et al., 2023). Factors such as poor neuromuscular control, fatigue, and inadequate warm-up have been found to be significant factors in the development of musculoskeletal injury (Nilstad et al., 2014). Sports injuries may arise from several factors such as lack of warm-up, poor general physical fitness, inappropriate sports equipment and playing surfaces, overtraining, poor nutrition and participating in play while afflicted with injury that leads to an increase in the nature and magnitude of musculoskeletal injury (Micheo, 2019). Additionally, external/ environment factors (e.g., poor field surfaces, incorrect footwear and insufficient recovery time), raise the risk of injury even further (Nwoba, 2017).

Student-athletes typically train with minimal medical supervision or access to strength and conditioning expertise (Mayhew et al., 2024). It is therefore essential to know the epidemiology and mechanisms of football-induced injuries in this population to design effective and context-specific prevention and care programs.

Research on sports injuries among university football players in Iraq remains limited, particularly in northern Iraqi universities such as the University of Telafer.

Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze the most common sports injuries among football players at the University of Telafer, with particular attention to their frequency severity, and correlation with demographic and positional variables. By providing a statistical assessment of injury patterns, this research seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of football- related injuries at the university level and to propose preventive strategies that enhance athlete health and performance.

2. Material & methods

2.1. Study Design

The design of the study was descriptive, based on the cross-sectional survey design, where the survey method was used to establish the extent of the occurrence of sports injuries among university football players.

2.2. Participants

The population of the study comprised football players at the University of Telafer. A total of 135 participants were recruited for the study, out of whom 105 participants completed the survey instrument.

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2.3. Data Collection Instrument

The instrument for the study was a structured questionnaire, which was designed to collect information regarding the nature of the occurrence of sports injuries among football players. Information regarding the occurrence of sports injuries among the participants was collected through the use of the survey instrument, which sought information regarding the occurrence of injuries among the participants. The questionnaire was reviewed by experts in sports sciences to ensure its content validity.

2.4. Procedure

The participants were informed regarding the purpose of the study, which was to collect information regarding the occurrence of injuries among the participants. The participants were assured that the information collected would be for the purpose of research. A total of 66 participants were interviewed, while the remaining participants completed the instrument through Google Forms.

2.5. Data analysis

The data collected from the participants was analyzed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS software version 25.0 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences; SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). Initially, the data was screened for the presence of missing or incorrect information to assess the appropriateness of the data for analysis. Any incorrect information was removed from the analysis. Descriptive analysis was done to establish the rate of injuries among the participants, while the Chi-square test was conducted to establish the association between the occurrence of injuries and the corresponding variables.

3. Results:

Table 1. Frequency of sports injuries among football players.

Injury Type	Frequency	Percentage
Muscle cramps / spasms	81	77.1%
Calf muscle tear	43	41.0%
Knee ligament problems	42	40.0%
Lower joint injuries	40	38.1%
Muscle strain	36	34.3%
Ligament sprain	33	31.4%
Foot injuries	33	31.4%
Hamstring strain	27	25.7%
Shoulder injuries	26	24.8%
Muscle tear	23	21.9%

The results in Table 1 show that muscle injuries were the most common among soccer players at the University of Telafer. Muscle spasms had the highest incidence (77.1%), followed by leg muscle tears (41%) and knee ligament problems (40%). Muscle strain and high physical exertion injuries represent the majority of injuries among university players.

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Table 2. Relationship between player age and injury occurrence.

Age Group	Number of Players	Injury Cases	Percentage
18–20	20	20	19.0%
21–23	52	51	48.6%
24–26	21	21	20.0%
27+	12	12	11.4%

Table 2 shows the distribution of injuries according to age. The age group that had the highest susceptibility to sport injury was the 21-23 age group, which represented 48.6% of the total sample. This is possibly because they are the majority of active players on the university team.

Table 3. Relationship between years of playing and sports injuries.

Years of Playing	N	Mean Number of Injuries	SD
1–5 years	19	5.37	4.03
6–10 years	58	5.86	4.18
11 years and above	28	6.79	3.34
Total	105	5.96	3.93

Table 3 shows the relationship between years of play and sports injuries. The results indicate that players with 6 to 10 years of playing experience had the highest injury rate of 44.8%. This may be due to the increased intensity of training and frequent participation in matches during this stage of their athletic career.

Table 4. Relationship between playing position and sports injuries.

Playing Position	Number of Players	Injury Cases	Percentage
Goalkeeper	12	12	11.4%
Defender	31	30	28.6%
Midfielder	26	26	24.8%
Winger	22	21	20.0%
Forward	14	14	13.3%
Total	105	103	100%

Table 4 shows that defenders and midfielders are prone to a higher rate of injuries compared to players in other positions. This could be due to the increased rate of physical contact and movement associated with playing these positions, which may cause muscle and joint injuries.

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Table 5. Most significant injuries among football players.

Injury Type	Frequency	Percentage
Muscle cramps	81	77.1%
Calf muscle tear	43	41.0%
Knee ligament injury	42	40.0%
Lower joint injuries	40	38.1%
Muscle strain	36	34.3%

Table 5 the most common injuries that occur to soccer players are shown below. Muscle cramps are at the top of the list at 77.1%, followed by leg muscle tears and knee ligament injuries. The results are consistent with previous findings that lower limb muscle/joint injuries are the biggest risk to soccer players.

4.Discussion

The present study aimed to identify the most common sports injuries among football players at the University of Telafer. Moreover, the study explored the relationship between sports injuries and some variables, including age, years of playing, and playing position. The study revealed that the most common sports injuries were muscle injuries. Muscle cramps, muscle strains, and tears in the calf muscles were the most common types of injuries. These findings concur with previous studies that found that muscle injuries represent a significant proportion of sports injuries in football players due to the high level of physicality of the sport. According to Ekstrand et al., muscle injuries are among the most commonly reported injuries in football competitions.

Furthermore, the study discovered that sports injuries in the lower extremities were the most prevailing. Such injuries included the knees, ankles, and feet. These findings agree with the studies conducted by Hawkins and Fuller who found that 80 to 90 percent of sports injuries among football players occur in the lower extremities due to running, sudden changes of direction, and physical contact among players. These findings are also consistent with the results submitted by Gurau et al. (2023), who showed that most football injuries occur in the lower extremities.

The predominance of lower extremity injuries exhibited in this study is expected because of the biomechanical nature of football activities. Football players frequently perform high-intensity actions such as sprinting, sudden deceleration, jumping, tackling, and rapid directional changes. Such activities put excessive stress on the knees, ankles, and thigh areas. According to Gurau et al. (2023), “lower limb injuries account for the majority of football-related musculoskeletal disorders due to repetitive loading and physical contact during play. Therefore, preventive neuromuscular training programs may contribute significantly to reducing injury incidence among university football players.” (p. no 5) The analyses also demonstrate that age was not significantly relevant in most injury cases. This may imply that the occurrence of injuries is more related to training loads, physical conditioning, and the intensity of the action in the match rather than the age of the player. Moreover, the period of playing experience of the player was not significantly relevant in most of the cases, apart from foot fracture injuries. This may be attributed to the fact that

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the longer the playing experience, the more the exposure to mechanical stresses, which may lead to injuries.

With regard to playing positions, the findings of the results show that defenders and midfielders have the highest incidence of injuries. This can be attributed to the fact that these players are always in motion, tackling opponents, and retrieving the ball, which together put a lot of demand on the body. These findings are in line with the etiological analysis of injuries among both professional and amateur football players.In Conclusion the findings of the present study corroborate the notion that football-related injuries are largely related to the physical demands of the game, with particular emphasis on the biomechanical demand on the muscles of the lower extremities. Thus, the implementation of injury prevention programs is essential for the reduction of injuries among football players.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations:

5.1. Conclusion

The objective of the present study was to evaluate the prevalence and distribution of sports-related injuries among football players at the University of Telafer and their relationship with a number of specified injury-related variables. The findings of the study reveal that muscle-related injuries are the most common type of injury among university football players. Muscle cramps, tears of the calf muscle, and muscle strains are the most common muscle-related injuries. These findings highlight the considerable physiological demands placed on football players during football-related activities. These demands are particularly those related to sprinting during football games and training sessions. This study demonstrated that the incidences of injuries in the lower limbs among football players that include the knees, ankles, and feet are much higher than the injury rates in other areas of the body. This comes from the fact that the lower limbs continuously perform the movement tasks, and thus bear highest biomechanical loads.

The analyses also demonstrate that age and playing experience have no significant effect on the majority of injuries, which indicates that injuries among university football players are most probably due to the intensity of practice, physical condition, and game conditions rather than other factors. However, a significant relationship was found concerning foot fractures, which might be related to the cumulative effect of mechanical stress during long periods of football activities. In addition, the analysis of positional factors indicates that defenders and midfielders are more susceptible to injuries than players in other positions. It may be assumed that these players are more exposed to injuries due to their tactical role in the game. These players are required to recover the ball from the opponent team, tackle the opponent players, move across the entire field during the game, and physically engage with the opponent team members. All these factors may increase the probability of musculoskeletal injuries.

The findings of the analysis have shown the need for developing an effective injury prevention strategy in university football. It may be assumed that developing an effective injury prevention strategy may reduce the incidence of injuries in university football players and increase their athletic performance. It may also be assumed that strengthening the medical and physiotherapy support in university sports programs may help in effective management of injuries in football players and reduce the impact of injury on their

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performance in collegiate football.

5.2. Recommendations:

Considering the findings of the study and the significant incidence of muscle and lower extremity injuries among university football players, the recommendations provided below intend to minimize the incidence of injury and promote the safety and performance of the football players.

5.2.1 .Implementation of Structured Warm-Up Programs

Football coaches should make sure that football players participate in structured and scientifically developed warm-up programs before the training sessions and matches. Structured warm-up programs have been proven to minimize the incidence of muscle strains and ligament sprains significantly. Warm-up programs improve blood flow and increase joint mobility while preparing the muscles for strenuous exercise.

5.2.2 .Strength and Conditioning Programs

Universities should consider incorporating strength and conditioning (S&C) programs into the training regimen of football players. Football players should be provided with well-designed strength and conditioning programs that focus on the muscles of the lower extremities and the core. Improved muscle strength is associated with the incidence of common football injuries, including muscle strains and ligament sprains.

5.2.3 .Access to Medical and Physiotherapy Support

The sports programs in universities must be provided with access to sports medicine professionals, physiotherapists, and athletic trainers during both training and competitions. This is to avoid further complications and reduce the recovery period. Regular medical checkups and injury monitoring systems must be developed to identify early signs of overuse injuries.

5.2.4 .Proper Recovery and Load Management

The training loads should be carefully monitored by the coaches and trainers, and enough recovery periods must be allowed between training sessions and matches. Intensification of training loads without proper recovery times
may increase the chances of fatigue, consequantly elevating the risk of musculoskeletal injuries. Recovery techniques must be adequately incorporated into the routines of the players.

5.2.5. Nutritional Monitoring and Hydration

Football players must be provided with balanced nuitricious diets to support athletic performance and speedy recovery. Proper diets rich in proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals are required for muscle recovery and tissue repair. Appropriate hydration techniques must also be followed before, during, and after physical activity to avoid muscle cramps and fatigue.

5.2.6 .Use of Appropriate Sports Equipment

Universities and sports teams must ensure proper sports equipment, particularly football boots, is used by the players. This is to avoid further injuries, particularly in the ankle and knee joints. Proper footwear may reduce the risk of injuries caused by slipping and poor traction.

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5.2.7 .Educational Programs on Injury Prevention

Educational workshops and seminars are recommended in order to increase the level of awareness among athletes about injury prevention. Such programs might focus on training methods, injury risk factors, tackling methods, and the significance of physical conditioning.

5.2.8. Improvement of Playing Surfaces and Facilities

Football sports authorities and university management should make sure that football playing surfaces are compltely safe and well-maintained. Inappropriate playing surfaces may cause injuries during the training or the actual games. Moreover, sports facilities that are not well maintained may significantly increase the risk of injuries during training sessions.

5.2.9. Psychological Support for Injured Athletes

Psychological counseling services should be available to athletes who are injured during the training or the actual games. Injured athletes may experience lots of issues such as stress, anxiety, and fear of further injuries during training sessions. These factors may affect athletes' self-confidence concerning participation in sports activities again.

5.2.10. Future Research Directions

Future studies might very well be conducted using larger samples from various universities in order to provide more insights concerning sports injuries among university players and athletes. Longitudinal studies could provide more information about sports injuries among university athletes. Biomechanical studies could provide more information about sports injuries among university athletes.

Conflicts of interest

The author(s) declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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