

Non-Accidental Harms in Athletes with Impairment

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What are “non-accidental harms”?

Bullying

Hazing

Emotional abuse

Neglect

Harassment

Physical abuse

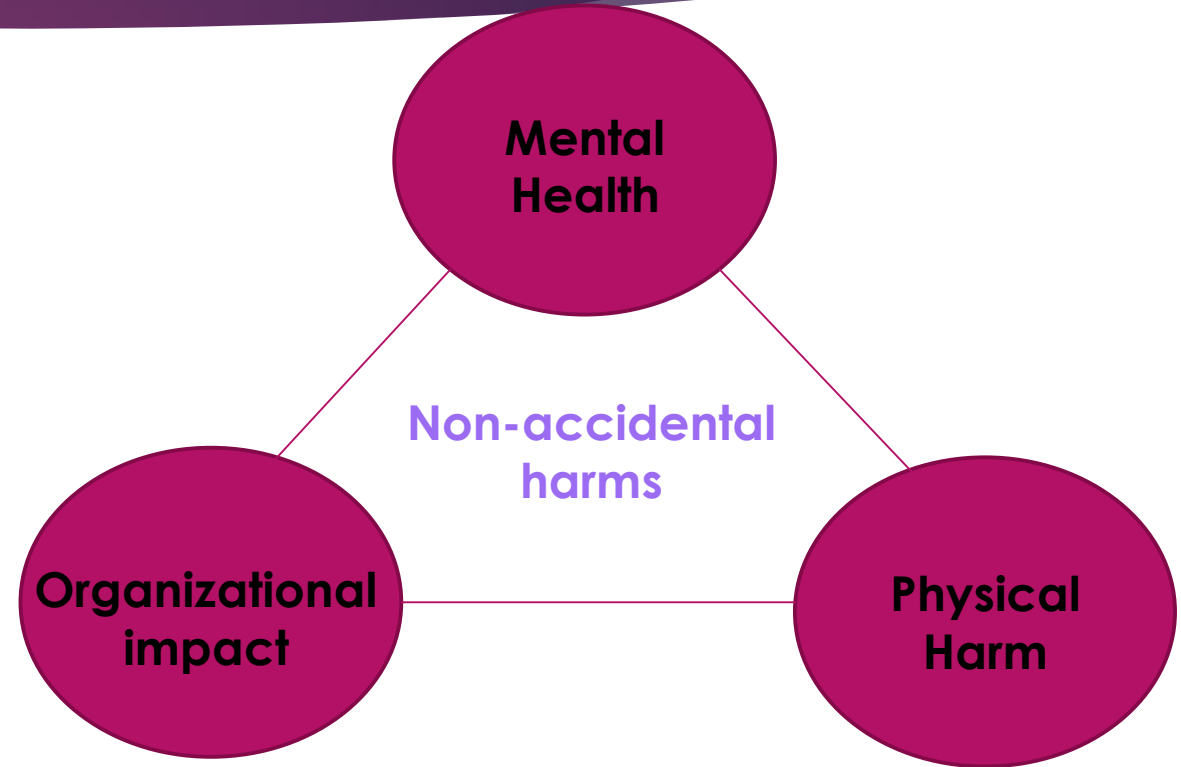
Sexual abuse

Intentional violence:

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

Why is this significant?

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Why is this significant?

3



"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 sport¹
- ▶ Athletes with physical and/or intellectual impairment may be up to **4 times more likely** to be victimized.¹
 - ▶ Dependency
 - ▶ Social powerlessness
 - ▶ Impaired judgment
 - ▶ Misinterpretation of affectionate behavior

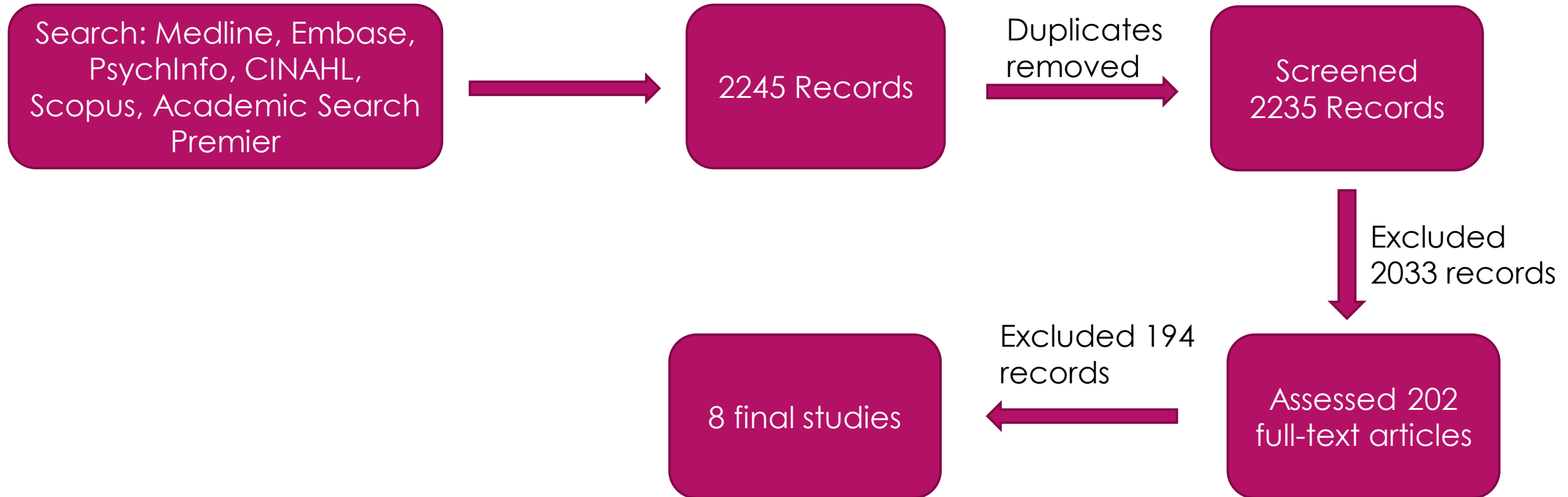


Summarize the current state of knowledge related to non-accidental harms in athletes with impairment at all levels of competition and delineate priorities for future research

- ▶ State-of the art literature review using the standardized tools for systematic literature review²
- ▶ 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

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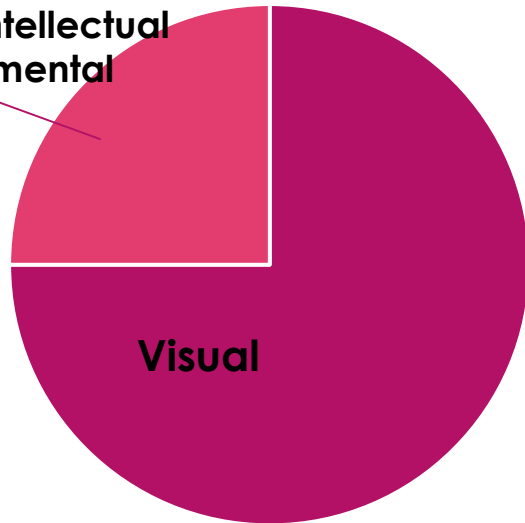


Characteristics of the final 8 studies reviewed

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Types of impairments

Physical, Intellectual
& Developmental



Number of participants

5-6124



Types of abuse studied

Bullying
Physical abuse
Sexual, psychological

Prevalence of abuse in Para athletes³

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- ▶ **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**

Trends of abuse in all athletes

- ▶ As competitive rank increased, frequency of physical abuse decreased but frequency of emotional abuse increased. ⁴
- ▶ Vertommen *et al*:

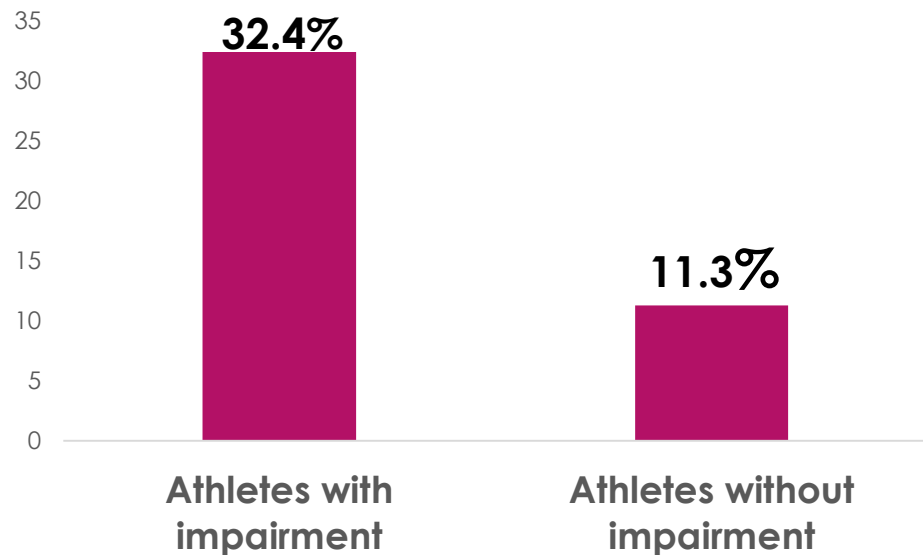
	Local	National	International
Psychological abuse	1.05*	1.14	2.32*
Physical abuse	1.26	1.64*	3.18*
Sexual abuse	1.22	1.44*	3.07*

Stafford A, Alexander K, Fry D. Playing through pain: children and young people's experiences of physical aggression and violence in sport. *Child Abuse Review* 2013;22:287-99.
 Vertommen T, Schipper-van Veldhoven N, Wouters K, et al. Interpersonal violence against children in sport in the Netherlands and Belgium. *Child Abuse Negl* 2016;51:223-36.

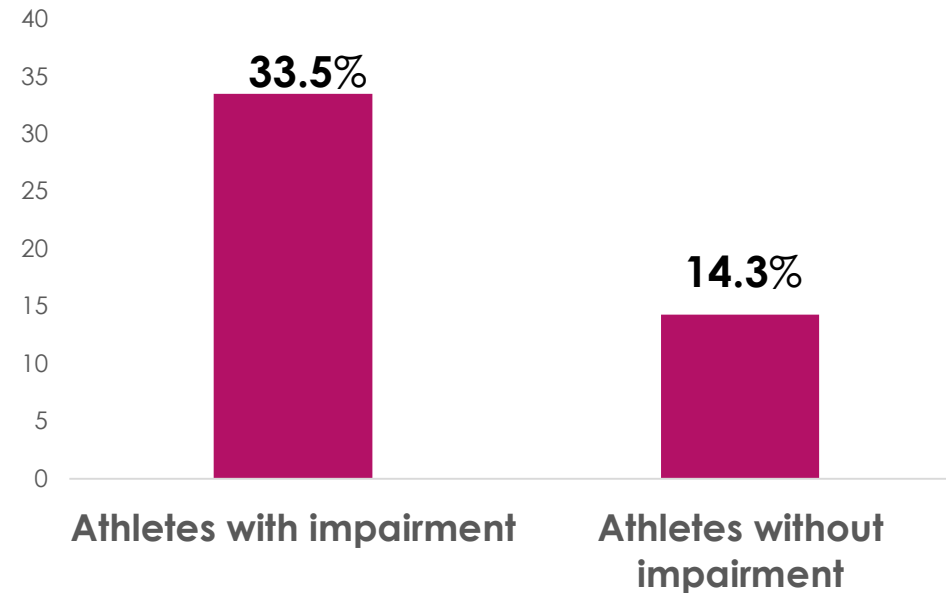
Physical & sexual harassment and abuse³

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Physical harm



Sexual harm



Vertommen T, Schipper-van Veldhoven N, Wouters K, et al. Interpersonal violence against children in sport in the Netherlands and Belgium. *Child Abuse Negl* 2016;51:223–36.

Bullying vs. Banter⁵⁻⁷

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Banter: Gentle, episodic, **bidirectional**

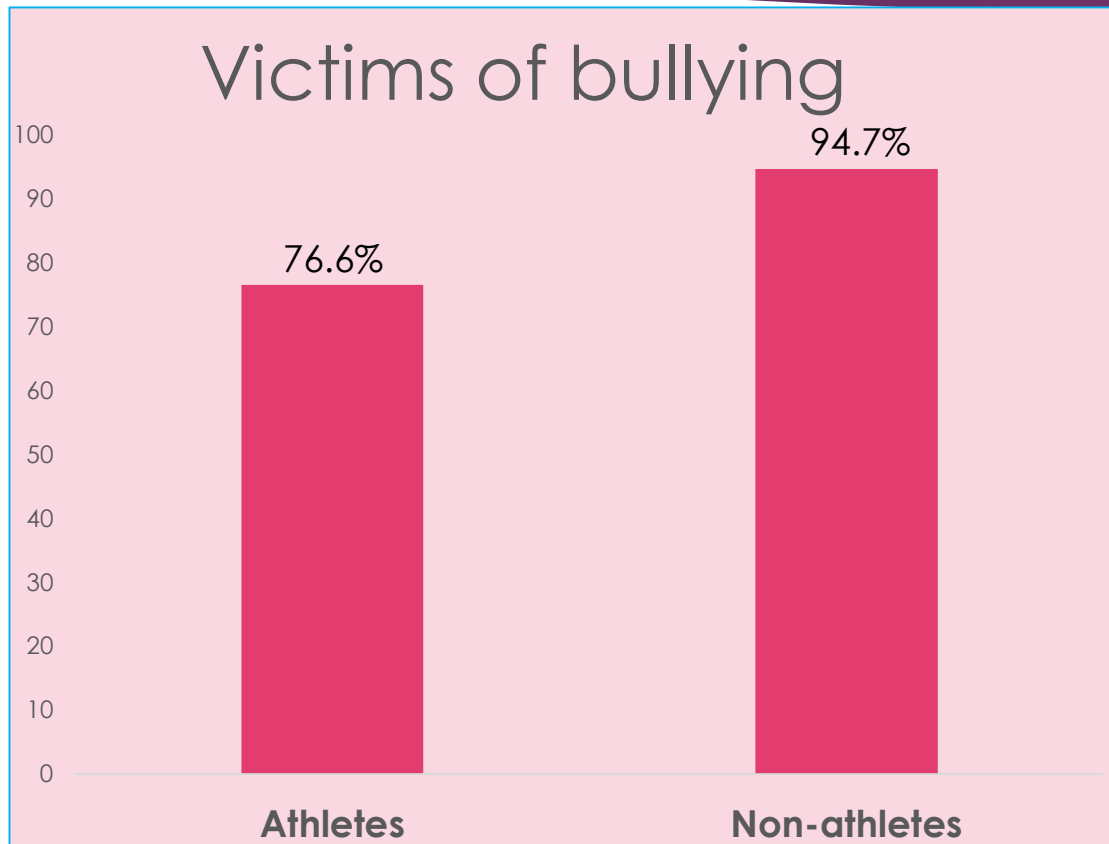
Bullying:

- Aggressive
- Repetitive
- Power imbalance (**unidirectional**)
 - ▶ Low position in social group
 - ▶ Bullying culture
 - ▶ Systemic power



Grey-Thompson, B.T. Duty of care in sport: independent report to government. Bullying: Definitions. PREVNet. <https://www.prevnet.ca/sites/prevnet.ca/files/fact-sheet/PREVNet-SAMHSA-Factsheet-Bullying-Definitions.pdf>
Preventing bullying. CDC. 2018. [chrome-extension://oemmdcbldboiebnladdacbdmaddadm/https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying-factsheet508.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/bullying-factsheet508.pdf)

The “Bully-Victim”



- ▶ “Bully-Victim” phenomenon was described by multiple studies and was more common among athletes with impairment than non-athletes.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

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Thank you