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Summary Report

# THE EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN PARTICIPATING IN ORGANISED SPORT IN THE UK

Kate Alexander, Anne Stafford, Ruth Lewis

The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC  
Child Protection Research Centre

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THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH / NSPCC

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# BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

This is a summary of the Main Report of a three year study of children and young people's experiences of organised sport<sup>1</sup> in the UK. The study, commissioned and funded by NSPCC, was conducted by researchers at The University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Child Protection Research Centre between 2007 and 2010.

## 1 CONTEXT

The benefits to children of participating in sport are well known and documented and include enhancement of self confidence and self-esteem, physical and mental health, and well-being (Scottish Executive, 2003). At the time the research was commissioned there was some, but rather less, information about negative and harmful treatment experienced in organised sport by children in the UK (Myers and Barret, 2002, Brackenridge *et al.*, 2005). Our study was commissioned to provide additional information about the nature of these negative experiences and harms.

In addition, research in this area has tended to focus on adults, mainly women, and on some aspects of harmful behaviours over others, for example sexual harassment and sexual abuse (Brackenridge, 2001, Fasting *et al.*, 2002, Leahy *et al.*, 2002, Fasting *et al.*, 2004, Fasting, 2005, Fasting *et al.*, 2007, Fasting *et al.*, 2008). Earlier studies involving children have focussed on the experiences of young athletes participating in sport at the elite level rather than recreational (Gervis and Dunn, 2004, Stirling and Kerr, 2007). The study attempted to address some of these gaps with specific aims to:

- Address the gap in the literature about harm to children in sport
- Investigate the range of maltreatment and negative experiences children might face in sport settings
- Provide information to assist in the development of policy about child abuse in sport.

## 2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

There were two main elements to the research. First, an online survey of students (aged 18–22) in higher and further education institutions across the UK, yielding over 6,000 valid responses (three quarters from young women, and a quarter from young men). The questionnaire explored respondents' experience and retrospective views of participating in organised sport as

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<sup>1</sup> **Organised Sport:** Organised sport was defined in the study as sport that is voluntary, takes place outside school hours and includes an element of training or instruction by an adult. It did not include PE and informally arranged sport such as 'kick-about' with friends. It did include extra-curricular sport at school, for example playing in the school team or being part of a club, based at school but taking place outside ordinary PE lessons.

children (aged up to 16) and gathered information about the impact of sport on the body image of young participants and about their experience of the following broad categories of harm:

- emotional harm including teasing, bullying and humiliating treatment
- self-harm
- sexual harm including sexual harassment and sexual abuse
- physical harm including training while injured or exhausted and aggressive and violent behaviour.

In each section of the questionnaire dealing with harm, respondents were asked if they had experienced any of the behaviours that defined the harm (see Appendix 1), and if they had, whether they had experienced them 'once or twice' or 'regularly', and who was responsible for the behaviours they had experienced.

The second element of the research consisted of 89 in-depth telephone interviews with young people who identified themselves in the survey as having experienced some harm in sport and who were willing to be interviewed. The themes explored in the interviews mirrored those in the questionnaire but provided young people with the opportunity to provide more detail, explain the importance of sport in their childhoods and describe their feelings about the experiences they disclosed in their questionnaire return.

There were considerable ethical challenges in undertaking a study concerned with surveying and interviewing young people about negative, harmful and potentially abusive experiences in sport. While our research did not directly ask children about their experiences, we were aware that in exploring issues of child abuse with young adults, this still raised sensitive issues. For this reason, the safety and welfare of survey respondents and interviewees was a priority for the research team, who were experienced in dealing with child protection issues arising in a research context. A senior child protection professional working for a local child protection organisation was identified and acted as a child protection consultant to the Principal Investigator on the project.

### 3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As with all research, the study had certain limitations. Some of these were inherent in the methodology; others were specific to the response achieved for this study:

- There are limitations in relying on young people's retrospective views as a proxy for children's views and experiences. On the one hand, retrospective recall can be flawed and it is possible that respondents can fail or forget to report. On the other hand, young adults, being close in age to children, are not being asked to recall experiences too far in the past. This may also make it easier for some to mention abusive experiences from the relative safety of young adulthood (Cawson *et al.*, 2000).

- Some of the experiences young people taking part in the research described may have taken place more than 10 years ago. Since then, a considerable amount of policy and practice development has taken place that has affected the way in which organised sport for children is delivered. The experiences of children taking part in organised sport today, may therefore be different.
- In order to ease completion of a long questionnaire, we chose to include very few 'must answer' questions. It was possible, therefore, for participants to skip questions or elements of them. In the sections on harm, non-response has been assumed in the analysis to indicate a 'never' or 'no' response.
- The sample was self-selecting not random. The study has not attempted to infer representativeness of a population, however, our assumption is that with such a large achieved sample, error is minimised.
- As the survey was essentially an opt-in exercise, young people were under no obligation to complete the questionnaire. We do not know what motivated those who completed it. It may be that young people who had particularly negative experiences were more motivated to complete the questionnaire, in which case the research could overstate negative experiences. On the other hand, young people whose experience of sport was very positive may have been more motivated to respond, in which case negative experiences could be understated.
- Male respondents are under represented. Nearly three quarters of the respondents were young women. In part this reflects the gender imbalance of the current undergraduate student population. The absolute number of male respondents (n=1,634) was however high enough to allow meaningful interpretation and comparison of the findings.
- The respondents comprised young people from a slightly higher socio-economic group than the population of young people as a whole, as they were drawn from a student population.

# CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES OF ORGANISED SPORT

## 4 INTRODUCTION

Respondents to the online survey participated in over 40 organised sports as either their main sport or second sport. A wide range of both individual and team sports were represented but just six sports were played by over 10% of respondents (swimming, netball, football, dance<sup>2</sup>, hockey and athletics). Unsurprisingly, there were gender differences in the sports participated in. For example, netball and dance were almost exclusively reported by girls, while football and rugby were predominantly played by boys. Of the top ten sports in the survey just athletics, tennis and badminton had similar proportions of boys and girls reporting participation.

In the main, young people painted a positive picture of sport participation. They reported valuing the social aspects of taking part, the time they spent with team mates, and the friendships they made. They appreciated the close contact with young people they might otherwise not have met.

## 5 OVERVIEW OF HARM EXPERIENCED BY RESPONDENTS TO THE SURVEY

The study highlighted that alongside the considerable benefits of participating in sport sat a range of more negative and harmful experiences. Table 1 gives an overview of the various types of harm experienced by survey respondents (see Appendix 1 for the behaviours that define each type of harm).

Table 1: Experience of various types of harm in main or second sport, by gender

	All		Male		Female	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
<b>Emotional harm</b>	75%	4554	77%	1260	74%	3294
<b>Sexual harassment</b>	29%	1784	17%	284	34%	1500
<b>Physical harm</b>	24%	1433	26%	425	23%	1008
<b>Self harm</b>	10%	605	9%	152	10%	453
<b>Sexual harm</b>	3%	171	5%	77	2%	94
Total	100%	6060	100%	1634	100%	4426

<sup>2</sup> Dance was added to the predefined list of sports in the questionnaire after the first phase of the research. This was because the overwhelming majority of young people who ticked 'other' for their sports were dancers.



- 75% of respondents reported emotional harm
- 29% reported sexual harassment
- 24% reported physical harm
- 10% reported self harm
- 3% reported sexual harm.

## 6 EMOTIONAL HARM

Disrespectful, hurtful and emotionally harmful treatment of young people was commonplace in children's experiences of sport in the UK. Three quarters of all respondents to the survey had experienced this in some form. Of those:

- 79% had been criticised about their performance
- 77% reported being embarrassed or humiliated about something
- 66% reported being teased
- 51% said they were shouted or sworn at.

The most common perpetrators of emotional harm were team mates and peers. However, a third of those reporting it in both their main and second sports said their coach was involved. Coaches became a more frequent source of emotional harm as young athletes advanced through the competitive ranks.

Being criticised about performance was the most commonly reported behaviour in this category. While this can be a valid part of training, many young people reported circumstances where criticism about performance was unhelpful, disproportionate and in some cases counter-productive. Sometimes young people mentioned this as a reason for leaving their sport. Young people described harsh treatment at the hands of peers when things did not go well in training and in competition, leaving them feeling that they had let the team down:

I remember making a mistake and everyone would be like, especially if they didn't think you were good enough to be in the team, they would criticise you after the game and go 'you're so shit, you're rubbish, you're playing badly, you don't deserve to be in the team, that was such a crap mistake you made.' ... Team mates, it wasn't really the coach because the coach was there, as I said, almost as sort of guide. He wasn't there to criticise or really to coach. I mean it wasn't serious high level sport, just the top team for our age-group, it wasn't any great shakes. But the guys, maybe they get it seeing all the professional sportsmen, but they were just so ready to criticise. I mean they weren't particularly brilliant friends at that age. That was actually when I was playing in the team from the year above and I guess it's because they wanted their mate in, but it was pretty harsh (Young man: District level football, local level football).

There could be harsh criticism from coaches too, sometimes to the point where young people reported being regularly in tears. In team sports the humiliation could be exacerbated when criticism took place in front of peers:

Yeah, there was definitely times when you could have someone [one of the coaches] really having a go at you, to the point that like you'd be crying (Young man: district level rugby, national level athletics).

Being shouted and sworn at was also common. Again this mainly occurred between peers, but coaches were also involved. Some of this was minor, infrequent and not directed at any particular young person. For some it was persistent; the result of anger and frustration about performance and could be frightening:

I mean the whole training was like, if you do one thing wrong then suddenly like you are being screamed at in the middle of an entire gym whether there is five year olds in there, or just your team in there. You are pointed out, isolated out, whether it's sent out the gym or just like screamed at or laughed at in front of the entire club (Young woman: international gymnastics).

Being made to feel embarrassed or humiliated about something was also common. More than three quarters of those reporting emotional harm said they had experienced this and two thirds had been teased. In interview young people spoke of being embarrassed and humiliated as a result of something coaches did. Teasing was something that happened between peers. Coaches sometimes used embarrassment and humiliation as a tactic to keep young people in their place.

We had a competition in training called ... we called it juice boy basically, just a penalty shoot-out and the loser has to wear a pretty pink helmet the next time they go on the ice. There was one occasion where the goalies were told to let everybody score except this one kid (Young man: district level ice-hockey, local level football).

Teasing between peers could involve taunting a boy for being involved in a 'girly' sport, or simply for wearing the wrong trainers. Sometimes teasing shifted into more serious bullying behaviour. More than a third of young people who reported emotional harm said they had been bullied. There were many instances where young people had been picked on:

You would generally find some nights at training like you would have ten, fifteen people having a pop at like one person, and it being like an onslaught, and it was just ... that was like the kind of bad side of it ... It could be anything like your skill base or your actual playing performance, even if like it wasn't an issue they would just pick something off it, and if you tried to say something to defend yourself and it would just all of a sudden be like ... if you say something slightly wrong or incorrect as a result then obviously that just gets picked on and like continue kind of thing. It could also be like a bit of personal stuff like family stuff and things like that (Young man: local level rugby, local level football).

Some young people reported they had been victims of serious ongoing and persistent bullying which they experienced as distressing, debilitating and undermining.

To a great extent all of these behaviours tended to be accepted as normal by young people and ‘just what happens in sport’, dismissed as ‘banter’, ‘meant in a jokey way’ and ‘just kids being kids’. There was little evidence of young people reporting it to adults (great care was taken to shield it from adults) or of adults effectively dealing with it. It provides some evidence of a sporting culture which accepts and condones disrespectful and negative treatment among young people and between young people and coaches.

## 7 BODY IMAGE

The body image impacts of sport were more positive than negative overall:

- 88% of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed how sport made them feel fitter
- 52% agreed or strongly agreed that they liked the way sport made their body look
- 51% agreed or strongly agreed that doing sport improved their body image.

There were, however, gender differences in the reported body image impacts of participating in sport, with young women more likely to report negative impacts than young men. The interviews allowed for further exploration of these more negative experiences. While these did not always stem from sport, they could find particular expression there:

It’s difficult to say as under sixteen you are so, so aware of your body, and I think it’s all really hard to kind of pinpoint whether sport would have made any difference with that. I mean, I remember being in the first couple of years of high school and we were all expected to shower after hockey, after being muddy and cross country and stuff, and everyone just kept their underwear on and washed the mud off their legs. I don’t think anyone would have taken all their clothes off in the shower, because it was literally ... there was no curtains or anything, it was just a shower block (Young woman: district level hockey, local level football).

Young women often described general self-consciousness about their bodies and how they looked, which was intensified by sport clothing – short gym skirts, leotards and swimming costumes were frequently mentioned. Where girls participated in sports where the clothing was not revealing, these problems were minimised. This kind of self-consciousness could also affect boys. For example, a young man described how his swimming team became acutely aware of each others’ bodies around puberty and spoke of how he would look at the physical development of his team mates, and think about their sexual development and maturity in comparison to himself.

In addition to exploring how participating in sport affected young athletes’ image of themselves and their bodies, the research also examined the extent to which they sought actively to change their bodies through dieting and excessive exercise. Our research found that for a minority of children involved in sport, the mainly positive body impacts of participating in sport may come at a price:

- 10% percent of respondents to the survey said they had a special diet plan to reach their perfect weight
- 11% had a special exercise plan to reach their perfect weight
- 5% reported having become anorexic or bulimic.

Dance and gymnastics had particularly high levels of young people reporting efforts to change their bodies through diet and exercise. Dancers were most likely to say they became anorexic or bulimic (9%), while gymnasts were by far the most likely to say they had a special diet plan so they could reach their perfect weight (16%).

Coaches also had a role in directly setting diet and exercise plans, in scrutinising and being aware of young people's weight and appearance, in not understanding the possible effect of this behaviour on young people's developing identities, and in not challenging a culture where being the perfect weight and having the right appearance was highly important to young people.

## 8 SELF HARM

Ten per cent of young people reported some form of self-harm. Of those:

- 56% reported hitting and punching themselves
- 55% reported scratching and tearing their skin
- 39% reported cutting themselves.

Young men and women reported self harming behaviour in similar proportions. However, young men were more likely to report hitting and punching themselves while young women were more likely to report scratching or tearing their skin or cutting themselves. Interviews provided important insights into the part sport can play in contributing to young people's self-harming behaviour.

Even though you are good at a sport, it doesn't seem to matter how many medals you win, it matters what you look like ... just sort of ended up really miserable about my body image ... So I just used to cut a bit around my legs and stomach ... But yeah it was all carrying on with feelings when I was younger (Young woman: national level kayaking, district level swimming).

I used to do it every day. It made me feel partly relieved but partly hating myself and thinking I deserved to be hurt (Young man: local level football, recreational kayaking).

Some attributed the onset of these behaviours entirely to sport, indicating that it stopped when they stopped participating. For others, the triggers for self-harming were in sport but sport was not the main reason. The roots of self harming could also lie elsewhere, but it took on a particular flavour in the context of sport. For almost all of those reporting self harm at interview, there was an association with negative self and body image. Some attributed these behaviours to

the pressures of training and competition. Given the strictures, rigours, and control necessary to compete and be successful at a certain level in sport, self harm provided a feeling of control for some young people in situations where they felt powerless.

## 9 SEXUAL HARM

We explored a range of sexual harms that children may face in sport settings ranging from sexual harassment of young people through to sexualised behaviour and sexual abuse. Experience of sexual harassment was common with 29% of all respondents (34% of young women and 17% of young men) reporting it. Of those:

- 71% experienced non-physical harassment in their main sport and 40% in their second sport. This included being subject to sexist jokes; being whistled or leered at; and having sexual comments made about your appearance
- 34% experienced physical harassment in their main sport and 16% in their second sport. This included: having your space invaded, physical contact that made you uncomfortable, being touched in a way that made you uncomfortable, and having a massage or rub that made you uncomfortable.

Around two thirds of those reporting sexual harassment in both their main and second sports said their team mates or peers were involved. However around a quarter said coaches were involved. Sexual harassment is notable among the harms explored in the research for the high proportion of 'other' perpetrators (one in five in both main and second sport). This category included spectators and passers-by and was particularly significant in predominantly female sports played outside.

Non physical harassment was often described as something that could be 'laughed off' but some experienced it as distressing and difficult. On the whole coaches and other adults did not deal with it effectively; rather, it was addressed in a 'cut it out lads' or 'knock it off lads' way:

Sometimes some of the spectators, the young lads, would make sexual jokes and comments when I was about 14/15 years old. This went on till about year 11. It wasn't anything really bad but it did make me feel self conscious. The coaches knew it too and they used to tell us just to ignore it (Young woman: local level netball, local level gymnastics).

The most common of the physically harassing behaviours was having your space invaded. More active physical harassment was rarer. However, some young people mentioned feeling uncomfortable when they were touched by coaches during instruction. They felt this could be done in a rather disrespectful way often without seeking young people's permission:

I didn't like how they would grab you to show you how to do something. I hated that. I suppose they needed to do that. ... But I didn't like it and felt that they should have asked me first before just grabbing or touching me. ... I was a coach after I left school and we were taught how to show children to do something without touching

them. And we were told always to ask first if we wanted to touch a child to show them something (Young woman: district level swimming, recreational gymnastics).

Prior research has identified a 'grey zone' between sexual harassment and sexual abuse where young people can feel unsure about whether something sexually inappropriate has occurred or not (Volkwein *et al.*, 1997, Brackenridge, 2001, Nielsen, 2001). In some examples from this study, young people reported being unsure at the time about whether behaviours were inappropriate and remained unsure, even with hindsight. Others were clearer in retrospect that something inappropriate had occurred. Examples included a young woman who described feeling uncomfortable when a friend's dad, who was a trained physiotherapist, offered to massage the kids in her club; and a young man who described a rugby coach giving players a congratulatory 'tap on the bum' for playing well.

Three per cent of young people responding to the survey had experienced some sexually harmful behaviour. In the majority of cases, this was having someone expose themselves; an experience much more common among boys than girls. At the time, much of this was shrugged off by young people as 'boys being boys':

Boys at the competition at swimming would find it a great joke to run into the girls changing rooms and flash their bits at us. That was quite common, but they were just little boys being little boys really ... The coaches would be like, you know, 'leave off', but it was never anything serious. They never got sent out of swimming or anything for it. It was always 'pack it in lads' (Young woman: national level kayaking, district level swimming).

At the time, this young woman found this behaviour to be immature but not upsetting. Looking back, although she was aware it was not actively condoned by coaches, she thought it was 'gross' and that adults should have done more to prevent it from happening.

There were some more serious reports, some of which were suggestive of there being particular issues for young gay men, such as the research participant quoted below, who left his sport altogether as a result of the sexual bullying he experienced.

It was like, how do I describe it. Like when you put on weight it looks like you have breasts as a boy. [There were] jokes about page three and things like that. Like when you are ten, 11 and 12, kids know nothing about ... it would be like - 'oh you're turning into a girl! And then it was like, 'boys kiss girls'. You kiss each other, like that - they wouldn't let me out of the changing rooms before I went along with what they wanted ... and obviously 5 minutes can seem like 5 hours when you are a child. You are like, 'no I need to go, I need to go now, I'm going to be in trouble. And so maybe another 30 seconds went on and it just got worse. So I mean it would only be like a few seconds but then, I'd, you know, and I could say that was more of a big deal than sort of like the fat jokes (Young man: local level swimming).

Coaches could also be involved in this, either directly, or indirectly by condoning it or allowing a culture where it was accepted. There were a number of abuse of trust incidents, where young women reported that girls in their mid to late teens had 'dated' their male coaches who were slightly older.

## 10 PHYSICAL HARM

A quarter of research participants (26% of young men and 23% of young women) had experienced some physical harm. Of these:

- 54% experienced being forced to train on when injured or exhausted in their main sport
- 55% had experienced aggressive treatment in their main sport. This included being shoved, being shaken, being thrown about, being knocked down, having something thrown at you, and being forcefully restrained.
- 17% had experienced violent treatment in their main sport. This included: being hit with an open hand, being hit with a fist, being hit with an implement, being grabbed around the neck, and being beaten up.

As with other forms of harm, young people were most likely to give their team mates and peers as perpetrators of physical harm. However, a third of respondents said that their coach or trainer was involved in the harm they experienced in their main sport. As with other forms of harm, the involvement of coaches increased as young athletes advanced through the competitive ranks. However, it was only in the case of physical harm where coaches overtook peers as perpetrators at elite levels.

Earlier studies have highlighted possible difficulties for adults in distinguishing between intensive training and training which is exploitative (David, 2005). And others writing in this area have highlighted how young people involved in sport are inculcated over time into a culture and sport ethos where overtraining and training through injury are seen as acceptable and the norm (Malcolm, 2006, Coakley, 2007, Killick, 2009). Young people in our study threw light on the way children come to accept a culture where training through discomfort, injury and exhaustion is seen as normal. Some described coaches encouraging them or 'guilting' them into continuing so that they would not let the team down:

If you were injured, you weren't allowed to stop. The coaches would guilt me into continuing. They would say things like, if you leave you'll affect the numbers of the sides ... They'd tell me I was letting the others down (Young woman: local level rounders, recreational hockey).

There were examples where training schedules were excessive, both in intensity and duration. Young people reported training sometimes to the point of being sick and passing out. Coaches could be aware of the effect of strenuous training schedules on young people; deliberately pushing young athletes to 'toughen them up'.

Coaches sometimes treated young people aggressively or violently. Mainly this was punitive, born out of frustration or anger when dissatisfied with young people's performance:

I remember there was one coach, very old school coach. A lady who, she was known as a bit of a battle axe, but she just, she was really quite sort of nasty verbally. But she would go round and, you know, if we couldn't quite reach the floor then she'd be there pushing us down. And I remember just, I actually, it was a weird feeling

kind of, I actually quite enjoyed the pain which was very strange ... but it was like ... I couldn't do the splits, therefore I obviously wasn't good enough and therefore I required punishment. And so to actually feel the pain was, that was, okay then because I'd been punished and that was fine (Young woman: district level gymnastics, local level equestrian sports).

More commonly, aggressive and violent treatment came from peers and took the form of physical bullying in the context of the physicality of sport. Sometimes the reported physical harm was accidental, and many felt that physical aggression was to be expected in sport and was accepted as part of what happened in sport. But sport also provided a more physical context for bullying. There were reports in team sports, of balls and other sporting props being used to deliberately hurt others. Sometimes sports such as rugby and football could provide the pretext for deliberate tripping, pushing and more serious violence.



## TO CONCLUDE

We conclude this summary by highlighting key findings and messages from our research:

- The research offers new insights into the experiences of child athletes participating at all levels of competition in a wide range of sports
- Overall, participating in organised sport is a positive experience for most children and young people
- While experience of harm occurs at every level of sport, there is a tendency for it to increase with level of participation
- Very serious harm of young people in organised sport is an issue but it was not reported in large numbers by young people in our study
- However, young people in our survey did report widespread, emotionally harmful treatment. Three quarters of all young people responding to the survey had experienced this in some form, including being criticised about performance in ways that could be disproportionate or unhelpful, being embarrassed humiliated, teased or bullied
- There were unacceptable levels of sexual harassment of young people in sport (29% of all respondents). This was mainly an issue for girls (34%). However, it was also relatively common for boys (17%). For girls this tended to begin around puberty at a time when they were becoming more self-conscious about looks and appearance. This could be exacerbated by wearing revealing sports clothing
- Sexualised bullying was a relatively common occurrence in some sports, notably rugby, football and to some extent swimming. This may be a particular problem for young people who were gay
- Physical harm of young people in sport was common: 26% of young men and 23% of young women reported this. There were examples of young people training or being forced to train through injury and exhaustion, sometimes to the point of being sick and passing out. Sometimes coaches were unaware of the effect of overtraining, with young athletes unable to speak up. Sometimes coaches did it deliberately as a way of 'toughening them up'. Occasionally physical harm was inflicted punitively as a result of poor performance
- In performance sports such as gymnastics and dance, as well as the technical challenges, there was a strong emphasis on appearance and being the perfect weight. There were graphic accounts of young women struggling to reach and maintain the perfect weight. Sometimes this had a negative impact on self image, on occasion resulting in eating disorders
- Ten per cent of young people responding to the survey reported self-harm. Some young people self-harmed outside sport but issues particular to sport, such as the rigours of competing and the sporting ethos could exacerbate this. For some young people, self-harming behaviour was directly attributed to participation in sport

- There was widespread acceptance of all forms of harm as normal and 'just what happens in sport'. Behaviours which would have been intolerable in other settings such as adult work places or school were often accepted as normal and condoned in sport
- Peers were the most common perpetrators of all forms of harm reported in the research
- Coaches were the second most common perpetrators of all forms of harm. Their role in harm increased as young athletes advanced through the competitive ranks, and in the case of physical harm, they overtook peers as the main perpetrators at elite levels
- Coaches' involvement in harm could be direct, or indirect by condoning it or not dealing with it effectively
- Young people reported that they often felt that coaches were not effectively handling cases of peer to peer harm
- The research raises important issues about the inter-relationship between sport, and body image, diet, cultures of excellence and a sporting ethic which accepts as normal a culture of bullying, humiliating treatment, sexualised behaviour and of training and competing through exhaustion and injury.

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# APPENDIX 1: TYPES OF HARM

In our study, we defined emotional harm, sexual harassment, sexual harm, physical harm and self harm through sets of behaviours explored in the survey. These are shown below. Our results include respondents' experiencing at least one of these behaviours either 'once or twice' or 'regularly', in either their main or second sport.

## *a. Emotional harm*

- Being embarrassed or humiliated
- Being bullied about something
- Being teased about something
- Being criticised about your looks/weight
- Being criticised about your performance
- Being shouted or sworn at
- Being called names
- Being ignored in a way that made you feel bad
- Being criticised/threatened for not wanting to train/compete
- Having lies or rumours spread about you
- Having your things damaged/stolen to humiliate/threaten you
- Being threatened with being thrown out of the club
- Being threatened with being hit but not actually being hit

## *b. Sexual harassment*

- Being subject to sexist jokes
- Being whistled or leered at
- Having sexual comments made about your appearance etc
- Having your space invaded
- Physical contact that made you uncomfortable

- Touched in instruction in a way that made you uncomfortable
- Massage or rub that made you uncomfortable
- Excessive phone calls at home that made you uncomfortable
- Being sent letters/cards/emails/texts with a sexual content
- Invitations to be alone with someone
- Excessive compliments or criticism about your appearance
- Excessive compliments or criticism about your performance
- Inconsistent treatment (sometimes singled out, sometimes ignored)

### *c. Sexual harm*

- Being forced to kiss someone
- Having someone expose themselves to you
- Being touched sexually against your will
- Someone trying to have sex with you against your will
- Being forced to have penetrative sex (oral, vaginal or anal)

### *d. Physical harm*

- Being forced to train when injured/ exhausted
- Being shoved
- Being shaken
- Being thrown about
- Being knocked down
- Having something thrown at you
- Being forcefully restrained
- Being hit with an open hand
- Being hit with a fist
- Being hit with an implement

- Being choked (grabbed around neck)
- Being beaten up

#### *e. Self harm*

Young people reporting that they had engaged in at least one of the following behaviours in the context of sport were classified as having experienced self harm:

- Cut yourself
- Hit or punch yourself
- Pull your hair out
- Scratch/pick/tear your skin
- Burn yourself
- Inhale/sniff substances
- Take an overdose
- Attempt suicide

