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The Characteristics of Sexual Abuse in Sport:

A Multidimensional Scaling Analysis of Events Described in Media Reports

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ABSTRACT

Most research on sexual abuse has been conducted within family settings (Fergusson & Mullen, 1999). In recent years, following several high profile convictions and scandals, research into sexual abuse has also encompassed institutional and community settings, such as sport and the church (Gallagher, 2000; Woolfe, Jaffe, Jette, & Poisson, 2003). Research into sexual abuse in sport, for example, began with both prevalence studies (Kirby & Greaves, 1996; Leahy, Pretty, & Tenenbaum, 2002) and qualitative analyses of the processes and experiences of athlete sexual abuse (Brackenridge, 1997; Cense & Brackenridge, 2001, Toftegaard-Nielsen, 2001). From such work, descriptions of the modus operandi of abusers in sport, and the experiences and consequences for athlete victims, have been provided, informing both abuse prevention work and coach education. To date, however, no study has provided empirical support for multiple associations or identified patterns of sex offending in sport in ways that might allow comparisons with research-generated models of offending outside sport. This paper reports on an analysis of 159 cases of criminally defined sexual abuse, reported in the print media over a period of 15 years. The main aim of the study was to identify the nature of sex offending in sport, focusing on the methods and locations of offenses. The data were analysed using multidimensional scaling (MDS) as a data reduction method in order to identify the underlying themes within the abuse and explore the inter-relationships of behavior, victim, and context variables. The findings indicate that there are specific themes that can be identified within the perpetrator strategies that include "intimate," "aggressive," and "dominant" modes of interaction. The same patterns that are described here within the specific context of sport are consistent with themes that emerge from similar behavioral analyses of rapist (Bishopp, 2003; Canter & Heritage, 1990) and child molester groups (Canter, Hughes, & Kirby, 1998). These patterns show a correspondence to a broader behavioral model – the interpersonal circumplex (e.g., Leary, 1957). Implications for accreditation and continuing professional education of sport psychologists are noted.

Sexual abuse is a complex phenomenon. It encompasses multiple personological and contextual dimensions that collectively contribute to a variety of behavioral manifestations. Such abuse can be violent or pseudo-intimate, forced or coerced, and involve penetrative and non-penetrative acts. Perpetrators may be homosexual, heterosexual, or bisexual and may have preferences for specific age bands such as adolescents (hebephilia) or children (pedophilia). A small minority might even be described as sadistic, relishing in the power they have to humiliate their victims. The motivations underlying sexual abuse are primarily sexual but may also incorporate elements of anger or hostility (e.g., Groth, 1977). In some cases, abusers are driven by a misplaced desire for intimacy (e.g., Marshall, 1993) and an inability to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships with men or women. Many perpetrators use justifications (or maintain cognitive distortions) that support their offending behaviour and use elaborate strategies to gain access to potential victims and avoid detection. Understanding this multitude of facets is a necessary precursor to identifying both the risks and the preventative strategies that can be put in place to prevent sexual abuse from occurring.

Sexual abusers operate in many different social contexts and adopt a wide range of approaches. While the problem of sexual abuse has been recognized by society as a whole, sporting organizations have been relatively slow to introduce reforms to bring about equality for women and children (Leahy, Pretty, & Tenenbaum, 2002; Toftegaard-Nielson, 2001). But society's recognition that social and recreational institutions need to provide safety and put in place effective strategies for reducing risk has stimulated safeguarding policy initiatives in sport in several countries, such as the UK (Child Protection in Sport Unit, 2006) and Australia (Australian Sports Commission, 2006).

Sport and exercise psychologists have privileged access to athletes, coaches, and sport entourages and so are in a good position to help with abuse prevention and early intervention. It is therefore important that, during their professional development, sport and exercise psychologists learn about both the potential methods employed by abusers and also how to identify signs of abuse

in victims. The research presented here describes some of approaches used by offenders across different sporting contexts. The behaviors used to groom or coerce young people into sexual activity within these contexts are partly driven by situational conditions, not necessarily specific to any sport. Many perpetrators are adept at facilitating such conditions for abuse. Attempts have been made here to capture these conditions and to examine how they vary between male and female victims.

Defining the Process

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Although there is no universally accepted definition of sexual harassment, it is generally agreed to be a process rather than an event and to involve sexual attention that is unwanted by the victim. Both sexual harassment and sexual abuse involve discrimination and the misuse of power. It can therefore be said that there is a link between the two. Brackenridge (2001) has identified sexual harassment and abuse as stages along a continuum of sexual exploitation (see Figure 1). According to this model, sexual discrimination may involve unfair working practices or differential pay structures; sexual harassment may involve written/verbal abuse or threats, sexually oriented comments, and bullying based on sex; and sexual abuse may involve groomed or forced sexual activity, sexual assault, and rape. Further to this behavioral continuum are the personal preferences of the perpetrator in terms of sexual interests (e.g., victim age) and orientation.

Within this broad domain of sexual harassment/abuse, there are further characteristics that are encompassed under the general heading of "grooming." As with other forms of sexual aggression, there is no singular activity that can be described under the label. Although the origin of the term is unclear, the term "grooming" is applied to any strategies that abusers adopt to convince or coerce a child to engage in sexual behaviour with them (Finkelhor, 1984; Salter, 1995). Grooming may take any number of forms, ranging from financial inducements to elaborate strategies for gaining the trust and compliance of a vulnerable younger person. Gallagher (2000)

identifies some important strategies deployed to effect sex offenses in institutional settings, which are readily applicable to other contexts and are used within this work.

Outside Sport

Although the exact prevalence of sexual abuse is difficult to determine, it is clear that it occurs across all classes of society and in any context where there is the opportunity for exploitation and an individual with the will to exploit. Not surprisingly, abuse has been reported in educational settings, the church, the care system, the workplace, and sport (Woolfe, Jaffe, Jette, & Poisson, 2003). Most studies of abusers have tended to focus on those detained in prison and have, therefore, been caught. It is inevitably more difficult to study abusers who remain largely undetected and, as such, less attention has been paid to sex offending within professional, recreational, or institutional settings where authority structures inhibit reporting by victims (Brackenridge and Kirby, 1997; Woolfe et al., 2003). Because of this, the prevalence of sexual abuse is often difficult to determine accurately and can only be estimated.

Most previous studies of child sexual abuse have focused on incidents occurring within family settings (Parton, 2005; Whealin, Davies, Shaffer, Jackson, & Love, 2002). In a recent UK study, Cawson, Wattam, Brooker, and Kelly (2000) reported that 16% of children under 16 years of age had experienced sexual abuse. The figures for incidence of child sexual abuse vary, however, depending on the country in which the investigation took place and the definition of sexual abuse used. In the USA, for example, Finkelhor and Jones (2006) report that there has been a steady decline in reported sex offenses to children since 1993, which they attribute, in large measure, to improved prevention and reporting measures. Perhaps it is also a reflection of the lengthy custodial sentences applied to this group in the U.S.

Inside Sport

Relatively few studies have examined prevalence rates of abuse in sport, and it remains an emerging area for research. Studies that have been conducted suggest a prevalence between 2% (Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997; Volkwein, Schnell, Sherwood, & Livezey, 1997) and 22% (Kirby and Greaves, 1996). Fasting, Brackenridge, and Sundgot-Borgen (2004) found that sexual harassment prevalence among elite female athletes was unrelated to sport type (individual vs. team), gender structure (male vs. female member dominated), or amount of clothing cover. Studies of sexual abuse in sport have focussed mainly on male coaches as abusers ,but there is also evidence of peer abuse, especially through the practices of hazing and sexual bullying (Johnson & Holman, 2004; Robinson, 1998). A small amount of data has been collected about female coach abusers (e.g., Kirby, Greaves, & Hanvisky, 2000), and they also feature in athlete anecdotes.

Although some abusers are opportunists, there are almost always precursors to abuse through the stages of deliberate planning, grooming, and execution (Toftegaard-Nielsen, 2001). Pryor (1996) conducted a survey to identify grooming methods commonly used by offenders. Methods often involved verbal or physical intimidation or the giving of gifts and money. One common tactic was the use of verbal or physical force to gain the victim's compliance; another was emotional manipulation. The latter occurred when the offender did favors for the victim in exchange for sex or, alternatively, used emotional blackmail. The seduction and testing of victims was used when there was already a preexisting relationship between the victim and the offender. In these relationships, the victim would be accustomed to some form of affection from the offender, which would be gradually extended while testing the victim's reaction to sexual approaches.

These perpetrator methodologies have also been found in sporting contexts, when the coach may use grooming to gain the trust of the athlete and even their family (Brackenridge, 2001; Toftegaard-Nielson, 2001). Abusive coaches have been found to slowly push back the boundaries of acceptable behavior, increasingly violating personal space, using verbal familiarity, emotional blackmail, and eventually physical contact. If an athlete rejects this, then they may be forced to

leave the sport or be snubbed by the coach. If, however, the athlete submits to these advances, they may find that they become trapped into succumbing to the coach's demands. Abusive coaches often establish a respected role among the community in order to conceal their unethical behaviour (Brackenridge, 1997; Cense & Brackenridge, 2001).

Other studies have examined the environmental or contextual variables surrounding the abuse. Myers and Barrett (2002) conducted visual inspection of 78 cases from swimming in the UK under three categories: (1) abuse outside the swimming environment that was detected within the context of swimming; (2) abuse resulting from poor coaching practice or a low threshold of care within the swimming environment; and (3) serious sexual, physical, and emotional abuse and neglect as legally defined. Their report describes the location of the abuse (e.g., locker rooms, car parks, hotels) and the status and gender of the abuser. All reported sexual abusers (49% of the total referrals) were authority figures (e.g., coaches, trainers, pool staff, club officials), and all were male.

Brackenridge, Bringer, and Bishopp (2005) analyzed 132 case files from the English Football (soccer) Association. They used SPSS.X to interrogate 50 variables and, again, presented descriptive data but no relational analysis. The main purpose of this study was to examine the efficacy of management information systems for abuse referrals in sport. They found existing systems to be poor. For example, the age of the alleged perpetrator was recorded in only 17 cases. Sexual abuse reports accounted for 10.6% of the total, but a further 15.9% reports related to sexual offences in other contexts, such as a coach having a criminal record for a sex crime or having been the subject of enquiries that had subsequently been dropped. The study also examined the sport role and gender of alleged abusers, the location for the alleged abuse, and the attrition rate between initial reporting and eventual case outcomes. The authors acknowledged that the weakness of the data limited the conclusions that could be drawn from their analysis and emphasised the need for comprehensive, standardised case recording systems in sport.

Sexual harassment prevalence rates are highest in workplaces where women are underrepresented, where there are hierarchical distributions of power, and where a masculine

heteronormative gender culture prevails, and they are lowest in environments where women dominate (Fasting & Knorre, 2005). It is therefore of some concern that women may be particularly at risk in the sports environment where men dominate most sports behaviors (Acosta & Carpenter, 1985; White & Brackenridge, 2006). This reflects the broader cultural values and beliefs associated with paternalistic societies (Brownmiller, 1983). Such beliefs and attitudes about the role of women may have perpetuated the acceptability of sexual misconduct through "rape myths" (e.g., women in scant clothing are seeking sexual attention; Sanday, 1981). Both rapists and child molesters tend to display distorted thinking, with some believing that their behavior is not harmful or that the victim wanted to have sex (Morrison, Erooga, & Beckett, 1990). These thinking styles enable perpetrators to do what they do and are found in all contexts where there are opportunities for abuse to occur.

Coaches, the majority of whom are men (Acosta & Carpenter, 2006), exert a great deal of power over their athletes, especially those at or approaching the elite level (Brackenridge & Kirby, 1997). Brackenridge (1997, 2001) discussed how it is possible for a predatory coach to use this power to his advantage. Most athletes want to develop and improve their skills and be selected for the team. Parents often want success for their children, and administrators need their sport to succeed in order for it to survive. This puts coaches in a position of authority and power over all these individuals. The abusive coach exploits this power and, yet, is able to maintain his position because he appears indispensable to the sport. It is therefore the athlete, and not the coach, who is expendable, hence the athlete may not report abuse in order to avoid the risk of de-selection (Brackenridge, 1997).

Toftegaard-Nielsen (2001) examined interpersonal boundaries and the behaviors and processes that lead to sexual abuse among a sample of Danish athletes and coaches. The study found that 25% of the athletes had either experienced or knew someone who had experienced sexual harassment or abuse in their sport. Intimate physical contact was widely accepted, and there was a fairly relaxed attitude towards the consumption of alcohol, a known sexual disinhibitor (Koss & Gaines, 1993). The coaches who admitted to engaging in intimate relations with their athletes

were between 30 and 45 years old, had more relaxed attitudes towards bodily and verbal intimacy than coaches who did not form these relationships, were more likely to attend parties with the athletes, and were more likely to permit athletes to consume alcohol. Nineteen percent of all the coaches in the study admitted having felt emotionally and sexually attracted to their athletes, and only half of the coaches knew about the legal age of consent (18 years). Most of the athletes who experienced inappropriate behavior from their coach reported feeling unable to do anything about it, as it was "just the way things were" (Toftegaard-Nielsen, 2001, pp. 179).

A number of studies of the grooming process, or modus operandi, of sex offenders in sport have emanated from qualitative research. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews with abused athletes, Brackenridge and Kirby (in Brackenridge, 2001, pp. 35) extrapolated the stages of the grooming process adopted by sexually abusive authority figures in sport. They include targeting a potential victim, building trust and friendship, developing isolation and control, building loyalty, initiating sexual abuse, and securing secrecy. From his multi-method investigation of sexual abuse by sport coaches, Toftegaard-Nielsen (2001) also described the grooming process in sport, defining what he termed "the grey zone" between acceptable and unacceptable coach-athlete behaviors. Coaches' perceptions of borderline acceptable/unacceptable or ambiguous behaviours were also the focus for Bringer's doctoral research (Bringer, Brackenridge, & Johnston, 2002). Using data from interviews with Dutch athletes, Cense and Brackenridge (2001) traced the temporal and developmental sequences of sexual abuse in sport, describing the stages of abuse, the components of each stage, and the indicators of each component. Leahy, Pretty, and Tenenbaum (2004) described a generalized perpetrator methodology abstracted from their analysis of the experiences of sexually abused athletes. Whilst all of these studies have been useful in describing the process by which grooming and abuse take place, none of them have discriminated between different perpetrator strategies.

Typologies and Theories of Sexual Aggression

As with all areas of human enquiry, there are multiple theoretical orientations available to explain any single behavior. Psychological perspectives inevitably reflect the central theoretical ideas that have emerged over the past few decades. As such, evolutionary theory, psychodynamic, social learning, and behaviourist paradigms have all been applied to our understanding of sexual aggression as based in nature, nurture, or a combination of the two. Historically, the attempts to describe meaningful differences between offenders emerged from clinical observations, with rapists and child molesters duly assigned to discrete classes within taxonomies. Clinical classifications reflect the changing emphasis within psychology on different theoretical orientations, with early psychodynamic taxonomies (e.g., Guttmacher & Weihofen, 1952) replaced with ever more sophisticated systems for discriminating between and within offender types (e.g., Prentky & Knight, 1991).

A number of typologies have been put forward to explain the differences between those who sexually abuse adults and those who offend against target children. No model is universally applicable, but each offers some useful concepts, which may inform our understanding. A number of taxonomies exist for rapists and child molesters based on multiple motivational, behavioral, and contextual factors (Cohen, Seghorn, & Calmas, 1969; Groth, 1977; Groth & Burgess, 1977; Prentky & Knight, 1991). The range of motivational factors includes anger, power (or low self-esteem), and sex, while the range of modus operandi suggest variations in the levels of impulsiveness, aggression, and victim-offender communication. While some perpetrators abuse out of an indifference towards their victims, others seek intimacy from the sexual activity.

The lack of consensus, as to what factors should be legitimately included within such systems and how many types of sex offender exist, reflects some fundamental problems in making discriminations within this group and any other subject pool defined by a specific set of behaviors. Given the range and variation of the factors required to explain their differences and similarities, it may perhaps be an oversimplification of the phenomenon to try to suggest a small number of

discrete abuser types. An alternative way of interpreting classifications of abusers would be to separate the concepts from the types. While there are variations in the numbers of abuser types defined by these "classification" schemes, the underlying content shows some consistency with respect to motivations, behaviors, and the contexts for abuse. Within rape typologies, motivational themes of sex, power, anger, and the desire for love are clearly evident, and behaviourally, abusers vary with respect to aggression, sexual activity, and the use of control. Whether these themes indicate distinct types is perhaps less important than their consistency across authors in describing the core elements upon which abusers vary.

Studies examining the behavioural characteristics of child molesters also identify some common themes. For example, Canter, Hughes, and Kirby (1998) suggested a model of child sexual abuse based on "intimate," "aggressive," and "opportunistic" themes, reflecting the data used and comparability with behavioral studies of rape (e.g., Canter & Heritage, 1991). Finkelhor's work (Finkelhor, 1984; Finkelhor & Araji, 1986) provides a more sophisticated combination of person and situation factors involved in the process of child sexual abuse, including four motivational factors :(1) emotional congruence, (2) sexual arousal to children, (3) blockage, and (4) disinhibition. Finkelhor proposes four preconditions for abuse: (1) motivation (as just described), (2) overcoming internal inhibitions, (3) overcoming external inhibitions, and (4) overcoming the resistance of the child/victim. Overcoming internal inhibitions may require the development of distorted thinking styles, which justify the desire, and may utilise alcohol and drugs as disinhibitors. Overcoming external inhibitions may require planning and creating situations in which grooming can be easily carried out. Finally, the perpetrator will need to entrap the victim in order to overcome resistance. According to Finkelhor, abuse can only occur when the four preconditions are met. It is likely that similar processes are involved when a coach considers violating the boundaries between himself and the child or adolescent trainee. However, there is likely to be a minority of coaches with more psychopathic tendencies (e.g., Hare, 1990), for whom the athlete is merely an object for their abuse.

Factors Underpinning Sexual Abuse in Sport

Many of the factors that contribute to sexual abuse in sport are comparable to the factors identified in other forms of sexual aggression, described above. However, the context for abuse in sport transcends the adult-child boundary, and it may be difficult to describe abusers within any single paradigm of "rapist" or "child abuser." Unlike other forms of sexual aggression, however, which require gaining compliance of an often-unwilling victim, the coach-child relationship incorporates a power dynamic and even adoration on the part of the victim. As with any relationships incorporating a mismatch of status (coach-athlete, priest-choirboy), it may be exploited by those unscrupulous enough to do so. Children naturally have a low structural status in society, making it difficult for them to resist the power that adults hold.[1] This is reinforced in the sporting world where the coach has more knowledge and skills than the young athlete. The desire to succeed and reach the elite level may make it even harder for the child to resist the behavior of the person in authority. Additionally, the child athlete is still a child and may not have the knowledge and awareness that what is happening to them is wrong, especially if such behaviour has been normalized in the sport environment (Brackenridge, 2001).

Research by Brackenridge (1997) has shown that those most vulnerable to sexual abuse in sport are often at or just before puberty, with low self-esteem, friendship difficulties, a poor family bond, and look up to their coaches as role models and father figures. Brackenridge likens the relationship between the abusive coach and the athlete to domestic violence relationships. The victim may endure an abusive relationship with the coach for many years even after the victim has realized that it is wrong, often falling into a cycle of dependency, sexual attention, guilt, and reinforced dependency. This cycle is especially difficult to break if the athlete is potentially an elite performer. Equally, adolescence is a time of sexual tension and confusion during which young people develop their sexual identities and push interpersonal boundaries. From a biological point of view, it is the point where a girl reaches sexual maturity and is perhaps most desirable in reproductive terms (Buss 1991).

Using Grounded Theory method, Brackenridge (1997) established three sets of risk factors for sexual abuse in sport associated with coach (perpetrator), athlete (victim), and sport (situation). Coach variables include an older, male coach with a high reputation in the sport, someone trusted by the parents/carers, and many chances to be alone with the athlete at training, competitions, and away trips. Athlete variables, as indicated above, include a young female with low self-esteem but high talent, a distant relationship with her parents/carers, completely devoted to her coach. Sport variables include those with weak recruitment controls, poor climates for reporting and debating sexual abuse, and many opportunities for away trips.

Cense and Brackenridge (2001) reported interviews with 14 athletes who had been sexually abused in a sport context, and the results further supported these established risk factors. Four situational factors were identified as being particularly high risk: (1) when the athlete was competing in a tournament, (2) during massage by the coach, (3) at the coach's house, or (4) when the athlete was driven home by the coach. Similar locations – trips away, training sessions, private locations, vehicles, and hotels - were identified as high risk in other studies (e.g., Kirby, Greaves, & Hankvisky, 2000). According to Brackenridge's later contingency model (2001), which merged her analysis of risk with Finkelhor's model, abusive behavior is unlikely to be triggered by a single risk factor. Instead, it is more likely that a combination of coach, athlete, and sport risk factors creates high-risk situations, meaning that prevention should be targeted at both individual and situational factors.

These studies have helped to identify the characteristics of perpetrators, victims, and the contexts in which offenses happen. The identified themes are consistent with the patterns and characteristics identified in intra- and extra-familial abusers with similar strategies employed in a variety of contexts (Elliott, Browne, & Kilcoyne, 1995). In addition, there are themes that are specific to the sporting context, just as there are themes specific to domestic and religious settings, as shown in the literature concerned with offender profiling (Jackson & Bekerian, 1997). Attempts are made below to model these characteristics in sport using multivariate statistical analyses.

Although close attention has been paid to the behaviors involved in sexual aggression, much less attention has been given to the multiple contexts in which abuse takes place. No extant model is able to fully explain the full range of motivational, behavioral, and contextual factors that have been identified for sexual aggression.

If "prevention is better than cure," then the profession of sport psychology needs to address not only the signs and indicators of sexual abuse in sport but also means of forestalling the problem. Before that can happen, psychologists need to be familiar with the dynamics of sexual abuse and its particular manifestations in the context of sport. While some sport and exercise psychologists undertake studies of abuse in all its forms (emotional, physical, sexual, and neglect) as part of a generic clinical education, others have little or no exposure to these issues as part of their accreditation. Thus, one of the purposes of this paper is to draw the attention of the sport and exercise psychology profession to the issue of sexual abuse in sport in ways that will help consulting psychologists to intervene constructively in abuse prevention.

The Study

As discussed above, previous studies on sexual harassment and abuse in sport have included both qualitative and quantitative investigations and surveys. The qualitative studies have been useful in learning about athletes' experiences and identifying risk factors. Most of the quantitative studies, however, have used small samples and have low response rates (Fasting, Brackenridge, & Sundgot-Borgen, 2004). The main aim of this study was to identify the critical features of sex offending in sport, the sport roles of offenders, their reasons for offending, and the methods and locations of offences in relation to extant literature on repertoires and typologies of sexual offending. This information should be of use for the professional accreditation and continuing education of consulting sport psychologists.

Method

Case Identification

Data for the study came from 325 cases of sexual abuse in sport, that were reported in national and international newspapers between 1992 and 2006 and then collected by the first author.[2] These were screened so as to identify cases for which there was sufficient information to apply the coding schedule. Screening criteria were as follows: female abusers were omitted because there were so few ($n = 6$); cases involving coaches who abused outside the immediate sport setting were omitted; and cases which were not thoroughly reported and for which no data could be found through other sources (e.g., Internet/media search engines) were also omitted, leaving 159 usable cases of sexually abusive incidents. Given the purposive nature of the data, cases did not necessarily provide complete details of the perpetrator or events, nor are they necessarily representative of any specific sport or country of origin.

Instruments

Using previously identified characteristics (Brackenridge, 1997; Gallagher, 2000), a coding schedule was developed, the content of which is described in the results section. The schedule aimed to capture the basic characteristics of the abuser (e.g., age, role), the nature of the abuse (e.g., specific sexual and aggressive themes), victimology, and the contexts within which the abuse occurred (e.g., place and time). Variables were also developed from the themes that emerged from a preliminary content analysis of all cases. These focused on the specific strategies utilized for grooming or coercing the victim into sexual activity. The behavioral variables were all coded as either "present" or "absent." Collectively, the variables describe a number of important conceptual domains that form the basis for the inquiry and guide the analytical process. The importance of establishing the underlying thematic content is to aid the statistical analysis so that the relationships between the themes can be explicitly explored.

Procedure

All cases were coded by a single rater, and 25% of cases were also coded by a second rater to establish inter-rater reliability. Cohen's (1960) Kappa was 0.85, which is considered acceptable (Fleiss, 1971) and indicates an agreement of 92%. The data from the coding schedules were then

entered into a statistical spreadsheet (SPSS ver.13). The frequencies for all variables were examined and cross-tabulated by victim gender to explore some of the similarities and differences across victim and abuser themes. It was not possible to examine these associations statistically as the cell counts were simply too low to achieve statistical power. However, some interesting observations do emerge, as reported below.

To explore the underlying behavioral themes and their co-occurrences within the data, multidimensional scaling (MDS) was used as a method for data reduction. MDS is a non-metric alternative to factor analysis (e.g., Borg & Groenen, 1997), which may be applied to interval or nominal level data and is therefore appropriate for the dichotomous behavioral features identified in this study. The associations between variables are presented in the form of scalogram, in which variables are represented as points in space. Distances between variables represent the degree of statistical association. "The graphical display of the correlations provided by MDS enables the data analyst to literally 'look' at the data and to explore their structure visually" (Borg & Groenen, 1997, pp. 3). MDS analyses were carried out using Statistica (version 5.5) and use a Guttman-Lingoes (Lingoes, 1973) algorithm. The approach taken here is similar to the methods employed by investigative psychologists to identify core behavioral themes that can be used to support offender profiling (e.g., Canter & Heritage, 1990).

Results

The results are conceptually driven in that the data describe the general characteristics of the perpetrators and the victims, with more detailed emphasis on the types of grooming strategies that they employed to affect a variety of forms of sexual abuse. The following sections provide descriptive details for these general and specific themes.

Perpetrator Characteristics

Perpetrators were identified across types of sport and reflect specific national orientations. As such, over 60% of cases were derived from the US, with the remainder largely from the UK,

Canada, and Australia. Although not necessarily representative of specific sports, the range of abusive strategies captured nonetheless reflects the diversity of sexually abusive behaviors. In most cases (98%), the perpetrators were coaches, teachers, or instructors directly involved with athletes. Some of the offenders were married (29%) and had children of their own (31%) and, not surprisingly, there was a high degree of overlap between the two. Where known, offender ages ranged between 16 and 63 with the mean age being 34.2 (*S.D.* = 10.8) years old.

Many of the media reports were concerned with the legal consequences of high and low profile cases. Of the 159 cases examined, 113 resulted in a conviction, with a further three resulting only in a fine. In nine cases, the perpetrator was acquitted, and charges were dropped in a further eight cases. For the remainder (25 cases), the outcome was not given or unknown. Although not all of the perpetrators were convicted criminals, the majority of those in the sample were clearly implicated in incidents of sexual abuse. We acknowledge that the media emphasis on specific abusers is unlikely to give an accurate representation of the phenomenon as a whole. Conversely, the level of detail surrounding the incidents indicates sufficient variability to facilitate this inquiry.

Victim Characteristics

In cases where there were multiple instances of abuse (involving more than one victim or more than one occasion), behavioral characteristics were coded if they had occurred against *any* victims, thus reflecting a profile of abusive behaviors. In the majority of cases, there was one victim, although a number of perpetrators had clearly been involved in multiple incidents, sometimes against both male and female victims. There were 108 incidents of abuse towards females, 45 towards males, and in six cases perpetrators offended against both male and female victims. Victim age at the time of the abuse ranged between 9 and 21 years for females (*M* = 14.8, *S.D.* = 2.1) and 11 and 17 years for males (*M* = 13.7, *S.D.* = 2.1), although some of the perpetrators with multiple victims had abused victims as young as five years old. The victim age and gender preferences for the sample are given in Table 1, in which a child is defined as under 12 years old, an adolescent between 13 and 17 years, and an adult is 18 years old and above.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The purpose of distinguishing children from adolescents is simply to emphasize that this information may reflect different sexual interests or deviations. Hebephilic (adolescents) interests may not be functionally analogous to pedophilic (children) interests, although the distinction is rarely made in the literature. The majority of cases fell within the hebephilic range, indicating either a particular type of sexual interest among sport offenders or a particular situational opportunity presented by sport.

[Insert tables 2 and 3 about here]

The Nature of the Abuse

Details of both sexual and grooming behaviors are provided in Tables 2 and 3 respectively and are broken down by sex of victim to illustrate the differential patterns. All potential behaviors were coded as "present" or "absent" for all cases in order to provide a profile for each subject. In cases where a sexual assault was specified but no details were provided, the researchers defaulted to defining this as indecent assault rather than assuming that it met the definition of rape. It is evident from Table 2 that indecent assault occurred in almost three quarters of the cases and that unlawful (consensual) sex occurred in slightly more than a quarter of them. Some sexual behaviors are obviously linked to the sex of the victim, with males subjected to higher levels of anal penetration. Masturbation, showing pornography, and the victim touching the offender all had quite low frequencies. Given that the behaviors were coded from incomplete media reports, it is likely that all behaviors will be underrepresented to some degree, with only the most serious behaviors reported. Filming was considered in this context as a sexual behavior, although we accept that it might be equally considered a form of grooming.

The term "strategy" is used here to refer to any behaviors that facilitate sexual abuse; not all are necessarily "grooming" behaviors. The use of aggression, for example, is clearly an overt coercive strategy that is, in many ways, an alternative to grooming and more akin to assault. Giving a victim alcohol as a disinhibitor and giving gifts are, perhaps, far more typical in grooming

strategies. The different perpetrator strategies utilized may well indicate subtle differences in personality that could be explored in later studies. The "Other" category for grooming behaviors included providing a personal telephone, acting as a confidante, or teaching the victim ways to deceive their parents or provide excuses for them. Such methods clearly demonstrate the sophistication of some perpetrators in their approach and why many remain undetected.

Further demonstrating the specific strategies used by perpetrators is the variety of contexts or situations within which the abuse occurs. Some of these may be created by the perpetrator (social occasions at his house), while others are facilitated by sporting situations common to most types of sport (residential sport trips). These are provided in Table 4, cross-tabulated by gender.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

Within these categories there are also distinctions to be made between the situations that arise or are created (e.g., social and sporting occasions) and the locations that emerge as prominent places for abuse to occur (e.g., locker room or perpetrator residence). Table 4 shows that, for this sample, the abuse often occurred at the offender's home (41%), usually in the context of a social event. The abuse was also quite frequently noted as having occurred in a vehicle (23%) and linked to driving the young person home. The types of situations that facilitate abuse are also worth noting because the abuse often occurred during a training session (50% for female victims and 20% for male victims) or a non-sport social occasion (43% for female victims and 27% of male victims). Competitions away also featured quite frequently as an occasion for abuse (21%). These data confirm the situational risks identified earlier by Kirby et al. (2000) and by Cense and Brackenridge (2001). It seems that "playing away" has multiple connotations in this context, and perpetrators are careful not to "soil their own turf".

Multidimensional Scaling (MDS)

A number of iterative MDS analyses were carried out, exploring the associations of the facets identified conceptually in the tables above. This way, the relationships of behaviors and contexts to themselves and each other could be explored separately and in combination. As the data

for the MDS were all dichotomous, the measure of association used was a Jaccard coefficient. MDS

is a technique that transforms the association matrix into a distance matrix that can be "unfolded"

into geometric space to provide a visual representation of all associations. The measures of fit for

the solutions are indicated by the stress index (Kruskall, 1964) and a coefficient of alienation

(Guttman, 1968). These simply provide an indication of the goodness of fit between the spatial

representation and the original association matrix and should be ideally be lower, rather than higher,

on a scale of 0 to 1. A value less than 0.2 is generally considered acceptable (Kruskall, 1964),

although others argue that interpretation is equally important (Shye, 1985). This is, of course, true

for all statistical analyses in which there is a tradeoff between empiricism and parsimony.

Three MDS analyses, which initially including only the sexual and grooming behaviors and

subsequently including victim gender and contexts for abuse, were conducted on the behavioral

characteristics of the cases. Within these types of analysis, it is important to maintain some kind of

homogeneity with respect to the conceptual universe being explored (e.g., behavior) because the

inclusion of spurious variables (outside of the domain of interest) only complicates the

interpretation of the results. The purpose of the MDS is exploratory in identifying any underlying

behavioral dimensions that might usefully discriminate abusers. Such themes may also indicate

differential patterns of abuse in relation to situation or victim preference. The MDS of the sexual

and grooming behaviors is provided in Figure 2.

[Insert Fig 2 about here]

The MDS space is divided up, logically, according to the thematic content of clusters of

variables and labeled (in upper case) accordingly. These are clusters described as "Intimate,"

"Aggressive," and "Coercive/Manipulative." The coefficient of alienation for this solution is 0.27

with a stress index of 0.24, which is quite high. A clear theme that emerges is one of intimacy in

which unlawful relationships are established, which includes verbal gestures of love, extra attention,

and apparently consensual sex rather than indecent assault or rape. Conversely, more aggressive

strategies are associated with buggery (sodomy) and masturbation of the victim. In the top part of

the plot, the variables indicate a spectrum of coercive strategies that perhaps interact with the

principal bi-polar Intimacy-Aggression dimension. Coercion might be considered a necessary

component of all abuse, although some forms are highly specific to sport (such as offering extra

training or encouraging sexual activity as a means to improve performance). Here, the clusters

represent the co-occurrence of grooming strategies with specific sexual activities, although these

should be considered trends. The clusters should not be interpreted as a typology but rather as a

range of factors, which collectively describe the phenomenon.

Within the MDS space, the variables are necessarily distributed according to their relative

associations and the frequency of the events. High frequency variables naturally co-occur with more

variables than low frequency items, and these tend to lie at the center of the plot, representing

generic components (e.g., indecent assault). Variables forming distinct regions in the space are

interpreted according to their unique conceptual content and are often distributed radially from the

center in the form of a circumplex.

[Insert Figures 3 and 4 about here]

Figure 3 shows a 2D plot for sexual behaviors and grooming behaviors with victim gender

included purely to demonstrate that the patterns of behavior are inevitably linked to victim gender.

The coefficient of alienation for this plot is 0.28 with a stress index of 0.25, which was a little high,

but the results were nonetheless interpretable. Figure 4 shows a 2D plot for grooming behaviors,

location, and occasion of abuse. The coefficient of alienation for this plot is 0.28 with a stress index

of 0.25, which is acceptable. The same three facets as the previous plots are labeled here.

Discussion

Clear behavioral themes emerge from the MDS analyses, which are readily interpretable

within a psychological perspective. Perhaps the most prominent of these are the Intimacy–

Aggression themes, juxtaposed as a bi-polar dimension. The same themes are also found in studies

that have utilized similar statistical methods for examining the behavioral characteristics of rapists

(Canter & Heritage, 1990) and child molesters (Canter, Hughes, & Kirby, 1998), using similar behavioral variables. Unfortunately, Canter does not define a consistent set of themes that are applicable to multiple forms of sexual aggression, nor does he distinguish power and sex from aggression and intimacy. Bishopp (2003) suggests that rape incorporates the same dynamics as other forms of interpersonal behavior, as described within interpersonal theory (Sullivan, 1953) and the interpersonal circumplex (Leary, 1957). In other words, the main behavioral themes of sexual aggression are an interaction of Love–Hate (Aggression–Intimacy) and Dominance–Submission. In addition, there are more subtle distinctions that need to be made with respect to the degree or severity of each of these behavioral dimensions, which have yet to be explored.

Further to these core, interpersonal dynamics are the specific sexual behaviors that are the goals of such interactions, as well as other motivations, which may be driving the perpetrator. It is likely that the kinds of sexual behaviors that occur within the context of abuse are moderated by the more general interpersonal style of the offender. Sexual behavior overlays the interpersonal style, and some sexual behaviors will occur across interpersonal styles, while others may be peculiar to a specific style or interest on the part of the perpetrator. For example, when a perpetrator performs oral sex on a victim, it may reflect a distorted view that the victim wants to receive sexual pleasure from the offender or that the victim is enjoying it. Equally, anal sex, for a person unaccustomed to such an act, is likely to reflect more aggressive, sexually deviant, or demeaning motivation. These motives may be reflected in the style of assault, but in many studies the motive is either unclear or unknown by the researchers. As such, only tenuous links can be made between any specific motive and any specific behavior (e.g., aggression and anger).

As we learn more about differing forms of sexual abuse and aggression, it is becoming clear that there are as many overlaps between groups of abusers as there are differences between them. No matter what the context for abuse, the methods of perpetration show high levels of consistency in terms of the behavioral themes described above. Perhaps, what discriminates abuse within institutional settings is that there are more preconditions for abuse to occur in terms of opportunities

and access. What is also clear from this work is that power is a multifaceted tool, which can be wielded in many ways. The intrinsic power dynamics within the coach-athlete relationship inevitably opens that relationship to abuse and enables coercive strategies to be used. The range of strategies employed by such perpetrators reflects the differing capacities for control, intimidation, and coercion, as well as the variety of ways in which the context of sport may be exploited for sexual means. Whether it involves giving presents or special attention, intoxication or overt violence, it all constitutes abuse.

Implications for Sport and Exercise Psychologists

A significant number of coaches in this sample either had previous convictions of abuse or had been accused of abuse in the past. One of the goals for protecting young athletes from abuse is to introduce criminal screening procedures for any adult working in a trust relationship with young people, as has been done in sport in England (Child Protection in Sport Unit, 2006). This prescription includes sport and exercise psychologists. Unfortunately, while this may be helpful, it is not a failsafe mechanism. Many perpetrators will commit several offenses before being apprehended, and others never reach the criminal justice system because their victims are too frightened to report them or testify against them.

The finding of three facets of abuser repertoires indicates possible warning signs or patterns of behavior that could alert sport psychologists to potential problems. Provided sport psychologists have been trained to understand and recognize these facets of behavior, they will be more attuned to them in the practical setting. Since 2006, any member of the British Association of Sport and Exercise Sciences seeking accreditation must undergo training in child protection/safeguarding. This requirement is intended to both protect athletes and to prevent sport and exercise scientists from putting themselves at risk of unfounded allegations. There is no guarantee, however, that sport and exercise psychologists from different countries all experience the same standards of accreditation or training or that they understand their professional responsibilities to intervene in preventing sexual abuse and promoting athlete safety.

Sport coaches often have control over an athlete's medical treatment, diet, social activities, and sexual behaviour (Tomlinson & Yorganci, 1997). Indeed, such control is often normalized within training regimes, meaning that sexual misdemeanours may be more easily tolerated in sports settings than elsewhere (Brackenridge, 1994; Volkwein et al., 1997). Hands-on instruction may also be tolerated in sports where a certain amount of physical contact is needed during practice sessions, creating the potential for inappropriate touching and abuse. The reports in this study show that clear boundaries have not been established or are not being implemented yet in many sport organizations and that a considerable amount of inappropriate behaviour is tolerated. Just as consulting doctors and psychologists adhere to professionally prescribed standards, guidelines for appropriate coach/athlete relationships could help to make this clear and contribute to reducing the potential for sexual harassment and abuse in sport. Sport and exercise psychologists, thus, have twin roles to fulfill, applying high standards of professionalism themselves and intervening on behalf of young athletes whenever they spot signs of sexually abusive strategies by coaches or other authority figures.

Limitations

Some of the cases used for this study were high profile ones and therefore had a great deal of media coverage, whereas others were less prominent, with scant coverage, and had to be eliminated from the sample. Also, because the initial sample was purposive, the cases were not representative of all sports and countries, nor was it possible to check the veracity of the information in all cases. While the results here are quite intuitive, the quality of data is questionable because journalistic accounts only report limited details of specific offending events. Even so, there was sufficient content and variability to demonstrate consistency with studies outside sport that have utilized victim accounts or crime scene data. Clearly, future work should explore more detailed accounts from as large a population as is feasible. As argued by Brackenridge, Bringer, and Bishop (2005), this task would be aided by more consistent recording of abuse case data by sport organizations.

Conclusion

From cases of sex abuse in sport in media reports over a 16 year period, three clear facets of coach abuser repertoires were found: "intimate," "opportunistic," and "coercive/power." Sexually abusive coaches use very different patterns of behavior with female victims versus male victims. Female victims are more likely to experience the less aggressive and more intimate behaviors and grooming strategies, such as declarations of love, kissing, and unlawful sex. Male victims are more likely to experience more aggressive and intrusive grooming strategies and behaviors, such as buggery (sodomy), being provided with alcohol, and being shown pornography. The results support the theories of other researchers and their findings about grooming and sexual abuse both within and outside sport. This could add to the awareness of sexual abuse in sport by sport and exercise psychologists and, thereby, help to encourage the development of abuse prevention policies and procedures.

Notes

1. As with the term "resilience," "resistance" is a contested concept in the harassment and abuse literature. Both terms can give rise to the mistaken assumption that victims are somehow responsible for preventing their own abuse.

2. Some of these cases were supplied by colleagues from the UK, Canada, USA, Australia, Germany, Norway, Belgium, and The Netherlands; their assistance is gratefully acknowledged.

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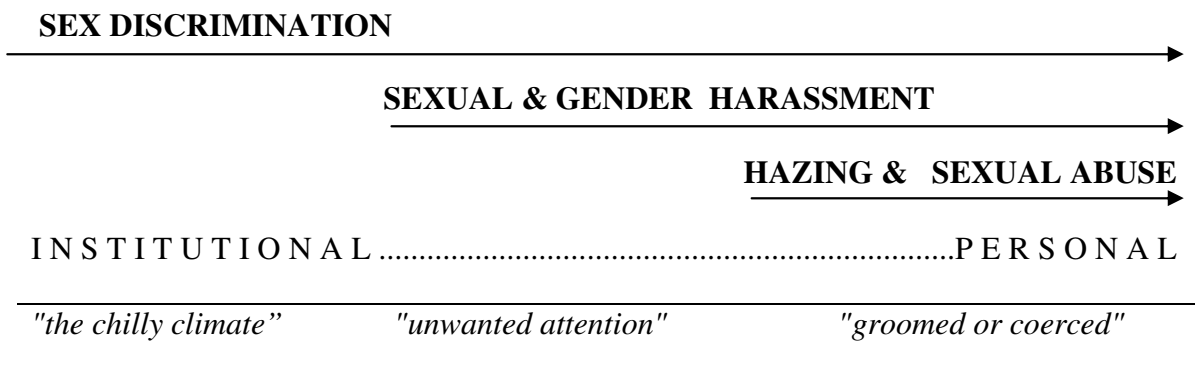
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SEX DISCRIMINATION →

SEXUAL & GENDER HARASSMENT →

HAZING &   SEXUAL ABUSE →

I N S T I T U T I O N A L ....P E R S O N A L

"the chilly climate"   *"unwanted attention"*   *"groomed or coerced"*

Figure 1. The sexual exploitation continuum (adapted from Brackenridge 2001, p. 29).
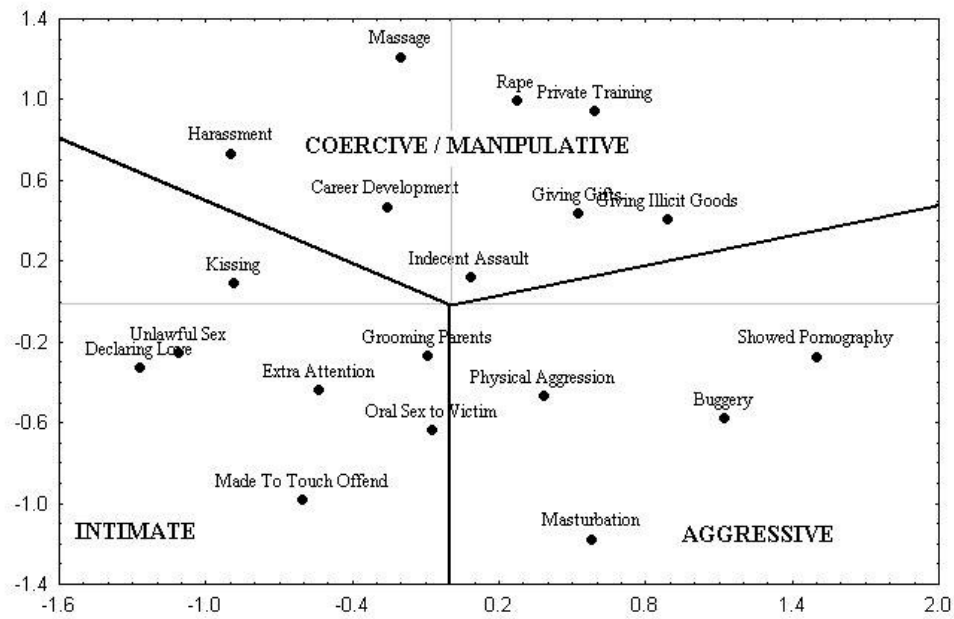
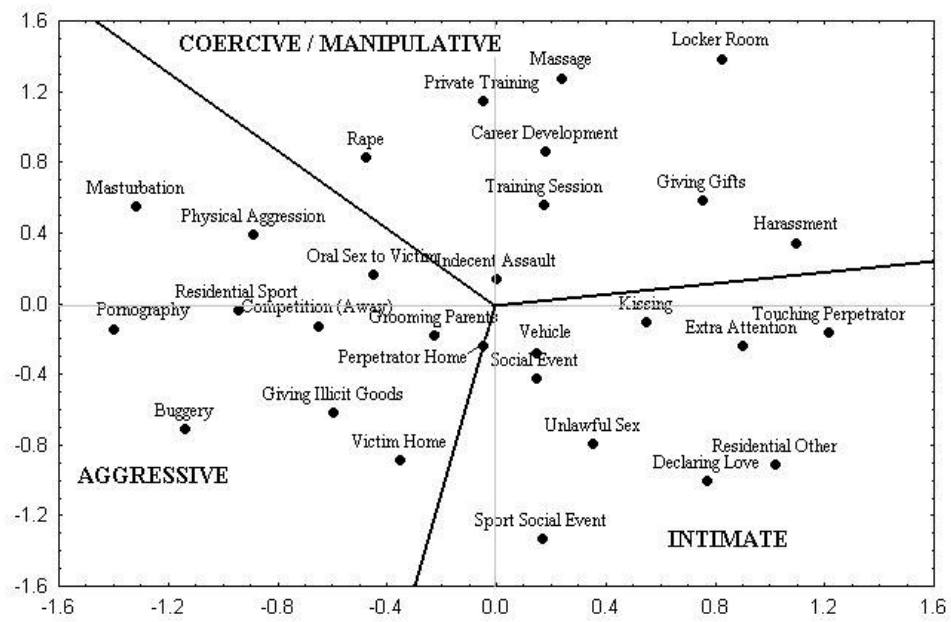*Figure 2.* MDS of grooming and sexual behaviors.

Figure 3. Sexual behaviors and grooming behaviors in relation to victim gender.
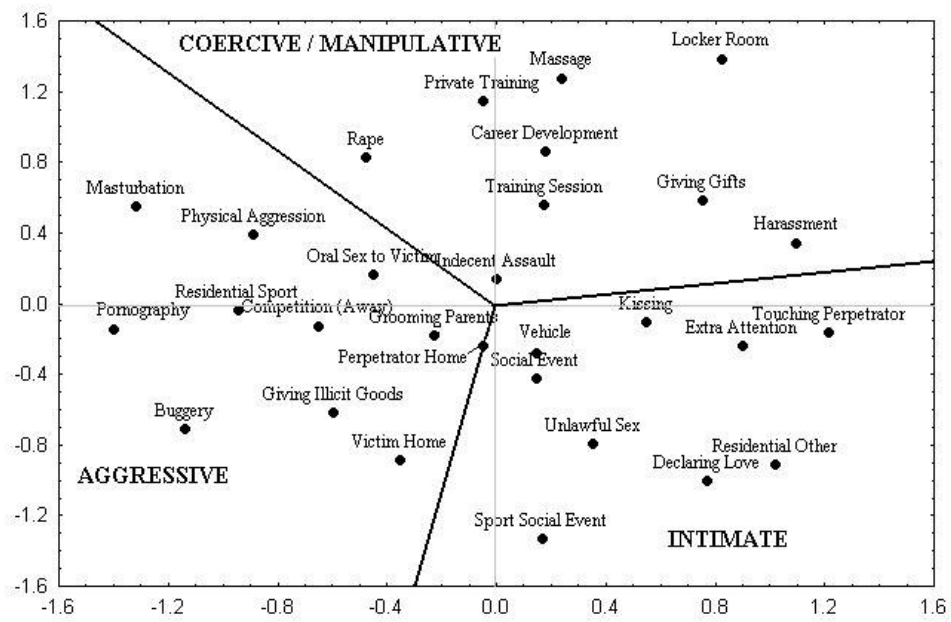
Figure 4. Grooming behaviors, location, and occasion of abuse.

Table 1

Victim Age Category

Victim age	Female	Male
Child	31	28
Adolescent	84	32
Adult	9	1
Not known	11	6

Table 2

Sexual Behaviors by Victim Sex

Sexual behaviour	Female	Male
Sexual harassment	17	4
Indecent assault	76	44
Consensual sex	43	2
Touching	109	49
Kissing	25	5
Oral sex to victim	17	10
Rape	23	0
Buggery	2	15
Masturbation of victim	1	7
Digital penetration	3	0
Indecent exposure	4	2
Victim made to touch offender	5	4
Oral sex to offender	4	0
Foreign object insertion	4	0
Filmed acts	5	3

Table 3

Strategies for Abuse Facilitation by Victim Sex

Strategy type	Female	Male
Verbally grooming victim	7	1
Grooming parents	15	10
Giving victim extra attention	11	5
Giving victim gifts	7	6
Declaring love to victim	15	1
Giving victim private training	10	2
Giving victim therapeutic massage	12	4
Employing performance enhancing methods	2	1
Using career development	7	7
Requesting nudity for sport reason	9	3
Providing victim illicit goods	14	11
Providing victim alcohol	11	8
Showing victim pornography	3	11
Verbal aggression	14	8
Physical aggression	9	6
Other grooming strategy	4	5

Table 4

Abuse Contexts by Victim Gender

Location	Female	Male
Indoor sport site	46	20
Outdoor sport site	6	2
Offenders vehicle	27	11
Residential sport trip	15	11
Residential trip other	10	8
Perpetrator residence	42	27
Victims residence	8	8
Training session	50	20
Locker room	7	4
Competition event home	1	1
Competition event away	21	14
Social occasion related to sport	9	3
Social occasion not related to sport	43	27
Extra curricular social activities	13	14
Driving victim home	7	0
Taking victim away from setting	48	27