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SUMMARY

‘He (my coach) destroyed much of my self-esteem ... and I left Norwegian sport because of that episode.’ This quote is from a former elite female athlete who was sexually harassed by her coach. This text defines sexual harassment and abuse, reviews what we know about the nature and prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse in sport, and discusses what we can do to prevent its occurrence.

TAKE-HOME MESSAGES:

- In this text, we have explained and defined sexual harassment and abuse. We have further shown that sexual harassment and abuse occur in sport, and have presented risk factors and consequences. Finally, we have focused on prevention; every sports organisation should have a policy and a plan of action to prevent sexual harassment and abuse from occurring in their sport, and to deal with allegations that may arise. Codes of conduct and ethical guidelines binding on everyone involved in sport should also be developed.
- Unfortunately, the themes discussed here are often absent from education programs for coaches. We believe that the data presented in this text also strongly indicate that education for both athletes and support personnel is vitally important.



INTRODUCTION

Most people will agree that participation in sport is a very positive activity and that the sporting field is a safe arena. It is therefore difficult for people to believe that there are individuals in the sporting environment who harass and abuse athletes. But because sport is a mirror of society in many ways, we should not be so surprised; research over the past 20 years has shown that sexual harassment and abuse do occur in sport.

An example of sexual harassment is Peter Mueller's behaviour towards the Norwegian female athlete Maren Haugli. Mueller, the coach of the Norwegian national speed skating team, admitted saying to her at a dinner after an international competition in Berlin, 'I heard you are good at sucking cock? So are you?' Ms Haugli complained to the board of the Norwegian Skating Association and Mueller was subsequently fired.

Here is an example of abuse: In the city court of Kristiansand in Norway, a sports leader and coach was accused of having committed sexual assault against 27 young people aged 12–16 years. The coach was sentenced to four-and-a-half years in prison and banned from working with children. The sentencing statement included this text:

To obtain sexual contact and gratify his paedophilia, the defendant systematically exploited children who had great confidence [trust] in him. He cynically exploited his position as sports director and coach and the unique [position of] trust he had with the children, their families and the sports club.

In both these cases, the perpetrator held the position of coach. Evidence suggests that the coach is the most influential person in the youth sports environment, and we know from similar cases that the coach–athlete relationship can be a dangerous liaison. This is especially so because part of accepted sports behaviour is to show emotion when someone wins or loses, often expressed through physical body contact (embracing, kissing, hugging). Close body contact may also be involved when players are learning new movements and techniques. Therefore, openness with regard to this issue is vital, and the limits of acceptable behaviour should be discussed and agreed. Guidelines to prevent harassment and abuse should also be developed. However, as elsewhere in society, opinions may differ on what constitutes harassment and abuse in sport, and the best way to prevent them.

In this text, therefore, we will first look at definitions of sexual harassment and abuse, then present some findings from studies about sexual harassment and abuse in sport, and finally, examine what can be done to prevent sexual harassment and abuse.

WHAT IS MEANT BY SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL ABUSE?

Definitions of these concepts include the core elements that the behaviour experienced is unwanted or threatening, troublesome, insulting or offensive. In the Norwegian *Gender Equality Act*, sexual harassment is defined as 'unwanted sexual attention that is offensive to the object of such attention'. It is the end of the quote. Unwanted sexual attention refers to a wide range of verbal and nonverbal behaviours that are offensive and unwanted, and that are not reciprocated. It is therefore common to distinguish between verbal, nonverbal and physical sexual harassment. Verbal sexual harassment may include unwanted intimate questions relating to one's body, clothes or private life; 'jokes' with a sexual innuendo; and proposals or demands for sexual services or sexual relationships. Nonverbal sexual harassment might take the form of staring at people, or showing pictures of objects

with sexual allusions. Physical sexual harassment is unwanted or unnecessary physical contact of a sexual nature, such as 'pinching', pressing oneself onto the body of others, or attempting to kiss or caress another person. There is a difference between flirting and sexual harassment. Flirting implies that the attention offered is mutual and reciprocated, and is perceived as positive by both parties, in contrast to sexual harassment, which is *unwanted* sexual attention.

An important difference between definitions of sexual harassment and sexual abuse is that abuse is characterised by non-consensual sexual contact or acts. Further, abuse can involve a person being tricked, forced or coerced into a sexual act that they do not want, or to which they are insufficiently mature to consent. Abuse also implies that a perpetrator offends another person's rights. Attempted rape and rape are examples of sexual abuse. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC; <http://www.nspcc.org.uk>) in the United Kingdom defines sexual abuse in this way:

Sexual abuse involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities, including prostitution, whether or not the child is aware of what is happening. The activities may involve physical contact, including penetrative (e.g. rape, buggery or oral sex) or non-penetrative acts. They may include non-contact activities, such as involving children in looking at, or in the production of, sexual online images, watching sexual activities, or encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways

Behaviours that are characterised as sexual harassment may include abuse, depending on the age of the victim. Behaviours mentioned under physical sexual harassment that are experienced by children (in many countries this includes all young people up to 18 years of age) are examples. Thus, a grey zone exists in defining harassment and abuse, as does a continuum from sex discrimination through gender-based and sexual harassment to sexual abuse. However, making a distinction between harassment and abuse can be useful in trying to understand what sometimes happens between coaches and young female athletes.

'Grooming' is a tool that potential abusers may use to gain a position of trust (usually with a minor) from which to carry out the abuse. Grooming may continue for years, without the person who is the target of the attention being aware that an ever-stronger bond is being tied between themselves and the abuser. Finally, the person is caught in a kind of mental or emotional net and feels unable to refuse to comply with the abuser's sexual wishes and demands. Grooming and/or coercing someone for sexual abuse involve slowly gaining the trust of the person before systematically breaking down interpersonal barriers against sexual involvement. The process can initially appear quite innocent; for example, a coach offering rides home or other special privileges. Young athletes being groomed in this way can feel trapped into obedience; their compliance is assured or compelled by threats of being dropped from the team, or by the giving or withholding of privileges.

Research has shown that this spectrum of behaviour most commonly occurs between young athletes and older coaches or other people whom the athletes trust and whose relationship with the athlete is like that of parent and child.

Viewed from an international perspective, the legislative protection given to athletes and coaches varies greatly. According to the United Nations, 90 nation states have some form of legislation prohibiting sexual harassment; however, depending on the country in question, sports organisations may or may not be covered by these various laws. In most countries, the penal code applies to sexual abuse. In Norway, for example, the penal code applies to anyone who, by words or actions commits sexual abuse or other indecent behaviour: in a

public place; in the presence of, or in the proximity of, somebody who has not agreed to the acts or behaviour; or in the presence of, or in the proximity of, children under 16 years of age, or an individual of any age who is mentally disabled. The code also prohibits sexual acts associated with the abuse of one's position, either in a relationship of dependency or in a relationship of trust.

In legal terms, the penal code in the USA recognises two kinds of sexual harassment: *Quid Pro Quo* and Hostile Environment. *Quid pro quo* is a Latin legal term meaning 'what for what'. Applied to sexual harassment in sport, a quid pro quo relationship exists when benefits are granted or withheld depending on an athlete's willingness or refusal to submit to the sexual demands of a person in authority. A coach, for example, might drop an athlete from the team because the coach's sexual advances are refused. A hostile environment exists when a person's conduct is pervasive or severe enough to disturb an athlete and interfere with the ability to perform. A hostile environment can affect more than the targeted person—for example, a team member who witnesses repeated incidents, even if not directed at that person, might also be considered a victim of sexual harassment.

WHAT DO WE KNOW FROM RESEARCH ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE IN SPORT?

The first studies on sexual harassment and abuse in sport were published about 15 years ago, but very little research has been carried out in this field, either internationally or nationally. Given the relatively recent history of research in this area, it is unsurprising that a marked variety of approaches to the subject, both theoretical and methodological, are found. In addition to quantitative prevalence studies, qualitative studies have gathered descriptions of harassment and abuse experiences and their consequences. From these studies, risk factors have been described, and theoretical models and propositions grounded in athletes' experiences have been generated. The studies have primarily concerned former athletes who had been abused by their coaches, often when they were quite young (i.e. before or near puberty). Apparently, the most common perpetrators of sexual harassment and abuse in sport are male coaches and male athlete peers. Most of the published work on sexual harassment in sport has focused on men's harassment of women—the form most often reported—particularly that involving male coaches and female athletes.

Prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse in sport

We need to be aware of the difficulties in comparing data that attempt to map the prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse. This lack of true comparability arises from the various approaches adopted by researchers, such as differences in sampling procedures, methodological approaches, vocabulary and connotative meanings of questionnaire items, safeguards used to preserve anonymity and confidentiality of disclosures, and the type of statistical analyses. In addition, the extreme sensitivity of the subject itself probably leads to underreporting and contributes to the (often) poor response rates in these studies. To repeat: unless the same, or essentially similar, measurement methodologies have been used in different studies, comparing prevalence rates is difficult—either comparisons within the sports field or comparisons of the rates in sport with those in other areas of society, or society in general.

The prevalence of sexual harassment and abuse in sport is reported as between 19 and 57%. Many of the incidents described by respondents are classifiable as sexual

harassment, but some episodes of sexual abuse were reported. Information about sexual abuse only, however, is rarer. Although we don't have prevalence data on sexual abuse, we have some information from surveys, media reports, interviews with former athletes, and criminal court cases. A study among female sports students in the USA found that 19% of the female students surveyed had experienced sexual harassment; in the UK, 21% of female club athletes had experienced sexual harassment. In a study from Turkey, 200 of 356 sportswomen (56%) revealed that they had been sexually harassed in sport. A Danish study of sports science students found that 25% of respondents either knew about, or had themselves experienced, sexual harassment by the coach of a sports participant under the age of 18 years. Four of these respondents reported having been sexually abused.

In the first-ever national survey of sexual harassment and abuse in Canadian sport, a questionnaire was offered to 1200 of Canada's high-performance and recently retired Olympic athletes. Of these, 22% replied that they had had sexual intercourse with persons in positions of authority in sport, while 9% reported they had experienced *forced* sexual intercourse—been raped—with such persons. A screening questionnaire of 2118 Australian athletes showed that 31% of females reported experiencing sexual abuse at some time in their lives. Of these, 41% had been sexually abused within the sports environment. Both the Canadian and Australian surveys suffered from low response rates (22% and 19%, respectively). This raises questions about the extent of underreporting and bias in the data.

In Norway, to determine whether sexual harassment was a problem in the country's sports, a comprehensive survey on sexual harassment and abuse in sport was conducted. The sample consisted of athletes who were members of a junior, development, or senior national team. In the initial phase of the study, 660 elite female athletes, aged 15–39 years and from 56 sports disciplines, were surveyed. Two features distinguish this study from other studies, including other international studies: a very high response rate (87%) from the athletes, and an age-matched control group (response rate 73%). The control group of 785 women consisted of a representative sample of the Norwegian population. In the questionnaire for the control group, questions that applied to sport were replaced by questions related to education or work. The survey found no difference between the prevalence of sexual harassment experienced by athletes in a sports context (28%) and that experienced by the control group of women in an educational or workplace setting. Further, the sexual harassment apparently occurred in all the sports in the study. The authors concluded that 'sexual harassment is a societal problem and therefore also, as a consequence, a problem for Norwegian sport ... There is, however, no reason to conclude that sport in general is worse than other arenas.' (Fasting, Brackenridge, & Sundgot Borgen, 2000, p. 30)

The second phase of this Norwegian study conducted follow-up qualitative interviews with 25 of the athletes who had experienced sexual harassment. Of these women, 15 (60%) had participated in the Olympic Games, world championships or World Cup competitions. The interviews revealed that most of the female athletes were sexually harassed by male coaches. The following example of unwanted physical contact from a male coach was told by Mari. The incident took place when she was between 14 and 15 years of age:

... when we didn't perform well, then the punishment was that we should sit on his lap. I remember I thought it was disgusting. He touched us and was really very disgusting. I don't understand today why we accepted it at all. We had a drill where we had to sprint, and the one who came last had to sit on his lap, so everyone was running like hell ... (Fasting, Brackenridge, & Walseth, 2002, p. 42)

The likelihood of being harassed increases with performance level. A study in the Czech Republic found 45% of participants had experienced sexual harassment in a sports setting. The probability of being harassed by someone inside the sport increased from 33% for those playing the sport purely for the exercise to 55% for athletes at the elite level.

A survey comparing the incidence of sexual harassment among sports students in three European countries—the Czech Republic, Greece and Norway—found that 34% of these students had experienced sexually harassing behaviour from someone in sport. Behaviour seen as sexual harassment was reported far more often in the Czech Republic (42%) and Greece (44%) than in Norway (24%). This study measured sexual harassment in exactly the same way in all three countries. Therefore, the authors attributed the marked differences in the prevalence of sexually harassing behaviour to differences in social structures between the three countries; that is, differences in gender hierarchy in society at large, in gender equality laws, and in the severity and rigour of enforcing laws prohibiting sexual harassment within and outside sports.

The studies discussed here indicate that sexual harassment and abuse occur most frequently in locker rooms, at sports arenas, when travelling to venues for playing 'away games', at the home or in the car of the coach, and associated with social arrangements.

Consequences of sexual harassment and abuse

The impact of sexual harassment and abuse can be serious, first and foremost for the athlete, but also for the sport itself, because clubs and sports associations may lose both members and sponsors. For athletes, studies have shown many consequences of exposure to sexual harassment or abuse: anxiety, fear, a sense of vulnerability and helplessness, fear of rape, decreased ability to concentrate, poor sports performance, depression, lower self-esteem, negative effects on family life, absence from work or studies, feelings of guilt and shame, negative effects on social activities, and the premature end of their sporting career. Other negative health consequences that have been reported are physical complaints such as headaches, sleep disturbance, weight loss or gain, gastrointestinal disturbances and nausea, fatigue, and neck and back pain.

Unfortunately, athletes frequently don't report incidents of sexual harassment and abuse, as reported in the Norwegian study discussed above. In the Canadian study, some of the reasons given for a reluctance to report harassment were fear of being dropped from the team; fear of not being believed; feeling ashamed or embarrassed; loyalty to the coach or team; and not knowing whom to talk to. Coaches must understand the severe impact of sexually harassing behaviours. Similarly, it is extremely important that athletes report harassment or abusive behaviour, and, if athletes or coaches see these behaviours occurring, they must report the incidents.

Power relationships: Coaches as perpetrators of sexual harassment and abuse

Apart from some information from media reports, court reports and interviews with athletes, we have little direct knowledge of the psychological profile of the abusive or harassing coach, that is, what leads them to commit these offences. Analyses of accounts of sexual exploitation in sport indicate that perpetrators' feelings of power and control arise from feelings of confidence and superiority. According to these studies, sexually abusive coaches have good social skills, high visibility, popularity, and a high level of sexual confidence. Popular media representations of harassing coaches also suggest that not only do they

have a reputation for success, but often they also are regarded as 'very nice people'. A study of Norwegian court reports of cases in which perpetrators had been sentenced for sexual abuse in sport found that in 11 of 15 cases the perpetrators had been coaching their victims. Further, all perpetrators were men, the youngest 19 years old and the oldest 58 years. The civil status of the perpetrators varied; none was a fulltime coach. The authors concluded that no clear profile of a perpetrator could be drawn.

Most perpetrators of sexual abuse and sexual harassment in sport never face the criminal justice system because of victims' fears of reprisals, 'de-selection' (being barred from further training or advancement in their sport), or not being taken seriously. However, we might learn more about these perpetrators by listening to those whom they have abused or harassed. From the interviews with the Norwegian elite female athletes who had been sexually harassed by their coaches, three main types of offending sports coaches emerged: (a) the Flirting–Charming Coach; (b) the Seductive Coach; and (c) the Authoritarian Coach. The behaviour of the Flirting–Charming coach is characterised by constant flirting, joking, trying to touch, and so on. The behaviour of the Seductive Coach is characterised by more extreme behaviour and trying to 'hit on' everyone. Authoritarian Coaches, in addition to displaying and using their power, are also characterised by psychological (behavioural) and/or psychiatric (mental illness) problems, and often have a degrading and negative view of women in general. This study, however, concluded that rather than being one type only (i.e. conforming to a single pattern), sexually harassing coaches may select from a repertoire of several harassment scripts that vary according to the situation.

The European study mentioned earlier found that the prevalence of sexual harassment was significantly higher among female athletes who had experienced an authoritarian type of coaching than among athletes who lacked such an experience. Authoritarian coaching behaviour is characterised by negative feedback, directive communication, coach-led decision making, task-centred role orientation and goal-oriented performance.

In most cases, sexual harassment and sexual abuse are expressions of abuse of power. Examples of power relations in sports include the power that people in the support network always have in relation to athletes: this especially applies to the coach, who can help young athletes achieve their sporting goals. This type of trust and power relationship is often called an 'expert' or 'power of position' relationship, which can be exploited and lead to sexual harassment and abuse. Therefore, coaches should be aware of this power difference between themselves and their athletes; they should realise that the athletes are dependent on them and see them as the experts, and usually have complete trust in them. If misunderstood, this power imbalance can lead to exploitative sexual relationships with athletes. The same proposition is argued in a Canadian study that found coaches' power contributes to athletes' risk of abuse.

PREVENTION

In itself, an open, sound and safe sporting environment will give some measure of protection against harassment and abuse, and also against false accusations. To maintain and strengthen a sound sporting environment, the management of a sporting organisation must agree on what constitutes a sound environment. Questions of importance include: How should club members interact with one another? What expectations and requirements should be placed on parents, coaches and managers? How should the club be managed? All sports should have a set of ethical guidelines in which the boundaries for acceptable

behaviour are made apparent. The role of the coach is very important here, because she or he is often the person spending the most time with the athletes, and simultaneously acts as their role model. Ethical guidelines should therefore be referenced in the employment contracts of coaches. Procuring a police certification of good conduct before hiring a coach is also an important option.

During the past 15 years, countries such as the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the UK, Norway and the Netherlands, amongst others, have developed policies and codes of practice to prevent sexual harassment and abuse in sport. But, in many countries worldwide, sexual harassment and abuse in sport is ignored as an important issue. However, since 2006, this issue has been a concern for the International Olympic Committee (IOC; <http://www.olympic.org/>). Consequently, in 2007 the committee adopted a consensus statement on sexual harassment and abuse. The statement ends with these recommendations, directed towards all sports organisations:

1. Develop policies and procedures for the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse.
2. Monitor the implementation of these policies and procedures.
3. Evaluate the impact of these policies in identifying and reducing sexual harassment and abuse.
4. Develop an education and training program on sexual harassment and abuse in their sport(s).
5. Promote and exemplify equitable, respectful and ethical leadership.
6. Foster strong partnerships with parents and carers in the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse.
7. Promote and support scientific research on these issues.

The question is how—and even whether—the IOC will effectively communicate this ideal to the national Olympic committees and the international sports federations. Further, will these organisations be willing to follow up these recommendations in practice? However, the IOC is implementing two projects: it is developing a model of best practice for athlete protection, and an educational program, via an interactive online platform, on the athlete's right to safe sport. The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee (NIF) decided in March 2008 that everyone (whether unpaid volunteers or paid staff) working with children must have police clearance concerning sexual abuse of children. This law was implemented in January 2009 and applies to all levels in the organisation. The NIF has also created a telephone hotline that members of sports teams can call at any time for advice and guidance. Also, in 2011 the committee adopted the following guidelines, which apply to all Norwegian sports, to prevent sexual harassment and abuse:

1. Treat everyone with respect, and refrain from all forms of communication, action or behaviour that may be perceived as offensive.
2. Avoid body contact that may be perceived as unwanted.
3. Avoid all types of verbal intimacy that may be perceived as sexually charged.
4. Avoid expressions, jokes and opinions that relate to the athlete's gender or sexual orientation in a negative way.
5. Seek to have both sexes represented in the support network.
6. Avoid contact with the athletes in private spaces unless there are several persons present, or in agreement with parents/guardians or the sports management.

7. Show respect for the athletes', coaches' and leaders' private life.
8. Avoid dual relationships. If a reciprocal relationship is established, the situation should be raised and clarified openly in the milieu.
9. Do not offer any form of reward with the purpose of demanding or anticipating sexual services in return.
10. Take action and give notice if a breach of these rules is experienced.

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