

Consensus Statement

SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE IN SPORT

IOC Medical Commission Expert Panel

Panel Members:

Arne Ljungqvist (Sweden)	Chairman, IOC Medical Commission
Margo Mountjoy (Canada)	Consensus Statement Coordinator, IOC Medical Commission
Celia Brackenridge (UK)	Program Consultant: Professor of Sport Sciences (Youth Sport), School of Sport and Education, Brunel University
Kari Fasting (Norway)	Program Consultant: Professor at the Department of Social and Cultural Studies, Norwegian School of Sport Sciences

Participants:

Steven Boocock (UK)	Director, Sport England/National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children Child Protection in Sport Unit
Charlotte Bradley-Reus (Mex)	President of NGO "DEMUSA", Journalist, Researcher
Joy Bringer (Wales)	Senior Sports Psychologist to the Sports Council for Wales
Paulo David (Switzerland)	UN Human Rights official, Human Rights in Youth Sport
Margery Holman (Canada)	Professor in the Department of Kinesiology at University of Windsor
Sheldon Kennedy (Canada)	Former NHL Hockey player, Founder of "Respect in Sport"
Kimie Kumayasu (Japan)	Associate Professor, Osaka Prefecture University, Faculty of Liberal Arts and Sciences.
Sandra Kirby (Canada)	Professor in the Department of Sociology at University of Winnipeg
Trisha Leahy (Hong Kong)	Clinical Psychologist, Hong Kong Sports Institute
Petra Moget (Netherlands)	Senior Advisor to Dutch Olympic Committee on Sexual Harassment & Abuse
Debbie Simms (Australia)	Advocate & Policy Specialist for Sport Australia
Jan Toftegaard-Stoeckel (Den)	PhD. Researcher on Sport and Abuse, Institute of Sport Science and Clinical Biomechanics, University of Southern Denmark
Ian Tofler (USA)	Sports Psychiatrist; Clinical Specialist & Researcher
Maarten Weber (Netherlands)	Police Psychologist, Chief inspector of Police, Advisor to Dutch Olympic Committee on Sexual Harassment & Abuse

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SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ABUSE IN SPORT

In its role of promoting and protecting the health of the athlete, the IOC Medical Commission recognises all the rights of athletes, including the right to enjoy a safe and supportive sport environment. It is in such conditions that athletes are most likely to flourish and optimise their sporting performance. Sexual harassment and abuse are violations of human rights, regardless of cultural setting, that damage both individual and organisational health. While it is well known that sport offers significant potential for personal and social benefits, this potential is undermined where such problems occur. Sexual harassment and abuse occur worldwide. In sport, they give rise to suffering for athletes and others, and to legal, financial and moral liabilities for sport organisations. No sport is immune to these problems which occur at every performance level. Everyone in sport shares the responsibility to identify and prevent sexual harassment and abuse and to develop a culture of dignity, respect and safety in sport. Sport organisations, in particular, are gatekeepers to safety and should demonstrate strong leadership in identifying and eradicating these practices. A healthy sport system that empowers athletes can contribute to the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse inside and outside sport.

This document summarises current scientific knowledge about the different forms of sexual harassment and abuse, the risk factors that might alert the sport community to early intervention and the myths that deflect attention from these problems. It also proposes a set of recommendations for awareness raising, policy development and implementation, education and prevention, and enhancement of good practice.

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Sexual harassment and abuse in sport stem from power relations and abuses of power. *Sexual harassment* refers to behaviour towards an individual or group that involves sexualised verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviour, whether intended or unintended, legal or illegal, that is based upon an abuse of power and trust and that is considered by the victim or a bystander to be unwanted or coerced. *Sexual abuse* involves any sexual activity where consent is not or cannot be given. In sport, it often involves manipulation and entrapment of the athlete. Sexual harassment and abuse occur within an organisational culture that facilitates such opportunities. Indeed, they are symptoms of failed leadership in sport. Gender harassment, hazing and homophobia are all aspects of the sexual harassment and abuse continuum in sport (see Appendix 1). *Gender harassment* consists of derogatory treatment of one gender or another which is systematic and repeated but not necessarily sexual. *Hazing* involves abusive initiation rituals that often have sexual components and in which newcomers are targeted. *Homophobia* is a form of prejudice and discrimination ranging from passive resentment to active victimisation of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people.

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE: PREVALENCE, RISKS AND CONSEQUENCES

Research indicates that sexual harassment and abuse happen in all sports and at all levels. Prevalence appears to be higher in elite sport. Members of the athlete's entourage who are in positions of power and authority appear to be the primary perpetrators. Peer athletes have also been identified as perpetrators. Males are more often reported as perpetrators than females.

Athletes are silenced by the sexual harassment and abuse process. The risk of sexual harassment and abuse is greater when there is a lack of protection, high perpetrator motivation and high athlete vulnerability (especially in relation to age and maturation). There is no evidence that the amount of clothing cover or the type of sport are risk factors: these are myths. Research identifies risk situations as the locker-room, the playing field, trips away, the coach's home or car, and social events, especially where alcohol is involved. Team initiations or end-of-season celebrations can also involve sexually abusive behaviour against individuals or groups.

Research demonstrates that sexual harassment and abuse in sport seriously and negatively impact on athletes' physical and psychological health. It can result in impaired performance and lead to athlete drop-out. Clinical data indicate that psychosomatic illnesses, anxiety, depression, substance abuse, self harm and suicide are some of the serious health consequences. Passive attitudes/non-intervention, denial and/or silence by people in positions of power in sport (particularly bystanders) increases the psychological harm of sexual harassment and abuse. Lack of bystander action also creates the impression for victims that sexually harassing and abusive behaviours are legally and socially acceptable and/or that those in sport are powerless to speak out against it.

RELATIONSHIPS IN SPORT

Sexual harassment and abuse in sport do not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race, sexual orientation or disability. Athletes come from many different cultural and family backgrounds and are the centre of a system of relationships focused on helping them to achieve their sport potential. There is always a power difference in an athlete's relationships with members of their entourage (coaches, scientific and medical staff, administrators etc.). This power difference, if misused, can lead to sexual harassment and abuse and, in particular, to exploitative sexual relationships with athletes.

These relationships require that a significant amount of time be spent together in the emotionally intense environment of competitive sport. This situation has the potential to put the athlete at risk of isolation within a controlling relationship where his/her power and right to make decisions is undermined.

All adults in an athlete's environment must adopt clear guidelines about their roles, responsibilities and appropriate relationship boundaries. It is essential that each member of the entourage, and any other authority figure, stays within the boundaries of a professional relationship with the athlete.

PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Accepted prevention strategies include policies with associated codes of practice, education and training, complaint and support mechanisms and monitoring and evaluation systems. Regardless of cultural differences, every sport organisation should have these provisions in place.

The policy is a statement of intent that demonstrates a commitment to create a safe and mutually respectful environment. The policy should state what is required in relation to the promotion of rights, well-being and protection. It allows the organisation to generate prompt, impartial and fair action when a complaint or allegation is made. It further allows it to take disciplinary, penal and other measures, as appropriate.

Codes of practice describe acceptable standards of behaviour that, when followed, serve to implement the policy. Standards of behaviour set a clear benchmark for what is acceptable and unacceptable. They can help to minimise opportunities for sexual harassment and abuse and unfounded allegations. (See Appendix 2.)

RECOMMENDATIONS

All sport organisations should:

1. develop policies and procedures for the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse;
2. monitor the implementation of these policies and procedures;
3. evaluate the impact of these policies in identifying and reducing sexual harassment and abuse;
4. develop an education and training program on sexual harassment and abuse in their sport(s);
5. promote and exemplify equitable, respectful and ethical leadership
6. foster strong partnerships with parents/carers in the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse; and
7. promote and support scientific research on these issues.

Through sexual harassment and abuse prevention in sport, sport will become a safer, healthier and more positive environment for all.

In case of divergence between the English version of the Consensus Statement and the translated versions, the English version prevails.

Appendix 1 The sexual exploitation continuum

Source: Adapted from Brackenridge (1997)

SEX DISCRIMINATION

SEXUAL & GENDER HARASSMENT

HAZING & SEXUAL ABUSE

INSTITUTIONAL PERSONAL

<i>"the chilly climate"</i>	<i>"unwanted attention"</i>	<i>"groomed or coerced"</i>
vertical & horizontal job segregation	written or verbal abuse or threats	exchange of reward or privilege for sexual favours
lack of harassment policy and/or officer or reporting channels	sexually oriented comments jokes, lewd comments or sexual innuendoes, taunts about body, dress, marital situation or sexuality	groping
lack of counselling or mentoring systems	ridiculing of performance	indecent exposure
differential pay or rewards or promotion prospects on the basis of sex	sexual or homophobic graffiti practical jokes based on sex	forced sexual activity sexual assault
poorly/unsafely designed or lit venues	intimidating sexual remarks, propositions, invitations or familiarity	
absence of basic security	domination of meetings, play space or equipment	physical/sexual violence
	condescending or patronising behaviour undermining self-respect or work performance	rape
	physical contact, fondling, pinching or kissing	incest
	vandalism on the basis of sex	
	offensive phone calls or photos	
	stalking	
	bullying based on sex	

Appendix 2 Criteria for sexual harassment and abuse policies and codes of practice in a sport organisation

The policy on sexual harassment and abuse should:

- identify and address these issues
- be clear and easily understood
- involve consultation with athletes
- be widely communicated through publication and education
- be approved by the relevant management body (e.g. Management Board or Executive Committee) and incorporated into its constitution and/or regulations
- apply to all involved in the organisation
- be supported by a comprehensive education and training strategy
- be reviewed and updated on a regular basis, particularly when there is a major change in the constitutional regulations of the organisation or in the law.

The policy should:

- state that all members have a right to respect, safety and protection
- state that the welfare of members is paramount
- identify who has responsibility for implementing and upholding it
- specify what constitutes a violation
- specify the range of consequences for such violations
- specify procedures for reporting and handling complaints
- provide details of where to seek advice and support for all parties involved in a complaint
- specify procedures for maintaining records
- provide guidance for third party reporting ('whistleblowing').

There should be codes of practice on sexual abuse and harassment for specific member roles in a sport organisation. The code of practice on sexual harassment and abuse should:

- provide guidance on appropriate/expected standards of behaviour from all members
- set out clear processes for dealing with unacceptable behaviours, including guidance on disciplinary measures and sanctions.

Resources list – Sexual harassment and abuse in sport

This is not a definitive list but merely indicative of some of the baseline sources on this subject.

Australian Sports Commission (2006) *Ethics in Sport – Member Protection*. Available at www.ausport.gov.au/ethics/memprot.asp

Brackenridge, C.H., Pitchford, A., Nutt, G. and Russell, K. (2007) *Child Welfare in Football: An Exploration of Children's Welfare in the Modern Game*. London: Routledge/Taylor & Francis.

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Brackenridge, C.H. (2001) *Spoilsports: Understanding and Preventing Sexual Exploitation in Sport*. London: Routledge.

David, P. (2005) *Human Rights in Youth Sport: A Critical Review of Children's Rights in Competitive Sports*. London: Routledge.

Fasting, K., Brackenridge, C. and Sundgot-Borgen, J. (2003) 'Experiences of sexual harassment and abuse among Norwegian elite female athletes and non-athletes', *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 74(1):84-97.

Johnson, J. and Holman, M. (eds) (2004) *Making the Team: Inside the world of sport initiations and hazing*. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press.

Kirby, S. Greaves, L. and Hanvkivsky, O. (2000) *The Dome of Silence: Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport*. Halifax, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing/London: Zed Books.

Out Games (2006) *Declaration of Montreal on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Human Rights*. Described at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaration_of_Montreal

Panathlon International (2004) *Declaration on Ethics in Youth Sport*. Available at www.panathlon.net

Sport England/NSPCC Child Protection in Sport Unit (2003) *National Standards for Safeguarding Children in Sport*. Available at www.thecpsu.org.uk

Tofler, I. and de Geronimo, T.F. (2000) *Keeping Your Kids Out Front Without Kicking Them From Behind: How to Manage High-achieving Athletes, Scholars and Performing Artists*. San Fransico, CA: Jossey-Bass.

WomenSport International *Position Statement on Sexual Harassment in Sport*. Available at www.womensportinternational.org

C Brackenridge and K Fasting
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