

# Violence Against Women and Children in Sport:

## *An Input to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls*

Type of Stakeholder: Academic institution.

Respondent: Henrique Napoleão Alves\* on behalf of the [Facts and Norms Institute](#).<sup>1</sup>

Can we attribute responses to this questionnaire publicly? Yes.

### Introduction

In the world of sport, women and girls face higher risks of various forms of violence, including sexual, physical, and psychological abuse. The United Nations reports that nearly 21% of professional women athletes have suffered sexual abuse as children—almost twice the rate of their male counterparts. This risk is further exacerbated for those facing intersecting forms of discrimination, including individuals with disabilities, migrants, refugees, and those from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> Numerous cases have surfaced over the years, revealing a spectrum of abuse—physical, emotional, and sexual—perpetrated by authoritative figures within sports or peers. This situation, along with its encompassing political, social, economic, and cultural context, prompts a critical examination of the duties and responsibilities of both State and non-State actors in preventing discrimination and violence against all women and girls.<sup>2</sup>

The *United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women and Girls*, Ms. Reem Alsalem, is preparing a thematic report on the subject to be presented to the UN General Assembly at its 79th session in October 2024. In preparation for the report, on 19 January 2024 the UN Special Rapporteur issued an invitation for relevant stakeholders to submit their written inputs in the form of answers to a predefined Questionnaire.<sup>3</sup>

The following is the input from the Facts and Norms Institute with conceptual and normative information about violence against women, girls, and boys in sport. It is focused on answering the first question of the Questionnaire regarding the different forms of violence that women and girls in sports may experience.

This input is the first product of a larger research project, “Violence against women, girls, and boys in sport: a human rights-based approach regarding Brazil”. It is

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\* Director & Chief Researcher, [Facts and Norms Institute](#).

<sup>1</sup> Disclaimer: authors’ views are exclusively on behalf of [Facts and Norms Institute](#).

<sup>1</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. [Call for input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the UN General Assembly on violence against women and girls in sport](#). *UN OHCHR Calls for Input*, 19 January 2024.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. [Call for input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the UN General Assembly on violence against women and girls in sport](#). *UN OHCHR Calls for Input*, 19 January 2024.

<sup>3</sup> United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. [Call for input to the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls to the UN General Assembly on violence against women and girls in sport](#). *UN OHCHR Calls for Input*, 19 January 2024.

authored by the supervisor of the project, professor Henrique Napoleão Alves, who was responsible for the first step of the project focusing on the theoretical and normative framework. The next steps and products are entrusted to both professor Alves and researcher Sarah Ebram Alvarenga, who is currently developing a comprehensive review of specialized literature, media sources, and Brazilian legislation and policy on the subject.

### The Institute's work

The [Facts and Norms Institute](#) is an independent academic institution based in the Global South, with members present in all continents. The Institute's mission is straightforward: to promote a rational, human rights-based approach to social issues. Since its establishment, the Institute promoted educational activities ranging from the online training of researchers in human rights-based methods and techniques to onsite courses and events, such as the *Advanced Course on International Law and Human Rights* (in partnership with the Ius Gentium Conimbrigae – Human Rights Centre of the University of Coimbra, Portugal).

The Institute also conducted social and legal research in collaboration with the Inter-American Court of Human Rights in the form of written Amici Curiae Memorials. The Institute's record includes, *v.g.*, i) an Amicus Curiae Memorial in the proceedings of the case *Leite de Souza and Others vs. Brazil*, also known as the Massacre of Acari case, a comprehensive argument regarding the systemic violence perpetrated by State agents in Brazil, particularly focusing on police violence, the limits of transitional justice, and the dehumanization of poor and Afro-descendant populations; ii) and an Amicus Curiae Memorial in the proceedings of the Advisory Jurisdiction of the Court regarding Human Rights and the Climate Emergency.

Moreover, the Institute conducted research about varied human rights topics in collaboration with the United Nations, including human rights and infectious diseases; torture and torture prevention; the notion of short-term enforced disappearances; religious intolerance, violence, and racism; social participation; transitional justice and sustainable development; poverty, post-growth and SDGs; sustainable development and the human rights of persons with albinism; the role of non-State actors (particularly businesses) in transitional justice; memorialization and the Roma; the protection of lawyers; the human rights of indigenous and rural communities to water and sanitation; militarization of indigenous and quilombola land; human rights and internet shutdowns; mercury, artisanal and small-scale gold-mining and human rights; contemporary forms of slavery and the informal economy; technology and contemporary forms of slavery; human rights and voluntourism; sanctions and human rights; digital education and online protection of young people; adequate housing and climate change; the extractive sector, just transition, and human rights; and the present submission concerning violence against women and girls in sport.

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## Executive Summary

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- Women and girls in sports often face violence and discrimination at all levels, from grassroots to professional environments. This abuse can be perpetrated by coaches, peers, fans, and others, severely impacting their well-being, performance, and participation in sports.
- The World Health Organization defines violence as the intentional use of physical force or power against oneself, others, or a community, likely resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation. This includes power dynamics like threats, intimidation, neglect, and abuse (physical, sexual, and psychological), but excludes unintentional incidents. Similarly, a 2023 UNESCO and UN Women report about violence against women and girls in sports emphasized focusing on intentional, non-accidental violence. The World Health Organization also categorizes violence into self-directed (e.g., suicide, self-mutilation), collective (e.g., political, or social violence by groups), and interpersonal (e.g., violence between individuals). In sports, interpersonal violence is most common. While self-directed and collective violence are less common, the competitive nature of sports can sometimes lead to such behaviors.
- While not defining violence directly, CEDAW establishes a foundational framework for understanding and combating violence against women by addressing discrimination broadly. Its mandates for eliminating discrimination and promoting equality in various spheres, including education and employment, is relevant to environments such as sports. General Recommendation 19 of the CEDAW Committee clarifies that discrimination includes gender-based violence, identifying it as a barrier to equality. The CEDAW Committee addresses both overt and covert forms of violence, emphasizing power dynamics.
- The 1993 *UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* defines violence against women broadly, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence in various settings such as family, community, and those perpetrated or condoned by the State. This captures the multiple arenas where violence can occur, including sports.
- The 1994 Inter-American *Belém do Pará Convention* clarifies violence against women to include acts or conduct based on gender in both public and private spheres. It specifies State obligations to prevent, punish, and eradicate such violence, providing a legal framework that can extend to sports contexts.
- The 2003 African *Maputo Protocol* offers a comprehensive definition of violence that includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, recognizing broader social, economic, and cultural factors. Its broad scope suggests applicability to various contexts, including educational and recreational activities like sports.
- The 2011 European *Istanbul Convention* identifies violence against women as a form of discrimination and a human rights violation. It defines it as a category covering all forms of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence. It calls for comprehensive and coordinated policies. Its inclusive definition and emphasis on societal change highlight its relevance to sports, where gender-based violence and discrimination can be prevalent.

- Article 19 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child requires States to take all appropriate measures to protect children from physical, mental, and sexual violence, neglect, and exploitation while in the care of parents, legal guardians, or any other caregivers. The Committee on the Rights of the Child issued General Comment No. 13 to interpret article 19, highlighting the need to address both physical and non-physical forms of harm and identifying recreational and sports coaches as caregivers, and sports and recreational facilities as care settings.
- The joint General Comment No. 18 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child and General Recommendation No. 31 by the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women emphasize the elimination of harmful practices rooted in discrimination. According to the joint document, these practices, often involving violence or coercion, violate human rights and limit individuals' potential. Addressing these practices requires tackling their systemic and structural causes.
- General Comment No. 20 by the Committee on the Rights of the Child focuses on protecting adolescents from violence, recognizing their specific vulnerabilities. It advocates for comprehensive measures to end all forms of violence, including corporal punishment and harmful practices, and stresses the involvement of adolescents in prevention strategies.
- The *Optional Protocol to the CRC on the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography* mandates States to criminalize and penalize these forms of exploitation, emphasizing international cooperation and the protection of child victims. The Protocol highlights the need for preventive measures and public awareness campaigns to address the root causes of exploitation.
- The Council of Europe's *Lanzarote Convention* criminalizes various forms of sexual abuse of children, including abuse within families and through coercion. It mandates preventative measures, victim support programs, and international cooperation to combat sexual exploitation and abuse.
- The *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* emphasizes eliminating harmful customs and practices, such as child marriage, and protecting children from all forms of abuse and neglect. It underscores the importance of comprehensive measures to safeguard children's rights.
- While not exclusively about children, the *American Convention on Human Rights* addresses the rights of the family and children. While interpreting the Convention, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights emphasized the fundamental rights of women and children to live free from violence, deriving from principles of equality, non-discrimination, life, and personal integrity.
- Physical violence is one of the most overt forms encountered by women and girls in sports. It includes direct physical harm or assault, such as being hit, beaten, or subjected to other physical attacks, including sexual violence of a physical nature. A UNESCO and UN Women report defines physical violence as acts like hitting, kicking, burning, and denying medical care. In sports, such violence is often justified under the guise of improving performance or discipline. A 2020 Human Rights Watch report highlighted abusive coaching practices in Japan, including hitting athletes

with bats and sticks and holding their heads underwater to simulate drowning. These abusive practices have led to severe consequences, including athlete suicides.

- Psychological violence in sports involves trauma inflicted on individuals' mental state or emotional well-being. This can include verbal abuse, indirect physical acts, denial of attention and support, and body shaming. Such violence aims to disempower and degrade athletes, leading to long-term negative effects on their mental health, body image, performance, and overall relationship with sports. Psychological violence can cause depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and other mental health issues, severely impacting athletes' personal development and quality of life.
- Economic violence in sports can manifest as contract exploitation, control over earnings, and denial of financial resources. Young athletes may be coerced into signing exploitative contracts that favor managers, agents, or sports organizations, leaving them with little financial security or autonomy. Coaches or agents might take a disproportionate share of athletes' earnings or use their image for profit without proper compensation. Economic sabotage can prevent athletes from pursuing educational opportunities or maintaining employment outside their athletic careers. The European Institute for Gender Equality defines economic violence as acts that cause economic harm, control over finances, and economic exploitation. In sports, this can undermine female athletes' financial stability, leading to mental health issues and dependency.
- Online or digital violence includes any act of violence committed or assisted by information and communication technologies. Female athletes may face relentless online harassment, including threats, insults, and doxing, which can significantly impact their mental health and sense of safety. The pressure to share intimate images or engage in sexting, and the non-consensual sharing of such images, can lead to public humiliation and emotional distress. Online body shaming and trolling are also prevalent, leading to body image issues and psychological distress. The continuous exposure to online violence can impair an athlete's performance, damage their public image, and lead to long-term career repercussions.
- Coercive control in sports involves acts or patterns of behavior aimed at making athletes dependent by isolating them, exploiting them, regulating their behavior, and eroding their autonomy and self-esteem. Coaches or team officials may limit athletes' contact with family and friends, restrict their access to resources, and socially isolate them within their teams. Athletes may be pushed to compete despite injuries, required to engage in unpaid promotional activities, and have their finances controlled by others. Such behaviors erode athletes' confidence, autonomy, and self-worth, creating a dependency on the abuser's approval and control.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

**1. What are the different forms of violence that women and girls in sports may experience (e.g. physical, psychological, economic, online violence, coercive control, as well as extreme forms of discrimination that amount to violence)?**

Women and girls in sports may experience various forms of violence and discrimination that can severely impact their well-being, performance, and overall participation in sports. These forms of violence and discrimination can occur at all levels of sports, from grassroots and community levels to elite professional environments, and can be perpetrated by coaches, peers, fans, and others within the sports community.

Our analysis will delve into the various forms of violence that women and girls may encounter in sports, structured across several key sections. Beginning with the *conceptual and normative framework*, the text will outline international definitions, standards, and rules that shape our understanding of violence against women and girls. The subsequent sections will explore specific types of violence, such as *physical violence, psychological violence, economic violence, online violence*; and a final section concerning *coercive control*. Each section will provide a detailed examination of these categories, their manifestations in sports, and the broader implications for women's and girls' safety and well-being.

## Conceptual and normative framework

When exploring the different forms of violence women and girls may experience in sports, it is crucial to acknowledge the complexities inherent to the concept of violence itself. The following is a research effort to collect and systematize international definitions, standards and rules related to violence in general, and to violence against women and girls in particular.

The World Health Organization defined violence as “[t]he 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.”<sup>4</sup> This definition notably excludes unintentional incidents such as most road traffic injuries and burns. On the other hand, by referring to “the use of physical force or power”, WHO’s definition includes actions stemming from power dynamics, such as threats, intimidation, neglect, and omissions, alongside overt acts of violence. It is also understood as encompassing all types of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, as well as suicide and other self-abusive acts. Consistently, WHO’s definition further

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<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization. Violence: a public health priority: WHO Global Consultation on Violence and Health. Geneva: WHO, 1996; World Health Organization. [World report on violence and health](#) (Edited by Etienne G. Krug, Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony B. Zwi and Rafael Lozano). Geneva: WHO, 2002, p. 5; World Health Organization. [Global status report on violence prevention 2014](#). Geneva: WHO, 2014, p. 2.

encompasses a range of outcomes from injury and death to psychological harm, maldevelopment, and deprivation.<sup>5</sup>

The “intentional” aspect of WHO’s definition of violence can be particularly relevant to the context of sports. In a 2023 report about violence against women and girls in sports, UNESCO and UN Women focused on “intentional”, “non-accidental” violence to distinguish from “accidental” or “unintentional” violence common in contact sports.<sup>6</sup>

The World Health Organization also differentiates between (a) *self-directed violence* which people inflict upon themselves, such as suicidal behavior and self-mutilation; (b) *collective violence*, which is instrumental violence inflicted by larger groups such as nation states, militia groups and terrorist organizations in order to achieve political, economic or social objectives); and (c) *interpersonal violence*, which is violence that occurs between family members, intimate partners, friends, acquaintances and strangers.<sup>7</sup>

In the context of sports, interpersonal violence is the most encountered form of violence. This includes acts of aggression and violence between athletes, coaches, and fans, often occurring during or after competitive events. Instances of interpersonal violence in sports can range from verbal altercations and threats to physical confrontations, such as fights between players on the field or between fans in the stands. These occurrences are fueled by intense emotions, rivalry, and sometimes the influence of alcohol or drugs. While self-directed violence and collective violence are less common in sports settings, the competitive nature and high-stakes environment of sports can occasionally lead to such manifestations, albeit in different forms. For example, the pressure to perform might lead an athlete to self-harm or adopt harmful behaviors, while collective violence may emerge in the form of riots or large-scale disturbances by fan groups. However, these are not as prevalent as interpersonal violence, which remains the primary concern within sports environments, highlighting the need for effective strategies to manage aggression and promote a culture of respect and sportsmanship.

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Adopted by the UN General Assembly on 20 December 1993, the *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women* defines the concept of “violence against women” as encompassing, *inter alia*, (a) “[p]hysical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation”; (b) “physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced

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<sup>5</sup> World Health Organization. [World report on violence and health \(Edited by Etienne G. Krug, Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony B. Zwi and Rafael Lozano\)](#). Geneva: WHO, 2002, p. 5.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO; UN Women. *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport: a Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners*. Paris: UNESCO, 2023, p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> World Health Organization. [Global status report on violence prevention 2014](#). Geneva: WHO, 2014, p. 2.

*prostitution*"; and (c) *"physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State, wherever it occurs."*<sup>8</sup>

Adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 18 December 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) stands as an international bill of rights for women. It encompasses both civil and political rights—such as equality in political and public life (Article 7), legal matters (Article 15), and family relations (Article 16)—and economic and social rights, including equality in education (Article 10), employment (Article 11), and health (Article 12).

Though CEDAW does not explicitly define "violence against women," it establishes a foundational framework for understanding and combating such violence through a comprehensive approach to eliminating discrimination.

Discrimination, as defined in Article 1 of CEDAW, is *"any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field."* This broad definition encompasses both intentional and unintentional actions that discriminate against women and girls in the exercise of their rights.<sup>9</sup>

Countries that have ratified CEDAW (almost all United Nations member States) are obligated to abolish discriminatory laws, policies, and practices across various domains: publicly, through constitutions, laws, government policies, public institutions, and women's participation in political life; privately, affecting actions by individuals, businesses, associations, groups, and families; culturally, addressing deep-seated prejudices, stereotypes, customs, and beliefs. These commitments to eliminate discrimination against women in all spheres of life encompass ensuring legal protections against violence and the development of public policies and programs aimed at preventing and addressing such violence. Notable provisions from the Convention include:

- Article 2: Requires States to condemn discrimination against women and pursue policies to eliminate such discrimination through modifying or abolishing laws, customs, and practices constituting discrimination.
- Article 3: Requires States to take appropriate measures to ensure women's full development and advancement, thereby guaranteeing their human rights on an equal basis with men.
- Article 5: Seeks the modification of social and cultural patterns to eliminate prejudices and practices based on stereotyped roles for men and women.
- Article 6: Addresses the exploitation of women, including measures to combat trafficking and prostitution.
- Article 10: Ensures equal rights for women in education, eliminating discrimination under any form and promoting the same opportunities in educational fields including access to studies, vocational training, and scholarship criteria.

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations. [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women](#). General Assembly resolution 48/104. Adopted on 20 December 1993.

<sup>9</sup> Similarly: Helfer, Laurence R. International Human Rights Law: Prospects and Challenges. *Duke University / Coursera.org*, Spring 2014. Available at <<https://www.coursera.org/learn/human-rights-law/>>. Las visited on 10 January 2016.



- Article 11: Focuses on eliminating discrimination against women in employment, ensuring equal employment rights, free choice of profession and employment, safe working conditions, and protection against harassment.
- Article 13: Recognizes women's rights to economic and social benefits, aiming to ensure equal rights for men and women to family benefits, financial credit, and participation in recreational activities, sports, and all aspects of cultural life.
- Articles 15 & 16: Emphasize women's equal rights in marriage and family relations.

***“During adolescence, discrimination, inequality and stereotyping against girls often intensify and lead to more serious violations of their rights because, among other reasons, cultural norms ascribing lower status to girls can increase the likelihood of confinement to the home, lack of access to secondary and tertiary education, limited opportunities for leisure, sport, recreation and income generation, lack of access to cultural life and the arts, burdensome domestic chores and childcare responsibilities.”***

(Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, 2019) <sup>10</sup>

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee) has issued several General Recommendations that provide in-depth interpretations of CEDAW's provisions concerning violence against women. In this sense, *v.g.*,

- General Recommendation No. 19 posits that “[t]he definition of discrimination includes gender-based violence, that is, violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately” (para. 6), highlighting that such violence “may breach specific provisions of the Convention, regardless of whether those provisions expressly mention violence.” It explicitly mentions that “gender-based violence is a form of discrimination that seriously inhibits women's ability to enjoy rights and freedoms on a basis of equality with men” (para. 6). Moreover, it elucidates that violence against women, whether it occurs within the family, the community, or is perpetrated by the State, is deemed discrimination. Consequently, this subjects States to the obligation of eradicating such discrimination, encompassing the amendment or repeal of laws, regulations, customs, and practices that perpetuate violence against women (para. 24).
- General Recommendation No. 30 on women in conflict prevention, conflict, and post-conflict situations highlights the increased risk of gender-based violence that women and girls face in situations of conflict and the importance of their participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding processes. This Recommendation addresses the States' obligations to protect women from violence, ensure their participation in peace processes, and take measures to prevent conflict-related sexual violence.
- General Recommendation No. 33 on women's access to justice elaborates on the barriers women face in accessing justice and the importance of legal and judicial systems being responsive to the needs of women who are victims of violence. It

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<sup>10</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. [Annex 1: Standards and Recommendations: Violence and Discrimination Against Women and Girls](#). OEA.Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 233. 14 November 2019, paragraph 40, p. 20.

provides guidance on ensuring that women have effective access to justice, particularly in cases of gender-based violence, and emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive judicial and legal processes.

- General Recommendation No. 35 recognizes the new challenges in combating violence against women by acknowledging that *"technology and the internet are among the contexts where violence against women is perpetrated"* (para. 20), underscoring the necessity for a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach that encompasses prevention and the provision of support for victims, thereby reflecting on the dynamic and evolving nature of gender-based violence. This recommendation further emphasizes that *"[g]ender-based violence against women occurs in all spaces and spheres of human interaction"*, whether public or private (para. 20), underscoring the pervasive nature of such violence and the imperative for robust and adaptive strategies to address it.

Adopted on 9 June 1994, the *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women*, better known as the “Belém do Pará Convention”, or “Convention of Belém do Pará”, is the first legally binding international treaty that criminalizes all forms of violence against women. The Convention’s Article 1 defines “violence against women” as *“any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere.”* Article 2 further details that the category of “violence against women” include violence *“(a) that occurs within the family or domestic unit or within any other interpersonal relationship, whether or not the perpetrator shares or has shared the same residence with the woman, including, among others, rape, battery and sexual abuse; (b) that occurs in the community and is perpetrated by any person, including, among others, rape, sexual abuse, torture, trafficking in persons, forced prostitution, kidnapping and sexual harassment in the workplace, as well as in educational institutions, health facilities or any other place; and (c) that is perpetrated or condoned by the State or its agents regardless of where it occurs”*. Moreover, articles 7 to 9 textually refer to the duties of States regarding the prevention, punishment, and eradication of violence against women. The following table systematizes such duties:

ARTICLE	DUTY	DESCRIPTION
7	<i>General Obligations</i>	States Parties commit to condemning all forms of violence against women and to pursue policies to prevent, punish, and eradicate such violence
7.a	<i>Refrain from Violence</i>	Ensure that State authorities, officials, personnel, agents, and institutions do not engage in violence against women
7.b	<i>Due Diligence</i>	Apply due diligence to prevent, investigate, and impose penalties for violence against women
7.c	<i>Legislation</i>	Include necessary provisions in domestic legislation to prevent, punish, and eradicate violence against women, and adopt appropriate administrative measures
7.d	<i>Legal Measures</i>	Adopt legal measures to protect women from harassment, intimidation, threats, and any harm to their life, integrity, or property
7.e	<i>Amend Laws</i>	Amend or repeal laws and practices that sustain violence against women

7.f	<i>Legal Procedures</i>	Establish fair and effective legal procedures for women subjected to violence, including protective measures and timely access
7.g	<i>Access to Remedies</i>	Ensure women have access to restitution, reparations, or other just and effective remedies
7.h	<i>Legislative Measures</i>	Adopt legislative measures necessary to give effect to the Convention
8	<i>Specific Measures</i>	Undertake specific measures and programs to promote the rights and protection of women from violence
8.a	<i>Awareness and Observance</i>	Promote awareness of women's rights to be free from violence
8.b	<i>Modify Social Patterns</i>	Modify social and cultural patterns to counteract prejudices and stereotypes that legitimize violence against women
8.c	<i>Education and Training</i>	Educate and train justice, police, and law enforcement personnel on preventing, punishing, and eradicating violence against women
8.d	<i>Specialized Services</i>	Provide specialized services for women subjected to violence, including shelters and counseling
8.e	<i>Public Awareness</i>	Support education to raise public awareness of violence against women and its remedies
8.f	<i>Readjustment and Training</i>	Provide access to programs for women to fully participate in life after being subjected to violence
8.g	<i>Media Guidelines</i>	Encourage media to adopt guidelines that contribute to the eradication of violence against women
8.h	<i>Research and Statistics</i>	Conduct research and gather data on violence against women to assess and improve measures
8.i	<i>International Cooperation</i>	Foster international cooperation in protecting women subjected to violence
9	<i>Special Consideration</i>	Take into account the vulnerability of women to violence based on race, ethnicity, status as migrants, refugees, displaced persons, and other factors

Adopted on 11 May 2011, the *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*, widely known as the Istanbul Convention, represents a landmark in European efforts to protect women and girls from violence. It is recognized as the first legally binding instrument in Europe dedicated explicitly to this cause, setting comprehensive legal standards for government action against violence towards women. The Istanbul Convention identifies violence against women as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination (Article 3), and it obliges its signatory States to prevent violence, protect victims, and prosecute perpetrators.

The Convention's definition of violence against women is broad and inclusive, covering all forms of physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence (Article 3). This includes, but is not limited to, domestic violence, sexual harassment, rape, forced marriage, stalking, female genital mutilation, and forced abortion and sterilization.

The Convention is notable for its holistic approach, addressing the need for comprehensive and coordinated policies, effective implementation measures, and the promotion of international cooperation. Other key provisions within the Istanbul Convention include:

SUBJECT	DESCRIPTION
<i>Discrimination Prevention</i>	Ensures measures are taken to prevent discrimination, particularly against women and girls at greater risk of violence due to specific characteristics (Article 4)
<i>Integrated Policies</i>	States must adopt and implement effective, comprehensive, and coordinated policies across government agencies and stakeholders to combat violence (Article 7)
<i>Preventive Measures</i>	Requires broad efforts to change societal attitudes, stereotypes, and practices perpetuating violence against women. Involves education and media campaigns (Article 12)
<i>Raising Awareness</i>	Underlines the role of awareness campaigns and education to prevent violence and promote gender equality (Article 13)
<i>Training Professionals</i>	Highlights the importance of training for professionals dealing with victims to ensure sensitive and informed support (Article 15)
<i>Private Sector and Media Role</i>	Emphasizes the role of the media and private sector in preventing violence and stereotypes that perpetuate gender-based violence (Article 17)
<i>Research and Data Collection</i>	Stresses the need for ongoing research and data collection to inform effective policy-making and prevention strategies (Article 11)
<i>Protection and Support</i>	Mandates establishment of services like shelters and legal aid for victims, ensuring immediate and effective protection and support (Articles 20-22)
<i>Substantive Law Provisions</i>	Introduces criminal offenses such as psychological violence, stalking, physical violence, sexual violence (including rape), forced marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced abortion, and forced sterilization (Articles 33-39)
<i>Legal Measures</i>	Provides for legal measures to support and protect victims, including protection orders and legal aid (Articles 52-57).
<i>Monitoring Mechanism</i>	Establishes the GREVIO (Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) to monitor the Convention's implementation (Article 66).

Adopted on July 11, 2003, and entering into force on November 25, 2005, the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*, commonly known as the Maputo Protocol, builds on the global and regional frameworks for protecting women's human rights by addressing the unique challenges faced by African women, addressing issues such as gender-based violence, harmful traditional practices, and economic discrimination within a culturally sensitive context. Article 1 of the Maputo Protocol lays the foundation for its comprehensive framework by defining key terms such as:

- Discrimination against women: “any distinction, exclusion or restriction or any differential treatment based on sex and whose objectives or effects compromise or destroy the recognition, enjoyment or the exercise by women, regardless of their marital status, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all spheres of life” (Article 1.f).

- Harmful Practices: “all behavior, attitudes and/or practices which negatively affect the fundamental rights of women and girls, such as their right to life, health, dignity, education, and physical integrity” (Article 1.g).
- Violence against women: “all acts perpetrated against women which cause or could cause them physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, including the threat to take such acts; or to undertake the imposition of arbitrary restrictions on or deprivation of fundamental freedoms in private or public life in peace time and during situations of armed conflicts or of war” (Article 1.j).

The extensive content of the Maputo Protocol in terms of rights and obligations is summarized and systematized in the following table:

ARTICLE(S)	DESCRIPTION
<i>2: Elimination of Discrimination</i>	Mandates States parties to combat all forms of discrimination against women through comprehensive legislative, institutional, and other measures, integrating gender perspectives into policy-making to ensure women's full development and advancement on equal terms with men.
<i>3-5: Rights to Dignity, Life, Integrity, and Security</i>	Emphasizes protection against all forms of violence and exploitation, including sexual, psychological, and economic harm. States are called to enact laws prohibiting violence against women, ensure punishment for perpetrators, and provide support and rehabilitation for victims.
<i>6-7: Marriage, Separation, Divorce, and Annulment of Marriage</i>	Promotes equality within marriage and family relations, setting the minimum age for marriage at 18 and ensuring equal rights during separation, divorce, or annulment, including property rights and custody of children.
<i>11: Protection in Armed Conflicts</i>	Provides special protection for women during armed conflicts, mandates States to protect women from violence, exploitation, and abuses during conflicts, and emphasizes women's roles in peace-building efforts.
<i>12-13: Education and Economic Rights</i>	Calls for eliminating educational stereotypes and promoting equal opportunities in education and employment, ensuring women's access to educational levels, and career advancement in fields traditionally dominated by men.
<i>14: Health and Reproductive Rights</i>	Ensures women's rights to health, including sexual and reproductive health, the right to control fertility, make informed decisions about reproduction, and access to family planning education and services.
<i>18-19: Environmental and Development Rights</i>	Recognizes women's rights to a healthy and sustainable environment and their role in sustainable development, emphasizing women's participation in decision-making and access to productive resources.
<i>15: Right to Food Security</i>	Guarantees women's access to adequate food, clean drinking water, and means of producing nutritious food, emphasizing the importance of food security for women's health and well-being.
<i>16: Right to Adequate Housing</i>	Ensures women's equal access to housing and to living conditions in a healthy environment, addressing the need for adequate housing as a fundamental human right.
<i>17: Right to Positive Cultural Context</i>	Promotes women's participation in the determination of cultural policies at all levels, ensuring their ability to live and participate in a positive cultural context.

<b>20: Widows' Rights</b>	Protects the rights and welfare of widows, ensuring they are not subjected to inhuman, humiliating, or degrading treatment, and retain guardianship of their children and the right to property and remarriage.
<b>21: Right to Inheritance</b>	Ensures women's equitable share in inheritance, recognizing their right to inherit property from their spouses and parents on equal terms with men.
<b>22: Protection of Elderly Women</b>	Provides for the specific needs of elderly women, ensuring their protection and access to appropriate services, reflecting a commitment to the welfare of women throughout their lifespan.
<b>23: Protection of Women with Disabilities</b>	Ensures protection and access to services for women with disabilities, emphasizing their right to employment, education, and participation in decision-making.
<b>24: Protection of Women in Distress</b>	Protects women in difficult situations, including the poor and women heads of families, ensuring their access to suitable living conditions and services, and addressing their specific vulnerabilities.

The table below consolidates the information from key international human rights instruments, highlighting their contributions to defining and combatting violence against women:

INSTRUMENT	ADOPTING BODY	ADOPTION	EXPANDED DEFINITION & KEY POINTS
<b>CEDAW</b>	<b>United Nations</b>	<b>18 Dec. 1979</b>	While not defining violence directly, establishes a foundational framework for understanding and combating violence against women through a comprehensive approach to eliminating discrimination. Its broad mandates for equality in various spheres of life, including education and employment, indirectly address environments like sports by obligating States to eliminate discrimination and promote equality.
<b>General Recommendation 19</b>	<b>CEDAW Committee</b>	<b>1992</b>	Refers to how the concept of discrimination includes gender-based violence, highlighting violence against women as a barrier to equality. Addresses both overt and covert forms of violence, emphasizing the role of power dynamics.
<b>Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women</b>	<b>United Nations</b>	<b>20 Dec. 1993</b>	Defines violence against women broadly to include physical, sexual, and psychological violence across various settings, including family, community, and those perpetrated or condoned by the State. This definition captures the multiple arenas in which violence can occur, including sports.
<b>Belém do Pará Convention</b>	<b>Organization of American States</b>	<b>9 June 1994</b>	Clarifies violence against women to include acts or conduct based on gender, in both public and private spheres. Specifies obligations for States to prevent, punish, and eradicate such violence, providing a legal framework that could be extended to sports contexts.
<b>Maputo Protocol</b>	<b>African Union</b>	<b>11 July 2003</b>	Offers a comprehensive definition that includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm, recognizing the broader social, economic, and cultural factors contributing to violence against women. Its broad scope suggests applicability to various contexts, including educational and recreational activities, thus encompassing sports.

Istanbul Convention	Council of Europe	11 May 2011	Identifies violence against women as a form of discrimination and human rights violation. Includes a broad range of violence types and calls for comprehensive and coordinated policies. Its inclusive definition and emphasis on societal change highlight the relevance to sports, where gender-based violence and discrimination can be prevalent.
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The subject of violence has also been the concern of international instruments regarding the rights of the children and their interpretation.

Adopted on 20 November 1989, the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* is one of the most important international treaties concerning children's rights, including protections against various forms of violence. Article 19 of the CRC requires States “take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures” to protect children from “all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse” while in the care of parents, legal guardians, or any other person.

On 18 April 2011, the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment No. 13, a detailed interpretation of Article 19 of the CRC, providing clarity on the obligations of States to protect children from violence and the nature of violence against children. It defines violence broadly as referring to “all forms of harm to children as listed in article 19”, clarifying that all terms used to describe types of harm (injury, abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment, exploitation) carry equal weight. It also highlights that, although in common parlance the term violence is often understood to mean only physical or intentional harm, the use of the term in the context of the Convention is not to be interpreted in any way to minimize the impact of, and need to address, non-physical and/or non-intentional forms of harm such as neglect, psychological maltreatment, and others.<sup>11</sup> The comment also expressly includes “recreational and sports coaches” under the category of “caregivers” referred to in article 19, as well as “sports, cultural and recreational facilities” as examples of “care settings”.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the comment clarifies that the administrative measures required by article 19 of the Convention include, *inter alia*, “policies, programmes, monitoring, and oversight systems required to protect the child from all forms of violence” at the levels of governmental, professional and civil society institutions. This duty to adopt administrative measures in the cited context encompasses, *e.g.*, “developing and implementing, through participatory processes which encourage ownership and sustainability, [...] professional ethics codes, protocols, memoranda of understanding and standards of care for all childcare services and settings (including daycare centres, schools, hospitals, sport clubs and residential institutions etc.)”.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. [General comment No. 13 \(2011\): The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence](#). *UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/13*, 18 April 2011, paragraph 4.

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. [General comment No. 13 \(2011\): The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence](#). *UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/13*, 18 April 2011, paragraphs 33-34.

<sup>13</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. [General comment No. 13 \(2011\): The right of the child to freedom from all forms of violence](#). *UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/13*, 18 April 2011, paragraph 42.

The date of 14 November 2014 marks the adoption of joint General Comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child and General Recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women with the objective of clarifying the obligations of States parties to eliminate harmful practices against women and children. The comment understands “harmful practices” as rooted in discrimination based on sex, gender, age, and intersecting forms of discrimination, often involving violence or coercion. These practices deny the dignity and integrity of the individual, constituting a violation of human rights. They result in physical, psychological, economic, and social harm, as well as limitations on the individual's ability to participate fully in society or develop to their full potential. These practices are traditional, re-emerging, or emerging and are maintained by social norms that perpetuate male dominance and inequality of women and children. They are imposed on women and children by family members, community members, or society at large, regardless of the victim's consent. The causes include stereotyped sex- and gender-based roles, presumed superiority or inferiority of sexes, control over women's and girls' bodies and sexuality, social inequalities, and male-dominated power structures. Efforts to change these practices must address their systemic and structural causes.<sup>14</sup>

On 6 December 2016, the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted General Comment No. 20 on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence. This comment emphasizes the need for protection against violence during adolescence, recognizing the specific vulnerabilities and the forms of violence that adolescents may face, including sexual, physical, and emotional violence in various settings. In its specific section on violence, the comment advises States to adhere to the guidance in General Comments No. 13 (2011) and No. 18 (2014), advocating for “*comprehensive legislative, administrative, social, and educational measures to bring an end to all forms of violence, including a legal prohibition on corporal punishment in all settings, and to transform and bring an end to all harmful practices*”. The comment also recommends States “*to create more opportunities for scaling up institutional programmes on prevention and rehabilitation, and the social reintegration of adolescent victims, stressing the need to involve adolescents in the development of prevention strategies and protective responses to victims of violence*”.<sup>15</sup>

Adopted on 25 May 2000, the *Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography* specifically addresses the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography, defining these terms broadly to capture various forms of exploitation (Article 2). It mandates States Parties to criminalize and apply appropriate penalties to a range of acts related to these forms of exploitation, including attempts, complicity, or participation in such offenses (Article 3). The Protocol underscores the importance

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<sup>14</sup> United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women; Committee on the Rights of the Child. [Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices](#). *UN Doc. CEDAW/C/GC/31-CRC/C/GC/18*, 14 November 2014, paragraphs 7, 15, 17.

<sup>15</sup> United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. [General comment No. 20 \(2016\) on the implementation of the rights of the child during adolescence](#). *UN Doc. CRC/C/GC/20\**, 6 December 2016, paragraph 49.



of adopting measures to establish jurisdiction over these offenses, ensuring that no safe haven exists for perpetrators (Article 4).

A cornerstone of the Protocol is its emphasis on international cooperation for the prevention, investigation, prosecution, and punishment of offenses, reflecting a recognition that these forms of exploitation often transcend national borders (Articles 10 and 6). It also stipulates the importance of extradition as a tool in combating these crimes, with specific provisions to streamline the process among States Parties (Article 5). Significantly, the Protocol places a strong emphasis on the rights and protection of child victims throughout the justice process. It outlines detailed measures to safeguard their rights, privacy, and well-being, ensuring they receive appropriate support, protection from retaliation, and access to compensation (Article 8).

Preventative measures form an integral part of the Protocol, with States Parties encouraged to address the root causes of exploitation, such as poverty, underdevelopment, and discrimination. Public awareness campaigns, education, and training are highlighted as key strategies to prevent these crimes and reduce demand (Article 9). States Parties are required to report on the measures they have taken to implement the Protocol's provisions, underscoring the commitment to ongoing monitoring and evaluation of efforts to combat the sale of children, child prostitution, and child pornography (Article 12).

Adopted on 25 October 2007 and entering into force on 1 July 2010, the Council of Europe's Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, also known as the Lanzarote Convention, is the first instrument to establish the various forms of sexual abuse of children as criminal offences, including abuse committed in the home or family, with the use of force, coercion, or threats (see, *v.g.*, Article 18).

The Convention emphasizes the importance of preventative measures, mandating the screening, recruitment, and training of individuals who work with children (Article 5), educating children about the risks and how to protect themselves (Article 6), and implementing monitoring measures for offenders and potential offenders (Article 7). Furthermore, it introduces a wide range of initiatives to support victims, including establishing programs for physical and psychological recovery (Article 14), encouraging the reporting of suspected abuse (Article 12), and setting up helplines for children (Article 13). It also ensures that certain types of conduct are classified as criminal offences, such as engaging in sexual activities with a child below the legal age (Article 18(a)), child prostitution and pornography (Articles 19 and 20) and the solicitation of children for sexual purposes (Article 23). The Convention also sets a precedent in jurisdictional matters, allowing States to prosecute offenses committed abroad by their nationals or residents, and it emphasizes the necessity of international cooperation to prevent, investigate, prosecute, and punish those responsible for sexual exploitation and abuse of children (Articles 25, 38, and 39). This is complemented by a specific monitoring mechanism to ensure effective implementation of the Convention's provisions (Article 39).

The *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* provides a protective framework specifically for children, including girls, emphasizing the elimination of customs and practices that endanger the health or well-being of children, such as child marriage (see, *v.g.*, Article 21), as well as the States Parties' duties to take

*“specific legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment and especially physical or mental injury or abuse, neglect or maltreatment including sexual abuse, while in the care of a parent, legal guardian or school authority or any other person who has the care of the child” (Article 16.1).*

While not exclusively about children, the American Convention on Human Rights, also known as the Pact of San José, touches upon the rights of the family, the rights of children, and the rights to protection for children. Adopted on 22 November 1969, the convention emphasizes the fundamental human rights that should be guaranteed to all, including children, within the Americas. In this sense, article 19 of the Convention, establishing the rights of the child in a general manner, is often read in connection with all the other civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights protected by the other substantive articles of the Convention. While interpreting the Convention, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) affirmed the right of women and children to live free from violence as a fundamental principle of international human rights law deriving from the human rights to equality and non-discrimination, life, and personal integrity<sup>16</sup> (as protected, *v.g.*, in articles 1, 4, 5, 19 and 24 of the American Convention).

## Physical Violence

***“Women, children, and elderly people bear the brunt of nonfatal physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.***

***A quarter of all adults report having been physically abused as children.***

***One in five women reports having been sexually abused as a child.***

***One in three women has been a victim of physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner at some point in her lifetime.***

***One in seventeen older adults reported abuse in the past month.”***

(World Health Organization, 2014)<sup>17</sup>

One of the most overt forms that women and girls may encounter, *physical violence* includes direct physical harm or assault, i.e., being hit, beaten, or subjected to other forms of physical attack, including sexual violence of a physical character.

A recent publication by UNESCO and UN Women defines physical violence as *“hurting or trying to hurt someone by hitting, kicking, burning, grabbing, pinching, shoving, slapping, hair-pulling, biting, denying medical care or forcing alcohol and/or drug use, or using other physical force.”*<sup>18</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. [Violence and Discrimination Against Women and Girls](#). OAS/Ser.L/V/II. Doc. 233 14 November 2019, p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> World Health Organization. [Global status report on violence prevention 2014](#). Geneva: WHO, 2014, p. viii.

<sup>18</sup> UNESCO; UN Women. *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport: a Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners*. Paris: UNESCO, 2023, p. 20.

It further defines *sexual violence* as “any sexual act committed against the will of another person, either when this person does not give consent or when consent cannot be given because the person is a child, has a mental disability, or is severely intoxicated or unconscious as a result of alcohol or drugs”. Moreover, it differentiates between rape, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation as different manifestations of sexual violence<sup>19</sup>:

- Rape: “any non-consensual vaginal, anal or oral penetration of another person with any bodily part or object”.
- Sexual harassment: “non-consensual physical contact, like grabbing, pinching, slapping, or rubbing against another person in a sexual way. It also includes non-physical forms, such as catcalls, sexual comments about a person’s body or appearance, demands for sexual favors, sexually suggestive staring, stalking, and exposing one’s sex organs.”
- Sexual exploitation (or “sextortion”): “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes.”

In the context of sports, physical violence is often justified under the guise of improving athletic performance or discipline. The “No Pain, No Gain” culture prioritizes sports performance over welfare, including child welfare. It favors the normalization of deprivation and pain, and it allows perpetrators to mask violence by claiming “it’s just part of the game”.<sup>20</sup>

In a 2020 report examining physical, sexual, and verbal abuse of child athletes in Japan, both girl and boy athletes, Human Rights Watch highlighted that the most overtly violent of the common forms of physical abuse in sports is when coaches strike players with their hands, feet, or other objects.<sup>21</sup> The abusive coaching practices which were documented by Human Rights Watch include hitting children with bats and sticks, slapping children across the face, and holding children’s heads underwater to simulate drowning.<sup>22</sup>

Human Rights Watch also documented cases of suicide of teenagers following physical abuse; *e.g.*, a fifteen-year-old junior high school table tennis player mentioned in her suicide note that her coach threatened to kill and punch her, and a seventeen-year-old high school basketball player left a suicide note which said that he could no longer stand being physically abused by his coach (and the coach admitted to slapping the boy in the face multiple times).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> UNESCO; UN Women. *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport: a Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners*. Paris: UNESCO, 2023, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup> UNESCO; UN Women. *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport: a Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners*. Paris: UNESCO, 2023, p. 42.

<sup>21</sup> Human Rights Watch. “I Was Hit So Many Times I Can’t Count”: Abuse of Child Athletes in Japan. Washington DC: Human Rights Watch, 2020, p.

<sup>22</sup> Human Rights Watch. “I Was Hit So Many Times I Can’t Count”: Abuse of Child Athletes in Japan. Washington DC: Human Rights Watch, 2020, p. 1. See, also: UNESCO; UN Women. *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport: a Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners*. Paris: UNESCO, 2023, p. 42.

<sup>23</sup> Human Rights Watch. “I Was Hit So Many Times I Can’t Count”: Abuse of Child Athletes in Japan. Washington DC: Human Rights Watch, 2020, p. 13-24.

## Psychological Violence

***“Whereas males are disproportionately represented among victims of violent death and physical injuries treated in emergency departments, women and girls, children and elderly people disproportionately bear the burden of the nonfatal consequences of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, and neglect, worldwide. They also suffer a host of negative health and social consequences from these acts of violence that often last a lifetime and that are not captured in official statistics.”***

(World Health Organization, 2014)<sup>24</sup>

*Psychological violence* has been described, *v.g.*, as trauma inflicted on individuals' mental state or emotional well-being, aiming to disempower targets by degrading, demoralizing, or shaming them. It often involves efforts to instill fear, cause stress, or harm credibility and can occur both in person and digitally.<sup>25</sup>

In sports, *psychological violence* encompasses various non-physical forms of hostile treatment or rejection. It manifests in several ways, including verbal abuse, indirect physical acts, denial of attention and support, and body shaming. Verbal abuse may involve threats and derogatory remarks that demean an athlete's abilities, appearance, or worth, often using labels such as "worthless," "disgusting," or "useless". Indirect physical acts, such as throwing equipment, while not directly harming the athlete physically, contribute to an atmosphere of fear and intimidation. The denial of support, guidance, and attention, *v.g.*, by coaches and authoritative figures as a punitive response to perceived poor performance, is another form of psychological violence. Body shaming, a particularly insidious form of psychological violence, involves disproportionate pressures to conform to specific body types or weight standards, negative comments about one's body, and punitive measures for failing to meet these standards. Such behaviors and practices belittle, threaten, discriminate against, or systematically undermine an individual's dignity, self-worth, and development within the sporting environment.<sup>26</sup>

The consequences of such psychological violence can be profound and lasting, affecting athletes' mental health, body image, performance, and overall relationship with sport. Negative effects include depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation, eating disorders, and posttraumatic stress disorder, among others. These impacts not only affect the athletes' sporting careers but also their personal development and quality of life beyond sports.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>24</sup> World Health Organization. [Global status report on violence prevention 2014](#). Geneva: WHO, 2014, p. 8.

<sup>25</sup> See, *e.g.*, Krook, Mona Lena. "Psychological Violence". In: *Violence against Women in Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020.

<sup>26</sup> See Willson, Erin; Kerr, Gretchen. [Gender-Based Violence in Girls' Sports](#). *Adolescents* 3, p. 78-289, 2023, p. 279-280. See, also: World Health Organization. [World report on violence and health \(Edited by Etienne G. Krug, Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony B. Zwi and Rafael Lozano\)](#). Geneva: WHO, 2002, p. 18 (associating psychological violence, *v.g.*, with bullying, sexual harassment, threats, and intimidation).

<sup>27</sup> See Willson, Erin; Kerr, Gretchen. [Gender-Based Violence in Girls' Sports](#). *Adolescents* 3, p. 78-289, 2023, p. 281.

### Sports ethics & psychological violence

In a recent study by Fournier et al., the researchers explore the nuanced relationship between athletes' adherence to sport ethical norms—particularly "self-sacrifice" and the "refusal to accept limits"—and their experiences of psychological violence from coaches. "Self-sacrifice", within this context, refers to athletes' willingness to prioritize their sport above all else, often at the expense of their personal well-being, social relationships, and academic or career pursuits. This norm valorizes enduring pain, hardship, and personal sacrifices for the sake of athletic excellence and team success. Conversely, the "refusal to accept limits" embodies athletes' tendencies to push beyond their physical and psychological boundaries, challenging their own limits in pursuit of superior performance, even when such efforts pose risks to their health and safety. Analyzing responses from over a thousand young athletes, the study revealed a striking pattern: girls in individual sports who highly align with the "self-sacrifice" norm tend to experience more psychological violence by coaches. This suggests that the pressure to sacrifice for the sport may render them more vulnerable to abusive behaviors that seek to exploit their commitment. On the other hand, athletes who embody the "refusal to accept limits" norm, regardless of gender and in individual sports, reported fewer experiences of psychological violence.<sup>28</sup>

## Economic Violence

As correctly stated by UNESCO and UN Women, "*because violence can exist on a continuum, some abusers take advantage of an athlete's economic vulnerability to commit other forms of violence.*"<sup>29</sup> The contribution of economic vulnerability to other forms of violence, however, does not negate the existence of a specific form of violence with an economical character.

Defining this specific form of violence, that is, "economic violence", is not without challenge as it is not as frequently examined and discussed as physical, sexual, and psychological violence. Still, there had been insightful attempts to define it. In this sense, *e.g.*, UNESCO and UN Women referred to economic violence as "*making or attempting to make a person financially dependent by maintaining total control over financial resources, withholding access to money or forbidding attendance at school or employment.*"<sup>30</sup>

In the European context, article 3 of the Istanbul Convention defines violence against women as a category covering "all forms of physical, sexual, psychological, and *economic violence*". The Convention's "Explanatory Report" does not define economic violence; it simply states that "economic violence can be related to psychological violence."<sup>31</sup> Moreover, articles 6, 12, and 18 of the Istanbul

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<sup>28</sup> Fournier, Carolane; Parent, Sylvie; Paradis, H  l  ne. The relationship between psychological violence by coaches and conformity of young athletes to the sport ethic norms. *European Journal for Sport and Society*, Volume 19, Issue 1, p. 37-55, 2022.

<sup>29</sup> UNESCO; UN Women. *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport: a Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners*. Paris: UNESCO, 2023, p. 20.

<sup>30</sup> UNESCO; UN Women. *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport: a Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners*. Paris: UNESCO, 2023, p. 20.

<sup>31</sup> See: Council of Europe. Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. *Council of Europe Treaty Series* No. 210, 11 May 2011, paragraphs 40-42.

Convention refer to the States' duties to promote the "empowerment" of women and the "empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence". The Convention's "Explanatory Report" clarifies that "empowerment" means empowerment in all aspects of life, including economic empowerment; and that the empowerment and economic independence of women victims of violence mean, inter alia, instilling "*in victims a sense of control of their lives, which in many cases includes working towards financial security, in particular economic independence from the perpetrator*".<sup>32</sup> In 2023, the European Institute for Gender Equality defined "economic violence" as follows<sup>33</sup>:

Economic violence a common form of violence against women statistically defined as any act or behavior which causes economic harm to an individual.

Economic violence is rooted in gender inequality and reinforced by traditional gender norms.

Perpetrators of economic violence control the victim's ability to acquire, use, and maintain economic resources, threatening their economic security and potential for self-sufficiency.

Economic violence often occurs in the context of intimate relationships. Notably, control over economic resources is one of the main reasons that constrains women's possibilities of leaving abusive relationships.

Economic violence does not need physical proximity to perpetrate, meaning that it can continue or start postseparation, for example, perpetrators may refuse to pay alimony or coerce victims into agreeing to unfair financial settlements.

Economic violence in intimate relationships often co-occurs with other forms of intimate partner violence (physical, psychological, and sexual), coercing and controlling behaviors. Perpetrators of economic violence use economic control, economic sabotage, and economic exploitation against their victims. Notably, digital technologies can further facilitate this form of violence (e.g., controlling/exploiting the finances of a victim through internet banking).

The European Institute for Gender Equality also addressed the main types of economic violence: economic control, exploitation, and sabotage.<sup>34</sup>

- *Economic control*: preventing, limiting, or controlling a victim's finances and related decision-making. Examples include restricting access to money, necessities, financial assets, and information; controlling the amount of money a victim can spend or tracking their use of it; preventing a victim from obtaining bank accounts in their name or from making financial decisions.
- *Economic exploitation*: using the economic resources of a victim to the abuser's advantage. Examples include opening a line of credit in their partners' name without consent, building up debt under the victim's name; stealing or damaging a victim's property or resources or selling them without

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<sup>32</sup> See: Council of Europe. Explanatory Report to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. *Council of Europe Treaty Series* No. 210, 11 May 2011, paragraphs 40-42.

<sup>33</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality. *Understanding Economic Violence against Women*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> European Institute for Gender Equality. *Understanding Economic Violence against Women*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, p. 1.

permission; taking wages, pensions, or other forms of financial aid from a victim without permission.

- *Economic sabotage*: preventing a victim from pursuing, obtaining, or maintaining employment and/or education. Examples include preventing a victim from attending employment and educational activities or sabotaging items needed to fulfil such activities; interfering with a victim’s work or education; refusing to contribute towards childcare responsibilities.

In the context of sports, economic harm against women and girls can manifest in several ways. One manifestation is contract exploitation. Young athletes, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, may be coerced into signing exploitative contracts. These contracts often favor managers, agents, or sports organizations, leaving the athletes with little or no financial security or autonomy. Such practices can include unfair profit-sharing agreements, high management fees, and restrictive clauses that limit the athlete’s ability to change teams or seek better opportunities.

Another form of economic violence is control over earnings. Athletes may find their earnings controlled by others, either through direct confiscation of their wages or through coercive practices that force them to spend their money in ways dictated by the perpetrator. This can include having to pay for team-related costs out of their own pockets without proper reimbursement.

Additionally, economic violence can involve coaches, agents, or other people in positions of authority taking a disproportionate share of the athletes’ earnings, and/or using their image for marketing and profit without adequate compensation or control over how they are portrayed.

Denial of financial resources is another way economic violence manifests. Athletes might be denied access to necessary financial resources such as funding for training, equipment, or medical care, which their male counterparts receive. This disparity can hamper their ability to compete effectively and reinforce a cycle of economic dependence and disadvantage.

Furthermore, economic sabotage can prevent athletes from pursuing educational opportunities or maintaining employment outside of their athletic career. This can include intentionally scheduling practices in a way that conflicts with educational commitments or discouraging participation in educational programs that would provide financial independence and career options beyond sports.

Economic harm can also be inflicted through theft and property damage. Athletes may have their property stolen or damaged as a means of exerting control or inflicting punishment. This can include the destruction of personal belongings, sports equipment, or vehicles, as well as financial theft, where money is taken from the athlete’s bank accounts or personal funds without consent.

Additionally, economic harm can occur when athletes are pressured to participate in excessive training or competitions without adequate compensation or when money is demanded for “favors” or inclusion in the team. Intentionally reducing playing time, terminating contracts, promoting negative media portrayals, or other actions that impact their earning potential can also lead to economic harm.

However, it is crucial to differentiate between legitimate financial and economic restraint, particularly concerning children, and de facto economic violence. Concerned parents or guardians who manage the finances of young athletes to ensure their long-term welfare and financial stability are engaging in responsible

behavior. Legitimate acts include setting up trust funds, overseeing expenditures, and ensuring that earnings are saved or spent wisely to secure the athlete's future. These actions are characterized by transparency, the intention to benefit the athlete, and the involvement of the athlete in financial decisions appropriate to their age and understanding. In contrast, economic violence involves controlling or exploiting the athlete's financial resources without their consent or to their detriment. It is marked by a lack of transparency, the intention to benefit someone other than the athlete, and the exclusion of the athlete from financial decision-making processes.

Economic violence in sports not only undermines the financial stability of female athletes but also affects their mental and physical well-being. The stress and anxiety associated with financial exploitation and dependence can lead to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety, further impacting athletic performance. Moreover, the lack of financial independence can make it difficult for athletes to leave abusive situations, whether they are related to their personal lives or their professional environment.

## Online or digital violence

The rise of the digital age has ushered in new forms of violence and abuse, and women and girls in sports are also vulnerable to these emerging threats.

Online or digital violence, as defined by UNESCO and UN Women, encompasses any act of violence committed, assisted, or aggravated by the use of information and communication technologies, including mobile phones, social media, computer games, text messaging, or email. This includes cyberbullying (sending intimidating or threatening messages), non-consensual sexting (sending explicit messages or photos without the recipient's consent), and doxing (the public release of private or identifying information about the victim).<sup>35</sup>

In the context of sports, online violence can manifest in numerous ways. For instance, female athletes may be subjected to relentless online harassment, receiving threatening messages, insults about their appearance or performance, and even death threats. This can originate from disgruntled fans, opposing teams, or even individuals within their own sporting community. The anonymity of the internet emboldens perpetrators, creating a hostile environment that can significantly impact an athlete's mental health and sense of safety.

The pressure and coercion to share intimate images or engage in sexting can be particularly high for female athletes, who are often objectified and sexualized based on their athletic prowess. Non-consensual sharing of private images, or "revenge porn," can have devastating consequences, leading to public humiliation, emotional distress, and reputational damage.

Women and girl athletes are not immune to doxing either. Personal information, such as home addresses, phone numbers, or family details, can be publicly exposed online, making athletes vulnerable to stalking, harassment, and other forms of offline violence.

Another manifestation of online violence against women and girl athletes is through online body shaming and trolling. Social media platforms are frequently used as

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<sup>35</sup> UNESCO; UN Women. *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport: a Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners*. Paris: UNESCO, 2023, p. 20.



breeding grounds for body shaming and criticism of female athletes. Their physiques, weight, and even clothing choices are scrutinized and ridiculed, leading to body image issues, eating disorders, and psychological distress.

The internet can also be used to spread false information or rumors about female athletes, damaging their reputations, sponsorship opportunities, and public image. The spread of disinformation can be even a deliberate tactic to undermine their careers and create a hostile environment.

The effects of online violence on female athletes can be profound and multifaceted. Continuous exposure to online harassment can lead to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder, impairing an athlete's ability to perform and maintain their well-being. The stress and distraction caused by online violence can negatively impact athletic performance. Athletes may find it difficult to focus on training and competition, leading to a decline in their professional capabilities. Moreover, online violence can damage an athlete's public image, affecting sponsorship deals, endorsements, and other income opportunities. Negative publicity and reputational damage can have long-term career repercussions. The threat of doxing and online stalking can lead to heightened concerns for personal safety, forcing athletes to take protective measures that disrupt their personal and professional lives.

## Coercive control

***“Violence against women and girls occurs in many forms: it can be physical, sexual, emotional, psychological and/or economic. It can take place in the physical world or in the digital world. Violence against women and girls often involves coercive control, in which an abuser exerts several controlling behaviors that erode the autonomy and self-esteem of the survivor. Because all kinds of violence are rooted in gender inequality and an imbalance of power and resources, these types of violence can coexist and are often intertwined. Violence can also exist on a continuum, in which seemingly minor incidents or patterns of abuse, such as threats, humiliation and other kinds of intimidation, can escalate to extreme violations or have devastating detrimental effects on physical and mental health and well-being over time.”***

(UNESCO & UN Women, 2023) <sup>36</sup>

Coercive control, as defined by UNESCO and UN Women, refers to an act or a pattern of acts of assault, threats, humiliation, intimidation, or other abuse used to harm, punish, or frighten the victim. It is a controlling behavior aimed at making a person dependent by isolating them from support, exploiting them, regulating their everyday behavior, depriving them of independence, and eroding their autonomy and self-esteem.<sup>37</sup>

The following table explores how the goals of coercive control manifest in the context of sports:

<sup>36</sup> UNESCO; UN Women. *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport: a Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners*. Paris: UNESCO, 2023, p. 19.

<sup>37</sup> UNESCO; UN Women. *Tackling Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport: a Handbook for Policy Makers and Sports Practitioners*. Paris: UNESCO, 2023, p. 18-19.

Goal	Manifestation In Sports
<b>Isolation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Restricting Communication: Coaches or team officials may limit athletes' contact with family and friends, preventing them from seeking emotional support.</i></li> <li>- <i>Limited Access to Resources: Athletes may be denied access to external resources such as counselors, mentors, or support groups that could help them cope with abuse.</i></li> <li>- <i>Social Isolation: Athletes can be isolated within their teams, discouraged from forming bonds with teammates, or ostracized from social events.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Exploitation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Forced Performance: Athletes may be pushed to compete despite injuries or against their will, risking their health for the benefit of the team or coach.</i></li> <li>- <i>Labor Without Compensation: Athletes may be required to engage in promotional activities, extra training sessions, or other tasks without appropriate financial compensation or acknowledgment.</i></li> <li>- <i>Financial Exploitation: Coaches or agents might take an unfair share of athletes' earnings or use their image for profit without proper compensation.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Regulation of Everyday Behavior</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Control Over Diet: Strictly regulating what and when athletes eat, often leading to unhealthy eating habits or disorders.</i></li> <li>- <i>Training Schedules: Imposing grueling and inflexible training routines that leave little room for rest or personal time.</i></li> <li>- <i>Social Activities: Dictating athletes' social interactions, including who they can spend time with and where they can go, often under the guise of maintaining focus on sports.</i></li> <li>- <i>Personal Relationships: Interfering in athletes' personal lives, including romantic relationships, to maintain control over them.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Deprivation of Independence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Educational Interference: Discouraging or preventing athletes from pursuing educational opportunities to keep them dependent on their sports career.</i></li> <li>- <i>Career Limitations: Limiting athletes' ability to explore career opportunities outside of sports, ensuring they remain financially and professionally dependent on their current situation.</i></li> <li>- <i>Financial Control: Restricting access to personal finances, controlling how athletes spend their money, or denying them the ability to make financial decisions independently.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Erosion of Autonomy and Self-Esteem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Constant Destructive Criticism: Regularly belittling athletes' performance, abilities, or appearance to undermine their confidence and self-worth.</i></li> <li>- <i>Gaslighting: Manipulating athletes into doubting their own experiences and perceptions, making them question their reality and judgment.</i></li> <li>- <i>Emotional Manipulation: Using guilt, fear, or affection as tools to control athletes' behavior and decisions, creating a dependency on the abuser's approval.</i></li> <li>- <i>Public Humiliation: Criticizing or punishing athletes publicly to shame them and erode their self-esteem.</i></li> </ul>



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