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# **Paralympic athletes' perceptions of their experiences of sports-related injuries**

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# Introduction

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- 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

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- 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

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





# Participants

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- 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

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- 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.

Domains	Perceptions of experiences	Categories	Essence
The impairment	Injuries occur because of the impairment	<b>Secondary effects of impairment</b>	Awareness
Incorrect training	Injuries get worse the more you train	<b>Sports overuse</b>	Incapacity
One's own performance	Impatience cause	<b>The self-inflicted injury</b>	Guilt

*“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.

Domains	Perceptions of experiences	Categories	Essence
Consequences of SRIP	Injuries negatively influence the daily life	Impact on both sports and daily life	Concern
Occurrence of pain	Pain is something you have to live with	The normalized pain	Normality
The risks of elite sports	Elite sport is harmful and risky	Hazard acceptance in elite sports	Health hazard

***“What can reduce my pain is to stop doing sports or to stop using my wheelchair”***



# Results

**Table 3.** The possibilities for prevention of sports-related injuries in para-sport.

Domains	Perceptions of experiences	Categories	Essence
General possibilities for prevention	One's own responsibility of the body and gear can prevent injuries	<b>Individual possibilities to prevent SRIP</b>	Assets
Preconditions in Paralympic sports	Paralympic athletes do not have same conditions	<b>The unequal pre-requisites</b>	Inequality

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



# Discussion

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- 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

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- 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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