

Is injury part of sports? A children's rights perspective

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journals.sagepub.com/home/irs**Hande Turkeri-Bozkurt** 

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Abstract

In recent years the violation of children's rights in sports and sports injuries have become very important research areas in their own right. There are also some studies which touch upon the significant link between the two areas. However, the research that has been undertaken dealing with the relationship between the violation of child rights and sports injuries has been very limited. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to: (a) examine the injury experiences of children who continue to receive training in volleyball as licensed athletes; (b) determine the violation of rights that have arisen in this process; and (c) explore the link between injury and violation of children's rights. Research data were collected via in-depth interviews with 21 young volleyball players, both male and female, and data analysis was conducted using the interpretative phenomenological analysis method. This study concludes that athletes are exposed to violation of rights in various forms that lead to injury. It is hypothesized that the results of this study will be taken into consideration in policy development and training planning with regard to the violation of child rights. Hence it is believed that it will increase awareness in practice.

Keywords

children's rights, emotional abuse, physical abuse, sports injury

Children's rights have been gaining importance on the world agenda since the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child drafted by Eglantyne Jebb in 1923, which was adopted by the League of Nations in 1924. The declaration was updated in 1959 as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and finalized in 1989 as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Since then, children's rights have been discussed under various topics (e.g. Chaney, 2017; Coughlin, 1968; Davidson and Horowitz, 1984; Tomescu, 2011; Woodhouse, 1996) in the academic world, but children's rights have only

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recently entered the discussion in the context of sports (Brackenridge, 2006). In this context, when talking about children's rights in sports, common research subjects include health problems due to intensive training (David, 2005); physical (David, 2005), emotional and sexual abuse (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2016; David, 2005); discrimination (David, 2005); economic exploitation (David, 2005); violence (Brackenridge et al., 2010, 2012; David, 2005) and child protection in sports (Lang and Hartill, 2015; Weber, 2009).

Approaches to children's rights in sports

The violation of children's rights in sports is a very significant subject that has been largely discussed in recent years. There is much research and many articles have been written to draw attention to this topic and to develop a solution. In addition, a wide range of organizations, institutions and working groups are dedicated to bringing awareness in order to protect children in sports. For instance, in England from the mid-1990s onwards, coaches have been trained in child protection in sports under the supervision of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (Malkin et al., 2000). In 2001 the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), which is linked with the NSPCC, created an effective model to change sports circles' attitudes to reduce the risks of abuse in sports (Boocock, 2012). In 2007 sport-specific international bodies have started to work on child welfare in sports (Alexander et al., 2011). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), through the Sport Working Group, produced the first publication for safeguarding in sports, called 'International Standards for Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport' (Brackenridge and Rhind, 2014). In later times, the International Olympic Committee agreed on consensus statements on harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Recently Daniel Rhind and Frank Owusu-Sekyere (2018), from the International Safeguarding Children in Sport Working Group, published a book called the *International Safeguards for Children in Sport: Developing and Embedding a Safeguarding Culture*.

Many years back, Rainer Martens and Vern Seefeldt developed the first children's rights framework in competition sports (Brackenridge, 2006). They published the 'Bill of Rights for Young Athletes' in 1979, which is one of the most important declarations written on children's rights. As mentioned earlier, today there are many sources and declarations with regard to the safeguarding of children in sport. However, in this research the 'Bill of Rights for Young Athletes' was chosen because: (a) none of the other studies have been clearly defined as a bill of children's rights in sport; (b) they served as a guide in terms of what should be done to protect children in sports; and (c) although the 'Bill of Rights for Young Athletes' is not currently in use, it is believed that it is very suitable for the conditions in today's sports environment.

According to the bill of rights, the rights of young athletes are as follows (Martens and Seefeldt, 1979):

- *Right to participate in sports*: The athlete must be provided with the opportunity to play in various positions in different sports branches. The philosophy of 'first child, then winning' must be adopted. Every child must have an equal amount of time in the game.

- *Right to participate at a level commensurate with maturity and ability:* Each age group should be provided with appropriate activities for their own age.
- *Right to have qualified adult leadership:* Coaches working with children must be provided with special education so that they can learn the skill level and characteristics of the age group they are working with.
- *Right to play as a child, not as an adult:* The training and competition environment must be organized in accordance with the level of physical and emotional maturity of the child involved in this environment. Coaches must avoid being too expert, and children should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their creativity and imagination.
- *Right to share in the leadership decision-making of sports participation:* Children should be allowed to share their ideas in an appropriate manner according to their level. Besides giving instructions, it is necessary to give children the opportunity to make decisions when possible.
- *Right to participate in safe and healthy environments:* Activities should not risk the physical and psychological health of the child.
- *Right to proper preparation for participation in sport:* Children must be subject to a programme to improve their basic skills before entering the competition environment. In this process, instead of competition, the child should have more opportunities for entertainment.
- *Right to an equal opportunity to strive for success:* Children should be taught that success is not only about winning, but about effort and development, and that failure is not only about losing. On the road to success, all children deserve equal opportunities and qualified education.
- *Right to be treated with dignity:* All children should be treated sensitively, respectfully, and with understanding. Insensitive adults have no place in children's sports.
- *Right to have fun in sport:* This will spontaneously occur if the first nine rights are realized.

However, these rights are frequently violated in sports environments and numerous negativities arise for child athletes as a result. For example, one negativity is physical abuse, and one problem caused by physical abuse is sports injuries (Farstad, 2007). These injuries seem to have devastating effects on the lives of child athletes, such as decreased academic performance, increased risk of depression and bad habits, withdrawal from participation in physical activity and sports, and increased health problems such as osteoarthritis and obesity (National SAFE KIDS Campaign (NSKC), 2004). Despite this, it is notable that not much research on the connection between sports injuries and violations of children's rights exists.

Injury and violations of children's rights in sports

Sports constitute a distinct world with its own values, especially for elite athletes. The most important expectations in this world are excellence, emotional intensity and risk taking. In this environment, advancing requires much struggle and sacrifice (Heil, 1993). Athletes are constantly encouraged by their coaches, families, audiences, media

and friends to participate while in pain, to be mentally strong, and to give their all.. Consequently athletes' bodies may be overburdened (Heil, 1993). Serious injuries that can arise as a result of this overload (Farstad, 2007) are the emotional and psychological trauma that athletes may experience. In particular, child athletes who have reached the elite level or the candidates who compete at the elite level are more affected by injury because the injuries could endanger their prospects of a professional sports career. Determining the factors that cause injury at this point is a key issue. The literature demonstrates that the causes of injuries are: life stress, the poor quality of coaching, biological maturity, (Caine et al., 2008), pressure of success, attentional focus, etc. (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010).

Additionally, some studies also touch upon the link between violation of children's rights, child abuse and sports injuries. For example, in his study on the protection of children's rights in sport, Farstad (2007) included injuries caused by overloading and overtraining, finding that these are types of physical abuse. In another study on abuse, harassment and maltreatment in sports, the researcher determined that the symptoms of maltreatment experienced by child athletes include a decrease in performance, loss of confidence in other people, sleeping problems, aggressive behaviours and unexplained injuries (Stirling et al., 2011). Crooks and Wolfe (2007) describe maltreatment as 'voluntary behaviour resulting in or with the potential to result in psychological damage or physical injury'. In another study, Stirling (2009) referred to the relationship between maltreatment and sports injuries.

In research that developed a model to prevent child abuse, Kerr and Stirling (2008) revealed many negligent behaviours regarding children in sports, one of which is taking unnecessary risks that will injure the child. Although not a field study, in one of her publications, Celia Brackenridge categorized sports injuries as either accidental and non-accidental, stating that Safe Sports International linked non-accidental injuries to 'violence' and thus a major violation of rights (Brackenridge, 2015). In their book, Pike and Scott (2015) discussed the link between violation of rights and problems such as athletes who play while they are in pain and/or athletes who go back to playing without fully recovering. In his book, Paulo David (2005) pointed out the link between sports injury and children's rights violations, and described injury as a type of abuse.

As has been pointed out, one of the types of violation of rights is abuse, which is also considered a potential cause of injury. Stirling (2009) describes abuse as a physical, emotional, sexual and offensive form of behaviour by the coach who actually should play a protective role. The definition of child abuse by the World Health Organization (1999) is as follows:

Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.

As seen in Stirling's definition, a key protagonist of rights violations is considered to be the coach, especially the coach who sees his/her own desires to be more important than the wishes and needs of the child (Eliasson, 2015). This is one of the main reasons

that children are put at risk. Eliasson described this incident as ‘adult domination in sports’. Children have the tendency to take risks with regard to their own strengths and abilities in sports particularly when they are individuals approaching adulthood or when they strive to become members of a particular community (Mayall, 2000: 246). This causes them to live with health-related physical problems. In this context, the link between injury and violation of rights is very significant for a young athlete’s sports career and, obviously, this subject stimulates further discussion and development.

Research aims

In recent years violation of children’s rights in sports and sports injuries have become very important research areas in their own right, while some studies directly address the significant link between the two. However, the research dealing with the relationship between the violation of children’s rights and sports injuries is very limited. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to: (a) examine the injury experiences of children who continue to receive training in volleyball as licensed athletes; (b) determine the violation of rights that have arisen in this process; and (c) explore the link between injury and violation of children’s rights. In this study, violation of rights was examined using the framework of Martens and Seefeldt’s (1979) *Bill of Rights for Young Athletes*.

Definition of constructs

Child athletes were selected for this research, because there are few studies in the literature examining injuries from the perspective of children’s rights. Despite numerous studies on children’s rights violations and abuse in sports (e.g. Brackenridge, 1994; Brackenridge and Rhind, 2014; David, 1999; Gervis and Dunn, 2004; Lang, 2010; Leahy et al., 2008; Rulofs, 2015; Stirling and Kerr, 2009), injuries, as a crucial part of the sports lives of young athletes, have rarely been touched upon. Also, since most research on sports injuries (e.g. Noh et al., 2005; Podlog et al., 2012; Roach and Maffulli, 2003; Smith et al., 1990) has been conducted on male and female participants, this study also included male and female athletes. Participants who continued their active sports careers were preferred, so that their experiences of injury could be more closely examined. Finally, volleyball was selected as the focus in this research, because an examination of the literature on children’s rights revealed that the number of studies of team sports is limited (e.g. Cook, 2013; Gervis and Dunn, 2004; Pitchford et al., 2004; Stirling, 2010), and no research specifically focuses on volleyball.

Methodology

Since the main approach in this study is to examine the facts we are aware of but of which we do not yet have an in-depth knowledge and understanding, a phenomenological approach was adopted. The purpose of this approach is to understand the essence of a phenomenon through the experiences of participants in a case (Creswell, 2012). This study aims to investigate the link between children’s rights and injury through the experiences of young volleyball players.

Participants

The participants in this study were 21 child athletes, 13 of whom are male and eight of whom are female. The general characteristics of participants were that they were aged between 13 and 18 years, had played volleyball for at least one and, at most, 10 years, and were mostly hitters. These athletes experienced problems related to ankle sprains (Adirim and Cheng, 2003), shoulder and knee injuries (Adirim and Cheng, 2003), and chronic back and knee pain, which is in parallel with the literature.

Recruitment

Following the approval of the Ethics Commission of Hacettepe University, a purposeful sampling method, namely the criterion sampling technique outlined by Patton (1990), was used to recruit participants. The purposeful sampling method is preferred when an in-depth understanding of a subject, rather than empirical generalization, is sought. The purpose of criterion sampling is to ensure that participants meet the criteria previously prepared by the researcher in accordance with the research problem (Patton, 1990). The following criteria were used in the selection of participants. The participant: (a) was a registered athlete on a volleyball team; (b) actively plays volleyball; (c) experienced an injury that affected performance; and (d) even though currently not injured, had an injury before and returned to the sport. All individuals meeting these criteria were included in the study.

During the data collection phase, first, sports clubs with volleyball youth branches active in the researchers' city of residence were identified and interviews conducted. At the saturation point where the content of interviews started to repeat, the interviews with athletes, parents and coaches were terminated. Appointments were made by telephone with each participant, and the interviews were conducted on a specified day and time.

Before the interviews, participants were given consent forms providing information on the goal of the study and the process, and asked to sign to indicate their approval. They were also informed about the content of the questions. Furthermore, their permission for voice recording was obtained. One copy of the forms was archived by the researcher, and another was given to the participants. The permission of the parents of under-aged athletes was also obtained.

Data collection and analysis

Research data were collected via semi-structured in-depth interviews with all participants. The interviews lasted between 25 and 60 minutes. The place of the interviews was quiet and calm, and participants felt comfortable and safe.

Following the data collection process, interviews were transcribed verbatim (word-for-word) and the text sent to the participants, who were asked to correct the information as they wished. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted on the text finalized by participants (Smith et al., 2009).

In the first phase, the transcription of one athlete was read repeatedly, and the first themes of the study were derived by combining his/her statements relevant to the goal of

the study. Then, these initial themes were gathered and classified under a couple of main themes. After the same procedure was performed for each participant, the main themes were integrated to conceptualize the final main and sub-themes of the research.

Ethical considerations

The interviewer, considering that some participants are children, tried to develop trust-based contact with interviewees, and assured them that nothing would be shared with coaches or parents outside the interview room. The researcher easily established a connection with the participants thanks to her undergraduate education in psychology and as a former volleyball player. On the other hand, as she was obliged to quit sports because of an injury, data analysis was performed separately by two researchers and crosschecked to avoid impartiality issues due to the subjective position of one researcher. Finally, pseudonyms were used instead of real names when conveying the findings to protect the confidentiality of participants.

Findings

In this research, which examines injuries from the perspective of children and their rights, three major themes were identified after analysing the findings obtained from the interviews with athletes. These themes are: 1. injury experience of child athletes; 2. violations of rights in volleyball; and 3. benefits of volleyball. Details of these main themes and their sub-themes are provided below.

Injury experiences of child athletes

The data related to this theme were obtained by examining what the athletes felt before, during and after injury, and their experiences. A significant proportion of the athletes stated that they did not think much about injuries, thought injuries were normal, and continued to play despite being injured. However, other athletes reported considering their efforts wasted when they were injured, they were sad when they were first injured, they had experienced intense fear of another injury, and this felt 'like the end of the world'. Below are some examples of the athletes' discourse on this issue.

Orhan: (...) for the first time in my life, I had an ankle sprain, and it was an incredible pain for me at that time. I still remember that I cried in pain. However, the second time, I was like, so what do we do? Let us put some ice on it and it will be okay. The first one upset me a bit, but then I realized that it is quite normal.

Faruk: (...) injury affects me very much. I mean, when I am injured, everything is finished for me. My world collapses. I cannot go to training, and my relations with the household worsen. I mean, I become distanced from people.

In terms of the injury experience of athletes, some said that they were upset after the injury, but easily got over their injuries with the help of their coaches, while others stated

that they feared losing their position on the team because of competition, and that the possibility of staying away from volleyball was painful for them. For example, Semra explained in the simplest terms the meaning of the injury experience for her: 'The worst part about getting injured is that you cannot play and you wonder, "will I be able to play when I am okay?"' There were times when I did not tell anyone about my pain'.

Athletes' experiences of injuries indicated that, in general, the first injury caused concern but, after that, they started viewing injuries as a part of the sport, although they still considered injuries frustrating.

Violations of rights in volleyball

One of the main themes that emerged in the analysis of research data was the violation of rights in volleyball. This main theme is covered in the framework of Martens and Seefeldt's (1979) *Bill of Rights for Young Athletes*. In this framework, three sub-themes constituting the main theme were identified.

Violation of the right to have qualified adult leadership. The right to have qualified adult leadership means that 'coaches working with children must be provided with special education so that they can learn the skill level and characteristics of the age group they are working with' (Martens and Seefeldt, 1979: 15-31). Clearly, some coaches who do not receive such training or who do not benefit from the training they receive are likely to injure athletes through wrong practices. The results of the analysis of the findings in this study indicate that athletes' rights to have qualified adult leadership were violated, making them vulnerable to injuries.

Considering the following athletes' discourse, it is obvious that some coaches are not fully aware of the skill level and characteristics of the age group they are working with.

Semra: When I was in the eighth grade, my shoulder was injured in a game. I was the hitter. They said my trainers forced me to work harder than I could manage. I then went to physiotherapy, and could not move my shoulder for a long time. Furthermore, there is still pain in my shoulder.

Based on Semra's statements, when she was in the eighth grade, her coach forced her beyond her limits and, consequently, she still has not overcome the physical effects of that injury. A coach with sufficient education and knowledge is expected not to put unnecessary pressure on athletes, which would cause them to be injured. In this situation, the right to have qualified adult leadership has been obviously violated.

Sezin: My abdominal muscle was torn and I could not play for one and a half months. Normally, we had a certain training tempo, but our coach overloaded us two weeks before the tournament. I told him that it hurt, but he did not listen to me and said it would not be a problem. I said that was fine, but five days later, I was not able to even stand up. We visited the doctor. He saw a large tear in the abdominal muscle, which was caused by overloading.

We can infer from Sezin's statements that she was subjected to overloading by her coach because of the upcoming major competition. In addition, the coach did not consider the athlete's pain, and removed the opportunity of an early intervention in a possible injury. Likewise, even though under pressure to be successful, a trainer with the necessary training is expected not to stop such situations from occurring.

Another case that reveals this sub-theme is that coaches regard injuries as normal in sports. Certainly, most injuries are preventable and avoidable. Possibly one reason coaches try to portray injuries as normal is that they want to hide their inadequacies in preventing them. The following remarks by Meltem demonstrate how her coach normalized injuries and how she internalized this.

Meltem: As coach İrem said, we are doing a performance sport and challenging our bodies. Injury is actually a good thing for us, a sign of working. That is what I think too. I think the pain in our bodies should motivate us. It is inevitable. We will ultimately face injuries. We will learn to live with ice around our legs and so on.

In this way, the internalization of injuries by the athletes is also considered an example of granting consent to the practices of power. It can be suggested that in relation to Meltem's view, considering Foucault's (1972) discourse related to power, the normalization process comes from the sports culture itself, and the power holders in sport reinforce this perception in their own interests. The basic strategy that power holders pursue, and in suggesting that their practice is beneficial to the ruled masses, effectively imposes the dominant group's own ideas and leads the masses to internalize these views. On the other hand, Foucault (1972) argued that power relations are easily accepted by the ruled masses and therefore the element of domination is not directly noticed. The normalization of Meltem's injury shows how some coaches covered up their inadequate knowledge through the imposition of their power. In this research it was found that children believed that the practices were designed for the child's own good, and this prevented them from acknowledging the domination of the coaches. Briefly, as Foucault has pointed out, they have been misled. Eventually, in the experience of injury, if the children legitimized and normalized the condition that they are subjected to – such as physical, moral, psychological violations, in the pursuit of competitive success – then the violation of rights may not be apparent. In this research, it is observed that coaches, i.e. those in power, put the athletes' bodies through extreme training routines and that this tremendous workload results in injury which is then normalized and justified through the view that this is just 'part of sports'. Consequently this leads the athletes to internalize the situation.

Violation of the right to play as a child, not as an adult. The right to play as a child, not as an adult, is expressed as follows:

The training and competition environment must be organized in accordance with the level of physical and emotional maturity of the child involved in this environment. Coaches must avoid being too expert, and children should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their creativity and imagination. (Martens and Seefeldt, 1979: 15-31)

The research data revealed that this violation of rights occurred especially through over-specialization. The interviews revealed that many participants planned to choose volleyball as a profession. When a sport is chosen as a profession, it requires specialization. However, research findings indicate that specialization may cause problems associated with injury in some cases. As a result, when an athlete has made the decision to become a professional volleyball player, the athlete feels enormous pressure both physically and emotionally from the coach and from herself/himself.

One such case is changing the athlete's playing position without his/her approval or an explanation for this. If he/she is willing to become a volleyball player, he/she needs to follow what has been said.

- Onur: Although I did not want it, my position in the school team changed and I started to play as the wing spiker. Honestly, I think that I was not good in this position. I used to hurry to the ball while playing as the middle blocker. Thus, I injured my waist.
- Araştırmacı: Did they give you any explanation?
- Onur: No, they said if I am willing to become a volleyball player I need to work in every position. Because I want to become a volleyball player I kept silent and I got injured as an outcome.

In this context it has become clear that the child athletes who chose to become professional volleyball players had been training above their capacities and had been expected to become too specialized too early. In addition to the over-training regimes, children are children first and athletes second (Bissell, 2016), and thus the children need to have their own free playtime.

Violation of the right to participate in safe and healthy environments. The right to participate in safe and healthy environments refers to the fact that 'activities should not risk the physical and psychological health of the child' (Martens and Seefeldt, 1979: 15-31). Yet a striking finding of this research is that coaches make athletes play despite their pain or injuries or turn a blind eye, which is a great risk for the child athlete's career. This approach risks the physical and psychological wellbeing of the child. When coaches allowed athletes to play despite their pain, the injuries often became chronic. However, it was also observed that the children were not aware of this. The following dialogue between Hakan and the researcher is an example of this finding.

- Hakan: My first injury was a constant pain in my metacarpal bones two years ago. The pain was so severe that I could occasionally not even walk. I continued my training like this for two to three weeks. My coach Akif then sent me to see a doctor. The doctor said that it was a stress fracture, and I was not able to play for two months.
- Researcher: Did you tell your coach that you had pain?
- Hakan: I told him. However, he said it would pass, but when it did not, he sent me to the doctor.

Some other cases that may be examples of this approach include the playing experiences of athletes when they were unable to stretch their arms because of pain, or playing until they collapsed. There are also cases in which the athlete continues to play with chronic pain for many years. The children expressed that they did this to ensure they stayed on the volleyball court and did not lose their position in the team. The interviews revealed that these cases were typical during the final matches.

Researcher: How did the problems in your knee occur?

Görkem: My knee twisted. It happened during the school finals this year. The libero bumped the ball very badly. The ball went towards the wall. I went to the ball. However, my knee twisted when I tried to stop. I left playing there, and when I returned to the club, I was treated. However, before full recovery, I continued playing.

Researcher: Why? Was that your choice?

Görkem: No.

Researcher: Did you talk about it?

Görkem: Yes I did, but...

Researcher: Why did they let you play before full recovery?

Görkem: They needed me. I had been training for one year. It was the last year for some of my friends. Actually, I did what I had to do, but it ended badly for me.

From Görkem's statements, we can understand that he normalized playing with injuries and made them part of his life. It is a dilemma for him to think that this was what he had to do and recognizing it would have negative consequences for his future.

Benefits of volleyball

The findings conveyed up till now are about the negativities created by sports experiences in the child's life. However, from the viewpoint of the child, there are also important benefits of participating in sports that makes children endure these hardships and love volleyball. Based on the children's discourse, thanks to sports, they 'learn to behave', 'expand their social circles', 'see different places', 'acquire social status', 'stay away from bad habits' and 'acquire leadership skills'. As society anticipates the socialization of the individual, the volleyball environment instils positive behaviours in these athletes.

Another important benefit of volleyball for children is that it provides them with experiences that prepare them for life. According to the interviewees, these achievements enable children to cope with the challenges of life by making them 'psychologically stronger (forget everything on the volleyball court)', instilling in them 'the ability to look at events differently', they 'learn to compete', their 'self-confidence increases', they 'develop the skills for self-expression', they 'develop problem-solving skills', 'learn discipline and tolerance', 'develop thinking skills' and learn to 'stand on their own feet'. The expressions below clearly reflect the athletes' views on these issues.

- Orhan: In terms of social status, volleyball provided me with a body form that can be distinguished from that of other people. Although I am the shortest in the team, I have a better physical structure than someone the same size as me. I am more tolerant, because we are always with the team.
- Koray: After school, I go to my training, unlike everybody else. There are those who have bad habits like smoking in high school. However, we cannot. I think this is a good thing.
- Beyza: Playing volleyball made me more disciplined. It provided me with responsibilities. Now, I have responsibilities for everybody. There are things I have to do for myself and my team. Volleyball provided me with friends, with a social environment, and with amazing memories.

Discussion

This study was designed to show the link between injuries and violations of the rights of children who receive training in volleyball as licensed athletes. The study revealed that athletes are affected emotionally by their injuries, but seek ways to accept their situation as normal and continue. The findings of this study indicated that violations of children's rights accounted for both the injuries and emotional hardships that children experienced in this process. However, it has been observed that the athletes were not aware of their rights, the violation of those rights or the link between these violations and the injuries they suffered (Eliasson, 2015). Moreover, it is noteworthy that their injury experiences were totally based on normalization processes (Pike, 2010; Pike and Scott, 2015). Most significantly, however, the findings obtained from the discourses of the athletes who participated in this study revealed that there was violation of the right to have qualified adult leadership; violation of the right to play as a child, not as an adult; and violation of the right to participate in safe and healthy environments. These are aligned to Martens and Seefeldt's (1979) declaration on children's rights.

Firstly, the study found that the coaches violated athletes' right to have qualified adult leadership through excessive physical loading and normalizing injury without considering the skill level of the age group they were working with. It is thought that normalizing injury diminishes its importance (Pike, 2010; Pike and Scott, 2015). Excessive physical loading is considered one of the most important causes of injury (Pike, 2010). This overloading is also considered by the World Health Organization (1999) as child abuse, and classified as a violation of rights. In recent years Oliver and Lloyd (2014) have also asserted that physical overloading is a form of abuse. When coaches overload child athletes this is most likely due to a lack of sufficient information or skills, and the pressure of success (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010).

Secondly, it was found that over-specialization violates children's right to play as a child, not as an adult. The research findings revealed that as a result of over-specialization, athletes regard volleyball as a profession, which positions the coach as an unquestionable power figure (Stirling and Kerr, 2009). Thus, the wrong behaviours of coaches are not questioned by athletes, and some mistakes cause injuries.

Thirdly, it was observed that coaches violated children's right to participate in safe and healthy environments by forcing them to learn to live with pain (Pike, 2010) and

forcing them to compete despite their injuries. The research findings also revealed that the fact that coaches normalize living with pain and competing, despite injuries, causes athletes to adopt this approach (Pike and Scott, 2015). Thus, either the athletes get injured, or their physical problems do not heal for months.

It was also noted that athletes normalized and internalized the negativities regarding injuries (Pike, 2010; Pike and Scott, 2015; Young, 2004). The major source for this normalization was the coach. The interviews disclosed that athletes thought their coaches knew everything, and they submitted to various types of psychological and physical pressures to meet their coaches' expectations. Stirling and Kerr (2009) similarly found that in elite sports coaches have a great impact on athletes' lives while demonstrating their own power. Drawing on Foucault (1972), and as described in the theme of 'violation of the rights to have qualified adult leadership', it can be seen that the coaches take their strength from the approval and obedience of the athletes. The athletes believe that their future career prospects lie with their coaches, and so show great respect to the knowledge and skills of their coach. By considering their own benefit, the athletes leave the control of their bodies to their coaches. They become very obedient and are dominated by their coaches as they think that this will be for their own good. Thus, the assertion of the power of the coach over athletes has a great impact on the internalization of tolerance towards the athlete's own injuries. In addition, athletes who believe that their coaches know everything have limited decision making in some cases and this demonstrates a violation of the rights according to Article 12 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2013). Article 12 states:

Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

In conclusion, similar to other research (Crooks and Wolfe, 2007; David, 2005; Farstad, 2007; Kerr and Stirling, 2008; Stirling et al., 2011; Stirling and Kerr, 2009) this study revealed that some forms of violations of children's rights may cause injuries in the sports environment. But this article further examined the link between injuries and violations of rights in depth, in terms of children's experiences and Martens and Seefeldt's (1979) *Bill of Rights for Young Athletes*. As a result, it is possible to elaborate in detail how the connection between injuries and violation of rights occurs.

Thus, why do children tolerate these violations of rights, the injuries to their bodies and living with these injuries? Considering the sub-theme 'benefits of volleyball' in the research findings, the following reasons for the children's tolerance of these situations emerged: they are used to living with a sport; they do not want to lose the prestige they have achieved; and volleyball has provided them with benefits that they would not otherwise have attained. Most importantly, these children are passionate about their sport and this passion obstructs their understanding of the violations that they might have experienced. It could be hypothesized that, in some cases, injuries may not lead to

harmful consequences and some athletes choose to play through known injuries and justify themselves by taking risks to progress or improve performance. Some could be very insistent on playing even though they have been informed about the potential risks. However, at this point, the authorities such as coaches should take action and disregard the ambition of success in order to protect the athletes; they should not let them participate in sports or drop them from the team. Perhaps the most important step in the prevention of violation of rights leading to physical harm is to raise awareness and to train both the coaches and the athletes.

Implications and recommendations

In the discussion section of this research, detailed information was given about the ways in which the violation of children's rights can cause injury in sports. This information draws attention to the importance of the relation between injury and child rights, it may become a reference for future studies and it could be beneficial for the parties that have been developing policies to govern, and the institutions that have been planning the training of, coaches. Training the coaches alone is likely to be insufficient, for it is believed that training must be mandatory for the parents, officials, sports administrators and every individual interacting with the athletes. Consequently this will raise awareness both in practice and in the academic world. It is believed that more investigation is needed. If similar research is carried out with the participation of child athletes, coaches, families and managers of different branches, it will be understood that both the children and the others' view to the relationship between injury and violation of children's rights in sports, and that if similar problems have been experienced in different branches. On the other hand, this study suggests that it will be important to examine whether the findings of rights violation leading to injuries varies between participants, for example, across individual and team sports. This too could be a focus for future studies.

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