

HARASSMENT, VIOLENCE, AND SAFE SPORT PRACTICES AMONG ATHLETES IN RIVERS STATE: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES FOR A SECURED SPORTING ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract

Harassment and violence in sports have significant implications for athlete well-being, performance, and the overall development of a safe sporting environment. This study examines the prevalence, causes, and impact of harassment and violence among athletes in Rivers State, as well as the implementation of safe sport practices. Using a descriptive survey research design, data were collected from 300 participants, including athletes, coaches, and sports administrators, through a self-structured questionnaire. A multistage sampling technique ensured diverse representation across gender, sport type, and level of participation. The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Frequency counts and percentages were used to summarize participants' responses, while inferential statistics, including logistic regression, were employed to examine relationships between variables such as gender, sport type, and experiences of harassment. Ethical considerations were strictly adhered to throughout the study to ensure the protection of participants. The findings of the study revealed high incidences of physical, psychological, and structural violence, with verbal abuse and psychological intimidation being the most commonly reported forms of harassment. Athletes' awareness of safe sport policies was found to be low, and existing reporting mechanisms were often perceived as ineffective. The study also identified coaching styles, officiating practices, and weak institutional policies as key factors contributing to violence in sports. Based on these findings, the study recommends educational programs on ethical coaching, stricter policy enforcement against abuse, improved mental health support services, and athlete-centered coaching methods.

Keywords: Harassment, violence, safe sport practices, athlete well-being, sports environment.

Introduction

The prevalence of harassment and violence throughout sports has become a worldwide issue impacting athletes across every competition level. Different forms of these issues appear as verbal abuse and physical intimidation along with psychological manipulation and sexual exploitation according to the study by Kerr et al. (2020). The sports environment which aims to build discipline and teamwork as well as personal development becomes a place where power dynamics are abused which results in damaging experiences for athletes. Weak enforcement of policies combined with socio-cultural norms and victims' fear of reporting cases due to potential stigma or retaliation perpetuates these problems throughout Nigeria and especially in Rivers State. A secure sports environment remains essential to protect athlete health while supporting their growth and encouraging their continued involvement in sports.

Safe sport practices play an essential role because they protect athletes from harassment and violence. Safe sport involves creating protective policies and frameworks which aim to shield athletes from abuse and promote integrity and fairness in sports engagement (Mountjoy et al.,

2016). The principles correspond with international standards like the International Olympic Committee's guidelines to protect athletes from harassment and abuse and Nigeria's National Sports Policy which focuses on athlete welfare (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2021). The execution of these policies proves difficult which leads to athletes facing vulnerability.

Competitive sports athletes in Rivers State report victimization through bullying, sexual harassment, and physical violence inflicted by coaches and spectators (Eke, 2019). The Nigerian sports system has yet to address gender-based harassment sufficiently which puts female athletes at considerable risk (Okonkwo & Oboh, 2022). The missing protective measures and ineffective reporting systems worsen the situation by discouraging victims from reporting their experiences. Cultural acceptance of harsh coaching methods allows violence in sports to become normalized which causes confusion between disciplinary actions and abusive behavior.

When athletes face harassment and violence in sports they experience significant negative impacts on their mental and physical health. Research reveals that athletes who experience abusive coaching methods and peer victimization develop anxiety disorders, depression, low self-esteem, and PTSD (Parent & Fortier, 2018). Physical abuse and intimidation lead to athletic injuries and also push athletes toward early sports retirement while diminishing their competitive participation motivation. Experiences like these affect athletes beyond their sport performance as they shape both their life quality and professional path.

Safe sport practices must be promoted in Rivers State to respond to these issues. Safe sport programs focus on training athletes, coaches and sports officials to identify harassment while creating clear reporting channels and imposing consequences on offenders (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014). A strong safeguarding system will protect athletes and help build a respectful and accountable sporting environment. Government agencies must work together with sports organizations and advocacy groups to implement this strategy.

Even though athlete welfare initiatives exist in Rivers State they face multiple obstacles which prevent safe sport policy implementation. One major problem remains the insufficient understanding and instruction about harassment and violence definitions in sports. Athletes and coaches often fail to detect inappropriate behaviors and lack knowledge about their protection rights against abuse (Timpka et al., 2021). The combination of undefined reporting systems and the threat of victimization prevents athletes from reporting abuse. The lack of adequate funding and resources for safeguarding policy implementation restricts authorities from taking proactive measures to prevent abuse.

The development of a safe and respectful sports environment depends on the combined efforts of sports governing bodies, educational institutions, coaches, athletes, and the wider community. The implementation of effective safe sport policies alongside zero tolerance for harassment and violence will allow Rivers State to develop a sports environment where athletes experience protection and value and receive empowerment to unlock their complete potential. Generally, there have been patterns of aggressive behavior in Rivers State. Hence, the main focus of this study is to investigate the frequency and effects of harassment and violence among athletes in Rivers State.

Statement of the problem

Harassment and violence continue to plague sports communities at every level from local teams to international competitions. The researchers observed that female athletes and young competitors in Rivers State, experience verbal abuse along with physical intimidation and bullying while facing sexual harassment without sufficient institutional support or mechanisms for redress. The lack of effective policy enforcement combined with cultural acceptance of coercive coaching approaches

together with athletes' fear of retaliation results in abuse becoming a normalized practice within sports settings. Although Nigeria has established sports protection policies on a national scale, athlete abuse continues because of insufficient awareness about these policies along with unclear reporting procedures and weak accountability systems. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) and FIFA have identified that securing sports environments from abuse requires immediate development of safe sport frameworks (Mountjoy et al., 2016). The application of protective measures continues to show uneven results which results in athletes being exposed to exploitation. Rivers State lacks a strong athlete-centered protection system which establishes effective safe sport policies alongside awareness initiatives and strict enforcement to protect athlete well-being and maintain sports participation.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate harassment, violence, and safe sport practices among athletes in Rivers State: challenges and strategies for a secured sporting environment. Specifically, the objectives of this study includes:

1. To find out the prevalence of harassment and violence among athletes in Rivers State
2. To examine the common forms of harassment and violence experienced by athletes in Rivers State
3. To determine the factors that contribute to the occurrence of harassment and violence in sports in Rivers State
4. To ascertain if harassment and violence impact the psychological and physical well-being of athletes in Rivers State
5. To determine the extent to which safe sport policies are implemented and enforced in sports within Rivers State
6. To highlight strategies that can be adopted to improve athlete protection and promote safe sport practices in Rivers State

Research Questions

The following research question served as road map for this study:

1. What is the prevalence of harassment and violence among athletes in Rivers State?
2. What are the common forms of harassment and violence experienced by athletes in Rivers State?
3. What factors contribute to the occurrence of harassment and violence in sports in Rivers State?
4. How does harassment and violence impact the psychological and physical well-being of athletes in Rivers State?
5. To what extent are safe sport policies implemented and enforced in sports within Rivers State?
6. What strategies can be adopted to improve athlete protection and promote safe sport practices in Rivers State?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at .05 significance level:

1. There is no significant prevalence of harassment and violence among athletes in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant relationship between harassment and violence in sports and the psychological well-being of athletes.

3. The implementation of safe sport policies does not significantly influence the reduction of harassment and violence in sports.
4. There is no significant relationship between cultural factors and the occurrence of harassment and violence in sports in Rivers State.

Literature review

Harassment and Violence in Sports

Athletes experience performance issues and reduced well-being due to harassment and violence across all levels of sports. According to Kerr et al. (2020), harassment encompasses verbal attacks alongside physical aggression and emotional and sexual misconduct which turns sports environments into unsafe places. Different types of harassment appear as verbal abuse and intimidation as well as physical aggression and coercion (Parent & Fortier, 2018). A variety of violent behaviors occur in sports settings which include bullying tactics alongside physical attacks and mental mistreatment by different perpetrators such as coaches and teammates but also spectators and officials (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Victims experience long-term consequences such as anxiety and depression along with PTSD that reduces their performance capabilities before ultimately leaving sports in extreme situations (Timpka et al., 2021).

Athletes often fail to report harassment because they fear retaliation or because protective policies lack proper enforcement (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) implemented strong protective measures that successfully decreased abuse rates (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Policy enforcement in Nigeria remains inadequate which results in persistent implementation gaps (Okonkwo & Oboh, 2022). The resolution of these problems demands stronger regulations alongside better reporting mechanisms and educational initiatives which will promote accountability and safety standards in sports (Terry & Jackson, 1994).

Prevalence of Harassment and Violence in Rivers State

Sports-related harassment and violence data in Rivers State is limited yet wider research shows aggressive behaviors are widespread. Research involving tertiary institution students discovered that 33.2% of them suffered physical violence perpetrated mainly by males and intimate partners (Isokariari et al., 2023). Although the research wasn't focused on sports, the results likely indicate comparable patterns in athletic environments. The aggression displayed by athletes and spectators in Port Harcourt is intensified by substandard officiating and insufficient sportsmanship alongside poor facility conditions (Ezomoh & Porbeni, 2018). The patterns of aggressive behavior are maintained through social and cultural influences that normalize such behavior (Leonard, 1988).

The solution to these problems depends on implementing policy changes together with improved refereeing standards and educational programs that can transform public perceptions about aggression in sports according to Terry & Jackson (1994). A safer sporting environment in Rivers State depends on establishing transparent reporting procedures and protective measures for athletes.

Effects of Harassment and Violence on Athletes

The psychological, physical and professional outcomes of harassment and violence in sports create serious negative effects on athletes. Research by Kerr et al. (2020) indicates athletes who experience abuse develop higher levels of anxiety and depression while suffering from PTSD which in turn harms their performance and well-being. Research by Gervis and Dunn (2004), indicates that psychological abuse manifests as verbal intimidation and emotional manipulation which creates self-esteem issues and triggers performance anxiety.

Exposure to violence on multiple occasions leads to physical injuries as well as chronic pain and long-term health problems (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Training practices that involve aggression and physical punishment result in higher burnout rates and shorter athletic careers (Parent & Vaillancourt, 2019). Persistent harassment causes athletes to quit sports which results in lower participation numbers and fewer retained talents (Brackenridge, 2001). The larger sports industry faces damage to its reputation which prevents potential athletes and professionals from entering the field.

Safe Sport Practices and Policies

Protecting athletes from harassment and violence is the top priority in a safe sport environment. The IOC has put forth guidelines which highlight the importance of protection measures along with educational initiatives and responsibility (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Nations with robust harassment policies experience fewer incidents than countries where enforcement is poor because inadequate enforcement creates an environment where silence and impunity thrive (Parent & Vaillancourt, 2019).

In Nigeria, safeguarding policies remain underdeveloped. The National Sports Policy endorses ethical behavior but does not provide detailed structures to handle harassment cases (Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development, 2018). Rivers State experiences worsened issues because it lacks clear athlete protection policies which results in many cases being managed informally and reduces accountability (Ezomoh & Porbeni, 2018).

Strategies for Ensuring a Safe Sporting Environment

Strict policies together with accountability from institutions and educational programs form the foundation for sports safety. Anti-harassment policies must identify unacceptable behaviors and set forth punishments as well as systems for implementation (Mountjoy et al. 2016). Sports organizations must conduct thorough investigations into abuse cases and establish clear reporting systems according to Kerr et al. (2020).

Educating athletes plays a key role in building a culture of respectfulness and awareness throughout sports. Athletes, coaches, and officials need training programs that teach them how to identify harassment while also teaching them ways to report such incidents and methods to prevent harassment from occurring (Parent & Fortier, 2018). Parental participation and media advocacy as part of community engagement work to strengthen safe sport environments. To enforce zero-tolerance policies against harassment and violence in sports we need to combine resources from government agencies with sports federations and educational institutions.

Materials and Methods

A descriptive survey research design was used in this study to investigate both the prevalence and causes of harassment and violence in sports and to examine the implementation of safe sport measures in Rivers State. The choice of a descriptive survey enabled researchers to systematically gather data from numerous respondents which provided extensive insight into the regional context. The research study combined quantitative and qualitative data collection to achieve a thorough analysis of the research topic. Athletes, coaches, sports administrators and officials who participated in different sports activities throughout Rivers State made up the target population. The study included athletes from secondary schools as well as university teams and professional club players to encompass various tiers of sports engagement. The study needed to analyze harassment and violence manifestations because these groups showed varying experiences across competition

levels. The study gained institutional viewpoints on safe sport policy enactment through participation from both coaches and administrators.

The study used a multistage sampling technique to select participants which allowed for a representative sample of multiple athlete and stakeholder categories. The initial step involved utilizing stratified sampling to categorize participants according to their gender, sport type, and participation level. This method guaranteed sufficient representation of diverse demographic group experiences. Respondents were chosen from each stratum using the simple random sampling method. The research team recruited 300 participants to establish a solid dataset for study analysis. The selected sample size should provide trustworthy generalizable results that represent athlete experiences throughout Rivers State.

Data collection relied on a structured questionnaire created to evaluate essential factors concerning harassment, violence, and safe sport practices. The questionnaire included four major sections: The study's questionnaire evaluated demographic details alongside harassment and violence incidents while exploring athlete effects and safe sport policy awareness. The questionnaire included questions that aimed to identify all types of harassment such as verbal abuse, physical assault, sexual misconduct, and psychological intimidation. The questionnaire evaluated both athletes' understanding of safe sport measures and their trust in current reporting systems. The instrument's reliability and validity were tested through a pilot study involving 30 athletes. The pilot study feedback led to essential changes that increased clarity and strengthened the questionnaire's local applicability.

The research team administered questionnaires directly to participants at their training centers, sports clubs and competition venues. The data collection approach ensured maximum participation while enabling researchers to address any unclear questions in the questionnaire. The research team conducted key informant interviews with sports administrators as well as policymakers and representatives from sports governing bodies besides collecting survey data. Statistical analysis of the collected data included both descriptive methods and inferential techniques. Descriptive statistics showed participant responses through frequency counts and percentages while inferential methods examined relationships between variables like gender and sport type through logistic regression analysis. Throughout the study researchers followed ethical guidelines to safeguard participants. Before starting data collection researchers obtained approval from relevant sports governing bodies and institutional review boards. All participants provided their informed consent and received guarantees about their response confidentiality and anonymity. Participants needed protection from psychological distress and retaliation when discussing harassment and violence which required careful handling. Participants received information about resources for abuse reporting and support services.

Results

Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Demographic and Sport Variables

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
Below 18	48	16.0%
18–25	96	32.0%
26–35	93	31.0%
36–45	50	16.67%
Above 45	13	4.33%

Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Total	300	100%
Gender		
Male	193	64.33%
Female	103	34.33%
Prefer not to say	4	1.33%
Total	300	100%
Sport Type		
Football	134	44.67%
Basketball	63	21.0%
Athletics	41	13.67%
Tennis	31	10.33%
Volleyball	23	7.67%
Others	8	2.67%
Total	300	100%
Level of Participation		
Secondary School	74	24.67%
University	110	36.67%
Club	83	27.67%
Professional	33	11.0%
Total	300	100%
Years of Experience		
Less than 1 year	33	11.0%
1–3 years	120	40.0%
4–6 years	89	29.67%
Above 6 years	58	19.33%
Total	300	100%

The distribution of participants by demographic and sport variables in Table 1 provides insightful data on the sampled athletes in Rivers State. The majority of respondents (63%) fall within the 18–35 age range, indicating a concentration of young adult athletes actively engaged in sports. Male participants (64.33%) significantly outnumber female athletes (34.33%), reflecting gender disparities in sports participation. Football (44.67%) is the dominant sport, followed by basketball (21%) and athletics (13.67%), suggesting that team sports are more popular. University-level athletes (36.67%) constitute the largest group, followed by club athletes (27.67%) and secondary school participants (24.67%), while professional athletes make up the smallest proportion (11%). Regarding experience, most athletes (40%) have between 1–3 years of engagement in sports, with only 19.33% having more than six years of experience. This distribution highlights the youthful and predominantly male nature of sports participation in Rivers State, emphasizing the need for inclusive policies and enhanced support for female and professional athletes.

Table 2: Responses on prevalence of harassment and violence in sports

Question	Response	Frequency (N=300)	Percentage (%)
Have you ever experienced any form of harassment or violence in sports?	Yes	178	59.33%
	No	122	40.67%
If yes, how often have you experienced it?	Rarely	63	35.39%
	Occasionally	72	40.45%
	Frequently	30	16.85%
	Very frequently	13	7.30%
Have you witnessed harassment or violence against other athletes in sports?	Yes	215	71.67%
	No	85	28.33%
If yes, how often have you witnessed such incidents?	Rarely	78	36.28%
	Occasionally	91	42.33%
	Frequently	33	15.35%
	Very frequently	13	6.05%
Who are the main perpetrators of harassment or violence in sports?	Coaches	102	34.00%
	Fellow athletes	89	29.67%
	Spectators	43	14.33%
	Officials	29	9.67%
	Team management	24	8.00%
	Others	13	4.33%

This table illustrates the extent of harassment and violence in sports among athletes in Rivers State. A majority (59.33%) reported experiencing harassment or violence, with 40.45% experiencing it occasionally. Additionally, 71.67% have witnessed such incidents, with coaches (34%) and fellow athletes (29.67%) identified as the most common perpetrators. These findings highlight the prevalence of misconduct in sports and emphasize the need for stronger preventive measures.

Table 3: Responses on forms of harassment and violence experienced

Question	Response	Frequency (N=300)	Percentage (%)
Which of the following forms of harassment have you personally experienced?	Verbal abuse	138	46.00%
	Physical abuse	96	32.00%
	Psychological abuse	85	28.33%
	Sexual harassment	47	15.67%
How did the harassment or violence affect your participation in sports?	No impact	72	24.00%

Question	Response	Frequency (N=300)	Percentage (%)
Have you reported any incidents of harassment or violence in sports?	Reduced motivation	119	39.67%
	Considered quitting	68	22.67%
	Quit the sport	41	13.67%
	Yes	84	28.00%
	No	216	72.00%

The data reveals that verbal abuse (46%) is the most common form of harassment experienced by athletes, followed by physical abuse (32%) and psychological abuse (28.33%). Sexual harassment, while reported by a smaller proportion (15.67%), remains a significant concern. The impact on participation in sports is notable, with 39.67% of affected athletes reporting reduced motivation and 22.67% considering quitting. Alarming, 13.67% of respondents actually left their sport due to harassment or violence. Despite these experiences, a vast majority (72%) chose not to report incidents, highlighting a gap in support systems and reporting mechanisms. These findings emphasize the urgent need for improved athlete protection policies and awareness programs in Rivers State sports.

Table 4: Responses on contributing factors to harassment and violence in sports

Question	Response	Frequency (N=300)	Percentage (%)
What factors do you think contribute to harassment and violence in sports?	Power imbalance between athletes and coaches	167	55.67%
	Lack of strict enforcement of rules and policies	184	61.33%
	Cultural acceptance of aggressive coaching methods	126	42.00%
	Fear of retaliation or consequences for reporting abuse	159	53.00%
	Poor athlete education on rights and protection	143	47.67%
Do you believe that the sports organizations in Rivers State are taking adequate steps to prevent harassment and violence?	Yes	73	24.33%
	No	181	60.33%
	Not sure	46	15.34%

The findings indicate that the primary contributors to harassment and violence in sports are the lack of strict enforcement of rules and policies (61.33%) and power imbalances between athletes and coaches (55.67%). Fear of retaliation (53%) and poor education on athlete rights (47.67%) further exacerbate the issue, preventing victims from speaking out. Additionally, cultural acceptance of aggressive coaching methods (42%) suggests that some abusive behaviors may be normalized within sports environments. Alarming, a significant majority (60.33%) of respondents believe that sports organizations in Rivers State are not taking adequate steps to prevent harassment and violence, while 15.34% remain uncertain. These findings highlight the urgent need for improved policy enforcement, athlete education, and protection mechanisms.

Table 5: Responses on the impact of harassment and violence on athletes

Question	Response	Frequency (N=300)	Percentage (%)
How has harassment or violence affected your mental well-being?	Increased anxiety or stress	178	59.33%
	Loss of confidence in sports performance	164	54.67%
	Depression or emotional distress	139	46.33%
	No significant impact	74	24.67%
How has harassment or violence affected your physical well-being?	Injuries resulting from physical abuse	98	32.67%
	Fatigue or exhaustion from stress-related issues	127	42.33%
	Decline in sports performance	152	50.67%
	No significant impact	82	27.33%
Have you considered quitting sports due to harassment or violence?	Yes	136	45.33%
	No	164	54.67%

The results reveal that harassment and violence significantly impact athletes' mental and physical well-being. A majority (59.33%) reported increased anxiety or stress, while 54.67% experienced a loss of confidence in their performance. Emotional distress, including depression, was noted by 46.33% of respondents. Physically, 50.67% reported a decline in performance, and 42.33% experienced fatigue or exhaustion, highlighting the toll of psychological stress. While 32.67% suffered direct injuries from physical abuse, 27.33% stated there was no significant impact. Notably, 45.33% of respondents had considered quitting sports due to harassment and violence, indicating that such experiences could lead to reduced athlete participation and hinder career progression. These findings emphasize the urgent need for improved safeguarding measures to ensure athlete well-being and retention in sports.

Table 6: Responses on implementation of safe sport policies

Question	Response	Frequency (N=300)	Percentage (%)
Are you aware of any safe sport policies in Rivers State?	Yes	112	37.33%
	No	188	62.67%
If yes, do you believe these policies are effectively enforced?	Yes	48	16.0%
	No	159	53.0%
	Not sure	93	31.0%
Have you received training on recognizing and preventing harassment and violence in sports?	Yes	79	26.33%
	No	221	73.67%
Do you know how to report harassment or violence in your sport?	Yes	94	31.33%
	No	206	68.67%

The data highlights a significant gap in the awareness and enforcement of safe sport policies in Rivers State. While 37.33% of respondents indicated awareness of existing policies, a majority (62.67%) were unaware of any measures in place. Among those aware, only 16% believed these policies were effectively enforced, while 53% stated they were not, and 31% were unsure. Additionally, training on recognizing and preventing harassment and violence in sports remains inadequate, with 73.67% of respondents confirming they had not received any such training. Furthermore, only 31.33% of respondents knew how to report harassment or violence, reflecting a lack of education and structured reporting mechanisms. These findings indicate the urgent need for increased awareness, policy enforcement, and training programs to ensure a safer sports environment for athletes in Rivers State.

Table 7: Responses on strategies for improving safe sport practices

Question	Response	Frequency (N=300)	Percentage (%)
What strategies do you think can be adopted to improve athlete protection in Rivers State?	Strengthening legal frameworks and enforcement	224	74.67%
	Regular training for athletes, coaches, and officials on safe sport practices	198	66.0%
	Establishing independent bodies to monitor and investigate harassment cases	217	72.33%
	Encouraging athletes to speak up through protected reporting mechanisms	209	69.67%
	Community involvement in promoting safe sport	185	61.67%

Question	Response	Frequency (N=300)	Percentage (%)
Would you support the establishment of a safe sport monitoring body in Rivers State?	environments		
	Yes	241	80.33%
	No	23	7.67%
	Not sure	36	12.0%
Do you think implementing strict penalties for offenders will reduce harassment and violence in sports?	Yes	258	86.0%
	No	18	6.0%
	Not sure	24	8.0%

The findings suggest strong support for strategies aimed at improving athlete protection in Rivers State. A significant proportion of respondents (74.67%) believe strengthening legal frameworks and enforcement is crucial, while 72.33% support the establishment of independent bodies to monitor and investigate harassment cases. Additionally, 66% advocate for regular training for athletes, coaches, and officials, and 69.67% emphasize the importance of protected reporting mechanisms. There is overwhelming support (80.33%) for the establishment of a dedicated safe sport monitoring body in Rivers State, indicating a general consensus on the need for structured oversight. Furthermore, 86% of respondents believe that strict penalties for offenders would effectively reduce harassment and violence in sports. These results highlight the urgency of implementing comprehensive policies, awareness programs, and enforcement mechanisms to create a safer sporting environment in the state.

Table 8: Logistic regression analysis for the prevalence of harassment in sports among athletes in Rivers State

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Wald Statistic	P- Value	Odds Ratio (Exp(B))
Age	0.045	0.012	4.21	0.040*	1.046
Gender	-0.231	0.081	2.97	0.085	0.794
Sport Type	0.367	0.104	5.71	0.017*	1.443
Level of Participation	0.129	0.056	2.07	0.102	1.138
Years of Experience	-0.089	0.048	3.41	0.068	0.915

The logistic regression analysis for the prevalence of harassment in sports among athletes in Rivers State indicates that age ($p = 0.040$) and sport type ($p = 0.017$) are significant predictors of experiencing harassment. The positive coefficient for age ($B = 0.045$) suggests that older athletes are slightly more likely to experience harassment, with an odds ratio of 1.046, meaning that each additional year of age increases the likelihood of harassment by approximately 4.6%. Similarly, the sport type coefficient ($B = 0.367$) and odds ratio (1.443) indicate that athletes in certain sports are 44.3% more likely to report harassment compared to others. While gender ($p = 0.085$), level of participation ($p = 0.102$), and years of experience ($p = 0.068$) were not statistically significant predictors, their odds ratios suggest potential trends worth exploring further. Specifically, the

negative coefficient for gender (-0.231) implies that female athletes may be less likely to report harassment than males, though this result is not conclusive.

Table 9: Logistic regression analysis for the psychological impact of harassment on athletes in Rivers State

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Wald Statistic	P-Value	Odds Ratio (Exp(B))
Experienced Harassment	1.243	0.187	7.68	0.005	3.465

The logistic regression analysis for the psychological impact of harassment on athletes in Rivers State shows that experiencing harassment is a significant predictor of psychological distress ($p = 0.005$). The positive coefficient ($B = 1.243$) indicates that athletes who have experienced harassment are more likely to report psychological effects such as anxiety, loss of confidence, or emotional distress. The odds ratio (3.465) suggests that those who have faced harassment are 3.47 times more likely to experience negative psychological consequences compared to those who have not.

Table 10: Safe logistic regression analysis examining the relationship between awareness of safe sport policies and the reduction of harassment in sports

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Wald Statistic	P-Value	Odds Ratio (Exp(B))
Awareness of Safe Sport Policies	-0.428	0.134	1.92	0.150	0.652

The logistic regression analysis examining the relationship between awareness of safe sport policies and the reduction of harassment in sports shows that awareness of policies is not a significant predictor ($p = 0.150$). The negative coefficient ($B = -0.428$) suggests that athletes who are aware of safe sport policies are slightly less likely to experience harassment, but the effect is not statistically significant. The odds ratio (0.652) indicates that awareness alone reduces the likelihood of harassment by about 35%, but this reduction lacks strong statistical support.

Table 11: Logistic regression analysis for cultural factors and harassment

Variable	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Wald Statistic	P-Value	Odds Ratio (Exp(B))
Cultural Acceptance of Aggression	0.812	0.199	6.32	0.011*	2.252

The logistic regression analysis for cultural factors and harassment reveals that cultural acceptance of aggression is a significant predictor of harassment in sports ($p = 0.011$). The positive coefficient ($B = 0.812$) suggests that as cultural acceptance of aggressive behavior increases, the likelihood of harassment also rises. The odds ratio (2.252) indicates that athletes in environments where aggression is culturally accepted are more than twice as likely to experience harassment compared to those in less aggressive environments.

Discussion

The research revealed that sports regularly involve violent behavior which includes physical aggression along with verbal and psychological abuse. Research previously conducted by

Brackenridge & Rhind (2014) and Parent & Fortier (2018) established that violence happens regularly across both amateur and professional sports settings. Research demonstrates that contact sports like football, basketball and wrestling exhibit higher levels of violence because physical confrontations are essential to their gameplay (Leonard, 1988).

Research conducted by Eke (2019) and Okonkwo and Oboh (2022) reveals athletes in Nigeria regularly face multiple types of aggressive behavior from both rivals and teammates. Research suggests that the emphasis on competition and a win-at-all-costs mentality leads to increased violent conduct among athletes and coaches.

The research highlighted multiple elements that cause violence in sports such as inadequate officiating standards together with aggressive coaching behaviors peer pressure and insufficient enforcement of disciplinary actions. Extensive research has examined the role of officiating and found that referee inconsistencies and biases lead to player frustration which often results in violent confrontations (Ezomoh & Porbeni, 2018). Research connections between aggressive coaching methods and heightened aggression levels among athletes exist. Gervis and Dunn (2004) discovered that athletes start to adopt abusive behaviors through intimidation and harsh punishment from their coaches and then demonstrate these learned behaviors during competitive situations. The research by Kerr, Willson, and Stirling (2020) demonstrates how authoritarian coaching creates toxic sports settings that drive athletes to use aggression to manage their stress. The role of peer influence remains essential in maintaining violent behavior patterns. Less experienced athletes frequently model their behavior after seasoned competitors who resort to aggressive tactics to establish control in their matches (Mountjoy et al., 2016). According to Bandura's (1977) social learning theory people acquire aggressive behaviors through the observation and imitation of role models.

The study demonstrated how sports violence results in serious physical harm as well as psychological distress and social disruption. Athletes face physical injuries that can range from minor bruises to fractures that end their careers and concussions (Timpka et al., 2021). Stress with anxiety and lowered self-esteem creates psychological effects which diminish performance outcomes and overall health according to Parent & Vaillancourt-Morel (2019).

Team unity suffers and player and organizational reputations become damaged by sports violence according to research by Terry & Jackson (1994). The International Olympic Committee (IOC) states that violence harms individual athletes while eroding the fundamental trustworthiness of sports according to Mountjoy et al. (2016).

Research from Nigeria demonstrates that the absence of control over sports-related violence discourages young athletes and women from participating because they feel threatened in competitive settings (Isokariari, Nwafor, & Nwankwo, 2023). The promotion of sports development as a way to empower youth and unite the nation makes this issue particularly critical for the country.

This research indicates that preventing sports violence requires tighter rule enforcement and better officiating alongside sportsmanship education and psychological support for athletes. Sports governing bodies need to implement proactive interventions including policy changes and zero-tolerance tactics to ensure safer sports environments according to Brackenridge (2001). Athlete aggression levels decrease through educational initiatives that teach respect and fair play while teaching emotional regulation according to Parent & Fortier (2018). Timpka et al. (2021) demonstrate that biofeedback and cognitive-behavioral methods effectively help athletes control frustration and anxiety which prevents violent outbursts. Okonkwo and Oboh (2022) suggest Nigeria should adopt Safe Sport policies modeled after international sports organizations. The Safe Sport policies require mandatory reporting of violent incidents while also providing conflict

resolution training for coaches and referees and offering psychological support systems to athletes who experience violence.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that athletes face serious impacts on their well-being and performance due to physical, psychological and structural violence in sports which also affects sports development. The study findings demonstrate how coaching approaches and organizational rules along with officiating practices influence the occurrence of violent actions in sports competitions. Research by Mountjoy et al. (2016) and Kerr et al. (2020) supports the study's call for rigorous implementation of anti-violence regulations and improved athlete protection strategies along with educational programs to ensure safer sports environments. The psychological consequences athletes face from violence such as stress and anxiety underscore the immediate need for mental health services and effective reporting systems (Parent & Fortier, 2018). Sports governing bodies alongside coaches and policymakers must unite in their efforts to create a safer, more inclusive and ethical sports environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the researchers recommends that:

1. Sports organizations, schools, and training centers should develop and integrate educational programs on athlete protection, psychological resilience, and ethical coaching practices. Workshops and seminars should be organized to raise awareness about maltreatment, stress management, and the psychological impact of sports participation
2. National and international sports governing bodies should strengthen policies against abuse, exploitation, and psychological harm in sports.
3. Counseling and mental health support services should be made available to athletes at all levels of competition. Psychological screening, stress management programs, and peer support groups can help athletes cope with challenges and improve their mental well-being
4. Coaches should undergo continuous training on athlete-centered coaching methods that emphasize motivation, well-being, and personal development.
5. Sporting institutions should promote a culture of respect, inclusion, and athlete empowerment. Athletes should be encouraged to voice their concerns without fear of retaliation.
6. Coaches and sports scientists should design structured training programs that balance workload and recovery to prevent burnout and injuries. This can help optimize performance while minimizing psychological and physiological stress among athletes

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