

# Infographic. A guide to understanding athlete abuse

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With increasing frequency, reports of interpersonal violence (eg, abuse) are emerging from sport settings, across a range of sports.<sup>1-3</sup> Individual sports with female-dominated membership statistics, feminine gender culture and low clothing levels (gymnastics, swimming) seem especially vulnerable to systemic abuse, and team sports with male-dominated gender structure, masculine gender culture and high clothing levels (ice hockey, American football) are also affected. Thus, it is clear that interpersonal violence is prevalent across a range of sport settings. But it can be difficult to understand.

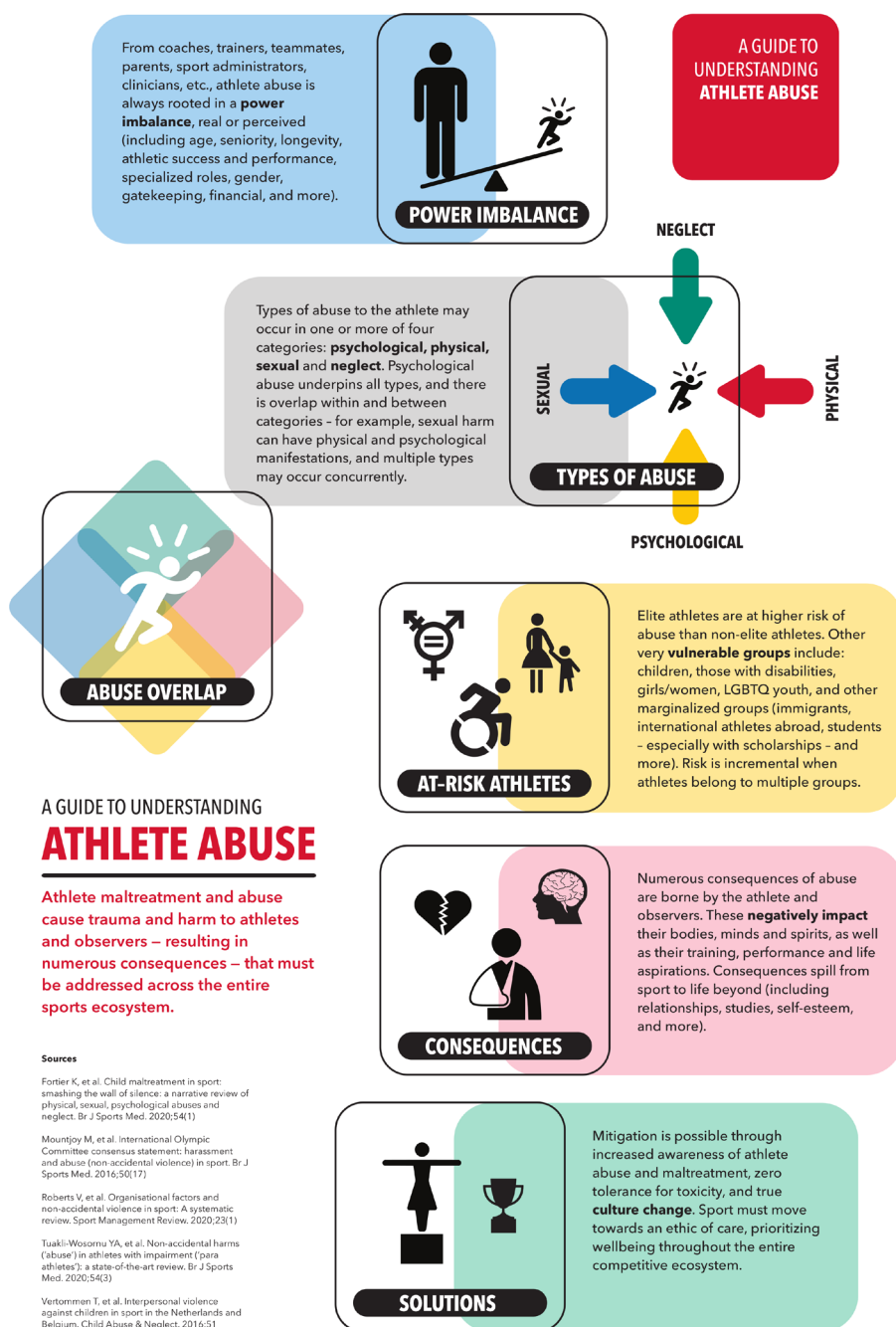
This is because there are a range of athlete harms, various antecedent risk factors (structural, cultural, interpersonal), and a host of short-term and long-term consequences for athletes, their teammates/entourages and their organisations.<sup>4</sup> Athlete abuse includes physical, psychological/emotional and sexual harassment and abuse, neglect, peer aggression, undue stress, hazing, bullying and other modes. It is known that psychological abuse anchors all forms of interpersonal violence in sport, and known prevalence rates of harassment, abuse and neglect in sport range widely.<sup>5</sup> Fallout from abuse can be catastrophic (eg, serious, recurrent and/or chronic physical injuries, sport drop-out, self-harm and/or suicide), thus sport organisations around the world are prioritising safeguarding education, policies and procedures into comprehensive injury prevention frameworks.<sup>1</sup> But the relatively limited empirical data we have is heterogeneous, and can be difficult to find in one place. This infographic attempts to present an easy-to-understand summary of current data on athlete abuse based on a comprehensive review and synthesis of the available literature.

Two lenses were used when deciding on the best vocabulary to communicate this information: first, the message content itself. Abstract concepts such as ‘power imbalance’ are harder to represent as pure images when compared with tangible things, and the process and effects of athlete abuse (verbs, actions) also needed to be expressed. Second, the audience’s ability to decode the message was considered, that is, audience textual and visual literacy levels, alignment between creative intent and audience perception, signal-to-noise ratio (competing

graphics, use of decorative and nonessential material) and the communication context. In light of these considerations, Olympic/Paralympic colours, ample textual support and simple icon-style images were used. To express ‘power imbalance’, for example, these ‘power’ and ‘balance’ devices were combined: large versus small scale of figures; static figure (controlling) versus dynamic figure (fleeing); calm figure (intentional)

versus stressed figure (victim, powerless) and use of playground ‘teeter totter’ as both balance and innocence metaphor.

The intent is to share information in an athlete-centred and sport-centred way so as to boost understanding of athlete abuse and enable easier integration of these data into education and injury prevention frameworks in sport. Clear communication using practical tools is important for sports



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organisations and advocates seeking to uphold a duty of care to athletes.

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