Paralympic athletes’ perceptions of their experiences of sports-related injuries

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Introduction

• Increased interest in para-sport the last decades
• “Paralympic athletes have become elite of their sport” (Vanlandewijck. 2011)
• Participation in sports places the athlete at a risk for injury (Ljungqvist et al. 2009)
• Few studies concerning sports-related injuries in Paralympic athletes
• Today, some injuries are known to preventable (Verhagen. 2015)
Introduction

• Existing studies show that injury rates are considerably high (Fagher & Lexell. 2014)
• Very few studies regarding risk factors, impairment related factors and preventive measure
• In summary, our knowledge is scarce
• One way is to increase our understanding through qualitative research
Aim

- To explore Swedish Paralympic Athletes’ perceptions of their experiences of sports-related injuries, risk factors and preventive possibilities using a qualitative design.
Participants

• 18 athletes (7 women, 11 men)
• Vision impairment (n=8), intellectual impairment (n=1), and physical impairment (n=9)
• Goalball (n=5), wheelchair-rugby (n=2), athletics (n=2), cycling (n=1), alpine skiing (n=1), boccia (n=1), ice sledge hockey (n=1), judo (n=1), table tennis (n=1) and swimming (n=3)
• 12.1 hours training/week
Methods

- Phenomenography
- Developed within the educational research
- Different explanatory models of perceptions and understandings of how individuals make sense of a phenomenon
- Individual interviews (20-44 minutes)
- Analyzed according to the 7-step model described by Sjöström & Dahlgren (2002)
- 1<sup>st</sup> order perspective, 2<sup>nd</sup> order perspective, essence
## Results

**Table 1.** The causes of sports-related injuries in para-sport.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Perceptions of experiences</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Essence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The impairment</td>
<td>Injuries occur because of the impairment</td>
<td><strong>Secondary effects of impairment</strong></td>
<td>Awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect training</td>
<td>Injuries get worse the more you train</td>
<td><strong>Sports overuse</strong></td>
<td>Incapacity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One´s own performance</td>
<td>Impatience cause</td>
<td><strong>The self-inflicted injury</strong></td>
<td>Guilt</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“I have had problems with my shoulders during my entire career, I believe it is because I´ve been training too much when I was a kid”
Results

Table 2. The consequences of sports-related injuries in para-sport.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Perceptions of experiences</th>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Essence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Consequences of SRIP</td>
<td>Injuries negatively influence the daily life</td>
<td>impact on both sports and daily life</td>
<td>Concern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occurrence of pain</td>
<td>Pain is something you have to live with</td>
<td>The normalized pain</td>
<td>Normality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The risks of elite sports</td>
<td>Elite sport is harmful and risky</td>
<td>Hazard acceptance in elite sports</td>
<td>Health hazard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“What can reduce my pain is to stop doing sports or to stop using my wheelchair”
Table 3. The possibilities for prevention of sports-related injuries in para-sport.

<table>
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<th>Perceptions of experiences</th>
<th>Categories</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General possibilities for prevention</td>
<td>One’s own responsibility of the body and gear can prevent injuries</td>
<td>Individual possibilities to prevent SRIP</td>
<td>Assets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preconditions in Paralympic sports</td>
<td>Paralympic athletes do not have same conditions</td>
<td>The unequal pre-requisites</td>
<td>Inequality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“If you go to the primary care center they just tell you to rest or continue to train”
Discussion

• Important to consider the impairment and that life becomes more difficult

• Self-blame may be indicator of injury risks

• Plan elite-investment during youth

• Important with knowledge about sport as well as impairments among athletes, coaches and trainers

• A first step towards injury prevention in para-sport could be specifically designed information and educational interventions, advantageously targeting the young para-athlete

“Don’t forget that we are disabled, we are not just athletes”
Conclusion

• Sports-injuries in Paralympic athletes are complex and multifactorial

• Differ in several ways from abled-bodied athletes

• Base for future development of sports safety work within the Paralympic movement

• Assure that future para-sport medicine interventions consider the athlete’s own perspective and not only outer perspectives
Thanks!

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