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## **Editorial: Protecting the Welfare of Individuals Operating in Organized Sport**

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16 **healths<sup>5</sup>, safeguarding<sup>6</sup>, well-being<sup>7</sup>, welfares.**

### 17 **1 Introduction**

18 The issue of physical and mental welfare in sport has gained increasing prominence in recent years,  
19 leading various personnel (e.g., the media, professional bodies and researchers) to consider aspects  
20 such as safeguarding, clean sport, overtraining, and the wider ethics surrounding the duty of care of  
21 those involved in this environment. Given the importance of these aspects, it is unsurprising that  
22 researchers as well as professional bodies and sports organizations have tasked themselves with  
23 protecting individuals in sport from the harmful effects of wrongdoing and factors which might  
24 create significant injury risk (e.g., concussion). As a result, numerous positive advances have been  
25 made to understand and improve the welfare and well-being of those in sport, as well as to raise  
26 awareness and education at the micro- (e.g., peer-to-peer), meso- (e.g., coach-athlete, coach-parent,  
27 parent-athlete), exo- (e.g., professional leagues, national governing bodies), and macro-system (e.g.,  
28 media and societal views) levels. Despite such positive advances, they have not always been well  
29 communicated between system levels of sport or across international perspectives. Therefore, this

30 special topic sought to address these concerns, utilizing various international perspectives to provide  
31 recommendations to protect individuals across the sporting systems.

## 32 **2 Contents of the Research Topic**

33 In this Frontiers research topic, it is pleasing to see a number of multinational collaborative studies,  
34 with our topic including research findings from Canada, the United States of America, and eight  
35 European countries. We believe this multinational collaboration illustrates an international research  
36 commitment to better understanding and addressing safeguarding and welfare in organized sport. The  
37 authors who have contributed to this research topic have utilized a range of methods (e.g., mini  
38 reviews, quantitative, qualitative, and intervention methods) to expand our knowledge of how  
39 sporting personnel, organizations, and national governing bodies can protect the welfare of various  
40 individuals who are involved in organized sport. Below, we provide a research topic summary of  
41 author contributions based on three overarching themes: (1) Abuse, bullying, interpersonal violence  
42 and maltreatment studies; (2) Exploring mental health in elite athletes, and; (3) Parent and match  
43 official perspectives on concussion management.

### 44 **2.1 Abuse, Bullying, Interpersonal Violence, and Maltreatment Studies**

#### 45 **2.1.1 Reviews**

46 [Gillard et al. \(2024\)](#) conducted a mini review to synthesize knowledge regarding the roles, readiness  
47 to change and training needs of athlete health and performance team members to handle interpersonal  
48 violence in sport. From 43 articles that were reviewed, it was identified that very little research has  
49 directly assessed athlete health and performance team members' needs to facilitate safety and  
50 eradicate interpersonal violence in sport. The authors offer a series of expert recommendations to  
51 guide future research and practice.

#### 52 **2.1.2 Quantitative Findings**

53 [Muhonen et al. \(2024\)](#) surveyed Finish elite and leisure athletes to ascertain whether there is any  
54 correlation between emotional abuse, athletic identity, and disclosure of abusive behaviors. Results  
55 indicated that a salient athletic identity was related to a higher prevalence of emotional abuse,  
56 children were most susceptible to emotional abuse, and both salient athletic identity and emotional  
57 abuse negatively predicted athletes' disclosure of emotionally abusive coaching practices.

58 To develop a tool to measure coaches' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of interpersonal violence  
59 practices in sport, [Parent et al. \(2024\)](#) consulted with an expert panel of six researchers, and carried  
60 out item reduction to arrive at a 25-item PIEVS scale containing six dimensions. Following this, the  
61 authors conducted an initial validation of the PIEVS scale with 690 coaches to determine the 1-factor  
62 solution for both the 25-item, and a 9-item short form version of the scale. In addition, convergent  
63 and divergent validity was achieved by identifying significant relationships with disempowering and  
64 (inversely) empowering motivational climates.

65 [Vveinhardt and Kaspars \(2024\)](#) surveyed 371 Lithuanian Kyokushin karate athletes to measure  
66 bullying experiences and signs of stress, anxiety and depression. The findings indicated that 75.5% of  
67 Kyokushin karate athletes had experienced unethical behavior by their coaches or others at least  
68 once. In addition, signs of stress, anxiety and depression were found to be correlated with damage in  
69 the areas of communication, social relations and physical health.

70 The work of [Willson et al. \(2024\)](#) examined the relationship between psychological abuse, athlete  
71 satisfaction, eating disorder and self-harm indicators in current and retired Canadian national team  
72 athletes using a maltreatment survey. The results indicated a negative correlation between  
73 psychological abuse and athlete satisfaction, and a positive correlation with eating disorders and self-  
74 harm indicators.

### 75 **2.1.3 Qualitative Findings**

76 [Adams et al. \(2024\)](#) implemented interviews to explore how and why former intercollegiate athletes  
77 identified their head coach as emotionally abusive. The athletes' narratives suggested that a coach is  
78 labelled abusive if they diminished performance, neglected holistic development, were inconsistent,  
79 provided negative emotional responses, and dehumanized athletes.

80 [Newman and Rumbold \(2024\)](#) conducted interviews with safeguarding and welfare personnel in  
81 English professional and semi-professional football to explore their understanding of maltreatment.  
82 Findings indicated that wrongdoing in football contexts is nuanced in comparison to other sports, as  
83 certain forms of maltreatment are driven by the unique nature of football environments. This work  
84 provides a platform for practitioners and researchers to raise awareness of maltreatment in  
85 professional football whilst also challenging the prevailing workplace culture.

### 86 **2.1.4 Intervention Mapping**

87 The work of [Adriaens et al. \(2024\)](#) implemented an intervention mapping approach as a guiding  
88 framework to systematically develop a bystander training program (i.e., Safe Sport Allies), to train  
89 youth sport participants and youth sport coaches to act as effective bystanders. The authors propose a  
90 variety of behavior change program principles to improve sport participants' bystander behaviors.

## 91 **2.2 Exploring Mental Health in Elite Athletes**

92 Work by [Küttel et al. \(2024\)](#) interviewed seven Danish international elite athletes to unveil  
93 perspectives on career and mental health development, whilst considering the dynamic interplay of  
94 personal and environmental factors. Findings highlighted the complex interplay of factors affecting  
95 mental health, and emphasize the need for creating supportive environments that help athletes  
96 manage the intense demands of elite sport.

97 To explore the media coverage relating to German elite athletes' mental illness, [Hapig et al. \(2024\)](#)  
98 conducted a systematic search and screening of eleven German newspapers and magazines. Through  
99 synthesizing more than a decade's worth of German print media, it was concluded that there is an  
100 enhanced awareness towards the topic of mental illness and those affected in recent years. This was  
101 evidenced by the increased integration of responsible reporting elements, the inclusion of diversified  
102 perspectives, and the considerate selection of content.

## 103 **2.3 Exploring Parent and Match Official Perspectives on Concussion Management**

104 [Hagopia et al. \(2024\)](#) conducted two focus groups with 11 parents in Canada to gain their  
105 perspectives and experiences with Neuropsychological Baseline Testing (NBT) to better manage  
106 concussion injuries. Using inductive content analysis, some common themes included navigating  
107 uncertainty about the nature of concussion and its management process, and mixed NBT reviews  
108 regarding its usefulness in concussion management.

109 In the concluding article, [Jorgensen et al. \(2024\)](#) conducted semi-structured interviews to investigate  
110 match officials' perspectives and experiences regarding sport-related concussion management and the  
111 Blue Card protocol (i.e., the removal of athletes from play if they are suspected to have sustained a  
112 concussion) in community rugby in Canada. The authors highlighted that despite potential benefits to  
113 athlete welfare, the welfare of match officials is risked due to sporting cultures that tolerate abuse.

#### 114 **Conflict of Interest**

115 The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial  
116 relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

### 117 **3 Author Contributions**

118 CRediT

119 JLR: Conceptualization; Project administration; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Writing –  
120 original draft; Writing – review & editing

121 JAN: Conceptualization; Project administration; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Writing –  
122 original draft; Writing – review & editing

123 AJH: Conceptualization; Validation; Visualization; Writing – original draft; Writing – review &  
124 editing

125 LD: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing – review & editing

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