



A Study on Negative Human Rights-Related Experiences of Female College Student Athletes in South Korea

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to describe negative experiences related to human rights among female college student athletes in South Korea. For this purpose, qualitative research methods were used in this study. A total of 10 female college athletes participated in in-depth interviews, and the interview was conducted from March 1 to September 1, 2021. The main research results are as follows. First of all, most female college athletes who participated in the interview revealed that they had experienced physical or psychological harassment and abuse since elementary school. Second, female college student athletes experienced pressure with respect to their freedom and self-determination. It was found that life as an athlete is controlled by way of limiting the athletes' right to self-determination including restriction on appearance, being excluded from various college activities and restrictions on socializing due to curfews. Third, participants demonstrated that the perpetrators were senior athletes and coach. Therefore, the study indicated that it is a fact of life at college level that female college athletes have experienced physical and verbal violence in sport. As such, human rights education and policies are needed to promote the human rights of female college students.

Key words: college student athlete, female athlete, human rights, harassment, abuse

Introduction

Cases of Human Rights Violence in Sports

According to the United Nations (UN), human rights are rights inherent to all human beings regardless of nationality, sex, race, ethnicity, language or religion (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/what-are-human-rights>). Human rights include the right to life which implies

the rights to food, education, work, health, and liberty without discrimination.

The discussion of human rights in sports has become an important issue after several cases of abuse involving athletes have come to light around the world. In particular, some recent cases have had a major impact on people around the world and have raised awareness about human rights in sports. In November 2016, Andy Woodward, a former player in the English football league, spoke publicly to the Guardian newspaper about his experience of child sexual abuse by former coach Barry Bennell (The Guardian, 16 November 2016). After the initial report, the Football Association, the

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Scottish Football Association, several football clubs, and the police launched an investigation wherein more than 350 victims were reported.

In September 2016, Rachael Denhollander, a former professional gymnast, contacted the Indianapolis Star and exposed Larry Nassar's sexual abuse of gymnasts in the United States (Indianapolis Star, 12 September 2016). The scandal revealed that Lawrence Nassar, the team doctor for the U.S. women's national gymnastics team, used his job as a team doctor to sexually abuse many athletes (CNN, 5 February 2018).

In 2020, Human Rights Watch also reported widespread abuse within sports in Japan. According to a Human Rights Watch report, the experiences of more than 800 athletes in 50 sports were surveyed, including the direct records of athletes being physically, verbally or sexually abused (Human Rights Watch, 2020). The report is titled "I Was Hit So Many Times I Can't Count", and if the Covid-19, a global epidemic, had not spread, the report would have been released the week the Tokyo Olympics were to begin (Reuters, 20 July 2020).

In South Korea, a month before the 2018 Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, it was reported that Cho Jae-beom, a coach of the national skating team, sexually assaulted Shim Suk-hee, a member of the national skating team. In addition, a number of team victims also came forward and an investigation was conducted, wherein on December 10, 2021, the Supreme Court sentenced Cho Jae-beom to 13 years in prison. Also, in 2020, Choi Sook-hyun, a member of the triathlon national team, committed suicide due to physical punishment by a coach and harassment by senior teammates.

Policies to Prevent Abuse and Harassment

Due to several cases of abuse of athletes, international sports organizations have discussed and emphasized principles for preventing harassment and abuse in sports. In particular, the International Olympic

Committee (IOC) emphasizes human rights in sports as a key issue and clearly specifies sports human rights in its Sports Charter to promote awareness.

According to Principle 4 of the Olympic Charter, the practice of sport is a human right. Every individual must have the possibility of practicing sport, without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play. Also, Rule 2.18 states that "the IOC's role is to promote safe sport and the protection of athletes from all forms of harassment and abuse", emphasizing the need to protect athletes from harassment and abuse (International Olympic Committee, 2021).

In 2007, the IOC announced the IOC Consensus Statement on Sexual Harassment and Abuse in Sport, and in 2016 the IOC Consensus Statement on harassment and abuse in sport came out. These consensus statements detail the IOC's position on harassment and abuse in sport. In 2019, the Olympic Charter was amended to include 'Safe Sport', and in 2020 the IOC published recommendations for a Human Rights Strategy. As such, the IOC clearly emphasizes human rights in sports and is currently working to promote its development (International Olympic Committee, 2022).

In the past five years, the relevant Korean public sports organizations such as the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea, and the Korean Sport & Olympic Committee have all promoted policies related to sports human rights. First, the Korean government launched the Sports Innovation Committee under the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in February 2019, held more than 100 meetings, and announced seven (1st-7th) guidelines for the protection of human rights in sports. Second, in 2020, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism inaugurated the Sports Ethics Center which is providing sports human rights education for sports' leaders and athletes. Third, in 2019, the Korean Sport and Olympic Committee established a sports human

rights counseling office in the Jincheon Athletes' Village, and is currently supporting human rights counseling for athletes. Fourth, the Korea University Sports Federation (KUSF) added the item 'Improvement of human rights' to the evaluation index of college sports for the human rights of college student athletes. In addition, human rights education was conducted for 116 colleges and 4,016 college student athletes in 2021, and the 'guideline on sports human rights for college sports' will be published and distributed to 126 colleges in 2022.

Literature Review

In a previous study, Fasting et al. (2003) investigated sexual harassment and abuse experienced among Norwegian elite female athletics. Of a total of 553 Norwegian elite female athletes, 45% (n=246) had experienced sexual harassment and abuse. In a sport setting, 55% (n=165) admitted to having experienced sexual harassment and abuse.

In Australia, Leahy et al. (2002) investigated the prevalence of sexual abuse in competitive sports. Of a total of 370 Australian athletes in competitive sports (elite vs club), 26.8% (n=99) reported having experienced sexual abuse within their lifetime. Female athletes (n=65) experienced more sexual abuse than male athletes (n=34).

In the U.K., Stafford et al. (2015) conducted a survey of early adults (18 to 22 years old) on psychological harassment and abuse in sports (in childhood until the age of 16). A great majority of these children sport participants (75%; n=4554) reported having experienced emotional harm at least once in their sport.

In the Netherlands and Belgium, Vertommen et al. (2016) surveyed 4043 adults in a large-scale prevalence study of interpersonal violence in sports among children. According to the results of the study, 38% (n=1,520) of Dutch and Belgian children had experienced psychological violence, 11% (n=455) physical violence, and 14% (n=578) sexual violence.

In a recent study, LeRoy (2021) analyzed 59 federal and state court cases and 110 rules for student athletes in college who have experienced harassment and abuse in NCAA. The results showed that first, complainants or victims were made up of more women (44 cases, 74.6%) than men (15 cases, 25.4%). In other words, it shows that the victims of harassment and abuse are far more likely to be women rather than men. Second, in the types of relationships, coach-player interactions (31 cases, 52.5%) were the most common, followed by administrator-player relationship (20 cases, 36.4%), player-non-player student relationship (16 cases, 27.1%), and player-player disconnection (10 cases, 16.9%). Third, looking at the frequency of different types, verbal harassment (19 cases, 32.2%) was the most common, followed by sexual harassment (17 cases, 28.8%), and physical harassment (16 cases, 27.1%). Finally, LeRoy pointed out that the number of cases and lawsuits has increased in recent years since 1981, and showed that the harassment and abuse in college sports are an important challenge that must urgently be solved by the NCAA in the United States.

In South Korea, although there have not been many academic studies on the human rights of student athletes since the 2000s, research has been conducted on the topics of sport environment of student athletes, human rights education, and related policies and laws (Han, 2014; Kang, 2003; Lee et al., 2007; Yu & Yi, 2004).

In recent research carried out in South Korea, first of all, studies were made on the protection of human rights of student athletes such as the prevention of (sexual) violence and rights to learn (due to low academic performance) (An & Kim, 2020; Jung, 2021; Kim, 2020). Second, sports human rights education, law and policy-related studies (Goh, 2021; Yu, 2021) were published. Third, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea set up a special investigation team on sports human rights in 2019 to investigate the prevalence of human rights violations in sports. The National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2019a) investigated a total of 57,557 elementary, middle, and

high school athletes, wherein students responded that they had experienced verbal harassment and abuse (15.7%; n=9,035), physical harassment and abuse (14.7%; n=8,440), as well as sexual harassment and abuse (3.8%; n=2,212).

In addition, the National Human Rights Commission (2019b) surveyed human rights violations among 7031 (male = 4050, female = 674) student athletes in college, to which 4924 college student athletes responded. According to the results, 31% (n=1,514) had experienced verbal harassment and abuse, 33% (n=1,613) physical harassment and abuse, and 9.6% (n=473) sexual harassment and abuse, which is 2-3 times higher than that of elementary, middle, and high school student athletes.

The Necessity of Research

For a long time, harassment and abuse cases related to human rights in sports have continued around the world and in Korea. The negative experiences related to human rights experienced by athletes in sports are still ongoing today. So international organizations have established policies to prevent abuse and harassment. In addition, Korea also recently enacted policies in public institutions and organizations, and is trying to the education to prevent sports violence.

However, according to the literature review, despite these efforts, harassment and abuse related to human rights in sports have not disappeared even today. Therefore, policies, education, and research to prevent sports violence must be continued, and there is a necessity of the research. Also, in this research, it will emphasize the necessity of continuous policy without stopping policy and education.

It seems that student athletes in college who are in their early adulthood without the protection of families and schools may end up having negative experiences or violations of their various human rights in Korea. That being said, not much research has been done so far on this issue because the subject of human rights

is a sensitive one, especially when it comes to the experiences of student athletes. In particular, fewer studies have been conducted on college students compared to adults and children.

Qualitative research on the in-depth experience of college athletes with respect to their human rights is still insufficient. Moreover, there are fewer studies on female athletes than male athletes. According to a recent qualitative study of college student athletes by Lim et al. (2021), college student athletes are not being allowed full self-determination while their freedom is still being suppressed. Also, many college athletes were experiencing isolation from the college culture by being excluded from normal college life such as school field trips (M.T. in Korean) and club activities. However, the study participants consisted solely of male college athletes.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to describe the negative experiences of female college athletes insofar as their human rights are concerned. This study thus focuses on a qualitative study of the experiences of female athletes. Furthermore, this paper will describe what kind of isolation experiences female college athletes have and how they experience harassment and abuse in direct violation of their human rights.

Methods

Participants

The main purpose of this study is to analyze negative experiences related to human rights of female college student athletes in South Korea. A total of 10 female college athletes participated in the study. The research participants were recommended by university professors, and they tried to select student athletes in as many different sports as possible. The characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

The participants ranged in age from 22 to 24 (2nd - 4th grade of university), and the schools were located in Seoul, Gyeonggi-do, and Chungcheongbuk-do in

Table 1. Participants

Participant	Sport		Accommodation	College	School year
C. W	Soccer	Team	Individual living	D Univ.	Sophomore
S. W	Soccer	Team	Individual living	D Univ.	Sophomore
C. K	Tennis	Individual	Individual living	D Univ.	Sophomore
R. Y	Golf	Individual	Individual living	D Univ.	Sophomore
L. H	Table Tennis	Individual	Dormitory	Y Univ.	Senior
O. M	Kendo (Japanese fencing)	Individual	Dormitory	Y Univ.	Junior
S. M	Kendo (Japanese fencing)	Individual	Dormitory	Y Univ.	Junior
K. J	Judo	Individual	Dormitory	Y Univ.	Junior
S. S	Handball	Team	Dormitory	H Univ.	Senior
K. H	Field hockey	Team	Dormitory	H Univ.	Senior

South Korea. According to the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2021), the experience of being evaluated for body shape or appearance by a coach or team mate was higher in individual sports (14%) than in group sports (7%). In this study, 4 athletes on team sports and 6 athletes on individual sports were selected. Also, according to the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2019b), 84% of college athletes were living in dormitories, and it was investigated that they must obtain permission and are living under surveillance and control. Thus, in this study, 6 athletes on dormitory and 4 athletes on individual living were selected.

Data Collection

In this study, qualitative research was employed to describe the athletes' experiences in more depth, while a literature review and in-depth interviews were conducted as data collection methods. The data collection period was from March 1 to September 1, 2021. In particular, this was a period when all Koreans could not go out without masks due to COVID-19, and classes at universities were recommended to be conducted online (non-face-to-face) instead of attending (face-to-face) in classrooms.

In particular, since the topic of this study is a

sensitive subject, prior to the start of the study, permission was obtained from the officials and professors of the universities where researchers and a certain level of rapport were already formed. Participants in the study were recommended by professors who tried to select student athletes in various sports as much as possible.

Also, special care was taken to ensure that personally identifiable information was not revealed during and after the interview. Although contact information such as name, e-mail, and phone number was collected for personal information collection, personally identifiable information was not shared with anyone other than the interviewer, and no personally identifiable information was included in the research report. In addition, the interviewees were anonymously processed with alphabetic names such as A, B, and C, and all interview data was safely stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office.

The in-depth interview was a one-on-one personal interview, wherein a semi-structured form of in-depth interview was used. Each interview lasted from about 60 to 90 minutes, while the place and time of the interview were selected by the participants. It was informed that the athlete could stop the interview at any time if she did not wish to be interviewed during the interview.

Table 2. Interview question

Interview question
1. Personal information
(1) What is your current grade (age) and sport?
(2) When did you start exercising as an athlete?
2. Negative experience as a college student
(1) What are the difficulties of college life as a college student?
(2) What are the difficulties of college life as an athlete?
3. Negative experience as an athlete
(1) How many hours do you exercise per day?
(2) Have you ever experienced violence (physical, verbal, sexual)? Or have you seen it?
(3) If you have experienced violence, who was the perpetrator?

The interview questions consist of three main parts. The first is the personal information question for personal background. The second is the Negative experience as a college student question. The third question is about the negative human rights experience as an athlete. Details are shown in Table 2.

Trustworthiness of the Data

The contents of the in-depth interview were transcribed with a view to extracting meaning through the coding process for each subject. To ensure trustworthiness of this research, “triangulation,” “member checking,” “peer debriefing” were used.

First, ‘Triangulation’ was used to increase the reliability of the data analysis process. Data were collected from multiple sources, which included 19 participant interviews, journal articles, public institution documents, promotional materials and newspaper data. Second, “member checking” was utilized to determine the credibility of the research results. After recording the interviews, transcriptions were made and emailed to participants. Third, for ‘peer debriefing’, external auditors were contacted to review the entire project. Three researchers were consisting of a professor, a PhD in sports sociology, and a graduate student. Throughout the study, the researchers consulted with three peer

reviewers to control their own bias in interpreting the data. The researchers met regularly with three peer reviewers to discuss findings and interpretations. The peer reviewers read data segments and themes, and evaluated possible findings with the researcher. This comprehensive review by peers provided redundant checks for trustworthiness of the data throughout all stages of the research process.

Results and Discussion

Experience of Violence

Physical Harassment and Abuse

“I did get hit in elementary school, but I endured it, and in middle school, I got hit a lot with a racket when I practiced and lost games.” (C.K.)

“I was hit (physically) when I was in middle and high school. (As punishment) I did more physical exercise and more running. But certainly at university not at all.” (L.H.)

According to the participants in this study, most of the college female athletes stated that their experiences had included physical harassment and abuse in elementary, middle, and high school. In previous

studies, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2019b) stated that 33% (1,613) of college athletes experienced physical harassment and abuse, while 15.8% (n=255) of those had experienced physical harassment and abuse more than once. In addition, the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2020) studied human rights violations among elite female athletes. They found that college athletes (9%) had experienced physical harassment and abuse, while middle, high school and adult athletes (4-5%) had experienced physical harassment and abuse. Therefore, when integrating quantitative and qualitative studies, it was confirmed that some college female athletes have experienced physical harassment and abuse in sports.

In the prevalence study of Europe, Vertommen et al. (2016) stated they in Netherlands and Belgium experienced psychological violence (38%), physical violence (11%), and sexual violence (14%) in sports of their childhood. In the U.S., LeRoy (2021) analyzed 59 federal and state court cases and 110 rules related to violence in the NCAA. College student athletes experienced verbal harassment (19 cases, 32.2%), serial harassment (17 cases, 28.8%), and physical harassment (16 cases, 27.1%) in the legal disputes of NCAA. Therefore, it suggests that negative violence experience in sports is a global problem including Korea, and sports culture for safe sports is a challenge that must be solved.

However, there were many participants who stated that physical harassment and abuse in college were minimal compared to elementary, middle, and high schools. Participants did not deny have had physical harassment and abuse in sports, but many agreed that it is decreasing. Thus, it is carefully assumed that physical harassment and abuse in college sports have decreased due to exposure to sports human rights in the media over the past 10 years and the efforts of public institutions and schools.

Psychological Harassment and Abuse

“Once there is something to be done, the juniors

have to move quickly, and the seniors scold me if the sound is too low (when I usually practice training). There was a locker room that everyone shared. But the youngest members clean up there. I get in trouble when I'm not clean or when I look bad to my coach during exercise.” (C.K.)

According to the definition adopted in the IOC Consensus Statement, psychological abuse is a pattern of deliberate, prolonged, repeated non-contact behaviors within a power-differentiated relationship (Mountjoy et al., 2016). It includes threatening, shouting, humiliating, ignoring, excessive criticism, etc.

In a study by the National Human Rights Commission (2019b), 29% (n=1,173) of college athletes answered that they had experienced doing unwanted errands, laundry, and cleaning on behalf of senior athletes. According to the results of this study, junior athletes stated that they should do errands, laundry, and cleaning for senior players. Moreover, if female athletes are not good at this, it has been shown that they have experienced verbal or psychological harassment and abuse by their seniors. These rules and controls are caused by an imbalance of power between senior and junior athletes, not rules determined by mutual consent. Therefore, in this interview, the hierarchical culture that exists in sports was confirmed, while harassment and abuse seem to occur on a daily basis.

Roberts et al. (2020) investigated 43 qualitative studies related to the psychological, physical, and sexual abuse of athletes. The systematic review indicated that power imbalance is related to psychological, physical and sexual abuse. Athletes appeared to heavily depend on power possessed by coaches. For example, athletes needed to be identified as a team member and benefit from the coach to achieve success. The fear of losing a relationship with the coach kept athletes from resisting abuse. Coaches used abuse and violence (e.g., humiliation, verbal threats, shouting) to make discipline and control (Roberts et al., 2020).

In addition, Roberts et al. (2020) demonstrated that

the belief in the effect of abuse to improve performance was related to psychological abuse. For example, coaches purportedly used psychologically abusive tactics to strengthen performance and prevent failure. The false belief that abuse and violence help improve performance has been accepted by many athletes who believed that abuse could make them excellent athletes.

In summary, therefore, combining interviews and previous studies, it seems that athletes rely on coaches' power, and power imbalance is related to physical and psychological abuse. Also, the false belief that abuse helps to improve performance is motivating.

The National Human Rights Commission (2019b) reported that 31% of university student athletes experienced verbal abuse (n=1,514), 33% physical violence (n=1,613), and 9.6% sexual violence (n=473). Although experiences of sexual violence were not stated in the interview, negative experiences of verbal or psychological and physical harassment and abuse were stated in the interview. Because the research topic is a sensitive issue, there was a limit to expressing negative experiences verbally through interviews. However, as a result of previous studies and this interview, it was found that female college athletes still experience various types of violence in their daily life.

Suppression of Self-Determination

Restriction on Appearance

“Until my junior years, the hair perm and hair color are not allowed, and only the seniors are available, it is possible to dye the hair color.... The coach doesn't like that very much...No nail art, no piercing earrings. I can do it when I go out, but the lower grades (freshman, sophomore, junior) can't” (O.M.)

According to the participants of the study, nail art and piercing ears, which are commonly used by college students in general, are prohibited from freshman,

sophomore, and junior because the coach does not like it. This shows the hierarchical structure and the power imbalance between female athletes and coach. The student athlete's appearance was under the control of the coach.

Deprived of Opportunity as a College Student

“They (ordinary college students) went to Everland (an amusement park in Korea) for M.T. (overnight trip to promote friendship among college students), but I exercised instead because the competition was next week. And at that time, I couldn't attend O.T. (New Student Orientation) because it was a match day. It's a pity because...it seems like I got the feeling that I didn't have any sort of freedom at all.” (K.J.)

Excessive competition and meritocracy in sports can lead coaches using any behavior, including violence, to win. Also, violence can become a vehicle for better performance when players become used to these dominant values without being critical of such behavior.

Student athletes in college comprise both college students and athletes. However, as a college student, there seems to be a lack of opportunities to gain various experiences other than training. For example, according to the interview, there were many participants who rarely attended regular school life such as O.T., M.T., and university clubs. Athletes who live on campus tend to center more on training time, such that participation in classes and studying were obstacles to their success as athletes.

According to a previous study, Yu & Yi (2004) demonstrated that athletes form a unique culture that differs from the school culture of ordinary students. In addition, Hong & Yu (2007) pointed out that student athletes experience some sort of an 'island' culture by being isolated from ordinary students. Therefore, in the case of athletes, policies should be prepared and implemented to increase opportunities for various

experiences such as studies, friendships with general university students, and clubs to reduce experiences of “isolation” and “alienation” among college students who are also athletes.

Restrictions on Socializing (Curfews)

According to the Human Rights Commission (2019b), 84% (n=4,418) of university athletes currently live in dormitories or similar accommodation in universities. Six out of 10 participants in this study were living in school dormitories, and due to Covid-19 they were not free to venture outside without permission from the school. Covid-19 began in November 2019, and at the time of conducting this study in 2021, the virus was prevalent, so all universities across the country recommended non-face-to-face (online) classes. As a result, there was a difference in dormitory life between before and after the virus came along (i.e. before and after 2020).

However, according to the study participants, even before Covid-19, university student athletes had to have the coach's permission to go out on weekends, and if the coach did not allow them, they were not allowed to go outside the university at all.

“Before COVID-19, I went out on Saturdays and Sundays (out of the dormitory). I was more free then than I am now. On weekends, I usually exercise until morning on Saturdays. If the coach would go out after working out on Saturday morning, I would come in before noon on Sunday, so I tend to just go out and eat.” (O.M.)

“Because of the COVID-19, we are not allowed to go outside the dormitory at all. Just as I came out of the dorm right now, I can't just leave a place like that (on the school campus). I need to get permission (from the dormitory manager and coach). ... The original rule is that I can't even go to a convenience store here (where I'm being interviewed now) or a cafe in the school.” (K.H.)

According to a survey by the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2019a), student athletes agreed that their human rights to self-determination were violated. 26% (n=1,088) of college athletes said, “I have been unfairly restricted from free time, going out, and staying out,” while 25% (n=1005) said, “I have been restricted from hairstyle, makeup, wearing accessories, and fashion.”

This interview also showed similar results to that of the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2019b). According to the interview, before Covid-19 athletes had to get permission from coaches on weekends and holidays, and in 2021 participants said in an interview that they should always get permission from dormitory officials and coaches whenever they had to leave the dormitory due to Covid-19. Even the convenience store and gym of the school are outside the dormitory, so they can only go there with permission. This control of movement lasted for more than a year, and although it was inevitable due to the Covid-19, college student athletes were experiencing very limited movement to places outside the dormitory let alone outside the school.

Dangerously, in the systematic review, Roberts et al. (2020) emphasized and concluded that isolation enables sexual abuse. Psychological or physical isolation from social support networks was associated with sexual abuse. Coaches, for example, often restrict interaction with parents during training, and believe that isolation reduces distractions and allows them to concentrate on training. But isolation was an essential feature of the environment, especially in the case of sexual abuse of elite child athletes by coaches.

Therefore, athlete, coach, parents, and organization need to realize that isolation is vulnerable to abuse, especially sexual abuse, in sports. In conclusion, for a safe sport for athletes, the policy should move toward creating a safe space where athletes can get help if they feel danger, and minimize psychological and physical isolation of athletes.

Perpetrator

Peers or Teammates

“I got a lot of criticism about my hair and appearance, as I was in the 1st and 2nd grade. If I'm not good at training or if I'm bad at the game that day, a senior player would ask me to cut my hair... Later, I talked to him, and he said, "Your least favorite thing is to cut your hair. When you talk about hair, you listen to me well. He said it like that.” (S.S.)

According to the interviews of the participants, many of the perpetrators were teammates, especially senior athletes in Korea. In Korean culture, the age hierarchy implicitly exists in a way similar to the military hierarchy. For example, in sports, taking an authoritarian attitude toward young people because they are younger is culturally common, even if it is unreasonable and irrational. In particular, as in the military, junior athletes must obey their senior athletes unconditionally, and sometimes serious violence such as hazing may occur.

Coach

“It's much better than before, but since the coach is the one who manages the team, it's divided into upper hand and command. There's something that's kind of suppressed in that situation, but I think it'll take a long time to get rid of it.” (K.J.)

From the interviews of participants, both the coach and athlete emphasized that it is a relationship between upper hand (A) and command (B). In other words, it shows the power imbalance between the coach and the athlete. Moreover, the player felt that the violence would continue if such power imbalance was not eliminated.

According to the National Human Rights Commission of Korea (2019b), among college athletes,

the perpetrators were senior athletes (72%, n=1,154), coaches (32%, n= 516), and directors (19%, n=302). In a study in the U.K., Stafford, Alexander, and Fry (2015) reported that in terms of experience of emotional harm, perpetrators were teammates or peers (79%, n=2,312), coach or trainer (36%, n=1,056), other adults in the club (6%, n=177), and others (5%, n=144). Therefore, this study proves once again that the majority of perpetrators of violence in sports are teammates and coach.

However, college athletes stated that even if they had a negative experience from team-mates and coaches, they did not seek help from adults and institutions who could help, such as parents.

“Parents know that. My parents told me that if it was my case, I wouldn't have let it go. But even though they knew about it, they said it's inevitable. My parents just know it, but (my parents) say it's inevitable in an athletic club.” (C.K.)

According to the definitions adopted in the IOC Consensus Statement, neglect is the failure of parents or care givers to meet a child's physical and emotional needs or failure to protect a child from exposure to danger (Mountjoy et al., 2016). According to interviews, athletes tend to experience violence in sports throughout their elementary, middle and high school years, and parents treat it as 'known but inevitable' things, so both athletes and parents have yet to find a serious solution. It shows that athletes were 'neglected' without protection from their parents or adults, even if they were exposed to danger in sport.

Kim & Kwon (2019) demonstrated that in the process of acquiring an athletic club identity, student athletes experience loss of empowerment. If it happens that athletes are unable to seek help from any adult as well as their parents, it is natural to feel a loss of empowerment and helplessness. Therefore, it can be interpreted that athletes endure pain even when they experience violence or loss of empowerment (Kim & Kwon, 2019), and a vicious cycle of repeated violence

and unequal hierarchies continues unabated.

Organizational tolerance and uncritical acceptance of violence can motivate violence in sport. Organizational tolerance often shows bystanders and a culture of silence even when coach does violence to athletes. Rodriguez & Gill (2011) shows that abuse became acceptable and desirable behavior when no punishment was given to perpetrators who performed violence in sports.

That is, athletes may believe that the perpetrator will not be punished and people who report abuse are likely to suffer a backlash. Moreover, the experience of abuse is ambiguous. Also, these beliefs may give rise to beliefs that allow abuse and norms that examples allow violence in sports. Therefore, formal and clear standards for safe sport and acceptable behavior must be established and standards must promote in college and sports organizations.

Fortunately, in 2022, the Korea University Sport Federation (KUSF) is producing sports human rights promotional materials to form a human rights-friendly culture in college sports. In addition, KUSF provides human rights education program for college athletes and coaches to improve the human rights-friendly culture of the college sports. In the fall semester of 2022, sports human rights education will be implemented for freshmen and sophomores, and plans to gradually expand it in the future. Also, in 2022 punishment for violence in college sports is being strengthened. In particular, the Ministry of Education has made it mandatory to include in the student's record that school violence will not be tolerated in the recruitment of college athletes when entering universities.

In conclusion, notwithstanding the efforts by various organizations, violence still continues among college athletes in Korea and elsewhere. Therefore, training in safe sports should be made mandatory. Lastly, education for safe sport and reducing violence in sports must continue, along with policies towards the promotion of safer sports.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to describe the negative experiences of female college athletes. This study thus focuses on a qualitative study of the experiences of female athletes, and 10 female college athletes were participated in in-depth interviews.

The main research results are as follows. First, unfortunately most of the college female athletes demonstrated that they had experienced psychological and physical harassment and abuse in elementary, middle, and high school. Also, indirectly they had seen or heard of peer athletes experiencing such violence. Fortunately, however, while the psychological and physical harassment and abuse at university is a fact, it can also be said that this trend is disappearing.

Second, for adults, going out without someone's permission is a basic human right. Perhaps limiting this right would be a suppression of that basic human freedom. However, the experience of suppressing the freedom to go out was not difficult to find among female college athletes. Thus, it is fair to conclude that college student athletes are for the most part still under a lot of surveillance and control in their daily activities, even though they are adults. In addition, as college student athletes, they have had experience of being marginalized from O.T. or club activities, as well as experiencing cultural isolation. In their school life, which is centered on exercise and training, opportunities to actively participate in various school events other than classes were excluded.

Third, participants indicated that the perpetrators were senior players and coaches. Culturally, in South Korea, there is a hierarchy of age, just like the military hierarchy. Therefore, it implied that power balance still exists in the relationship between senior and junior players and between coaches and players. Third, power balance, win-take-all rewards, and isolation were classified as social structural factors that could motivate violence in sports.

Therefore, for college student athletes to have a

happy college life, active friendship with students majoring in other fields is all the more necessary and should be emphasized. In other word, 'improving the quality of relationships' should be emphasized a lot more for the sake of the student athletes' wellbeing and happiness. Finally, given the above, education and effective policies in human rights with a view to promoting the human rights of female college athletes are a must. The hope for this study is that it will help create an environment whereby the rights and interests of female college athletes are promoted based on a better understanding and awareness of their intrinsic rights as human beings.

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