TITLE: Managing abuse in sport: An introduction to the special issue

RUNNING HEAD: Abuse in sport

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Abstract

This special issue was designed to advance a research agenda focussed on the management of abuse in sport. Despite progress in the field, greater attention to the structures, policies, processes, practices, and sites in which abuse occurs is required. As such, there is a need for evidence-based solutions to improve the management of abuse and integrity in sport. The authors identified 5 overarching themes across the 12 papers included within the special issue: the harms and legacies of abuse; abuse in mediated environments; abuse of referees; frameworks that sustain abuse; and safeguarding. The articles included in this issue highlight the complexity of abuse in sporting spaces, the impact it can have on victims and the challenges faced in appropriately managing sporting spaces toward the reduction of harm. This special issue is driven by the authors' desire to promote integrity and enrich the sporting experience for all, with the hope of driving further research into the management of abuse and integrity in sport.

1 Introduction

In 2017, Larry Nassar, the Medical Doctor for USA gymnastics, formally pled guilty to 10 counts of first-degree criminal sexual misconduct with minors under the age of 16 years (Fisher & Anderson, 2019). The scale of the case against Nassar dwarfed his admissions. In his position as a medical practitioner in various sports (including gymnastics, diving, athletics and swimming), it is estimated that he abused more than 250 victims in a career spanning multiple decades[1]. Nassar was sentenced to between 40 and 175 years imprisonment for his crimes. In 2018, British youth football coach Barry Bennell was convicted of sexually abusing young boys. He was sentenced to 30 years in prison, and the extent of this abuse continues to unfold as part of a broader inquiry concerning historical sexual abuse in youth football in the United Kingdom. In 2019, it was announced that the Nike Oregon project, led by head coach Alberto Salazar, was to be closed following Salazar's four-year doping suspension. In the aftermath, female athletes who trained under coach Salazar and his support team have provided testimony of being subjected to systemic physical and emotional abuse in a toxic high-performance culture (Chavez, 2019).

In all cases, the focus was initially placed upon the perpetrators. Nassar, Bennell, and Salazar were all framed as *individuals* who had misused their positions of power. However, as each case unfolds, the role played by other people, organisations, and institutions in concealing abuse has moved sharply into focus. As one lawyer who represented some of Nassar's victims claimed, "If it takes a village to raise a child, it takes a village to abuse one" (Kerr & Stirling, 2019, p.10). Abuse or violations of integrity, therefore, are not just individual acts perpetrated against a victims. Instead, the Nassar, Bennell, and Salazar cases shine a spotlight upon more systemic practices that enable abuse to occur in sporting spaces.

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[1] The number of victims could exceed that reported here as lawsuits continue to be filed against Nassar as an individual, and the organisations for whom he has worked.

Global patterns of abuse have been identified in academic research (e.g., Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014; Fasting, Brackenridge & Sundgot-Borgen, 2003; Hartill & Lang, 2018; Moutjoy et al., 2016; Stirling & Kerr, 2014; Vertommen et al., 2016; Parent, 2011), findings highlight the occurrence of abuse in sporting contexts ranging from community through to high performance sport. In South Korea, female athletes have spoken out about a culture of abuse present in the sport of skating (ice-track) (BBC, 2019a); in Canada, former national ski coach, Bertrand Charest, was convicted of 37 charges of sexual assault pertaining to crimes committed against young athletes (Kerr & Stirling, 2019); in the United Kingdom, cycling, rowing, canoeing, and gymnastics have each been investigated for having practices that led to the bullying of athletes by coaches, managers, and teammates (Adams & Kavanagh, in press); and English football has undergone a series of investigations into a 30-year history of child sex abuse, which has led to the conviction of more than 20 coaches being found guilty of abusing the young athletes in their care (BBC, 2019b).

While abuse has been in sharp focus, issues concerning sport and integrity more broadly are also commonplace in critiques of the purpose and place of sport in society. Accounts of overt illegal practices, such as doping, match-fixing, and deliberately or negligently causing harm, have been clearly documented (Kihl, Skinner, & Engelberg, 2016). An emerging corpus of work focuses on subtle, normalised behaviours that are typically and problematically associated with a win-at-all-costs ethos (Vanden Auweele, 2010). Such practices include, but are not limited to: systematic overtraining (Stafford, Alexander, & Fry, 2013); homophobia and transphobia in sport (Klein, Paule-Koba, & Krane, 2019; Cunningham & Pickett, 2018); systemic racism (Love, Deeb, & Waller, 2019); and sexism (Lee & Cunningham, 2016). These issues have implications for managers from community to elite levels of sport.

The papers in this special issue make a series of timely and important contributions to our understanding of abuse in sport, especially in light of the publication of independent welfare and safety reviews (e.g., Grey-Thompson, 2017; Phelps, Kelly, Lancaster, Mehrzad, & Panter, 2017), and media reportage of cultures of fear, intimidation, and bullying (The Guardian, 2017; Roan, 2017). Increasingly, sport organisations are held accountable for their role in developing and maintaining spaces, environments, and cultures that promote a duty of care (Maitland, & Rhind, 2015; Parent & Fortier, 2018; Wagstaff, 2018). However, there is danger that such duties of care are treated as symbolic requirements that are overshadowed by performance expectations (e.g., medal targets). While the management of abuse may be deemed a difficult and complex activity, we believe it should be regarded as a minimum welfare standard. In this special issue we advocate for a reinvigorated focus on managing abuse in sport that moves beyond a 'do no harm' ethos—towards higher standards of welfare, not simply the absence of 'poor welfare'. In this way, promoting integrity to offer safe, fair, inclusive, and enriching environments for all is an integral challenge for sport practitioners and academics. This special issue seeks to bring attention to this agenda.

2 The special issue

In this special issue, we consistently refer to abuse as an overarching term for what other authors in this issue refer to as non-accidental violence or maltreatment. Rather than engaging in a semantic debate about terminology, we wish to focus on the psychological, social, physical, *and* organisational consequences of abuse that require management. An explicit goal of this special issue is to 'shine a light' on the actors, contexts, and social and psychological forces that perpetuate and sustain abuse. Without such insights, we are unable to understand how perpetrators such as Larry Nassar and Barry Bennell were able to abuse victims over such extended periods of time. We structure our review of the articles that feature in the special issue as follows. First, we discuss articles in which the authors explicate

the harms of abuse. Second, we introduce articles that investigate abuse in virtual environments. Third, we present articles exploring abuse of referees and match officials. Fourth, we focus on contributions exploring frameworks that sustain or perpetuate abuse. The final set of articles present guidelines or ideas concerning safeguarding in sport.

2.1 The harms and legacies of abuse

Whereas types of abuse have been examined in existing literature, how athletes cope and the subsequent impact of abuse on individuals has received insufficient attention. Two contributions to this special issue explore the effect of abuse on victims after the events. Lopez, Dohrn, and Posig (this issue), provide insight into negative consequences of abusive leadership on followers' performance. Framed by leader-member exchange theory, Lopez et al., examine the impact of leader abuse on follower performance, by examining the effects of followers' core-self evaluations with their perceptions of abusive coaching behaviours and their performance. Their contribution to the literature concerns a focus on the followers' in the dyadic leadership process and examining whether the level of core self-evaluations of followers buffer the negative relationship between abuse and performance. In their analysis of 145 US student-athletes, Lopez et al. observe that core-self evaluations provide a buffering effect to the impact of abusive coaching on performance. Regardless of the buffering effect, abusive leadership leads to a reduction in group performance. Importantly, women reported lower levels of core self-evaluations than men, indicating that abusive leadership is more detrimental for female than male athletes. Lopez et al. make a key contribution to the special issue presenting the first study to explore how gender may affect victims' capacity to cope with or negotiate abuse in the leader-athlete relationship.

Previous literature has focused extensively on the immediate experience of abuse. Understanding how individuals experience abuse over time is critical. Treating the experience of abuse in terms of its legacy for individuals (and organisations) can shift

analyses from cases treated as singular moments in time, to temporal experiences that have complex and lasting impacts on those involved. While there is an immediate cost associated with abuse, the lasting impact and legacy of this experience has been under-researched to date (Vertommen, Kampen, Schipper-Van Veldhoven, Uzieblo & Vab Den Eede, 2018). Framed by narrative inquiry, McMahon and McGannon (this issue) highlight the experiential complexities of abuse through the eyes of one former athlete. Using creative nonfiction presented in a series of vignettes, the authors explore the lived experiences of a former elite swimmer and the realities of coping with abuse over time. The key contribution of McMahon and McGannon's article is to demonstrate that abuse is not experienced as a one-off event, but, instead, as a series of ongoing embodied and emotional experiences. The authors conclude that more support needs to be given to help athletes live and cope with the aftermath of abuse. The critical fiction approach offers pedagogical opportunities for sport workers, policy makers, parents, coaches, and athletes alike to support victims of abuse. This work highlights the need for methodologies that enable abuse and integrity issues to be examined in different ways to enable a deeper understanding of the complexity of the experience across the life span.

2.2 Abuse in mediated environments

To date, there has been a consistent focus on abuse that occurs in physical settings, thereby neglecting the advent of virtual technologies. While people of all ages are increasingly reliant upon technology for everyday tasks and interactions, overwhelmingly, the digital environment is one that is occupied by young people (Kavanagh, Jones, & Sheppard-Marks, 2016). Alongside the benefits of social connectivity, the Internet is a space in which transgressive behaviours can operate, often without detection. As such, online spaces can pose a significant threat to individual safety. Sanderson and Weathers' (this issue) contribution to the special issue provides a critical insight into virtual platforms and the

potential of these spaces to facilitate Child Sexual Abuse (CSA). In their study, they examined case reports of coach perpetrated CSA. The findings highlight how social media platforms, such as Snapchat, can be used to groom children for abuse in sports settings. Digital technologies have opened up pathways for coaches to gain the trust of victims in virtual spaces from which coach-perpetrators can move abuse from virtual to physical contexts. While sporting spaces are now recognised as sites where abuse can be perpetrated, the key contribution of Sanderson and Weathers' research is to demonstrate how grooming in virtual spaces, such as Snapchat, leads to the physical perpetration of abuse. The confluence of virtual and physical settings is a key area for action for sport organisations. Sanderson and Weathers indicate that the cases of abuse analysed unfold over time and, as such, with appropriate safeguarding, are preventable.

Kitchin, Paramio-Salcines, and Walters (this issue) approach abuse in an online context through presenting an important analysis of the organisational consequences of a public shaming campaign in response to perceived discrimination. Using the case of a disabled Premier League supporter who was unable to sit with family members during matches, Kitchin et al. explore the evolving process of communications that occurred publicly via social media posts that sought to raise awareness of the issue and attack the focal organization; privately, between supporter and club (via private email); and through national media coverage as the campaign gained broader traction. Their analysis details how organisational responses to initial supporter email complaints can – when perceived to be unsatisfactory or discriminatory – escalate into the public domain and be amplified by influential advocates. However, Kitchin et al. also demonstrate how public shaming, in this case, was used to target individual staff members, thus creating significant personal as well as organisational crises. Through a process-analysis of the campaign, the authors observe the subsequent changes to seating and access that took place at the focal club *after the shaming*

campaign. Notwithstanding the impact of the public shaming campaign (see the authors'

analysis of its complexities), Kitchin et al. note the opportune moment at which the shaming

campaign took place. Specifically, debates about accessibility in sport stadia broadly, and in

the Premier League specifically, already had media traction and, when the public shaming

campaign was launched, it resonated with this agenda. In a unique way, when compared to

the other problems addressed in this special issue, Kitchin et al. demonstrate the agency of an

individual that felt discriminated against by the club they supported to respond and create real

and public reputational concerns for the focal organisation.

2.3 Abuse of referees

Two contributions to this special issue turn our focus to match officials as victims of

abuse. In their cross-cultural analysis of the level of abuse, conflict, and support faced by

soccer referees in France and the Netherlands, Webb, Dicks, Thelwell, van der Kamp, and

Rix-Lievre (this issue) illustrate the significant levels of abuse – mostly verbal, but also

physical – experienced by referees. Framing their study using intergroup conflict theory,

Webb et al. locate players, spectators, and coaches as the ingroup and referees as the

outgroup. Drawing on literature outlining how positive intergroup contact might inform

future research, Webb et al. argue for policy and practice changes to reduce prejudice,

violence, and other issues that may exist towards the outgroup. This invokes a need for

stronger governance and management to reduce referee attrition, which echoes existing

evidence on referee dropout rates in football (Giel & Breuer, in press).

Building on the insights provided by Webb et al., (this issue), Jacobs, Tingle, Oja, and

Smith (this issue) examine the factors that have an impact on referee abuse from the

perspective of 15 US-based rugby union coaches. Jacobs et al., identify coaches as a key

perpetrator of abuse directed towards referees in rugby. Identifying five factors that influence

coaches' perspective of a referee, Jacobs et al., discuss (a) personal

characteristics/philosophies; (b) relationships; (c) social influences; (d) organisational

expectations, and; (e) culture. Each of these factors explain why coaches may perpetrate

abuse of referees and how these factors can help act as a buffer to abuse. Jacobs et al.

suggest that the five factors are interrelated and conclude that there are significant

opportunities to increases levels of constructive interaction between coaches and referees in

order to reduce the potential for abuse to take place. Furthermore, through coach certification

and the professional development of coaches, Jacobs et al. argue that organisations can help

inform, socialise, and influence coaching practice to reduce the volume of abuse directed

towards referees. The contributions of Webb et al. and Jacobs et al. demonstrate the

importance of management and governance if referee abuse is to be minimised.

2.4 Frameworks that sustain abuse

Moving beyond micro-level individualised experiences of abuse, in this section we

shift focus to discuss contributions to the special issue that explore organisational failings that

perpetuate abuse and integrity infringements. Roberts, Sojo, and Grant (this issue) present a

systematic review of existing work on non-accidental violence in sport to critically examine

the organisational factors that enable and motivate violence toward athletes in sport. The

authors reviewed 43 qualitative studies concerning psychological, sexual, and physical abuse

of athletes. Roberts et al. bring to light a range of organisational factors that led to the abuse

experienced by athletes. In relation to psychological, physical, and sexual abuse Roberts et

al., argue that organisational tolerance and conformity to dominant values which fail to

prioritise athlete well-being are most often associated with non-accidental violence. Drawing

on Salin's (2003) research on bullying in managerial contexts, Roberts et al. suggest that

while organisational factors may not be sufficient in isolation to account for harmful

interpersonal experiences they *can enable abuse to occur*. More specifically, organisational

tolerance is a necessary antecedent condition for all forms of abuse to occur in sport

organisations. Therefore, while individuals may abuse victims, it is also perpetuated by organisations that perpetuate climates that are tolerant of, or ignorant to, abuse in sport.

Nite and Nauright (this issue) present a compelling institutional analysis of the Penn State, Baylor, and Michigan State University abuse cases. While articulating the nuances of each case, Nite and Nauright argue that "the structured responses of the universities were fairly consistent". It is in relation to this point that Nite and Nauright push forward our understanding of abuse substantially. The analysis sheds light on the various sources of power that are exerted on victims in order to suppress cases. Internal pressures were reinforced by other audiences, such as fans, donors, and community law enforcers who *publicly supported the validity of institutional responses to each case,* thereby reducing scrutiny and publicly legitimating each university's position in relation to the scandals. As Nite and Nauright observe, each scandal was suppressed until *external media sources* were able to reveal information that enabled a broad enough swathe of stakeholders to sufficiently scrutinise *internal processes*. This scrutiny removed the suppressor factors (cf. Bitektine & Haack, 2015) created by internal and external audiences, and created conditions for the abusers and organisations to be publicly challenged. The authors shed a light on the complex institutional processes that facilitate abuse and abusers in environments that collude, silence, valorise, discipline perpetrators internally, and create opaque obscure internal processes to obfuscate abuse.

On a broader level, Verschuuren (this issue) presents a rapid review of whistleblowing practices in sport using Dowling, Edwards, and Washington's (2014) work on professionalisation. In this multi-level analysis of whistle-blowing determinants, Verschuuren reviews the individual, cultural, organisational, and environmental factors that make whistleblowing more or less likely. Taking these levels together in his analysis, Verschuuren clearly demonstrates the complex social, psychological, and organisational

determinants that inhibit whistleblowing in sport. Furthermore, he connects organisational

cultures that silence wrongdoing and feature weak ethical commitment with distinctive

features of sport such as intense loyalty and identification (see Smith & Stewart, 2010). In

such intense sporting cultures, subordination is engrained and, therefore, so are power

dynamics that – for a range of reasons – preclude athletes or staff from blowing the whistle

on deviant practices. Verschuuren concludes by discussing the importance of specific

integrity-based training for athletes, coaches, and managers in sport as well as advocating

specific protections for individuals that reveal acts of wrongdoing in sport.

2.5 Safeguarding

Building on the contributions about frameworks that sustain abuse and a failure to

blow the whistle on deviant practices, the final group of articles draw our attention to active

attempts by organisations to promote safe sporting spaces, manage abuse, and protect

individuals from harm. A notable development with regard to actively managing abuse has

been the advent of global safeguarding interventions: one example being the launch of the

International Safeguards for Children in Sport, the focus of Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere's (this

issue) contribution to the special issue. In this paper, the authors evaluate a global strategy to

safeguard children against abuse in sport. The authors capture the experiences of people in

organisations that contributed to the International Safeguards for Children in Sport over the

course of a two-year study. The Safeguards outline the guidance and processes that should be

put in place by any organisation providing sports activities for children and young people.

Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere suggest that the International Safeguards for Children in Sport

represent an important resource for managing abuse in sport. However, the significant

contribution of the research is in the authors call to shift the focus of research from

understanding instances of abuse to understanding the management of safeguarding. Thus,

moving the field from analyses of what has happened towards frameworks that seek to prevent abuse, in all its forms, from taking place.

Hartmann-Tews, Bartsch, Wagner, and Rulofs (this issue) analyse German National Sport Federations (NSFs) responses to sport-related political requirements concerning the development of a comprehensive policy for the prevention of sexual violence, following the 2010 Munich Declaration by the German Olympic Sports Confederation (Deutscher Olympischer Sportbund, DOSB, 2010). The authors discuss the role and relevance of the Commissioners for the Prevention of Sexualised Violence (CPSVs), an obligatory position that NSFs must now fill in their own organisations, following the conditions of the 2010 declaration. Through establishing the new CPSV role, with its obligation to regularly report on the NSFs activities related to sexual violence, Hartmann-Tews, et al. report that NSFs are 'pressured' or 'nudged' to keep the topic of sexual violence, including potential and implemented strategies and policy, at the forefront of the organization's agenda. Many of the CPSVs reported that NSFs are initially *reactive* and typically assign *higher priorities* to performance-centred policy (e.g. coaching and talent-scouting) than issues such as sexual violence. According to CPSVs, the NSFs perceive their core business to revolve around competitive sport success and performance enhancement issues. Subsequently, sexual violence prevention does not 'fit' neatly and is therefore subordinated within organisations' agenda and policy decisions.

Such work is continued by Kerr and Kerr (this issue) in their contribution, which articulates a vision for future maltreatment intervention initiatives. In their article: *Promoting athlete welfare: a proposal for an international surveillance system* Kerr and Kerr explore abuse in sport perpetrated over an extended period of time, the complicity of adults within such cases, and the failure of others to intervene in abuses when they knew of or suspected abuse. Drawing on Brofenbrenner's Ecological Theory and Latour's concept of the

oligopticon (Latour, 2005), Kerr and Kerr review the current landscape of maltreatment-prevention initiatives implemented in sport, highlighting safeguarding gaps, and the need to advance athlete welfare across five theoretical and organizational levels (individual, micro, meso, exo, and macro). To address current problems, complement existing policies and procedures, and further advance safeguarding in sport, the authors advocate for an athlete welfare information-sharing and surveillance system. The authors' vision for an international, oligoptic maltreatment "command centre" to collect, collate, share, and act on information from a range of dispersed sources in sport (including from existing initiatives) is certainly ambitious and positioned by Kerr and Kerr as imperative due to the damage caused by "systemic" and "unchecked abuse" (p.8).

3 Conclusion

The papers included within this special issue present a broad analysis of issues facing sport managers and academics. These issues range from the experience of abuse victims to the macro-level environments in organisations or institutions that perpetuate, suppress, or ignore harm. The articles we present highlight the complexity of abuse, the impact it can have on victims and organisations in the moment and over time, and the challenges faced in appropriately managing sporting spaces if we are to reduce harm and promote integrity. The authors of these papers make significant strides in starting to problematise the systems, organisations, and institutions that govern sport globally. It is evident across the contributions that organisational tolerance for abuse and the primacy placed on strategic performance priorities has a human cost. The sport management academy is well-placed to contribute to management and governance approaches designed to mitigate against, and reduce abuse in sport. Sport managers must take an active role in the development of policies, reporting procedures and education initiatives toward affording greater protection for all stakeholders.

While the management of abuse may be deemed a difficult and complex activity, we believe it should be regarded as a minimum welfare standard. We advocate for integrity as a guiding principle in research and practice, providing focus on managing abuse in sport that moves beyond a 'do no harm' ethos; towards safe, fair, positive, inclusive, and enriching higher welfare environments, not simply sporting spaces and experiences defined by an absence of poor welfare, abuse, and violence. It is also our hope that this body of work serves to inspire others to continue driving forward debates within the field of sport management around complex and ever-evolving safeguarding gaps and to refine the collective knowledge and understanding of where there are opportunities to re-imagine and implement new directions in protecting people from harm.

We are mindful that geographical, cultural, legal, economic, and political contexts have an impact on the management of abuse and integrity in sport. All of the submissions to this special issue originate from research conducted in the global West and, therefore, findings may not translate into all contexts. Future research should work to explore abuses in various forms and in contexts that have yet to be investigated. In addition, there is a need for more intersectional work, which will afford opportunity to consider how abuse and integrity issues in sport intersect with other forms of violence (such as racism, homophobia, transphobia).

There is still much work to be done in order to manage abuse and integrity in sport. As elite gymnasts Tasha and Jordan Schwikert shared, "The adults we trusted as kids to keep us safe failed profoundly to protect us. We raise our voices now to help prevent such a travesty in the future." (Pesta, 2019). We echo the words of Schwikert and Schwikert and all others who have experienced and continue to experience abuse in sport. We hope that other researchers in the myriad disciplines related to the management of sport and abuse will raise their voices toward the continuously evolving challenge of promoting integrity in sport.

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