

Perception of Sexual Harassment in the Sports Industry: A Case of Czech University Students

Michaela Kaprálková, Barbora Večlová, Veronika Krause

Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Charles University, Prague, Czech Republic

ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyze and describe the perception of sexual harassment in the environment of organized sport in the Czech Republic from the perspective of Czech University students with sport experience. Sexual harassment, while a growing area of social concern and policy, has largely gone unaddressed in Czech sport. This study emphasizes the need for the management of sport organizations and the government itself to understand this issue, and create policies so that sport can be more inclusive and safe to all demographics. A focus group was used to assess opinions and perception of the topic of sexual harassment in the Czech environment of organized sport. The focus group clarified and narrowed terms used in quantitative survey. 205 relevant responses (242 total) were obtained from students with organized sport experience in the Czech sports industry. Results were analyzed and disseminated to create policy proposals for sport organizations and other governing bodies with sports focus. The findings indicate that among the cohort of students enrolled in various Czech universities, instances of sexual harassment within the framework of organized sports are frequent and recurrent. Typically, the perpetrator is identified as a male athlete or coach, with the victim being a female athlete. Different forms of harassment, including verbal and non-verbal manifestations are prevalent. The psychological repercussions on victims are notable, often leading to adverse outcomes such as the cessation or alteration of their involvement in sports activities. Furthermore, the research underscores deficiencies in communication practices within the management of certain sports organizations regarding this issue. Overall, these findings underscore the significance and breadth of the matter, emphasizing the social responsibility incumbent upon sports organizations and other governing bodies in the administration of such institutions moving forward.

Keywords: prevention of sexual harassment, abuse of power in sports, social responsibility, good governance, gender issues, child sexual harassment, distrust in sports organizations

INTRODUCTION

Sexual harassment is a complex issue, the definition of which includes unwanted conduct of a sexual nature that violates a person's dignity and creates an intimidating or degrading environment (Brackenridge, 2001). This phenomenon is distinct from sexual discrimination and sexual violence, all of which can be interrelated (Amnesty International Czech Republic, n.d.). Sexual discrimination is a term used to refer to the disparagement of persons, differential pay, unequal educational or employment opportunities on the basis of gender or sexuality (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2007). Sexual violence, in turn, is the use of physical force (physical assault, rape) or threats of violence, where the perpetrator makes an effort through psychological influence to force their victim to submit to coercion.

Awareness of sexual harassment has increased recently, primarily due to the #MeToo movement and publicized cases such as the Nassar, Gailhaguet, and Karim cases (Burke, 2021). However, the issue at hand is difficult to both grasp and address due to its complexity, sensitivity, and frequent tabooing.

The legal framework of sexual harassment is determined by both international and Czech law. The Criminal Code of the Czech Republic defines crimes against human dignity in the sexual sphere, such as rape and sexual coercion (Act No. 40/2009 Coll., 2023). Sexual harassment is also addressed by the Labour Code and the Anti-Discrimination Act as a form of discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation or other characteristics (Act No. 262/2006 Coll., 2023; Act No. 198/2009 Coll., 2018). However, the general definition of sexual harassment varies at the national, cultural, and individual level, which complicates the measurement of its prevalence and also the prevention itself (Engelberg & Moston, 2016).

Sexual harassment has its roots not only in culture and history but also in basic human instincts. In contrast to the sexual drive, which exists because of the reproduction of the individual and the preservation of the individual's existence, a person is also driven by the erotic drive, which aims at the individual's satisfaction and the achievement of pleasure. If this drive is disturbed, either quantitatively or qualitatively, a variety of fetishes, deviance, or other sexual preference disorders may emerge (Pavlovsky & Roth, 2020). In addition to genes, a person is also influenced by his or her environment. The culture and historical events such as wars have also contributed to the prevalence of sexuality-related violence. In times of war, women have become spoils of war, trophies of war, or mere means to procreate children (Uzel, 2008). Social factors such as gender inequality and power imbalances may also play a role here (Fasting et al., 2011). Research by Engelberg & Moston (2016) agrees with this, confirming that sexual harassment is widespread and often underreported in society. The authors report that sexual harassment occurs in environments with imbalanced gender ratios and high levels of power among coaches, which is very much in line with the characteristics of the Czech sport environment addressed in this research.

According to the Damore law group (2020), in terms of sexual harassment, we can distinguish between verbal, non-verbal, physical, and quid pro quo forms. Verbal harassment consists of insults, sexualized remarks, name-calling, jokes, propositions or requests for sexual favors; non-verbal harassment includes sexualized mimicry, gesticulation, watching, winking, undressing,

stalking or showing videos or photographs with sexual overtones; the quid pro quo form of sexual harassment involves offers in exchange for sexual favors; physical sexual harassment then involves unwanted touching, fondling, pinching, kissing or groping. A particular and very current form is online sexual harassment, which involves sending inappropriate sexualized messages, photos, or videos (Kolouch, 2017).

Fasting et al. (2011) examined sexual harassment in sport in the Czech Republic, Norway, and Greece. They found that women in the Czech Republic and Greece were more likely to be sexually harassed than in Norway. The study also showed that sexual harassment in sport is often considered normal behavior, which makes it difficult to prevent and address. Taylor et al. (2024) confirm these findings and argue that sexual harassment in sports organizations is often systematic and deeply embedded in organizational culture, and in addition the authors highlight the often significant psychological and career consequences of sexual harassment for women in sport organizations.

The consequences of sexual harassment can be very serious. The aftermath can manifest through physical consequences, which include bruises, lacerations, fractures, unwanted pregnancies, and venereal disease (Chomova, 2014). There are also psychological consequences, such as guilt, fear, anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Weiss, 2017). The social consequences of sexual harassment can disrupt relationships with family and friends, cause social isolation, and lower self-esteem and self-confidence (Amnesty International Czech Republic, 2022). In a sports environment, in addition to the effects already mentioned, the consequences can lead to missing training sessions, a decline in performance, or even the end of a sporting career (Fasting et al., 2002).

For the reasons mentioned above, institutions such as sports clubs try to combat sexual harassment through codes of ethics and internal policies. These codes should include clear rules and procedures to protect athletes and staff (Geeraert & van Eekeren, 2022). Examples include the International Olympic Committee, which defines itself against sexual harassment and abuse in its Code of Ethics, where it rejects all forms of harassment and abuse (International Olympic Committee, 2018), or perhaps the International Gymnastics Federation, which emphasizes that no forms of violence, including sexual harassment and abuse, will be tolerated (International Gymnastics Federation, 2019).

Sports organizations should also actively work to create a safe environment for athletes and staff within the framework of good governance principles, the application of which is usually required to some extent by umbrella organizations (Geeraert & van Eekeren, 2022). This includes the implementation of codes of ethics, active education and awareness raising on sexual harassment prevention (Johnson & Cook, 2020), effective reporting and complaint mechanisms, and the provision of support for victims (Donnelly et al., 2016). This comprehensive approach is necessary to create a fair and safe atmosphere that allows athletes to focus on their performance without fear of harassment or abuse.

The objective and significance of the study

This study provides a closer look at the environment of Czech university students, where according to previous research the prevalence of sexual harassment may be relatively high, gender-related, and rooted in the organizational structure of sports organizations. The aim is to analyze and describe this environment, and to explain the importance of taking into account the problem of sexual

harassment, which should be addressed by the management of sports organizations. Furthermore, the goal of this study is to provide relevant recommendations for sports organizations on how to deal with this pressing problem in the context of Czech organized sport.

METHODS

This study uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, which together form a mixed-methods research design. Hendl (2005) states that combining qualitative and quantitative methods allows for more complex research questions to be addressed and more reliable answers to be obtained. This approach allows us to use the strengths of both methods and to eliminate their weaknesses (Svaricek & Sedova, 2007). Thus, through its results, mixed research provides a comprehensive view of the perception of sexual harassment in the sport environment by students of Czech universities and enables a better understanding of this social-psychological phenomenon.

Focus group

For the qualitative part of the research, the focus group method was chosen, which allows the use of dynamics and interaction between participants to obtain different attitudes and opinions on the topic under discussion. Miovisky (2006) emphasizes that the focus group uses the interaction of the participants and the group phenomenon, which distinguishes it from a group interview. Morgan (1997) defines a focus group as a method that obtains qualitative data through group interactions on a predetermined topic.

The focus group consisted of six Czech university students who are involved in organized sport. From these respondents, only opinions on the issue of sexual harassment in organized sport were obtained. Due to specific ethical concerns and the sensitivity of the data collected, the experiences of the respondents could not be the subject of this part of the research. The discussion was recorded, subsequently anonymized, and structured into several phases: preparatory, opening, motivational, core discussion, and closing.

1. In the *preparatory phase*, the basic conditions for participation in the research were set – respondents had to be students of Czech universities and had to be involved in organized sport. The group was balanced in terms of gender and different sports disciplines.
2. At the *start of the meeting*, the participants were introduced to the purpose of the meeting, the objectives of the survey, and the way the data were handled. All participants signed an informed consent form and were informed about the rules of the focus group.
3. This was followed by the *motivation phase*, where the researcher began by pointing out its importance and taboo in society and introduced the various subtopics of the research.
4. At the *core of the discussion*, the moderator had prepared thematic headings and model questions, which were flexibly adjusted during the discussion according to the answers of the respondents and the development of the discussion. Various sub-themes related to sexual harassment in sport were discussed.
5. *The final phase* served to close the discussion. The moderator thanked the participants for their activity and participation in the research and gave space for evaluation and

comments for feedback. The focus group participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss a sensitive topic without shame and stated that the discussion had made them think more deeply and realize the complexity of the issue.

The results and information provided by this part of the research were further used as a basis for the questionnaire survey, where responses relating to this topic were obtained from a wider range of respondents.

Questionnaire survey

For the quantitative part of the research, a questionnaire survey was chosen, specifically an electronic form of questioning. The questionnaire was created on the Survio.com website. It contained an introductory letter with the title of the research, an introduction of the researcher, the purpose of the research, the nature of the information collected and information about the handling of the data. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, respondents were informed that the questionnaire was voluntary, anonymous, and the participation could be terminated at any time. In contrast to the focus group, the survey could collect data including not only the respondents' views but also their experiences of sexual harassment.

The primary population for this research consisted of students from Czech universities who are involved in organized sport. The first two questions of the questionnaire investigated the fulfillment of these conditions and served as filter questions. Out of a total of 242 respondents, 37 were excluded for not fulfilling the conditions, so the final sample consisted of 205 respondents.

The questions were constructed in such a way that they were understandable and precise, meeting the principles of validity and reliability. To ensure that the principles of validity were met, operationalization was also created. Prior to the launch of the survey, a pilot study was conducted with 12 respondents, based on whose comments the necessary adjustments were made to the questionnaire.

The questionnaire survey aimed to obtain answers to questions regarding the respondents' opinions, personal and mediated experiences with sexual harassment, and the current state of anti-sexual harassment measures in sports organizations. The results of the questionnaire survey were then statistically processed and supplemented with findings from the focus group.

RESULTS

Views of focus group participants

The focus group participants agreed that the boundaries between what is and is not sexual harassment are related to the individuality of the situations and perceptions of individuals. The group first looked for a boundary at the level of the form and frequency of sexual harassment. Ultimately, the boundary was set by the respondents at the level of unwanted repeated physical touching or particularly vulgar remarks in verbal form or at the level of one-off verbal harassment.

Participants mentioned that sexual harassment is a repeated deliberate act that is intentional, unwanted, and coercive. They also stressed that it can be an act of some authority or even from individuals on the same level, and can be of a psychological or physical nature. The importance of

the individuality of each person's perception of a given situation or relationship dynamic was also highlighted.

On the basis of the Czech legislation and the keywords mentioned and the passages identified by the participants as important, the following very general definition of sexual harassment was constructed: *'It is a sexualized act that is intentional, unsolicited and coercive, which, regardless of its form, is not accepted by the other party, acts on them involuntarily and inappropriately and causes them psychological or physical harm or humiliation. The perception of sexual harassment is therefore individual, but each such situation must be taken seriously.'* This definition was further used in the questionnaire survey.

Participants acknowledged that sexual harassment is an issue in the sport setting, and they have some awareness of it. However, opinions vary as to whether it is a more common problem than in other settings. Respondents stated that there are shifting boundaries of what constitutes sexual harassment in the sport environment. Several situations arise in a sports environment that create space for sexual harassment, but are nevertheless taken as normal in that specific environment, such as showering together, changing clothes, etc., or the titillating situations and innuendo that arise are taken as just fun.

The group agreed that in their opinion the risk of sexual harassment varies depending on the sport. Some sports, they said, have a higher likelihood of sexual harassment because of more frequent physical contact, and the presence of a certain component of sexuality, such as in gymnastics or dance. They also consistently identified team sports as being at risk. Respondents also believed that women were more likely to be in the role of victim for cultural reasons, due to their physical weakness, greater sexualization of women by the media, greater sensitivity about sexual harassment or general initiation of intimate relationships by men.

Participants agreed that sexual harassment is usually repeated against one or more persons. The typical perpetrator is a male athlete or coach, motivated by a demonstration of power towards the victim, a perception of the victim's emotional imbalance or physical weakness. The group also said that there might be athletes who use sexual harassment to their advantage in exchange for some benefits.

Furthermore, focus group respondents agreed that victims may suffer psychological or physical consequences that may lead to the end of their sporting career. However, they also add that a potential false accusation of sexual harassment can have an almost fatal impact on an athlete's career and personal life. The consequences for the perpetrator are similar, but there is the added criminal sanction, which can take place either at a club level or in court.

If the participants found themselves in a position of sexual harassment victim, they would allegedly only address it in the case when the behavior was repeated or with a higher number of victims. They would confide in family and friends, not institutions, due to shame, fear of image deterioration or lack of trust in the sports institution to handle the situation. The group also acknowledged that sports organizations are sometimes more interested in concealing cases of sexual harassment than in solving them. In addition, participants stated that they have not yet seen any prevention against sexual harassment in sport organizations, but at the same time, they acknowledge the need for it. They stress the importance of prevention and a proactive approach to address sexual harassment in the sports environment. Furthermore, they would appreciate an

action on a national level from such institutions as the NSA (National Sports Agency – responsible for funding and policy setting in sport on a national level). The reasoning behind that is that centralized campaigns may make it easier for both sports organizations and athletes, as in the case of action just from sports organizations it might either appeal as “just on paper statement” or that the organization already has a problem and therefore tries to set some rules to solve it.

Synthesis of the results of the questionnaire survey

In the survey, 205 respondents (92 males and 113 females) who are students of Czech universities and who have experience with organized sport participated. The respondents represent a variety of sports, and in some cases, they have experience with more than one sport (see Table 1). Due to the sample size, it cannot be statistically confirmed that any sport has a higher incidence of sexual harassment.

Table 1. Experience with sexual harassment in the organized sport setting

Have you ever experienced any form of sexual harassment either personally or as a witness within a sports organization?			
Sport	No	Yes	Sum
track and field	4	5	9
aesthetic sports	11	6	17
fitness, bodybuilding	4	5	9
floorball	7	9	16
football	18	7	25
ice hockey	8	2	10
other individual sports	12	4	16
other team sports	9	12	21
unknown	1	1	2
rocket sports	4	6	10
combat sports	3	2	5
multiple individual sports	15	7	22
multiple different sports	22	13	35
multiple team sports	6	2	8
Sum	124	81	205

Of these respondents, 37% (30) had personal experience and 66% (53) had mediated experience. Sexual harassment was most prevalent in the settings of floorball, handball, athletics, football, gymnastics, swimming, weight training, and dance. Half of the personal experiences (15) involved repeated harassment by different individuals. In a quarter of cases, respondents were harassed once by one person (8), and in a fifth of cases (6) they were harassed repeatedly by the same person. These frequencies indicate the magnitude of the problem and the fact that there are more real cases due to repetition. Verbal harassment was the most common form (83%, 25), followed by non-verbal (53%, 16) and physical (40%, 12). Shockingly, even in this relatively small sample, there were four cases of rape (one case of direct and four cases of vicarious experience).

Another interesting finding is that when respondents were asked to indicate for each example on the scale whether or not they thought it was sexual harassment, 113 women in total said no 61 times and yes 855 times in one scale question (summarized in Figure 1) and yes 165 times in

another, no and 658 times yes (summarized in Figure 2), while 93 men in one case ticked the no option a total of 113 times and 615 times yes (summarized in Figure 1) and in another question men chose no 228 times and yes 473 times (summarized in Figure 2). Thus, it could be said that women in the sample are more likely to perceive some situations as clearly sexual harassment and less likely to strongly lean towards the option that it is not sexual harassment.

Figure 1. Rating examples of sexual harassment (part 1)

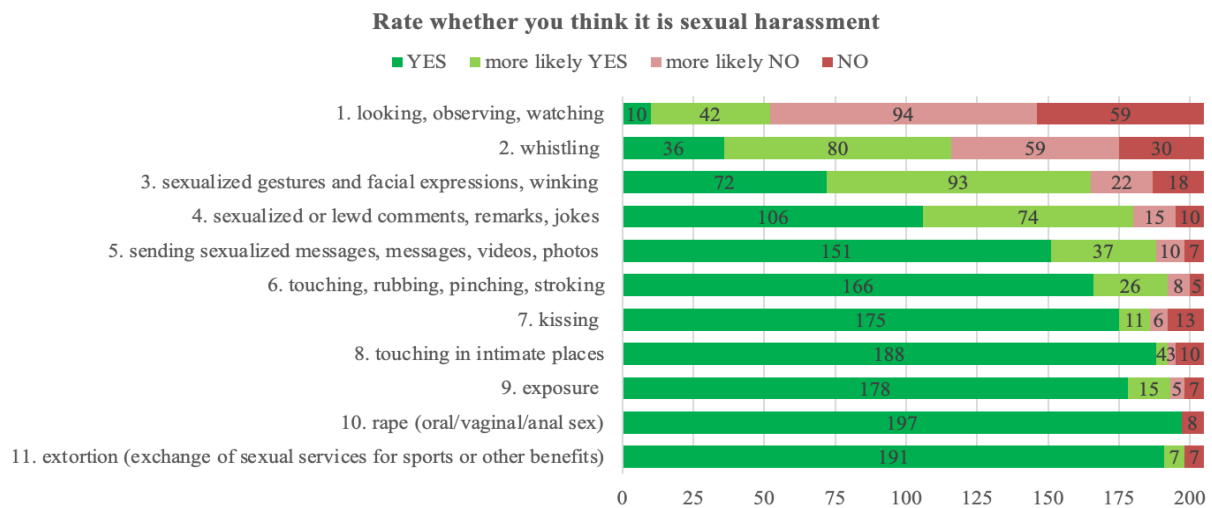
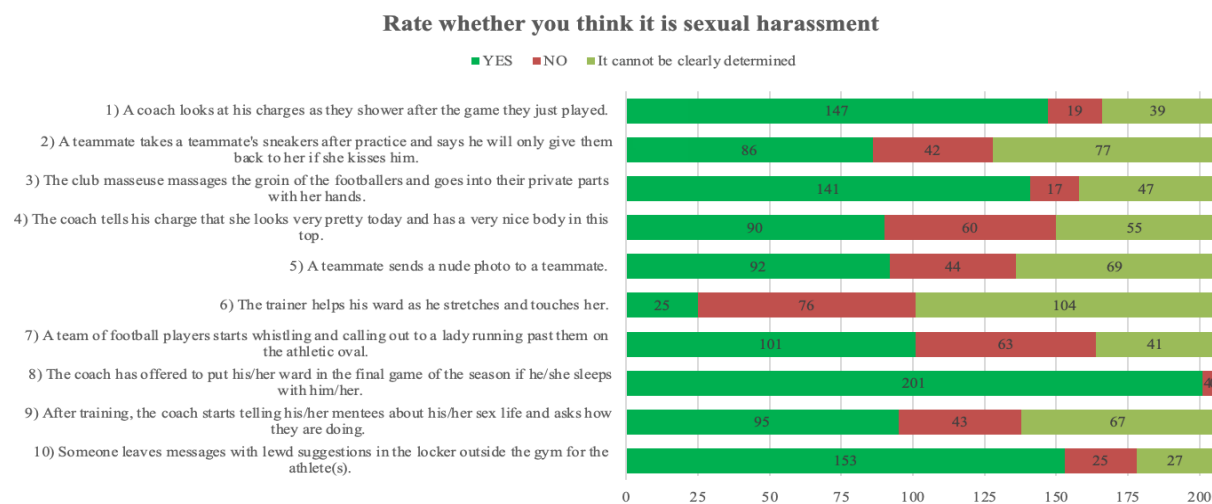


Figure 2. Rating examples of sexual harassment (part 2)



In the case of personal experience, the victim was in women (19) and in 1/3 of the cases men (11), always in the position of an athlete. Almost always, the perpetrator of sexual harassment was a man, who was most often in the position of athlete or coach (68%, 36). However, sexual harassment was also perpetrated by spectators (23%, 7) or members of the management of a sports organization (17%, 5).

Mediated experience shows a similar pattern. In almost all cases of mediated experiences, women were in the position of the victim (96%, 51), however, in 11% (6) of cases men were also harassed in the vicinity of the respondents. The victims were almost always in the position of the athlete (96%,

51). All respondents with vicarious experience mentioned that the perpetrator was male. However, three respondents mentioned a female perpetrator in addition to a male perpetrator. Interestingly, when a man was in the role of victim, both in personal and mediated experience, he was always harassed by another man. So it appears that, besides heterosexual cases, in sport environment, sexual harassment of a homosexual nature also occurs.

When it comes to direct experience, sexual harassment occurred most often in training areas (77%, 23). However, nearly a third of respondents also consistently mentioned locker rooms, showers, and restrooms (8); training camps and other sports venues (7); and online environments (7). For mediated experiences, the percentage of locations is similar. Training venues were the most common settings for victims to be harassed (71%, 38), followed by training camps and other sports venues (32%, 17), and locker room, shower, and restroom facilities (23%, 12). Sexual harassment in online environments accounted for a more significant proportion, compared to personal experience (43%, 23).

Respondents aged 15–18 were the most frequently harassed (60%, 18). However, in addition to that the research shows that harassment also occurred when the respondents were under 15 years old (20%, 6), which points to the problem of child sexual harassment. In the mediated experience, respondents were also most likely to be harassed between the ages of 15 and 18 (74%, 39). The representation of those experiencing sexual harassment under the age of 15 is even higher here than in direct experience (27%, 14), which only confirms the thesis outlined above.

In terms of personal experience, half of the victims (15) have faced psychological consequences as a result of sexual harassment, 20% (6) of respondents, who have personal experience of sexual harassment in organized sport, left the sport and 13% (4) changed teams or clubs. In the mediated experience, 43% (23) of respondents experienced psychological consequences, 32% (17) of victims changed teams or clubs and 13% (7) of respondents left the sport.

Half (50%, 15) of the victims had confided their problem, most often to friends (87%, 13), but also to coaches (20%, 3), family members (13%, 2) or a psychologist (13%, 2). This was similar for mediated experience, as observed by respondents. Victims most often confided in friends (87%, 13), but also to coaches (47%, 7), family members (33%, 5), or sports organization management (33%, 5). It is interesting that the person of the coach, according to the above results, represents either the perpetrator of sexual harassment or the person of the first confidant to whom victims confide about sexual harassment.

When it comes to the actual cases of sexual harassment that the respondents experienced, there were 25 cases of “verbal: sexual remarks, comments, jokes, nicknames, descriptions of sexual fantasies, situations, and experiences”, 16 cases of “non-verbal: whistling, winking, leering, sexualized gestures, or facial expressions”, 12 cases of “physical: groping, kissing, pinching the buttocks, patting, rubbing, caressing, intimate touches, etc.”, 4 cases of “coercion: “quid pro quo,” exchanging sexual favors for sports or other benefits”, 5 cases of “online: photos/videos with intimate content, sending pornographic videos, sending inappropriate messages/emails and 1 case of “rape (oral/vaginal/anal sex)”. That means some of the victims experience more than one form of sexual harassment in the organized sports setting.

Although 4 cases of rape appeared in the research, only 1 case was dealt with by the Police of the Czech Republic, the others remained unreported. In the case of personal experience, one case of

rape was reported, which was not resolved with the Police but only with the sports organization. In the mediated experience, a total of 6 victims of sexual harassment had their situation addressed, of which 5 cases were addressed with the sports organization and only one with the Police of the Czech Republic, although there were 3 cases of rape. The majority of respondents (56%, 115) of the whole sample did not feel confident in the handling of sexual harassment by sports organizations and the majority (82%, 168) also did not encounter any preventive measures within sports organizations. Only 11% (23) of the respondents noted any measures, most often in the form of posters or codes of conduct.

Overall, the results show that sexual harassment is present in the Czech sports environment and that more effective prevention measures and mechanisms to address these cases need to be put in place.

DISCUSSION

Sexual harassment in a sports environment is a widespread problem that has serious consequences for victims. The results of this research show that, according to the experience of university students, this problem is also present in the Czech sport environment. Comparison with the results of other research studies confirms and expands the understanding of this issue.

According to a study by Engelberg & Moston (2016), sexual harassment is widespread and often underreported. Fasting et al. (2014) report that the rate of sexual harassment in sports in the Czech Republic is higher than in, for example, Norway, which they attribute to the fact that behavior with elements of sexual harassment is perceived as normal in the Czech environment. This finding is consistent with the results of the present research, which also shows a high prevalence of sexual harassment among Czech university students involved in organized sport. 40% (81) of the respondents had experienced sexual harassment in a sports environment – some directly and some indirectly. We can only speculate what percentage of respondents experienced behavior that would be considered sexual harassment in another culture or environment, but they do not consider it sexual harassment due to its specific normalization.

At the same time, Engelberg and Moston (2016) emphasize that women are more likely to be sexually harassed in male-dominated sports environments, which is consistent with this study's finding that women are more likely to be victims than men, however, there is no statistically significant evidence of women being more sexually harassed in the "typically masculine" sports. According to the experience of the respondents, a woman athlete is repeatedly harassed by one or different perpetrators and is involved in up to two-thirds of the harassment cases. Although in the majority of cases, it is the woman who is in the role of victim, we must not neglect the men who find themselves in the role of victim. This research provides interesting results in this regard, finding that if a man is harassed, he is being harassed by another man. There is therefore homosexual harassment.

Sand et al. (2011) found that coaches who exhibit authoritarian and sexist behaviors increase the risk of sexual harassment. This research also identified coaches as frequent perpetrators of sexual harassment. Fasting et al. (2004) argue that in typically more masculine sports, sexual harassment may be reported more frequently, but only if it involves teammates or persons at the same level in

a given hierarchy. This study found that there are also cases in the Czech Republic in organized sport where the perpetrators are the victims' teammates, without further investigating the specific cases reported by the victims.

According to Taylor & Sveinson (2024), sexual harassment in sport organizations is often systematic and deeply embedded in the organizational culture. This is supported by the results of our research, which show that up to 56% (115) of respondents do not confide in sports organizations about their sexual harassment problem due to a lack of confidence in their ability to address the issue. Taylor & Sveinson (2024) also highlight the significant psychological and career consequences of sexual harassment. This research also indicates a high prevalence of psychological consequences. Simultaneously, sexual harassment has affected the victims' sporting experience within a given sports organization, whereupon they have chosen to change teams, clubs, or sports in up to 13% (4) of cases of personal experience and 32% (17) of cases of vicarious experience, or even to quit sport altogether in 20% (6) of cases of personal experience and 13% (7) of cases of vicarious experience. Nor should the subsequent tendency to engage in risky behavior, in this case, to use alcohol or drugs to a greater extent – 10%, (3) cases of personal experience and 4% (2) of mediated experience) go unnoticed.

Research conducted by Apaak & Sarpong (2015) points to the fact that many respondents have low levels of awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment and that many cases go unreported. The results of this research are consistent with this assertion as only half (15) of the respondents in the case of personal experience and one-fifth (15) in the case of vicarious experience shared their situation. Most respondents confided in friends or family in both cases. At the institutional level, i.e. with sports institutions or the Police, only 7 cases in total were dealt with, despite the fact that 4 cases of rape, among others, had occurred at work. This may be justified by the fact that the results of the research point to the absence of preventive measures against sexual harassment within sports organizations. As many as 82% (168) of the respondents had not even encountered any measures from the sports organization.

The reasons for not reporting are also related to the personal reactions of the victims to the situation. Fasting et al. (2007) found that victims' reactions include feelings of disgust, fear, irritation, and anger, with similar findings presented also by Park & Lee (2022). As a result, the study highlights the need for improved education and organizational change to effectively counter sexual harassment (Fasting et al., 2007). Corresponding to this, the results of this research provide suggestions in the form of the establishment of a national campaign to combat sexual harassment by the NSA, the establishment of anonymous hotlines to prevent the cover-up and downplaying of sexual harassment cases by sports institutions, the establishment of offices of psychologists who will be able to provide psychological support in sports organizations, and a more thorough selection of coaches and their further education and training in this area. The reason for emphasizing a centralized solution is mainly based on respondents' notions which made it clear that if measures are only set at the level of the organization, it may give the impression that the organization in question already has problems with sexual harassment.

It is evident that the Czech top sports organizations and legislation are taking steps to address the problems of sexual harassment and abuse in sport. Various sports organizations and other

stakeholders are meeting at a roundtable initiated by one of the government organizations to share their views and experiences and to jointly develop an action plan to eliminate these problems (the authors are aware of this initiative as they were also invited to the meeting through their research interest in sexual harassment). The aim of these efforts is not only to improve the overall situation but also to provide a safe and supportive environment for all athletes. This initiative reflects the commitment of Czech sports institutions to protect their members and create a fair and respectful sports environment. Last but not least, prevention initiatives should also arise in the academic environment where our research sample is located, as mentioned in their research by, for example, McNamee & Fleming (2020) or Taylor & Sveinson (2024). However, given the age of the victims, institutional prevention should surely start earlier, and the respondents in this research themselves emphasized the need for a national rather than academic umbrella of prevention.

The amendment to the definition of rape, which has successfully passed the Senate of the Czech Republic and is now awaiting the President's signature, can be considered a step in the right direction. This new definition applies the 'no means no' principle, which means that any non-consensual sexual intercourse is considered a rape. This change represents a significant step forward in the legal protection of victims of sexual violence and highlights efforts to more thoroughly prosecute perpetrators of these crimes. With this step, the Czech Republic is among the countries that are actively working to improve the legal status and protection of victims of sexual offenses and policies regarding other forms of sexual harassment might follow. From this point of view, perhaps we can only add that in the case of introducing any measures against sexual harassment, it should not remain only with the rules "on paper", but also education, enforcement and functional implementation of the given principles should be added, which is emphasized, for example, by Sullivan (2022).

Limits and further research

Limitations of the research include the fact that the focus group participants were purposely selected, which may influence the diversity of opinions and attitudes, and does not always represent the entire population of students with experience from organized sport. The limited number of respondents reduces the representativeness of the results, which cannot be generalized to the whole population. Other factors, such as culture or upbringing, which may have influenced respondents' views, were not considered.

Respondents may have had different interpretations of the term sexual harassment, which may have influenced the results of the study. Inaccuracies may have introduced confusion about whether sexual harassment includes rape and other forms of sexually-oriented behavior that one party does not voluntarily accept. Some confusion was avoided by providing a definition based on legislation and focus group results, but the overall results may still have been slightly skewed. This might be particularly evident in the most extreme cases, where victims indicated on the scales that they did not think it was sexual harassment, suggesting that they thought it was sexual violence. The sensitivity of the topic may also have led some respondents to downplay or misrepresent their experiences. The rounding of results may have caused minor inaccuracies in the interpretation of the data.

The results showed that sexual harassment perpetrators (6 %, 12) were also present among the research respondents. These circumstances may also have affected the accuracy of the results. Alongside this, there is also the issue of child and adolescent sexual abuse and although this topic was not the main focus of the research, it is featured frequently in respondents' discussions and was evident in some of the survey responses, suggesting the need for further research in this area.

In terms of further research, it is problematic that currently the academic community is more inclined towards creating measures such as compliance programmes, good governance principles, safeguarding and similar concepts, while the specificity of individual settings in terms of perception and incidence of sexual harassment is often overlooked. This tendency occurs, among other things, due to the difficulty in obtaining ethical approval for research that works with victims and describes their specific cases.

It is certainly worth mentioning that, given the shift in definition towards consent and the prioritization of the individual victim's perspective with an emphasis on voluntariness, the discourse is moving in the right direction, but the problem of 'facilitating' potential false accusations arises. This is also an issue that needs to be explored and ways of addressing it in specific settings need to be proposed.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study confirm that from the perspective of selected students of Czech universities sexual harassment is present in the Czech sports environment and that more effective prevention measures and mechanisms to address these cases need to be put in place. Respondents reported that sexual harassment is often normalized in the sports environment, which makes it difficult to prevent and address. Emphasis is placed on the consideration of this problem, the solution of which should be addressed by the management of sports organizations.

Mixed methods research combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods was used to obtain the results. The findings show that 40 % of the respondents have direct or mediated experience of sexual harassment in an organized sports environment. Different forms of sexual harassment were prevalent, including various verbal, non-verbal, physical, online forms, and actual rape. Repeated harassment and encounters with persistent harassers show the seriousness and extent of the problem. The perpetrators are usually men in positions of athletic authority or a coach, which may reflect an abuse of power and authority. The victims are predominantly women, but there have also been cases of men harassing men, demonstrating the presence of homosexual sexual harassment.

Sexual harassment often has serious psychological consequences that can lead to the termination of sporting activity or the change of sports clubs, which represents a loss for sports organizations and a negative impact on their reputation. Most victims do not address their situation because of the taboo surrounding the issue and the fact that they distrust the sports organizations. Respondents often seek help from friends or coaches who in some cases may themselves be also perpetrators.

Sports organizations should emphasize the selection of coaches and their training in sexual harassment prevention. The management of sports organizations should be alarmed by the low

confidence of respondents and the absence of preventive measures. Respondents recommend the establishment of a national campaign, anonymous helplines, and psychological help points in sports organizations. This comprehensive approach is necessary to create a fair and safe environment that allows athletes to focus on their performance without fear of harassment or abuse.

In conclusion, sexual harassment in the environment of sports organizations is still a current and persistent problem despite efforts to address it. Lack of communication and prevention by sports institutions causes mistrust and it is therefore essential that the management of sports organizations and specific governing bodies take a proactive approach to tackling the problem and improve their approaches.

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