

Article

# Gender-Based Violence in Girls' Sports

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**Abstract:** Millions of girls and young women participate in organized sports annually as a vehicle for developing a strong sense of self, social bonds, a positive body image and a sense of agency. Although the benefits of sport engagement are experienced by many girls, the overwhelming evidence of experiences of gender-based violence in sport cannot be ignored (e.g., USA Gymnastics, Hockey Canada). This paper will address gender-based violence experienced by adolescents in sport with a focus on psychological violence. The literature is replete with evidence that girls experience higher rates of gender-based psychological violence in sport than boys, and as a result, incur developmental costs. Psychological violence is experienced by girls in sport in the form of demeaning comments, body shaming, inequitable media coverage and funding and the ongoing policing of women's bodies in sport through sexualized sport attire and physiological testing. The causes and effects of psychological violence will be addressed along with recommendations to prevent and address gender-based violence in sport.

**Keywords:** athlete abuse; girls in sport; emotional abuse



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## 1. Introduction

Millions of girls and young women participate in school and community sports annually as a vehicle for developing a strong sense of self, social bonds, a positive body image and a sense of agency [1]. However, girls are more likely than boys to stop engaging in sports as they mature, with half of all participating girls dropping out of sports by adolescence [2,3]. This trend is most notable amongst racialized and Indigenous girls and young women [3]. Teenage girls have reported that deterrents from sport engagement include social identity and a lack of enjoyment [4], over-emphasis on performance, changes in team compositions and competing interests outside of sport [5]. Further, prevalence studies highlight that girl and woman athletes reportedly experience more abuse in sport than boys and men. At the root of many of these experiences is gender-based violence, defined as “violence against a person’s gender (including gender identity/expression) or gender that affects a particular identity group disproportionately” [6]. Others have defined gender-based violence as violence that is committed against someone based on their gender identity, gender expression or perceived gender” [7].

The research on gender-based violence in sport focuses on the terms of abuse, maltreatment, bullying, harassment, discrimination, non-accidental violence and violence. As a result, conceptual consistency and clarity across the research in sport is lacking, and most of it fails to identify gender-based violence as the root of these issues [8]. Further, while some authors distinguish between these terms based upon the severity of behavior (e.g., Cense & Brackenridge [9]), others distinguish based upon the relationship in which the behavior occurs (e.g., Stirling [10]) or include all behaviors under the umbrella term of “violence”. For the purposes of this paper, we will use the term “violence” to encompass “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” [11].

Public and scholarly attention on gender-based violence in sport has increased recently due to numerous high-profile cases across various countries. For instance, the highly publicized case of Larry Nassar, a team doctor who sexually abused hundreds of female gymnasts, including several US Olympic Champions, drew public outrage [12]. Similar sexual abuse cases exist globally, including Bertrand Charest (Alpine Canada), Robert Rixon (U.K. Swimming) and Fernando de Carvalho Lopes (Brazil Gymnastics). Although the media tend to focus on sexual violence against athletes, more recent scholarly attention has highlighted the prevalence and impacts of psychological violence. In fact, across several international prevalence studies, psychological violence is consistently the most commonly reported form of violence by athletes of various ages, genders and abilities [13].

Psychological violence as a form of gender-based violence will be the focus of this paper. The behaviors associated with psychological violence in sport will be reviewed, followed by an overview of the effects of psychological violence, potential causes of these experiences, and recommendations for preventing and addressing psychological violence. The studies cited in the following paper will include the experiences of girls and young women under the age of 22 years, categorized into early (11–13 years), mid (14–17 years) and late adolescence (18–22 years) [14].

## 2. Psychological Violence

According to the World Health Organization [11], psychological violence is defined as “a failure to provide developmentally appropriate and supportive environment; behaviours include restriction of movement, patterns of belittling, denigrating, scapegoating, threatening, scaring, discriminating, ridiculing, or other forms of nonphysical forms of hostile treatment or rejection” (p. 15). Garbarino [15], one of the first to study emotional abuse (a term often used interchangeably with psychological abuse or violence) of children, offered the definition of “the willful destruction or significant impairment of a child’s competence” (p. 92). Despite the large body of research on psychological/emotional abuse in the child development literature, the study of psychological violence in sport is relatively new.

Psychological violence against adolescent female athletes occurs in various forms, including verbal comments, physical acts, denial of attention and support, and body shaming. For example, verbal comments include female youth athletes reportedly being called “worthless”, “disgusting” and “useless” [16]. Physical acts associated with psychological violence have included coaches throwing equipment out of anger or frustration [16]. Athletes report being denied coaching attention or guidance in response to poor performance as a form of psychological violence [16]. Another form of gender-based violence experienced by girl and woman athletes is body shaming. Behaviors associated with body shaming include pressures to conform to a specific body type or weight standard; negative verbal comments made about the body (directed at themselves and others); body monitoring through regular weigh-ins, public weigh-ins, posting of weights or body composition tests; prescribed restrictive diets, controlling food and water intake and punishment or threats of punishment for non-compliance to set standards [17]. Body-shaming as a form of psychological violence has become an increasing concern in sport [17,18], especially for girls in aesthetic sports, who experience higher rates of eating disorders and negative body image than those in non-aesthetic sports [19,20]. Aesthetic sports include gymnastics, figure skating, artistic swimming, diving and dance, where a prescribed lean body is preferred for the technique and aesthetics of the activity.

The effects of body shaming on female athletes are highlighted by the following quote:

“No one ever told me in the outside world that I was fat but in the gymnastics world I was told that all the time... it does create a scar for the rest of your life . . . you constantly have a warped perception of yourself and that’s not something that will ever change [17].”

Another female athlete who experienced emotional abuse and body shaming at an international competition said: “I remember trying to make myself puke after one dinner

because I was so scared I ate too much. It was one of the first times I had really felt like vomiting after dinner was a solution” [17].

Gervis and Dunn reported that shouting, belittling, threats and humiliation were the most common forms of psychological violence reported by young athletes [21]. Similarly, Stafford et al. found that most of their sample reported being ignored and called names [22]. In an assessment of maltreatment experiences reported by Canadian National Team athletes, psychologically harmful behaviors were most frequently reported, including being shouted at in an angry or critical manner; being gossiped about or having lies told about them; being put down, embarrassed or humiliated and being intentionally ignored due to poor performance [13].

Several researchers have found that girls and women in sport report significantly more experiences of psychological violence than boys and men [13,23,24]. In a recent climate survey of U.S. athletes from Olympic and Paralympic sports, those athletes who identified as gender-non-conforming/transgender/other gender identity experienced more psychological violence than those who identified as men [24]. Importantly, the intersectionality of identities must be accounted for as girls and women are also racialized, are members of the LGBTQ2I+ community, and have varying abilities, thus adding layers of oppression. To date, much of the sport literature has viewed these aspects of identity as separate rather than interconnected.

### 3. Effects of Gender-Based Psychological Violence

Gender-based psychological violence in sport has received much attention from the public and scholars alike, in part because violence towards young people violates norms of care and development and therefore is assumed to have negative consequences. Additionally, concerns about harmful experiences by young athletes have been highlighted based upon the widespread understanding that early life experiences influence later development.

Despite the vast number of studies on the effects of psychological violence in the psychology and child development literature, the study of the effects of childhood experiences of violence in sport is in its infancy. Girl and woman athletes have reported negative effects from experiences of psychological violence during and post their athletic careers, including negative mental health (depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation), poor body image, posttraumatic stress disorder, unhealthy relationships with food including eating disorders, decreased sense of accomplishment, disdain towards sport, decreased motivation and performance detriments [17,18,25–27].

Vertommen and colleagues [28] explored the relationships between childhood experiences of interpersonal violence in sport and adult well-being and found that female respondents reported higher total scores on the Brief Symptom Inventory and lower somatization levels than their male counterparts. Similarly, Parent et al. [29] conducted a study of 1055 French–Canadian athletes between the ages of 14 and 17 years who completed online scales of interpersonal violence, self-esteem, psychological distress and PTSD symptoms. The findings indicated that the association between experiences of psychological violence or neglect by a coach and self-esteem was significant only in girls.

Several studies have qualitatively explored the relationships between psychological violence and mental health indicators. For example, in response to questions about the long-term influences of experiences of psychological violence in sport, one retired female athlete reported:

“Sometimes it feels hard for me to discover a new place or meet new people . . . My confidence has been so affected all these years because I was being told that I couldn’t do stuff... It’s something I have to deal with every day, you know to do something that scares me or overcome these little fears and gradually build my confidence back [25] (p. 85).”

Experiences of psychological violence in sport have also been associated with interpersonal difficulties in intimate or dating relationships. A retired female athlete from an

aesthetic sport offered the following perspective on the influence of her treatment in sport on her experiences in an intimate relationship:

“My first ever real relationship . . . was a terrible disaster and it just was because it became an extremely emotionally abusive dynamic. It was almost like that was the environment that I was familiar with and so I just kind of fell into it because that was the environment of my relationships. You know, it’s just when you’ve been treated a certain way for so long that’s just what you’re used to and that’s what you think you deserve [25] (p. 85).”

In a qualitative study of eight retired female athletes from aesthetic sports who had experienced emotionally abusive coaching practices, including body shaming, the findings indicated that these athletes experienced psychological distress long after they had retired from sport [25]. Many of the responses shared by these athletes resembled symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), including intrusive nightmares, avoidance of speaking about and interacting with those associated with their former sport experiences and somatic reactions to recalling their sport experiences. One elite female athlete reported: “And that’s [when on the National Team] about the time I had really, really, hard ideas, like if I took my own life right now, like, who would notice, you know? It had gotten really bad” [25] (p. 84). McMahon and McGannon [30] found that female athletes who had had abusive experiences also reported high-risk and self-harming behaviors such as eating disorders, substance use and risky sexual behaviors. The authors propose that these self-harming behaviors represented athletes’ attempts to exert control over their lives and cope with the harms that they experienced.

The negative impacts of body shaming on girl and young woman athletes are understandable given the significance of physical appearance for identity development in adolescence. During adolescence and emerging adulthood, girls and young women face the challenges of adapting to and developing a sense of satisfaction with their changing physical bodies, which are the results of puberty [31]. As adolescents navigate these challenges, they often experience hyper-sensitivity, heightened social comparisons and consciousness of their body and appearance. In fact, one’s views of the body and appearance are central aspects of one’s identity during adolescence [31,32]. The high prevalence rates of negative body images amongst youth reflect the prominence of this developmental challenge [33].

The struggle to accept one’s body and appearance may be exacerbated for female athletes in aesthetic sports, where physical appearance is prioritized. Given this focus, the impacts of body shaming on female athletes may be particularly damaging. The narrow, oftentimes exclusive, athletic identity that elite athletes develop may also exacerbate the impacts of body shaming. During adolescence and emerging adulthood, exploring various relationships, activities and commitments are cited as critical to the development of identity [34,35]; however, the process of exploration is often stifled in elite female athletes, primarily as a result of the extensive commitment that competitive athletes must make to their sport, which consequently precludes engagement in other activities and relationships. An extensive body of literature exists on the narrow identity experienced by elite athletes, who identify themselves primarily as “athletes” and whose relationships are limited to those in their sport context. In fact, many elite athletes spend more time with their coaches and teammates than they do with their families. Elite female adolescent athletes may experience identity foreclosure [36–38] characterized by a high commitment to an identity (in this case, an athlete) without prior exploration. This narrow athletic identity commonly results in adjustment difficulties upon retirement from sport, when a new identity must be established. This narrow athletic identity is also associated with an over-reliance on social messaging from those in the adolescent’s social context [36,39], which in the case of adolescent athletes includes coaches and teammates.

## 4. Contributors to Gender-Based Psychological Violence in Sport

### 4.1. Coaches' Power and Authority

The coach is in a position of inherent power over an athlete as a result of the legitimate power attributed to positions of authority such as sport coaches. Coaches' decision-making abilities and control over rewards and punishments also contribute to their power: coaches can choose who is selected to teams, funded and awarded travel, all of which are of great importance to athletes. The knowledge and experience of a coach, particularly if they have a history of producing successful athletes, gives them expert power, which in turn encourages athletes and parents to grant coaches referent power. Given the extensive time that coaches and female athletes spend together, along with the close, trusting relationship established between a coach and an athlete, the words and actions of coaches regarding an athlete's body and competencies can be extraordinarily impactful. Studies of the prevalence of psychological violence in athletes consistently demonstrate that these behaviors are most frequently enacted by the coach, most commonly male coaches [13,24,40].

Athletes who have experienced violence from their coaches refer to the influence of their coaches' power. For example, athletes have referred to their coaches as "parent-figures" [41] or "God" [42], expressing their unquestioned commitment to their coach: "You are somebody if you are coached by him, he coaches the best people in the country so no-one questions him" [39]. Another athlete said, "she was the best coach around so I had to tolerate the abuse", referring to the expertise power that led to their continued experiences of abuse [41]. In fact, the coach-athlete relationship has been equated to a master-slave relationship [43]. The power differential contributes to violence because athletes are pressured to submit to their coach and/or tolerate abusive behaviors. The misuse of power and a position of authority by coaches contributes to gender-based psychological violence by violating girl athletes' rights to safety, including psychological safety, and their rights to have input into their experience and to developmentally appropriate experiences.

### 4.2. Structural Influences

Structural influences include exploitative and unjust social, political and economic systems [44]. The well-documented gender inequities and gender-based violence seen in Westernized societies are also generally reflected in sport. The ubiquitous nature of structural violence is often invisible, pervasive and normalized, and it is, therefore, resistant to change [45–47].

One aspect of structural influence is the ways in which female athletes are (or are not) portrayed, represented and discussed in sport media. Media coverage reproduces gender stereotypes as coverage of male athletes focuses on skills and accomplishments, whereas the focus on female athletes is primarily on their physical appearance, their outfits and their responsibilities to family. A substantial body of literature addresses the lack of media coverage of female athletes relative to their male counterparts, the sexualized manner in which female athletes are portrayed and female athletes' failure to regulate emotions [48–50]. Moreover, it has been noted that racialized female athletes experience more micro-aggressions in media portrayal compared to white athletes [51]. Other substantial inequities in sport include the pay discrimination against female athletes, as emphasized by the women's soccer teams in the United States and Canada. It should also be noted that despite advances in gender equity in sport participation, there is a significant scarcity of women in leadership positions in sport. For example, at both the 2016 and 2020 Olympic Games, less than 20% of Canadian coaches were women [2].

Female athletes also experience violence through required sport attire. For example, while the rules in beach volleyball allow for men to wear shorts, women must wear bikinis with strict regulations on the size of the bikini bottoms [52]. Similarly, male gymnasts may wear long pants, while the women must wear one-piece leotards that just cover the groin and hip areas.

Finally, woman athletes, and particularly woman athletes from the Global South, have suffered violence through sex verification processes. Those women who have not

fit the expected standards for physical femininity have incurred testing and examinations through 'naked parades' to check genitalia, invasive manual inspections and chromosomal and endocrine testing [53,54]. Some women athletes have been coerced into invasive and unnecessary medical interventions [54]. These practices have been heavily criticized for their violation of fundamental human rights to dignity and privacy [55] and highlight the intersections between gender and race.

#### 4.3. Performance Excellence at-All-Costs

Sport, particularly high-performance sport, involves the pursuit of excellence and the pushing of the physical limits of the body to achieve performative success. Hughes and Coakley [56] used the term "sport ethic" to describe the emphasis on self-sacrifice, taking risks and challenging limits for the sake of sport performance. Athletes are continually pressured to be dedicated to their sport, to set goals and persevere until they are achieved and to strive for excellence at all costs, all of which reinforce the perspective that sport should supersede all else [56].

However, these continual messages of sacrifice and suffering for the sake of performance can leave athletes vulnerable to experiences of violence, including psychological violence [57]. Athletes have claimed that the pressures to win at all costs perpetuated a culture of violence. For example, one athlete said, "as long as people were achieving results, the coaches and high-performance directors could act with absolute immunity" [58]. Additionally, limits of the human body were often ignored in the pursuit of performance outcomes: "I felt pressure to compete when injured and fatigued... my high-performance director made it feel as though not competing wasn't a consideration" [58].

Additionally, performance excellence, particularly international medal counts, is incentivized by sport funding. In Canada, national sport organizations are funded through Sport Canada; however, additional funding is provided to medal-potential sports through a programme entitled "Own the Podium" [59]. This model has been criticized by scholars, as it creates an "extraordinarily narrow definition of success". In recent years, athletes have challenged this singular focus on performance outcomes, stating "no medal justifies how we were treated. I will never get over it" [58]. These findings encourage sport practitioners to consider the values and principles of sport, particularly the values of participation, enjoyment, well-being and inclusion, which seem to be ignored in the exclusive pursuit of high-performance outcomes.

#### 4.4. Normalization

One of the proposed reasons for the high prevalence rates of gender-based psychological violence is that it is normalized within the sport environment. Normalization in the sport context refers to the justification of potentially harmful behaviors as necessary or helpful for enhancing performance excellence. Normalization is encouraged and perpetuated when adults, including those in positions of power, authority and care over young people, fail to intervene when violent behaviors occur, especially in public spaces [15,60]. For example, sport administrators have justified their lack of intervention as an "inevitable part of elite youth sport" [60]. Athletes have shared their frustration with the acceptance and even celebration of these behaviors, with one athlete commenting "there is still a culture of excusing inappropriate coach behavior by labelling them as 'passionate'. Former and current coaches known to be physically and psychologically abusive toward children are being honoured in our sports hall of fame . . . parents are being brainwashed into thinking that only the toughest coaches will turn their children into champions" [58].

#### 4.5. Masculinity in Sport

Having recognized that the most vulnerable populations for gender-based violence are women and girls, amongst other equity-deserving populations (LGBTQ2I+, racialized), it is important to acknowledge the historical structures in sport that perpetuate oppression. Sport was "created by males for males without taking the needs of females into account in

any way" [61]. Historically, men were the exclusive participants in sports (and specifically, white men), with females prohibited from participation in the Olympic Games until 1900, when only two women competed [62]. Women have been excluded from participation because of beliefs about their biology, capability and place in society, including being deemed unsuitable for vigorous physical activity, duties of childbearing and the pressure to adhere to gender stereotypes [63]. Although more girls and women participate in sport today, there remains encouragement towards feminine sports such as gymnastics, swimming and tennis, which are easy, graceful and not too fatiguing [64].

Similarly, sport has been considered the "primary vehicle for masculinity validating experience" [65]. Specifically, sport can demonstrate power, strength, violence, competition and aggression, which has provided an avenue for civilized masculine dominance, allowing men to be viewed as heroes, preserve male identity and celebrate masculinity [61,65]. University-level male athletes have also discussed the pressures to conform to masculine standards, including emotional suppression, masculine exaggeration (i.e., being loud and dominant), hypersexuality, boasting about sexual conquests and entitlement [66]. Enforcing masculine tradition is an antecedent to gender-based violence. For example, an analysis of hazing practices, particularly actions of a sexual nature, found that they are used to establish and reaffirm hierarchies of masculinity [67].

In an effort to uphold masculine traditions, women's bodies are continually monitored and regulated. Pieper [54] has noted that the "justified" use of sex testing and gender verification measures taken in sport has been shaped by geographical, political, racial and gender concerns. Notably, she draws upon the history of gender to note that "colonisation created a dichotomous social order that eliminated the possibility for sex/gender fluidity" [54]. Gendered expectations iterate that women are passive, weak and subordinate, whereas men are active, strong and superior; therefore, there is an expectation that physiology and physique should embody these characteristics [68]. When women deviate from the prescribed Western standards of femininity, especially if they have a muscular physique, their womanhood is called into question [54,69]. This is especially reinforced with athletes of colour, particularly black athletes, who are continually stereotyped as less feminine than white women [54]. Tennis icon Serena Williams, for example, has been continually bullied for her appearance [70]. An analysis of social media comments regarding Serena found that they included themes of gender questioning, accusations of taking drugs for performance enhancement and racism, demonstrating the multiple intersecting forms of oppression that she faces for her gender, ethnicity and stature [71]. Notably, woman athletes have undergone sex verification processes to confirm their sex [53,54], while men's physicality is not monitored or criticized for naturally being "super masculine" unless it has an external advantage, such as doping [53].

#### *4.6. Self-Regulation of Sport*

Unlike other domains that care for and nurture young people, such as schools and daycare settings, sport is autonomous with regard to regulating or accountability bodies. Bruyninckx [72] has summarized this as "sport takes place in a sort of separate sphere, detached from the normal rules and regulations in society". Consequently, sport has been able to make its own rules and perpetuate normative practices even when these practices are not accepted outside of sport. In what other sector of society would it be acceptable for an adolescent girl to be called "useless" or "fat" by an adult in a position of power and who has a duty of care?

The self-regulating nature of sport has purportedly been used to ignore or actively silence athletes' voices when they express concerns about experiences of violence. For example, in a study of Canadian national team athletes from over 60 sports, less than 15% reported their experiences of violence to authorities [73]. The athletes were clear about why they did not report, including not knowing where or who to report to, as well as concerns about the negative repercussions for their athletic careers and retaliation. For example, one athlete reflected, "asking for help from the people that hired the abusive coach was like

committing [athletic] suicide”, and another athlete emphasized the need for “a third-party organization to report to, or even someone to talk to for advice. Right now we have no outlet for resolution, and I don’t even know who I would approach if I had an issue” [58].

The dangers of self-regulation were recently highlighted by a high-profile case of sexual violence and subsequent cover-up by Hockey Canada. In response to allegations of sexual violence perpetrated by a group of male hockey players against a young woman, it was later revealed that Hockey Canada knew about the assault, actively covered up the case and used reserve funds to settle the allegation. Moreover, since the reserved funds were established in 1989 to cover uninsured claims such as sexual violence, Hockey Canada has paid out 11 claims related to sexual misconduct [74]. The settlements also included non-disclosure agreements to ensure that the victims were silenced [75]. While this was highly publicized, it is far from an isolated incident, and there are many more examples of sport organizations attempting to hide problems of violence and to silence victims.

## 5. Conclusions and Recommendations

This article has provided an overview of gender-based psychological violence affecting girls and young women in sport. This next section proposes recommendations to address the normalization of psychological violence.

### 5.1. Address Power Relations

To address the power imbalance between coaches and athletes, athlete-centered [76] and/or autonomy-supportive [77] coaching methods are recommended. These coaching styles encourage athletes to be active participants in their sport, providing them with more autonomy and power [76], which reduces the control or absolute power a coach can have. Additionally, these methods prioritize the physical, psychological, and social development of athletes, which ensure health and safety [78]. Sport stakeholders, including staff, board members, sport administrators and parents can contribute to reducing violence by being active rather than complicit bystanders. This can include monitoring the coach-athlete relationship and training environments and intervening when necessary.

### 5.2. Advance Gender Equity

Sport has a deep-rooted history of structural inequity that has left girls and other equity-denied groups vulnerable to violence. To address these issues, large cultural shifts are required. Some recommendations to advance much-needed cultural change include acknowledging the ways in which power imbalances continue to exist. This includes ensuring access to equitable playing time and equipment, allocation of equitable financial compensation, increasing media exposure (with equitable language), ensuring there is equal representation of women in leadership positions and providing adequate mentorship opportunities [79]. Additionally, it is important to review policies to ensure there is adequate protection of girls and women in sport.

There is also a need to shift the ways in which girls are perceived and discussed in sport. This requires active attention to the language that is used to describe women, especially eliminating commentary on their bodies and appearance over their performance. Providing access to uniforms that are used for function over appearance (e.g., shorts, tights) can also help move the focus away from appearance criteria.

### 5.3. Reducing the Win-at-All-Cost Mentality

Sport does not only exist for the sake of performance; there are countless benefits to participating in sport, particularly for girls. Yet, there is a continued emphasis on winning and medals. We recommend that there is more acknowledgement and emphasis given to the other benefits, including positive social and personal development. Miller and Kerr [80] suggested that athletes’ excellence in performance is accomplished through personal development, meaning that by focusing on the personal development of girls in sport, performance may also increase. While this has been suggested for years, more

research is needed to demonstrate the effectiveness of these methods, particularly at high-performance levels.

#### 5.4. Strengthen Accountability Measures

Violence in sport can no longer be normalized. In other domains of child development, including schooling, there has been a shift towards student-centered learning that allows children to learn through experiences rather than being told what to do [81]. There has also been a shift in what is acceptable in teaching, which includes the elimination of yelling and physical punishment and movement towards methods of discipline that show students what they should do [82]. However, these shifts have not been seen in sport. There is a need to outline unacceptable behavior, for instance, Canada recently implemented a universal code of conduct to prevent and address maltreatment that outlines all types of violence that are no longer tolerated [83]. Additionally, there is a need for increased education about acceptable and expected behaviors and how to more effectively coach athletes. More research is needed on how coaches can effectively learn and change their behaviors.

Governments should also be encouraged to hold sport organizations accountable. For instance, following the revelations of Hockey Canada in 2022, the Canadian Minister responsible for sport froze the federal funding for the sport organization until a financial audit was completed, and they implemented an independent third-party reporting mechanism [84]. We recognize that while these are reactive solutions and the emphasis should be on preventative measures, it is also important for athletes and victims of abuse to have a safe place to report violence.

## 6. Strengths and Limitations

This paper contributes to the literature by highlighting psychological violence as a form of gender-based violence and the links between psychological violence and identity development during adolescence. Some of the limitations include a lack of longitudinal research designs to follow girl athletes from the point of entry into sport to withdrawal from sport. Such designs would enable a deeper understanding of the effects of psychological violence on girls' health and well-being, identity development and sustained participation or withdrawal from sport.

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