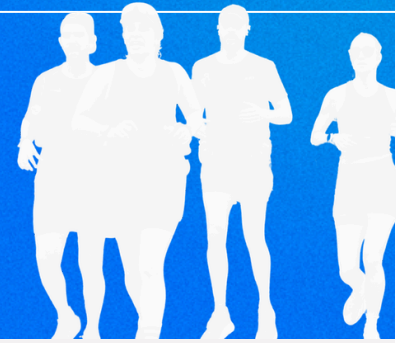


ABUSE IN SPORT FACT SHEET



There has not been extensive research about abuse in sport, with most of the research connecting to abuse in elite sport or connected to Olympics or children's sports.

This sheet is for:

This factsheet is a general resource for advocates and others that want to learn more about abuse in sport.

How advocates can use this:

Advocates can use this to increase understanding of the prevalence, demographics, and environments that can make sport a site for abuse.

Prevalence: What is the amount of abuse in sport?

Abuse happens in every sport and at every level. It is estimated that 13% of elite athletes experience sexual abuse in sport as children.

According to a study in the Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma in 2024, abuse in sport is varied and extensive. In elite and Olympic/Paralympic sport across sport types, athletes reported high levels of abuse. 54.5% of athletes reported psychological violence, 6.9% reported physical violence, and 8.8% reported sexual violence.

For athletes the experience of abuse in sports are commonplace, with the Courage First Athlete Helpline finding that between 40-50% of athletes experience some form of abuse.

Studies find that there is a significant overlap between different types of abuse experienced; athletes often experience multiple forms simultaneously.

^[1] Dallam, S. J., Ortiz, A. J., Timon, C. E., Kang, J. S., & Hamilton, M. A. (2024). Interpersonal Violence in Elite U.S. Athletes: Prevalence and Mental Health Correlates. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 33(9), 1135-1153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2024.2350998>.

^[2] Courage First Athlete Helpline, "I Am an Athlete," athlethehelpline.org, accessed Feb. 10, 2023.

^[3] Dallam, S. J., Ortiz, A. J., Timon, C. E., Kang, J. S., & Hamilton, M. A. (2024). Interpersonal Violence in Elite U.S. Athletes: Prevalence and Mental Health Correlates. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 33(9), 1135-1153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2024.2350998>.

Demographics: Who is being harmed?

Athletes of all genders are being harmed.

This includes LGBTQ+ athletes who often face other vulnerabilities due to their gender and sexuality.

Athletes with disabilities may face higher levels of abuse in sport.^[4]

Athletes in team sports have also been shown to be more at risk of abuse from the coaches.^[5]

One in five NCAA athletes have experienced abusive supervision in sports.

Environments: Why is sport a site for abuse?

Social norms of struggle, physical pain, and sacrifice at any cost for winning are conducive to abusive techniques.

The hierarchy of sport, where coaches and trainers have power and control over athletes can create an environment that allows for abuse to occur.

Training, competition, and travel is often isolating, and it can create conditions and opportunities for abuse.

Intersecting vulnerabilities, such as a child's identity and age as an athlete, their dependence on parents or guardians, disability, and socio-economic status can create conditions in which abuse is more likely to occur.

Many sporting environments that have one form of violence, such as physically abusive harms, are more likely to have other forms of violence, such as sexual or emotional abuse.^[6] This amplifies harm and creates situations of complex trauma from multiple forms of abuse.^[7]

Vulnerabilities in elite sport (elite sport are professionals and Olympic/Paralympic athletes) may be even higher, given the commitment, isolation and power/control over the sports career that coaches and others in sports health and management can wield in the context of professional and elite sports goals.

^[4] Runquist III EB, Adenaiye OO, Sarzaeim M, et al. Associations of abusive supervision among collegiate athletes from equity-deserving groups, *Br J Sports Med* 2025;59:1124-1134. Available at <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/bjsports/59/16/1124.full.pdf>

^[5] Runquist III EB, Adenaiye OO, Sarzaeim M, et al. Associations of abusive supervision among collegiate athletes from equity-deserving groups, *Br J Sports Med* 2025;59:1124-1134. Available at <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/bjsports/59/16/1124.full.pdf>

^[6] Dallam, S. J., Ortiz, A. J., Timon, C. E., Kang, J. S., & Hamilton, M. A. (2024). Interpersonal Violence in Elite U.S. Athletes: Prevalence and Mental Health Correlates. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 33(9), 1135-1153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2024.2350998>.

^[7] Dallam, S. J., Ortiz, A. J., Timon, C. E., Kang, J. S., & Hamilton, M. A. (2024). Interpersonal Violence in Elite U.S. Athletes: Prevalence and Mental Health Correlates. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment & Trauma*, 33(9), 1135-1153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10926771.2024.2350998>.
