

Hey everyone, welcome to today's Lunch and Learn, and our topic is the California assembly bill 734 and the ethics of tackle football.

Many of you know me already, my name is Check Degeneffe, professor of rehabilitation counseling and also the chair of the academic department.

So this Lunch and Learn, I think, is an outgrowth of a number of months of work and discussion on this topic with the three of us.

We're really happy to share this topic with you today.

The topic of youth tackle football and its safety, I think, is one that some people might question is this really relevant for the field of rehabilitation counseling?

And that's something I think we were the three of us are going to try to make that point that it is relevant on a number of domains given our expertise, given our ethical codes.

And we'll talk about the fact that our ethics not only are in the office and what we do professionally during the day, but it also extends to multiple domains of our life.

And I think that's where this topic has particular relevance.

Just some housekeeping things.

If you're here for the CRC unit, which I imagine some of you are interested in for that one ethics unit, I'll be putting my email address in the chat near the end of the presentation and just send me an email if you're interested in receiving the one CRC unit, then I'll send you the documentation to claim that.

And I also want to let you know we have this posted or we have submitted this presentation in the form of a journal manuscript to the journal of rehabilitation counseling bulletin.

And we're still waiting for the results.

We submitted back in July a check with the editor the other day.

Unfortunately, as many of you who submit articles know, that process can be lengthy at times.

And so we're still waiting, but we're really hopeful.

And one of the things the three of us have talked about is will the journal, will the reviewers be open to this idea of having a topic that on its surface, some of my questions are really relevant for rehabilitation counselors.

We're very excited to get that feedback.

And then the other thing we are planning to do is this is in some ways kind of like a dry run for a possible conference presentation.

We're looking at a number of different possible conferences.

And today is a chance for us to get some feedback to get a sense of the questions you have and how you received this topic.

And I think that could help shape some of the things we're going to look at.

So I'm going to share the screen, get the presentation on the screen, and then we will get started.

I'd like to introduce my co-authors, Austin Constein and Kimberly Ann McGot.

And both Austin and Kimberly are recent graduates of the Rehabilitation Counseling Program.

They both graduated in May of 2024.

Kim also is a graduate of the Cognitive Disabilities Advanced Certificate.

I direct that program.

And later we'll talk about in terms of this whole topic of AB 734, how it got started.

It came from this class, from one of the classes in the Cognitive Disabilities Certificate Program.

So we'll talk about in the context of this class how this got started and where that came from.

So, you know, really happy and proud to present with both Austin and Kim.

We've had a lot of discussions about this topic in the class, outside of the class.

And so it's just a great day.

And with that, I'll move to the next slide.

All right.

So this is Dr.

Bennett Omalu.

He's a forensic neuropathologist who famously discovered chronic traumatic encephalopathy, otherwise known as CTE, which is a brain disease and neurodegenerative brain disease, and former NFL player Mike Webster.

So his findings were published in the journal Neurosurgery, which really brought to light the long term consequences of repeated head impacts and concussions sustained during football games.

So Omalu was really the first person to bring football related CTE and brain trauma into public awareness, which actually ended up causing a lot of controversy between him and the NFL.

So there was even a movie that was created about this.

It's called Concussion, which Will Smith plays Dr.

Bennett Omalu.

And something kind of cool, I was actually scheduled to interview Dr.

Omalu for my paper as a subject matter interview expert.

But unfortunately, the day of, I got an email from his assistant who had said that he unfortunately got pulled into a trial.

So he was unable to meet and was booked up for months in advance.

So while I wasn't able to directly speak to him, something kind of cool too is Chuck actually worked with him on the TBI advisory board for some number of years.

So yeah, like I said, there was a lot of controversy between him and the NFL.

So they did what they could to really undermine and discredit his findings.

And then we have a quote here, which is from the New York Times op-ed where he's really just trying to influence and warn the general public.

So I'll read it now and it states, "If that child continues to play over many seasons, cellular injuries accumulate to cause irreversible brain damage.

As physicians, it is our role to inform an adult about the dangers of, for example, smoking.

If an adult chooses to play football, it is within his rights.

However, as a society, when we allow a child to play, high impact contact sports are re-endangering that child."

Next slide, please.

Should I click on the video, Kim?

Yeah.

Okay.

And joining me now is forensic pathologist and the author of "Brain Damage in Contact Sports," Dr. ...

So let's get it right to the right area here.

You have said that it is, in your words, child abuse to let kids play football.

Why?

Knowing what we know today.

As a physician, every two, three years I attend child abuse classes and I must report child abuse when I see it.

I'm mandated by law.

Knowing what we know today.

The fundamental definition of child abuse is the intentional exposure of a child to the risk of injury.

Knowing today that just one concussion causes permanent brain damage.

Knowing that each child goes into play football by 8 a.m. on Saturday morning, by 11 a.m. after he's done playing, he has suffered brain damage.

Isn't that intentional exposure of a child to the risk of injury?

All right.

So this video, really, if you watch the whole thing, it touches on the conflicting views of safety versus parental rights with contact sports.

And here in this video, so we hear Dr.

Omalu, he's labeling allowing a child to play tackle football as child abuse.

And he backs up his claim stating that the evidence undeniably shows that repeated blows to the head and concussions can cause irreversible brain damage.

So I think here, especially if you watch the whole thing, you can really get a glimpse of the way Omalu communicates his point and conveys his point.

One can say or one can describe it as maybe bold or provocative, which can really make him a polarizing presence to the field of youth contact sports.

And then interestingly, I ended up interviewing two other doctors.

One a physiatrist and the other a neuropsychologist, who when speaking with them, they acknowledge that there was a lot of risk involved with youth contact sports and especially with children's brains still forming.

So while acknowledging that risk, they were still not really supportive of an outright ban of tackle football.

So I thought that was really interesting.

So unlike Omalu, they were a lot more hesitant and they probably wouldn't label it as child abuse.

Well, now to this tackle football could soon be banned here in the state of California.

I close this bill.

Nearly 50 kids in football jerseys, parents and coaches packed a small state Capitol room Wednesday.

I oppose this bill.

I think the benefits outweigh significantly the risks and not with discounting each imposing a state bill that would ban children under the age of 12 from playing tackle football.

We believe this is wrong.

It's not right for our state to be doing this.

Steve Fabiano from Apple Valley Spearheads, the Save Youth Football California Coalition, and believes lawmakers shouldn't have the final decision on whether to play.

Tell us what the risks are.

Let us decide as parents.

The bill was introduced by Sacramento Assembly member Kevin McCarty, who linked tackle football to the risk of head injuries and trauma.

Kids only have one brain, only have one life.

And there's irreversible damage to kids brains that is totally unnecessary.

And you can wait.

The bill, which passed its first committee, also got support from Orange County Assembly member Avelino Valencia, a former college football player.

It is a very dangerous and violent sport.

There's no if, ands or buts about that.

Parents we spoke to were split on how they felt.

Just the increased incidence of confessions and what that can do long term for these kids.

I think that's something that's been the way.

I know that there's issues there.

But I think there's definitely room for it to be a parent's choice.

All right.

So here we really get a glimpse of the perspectives of families and coaches who, as we can see, actively oppose AB 734.

So many of these families, they really emphasize that it should be the parents right to decide.

We heard one parent saying, "Tell me the risks and just let me decide as a parent."

Which is actually what pretty much aligned with what the two doctors I spoke with thought as well.

I think the video also shows how the opponents of AB 734 were really able to use the media to raise public awareness and also shape public opinion of their disposition to AB 734.

All right.

So now we get to this class where this topic came from.

And this is a core class in the Cognitive Disability Certificate Program at San Diego State.

It's a class that I would describe as one where there's a lot of debate, there's discussion.

We kind of tackle issues where there's different positions.

You could take one view versus the other.

And the students in the class are really kind of tasked with, I think, trying to kind of grapple with some difficult topics and take various sides.

So as one example, we talk about the death penalty for individuals who are diagnosed with intellectual disability.

And we talk about the fact that on one end, is this somehow unfair to that population because of the nature of their cognitive disability to be put to death in a capital crime.

And this is something actually that the Supreme Court has ruled.

You can't put to death somebody in capital crime if they're diagnosed with an intellectual disability.

On the other hand, we talk about if you believe in full participation and self-determination, and if the person was deemed by the court to be competent to stand trial, should they also face the same penalties as anyone else?

So we go back and forth on this.

So this topic is kind of like that.

There perhaps are a variety of views.

So the students have to look at a policy issue and look at it for the entirety of the semester.

They do a narrative review, which is the approach we use for the paper that this presentation is based on.

They do a 45-minute class presentation.

As Kim noted, they do subject matter expert interviews to kind of get an in-depth view of the topic and background information and just to kind of get a different perspective, a variety of perspectives on whatever topic they are looking at.

So both Kim and Austin spoke with me earlier in the semester, kind of looking at what are some possible topics.

And I shared with them last week, I kind of selfishly said, "Well, what about AB 734?"

Because I had heard about this topic.

I wanted to learn more about it.

And so I thought, "Well, we have two students who are going to do their semester-long project.

I can learn more about it and they can learn more about it."

And thankfully, they both chose to do this.

And they came up with some really interesting projects and I think really got an in-depth nuance understanding of various dimensions of the project.

So, again, that is the basis of what we're doing here.

Okay.

So as Chuck said, during our class, we both, me and Kim, chose to look at AB 734 and what that bill was and kind of what it meant.

So we kind of wanted to take the time to share a little bit about the bill itself, kind of why it was proposed, and then eventually why it didn't end up getting passed, which we talked, or which we saw a little bit about in the video, but that was very brief.

So I kind of wanted to take a second to get a little bit more in-depth about what exactly AB 734 is.

So as we know, up until recently, a lot of the research and the connections to neurodegenerative diseases like CTE, which we see most commonly in line with football injuries, has really been about professional sports.

And the reason for that is that a lot of these neurodegenerative diseases develop after numerous blows to the head.

So we don't start to see any of these symptoms or the effect that they're having on individuals until a later age.

And because of that, we don't really see a lot of these diseases connected with children too often.

But that being said, there's more and more new data that has been coming out over the recent years about these types of diseases.

And it has caused for a push in legislation to protect these children that are playing these contact sports from the potential risks of contact sports at such a young age.

So this piece in particular, Assembly Bill 734, like we saw in the video, was introduced by California Assemblymember Kevin McCarty, who is not to be confused with former Republican Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy to different people.

But this bill was put together, as we heard, as an effort to put a ban on contact sports for children under the age of 12 here in California.

So this is the bill for time purposes.

I'm not going to read the whole thing, but the bill was proposed on February 13th of 2023 and it was amended on January 11th of 2024 after Governor Newsom expressed



his intent to veto the bill.

So when asked about why he would veto the bill, Governor Newsom said, and I quote, "I will not sign legislation that bans youth tackle football.

I am deeply concerned about the health and safety of our young athletes, but an outright ban is not the answer.

My administration will work with the legislature and the bill's author to strengthen safety in youth football while ensuring parents have the freedom to decide which sports are most appropriate for their children."

So the thing that we kind of wanted to look at is when looking about why, you know, Governor Newsom chose to veto the bill or why he would have vetoed the bill if it wasn't amended.

We thought about a couple of reasons and a couple of reasons that we speculated on as to why that could be are, one, as a future presidential candidate, it quite likely could be a reason for Newsom not supporting the bill as it would be difficult for any politician, not just himself, to kind of take the stance on taking away some type of parental choice, the parents' right to choose for their own children.

And then the second reason being that no state, in fact, has ever passed a tackle football age restriction bill.

So those were just kind of some of the things that we looked at in our paper that we kind of wanted to share with you.

And yeah, and just kind of give you guys a better background as to what AB 734 actually is.

All right.

So then we get to the overall purpose of what we're doing with this paper, with this presentation, with this effort.

I think, you know, one is that we, the three of us are taking a clear position that we believe this legislation should be passed.

And I think, you know, that's not always like a common position of academics.

We think often we do research, we kind of, you know, try to get a deeper understanding of various topics.

But at times, I think we can also, you know, take clear positions on different areas of legislation that really will have a public health impact, will have an impact on areas that we think are important that need to be addressed.

So one is that I think we look at this as the protection of a vulnerable

population.

So here we're talking about children that, you know, don't have the ability to make healthcare related decisions for themselves or they're depending on their parents to do that.

And at times, I think, and we'll get into this later when we get into some of the different dimensions of our ethical examination of this topic, that, you know, sometimes the government has to step in and I think help with making decisions that perhaps, you know, go against the decision making of other people.

And in this case, it's really looking at the rights of parents to make healthcare or football related decisions for their children versus, you know, should they not have that ability in terms, in this case, in terms of an age band.

We believe that as rehabilitation counselors, we have specialized knowledge on brain trauma and function.

We have classes in medical aspects of disability.

We have, like in our case, in our program, we have the specialization of cognitive disabilities and we have faculty members who are doing research in this area.

We have students, we have graduates who are working with this population.

And this is a case, I think, nationally, just in terms of clients that the members of this profession have expertise and they work with.

People with acquired brain injuries are one of those populations.

We want to also broadly facilitate awareness in the rehabilitation counseling profession.

I think probably, you know, and this is something, obviously, that's in my area of scholarship and focus, but yet I had limited understanding of AB 734.

So I think probably people that don't have this focus area probably have never heard of legislation like this.

And as Austin mentioned, had this legislation been signed by the governor, it would have been the first to actually have any type of age restrictions for tackle football for children.

So most places in the country are not looking at this and only five states have actually attempted this.

And we probably got the closest to actually having this go into place.

So we want to really create more awareness on this topic.

And when we look at ethics and we look at the different kind of the state of play on the topic, we will look at issues of exploitation, harm prevention, informed choice, and common conflict, conflict of interest.

These are all areas that are in our ethical codes, the code of ethics, rehabilitation counselors and certainly have relevance for this topic.

Okay, so now we wanted to take a second to talk about positionality.

More specifically, kind of look at football as a culture.

And as Chuck pointed out, all three of us are taking a stance in support of, you know, basically Bill 734.

But that being said, we kind of wanted to touch base on how we are all, in fact, connected to the game of football in some way through fandom, through family, through something.

And I feel that a lot of people might think that people that, you know, enjoy the game or have a connection to the game might not be in support of a bill like AB 734.

So we just kind of wanted to take a second to, you know, let you guys know a little bit about us and kind of who we are and what our connection is with the game, as well as talking about football as a culture, you know, in the country of America.

So as we can see on the slides here, we have three logos of our favorite football teams, Chuck's Green Bay Packers, Kim and her family have always rooted for the 49ers.

And of course, we have unfortunately now the Los Angeles Chargers logo right here, which is my favorite team.

But we kind of wanted to add this to our presentation, like I said, to kind of show that football has been and may potentially continue to be a part of all three of our lives.

And we'll talk about that, obviously, in the coming slides as well.

But jumping into football as a culture here in America, as we know, football is football and sports in general are a huge part, a huge part of many cultures and traditions all over the world.

And many families are brought together by sports specifically here in America.

We're going to talk about the game of tackle football.

And you know, that's whether that's like having a football themed party, people getting together to watch the Super Bowl.

You know, it gives us an opportunity to get together with the people that we love to spend our time with the most or even the chance to get to see people that we don't get to see very often.

And we come together to watch these sports.

And then on top of that, we know that many families are deeply rooted, you know, in culture and tradition connected to sports.

They have rituals, they have their superstitions, they have different values.

And so we really wanted to talk about that as well.

But even on a larger mainstream scale, you know, when we look about when we talk about football in America, we can see that football truly is viewed as America's sport.

And we can see that through, you know, how widely it's broadcast all across the nation from September all the way to February when the Super Bowl is over.

We see football broadcast all throughout the week.

We have college football on Saturdays and even other days now throughout the throughout the week.

We have the NFL on Sundays, Mondays and Thursdays.

Now we even have high school football being put on TV on Fridays.

So it's really undeniable that the sport of football truly does have a cultural impact in this country.

And we kind of wanted to touch on that as we move forward and talk about ourselves as well.

So we all have, as Austin is saying, we have we all have a connection to football.

We have different motivations for wanting to get involved in this topic.

And I think one of you know, in our paper and today, we really wanted to establish like we we all have this football connection because our speculation is that on the outside, people may look at legislation like AV 734 and assume that the people that are in favor of this legislation kind of hate football and want to ban entirely or don't have like any any belief in it or a belief perhaps that this is just the government telling people what to do.

This is just like, you know, the coastal elites telling everyone how to live their lives.

And we really wanted to say that that's not the case.

But we really, you know, I think I think our own individual connections to football perhaps make us all the more motivated to want to do something about this topic, because perhaps we have seen firsthand, you know, some of the impacts of this and that, you know, we've talked about in our class, and we may have personal connections.

So for myself, you know, as I mentioned, most of my background as a scholar, as an instructor, as an advocate has been in the area of acquired brain injury. I can mention, you know, I've served on the California TV advisory board, I've been involved many years on the board of directors for the San Diego Brain Injury Foundation.

My research looks at different dimensions of acquired brain injury, such as family issues and veteran issues.

And I've authored a couple of papers on CT and football as well.

And so, you know, I have this connection.

And for myself personally, playing the sport, I played the sport starting at age 12, in terms of tackle football.

I played flag football for a number of years before that that point.

So I played from a middle to high school.

And this photo is actually from high school.

And you know, I had talked to Kim about this, like a month or so ago.

And I know as mentioning as we get deeper into this topic, and looking at some of the research, it made me really kind of think back to like these years of playing tackle football and actually causing some concern.

Because you know, I think probably over the years of playing the sport, I probably have you know, hundreds of not what are not known as non concussive or sub concussive head impacts.

And these are impacts where there's no discernible sign of a concussion.

So the possible impacts of that are really unknown.

And I think, you know, that is part of like this motivation for looking at this topic, because I think if we're looking at younger and younger populations, you know, the the assumption of the concern or the fear is that that's going to have more of a deleterious effect on the brain and human development, you know, for that child over time.

So again, personally, you know, I've had a chance to really kind of reflect and kind of think about over that time, you know, what the potential long term impacts

could be.

And then kind of back to this personal connection to the sport.

You know, taught my my daughter how to play not tackle football, but flag football.

She played several seasons of flag football, you know, taught her how to throw a ball, how to run pass routes.

And she really loved loved the game.

She played for several several seasons.

She told me actually at one point, if she had a chance to play tackle football, she would want to.

So that we're working a lot of that.

But she really loved, I think, the team aspect of it being very competitive, the athletic competition, the challenge of it, the discipline.

And so for her was a big, big part of her life.

And and we really, you know, had a chance to connect and spend a lot of time together on on on that activity.

All right.

So I had a couple of there are a couple of things that kind of brought me to this topic.

So one back in during my undergrad, I did take a neuroanatomy and neurophysiology class.

And this was for speech pathology.

And I just remember my professor lecturing on, you know, the impact of concussions and the risks that tackle football presents.

And I remember just I remember just feeling like that something that really stuck with me and really just shaped my own opinion.

Even 10 years ago, I remember saying that I wouldn't allow my child to play tackle football.

So that's just something that really stuck with me.

Well, I'm not like the biggest like football fan out there.

I did grow up with diehard 49er fans, which you can see from this photo.

And my dad actually played football back in high school.

So he was able to dig up this photo for me.

He is number 54 right in the front there.

OK.

And then for me, this is a photo from a few years ago.

It's not the best photo because I'm way back there by the tee in bolt up.

But I just wanted to use this photo to kind of show kind of what Chuck and Kim have already said to show that we are fans of the game.

And for me personally, I've been a diehard fan of the Chargers ever since I was little, you know, watching games with my dad every Sunday.

So I have a deep connection to the game as well.

And kind of just the motivation behind, you know, wanting to look into this topic is like Chuck had said, you know, the love for the game and wanting to learn more about, you know, the game that you watch every week and, you know, going in with an open mind, obviously about, you know, the risks that the game presents.

And so for me, I just wanted to show that, you know, what we've already reiterated, that even a diehard football fan, you know, can have an open mind and can be concerned about the overall risks that the game of tackle football presents to its athletes.

And so that's why on the screen here, experiencing more moral and ethical conflicts about the sport after learning more and more about the research and the damage that the game has on its athletes.

It is concerning even to someone that has loved the game their whole life.

All right.

So now we get to the conceptual framework that we use to guide the development of this paper.

We have a number of alumni here today.

So you probably recognize this, Omen, a deal from organizational development.

Hopefully doesn't bring back like a lot of, you know, stressful memories.

But we thought that this theory or this framework really gave us a way to kind of think about a very complex topic that we have to look at it from multiple

dimensions.

And I think that's really the beauty of this theory.

It's a theory of organizational development.

It's often, you know, guided in business and human service agencies and a variety of places where people work together in various capacities, you know, working towards some type of common goal.

So in this case, we looked at this theory to guide our discussion of this topic, AV734, with kind of a broad understanding of organization.

So organization in terms of families and parents, the children playing the sport, youth tackle football organizations, the government, medical professionals, all the people that somehow are connected to stakeholders to this topic.

And this topic looks at four different or the framework looks at four dimensions.

We have this bog frame, the human resource frame, the structural frame and the political frame.

So when we look at the symbolic frame, this really looks at things like culture, values, beliefs, symbols.

So if an organization has a mission statement, for example, that would be very relevant to like looking at the symbolic frame and talking about like how would an organization actually kind of say to the public or to its employees, to its staff, you know, this is what we stand for.

The human resource frame looks at the fact that the people that are served by an organization need to be happy, productive, safe and self-actualized.

And it's a recognition that the individuals who support an organization don't do it just to get the job done, but they also, the organization has a responsibility to care for the people that supports its work.

So as an example, you might work for a company or some type of agency and you may look at like the benefits, the healthcare benefits, the vacation benefits, the childcare, things like that, where you're taking care of the people that are supporting that organization.

The structural frame looks at how do we provide a sense of order, rationality, a way to kind of guide the structure of what that organization does.

So having like, you know, clear rules, having clear procedures, having human resource departments to really guide like, you know, what do you do in different situations?

How do you guide the behavior, the, you know, the work of the employees?



And then finally, the political frame looks at how decisions are made and how people gain political power, how they gain decision-making power.

And you know, if we look at like here at SDSU, it's often a common, you know, area of discussion.

We have our union, we have our faculty senate, we have faculty, we have staff, we have, you know, all the students, all these different entities that are looking at the future of the university and the way that it makes decisions.

So how do we kind of work together?

So again, for AB 734, we thought that all these frames have relevance to this topic.

And the way we looked at this is what's called a narrative review.

And this is a way to kind of look at a collection of information that's different than what are systematic and scoping reviews.

That's where you might have some kind of topic area, research topic area, where you're attempting to basically identify every possible article or study that's been done on this topic.

So I did a, I worked on a scoping review looking at employment outcomes for people with traumatic brain injury a couple of years ago.

And so we initially identified like over 10,000 possible articles and we had to sift through all the possible articles.

We finally got to a final collection of articles.

So we're not doing that in a narrative review.

We are very selectively looking at articles that really fit what we are trying to examine.

So in this case, things that are relevant to the bone in a deal, four frames, looking at this also from an ethical framework, looking at this in terms of what's the current status.

So we looked at websites, government documents, scholarly materials, and put that information together.

And again, Kim and Austin both did subject matter interviews.

We didn't put that into our paper in terms of like doing quotes and so on from those interviews.

But those interviews are very important to give perspective to the topic, just to kind of give us like an awareness, for example, that as Kim mentioned, that people that are very closely connected to individuals with acquired brain injury, they were somewhat circumspect on taking a clear position on a topic like AB 734, which was surprising to us.

But that gave us some good background information, some good perspective to kind of go forward in looking at this topic.

So those interviews are very, very important.

And then finally, the entire narrative review was grounded in first status of the topic and then ethical action steps, which we'll now get into.

Okay.

So as Chuck mentioned, we decided to examine our assembly bill 734 and the ethics of youth tackle football through the lens of bone in deals, four frame model.

So I know Chuck touched on it a little bit, but just to remind everyone what the symbolic frame is, this frame addresses concepts like culture, value, beliefs, and of course, symbols to provide a sense of organizational purpose and meaning.

And so as we dive into some of these key points that we made in our paper and that we also have listed here on the slide, we can kind of see the connection to the symbolic frame and how that applies to these points here.

So starting with the first one, there has been a...

The popularity of football does continue to rise according to Gallup polling results.

However, this popularity is challenged by conflicting views on the nature of the sport itself.

So, however, although the sport does promote teamwork and discipline, which are two good things, it also does face criticism because it does act as a source for hegemonic and heteronormative attitudes, kind of portraying this masculinity that shows that a lot of athletes kind of buy into this thought of, "I gotta be masculine," everything like that.

And it could lead to these injuries that we're seeing with these athletes because of the way the sport is portrayed.

But if we take a look at some of these participation trends, like we see here in 2018, there were 1.4 million high school players ages 13 to 17.

And then if we look at the years of 2020 to 2021, we saw actually a massive drop of 17.9% in participation in tackle football in ages 6 through 12.

So with that drop in participation, actually came the rise of participation in flag football.

And there was a 15.8% growth over that same time period.

And although this shift in participation might just seem like it's a trend, we believe that it actually represents an existential threat to the game of tackle football.

So the inclusivity, obviously, in safety of flag football that welcomes all athletes, what is this?

Oh, we're saying that it could create potentially a generational pivot in how the game of tackle football is played and perceived.

So we can see that this threat is very real and acknowledged when we look at the biggest professional sports league in the world, the National Football League.

So over the new over numerous years here recently, the NFL has made numerous efforts to grow the game internationally.

And we've seen that just as an example.

To start the season, Chuck's Green Bay Packers played the Philadelphia Eagles over in Brazil, which I believe is the first game to ever be played in Brazil.

And then there's even more games this year.

I believe just this last week we had a game in England.

There's a few more games that are going to be played in England and another game that's going to be played in Germany as well.

And so although we see these attempts by the NFL to grow internationally, we could look at those obviously as, you know, with money at its core, trying to expand the game, trying to make as much money as possible.

But we also do speculate that this could be an international strategy as an attempt to replace a U.S. fan base and player pool that could be retreating from the game of tackle football and shifting over towards flag football due to safety concerns.

And so moving forward, it will be interesting to see how these dynamics shape the future of tackle football and any changes that maybe the NFL or any other organization might make to their game.

All right.

And then so now getting into the human resource frame just to give a refresher on what that is.

So the human resource frame focuses on what people need to be happy, productive, safe, and self-actualized, as Chuck mentioned earlier.

And so this frame recognizes that people do not only exist to meet the needs of the organization, but that the organization also needs to care for the well-being of their people.

So a lot of the things that we're going to focus on on this frame kind of refer back to that last statement that the organizations also need to care for the well-being of their people.

And when we see the game of tackle football, we don't really see that happening.

And we see a lot of these athletes, you know, getting forgotten about and being left with their injuries to deal with the long-term consequences on their own.

But to hop into some of the key points that we talk about here, as we can see, the we start to look at the critical issues surrounding tackle football and how exactly it creates worries with brain trauma on trial development, as well as potential brain structural impacts.

So as we discuss this and get into some of the statistics, though, it is important and that we wanted to really stress that although we may see these as statistics, these statistics represent, you know, human lives, individuals that were impacted by this sport.

And just let us not forget that these are real individuals that these statistics represent.

So that being said, there has been a consistent connection between tackle football and CTE, which Kim mentioned earlier is chronic traumatic encephalopathy throughout years of research.

So one of those studies that we talked about in our paper by Mez and his colleagues is that that we have listed here examined that the brains of over 260 or 266 deceased football players.

So of those 266 brains, CTE was found in 233 of them, which is an insane amount.

So this study goes on to find that players are one point three times more likely to develop CTE for each additional year of football played.

So that goes back to the more and more that you play, the higher chance you have to acquire CTE.

And we see that actually with the neurocognitive risks in the sport being portrayed in the media.

You know, when we see, like Kim mentioned earlier, when touching on Benidamalu with NFL players that have passed like Mike Webster, the Charger legend himself, Junior

Sayow, but we also are starting to see some of these symptoms and everything like that.

They've been portrayed in living players as well.

I mean, most recently, Brett Favre, for anyone that knows who Brett Favre is, was a star quarterback for the Green Bay Packers.

I mean, he just revealed his Parkinson's diagnosis a few weeks ago.

So we're starting to see the impact that the game of tackle football is having in that sense as well.

But what's even scarier is that 18 of those brains going back to Mez's study actually saw that CTE was present in athletes that played youth football or high school football as their highest level of football.

And these are eye opening statistics because we actually see that you don't need to be playing to a professional collegiate level to have these impacts happening on the brain as well.

But with that being said, we do want to acknowledge that there is selection bias, obviously, in a lot of the studies that are happening when it pertains to CTE because a lot of the brain autopsy research for a lot of these studies are done with brain donations from individuals and families who already suspect CTE, which could potentially skew the results.

And so what that means is that we don't really necessarily have a clear picture or a complete picture per se on how widespread CTE truly is among football players, in particular, and particularly because we don't have those individuals who played at lower levels exhibiting the symptoms of those individuals that did play at a professional or collegiate level.

All right.

And so now we kind of hop into we wanted to take a chance to really dive into the game of tackle football versus the game of flag football and maybe why we're starting to see this shift in participation moving towards flag football.

So taking a more in-depth look, here are two of the studies that we focused on in our paper.

So in a 2017 study by Peterson and his colleagues, they compared two tackle football leagues to one flag football, one flag football league grades two to seven.

So interestingly enough, according to this study, there was no significant differences when looking at concussions between the two leagues.

That being said, oh, and then also another interesting thing was that we found that

flag football injuries actually had a higher rate than tackle football injuries, which is astonishing to believe.

But that being said, the study did indeed face some critique, specifically with its methodology.

So the Concussion Legacy Foundation actually critiqued this study stating that Peterson relied on coaching on the coaches and self-reporting of the athletes who grades two to seven are pretty young, obviously, as we can see, for all of their for all their statistics, instead of having said maybe sideline placed athletic trainers to report that information back.

And so the Concussion Legacy Foundation went on to say that the primary issue associated with tackle football is not concussions, but therefore the repeated head impacts, which is a statistic that was also not measured by Peterson and his colleagues.

So to build on head impacts and kind of the impact that they have and how they affect the game, we can turn to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that we can see here at the bottom.

And in their studies, they have two of which that we mentioned in our paper.

The first study showed that tackle football was 15 times had 15 times more head impacts than flag football.

The second study showed 18 times more 18 times more head impacts in games and 19 times more head impacts in in practices.

So when we actually look at a study that did its due diligence in looking at head impacts in comparison to Peterson study, we do see that there are statistics showing that tackle football does indeed have a true impact on the generative neurodegenerative diseases as well.

Yeah.

And one thing I would add to to Austin's point, the CDC studies, those are based on child football leagues.

So it's kind of like the same thing that Peterson tried to look at youth tackle football compared to flag football.

So the CDC did the same thing.

But in this case, they had a different metrics.

And as Austin said, I think there's increased focus on the impacts of the number of head impacts rather than just kind of only a singular focus on concussions.

And that seems to be kind of a shift in where a lot of CT research is going toward.

Right.

So I have the structural frame here.

So the structural frame really just focuses on how organizations are structured in order to achieve their goals efficiently, emphasizing the need for clear structure, rules and policies.

So with that said, AB 734 would fundamentally change the way youth tackle football is handled in California as well as setting model practices for the rest of the country.

It's important to note that California does have a history of being an early adopter of enhanced public safety regulations.

So AB 734 was actually not the state's first attempt at addressing the safety issue of youth tackle football.

So back in 2021, AB 1 was actually passed by the California Youth Football Act.

So here I'm going to list out some of the key components and rules that are associated with that.

So one, information sheets on head injuries and concussions had to be provided to youth football players and their parents and guardians.

Two, coaches were required to receive certification in CPR, first aid and AED.

And then they also had to have at least one state life and medical professional at all games.

And then importantly, there was no more than two full contact weekly practices that were allowed.

So these rules and requirements actually went beyond any other state level youth tackle football regulation in the country.

And then so with that said, I think that really like the basis of AB 1, 2021, it really just shows that tackle football is a dangerous sport for youth.

Otherwise right, you wouldn't really need such regulations.

All of these rules wouldn't really need to exist.

So with that said, it seems just kind of counterintuitive that we wouldn't really get the same support in California for AB 734.

So despite all of these rules and regulations, it just seems kind of, it's interesting that that's where we kind of draw the line in this end by placing an

age limit restriction.

All right.

So within AB 734, they really had it as a graduated rollout.

So with year one, it would ban tackle youth, tackle football for youth under six years of age.

And then not until year three would it ban tackle football for youth under 10 years of age.

And then finally by year four, it would ban tackle football for youth under 12 years of age.

So we speculate that this was laid out this way for a number of reasons.

First we thought that the graduated rollout would really emphasize the need to protect younger kids first, starting off with age six.

And then second, it would provide football players, families, coaches, enough time to think of alternative plans, for example, like switching to black football.

And then third, we speculated that perhaps it was laid out this way to make it more politically attractive because it's harder to deny wanting to ban tackle football for youth six years and under versus having an outright ban for all children 12 and under.

So now our last frame is the political frame.

And I think the reason why this type of legislation has never been passed is that for politicians is very, very risky.

You know, Austin talked about like it's part of our culture.

It's part of football is kind of intertwined with everything we do.

And I think people would view this as kind of a threat to their sense of culture and family.

So politicians are aware of that and I think are afraid of not getting reelected if they advocate legislation like this.

Austin mentioned the impact of the presidential election.

I think that had a big role in not having this signed by the governor.

And there's this competing theme of safety versus parental choice.

That is really where the two dimensions go.



So one of the things I think politicians are very interested in looking at is how do parents actually feel about this?

Because parents are going to be the ones who are going to vote for them.

And there was a study done in 2020 that really tried to get a parent perspective and looked at 12 married couples in Texas, a very heavily football centric state.

And they examined how parents made the choice to ultimately let their children play tackle football.

And it looked at the roles of family, identity, community and information.

So Kim is going to talk a little bit about some of the outcomes of that study.

Yeah, so within that study, there were two overarching themes that came about and there were families that fell under the football first category and then families that fell under the safety first category.

With the football first families, football was deeply ingrained into their family identity.

It really occupied a lot of their time, their resources, their background.

A lot of these families had played football themselves, their parents had played football and so on.

So families within the football first category, a lot of them really overemphasized the advantages over the risks.

So some of those advantages included things like how the sport fostered leadership, camaraderie, discipline, things like that.

And a lot of these families also emphasized the agency that they took in allowing their child to play the sport.

So to really illustrate this more, I'm going to go ahead and read some direct quotes from the article.

Okay, so one parent stated, "They don't know anything else.

They just know football.

They know every sport, but we didn't give them a choice.

We made them do it.

It helps build character, helps them grow up and believe in themselves.

We made them play, but they wanted to play."

And then another parent stated, "The twins didn't really want to play because they wanted to concentrate on basketball.

I made them play football this year."

All right, so that's for the football first families.

And then on the other hand, we had families that were labeled safety first.

With these families, it was a lot different.

They initially actually would not allow their children to play the sport and they really emphasized that they understood that there were risks there.

And then with most families, well, with all of them, they ended up allowing their children to play, but I'll read a direct quote that really illustrates how one family came to the decision.

"Logan told Griffin, 'In ninth grade, don't even ask me.

You're not playing.

I'm putting my foot down.

I forbid you.

I will never forget it.'

Griffin came in your office and was like, 'Dad, this is my life and this is what I want to do.'

I walked into Logan's office and I said, 'We're going to have to pray a lot more and you're going to have to let him do it.

He's going to have to make his own mistakes and his own decisions.

If not, he will hate you for never letting him try.'

Logan was like, 'Okay, if you end up in a wheelchair, you realize you're going to look at me and mom's face every day when we change your diapers.'

And he was like, 'I understand.'

And then he was like, 'Do you really understand?

You could have spinal damage.'

Griffin was like, 'Yes, sir.'

And he was like, 'Okay.'

So that was one family and you can really see kind of the dynamic there.

Parents were really hesitant, but ultimately they gave the decision to their child.

And then other parents, they just ended up rationalizing their decision by saying that there's other sports where they can also get hurt as well.

Okay, so then this is where we jump to the ethics that we talked about in our paper and kind of where we try to tie this into the field of rehabilitation counseling.

So for the sake of time, I'm not going to read word for word like everything on the screen or anything, but as most of us know, there's a code of ethics in the field of rehabilitation counseling that we all must follow.

And for the symbolic frame here, we're going to focus on Section E, professional responsibility, exploitation of others.

And this kind of ties into that exploitation of athletes.

And so for this section of the code of ethics, it calls for rehab counselors to consider football related exploitation in a broader sense in ways that directly or indirectly benefit from health related sacrifices of those who play the sport.

And this is where we look at exploitation of athletes.

Up until recently, athletes weren't getting paid anything until these NIL deals came into place.

So we had thousands and thousands of college athletes putting their bodies on the line and receiving absolutely nothing for it.

And the one bullet point, it says 18.2% of revenue from football and basketball for athletic scholarships and then less than 1% of medical treatments for those student athletes.

So we can see this exploitation through statistics, but we can also see it as well just from being on campuses, own personal experiences.

I'm sure all of us have been on a campus and seen how our athletes are exploited.

They put them on all type of memorabilia and everything like that just to receive nothing of monetary value for the sacrifices that they're putting their bodies through.

And to tie this back into our field, as CRCs and CCRCs, we do have a responsibility to uphold these ethics, not just in a traditional work setting, but also in a broader context of higher education.

And kind of looking at this as more of following the spirit of the code to ensure that we act with integrity in all aspects of our interactions.

And then for the human resource frames, the part of the code of ethics that we tied into this one, avoiding harm, as we said, the human resource frame looks into obviously the individual helping out the organization, but the organization also needs to look out for its individuals.

And we don't see that happening a lot.

And when we see avoiding harm, we can see that a lot of these athletes are putting their bodies on the line and obtaining these injuries, these neurodegenerative diseases when we look specifically at the topic that we're covering here.

And as rehabilitation counselors, engaging in parent and teacher conferences when we meet with these parents and the teachers, but also kind of just putting an emphasis on the fact that us as counselors, we don't have to be a parent to see that the effect that this is having on the youth and to just always make an effort to raise awareness about this topic and to ensure that our athletes, whether that's on campus, if we're working in a school setting or individuals that we're working with that have children to inform them of the risks of the sport as well.

And so we kind of see this and kind of just pushing these third-party medical assessments to ensure that our athletes are safer.

We have the need for baseline testing and obviously training for coaches on concussions and neurological injury as well on the campuses that we might work on.

In the structural frame, we are dealing with, in this case, we look at the principle of autonomy, which is one of the core principles of ethical behavior in our profession.

And I think like AB 734 really brings to focus the fact of what are the long-term risks for playing the sport and making sure that the children that play the sport are fully informed in terms of what the risks are and their parents as well.

And it should be a shared decision-making process.

I think like the study that Kim had reviewed, I think one of the questions is, how much are those parents really sharing the possible risks with children?

I think today we have so much knowledge about what potential risks of the sport are.

So when Kim showed her dad playing football and I played football, we didn't really know the risk was talked about.

But I think that's different today.

So we need to have, again, open information about this.

And one of the things I think is on the horizon is like in vivo, live diagnostic, neurodiagnostic tests for CT, which at some point will happen.

And there I think there's going to be a lot of difficult decisions for children, for high school players, for college players, for professional players, deciding if they're going to play or not, if they can conclusively know that there's some signs of CT at that point.

All right.

So the ethics of the political frame.

So I think the spirit of this code really just highlights the importance that we as professionals in the field really use our positions of power in order to advocate for those who cannot advocate for themselves.

So we do have an ethical duty and responsibility to make genuine efforts in influencing the policies, procedures and practices within organizations that ultimately impact our clients.

And within the context of AB 734, I'll talk about this more here.

So it's important to note that the US, we do have a history of exploiting marginalized communities.

And in this case, the exploitation applies to youth playing tackle football as they don't possess the agency to make an informed decision on their own.

And so far, there have only been five states that have tried to place tackle football age limits.

So, you know, aside from California, there's only been Illinois, New York, Massachusetts and Maryland.

So continued attempts are going to be needed.

So next, I'm going to talk about ways that we as rehabilitation counselors can get involved.

So one is by getting more involved with the Brain Injury Association of America.

So the Brain Injury Association of America, they offer ways that to get involved in helping implement needed legislative and policy reforms.

So back in February 2020, they published recommendations on needed reforms for youth contact sports to address the dangers of concussions and the need for your schools to improve on their diagnostic and treatment practices.

So by getting involved with them, it would be a good start.

And then it's important to note that it's AB 734 is expected to be reintroduced in 2025, meaning us as rehabilitation counselors, we still have more time to become more involved in the political processes, which we can do by one, we could run for elective office, or even just doing what we can to rally support around this proposed legislation, really just bringing awareness.

So yeah, hopefully all of that could help push Governor Usom and California legislators to help push the bill forward and get it passed.

And then there actually was an imbalance of advocacy to promote AB 734, unfortunately.

So there was actually only one professional organization, which was the California Neurology Society that was formerly registered in its support.

Compared to the other side, there was actually a coalition of 30 youth, local organizations, and local government agencies who officially filed for their opposition.

So there's a huge imbalance there, which is likely why AB 734 did not pass.

So with that said, it is really critical for us as rehabilitation counselors to really raise awareness on this issue.

And one way we could do that is by utilizing the media to gather support, much like those who oppose AB 734 did.

So we saw in the video, there were parents, coaches, actively opposing the bill.

For example, there was Steve Fabiano, who was the leader of the Save Youth Football California Coalition, who really made it a point to consistently make media appearances to convey his point and to raise public awareness.

So it is critical that we find ways that we can increase media presence as well.

So I think, you know, kind of closing out, we're in a watershed moment in our profession in California, I think, for the United States.

We are now shifting the dangers of the discussion about football now to children, where it has really been focused more on professional players and college players.

As we talked about today, it's a difficult balancing of interests.

We have multiple contrasts in stakeholder interests.

And I think that really adds to the complexity of the issues we've talked about.

And we really view this as a social justice role for the profession.

Again, just not only looking at attention to ethics in our day-to-day work lives, but how do we do it in the other domains of our life?

So with that, we are at the end.

And Kim and Austin, I don't know if you've got to leave, but I can handle any questions.

And if anyone has any feedback, any questions, we can certainly stay on for a few more minutes.

But we really appreciate you being here and your attention to this topic.

So we have a question on the chat from Marissa.

What do you guys think about the guardian caps that some NFL players are opting to wear?

Do you think it's a step in the right direction to see popular NFL players promoting safety?

I kind of worry that the problem is still not being directly addressed and instead is being used as a temporary band-aid to the problem.

So I'm going to defer to Austin and Kim.

What are your thoughts on that?

As far as me personally, I think that the guardian caps, because I have seen some of these athletes actually choosing to wear them, and I think it kind of, I think that they are a good step, at least for right now, it does promote player safety.

Now, like you said, Marissa, I don't think it necessarily directly addresses the problem, obviously, because of all the risks that the game possesses.

And you can only do so much, I should say, at a time for the NFL to fully try to address the issue.

But I think the guardian caps are a good step.

As we talked about earlier in the presentation, kind of the macho attitude of the NFL, you do see very few of these players, I believe only a handful of them are actually wearing the guardian caps.

So like you said, it doesn't necessarily address the issue directly.

And it is viewed as a temporary band-aid because only so little players are actually wearing those guardian caps.

So it's nice to see.

It's nice that the NFL is actually allowing their players to have this option to wear these guardian caps because they do show that they are having an effect, a positive effect, especially in practices, I believe all the players wear them.

So the fact that they can wear them in the games is a good step.

Does it directly address the problem?

No, of course not.

If anyone has questions, feel free to just jump in and voice your questions, your thoughts.

Well, hey, I really enjoyed your presentation, everybody.

I have a couple of thoughts.

One was on your data that was related to the drop in football from 2020 to 2021.

Is that COVID related data?

Because any sport was going to be dropped during that period of time.

And I wanted to make sure in order to validate that you're seeing less people playing tackle and more young people playing flag, it would just seem that period of time that collect data would be, I don't know, a little sketchy.

But also on the political side of it, it's very much a catch 22 when you think about all the other sports that have had CTE involved in it.

It's complicated.

I was just talking with...

With CTE involved like volleyball or basketball or soccer where you're actually getting an impact on the brain.

If the state was going to just focus on one law for tackle football, how would that affect the other sports?

And then the other thing about CRCs, ethical decisions, I think always as a professional, we're always going to want to look at the best interest of the client or our patient.

But at the same time, we can maybe advocate as a professional association.

But I'm a little bit concerned that that would be overstepping or putting my value on my client when I think football isn't the best.



Just as much as putting my religion on somebody.

I can say this is what I think, but ultimately it's up to them to choose.

And so it is very difficult as a professional when you see somebody heading down a direction and you want to make a recommendation, but I don't necessarily think we can be fully responsible for the choices they make.

And that would go to their basic constitutional right.

In our country right now, we're a constitutional republic where they have the right to choose what they can do or what they don't want to do as we see in the families that are either pushing their child for football or pushing safety.

And so those are the things that were coming up in my mind as I was listening to the presentation and you can comment on any one of them.

Yeah, I can jump in.

I think one with the data on flag football versus tackle football, some of that definitely did kind of over, it was in the period of COVID-19 more or less.

But I think that the compelling thing about that is there was a pretty simultaneous in the same period, increase of flag football and a drop in tackle football.

I don't think there would be a perception that from a COVID-19 risk that tackle football would be safer.

I think it just reflects the fact that there's more of the concerns from the safety point of view.

I think it's interesting.

I think you make a lot of, I think, very compelling, interesting points about looking at this from are we putting our values and our clients?

I think that's always a question just in terms of any kind of public health laws we have.

I think back to the video we showed from Dr.

Amalo and kind of equating children, especially young children playing tackle football with child abuse.

We have child abuse laws, we have various laws, public health in various domains.

I guess the question is at what point do you not have any restrictions in terms of people's behavior and if one action of somebody is going to harm another person, when does the government have to step in and intervene versus do they just purely

give that choice in this case to parents to decide?

I think those are very difficult kind of political, philosophical questions.

I think that's perhaps why a lot of politicians as a noted don't really want to try to address this issue because it's so potentially confrontational and difficult to really know.

So I don't know.

I think when we get the reviews of this paper it'll be interesting to see.

We may have similar reactions and I think kind of questioning is there that kind of responsibility of our profession to look at this or not?

Does it kind of go outside our scope?

Austin, what are your thoughts on this?

I'm sorry if you can hear any noise coming from outside.

But no, yeah, I think to kind of touch on what you were saying, obviously going back to the first point about the statistics that Melissa referred to during that period right around COVID time, I would definitely say that there very well could have been an effect on the statistics based on the fact that it was during that COVID time so people weren't doing much outside or things like that.

But to Chuck's point, I believe that the statistics also showed kind of where tackle football had a drop in participation, flag football had a rise in participation.

So I don't really think COVID necessarily was an integral factor in people choosing to lean towards flag football during that time period.

So I would say that those statistics do hold some value still even regarding that it was during that COVID time period.

And then to the further point, like Chuck said, there's a lot of questions about what are the boundaries, how far would we go?

But I think the main point that we were trying to make is just as rehab counselors kind of just trying to do our best to keep others informed if they aren't about the risks.

If we are familiar, obviously having come from, like Chuck said earlier, different backgrounds coming from this program with the cognitive certificate and different things like that and working with individuals that might have brain injuries to just spread the word as much as we can, not necessarily pushing it on our clients or our students per se, but to inform colleagues, to inform people on campuses if we're working at the colleges of the risks of the sport.

That's kind of what I would have to say about it.

Well, I think that will probably close out for today.

Again, we really appreciate your time and thanks for being here and just have a great day.

So have a great weekend and good to see you all.

Bye bye.