

Call on concussion laws amid growing injury concern for female athletes.

Reported by Malaya Rodezno

New research has sparked discussions about whether concussion laws for females should be reviewed, as alarming differences in effects, higher rates and symptoms of concussion and sports-related injuries arise in female athletes.

Women suffer more sports-related injuries compared to men. According to Columbia University, women are at a greater risk for injury than their male counterparts. Females have a different gender makeup resulting in biomedical differences as well as smaller, thinner bones and the role of estrogen plays a key role in their development and maintenance.

The most common sports-related injury faced by women is an ATF Ligament Strain according to Simon Radley a physiotherapist at Essendon Football Club. Radley said, “Females generally have a larger Q angle, which does seem to increase the risk of injury for female athletes”. Women also have added motion to their hips and pelvis resulting in augmented injuries.

Former VFLW football player Julia McArdle and current player Alana Wenban have both experienced injuries that excluded them from playing AFL football.

McArdle completely ruptured her ATFL in her ankle and Wenban broke three of her ribs. However, they were rushed back into playing and didn’t go through an injury recovery procedure and eventually, redid the same injury.

Concussion is another key injury that has increased for females playing contact sports. McArdle has experienced three very bad concussions in the past seven seasons.

McArdle said, “I remember one concussion, where I couldn’t even stay awake in the car on the way home, I couldn’t stop crying, I had a headache for a good week, and I wasn’t able to go to work or see people”.

A concussion is a mild form of a traumatic brain injury caused by a bump, jolt or blow to the head. It affects male and female athletes very differently.

A study presented at the American Academy of Neurology’s annual meeting found that female athletes are 50% more likely to have sports-related concussions than male athletes.

Research shows that women are expected to suffer and experience worse symptoms of concussion than men. Like sports-related injuries, women’s bodies aren’t made to take massive hits with no consequences. Females have lower biomechanical threshold tolerance for head impacts with neck strength-to-head size ratios, hormones, and cerebral blood flow.

Although most female athletes are said to go to the doctors after a concussion compared to men, most local football clubs don't have access or the appropriate team to complete an HIA, which is a protocol that allows for a diagnosis of a concussion.

Registered Nurse Alana Wenban said, "Being a women's team in a male-dominated club, there were no ongoing trainers available to follow up with my injury".

The current concussion laws and regulations have all been based and made, particularly on the men's game.

Men have been playing AFL Football a lot longer than women have. The AFL originally started in 1860, with South Australia being the first club formed. Whilst AFLW only began a few years ago in 2016.

Wenban has had multiple concussions and at times was told to keep playing after massive concussions due to the discrepancy between coaches, players, and trainers regarding what the concussion protocol is for female athletes.

Currently in the United States of America, the concussion recovery protocol is different between genders. A female athlete would need to recover for 11 weeks, whilst a male athlete recovers for 7 weeks under their concussion protocol.

Physiotherapist Simon Radley agrees that there should be different concussion laws and protocols depending on gender as it's obvious that there is a fair discrepancy. He said, "If there is a difference in the recovery time from concussion, it probably does need to be addressed".

With the increasing number of girls and women playing contact sports the rules and recovery periods need to be reviewed said Radley. According to SGS Economics and Planning, '82 per cent of women aged 15 and over participate in sport across Australia'.

Reviewing concussion protocols and injury reports for female athletes could make a massive difference in managing participation levels for female athletes.

Images



Source: Matthew Phillip

Simon Radley, Coburg FC Head Coach instructs the senior women's team at training.



Source: Malaya Rodezno

Coburg Lions Women's team training on Wednesday night before upcoming round 1 on Saturday.



Source: Malaya Rodezno

Former VFLW Player Julia McArdle



Source: Malaya Rodezno

A young girl holds an AFL football.

Interviewees

Simon Radley

*AFL Sports Physio (Essendon FC)
& Coburg VAFA Women's Head Coach*
Ph: 0455 482 026

Julia McArdle

Former VFLW Football Player
Jmcmcardle@gmail.com
0478719391

Alana Wenban

*Registered Nurse at RMH &
Current Football Player*
alanawenban@hotmail.com

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