

UNICEF
Innocenti Research Centre

PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE IN SPORT

A REVIEW WITH A FOCUS ON INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES

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THE UNICEF INNOCENTI RESEARCH CENTRE

The UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence, Italy, was established in 1988 to strengthen the research capability of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and to support its advocacy for children worldwide. The Centre (formally known as the International Child Development Centre) helps to identify and research current and future areas of UNICEF's work. Its prime objectives are to improve international understanding of issues relating to children's rights and to help facilitate the full implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in all countries.

The Centre's publications are contributions to a global debate on child rights issues and include a wide range of opinions. For that reason, the Centre may produce publications that do not necessarily reflect UNICEF policies or approaches on some topics. The views expressed are those of the authors and are published by the Centre in order to stimulate further dialogue on child rights.

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The report draws together a rich set of material on violence in sport and related issues. Research was completed at the end of 2007; therefore, more recent developments on the issue of violence against children in sport have not been included. As explored in further detail in the Annex, a significant number of materials from diverse sources were gathered and analysed in the production of this report. Nevertheless, one of the study's limitations is that it draws primarily on English-language references. In addition, the search strategy yielded a preponderance of published materials from industrialized Western countries. As stated in the study, there are large gaps in the knowledge base on violence against children in sport in Africa (North and sub-Saharan Africa), Asia, Central and Eastern Europe, and Latin America and the Caribbean. These gaps, and others mentioned in the report, must be addressed so that we may have a more complete understanding of the full dimensions of the issue and can thus better protect children in sport.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNICEF has long recognized that there is great value in children's sport and play, and has been a consistent proponent of these activities in its international development and child protection work. Health, educational achievement and social benefits are just some of the many desirable outcomes associated with organized physical activity. In line with the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNICEF has also been a strong advocate of children's right to leisure and play and to have their voices heard in the planning and delivery of the sport activities in which they are involved.

During recent years, however, it has become evident that sport is not always a safe space for children, and that the same types of violence and abuse sometimes found in families and communities can also occur in sport and play programmes. Child athletes are rarely consulted about their sporting experiences, and awareness of and education on child protection issues among sport teachers, coaches and other stakeholders is too often lacking. Overall, appropriate structures and policies need to be developed for preventing, reporting and responding appropriately to violence in children's sport.

In recognition of this, the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre commissioned a review of the available empirical research and policy initiatives on this subject. The research resulted in a wealth of information, now published in this report. 'Protecting Children from Violence in Sport: A review with a focus on industrialized countries' defines the many aspects of the issue, provides examples of both good and poor practice, and makes suggestions for sport organizations to assist them in their violence prevention work. In particular, the study recommends improvements in:

- Data collection and knowledge generation about violence to children in sport
- Development of structures and systems for eliminating and preventing violence to children in sport
- Education, awareness-raising and training on this subject
- Promotion of ethical guidelines and codes of conduct as part of the prevention system.

It is anticipated that by addressing these gaps, significant improvements will be realized for the promotion and protection of the rights of children in sport.



1 INTRODUCTION

With regard to young athletes and in the spirit of article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, coaches, volunteers and professionals in sports are required to “ensure that sport is practised in a culture of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, friendship and fair play among all people.”

– Paulo David, *Human Rights in Youth Sport: A critical review of children’s rights in competitive sports, 2005*

Why Sport Matters

Children love to play: through play they learn social and physical skills, tolerance, discipline and respect for others¹ (see Box 1.1 below). Millions of children worldwide take part in some form of organized sport each week. Millions more participate informally in street games, spontaneous play sessions and casual ‘kick-about’ with their friends.

BOX 1.1 WHAT CHILDREN LIKE ABOUT SPORT

- “Sport’s really good ‘cos it gets you active and it puts you into the community more.” (Boy)
- “It’s not boring, it’s fun.” (Boy)
- “I like playing with my mates...and while I’m playing I get to learn as well.” (Girl)
- “It keeps you fit and it’s really enjoyable.” (Boy)
- “Setting your own goals and making friends.” (Boy)
- “You get the exhilaration from competing against everyone else.” (Girl)
- “It takes up most of my life.” (Boy)
- “I’ve made a lot of good friends playing sport.” (Boy)
- “We don’t mind whether we win or lose, it’s just playing that counts.” (Girl)
- “I really get loads of enjoyment out of it.” (Boy)

Sources:

With the exception of the final quotation, all the voices of children in this box have been taken from *Our Voice in Sport*, DVD, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Child Protection in Sport Unit, United Kingdom, 21 February 2006. The final quotation is from *Child Protection Conference*, CD-ROM, The Football Association, United Kingdom, October 2001.

As well as being a favourite childhood pursuit, sport contributes billions of dollars each year to the world economy.² Because of its multiple benefits, cultural significance and popularity, sport is recognized by governments as an important policy priority. It has been adopted by politicians as a major tool for the pursuit of a wide range of social, cultural and political objectives, including:

- *Health and well-being* – reducing childhood obesity, cardiac disease and type 2 diabetes, and promoting physical activity;³
- *Social inclusion* – promoting gender equity and religious and cultural tolerance;⁴
- *Education and personal and social development* – learning about leadership and self-esteem and reducing teenage pregnancy;⁵
- *Crime reduction*;⁶
- *Peace and social cohesion* – reconstructing war-torn and damaged communities.⁷

For the same reasons, many of the world’s industrialized nations, and multilateral organizations such as UNICEF, have adopted sport as a tool for their development aid programmes. The United Nations, including UNICEF, has long engaged with sporting events and celebrities to increase awareness and raise funds for its work, but it began to use sport more systematically in the early 2000s⁸ (also see Box 1.2, page 2). Sport is regarded by the international community as a powerful tool for achieving all the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed upon at the United Nations Millennium Summit in September 2000. Sport is thus conceived as a valuable vehicle for achieving international goals.

UNICEF’s country offices are also taking steps to ensure that a comprehensive approach to child protection is an integral component of all sport-related programmes supported by the organization, including Right to Play International and Sports for Development and Peace. Strategies include capacity-building among teachers and coaches on understanding and promoting child protection, and the inclusion of child protection indicators in programme monitoring. Non-discrimination and the inclusion of girls and children with disabilities are other essential components of UNICEF’s work towards the fulfilment of children’s rights.

In 2006, an international group of researchers, policy-makers and advocates of harassment-free sport met at the International Olympic Committee (IOC) headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland, at the request of the IOC Medical Commission. Their purpose was to produce the Consensus Statement

BOX 1.2 LANDMARKS IN THE HISTORY OF SPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT, 2000-2008

- 2000 United Nations Millennium Summit recognizes the power of sport and its values.
- 2001 Adolf Ogi is appointed the first Special Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Sport for Development and Peace.
- 2002 Following the United Nations Special Session on Children, Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan, convenes an Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport for Development and Peace to review activities involving sport within the United Nations system. The non-governmental organization Right to Play, headed by then UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador and Olympic medallist Johann Olav Koss, becomes the Secretariat of the Task Force.
- 2003 The book *Sport for Development and Peace: Towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals* is published by the Task Force. It underlines the power of sport for advancing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- A global conference on sport for development is held at Magglingen (Switzerland), hosted by the Governments of Switzerland and the Netherlands, bringing together delegates from a wide range of organizations in the private, public and not-for-profit sectors. The Magglingen Declaration 2003 is adopted.
- The United Nations General Assembly adopts a Resolution on the role of sport as a means to promote health, education, development and peace. The Resolution designates 2005 as the International Year for Sport and Physical Education.
- 2004 The United Nations Office of Sport for Development and Peace opens to support the work of the Special Adviser for a two-year period.
- 2005 The organization Right to Play and the New York Office of Sport for Development and Peace launch the Sport For Development and Peace International Working Group, a four-year initiative designed to engage governments, United Nations agencies and civil society in developing practical recommendations for integrating Sport for Development and Peace into domestic and international development policies and programmes linked to the pursuit of the MDGs.
- Young men and women leaders from more than 40 African countries unanimously endorse the International Year of Sport and Physical Education 2005 at the second Pan-African Youth Leadership Summit in Ifrane (Morocco). The United Nations 2005 World Summit underlines the role of sport in peace and development and an International Conference on Sport and Peace is held in Moscow under the aegis of the United Nations, with the backing of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).
- The International Year of Sport and Physical Education culminates in the 2nd Magglingen Conference on Sport and Development that endorses the *Magglingen Call to Action 2005*. This sets out 10 practical sport-related actions to help achieve the MDGs.
- 2007 In December, the term of Adolf Ogi, the first Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace, ends.
- 2008 On 18 March, Wilfried Lemke of Germany is appointed the second Special Adviser on Sport for Development and Peace.

Source:

The text in this box was excerpted from UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 'UNICEF and Sport: The mixed blessings of success', unpublished report on sport and international development, UNICEF IRC, Florence, 2007.

on Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport, which was adopted by the Committee's Executive Board in February 2007.⁹ In November 2007, the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre hosted a meeting on sport and violence. Following the rich discussion and exchange of ideas during the consultation, and with the IOC Consensus Statement providing an impetus, UNICEF IRC decided to pursue a research agenda on violence against children in sport. The findings of the research are now presented in this UNICEF IRC study.

Defining Violence against Children in Sport

In December 2001, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 56/138, which requested the Secretary-General to commission an in-depth study of violence against children and to propose recommendations for action for consideration by the Member States. Conducted by the independent expert and human rights lawyer Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, and supported by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO), the *World Report on Violence against Children* was published in late 2006. The report was the "outcome of the first comprehensive global attempt to describe the scale of all forms of violence against children and its impact,"¹⁰ and its fundamental premise is that "no violence against girls or boys is justifiable, and that all violence against them is preventable."¹¹

The *World Report on Violence against Children* was intended to be part of a "living process" aimed towards enforcing current law, raising awareness and public education, and integrating violence prevention into all national planning processes.¹² The research process was genuinely participatory and included field visits, regional, subregional and national meetings, and consultations with children during all stages. Data were gathered from all parts of the world: 136 countries – representing all regions – returned questionnaires. Multidisciplinary research centres and agencies and many individual experts were consulted. Altogether, well over 1,000 supporting documents were analysed. But very little information about violence against children in sport was gleaned in the *World Report*,¹³ despite the comprehensive search of sources and a growing published evidence base about the different forms of violence in sport.

UNICEF promotes sport as a major programming vehicle for development for peace. As the world's leading agency for children, it also recognizes the need to focus on child protection and anti-violence measures within sport itself. This report reviews the evidence about violence against children in sport and intends to identify gaps in knowledge that can be pursued through future research. It is every child's right to play safely and it is only through identifying and eradicating the worst in sport that it can be used safely to help all children achieve their best.

BOX 1.3 DEFINITION OF VIOLENCE

This study adopts the definition of violence used in article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child – "all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child." It also draws on the definition provided by the World Health Organization in the 2002 *World Report on Violence and Health*: "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."

In this study, violence is adopted as the most comprehensive term because it encompasses physical, sexual and psychological forms of maltreatment, including abuse and assault.

BOX 1.4 DEFINITION OF SPORT

Sport means different things to different people. In this study, sport is defined as all forms of physical activity that contribute to physical fitness, mental well-being and social interaction. These include play, recreation, casual, organized or competitive sport, and indigenous sports or games. This study, however, focuses on children's involvement in organized sport.

Sport involves rules or customs and sometimes competition. Play is any physical activity that is fun and participatory. It is often unstructured and free from adult direction. Recreation is more organized than play and generally entails physically active leisure activities.

Sport has become a universal language representing fun, friendship, discipline and achievement, and it seems almost inconceivable that it should be tainted by violence. But sport is not immune to the problems of violence that beset all spheres of life – the family, workplace, school and community. As this report shows, the evidence of violence against children in sport is undeniable, but much additional research is needed.

A recurring theme in the literature on young people in sport has been the need to define young athletes in a way that is appropriate to their needs, as children first and athletes second. Too often, however, children

with exceptional athletic potential are treated as adults. This has serious consequences for the realization of their human rights and their access to legal processes and mechanisms of protection and defence – which might be more accessible to them in non-sporting contexts.

In the context of sport, violence may be expressed in many ways. Some of these include:

- Psychological degradation or humiliation based on gender, body shape or performance
- Undue pressure on young athletes to achieve high performance
- Sex required as a prerequisite for team selection or privileges
- Physically injurious or sexually degrading initiation (hazing) rituals
- Nutrition and weight loss regimes that lead to eating disorders such as anorexia or other health problems
- Beatings and other forms of physical punishment as a spur to improved performance
- Injury through forced risk-taking in extreme environments
- Doping or the use of performance-enhancing substances
- Peer pressure to use alcohol or addictive substances
- Requiring young athletes to play when injured
- Use of physical exercise as a punishment
- Denial of sufficient rest and care.¹⁴

Age and Gender Distinctions in Competitive Sport

In some countries, the terms ‘youth’ or ‘young people’ are used to describe teenage children. Although the “evolving capacities of the child” are acknowledged in article 5 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, every person under 18 years of age is entitled to the full range of human rights and protection established in the Convention, including when engaging in sports. Competitive sporting careers, however, sometimes peak during childhood. In some sports, children as young as 12 or 13 may reach the highest levels of competitive performance; in others, full athletic maturity may come late in adulthood. What counts as ‘junior’ in one sport might be considered ‘senior’ in another.

This means that legal and sporting age definitions are not necessarily the same, so the distinction between an adult and a child is often confused in sport. Child athletes,¹⁵ especially if very talented and performing at a high level, may be treated as adults and given adult responsibilities, or they may be expected to behave as if they were above the age of consent. In such circumstances, it is easy to assume that the child does not need adult protection. As a consequence, violence against children may be overlooked, go unrecognized or be excused.

Recognition of this issue gave rise to the concept of ‘sport age’, which refers to sport-specific athletic development.¹⁶ This concept can help identify the developmental stages of young athletes in terms of their athletic, rather than chronological, maturity.

Sport is a gendered experience, one that may reinforce gender disparities and the gender order, or power relationships between females and males in society. Although girls and boys may sometimes play together in gender-mixed activities, in organized sport girls often play with and compete against girls, and boys play with and compete against boys. Furthermore, gender differences can easily become divisive, with boys often seen as having superior athletic skills compared to girls.¹⁷

Human Rights and Protecting Children from Violence in Sport

The Convention on the Rights of the Child provides the overarching framework that can guide those who provide and supervise sport for children.¹⁸ The Convention recognizes the human rights of children and is without doubt the most powerful child rights instrument. It has been further strengthened by its Optional Protocols on children in armed conflict and on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography.

The Convention acknowledges the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in realizing children’s rights. This is important for sport because there are numerous sport-focused NGOs, many of which work closely with governments. The Convention is monitored through a number of mechanisms, chiefly the Committee on the Rights of the Child. In addition to its mandate to review States’ efforts to implement the Convention, the Committee publishes interpretations of the content of human rights provisions in the form of General Comments on thematic issues. Several of the General Comments discuss the issue of children in sport, for example the inclusion of children with disabilities and ensuring that they can compete fairly and safely; the positive impact of peer education and proper role models; and ensuring that children are consulted about the accessibility and appropriateness of play and recreation facilities.¹⁹

The human rights and sport communities have only recently come together. The long history of sport as nominally apolitical has helped guard its autonomy. But this isolation has also precluded oversight of a range of practices that violate the rights of individual athletes and has allowed such practices to continue. In the academic world, rights advocates in sport have found their interests marginalized relative to more ‘mainstream’ research on sport performance enhancement. The development of human rights frameworks and anti-violence research within sport began largely due to the efforts of sport ethicists and

BOX 1.5 THE CHILD'S RIGHT TO PLAY

The Convention on the Rights of the Child sets forth the child's right to play in article 31, para. 1: "States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts." It further requires States to "encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity."

lawyers and to feminist sport sociologists.²⁰ Within this broad academic agenda, special consideration has been given to the rights of athletes with disabilities and the implications of athletes' rights for sport psychologists.²¹ To date, this work has lacked a particular focus on children, although some research focusing on the rights of children in sport is available.²²

Play and informal sports have long been seen as vital for healthy child development. There has been a drift, however, towards professionalism in competitive sport, which has become increasingly commercialized. This has been seen as associated with a loss of amateur values such as involvement in sports for pleasure and satisfaction, rather than for compensation or for winning at all costs. Arguably, the turning point for children's rights in sport came with the emergence of the 'elite child athlete' in the 1970s, epitomized by the perfect score of 14-year-old Nadia Comaneci in the gymnastics competition during the 1976 Olympic games.²³ The informality of street games and play has been taken over by youth sport regimes that are increasingly organized and controlled by adults aiming to maximize competitive success.

As part of this process, some child athletes have been put under tremendous pressure to succeed and their rights have frequently been compromised.

Early specialization in sport has become almost a necessity for any individual seeking international athletic success.²⁴ Conventional wisdom in sport science now proposes that to reach elite skill levels, 10 years or 10,000 hours of deliberate practice are required.²⁵ Countries that are serious about sporting success have adopted various forms of talent identification and schemes for long-term development of athletes, many of which are imposed on sport agencies as formal criteria in order to receive state funding.²⁶

Evidence of overtraining, abuse, burnout, dropout and exploitation of child athletes has prompted a number of academics, concerned parents and former athletes to speak out against severe training regimes and to call for investigations into the balance between individual rights and adult and state responsibilities in sport.²⁷ In short, the issue was whether children and young people in sports were regarded as athletes first and children second.²⁸ At the same time, sport has been embraced by the international development community as a seemingly ideal vehicle to promote its objectives with regard to peace, reconciliation and capacity-building.²⁹ There is no shortage of anecdotal evidence of violence against children in sport in peace and reconciliation, and in development settings.³⁰ Action should proceed on the basis of knowledge, and policies must be based on evidence. Thus, as far as possible, this report presents an overview of what is known about violence and violence prevention in the context of children's sport.



2 EVIDENCE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN IN SPORT

“While police are the authority figures most often mentioned in relation to community violence against children, it is clear that many other people with responsibility to supervise or defend children regularly abuse the trust implicit in their positions. These include sports coaches, religious authorities, youth club workers, and teachers.”

– Paulo Sérgio Pinheiro, *World Report on Violence against Children, 2006*

Where Are the Children?

Despite the emphasis on children and youth in much contemporary sport policy at the national and international level, children’s experiences are often missing from sport research. This may be due to the many ethical and research design issues involved in studies with, on and for children, especially for those undertaking sports science investigations.¹ With some notable exceptions,² where children are the source of data they are usually silent partners in the research and are afforded no power.³ This ‘absence’ in the face of more powerful actors (researchers, coaches, parents and adult athletes) renders the child little more than an athletic machine.

Social and economic deprivation clearly affects children’s engagement in sport.⁴ It is known, for example, that children who have suffered violence and maltreatment are less likely to participate in organized team sport. Other factors such as ethnic group, culture and gender also influence children’s experiences of sport, especially their experiences of discrimination and violence in sport. The available literature on harmful practices in children’s sport, summarized below, hints at the extent of abuse. Some more extreme examples from media reports are presented in Box 2.1 (*page 8*).

Measuring the prevalence of violence is a controversial and complex matter. The material reviewed for this report was uneven in its coverage of children in sport; research designs were often found to be weak, and data about children were either missing or incomplete. This study aims to identify gaps in knowledge about violence to child athletes, which can then spur further research and action.

Estimating the Prevalence of Violence against Children in Sport

As yet, there is only meagre assessment of the prevalence, scale or depth of violence against children in sport, and of the consequences for their well-being.

For a host of reasons, measuring the prevalence of violence and related behaviours is difficult. First, it is a sensitive subject, and many children who have experienced violence, as well as most perpetrators, are reluctant to discuss or report on the issue. Second, with little legal, policy or academic agreement about what constitutes violence against children, definitions and age boundaries vary between countries. Third, child athletes, because they are less powerful than adults, may be hesitant to report problems. Those who do speak out may face security risks or other negative consequences. Fourth, it is difficult to compare studies across cultures because of differences in definition, sampling, ethics and consent, and in measuring under-reporting and non-response. Finally, while ethical research that ensures children’s consent can be conducted, such consent must be informed and the process ongoing rather than a one-off event. This is not always evident from the studies being reviewed. Further, conducting ethical research with children – including child athletes – also means ensuring their freedom to refuse to participate and to withdraw at any time. Whether this has been done in a particular study is not always self-evident.

Establishing validity and reliability is as difficult in researching violence as in any other type of social research.⁵ Some studies adopt proxy measures to assess prevalence, such as the number of violence-related hospital visits by children, or the number of court convictions for violence against children. But such measures are imprecise and often underestimate the true scale of violence. Longitudinal studies are the most accurate if they include trends, but they are expensive and thus rarely undertaken. Finding accurate tools with which to measure the prevalence of child violence is thus a huge challenge to the research and policy communities.

Research on violence in sport suffers the same limitations as does research on violence in other areas. Many of the studies reported below do not distinguish, for example, between grades of violent behaviour (such as harassment, physical injury or sexual abuse); some do not differentiate between child athletes (under 18 years old) and adult athletes; some use legal definitions while others adopt everyday norms as threshold measures;⁶ and some do not differentiate on the basis of gender.

Sport psychologists and sociologists approach the study of violence against children from different perspectives and thus adopt different methods and measures of what counts as violence. Some

BOX 2.1 MEDIA REPORTS OF HARMFUL PRACTICES IN CHILDREN'S SPORT

Sumo wrestling, Japan: Death in suspicious circumstances of a 17-year-old wrestler – The boy's stable initially said he "died from a heart attack after rigorous training. But it was revealed that the teenager appeared to have sustained as yet unexplained injuries – including cigarette burns – and that he had run away from the stable at least once."ⁱ

Cricket, India: Harassment and sexual exploitation of female athletes – In July 2009, the manager of an Indian women's cricket team made headlines after several women players complained of sexual harassment and nepotism. They also accused him of sending lewd SMSs [Short Message Service texts]. The government of Andhra Pradesh State ordered an inquiry after a case was registered against him with the police based on the complaint of a woman cricketer.ⁱⁱ

Soccer, United States: Child abuse in youth sport – "The arrest of a football player's father in the on-field assault Saturday of a 13-year-old player on the opposing team is the latest sign that youth sports programs must refocus if they are to continue to serve children, observers say." The man, a 36-year-old assistant coach, was subsequently fired from his job, and banned for life from coaching youth football for the Delta Valley League.ⁱⁱⁱ He was initially booked on a felony charge, but was later charged with misdemeanor child abuse.

Bull fighting, Mexico: Child matador dies after being gored by 900 lb bull – "With no minimum age for matadors, the country has children as young as 10 picking up the sword... Rafita is only 10 years old and weighs 80 lbs. [He] is thought to be the youngest torero, or bullfighter, in the world. He is also one of the most popular in Mexico. Together with a handful of other child stars Rafita has reawakened interest in bullfighting when it looked headed for obscurity in Mexico... The children have engendered an impassioned debate over whether bullfighting is a noble drama that preserves Mexican heritage or a barbaric spectacle.... The argument got louder...after a Spanish child torero, Jairo Miguel Sánchez, 14, was gored by a 900 lb. bull at an Aguascalientes festival. A horn punctured his lung and plunged near his heart."^{iv}

Running, China: Girl Runs 2,000 Miles – "An eight-year-old girl has run over 2,000 miles to celebrate the 2008 Olympics. Zhang Huimin's father has been accused of child abuse, but he has denied the claims, saying she never complained of tiredness."^v

Coaching, Israel: Instructor jailed for abusing several children – "Nazareth District Court... sentenced a sports instructor to 14 years in prison and three additional years probation for sexually and physically abusing the children and teens he had been instructing. The 28-year-old instructor had directed a program in which he supervised teenage counselors and coached children as young as five years old. The indictment included 13 counts of sexual and physical abuse against 11 of the children that had been under his supervision. The presiding judges...wrote in the verdict that 'in the indictment, different acts are described, including stroking the victims' private body parts, kissing them on the mouth and the behind... all of which the victims resisted'.... The victims had been abused for a period of up to two and a half years."^{vi}

Notes

ⁱ McCurry, Justin, 'Last of the Sumo – Japanese youth turn their backs on the gruelling sport of emperors', *The Guardian*, 3 July 2007.

ⁱⁱ Singh, Prabhjot, 'Sports Not 'Healthy' for Girls? Sexual exploitation of women athletes is rampant', *The Tribune*, Online Edition, Chandigarh, India, 24 December 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Toppo, Greg, 'Image of Youth Sports Takes another Hit', *USA Today*, 5 September 2006. available at http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2006-09-05-football-assault_x.htm; and 'Football Coach who Tackled Kid gets Fired', <http://nbcsports.msnbc.com/id/14681867/>, both accessed 13 March 2010.

^{iv} Padgett, Tim 'Postcard: Mexico', *Time*, 2007.

^v SKY News, '8 Year Old Girl Runs 2,000 Miles across China', 28 August 2007, <http://beta.news.sky.com/skynews/video/UK-News?videoSourceID=1281575&videoCategory=UK+News>, accessed 24 March 2010.

^{vi} Ashkenazi, Eli, 'Sports Instructor Sentenced to 14 Years in Jail for Abusing 11 Children', *Haaretz.com*, 12 December 2006, www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/800131.html, accessed 13 March 2010.

psychology research measures violence as a one-off event or perhaps a series of events (such as the number of fouls in a game, or the number of red or yellow cards issued by a referee), but this can also mask its true prevalence. Sociologists might argue that violence arises from a (social) process whereby people with authority exercise unequal power over those without authority. This might help explain the structural causes of violence, but steps still need to be taken to bring perpetrators to account and to provide appropriate support to affected children. As yet, no standardized scales exist for measuring violence against children in sport.

Street play and other forms of adult-free recreation may be the only situations in which children have autonomy over their sport (although even then, they are often being closely observed by parents or other caregivers). In contrast, children in organized, competitive sport usually lack authority; they are excluded from decision-making and may have their voices silenced by coaches, assertive parents or caregivers, or by senior athletes.⁷ In these instances, participation in sport is therefore a *physical* but not a *political* right. As a consequence, children are rarely allowed to shape their own competitive sporting experiences and may be subjected to violence if they fail to comply with the wishes of sport authority figures. This exclusion from the right to participation as defined by the Convention on the Rights of the Child leaves children vulnerable to types of violence that range from bullying to sexual abuse and commercial trafficking.⁸

Bullying and Hazing

Bullying in sport may be defined as any hostile or offensive action against child athletes who are perceived as 'different'. These actions might be verbal, physical or emotional harassment; insulting or degrading comments, name-calling, gestures, taunts, insults or 'jokes'; offensive graffiti; humiliating, excluding, tormenting, ridiculing or threatening, or refusing to work or cooperate with others because of such differences as gender, sexual orientation, religion or ethnicity.⁹

In perhaps the only major study of bullying of children in sport to date, 30 per cent of 1,514 girls and boys aged 12-16 sampled across eight sport clubs in Norway reported having experienced bullying in a sport context. The same study revealed a higher drop-out rate from sport among those who had experienced bullying, for both boys and girls.¹⁰

Hazing and initiation fall under the category of sport bullying. Hazing consists of hazardous behaviours and activities required of newcomers by team or group members as a condition of their membership, or to maintain full status on a team or group. Such

behaviours have typically been considered pranks, but they can be damaging. Hazing can include harassment, verbal, physical or emotional abuse, humiliation and degradation. Hazing may be carried out by one person acting alone or with others, and may or may not involve a child's consent.¹¹ Hazing has also been defined as any activity that humiliates, degrades, abuses or endangers, regardless of the person's willingness to participate.¹² Sport hazing appears to follow patterns similar to those found in some military organizations, sororities and fraternities, private schools and police forces.¹³ These behaviours may take place covertly, but the fact that they occur appears to be an open secret in the sporting world.

Hazing research is focused almost entirely in North America, despite widespread anecdotal reports of the practice elsewhere. Hazing and specific initiation rituals are used to diminish and debase individuals so they can be 'rebuilt' as team members. The athlete experiences the abusive practices and remains silent as a price for being welcomed into the team. Authority figures such as coaches, trainers and managers may be aware of or participate in some or all of the hazing activities. These activities may include rituals designed to humiliate and degrade, and may be illegal or endanger the participants' well-being. Team members may be forced into unwanted sexual activities, feats of endurance, or painful games or performances involving deprivation or extreme consumption.¹⁴

Sport hazing of children and youth is prominent in the popular literature, yet little about it appears in published research. In the largest prevalence study at the time of writing, it was found that 91 per cent of American high school students belonged to at least one group, and 98 per cent were involved in at least one 'community-building' initiation rite. Forty-eight per cent of children who belonged to groups reported being subjected to hazing activities, and 43 per cent reported that they had been subjected to humiliating activities. Most students said they participated in "humiliating, dangerous or potentially illegal activities as a part of joining a group because those activities are 'fun and exciting'." The study also showed that hazing starts young and continues through high school and college. Twenty five per cent of those who reported being hazed were first hazed before age 13.¹⁵ The problem is linked with other forms of violence, including the sexual abuse of those being hazed.¹⁶

In sport, the character of some initiation activities has been found to encourage promiscuity and a tendency to physical violence among male athletes.¹⁷ Sport cultures that undertake hazing are marked by a tolerance of exclusion, misconduct, discrimination, lack of mutual respect or pride, and enforced silence to protect group secrets about abuse.

Physical Maltreatment

Physical norms and risk of injury

Physical activity enhances children's healthy growth and development. Yet concerns about physical violence in sport are wide-ranging, from those related to risk of injury or death associated with physical preparation and competitive performance of the sport itself¹⁸ to those arising from the treatment of child athletes by overzealous parents, coaches, agents, trainers or other athletes.¹⁹ In China, for example, reports have surfaced of elite girl runners being subjected to regular beatings, verbal abuse and other exploitative practices at the hands of their coaches.²⁰

Establishing just how much exercise, training and competition a child should undertake at different ages and stages of growth remains a challenge for physicians and exercise scientists. This is not least because children grow and mature at different rates, making chronology a poor indicator of maturation.²¹ The physical training prescription varies with the maturation of the athlete and the specific requirements of the sport. Guidelines regarding the quantity and type of training for the elite child athlete have been established based on evidence from the scientific literature.²² Athletic training programmes should not cause excessive pain to a child athlete, and exceeding these guidelines can raise the risk of injury and overtraining.

Aberrant sport-related behaviour patterns imposed by coaches can also result in physical harm to the child athlete. Unhealthy practices to 'meet weight' in weight-categorized sports (e.g., wrestling) and in weight-dependent sports (e.g., rowing) can result in serious physical illness and even death.²³ These practices include food and fluid deprivation, prolonged exposure to saunas and other devices to promote sweating and weight loss, use of cathartics and prolonged physical exertion. Another harmful sport-related behaviour is restricted nutrition in aesthetic sports such as gymnastics, to manipulate an athlete's physical appearance. The imposition of unhealthy nutritional restrictions to attain a 'desired' body morphology is a form of physical abuse and may lead to eating disorders in a young athlete.²⁴ Among girls and women, energy-intake deprivation can also lead to the female athlete triad (eating disorders, the absence of menstruation and insufficient bone density).²⁵ The harmful consequences of exerting undue performance pressure on child athletes were raised in Chapter 1. Talent identification and development schemes are part of the planning process for securing elite sport success, but if they are not carefully designed and delivered, such schemes can also compromise children's rights to participation and freedom from violence.

Peer aggression

Physical aggression in sport has been a familiar theme in the research literature, with particular attention paid to the alleged cathartic potential of sports to get rid of surplus energy. Some have argued, however, that sport is as likely to provoke as to dissipate aggression, and that social norms play a far greater role in game violence than genetic predisposition.²⁶ To this extent, social learning appears to play an important role in suppressing violent behaviour among child athletes.²⁷ As discussed earlier, peer aggression also plays a major role in bullying, hazing and initiations in sport.

Parental maltreatment

Parents and caregivers have consistently emerged in the research literature as one of the most significant positive influences on children's play and sport.²⁸ There are cases, however, where parents and caregivers put excessive pressure on their children to excel, through abusive and violent behaviour towards children, or at times ignoring or showing indifference towards them.²⁹ In extreme cases, parents have been involved in homicide related to youth sport.³⁰ The case of a child runner in India provoked much media interest and led to accusations that the boy had been sold by his mother, trafficked, and sexually and physically abused.³¹ Such issues raise not just physiological and social questions but also test the ethical basis of youth sport.³²

Drug and alcohol abuse

The use of performance-enhancing drugs, or doping, is one of the most highly publicized problems in sport, with millions of dollars spent each year to test and monitor elite performers through the World Anti-Doping Agency and its national partners. As children's involvement in elite sport grows ever more intense, some may be drawn into using such drugs to improve their performance.³³ Some have argued that sport is a form of social control and a tool for positive socialization, but it is not clear that sport necessarily diverts youth from using drugs.³⁴

Little is known about the relationship between children's sport and alcohol consumption. Empirical evidence suggests, however, that alcohol is a risk factor for children in the sporting environment. According to the Framework for alcohol policy in the WHO European Region, "The sport and leisure environments, a central part of young people's social space, are strongly linked to drinking through extensive marketing practices, and this can result in unintentional injuries and violence."³⁵ For teenagers, especially on college campuses or in sport club social areas, alcohol is frequently available, sometimes abused and occasionally integrated into hazing and other abusive practices.³⁶

BOX 2.2 WHAT ATHLETES SAY ABOUT ABUSE COMMITTED BY THEIR COACHES

“My coach physically abused his athletes during regular training on many occasions. The coach pulled, hit, pulled hair, and pushed athletes into the walls. He would also verbally abuse the athletes emotionally, I have waited many years to answer a survey like this, wanting someone to know how dangerous the coach was during the time I trained.” (Canadian male athlete)ⁱ

“He forced kids to do things when they were hurt. His philosophy was the Eastern Bloc philosophy: if it isn't bleeding, don't worry about it.” (Former Olympic gymnastics trainee)ⁱⁱ

“At nationals he took a lot of girls who weren't very good...one was inhibited and very self-conscious because she wasn't good enough to be there. He got her kneeling on the [performing area], smacked her on the bottom, pulled her hair and yanked her arm back.” (Female survivor of sexual abuse in sport)ⁱⁱⁱ

“[My parents] would go to competitions and see the way he treated me. He'd put me down before a competition...and they were like, 'That's not right. He's emotionally doing something wrong.' And I'd say 'No, he's not.' So it became...that made a conflict.” (Young Australian female athlete).^{iv}

Notes

ⁱ Kirby, Sandra, Lorraine Greaves and Olena Hankivsky, *The Dome of Silence: Sexual harassment and abuse in sport*, Fernwood Publishing Ltd., Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2000, p. 71.

ⁱⁱ Cited in Ryan, Joan, *Little Girls in Pretty Boxes: The making and breaking of elite gymnasts and figure skaters*, Warner Books, New York, 2000.

ⁱⁱⁱ Cited in Brackenridge, Celia H., *Spoilsports: Understanding and preventing sexual exploitation in sport*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 92.

^{iv} Cited in Leahy, Trisha, Grace Pretty and Gershon Tenenbaum, 'Perpetrator Methodology as a Predictor of Traumatic Symptomatology in Adult Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 19, no. 5, May 2004, pp. 521-540.

Emotional and psychological abuse

Success in competitive sport is generally acknowledged to require a high degree of psychological strength and fortitude, yet there is also widespread scope for emotional abuse of young athletes. The *World Report on Violence against Children* acknowledges that there is no standard definition of psychological violence. It suggests, however, that some psychological harm is involved in all physical and sexual violence and may also “take the form of insults, name-calling, ignoring, isolation, rejection, threats, emotional indifference and belittlement.”³⁷

The definition of emotional abuse used by the International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect includes: “The failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, including the availability of a primary attachment figure, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies commensurate with her or his personal potentials and in the context of the society in which the child dwells. There may also be acts towards the child that cause or have a high probability of causing harm to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. These acts must be reasonably within the control of the parent or person in a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. Acts include restriction of movement, patterns of belittling, denigrating, scapegoating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing or other non-physical forms of hostile or rejecting treatment.”³⁸

When children depend on adults for their well-being they become attached to them, and this attachment can create the desire to please. Where this is contingent on the child's success in sport it has the potential to cause emotional harm.³⁹ Experts express concern that the visibility and commercial rewards of competing at the elite level might exacerbate emotional abuses because gifted young athletes are increasingly pressured to train harder.⁴⁰

Parents, regardless of their socio-economic status,⁴¹ often project their aspirations and expectations onto their children who are athletes.⁴² Parental involvement in child athlete anxiety shows differences by gender, with mothers and fathers exerting different kinds of psychological pressures.⁴³

Some child athletes have reported their coaches as having been emotionally abusive.⁴⁴ Very little systematic research has been carried out, however, into emotionally violent coaching behaviours in children's sport.

Neglect

Neglect may be defined as “the failure of parents or carers to meet a child’s physical and emotional needs when they have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so; or failure to protect him or her from exposure to danger.”⁴⁵ This definition can also apply to coaches.

Little has been documented in the scientific literature on neglect of children within sport, but experts concur that neglect, including neglect of a child in sport, can lead to illness and injury. One example is parents or caregivers ignoring safety risks around sport equipment and the athletic environment. It can also mean not providing child athletes with adequate water and nutrition. Because children’s bodies have a large proportion of water, neglecting to provide them with water and prolonged exposure to heat can result in serious health consequences. Other examples of neglect in sport are the removal of social supports through relocation for training, and pressuring a child to play while injured.

Child Labour and Trafficking

Sporting success depends on dedication and many years of hard training. The intensity of sports training has certainly increased over the past few decades. Some people regard this as simply the price of success; others suggest that a reordering of priorities is needed to safeguard child athletes’ well-being and best interests.⁴⁶ Not only does the research show children participating in sport as vulnerable to abuse and violence, but the manufacturing of some sports equipment has also been associated with the exploitation of children. Child labour in the sporting goods industries, for example, especially ball stitching in Asia, has been exposed by both researchers and child rights activists as exploitative.⁴⁷ This has led to some positive interventions.

Trafficking in the context of sport involves the sale of child athletes, usually across national boundaries and for profit. This has been described as a new form of child slavery that leaves players in a precarious legal position.⁴⁸ There are known cases of trafficking in baseball and football, but finding systematic data on the practice is a challenge.⁴⁹ Unofficial, and therefore unregulated, football training centres test young players, who are then recruited or discarded. These players may become involved in illegal migration or be traded from club to club.⁵⁰

Research for this report found very few references to trafficking of children in sport; most references concerned children working as camel jockeys.⁵¹ Reports describe the variability of practices in the Middle East with respect to child camel jockeys, the sale of children by impoverished parents desperate for money, and the sexual and physical exploitation of boys by

their camel trainers. In 2005, the use of children as camel jockeys was banned in the United Arab Emirates, and robots were introduced to replace children. This came about largely as a result of pressure from human rights activists. In May of that year, UNICEF and the Government of the United Arab Emirates signed an agreement on the return of children who had been involved in camel racing to their countries of origin.⁵²

Violence against Children with Disabilities

Participation in sport by children with disabilities and other vulnerable children is a recognition of their fundamental rights and freedoms.⁵³ The Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities provide a framework for the protection of all children, including those with disabilities, and the promotion of their rights.

A child athlete with a disability can also be vulnerable due to poverty; ill health, infection or injury; lack of safe housing; lack of education; lack of supervision or parenting; or discrimination on the basis of sex, race, sexual orientation, religion, language or a past history of abuse. Extrapolating from general population data on persons with disabilities, it is estimated that there are at least 150 million children with disabilities worldwide.⁵⁴ Some estimates put the number as high as 200 million.⁵⁵ Persons with disabilities include those “who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”⁵⁶ Child athletes with disabilities are included in the definition provided in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Special multi-sport events for people with disabilities include the Deaflympics, Paralympics and Special Olympics, all of which include children.

The relationship between the vulnerabilities of children with disabilities and violence in sport needs to be better understood.⁵⁷ Experts conservatively estimate that people with disabilities are at least four times more likely to be victimized than people without disabilities,⁵⁸ and those with intellectual impairments are at the highest risk.⁵⁹ Scant research has been conducted on the links between disabilities, sport and vulnerability to sexual harassment and abuse,⁶⁰ although girls are regarded as more vulnerable than boys.⁶¹ In sport, we are attentive to unsafe sport practices, yet the unique vulnerabilities of athletes with disabilities are often not well understood. These include situations such as physical handling, drug administration and drug testing, which may allow opportunities for inappropriate touching.⁶²

Sexual Violence

In the 1960s and 1970s, violence in sport was largely defined as a problem of spectator misbehaviour or of infractions by athletes, which made it a public problem. Empirical documentation of sexual violence against children in sport only began in the early 1990s, when feminist researchers turned their attention to the private sphere.⁶³ The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that in 2002, 150 million girls and 73 million boys under age 18 around the world had experienced sexual violence involving physical contact.⁶⁴ Most knowledge about sexual violence in sport derives from quantitative or qualitative studies using retrospective designs in which adults constitute the target sample and report about their childhood experiences.⁶⁵ Researchers have used different terminology such as sexual abuse, sexual victimization, sexual harassment or unwanted sexual experiences, depending on the population studied. Nevertheless, sexual violence against children is generally understood as any sexual abuse of a child in which informed consent is not or cannot be given. Sexual violence may include non-contact, contact and penetrative sexual acts.

Although there is no internationally agreed definition of sexual violence, it is generally understood to include a wide range of acts of abuse and exploitation, encompassing both physical and emotional violence. It includes but is not limited to the inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity such as rape or other penetration, unwanted sexual advances or harassment; the exploitative use of children in prostitution; the exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials; and the intentional causing of a child to witness sexual abuse or sexual activities, even without having to participate.⁶⁶

After years of denial, most sport agencies in industrialized countries have recognized that sexual violence against children in sport is an issue they need to address. Perhaps the first governing body of sport to collate and publish data on sexual abuse in sport was the Amateur Swimming Association in the United Kingdom.⁶⁷ Researchers have examined the process and prevalence of sexual violence in sport, but data explicitly relating to sexual violence against children are insufficient.⁶⁸ One study among 250 sport students in Denmark found that about 25 per cent either knew about or had experienced situations in which a sport participant under age 18 had been sexually harassed by a coach.⁶⁹ In a study in Canada, 3.2 per cent of athletes reported that they had been upset by a 'flasher' in a sporting context when they were less than 16 years old, and 2.6 per cent reported experiencing unwanted sexual touching.⁷⁰ Unpublished data from Australia indicate that rates of sexual violence against children in sport may be as high as 8 per cent.⁷¹

As with sexual violence in other social spheres, individual characteristics such as age and elite status have been identified as possible risk factors. Studies suggest that talented athletes at or around puberty who have not yet achieved elite status – the 'stage of imminent achievement' – are more vulnerable to sexual abuse by an authority figure.⁷² Systemic risk factors have also been documented, such as the acceptance of psychologically abusive coaching practices and the often-unregulated power of authority figures to isolate aspiring young athletes.⁷³

The data on the consequences of sexual violence in sports echo those from studies in other social science spheres. Several psychological and behavioural distress indicators have been identified, including post-traumatic stress symptoms, eating disorders, problems forming relationships and loss of sports participation opportunities through attrition.⁷⁴

The perpetrators of sexual violence against children in sport have been identified as primarily authority figures, particularly coaches, but also team doctors, physiotherapists, trainers and counsellors. Some studies have found that children also experience sexual violence at the hands of their peers, including their teammates;⁷⁵ others have highlighted that sexual violence is perpetrated against children by people they do not know.⁷⁶ Explanations for sexual abuse by authority figures in sport have been outlined by a number of researchers, mainly using a gender-power framework; an authority figure exploits his or her power over the aspiring young athlete, entering the "forbidden zone" of illicit sexual relations.⁷⁷

The majority of studies on sexual abuse in sport have investigated male coaches who were guilty of abusing underage female athletes. This gender focus has been criticized because both male and female perpetrators and victims have been identified.⁷⁸ Additional research is needed in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of sexual abuse of children in sport.

Although little is known about sexual abuse of child athletes, it affects children in both industrialized and developing nations. There have been reports of sexual and physical abuse of boy camel jockeys (mostly from Bangladesh, Pakistan and the Sudan) in the Middle East,⁷⁹ bullying and harassment of stable hands and grooms in horse racing in the United Kingdom,⁸⁰ and anecdotal reports of forced bartering of sex for team selection by coaches in some countries in Africa. The issues of race, ethnicity, culture and religion have not yet been investigated in the context of sexual abuse in children's sport.

BOX 2.3 WHAT CHILD ATHLETES SAY ABOUT SEXUAL ABUSE COMMITTED BY THEIR COACHES AND PEERS

“When we didn’t perform well, then the punishment was that we should sit on his [the coach’s] lap.... 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.”ⁱ (Norwegian female elite athlete)

“The way it was presented was sex education... although at the time, I, I didn’t really, I suppose I did wonder how he could get an erection...in front of me, but I didn’t even...I didn’t think he was getting off on it...because it was always presented as...education and that sort of thing.”ⁱⁱ (Australian male athlete)

“So what do you do when you trusted this person, and you’ve got all this at your feet, like your sport and stuff and a whole bunch of friends, so what are you going to do? And I was new in the team...what did I know – maybe this was normal.”ⁱⁱⁱ (Australian male athlete)

“The coach was a paedophile. On team trips and during regular training, he would invite [child] athletes to his apartment or something would happen in the changing rooms or when we were staying at a hotel on the road.”^{iv} (Canadian male athlete)

“I was a victim of attempted abuse at the age of 15 by a 21-year-old on a national team trip. I had been drinking, we both had, and I had kissed him. Later he followed me to my hotel room and forced himself on me, pushing me to the floor with him on top of me. Fortunately my roommate came in and told him to leave. I told him to stop but he didn’t.”^v (Canadian female athlete)

“At 15 in the hockey world, it’s a tough thing to do, to say a man has touched you or made sexual moves on you. You don’t want to wreck your dreams.”^{vi} (Canadian professional ice hockey player)

Notes

ⁱ Fasting, Kari, Celia Brackenridge and Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen, *Female Elite Sports and Sexual Harassment*, Norwegian Olympic Committee, Oslo, 2000.

ⁱⁱ Leahy, T., ‘Sexual Abuse and Long Term Traumatic Outcomes in a Non-Psychiatric Sample of Adult Australian Athletes’, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southern Queensland, Australia, 2000.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Kirby, Sandra, Lorraine Greaves and Olena Hankivsky, *The Dome of Silence: Sexual harassment and abuse in sport*, Fernwood Publishing Ltd., Halifax, Nova Scotia, 2000, pp. 70-71.

^v Ibid., p. 74.

^{vi} Silent Edge, ‘Quotes by Sheldon Kennedy’, Syracuse, New York, USA, www.silent-edge.org/kennedy2.html, accessed 14 March 2010.

Discrimination

Because of their smaller size and relative lack of power, it is often difficult for children to challenge discriminatory practices. Harassment and exclusion in sport on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation and disability has been the subject of academic studies, but very few of these have focused explicitly on children.⁸¹

Gender harassment includes a broad range of verbal and non-verbal behaviours that convey insulting, hostile or degrading attitudes about women. Research evidence, however, is primarily embedded in studies about sexual harassment and various forms of unwanted sexual behaviour.⁸² At the time of writing, no sport research study was found to have a specific focus on gender harassment, or on harassment of children and youth.

Discrimination based on sexual orientation

Many authors have included discussions about homophobia in their writings on gender and sexuality in sport.⁸³ Researchers point to discrimination in ‘gender-appropriate’ performances, cultivation of the masculine-feminine division in sport, the toleration of ‘anti-gay’ epithets and coach/athlete selections based on heterosexual identity. Homophobia includes an irrational fear of, aversion to, harassment of or discrimination against persons on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation. It is also understood as a fear or hatred of homosexuals or homosexuality.⁸⁴ Sport researchers have found that homophobia is an integral part of heterosexism and hypersexuality and thrives in an environment of intolerance.⁸⁵ Little research has been done on homophobic bullying of child athletes, but two studies have revealed the effects of such experiences. In one, lesbian athletes reported some of their negative experiences growing up in teams in which their sexual identity became known.⁸⁶ The other, a study of 1,860 schoolchildren, found that 2.1 per cent had experienced homophobic bullying, 3.1 per cent were perpetrators of it and 14.7 per cent witnessed it, all in sport-related contexts. Such results point to homophobic bullying as a ‘spectator sport’.⁸⁷

Homophobia is one of the factors that contributes to the overall toll of abuse in sport, and together with other forms of discrimination, it can make sport an unsafe activity for many children.⁸⁸ People in all regions of the world experience violence, harassment, discrimination, exclusion, stigmatization and prejudice because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.⁸⁹

Once girls and boys reach puberty, the issues of gender, sexuality and sexual identity play more important roles in how they participate in society. There is some hesitation by lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) athletes to declare themselves

part of the LGBT community for fear of their physical and emotional safety. In some parts of the world, such orientations are illegal and/or are considered immoral. Verbal harassment, physical violence and exclusion are among the most widely reported forms of discrimination.

Homophobia intersects with other forms of harassment, such as discrimination against persons with disabilities, racism and sexism. LGBT persons, whether in sport environments or other social contexts, are vulnerable to abuse. Forms of homophobic abuse in sport that have been identified include:

- Being subjected to homophobic taunts and forced into homosexual sexual activities in initiation and hazing rituals
- Experiencing peer violence or stigmatization
- Being subjected to direct discriminatory practices in sport organizations
- Experiencing financial discrimination
- Discrimination by the media
- Being forced into inappropriate travel or sleeping arrangements with other athletes or coaches.⁹⁰

Knowledge about Perpetrators

No published studies were found that linked the search terms 'perpetrator' and 'violence against children in sport'. This is not surprising because it is a relatively new area of research. Within sport research, most of the work on violence against children to date has focused on documenting the prevalence and impact of sexual violence.

With notable exceptions,⁹¹ few researchers have focused on perpetrators as key informants, and the available studies have focused exclusively on sexual abuse. It is widely recognized that only a very small minority of sexual predators is actually apprehended and incarcerated.⁹² So even well-designed research among that population produces data likely to be unrepresentative of the vast majority of perpetrators who are not apprehended. Consequently, knowledge of perpetrator methodologies in sport comes from reports by athletes who have been sexually abused.⁹³

The limited research available addressing sexual perpetrator behaviours in sport shows patterns of grooming (entrapment) and coercion of children in families and other social institutions, with some variations for sport-specific contexts.⁹⁴ Additionally, research has found that systematic, psychologically abusive methods of coercing young athletes are key perpetrator strategies in sport.⁹⁵ What also emerges is that some sport cultures display features such as rigid and hierarchical power structures and normalization of emotionally abusive coaching practices, which either mask or facilitate such behaviour.⁹⁶

BOX 2.4 HARASSMENT BASED ON PERCEIVED SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Australia – “Our hockey coach used to make homophobic statements and jokes at our training sessions to motivate us to have greater contempt and hatred for several opposing teams because they had players who were possibly gay or lesbian.”ⁱ (Male field hockey player, 16 years old)

Canada – An award-winning Canadian junior ice hockey coach was sentenced to three and a half years in prison for the sexual abuse of two male players in his charge. The media generally first saw the interaction as ‘just about two males in love’ and were therefore reluctant to report on the case. Only when it emerged that one was heterosexual, married and a father did the media finally report that the sexual abuse he had suffered from the age of 14 was child sexual abuse.ⁱⁱ

Notes

ⁱ Leahy, T., ‘Sexual Abuse and Long Term Traumatic Outcomes in a Non-Psychiatric Sample of Adult Australian Athletes’, unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Southern Queensland, Australia, 2000.

ⁱⁱ Fusco, Caroline, and Sandra Kirby, ‘Are Your Kids Safe? Media representations of sexual abuse in sport’, in *Sport, Leisure Identities and Gendered Spaces*, edited by Sheila Scraton and Beccy Watson, Leisure Studies Association, 1999.



3 PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE IN SPORT

“Preventing and responding to violence, exploitation and abuse is essential to ensuring children’s rights to survival, development and well-being.”

– UNICEF Child Protection Strategy, 2008

The age of a child does not alter his or her status as a rights-holder; rights are afforded absolutely. Yet, at the same time, the Convention on the Rights of the Child recognizes certain relativities, such as “the evolving capacities of the child” (article 5) and children’s right to have their views taken into account “in accordance with the age and maturity of the child” and particularly during judicial and administrative proceedings (article 12). In the context of sport, this means that child athletes should progressively exercise their rights as their capacities to do so develop.¹

While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child set out principles pledging protection of all adults and children against violence, there is no universal agreement about the most effective measures to prevent violence, either in or beyond sport. This chapter considers anti-violence measures in sport from the global to the local level. It reviews the conceptual basis for these measures and describes a number of practical examples that might assist those seeking to promote the protection of children in sport.

The child athlete lives within a set of family, peer and school relationships, sport relationships, a wider sport community and, beyond that, society in general. The child athlete also occupies multiple, simultaneous roles – brother, sister, daughter, son, student, friend, etc. Failure to acknowledge these many roles and a singular focus on a young person’s sporting identity can exacerbate the tendency to overlook his or her rights as a child, especially in the intensively competitive environment of elite sport.

The Child Athlete

Despite the national and international civil and human rights frameworks that draw attention to participation rights, children themselves have been almost ignored in the design and delivery of violence prevention measures within sport (*also see Chapter 2*). Children’s physical participation in sport is a necessary but insufficient condition for the fulfilment of their right to participation, which is an important dimension of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Some national and international sport organizations have established athletes’ commissions, but few democratic, participative sport systems exist at the sub-national level.² None of these is focused exclusively on children. At the local level, children are represented on some sport club committees or other consultative structures.

Some initiatives have been taken to assist people who have experienced violence in sport to report their experiences. In the United Kingdom, there is a generic sport helpline as well as specific helplines for swimming and football.³ The Netherlands has also operated a sport helpline offering face-to-face counselling for anyone with concerns, including perpetrators of violence and athletes who have experienced violence.⁴ In Canada, following the revelations of sexual abuse of boys in junior ice hockey, the ‘Speak Out!’ campaign by Hockey Canada encouraged young victims to report on their own experiences and the experiences of others.⁵

Families and Peers

Parents and caregivers

There is widespread evidence of parental pressure, abuse and different forms of violence to their offspring and other athletes, most frequently from the sidelines.⁶ Parents and caregivers are therefore arguably the most prominent focus groups for violence prevention programmes (*see Box 3.1, page 18*).

Peers

Many child athletes place high importance on the social networks and friendships they develop through sport. Children are much more likely to tell their peers than anyone else about violence they have experienced, and to use each other as sources of information and support.⁷ At the elite level, however, young athletes are also competitors, vying for selection on a squad or team. This can complicate and strain peer relationships.

Educating child athletes about hazing and bullying (*discussed in Chapter 2*) was generally found to be lacking or ad hoc, although many young people are exposed to education about bullying more generally through school or community programmes.⁸

Sport Authority Figures

Physical education teachers

Along with families and community clubs, school-based physical education has traditionally been a major avenue for children to participate in organized sport. In primary school, physical education is often delivered by classroom teachers who are not specialists. For many children, physical education is a source of fun, stimulation and pleasure, and these teachers are a major influence in their lives. In some countries, there is a fine distinction between learning through physical education and participating in competitive sports. For many children, schools are places of violence,⁹ but teachers have the potential to prevent violence against children and to act as conduits for reporting violence against children and referring them to services. For this to happen effectively, physical education teachers require training about

BOX 3.1 VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVES AIMED TO REACH PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

Australia – Australian Football League’s (AFLs) Parents Information programme, 2004. The AFL Auskick Parent Orientation and Auskick Rules provide a parent orientation course at all Auskick centres at the first session, to educate parents on the programme and inform them about how they can become more involved.ⁱ

Canada – Coaching Association of Canada, *Straight Talk about Children and Sport: Advice for parents, coaches and teachers*, 1996.ⁱⁱ

United Kingdom – The Football Association’s *Respect Guide for Parents and Carers*, 2009, is a free course that provides advice on what it takes to be a supportive soccer parent or caregiver, and presents practical tips on how to positively influence young players in the game of football.ⁱⁱⁱ

United States of America – National Alliance for Youth Sports, Parents Association for Youth Sports, 2006. This online program requires parents to watch a 19-minute video and read and sign a Parents’ Code of Ethics. The initiative is sponsored by the National Alliance for Youth Sports, a non-profit organization that advocates for positive and safe sport for all children.^{iv}

Notes

ⁱ Australian Football League, ‘NAB AFL Auskick’, www.aflauskick.com.au/index.php?id=9, accessed 14 March 2010.

ⁱⁱ LeBlanc, Janet E., and Louise Dickson, *Straight Talk about Children and Sport: Advice for parents, coaches, and teachers*, Coaching Association of Canada, Gloucester, Ontario, 1996.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Football Association, *Respect Guide for Parents and Carers*, 27 October 2009, www.thefa.com/GetIntoFootball/FA Learning/SoccerParent.aspx, accessed 14 March 2010.

^{iv} Parents Association for Youth Sports, <http://paysonline.nays.org>, accessed 14 March 2010.

how to recognize the signs of violence and abuse.¹⁰ Good pedagogic practices in physical education can also help prevent violence by promoting confidence, sensitivity to others and self-awareness in children.

Coaches

Good coaches are vital role models in children’s sport, and they generally provide children with skilled instruction in a safe and non-threatening environment. But concerns about poor practices, overzealous coaching, abuse and the commodification of young athletes have led to the introduction of measures aimed at safeguarding children in sport. Such measures include codes of conduct (see Box 4.3, page 26) and accreditation linked to education, and mechanisms for reporting suspicions or allegations (see Box 3.3, page 21).

Medical and scientific staff

Sport scientists, sport medicine staff and paediatricians are increasingly engaged in supporting young athletes’ sports training. Yet not until relatively recently have professionals in some countries been sensitized to the potential for violence in sport and provided with the skills and capacities to help prevent or deal with it.¹¹ In the United Kingdom, for example, the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences requires candidates for sport science support accreditation to undergo training in how to safeguard young athletes.¹² The same organization runs a paediatric exercise special interest group that promotes safety and ethical practices for scientists working with young people in laboratory or other settings.¹³

Sport scientists and advocates of children’s safety in sport are gradually bringing the message of violence and trauma prevention to the wider sport community. Sport psychologists, in particular, are well placed to identify signs of violence and abuse in young athletes. They should also be able to recognize when relationships among athletes or between athletes and authority figures may cause harm to the child athlete, for example, when they are too close.¹⁴ In such situations, sport psychologists and their medical peers can play an important role in referring children to expert help.¹⁵

Managers, referees and officials

Sport managers, referees and officials can exert a positive influence on children and adults in sport. Although there are many examples of this positive influence, it also needs to be acknowledged that, in some cases, they abuse their positions of authority and contribute to harming children.¹⁶ By demonstrating leadership in eradicating all forms of violence against child athletes, managers, referees and officials have the opportunity to go beyond their traditional roles.

BOX 3.2 VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVES AIMED TO REACH COACHES

Australia – ‘Play by the Rules’ is an online training resource for coaches, administrators, officials and players. It provides information on how to prevent and deal with inappropriate behaviour, including discrimination, harassment, favouritism, bias and abuse. ‘Play by the Rules’ is a partnership between the Australian Sports Commission, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, state and territory sport and recreation and anti-discrimination agencies, and the Queensland Commission for Children, Young People and Child Guardian.ⁱ

Canada – The National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) is a coach training and certification programme for 66 different sports run by the Coaching Association of Canada. The course is offered in English and French across the country and is the recognized national standard for coach training and certification in Canada. NCCP workshops are designed to meet the needs of all types of coaches, from the first-time coach to the head coach of a national team. As part of the programme, all coaches are trained in ethical decision-making and sport safety. The organization’s website states, “Since 1997, the emphasis of the NCCP has been on developing competent coaches – an exciting step towards helping them to become more effective and have a more meaningful impact on an athlete’s experience.”ⁱⁱ

United Kingdom – Keeping Children Safe in Sport: NSPCC Child Protection Awareness Programme, 2000. Designed by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC), the programme is geared towards anyone who comes into contact with children through sporting activities, and is relevant for organizations that already have a child protection policy in place. Keeping Children Safe in Sport aims to help clubs safeguard the children in their care by enabling staff and volunteers to recognize and understand their role in child protection. By offering this introductory programme, organizations can ensure that staff and volunteers have the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and respond appropriately to concerns about children’s safety.ⁱⁱⁱ

Notes

ⁱ Play by the Rules, www.playbytherules.net.au, accessed 14 March 2010.

ⁱⁱ Coaching Association of Canada, ‘What is the NCCP?’, www.coach.ca/eng/certification/nccp_for_coaches/what_is_nccp.cfm, accessed 14 March 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, ‘Keeping Children Safe in Sport’, www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/training-andconsultancy/educare/educarekcspport_wda47930.html, accessed 24 March 2010.

The existence of violence and abuse in sport has been described as a failure of leadership, linked to a lack of will rather than simply a lack of awareness of the problem.¹⁷ Examples of good practice include training referees and umpires in child protection issues; establishing codes of conduct for scouts and agents; enforcing anti-trafficking measures; and conferring grants and other awards for sport managers whose organizations meet violence prevention criteria.

Sport Community

International organizations and sport for development organizations

The main international sport bodies are non-governmental and include:

- International federations and athletes’ commissions
- International Olympic Committee (also responsible for the Youth Olympic Games)
- Committee of the International Children’s Games
- Commonwealth Games Federation
- Court of Arbitration for Sport
- Right to Play International
- World Anti-Doping Agency.

Until recently, few of these organizations had introduced explicit measures to protect athletes, whether children or adults, from violence. Those that did often limited their focus to problematic spectators or fans.¹⁸ There was a time when these types of organizations shunned anyone who criticized or found fault with sport.¹⁹ Largely due to the commentary of critical scholars, journalists and some former athletes, the issue of violence in sport has increasingly been recognized as an area of concern and a policy imperative.²⁰

A number of violence prevention initiatives have been introduced in international sport, some of which apply to child athletes and others to both children and adults. To increase the protection of children, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association’s (FIFA) Executive Committee has approved a regulation that protects minors. The regulation states that a subcommittee appointed by the Players’ Status Committee will be in charge of the examination and possible approval of every international transfer and first registration of every child player who is not a national of the country in which he or she wishes to be registered.²¹

National and local organizations

As with international sporting bodies, there is a plethora of national and community sport organizations, including:

- Clubs
- Events organizations
- Governing bodies of sport
- Government sport agencies
- National Olympic Committees.

Across countries, the government intervenes in the regulation and operation of sport to varying degrees, with some countries operating very tightly controlled sport systems, while others are more laissez-faire. As the economic and civic status of sport gains in importance for a country, the government typically takes a more active role in how sport is run, either directly through legislation or indirectly through incentives such as tax breaks or grant criteria. Where violence prevention is seen as important, it is sometimes included in such regulatory approaches.

With a few exceptions, little evidence exists that public sport and recreation agencies have addressed child abuse as a serious concern for management.²² Exceptions include Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, each of which has introduced a range of protective measures to prevent violence against children in sport.

- *Australia* – The Australian Sports Commission's Ethics Programme has led to a number of initiatives focusing on good behaviour and violence prevention in youth sports.²³
- *Canada* – The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport and the Coaching Association of Canada have promoted ethical practice in children's sport.²⁴
- *The Netherlands* – The National Sports Federation's National Olympic Committee has used a combination of research, policy development and promotional campaigns to combat sexual abuse in sport.
- *United Kingdom* – A dedicated Child Protection in Sport Unit was established in 2001 and offers comprehensive advice on policy and practice to sport bodies. The unit established the National Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport, which consists of nine standards that all sport organizations were to have reached before 2008 in order to continue receiving grants from the government.²⁵ To reflect changes in the sporting industry and the growing role some sports organizations have in influencing the delivery of local sports, a tenth standard was added to the original nine.

Sport-specific organizations and clubs

Many individual sport bodies and clubs have adopted their own child protection and anti-violence measures during recent years, in some instances because of

national policy changes in their sport and in others because of initiatives by individual members. Few national sport authorities or governments have required sports within their countries to adopt child protection policies and procedures. Those that have feature prominently in the examples of good practice provided in this report.

Screening of candidates and running background checks as part of recruitment practice has helped some sport bodies prevent unsuitable people from working or volunteering in sport. Such efforts usually involve scanning national police records to identify persons with related convictions and barring them from involvement in sport activities that involve children.²⁶ Such schemes have been criticized as unwieldy, expensive and selective because only those who have been apprehended and convicted are listed, but they have also successfully excluded dangerous individuals from children's sport in some cases.²⁷ Occasionally, screening measures have been perceived as counterproductive for youth sport, frightening off potential volunteers or coaches due to fears about legal liability.²⁸

Addressing Violence in Sport

A number of mechanisms are available to sporting bodies to prevent violence or impose sanctions for breaches of procedures. At the highest level are the international legal instruments associated with children's rights. The most accessible mechanisms are those built into national law and organizational constitutions, such as codes of conduct and rule books.

A person who perpetrates violence against a child athlete may be dealt with internally through a particular sport's disciplinary procedures covering complaints, grievances, appeals, suspensions and reinstatement. Civil prosecutions or criminal investigations, or both, are other options. It is vital that individuals running sport clubs and organizations understand they *should not* deal internally with issues that may breach criminal law; these concerns should be referred to statutory authorities that can conduct enquiries and make expert judgements. This action also helps promote transparency within the culture of sport, which in itself can help enhance violence prevention.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The impact of several anti-violence policy initiatives in sport in industrialized countries has been assessed, mainly under the banner of child protection interventions. In the United Kingdom, the Rugby Football League, along with all state-funded sport governing bodies, was mandated to introduce a child protection policy.²⁹ The initiative is part of a five-year rolling programme implemented by the Child Protection in Sport Unit (funded by the NSPCC and Sport England) requiring all state-funded sports to have satisfied

BOX 3.3 VIOLENCE PREVENTION INITIATIVES AIMED TO REACH SPORT ORGANIZATIONS AND CLUBS

Australia – The New South Wales (NSW) Department of Sport and Recreation has developed ‘Child Protection and Intervention: Policy and guidelines template for state sporting organizations’ (1999); ‘Guidelines for Sport and Recreation Organisations’ (that are working to protect children); and the Sport Rage pilot programme.ⁱ The Department provides a range of online resources dealing with ‘sport rage’, including case studies, a discussion of legal issues and responding to incidents. In 2004, a manual for coaches was developed by the NSW Ministry of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, in collaboration with Soccer NSW, NSW Sport and Recreation, and the Blacktown District Sport Football Association. A sport rage prevention pilot programme took place in Blacktown during the 2004 winter season. During the pilot, parents, coaches, referees and administrators were encouraged to sign an ‘anti-sledge pledge’, specifically tailored to each group and based on the various Australian Sports Commission codes of conduct. For the first time, parents, coaches, referees and club administrators were in accord regarding their rights and responsibilities relevant to sport rage. The programme was later evaluated to determine its effectiveness. Among the findings were that after the initiative was piloted, the number of sideline reports, send-offs and cautions issued in the under-9, 10 and 11 age division games was significantly lower than during the three years before the pilot began (2001-2003).

Canada – The Government of British Columbia’s ‘Prevention of Abuse and Violence in Sport’

several national standards for safeguarding children in sport by 2008.³⁰ Preliminary results of a survey indicate that some positive changes have been achieved in monitoring and evaluating violence in sport, especially among the ‘gatekeepers’ (child protection officers and other club officials).³¹ But the fairly low survey response, at 37 per cent, could reflect a reluctance to prioritize this issue. To strengthen children’s participation in a sport, leagues and clubs could consider setting up children’s and youth councils.

The Football Association in the United Kingdom has also commissioned longitudinal research on the impact of its child protection strategy.³² Data showed greater activism among teachers, coaches and parents and caregivers regarding child protection in football following implementation of the strategy. The measurement tool developed for this work was subsequently modified to use with parental activation.³³ In Scotland, the impact of child protection work in a dozen governing bodies was investigated, leading to classification of coaches as ‘leaders’, ‘sceptics’, ‘followers’ and ‘resisters’.³⁴

initiative provides online information for organizations on how to deal with harassment and abuse, including how to recognize abusive situations and whom to call for help. It also offers information on reporting harassment and abuse, and ways of properly screening volunteers to identify and exclude those who may pose a risk to children. Useful information for parents, coaches, teachers and volunteers is included.ⁱⁱ

Ireland – The Irish Basketball Association’s Code of Conduct for Children’s Sport (2002) covers policy, principles and values for young players, parents and coaches. It provides a recruitment policy for volunteers; policies for travelling with children, conducting residential events with children and the use of photographic and filming equipment; and guidelines for responding to disclosure, suspicions and allegations as well as reporting procedures and other principles for dealing with allegations, confidentiality, or anonymous complaints and rumours.ⁱⁱⁱ

Notes

ⁱ “Sport rage is understood as any violence, foul language, harassment, abuse or bad behaviour in sport. Sport rage is bad for sport – reducing enjoyment, risking safety and tarnishing club reputations.” – NSW Government, Communities, Sport & Recreation, ‘Sport Rage’, www.dsr.nsw.gov.au/sportrage/index.asp, accessed 24 March 2010. Also see: NSW Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, ‘Sport Rage: A prevention guide for coaches’, Fair Play Canada, 2004, http://fulltext.ausport.gov.au/fulltext/2004/nsw/sportrage_coaches.pdf; and Department of Sport and Recreation Western Australia, ‘Keep It Fun: Clubs guide to encouraging positive parent behaviour’, 2004, <http://fulltext.ausport.gov.au/fulltext/2003/wa/keepitfun.pdf>, accessed 24 March 2010.

ⁱⁱ Government of British Columbia, Canada, Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport, ‘Sport and Recreation: Abuse and violence prevention’, www.hls.gov.bc.ca/sport/abuse_violence_prevention/index.htm, accessed 24 March 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ Irish Basketball Association, ‘Irish Basketball Association: Code of conduct for children’s sport’, Irish Basketball Association, Dublin, 2002.

Prior to the introduction of mandatory national standards for sport, one local government department in the United Kingdom commissioned a study on the impact of its child protection work with 400 voluntary sport clubs.³⁵ Club officers reported that the topic fell outside their ‘comfort zone’, reflecting the policy vacuum between the national and the community level that has been seen in other sport research.³⁶

The few evaluations conducted reveal the extent of engagement with violence prevention by the sport community. Even in countries that are apparently ‘advanced’ with respect to this issue, signs remain of knowledge deficits, denial and policy inertia. As this topic becomes more widely acknowledged, and as sport-related policy and prevention work is more actively pursued internationally, it will be vital for sport agencies in all countries to conduct monitoring and evaluation studies to measure the impact of violence prevention. Good intentions and written policies mean nothing if they are not translated into action.



4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“The entire sports process for the elite child athlete should be pleasurable and fulfilling.”

– *International Olympic Committee, IOC Consensus Statement on Training the Elite Child Athlete*

Violence against children in sport is a broad and complex issue. This study seeks to demonstrate that violence prevention, child protection and measures to safeguard the well-being of children are generally not yet embedded in sport delivery systems. Many industrialized countries have yet to recognize the need to strengthen child safety and violence prevention measures within sport. Until and unless this is done, the many potential benefits of sport will never be fully realized. As identified in this report, and based on the literature reviewed, in order to reap the benefits of sport and to better protect children, the large knowledge gaps on the subject must be addressed. These gaps relate to the following areas:

- *Geography* – Little is known about the linkages between sport and violence in developing and transitional regions, such as Africa, Asia, Central and Eastern Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean. Focused research and evaluation of policies and programmes in these regions must generate knowledge and inform interventions.
- *Types of violence* – Neglect, physical and psychological abuse, trafficking and exploitation in sport are all areas that are under-researched.
- *Education programmes* – Education is lacking for several key stakeholder groups, including athletes, policymakers, support personnel, officials and sport managers.

In addition, the child athlete’s voice is still largely unheard.

To address these gaps requires action on a number of measures. The steps that need to be taken relate specifically to the following broad categories:

- Improved data collection and knowledge
- Strengthened structures and systems
- Increased education, awareness-raising and training
- Creation of ethical guidelines and codes of conduct
- Implementation of international sport for development programmes and activities.

Knowledge and Data Collection

Prevention policies should be based on reliable evidence. Without an evidence-based framework, policies may be based on myths, stereotypes or lack of awareness, and may simply be ignored. Child protection researchers in sport recognize that they are a long way behind other areas of scientific enquiry in sport, such as physiology or biomechanics. A coordinated, multidisciplinary approach is required to provide the evidence base for advocacy and action to eliminate violence against children in sport. A key underpinning and framework in this effort is provided by the linkages between sport and children’s rights, as presented in this study.

Knowledge

Overall, there is a marked absence of empirical data on violence against children in sport and a lack of analysis on the most effective ways to prevent it. There is a great need for expanded data collection and knowledge generation. A number of areas have been identified where further research is needed, including:

- The diverse forms of physical and emotional abuse of children in sport, including particular attention to sexual abuse
- The prevalence, forms and impact of violence in sports worldwide, ideally using longitudinal studies
- The experiences in societies outside the current research base, which mostly covers industrialized countries
- The experience of boys
- The nature and scope of discrimination experienced by young LGBT athletes if or when they ‘come out’ in sport
- The gendered nature of homophobia and how it is experienced by young people in different sports
- Discrimination based on race, ethnicity, citizenship or religion in the context of sport.

Relatively little attention has been paid to psychological violence.¹ This is particularly relevant in competitive sport, because research has documented apparently normalized coaching and instructional practices as well as team initiation rituals that constitute psychologically abusive practices.² Some research has found that perpetrators of sexual violence in sport are often psychologically abusive of young athletes.³

BOX 4.1 WHAT CHILDREN SAY ABOUT SPORT

What they expect from adults

- "Treat me fairly." (Boy)
- "Don't expect any more of the kids than you do of yourself really." (Boy)
- "We have to put a lot of dedication in so I guess I expect them to do the same." (Girl)
- "To push me, to want me to do well, to want to succeed, to make you feel 'I can do this'." (Girl)
- "I expect them to be nice to you and understand and not shout at you." (Girl)
- "Treat people as you would like to be treated." (Boy)
- "The people that make it fun make us feel good inside and the people who don't make us feel like we're not achieving something, we can't do anything." (Girl)
- "At some clubs you have bad adults: if you have an adult who doesn't make sport fun then you're not enjoying yourself." (Boy)
- "The difference is that the ones that make sport fun, they make it a bit easier." (Girl)
- "Adults make sport fun by getting involved with you in the game, smiling and just giving you pleasure out of it." (Girl)
- "They make you want to carry on, they make you want to compete, they make you want to do it more and more." (Girl)

Specific forms of violence against children, such as psychological, physical or sexual abuse, are unlikely to be experienced in isolation.⁴ But sexual violence may be understood as inherently consisting of both physical and psychological violations.⁵ Studies indicate a high degree of association between childhood sexual, physical and psychological abuse reported retrospectively by adults.⁶ Similar results have also been found in the sports literature, which underscores the need for studies and interventions that take account of multiple types of violence against children in sport.⁷

Child athletes – especially those at the elite level – may also be vulnerable due to their dependency on multiple caregivers. It is especially important to address the risks of HIV infection. An estimated 2.1 million children under age 15 are living with HIV around the world,⁸ but the number of infected children in organized sport is not known. Because children with HIV and AIDS are vulnerable to being stigmatized, they are more open to abuse. Athletes involved in sport may already be infected, or they may become infected while participating in sporting activities. It is reasonable to assume that their exposure to HIV and other infections or diseases may be correlated with other vulnerabilities in sport, though research is needed in this area. Sexually abusive practices in sport may spread HIV infection.⁹ Researchers therefore need to address how

What they don't like about sport

- "I don't like the pressure put on the kids sometimes by their coaches or if their parents want them to win too much." (Boy)
- "Shouting, because it makes you think 'Oh, I can't do this' and it makes you feel upset...it drives you away from the sport and puts you off." (Girl)
- "I've come across some parents who so want their kids to win that they'll just interfere with your match totally." (Boy)
- "They say stuff, meaning for you to hear it, but it can get a bit hurtful sometimes." (Boy)
- "I think sometimes some people can get overexcited in the heat of the moment." (Boy)

How they would feel without sport

- "If I didn't have sport I think it would be really dull and everyone would be really unhealthy." (Girl)
- "My life would be very boring and I wouldn't have much to do." (Boy)
- "My life would be a misery without sport – it would be horrible." (Boy)

Source

All quotations have been taken from the DVD *Our Voice in Sport*, National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Child Protection in Sport Unit, United Kingdom, 21 February 2006.

organized sport can ensure inclusion and provide security, safety and high-quality sporting experiences for infected children and their communities.

Research should also examine the extent and nature of violence to child athletes with disabilities, the ability of these athletes to understand abuse, and whether they are able to effectively report any abusive experiences. Research might examine how child athletes with disabilities who have experienced violence view the significance of their relationship to the perpetrator and to other persons to whom they might have disclosed their experience. For this vulnerable group of children, more knowledge is needed on the gendered nature of sexual violence, on disclosures and responses to violence, on violence prevention, and on the linkages between and among vulnerabilities of athletes.

The research presented in this report is primarily from Australia, Canada, the United States and some countries in Europe, and covers cases in which coaches and other authority figures in sport have been identified as perpetrators of sexual violence against children.¹⁰ While the methods through which children are abused and exploited appear to be generally consistent, significant geographic gaps exist in the empirical database. Anecdotal evidence is virtually the only information available on the situation in Africa, Asia, and Central and South America.

Data disaggregation

Current sport research on violence and violence prevention either ignores children or fails to disaggregate data by age. Data collection efforts should aim to provide a breakdown of the incidence and prevalence of violence in sport by gender, age and other important characteristics of differentiation. Sport researchers should focus on children in their work on violence and abuse, and previous studies should be re-analysed to extrapolate data on children so as to better identify existing gaps and design interventions that effectively protect children from all forms of violence.

Monitoring and evaluation

Programmes aimed at violence prevention and promotion of child protection within sport should be continuously monitored and evaluated to determine their impact and make improvements or adjustments. The 'stage of imminent achievement' (which, as mentioned in Chapter 2, is the phase at or around puberty prior to a child achieving elite status), needs to be researched to determine how, if at all, it relates to other markers of vulnerability in sport, such as physical, sensory or learning disabilities.¹¹ Conversely, there should be monitoring and evaluation of the efficacy of sport as a tool of violence prevention beyond sport.

Research partnerships and networks

Researchers on violence prevention inside and outside sport would benefit from closer links and collaborative networks. This could lead to shared learning and resources and the avoidance of duplication of efforts, optimizing the benefits of research for all.

Structures and Systems

Most countries do not have effectively functioning structures and systems that can prevent and eliminate violence against children in sport. This report indicates that wider violence prevention and child protection provisions have not been applied systematically in sport. For this to change, each country and sport federation needs to identify a designated authority that can link sport to wider violence prevention networks at the national and international levels. Such linkages will strengthen coordination within sport, facilitate a dialogue about shared values and principles and, eventually, underpin international standards for violence prevention and child protection in sport.¹²

Education, Awareness-Raising and Training

If the potential benefits of sport for children and for development are to be realized, the policy discourse should reflect a spirit of vigilance towards children's rights in the context of sport. Violence prevention is a cost-effective form of child protection, and education and awareness-raising are important tools. Some

BOX 4.2 EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES FOR VIOLENCE PREVENTION IN SPORT

Canada – The organization Justplay Sport Services aims to resolve issues of violence, harassment and abuse in organized youth sport. Among the approaches it offers are the Justplay Behaviour Management Program and a workshop series. The programme was piloted in hockey in Ontario, and attracted national and international interest following a successful evaluation. It has been expanded to include collaborations with soccer, youth football, baseball, lacrosse, basketball and other sporting associations.ⁱ

The Canadian Red Cross published 'RespectED: Promoting safe relationships and communities through respect education' in 2006. The RespectED programme responds to violence against children and youth with several prevention education programmes. Through education and partnerships, it aims to "break the cycle of abuse, neglect, harassment and interpersonal violence through prevention education, and in so doing, to promote safe, respectful and supportive relationships for individuals, within the family and within the community".ⁱⁱ

United Kingdom – Sports coach UK offers workshops entitled 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' and 'Safeguarding and protecting children 2: Reflecting on practice'.ⁱⁱⁱ

Notes

ⁱ JustPlay, www.wejustplay.com, accessed 24 March 2010.

ⁱⁱ Canadian Red Cross, 'RespectED: Promoting safe relationships and communities through respect education', Ottawa, 2006, www.cnchl-cncdh.ca/cmslib/general/overview_of_respected_2006eng200711581527.pdf, accessed 24 March 2010.

ⁱⁱⁱ For details, see the course handbook: Slinn, Nick, *Protecting Children from Abuse: A guide for everyone involved in children's sport*, Coachwise, Leeds, UK, 2006. Also see the sports coach UK website, www.sportscoachuk.org.

programmes and workshops such as these are available in sport (see Box 4.2, above), but there are large gaps.

Those charged with policy responsibilities for children and young people need information on children's rights and protection in sport. Child athletes must be perceived as "born free and equal in dignity and rights"¹³ rather than as "miniature human beings with miniature human rights."¹⁴ This change in mindset might be achieved through open dialogue between representatives of sport, human rights and child protection.¹⁵ Education and awareness-raising material should be designed for different stakeholder groups, and its impact should be monitored in regions lacking such material. In particular, sport for development personnel working in impoverished and war-torn communities need well-structured programmes that cover this topic.

BOX 4.3 CODES OF ETHICS, CONDUCT AND PRACTICE

The International Committee for Fair Play focuses on national and international organizations working on sport and education, high-level athletes, children, adolescents, coaches and trainers. One of the committee's main objectives is to award annual international prizes for fair play. Prize-winners include famous champions in men's and women's sport categories as well as lesser-known athletes, beginners and young people. The organization's conviction is to regard fairness as more important than winning at all costs.ⁱ

Panathlon International is dedicated to promoting ethical practices in youth sports; its membership is especially strong in Europe and South America. The 'Panathlon Declaration on Ethics in Youth Sport' (2004) represents the organization's commitment to establishing "clear rules of conduct in the pursuit of the positive values in youth sport."ⁱⁱ

The Irish Sports Council's 'Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Children's Sport' (1996) is intended to benefit everyone involved in children's sport. By following the principles, policy and practice guidelines contained in the code, adult sport leaders can contribute to providing an enjoyable and safe environment for children. The guidelines contained in the Code of Ethics take account of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and are in accordance with national government guidelines.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport's 'Declaration of Expectations for Fairness in Sport' was the country's first national ethics strategy for sport. Now known as the 'True Sport Strategy', it provides guidelines for a collective, voluntary process for changing attitudes, values and behaviours in various levels of sport. It is based on the 'Declaration of Expectations for Fairness in Sport', which was adopted by federal and provincial/territorial ministers during the 2001 Canada Games in London, Ontario.^{iv}

Notes

ⁱ International Committee for Fair Play, www.fairplayinternational.org/introduction.php, accessed 24 March 2010.

ⁱⁱ Panathlon International, 'Panathlon Declaration on Ethics in Youth Sport', Ghent, 24 September 2004, www.paralympic.org/export/sites/default/IPC/IPC_Handbook/Section_2/Panathlonx20Declarationx20English.pdf, accessed on 20 October 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ Irish Sports Council, 'Code of Ethics Manual', Dublin, www.irishsportsCouncil.ie/Participation/Code_of_Ethics/Code_of_Ethics_Manual, accessed 24 March 2010.

^{iv} Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, 'Expectations for Fairness in Sport', 10 August 2001, London, Ontario, available at www.mhp.gov.on.ca/English/sportandrec/sport/expectations-e.pdf, accessed 24 March 2010.

Athlete education on child rights and child protection issues is needed throughout the world. It is especially important that children in sport are informed of their rights and how to exercise them.

Birth Registration

As a strategy for the prevention of many forms of violence and other child protection violations, birth registration is critically important.¹⁶ For all children, birth registration is closely linked to having an identity and a nationality, and to being able to benefit from legal protection. In many places, it is necessary for access to a range of services. In the context of athletics, knowing the precise age of a child is critical to ensuring the appropriate level of training and participation.

Ethical Guidelines and Codes of Conduct

All sport organizations should be driven by ethical principles representing their own ideals and their professional obligations to sport and the wider society. Significant cultural, social, political and religious differences across nations, however, make it difficult to establish rules and enforcement mechanisms to prevent all forms of violence against children in sport.

Codes of conduct, practice and ethics are one of the most common mechanisms for raising standards of safety and behaviour (*see Box 4.3, at left*). Some people argue that the enforcement of such codes violates their individual rights and autonomy, especially where they are working in a voluntary capacity.¹⁷ For others, such codes make explicit the shared values and aspirations of children's sport. This is also consistent with the spirit and intent of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is therefore helpful to clarify the objectives of codes of conduct aimed towards preventing violence against children in sport, and to identify the general characteristics of an effective code that could achieve such objectives. These include:

- To articulate aspirational, shared, core values that reflect a global consensus throughout the sports industry in relation to the prevention of violence against children in sport.
- To provide a statement of ethical principles in relation to violence against children in sport that enables individual stakeholders worldwide to recognize and resolve the ethical dilemmas of associated risk behaviours.
- To assist local jurisdictions, such as national governing bodies of sport or clubs, to define and raise standards of conduct appropriate to their own cultural beliefs and customs in relation to risk behaviours associated with violence against children.

An effective code of conduct, framed by child rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, might have the following structure:

- A section describing clear aspirational standards based on consensus principles that include explicit guidance to help members make informed decisions in ethically ambiguous situations.
- An enforceable or regulatory section that includes rules to help decision-making on specific required and proscribed behaviours.¹⁸

Such a code might focus both on deterring violence and empowering personnel to support this objective. Deterrence will only be successful if the code explicitly outlines both systemic and individual risk behaviours. Empowerment aims to ensure participants are able to implement the code effectively, which requires education and training in ethical competencies for new personnel and as part of continuing professional development. The code should prescribe mandatory training in ethical competencies for coaching and support staff and should be articulated as a basic right and requirement for sports industry personnel.

Learning about the Convention on the Rights of the Child needs to be integrated into initial and in-service training for all those working with and for children.¹⁹ Child athletes should therefore participate in this process and also learn to respect each other's rights.

The code should include explicit interventions for use when violence against children in sport is suspected. Parents, guardians, coaches and support staff should act on their right and obligation to report any concerns and suspicions to appropriate authorities. They therefore need access to justice, state agencies for protection of child rights and such services as training courses, telephone helplines and counselling.

International Sport for Development

Good practice in sport for development initiatives reflects and embeds children's right to play safely. There are concerns related to short-term community training camps or tournaments that lack a child protection infrastructure covering such topics as awareness-raising, appropriate recruitment, education, training and referral systems. Without such a system, violence against children could be perpetrated, masked or overlooked.

It is imperative that personnel involved in sport for development are culturally informed; fully trained to recognize, prevent and deal with violence against children; and able to prevent or respond appropriately to it, either inside or outside sport. No clear examples of such training have been found in the course of compiling this report.

Gaps in violence prevention also exist between NGOs and state organizations dealing with children in sport, such as social/community services and police. This is particularly a concern in sub-Saharan Africa, where many sport for development projects operate.²⁰

Advocates of violence prevention are generally much better informed about the complexities and dynamics of violence against children than are advocates of sport.²¹ But advocates of sport bring boundless energy and enthusiasm for children's involvement that can spark their personal hopes and aspirations. Where child protection services are available, sport developers have a vital role to play in recognizing and referring child survivors of violence to these services. But these personnel can only fulfil this role if they have the necessary awareness and skills.

Countries approach protecting children from violence in many different ways. There is no common agreement on what constitutes adequate violence prevention, although the *World Report on Violence against Children* offers examples of unique approaches. It is important to respect and value every community's cultural assets, but international standards for safeguarding children's rights and for violence prevention in sport must also be recognized. The Convention on the Rights of the Child offers a sound normative framework within which to situate the issue of child protection in sport.

There is solid evidence that sport makes a real and positive difference in the lives of many children. To realize these benefits requires collaboration between the agencies responsible for sport for development and those responsible for child protection. To this end, the Committee on the Rights of the Child should monitor the rights of the child in sport and ensure that States' ombudspersons incorporate sport in their work. In this way, the Committee on the Rights of the Child could become a de facto 'international observatory' for children in sport. In addition, every country should identify a designated authority with responsibility for child protection in sport – ranging from the school to the community to elite athletes.

Sport researchers and child advocates have made a good start in identifying the nature and scope of violence against children in sport. The challenge of transforming the sport community into an unequivocally safe space for children – one that assures the exercise of their human rights – will take both time and political will. However, there are sufficient examples of successful solutions here to encourage those who advocate change in sport. People engaged in violence prevention and those in sport need to work seamlessly together to effect this transformation and thereby provide safe sport for all children.

ACRONYMS

AFL	Australian Football League
AIDS	acquired immune deficiency syndrome
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
HIV	human immunodeficiency virus
IOC	International Olympic Committee
IRC	Innocenti Research Centre (UNICEF)
LGBT	lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
NCCP	National Coaching Certification Program (Canada)
NGO	non-governmental organization
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (United Kingdom)
NSW	New South Wales (Australia)
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WHO	World Health Organization

ANNEX

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The searches undertaken in support of this report were conducted through a range of widely available electronic databases and print materials in English, with a few selections in French.

Search Words/Combinations

Sport with: Abuse (with Consent/Emotional abuse/Neglect/Physical abuse/Sexual abuse/Child protection/Child rights/Safeguarding); Childhood; Children (with Abuse); Children (with Violence); Emotional; Neglect; Physical; Sexual; Age (with Consent); Children (Child protection/Child rights/Safeguarding); Consent; Cultural change (Measurement of); Gender harassment; Gender relations; Hazing; Homophobia; Human rights; Millennium Development Goals; Perpetrator; Physical Education; Policy (Impact/Procedures/Provisions/Standards); Regulatory frameworks and standards (International/Regional/Local/Codes of practice/ethics); School; Sport (Education and training); Violence (Symbolic/Theories of); Sexual harassment; and Youth.

Databases

Academic Search Premier (EBSCO)
ASSIA: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts
BioMed Central
Blackwell Synergy
British Education Index (BEI)
Cambridge Journals Online (CJO)
EBSCOhost Electronic Journals Service (EJS)
Emerald (management research)
ERIC: Education Resources Information Center
Google Scholar
informaworld (Taylor & Francis)
International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS)
Index to Theses in Great Britain and Ireland
IngentaConnect (social sciences)
MEDLINE (Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online)
Oxford Journals
ProQuest
PsycARTICLES
PsycINFO
PubMed Central (PMC)
SAGE Publications
ScienceDirect
Scopus
SPOLIT database
SportDiscus
SpringerLink
Web of Knowledge (Thomson Reuters)
Web of Science (Thomson Reuters)

NOTES

CHAPTER 1

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CHAPTER 2

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CHAPTER 3

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CHAPTER 4

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