What we know about sexual harassment and abuse in sports

Professor Celia Brackenridge
Overview

• Historic institutional blindness
• Contested definitions
• The rise of scientific enquiry
• The parallel pathways of science and activism
• Key European contributions to prevention
• The current status of the field of prevention
• Wider impacts on agendas for athlete welfare and sport development policy and practice
• Kari – What do we know?
Historical context

- Sport as a cultural and political island
- Historic institutional blindness/absence of prevention measures
- 1980s many cases but few publicised; very few studies
- 1990s beginnings of scientific studies and policy development
- 2000 Bratislava Conference of Ministers of Sport ...
- 2000s growth of science, activism and prevention policy
Contested definitions

• Harassment, abuse, exploitation, maltreatment, violence, victimisation ...
• SH = unwanted sexual attention
• SA = groomed or coerced involvement in sexual acts

Some areas of contestation:
• Touching or not?
• Action or impact?
• Age boundaries?
• Legal boundaries?
• Frequency?
• Power relations?
• Links between them and umbrella terms?
The rise of scientific enquiry

Origins:
• Feminist and pro-feminist interest in the dynamics of SHA – who, what, when, how, why, how to prevent?
• Interpersonal and relational factors – mainly coach/athlete/parent

Scientific roots:
• sexual abuse - focus on family and children – sport as a surrogate family
• sexual har’st - focus on workplace employees/athletes – sport as a workplace
• individual v. organisational approaches

Consequences for prevention:
• Emphasis on personal measures (codes of practice, coach education etc.)
• Organisational measures and ethical climate (transparency, accountability etc.)
The parallel pathways of science and activism

• Rise in human rights discourse, statutes and policy
• Related focus on gender equality and then on children’s rights
• Drive for ‘professionalism’ and ‘modernisation’ leading to new standards of governance and accountability
• Breakdown of traditional structures of authority
• Feminist incursion into sport -> female athlete empowerment and voice/willingness to speak out

Are we scientists or social workers?
Key European contributions

• 1997 Cense/NOC*NSF study and interventions
• 1999, 2000 CDDS desk studies
• 2000 Bratislava Conference of Ministers of Sport ...
  “a new and sensitive subject”
  “long been hidden under the table”
• 2000 Norwegian Women in sport project
• 2001 SPRINT conference, Helsinki: 26 European countries - preventing SHA of women and children in sport
  “I feel sorry for you English ... We don’t have this problem in Belarus”
Current status of prevention

- Knowledge and prevention are not in balance e.g. UK leads on prevention
- Still sport’s concerns about SHA overshadow other abuses
- Still vast differences in understanding across sport agencies in Europe
- Still no baselines against which to measure progress
- Still education is the most cost-effective form of prevention
- Lack of standardised approaches so no international comparisons but new International Standards (CPSU/UNICEF 2012) may help
- Prevention not necessarily correlated with economic indicators e.g. UK worst for child well-being in rich countries (including 19 from Europe) (UNICEF, 2007)!
- Improvements being led by external human rights pressures rather than necessarily from within sport i.e. sport follows society
- IOC (2007) and UNICEF (2010) sport work gives a moral lead and policy pressure
Wider impacts

- Are we reaching a tipping point in athlete welfare (not just SHA) work?
- Performance v. personal development
  
  *Humans doing v. human beings*

- Humanitarian shift in sport?
- Equalisation of authority relations?
- Realisation that welfare enhances, does not inhibit, performance success?
- Closer links between sport and non-sport prevention systems

*There can be no safe sport in an unsafe society*

**Conclusion:**

*Finding a performance rationale for prevention is our holy grail*
Reference points (chronological)


CDDS (1999) *Provisional Resolution on the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse of women and children in sport*, Strasbourg, CDDS (99) 86, 30th November
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/sport/resources/texts/spres00.3_en.asp

CDDS (2001) The Protection of Children, Young People and Women in Sport: How to guarantee human dignity and equal rights for these groups, Seminar Report, Hanasaari, Espoo, Finland, 14 - 16 September


http://www.olympic.org/medical-commission?tab=statements


UNICEF (2010) *Protecting Children from Violence in Sport: A review with a focus on industrialized countries*. Innocenti Research Centre, Florence, Italy

