Non-Accidental Harms in Athletes with Impairment

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What are “non-accidental harms”?

Intentional violence:
“Volitional acts that result in or have the potential to result in physical injury and/or psychological harm”

Bullying
Hazing
Emotional abuse
Neglect
Harassment
Physical abuse
Sexual abuse
Why is this significant?

- Mental Health
- Physical Harm
- Organizational impact
- Non-accidental harms
“All forms of harassment and abuse breach human rights...There is a legal and moral duty of care incumbent on those who organize sport, to ensure that risks of non-accidental violence are identified and mitigated”

– IOC Consensus Statement, Mountjoy et al.
Who is at risk?

- Power imbalance is central to all abusive relationships in sport.
- Athletes with physical and/or intellectual impairment may be up to 4 times more likely to be victimized.

  - Dependency
  - Social powerlessness
  - Impaired judgment
  - Misinterpretation of affectionate behavior
Summarize the current state of knowledge related to non-accidental harms in athletes with impairment at all levels of competition and delineate priorities for future research.
Methods

► State-of-the-art literature review using the standardized tools for systematic literature review\(^2\)
► Inclusion criteria:
  ► Human participants
  ► Written and published in English
  ► Descriptive, cohort and case series, case-control, qualitative, mixed methods studies, policy statements, position statements, and all clinical trials
  ► Harassment and abuse of school-based, youth, and athletes with impairment at various levels of competition.
Flowchart of Methods

Search: Medline, Embase, PsychInfo, CINAHL, Scopus, Academic Search Premier

2245 Records

Duplicates removed

Screened 2235 Records

Excluded 2033 records

Excluded 194 records

8 final studies

Assessed 202 full-text articles

2245 Records

8 final studies
### Characteristics of the final 8 studies reviewed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of impairments</th>
<th>Number of participants</th>
<th>Types of abuse studied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual</td>
<td>5-6124</td>
<td>Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical, Intellectual &amp; Developmental</td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Visual Impairments**

- 5-6124 participants

**Types of Abuse Studied**

- Bullying
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Psychological abuse
Prevalence of abuse in Para athletes

- Psychological abuse: nearly 50%
- Physical abuse: 32%
- Sexual abuse: 34%

Athletes with impairment (n=302, age 18-50, local-international level):

- 2.9 times more likely to experience sexual abuse
- 3.23 times more likely to experience physical abuse
- 1.31 times more likely to experience psychological abuse

As competitive rank increased, frequency of physical abuse decreased but frequency of emotional abuse increased. 4

Vertommen et al:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Local</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>International</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Psychological abuse</td>
<td>1.05*</td>
<td>1.14</td>
<td>2.32*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>1.64*</td>
<td>3.18*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>1.44*</td>
<td>3.07*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Physical & sexual harassment and abuse

Bullying vs. Banter

Banter: Gentle, episodic, bidirectional

Bullying:
• Aggressive
• Repetitive
• Power imbalance (unidirectional)
  ➤ Low position in social group
  ➤ Bullying culture
  ➤ Systemic power

The “Bully-Victim” phenomenon was described by multiple studies and was more common among athletes with impairment than non-athletes.\textsuperscript{8-9}
Limitations

- Few studies for inclusion
- Few participants in those studies
- Overall, low quality of evidence
- Many studies did not include elite Para athletes
- Studies that included Para athletes did not specify type of impairment
- Dearth of studies on physical, sexual harms and other types of abuse
- Most focused on athletes with visual impairments
Para athletes are up to **four times** more likely to be victimized.

Non-accidental harms are rooted in psychological **power imbalance**.

True depth and breadth of non-accidental harms in Para athletes remains unknown.

**Future studies (human rights-based approach):**
- Relationship between type, level of impairment and risk of harm
- Prevalence of non-accidental harms, stratified by age, gender, sport, competition level, and impairment status
Acknowledgements

► Dr. Yetsa Tuakli-Wosornu, MD, MPH
► Dr. Sandra Kirby, PhD
► Mark Gentry
► Kimberly Ona Ayala, Fiona Doolan, Taylor Ottesen, Blake Caldwell, Nida Naushad, Patrick Huang, Laurel Kaye, and Lovemore Kuzomunhu
► Keggi-Kimball Fund for International Orthopedic Education
Thank you