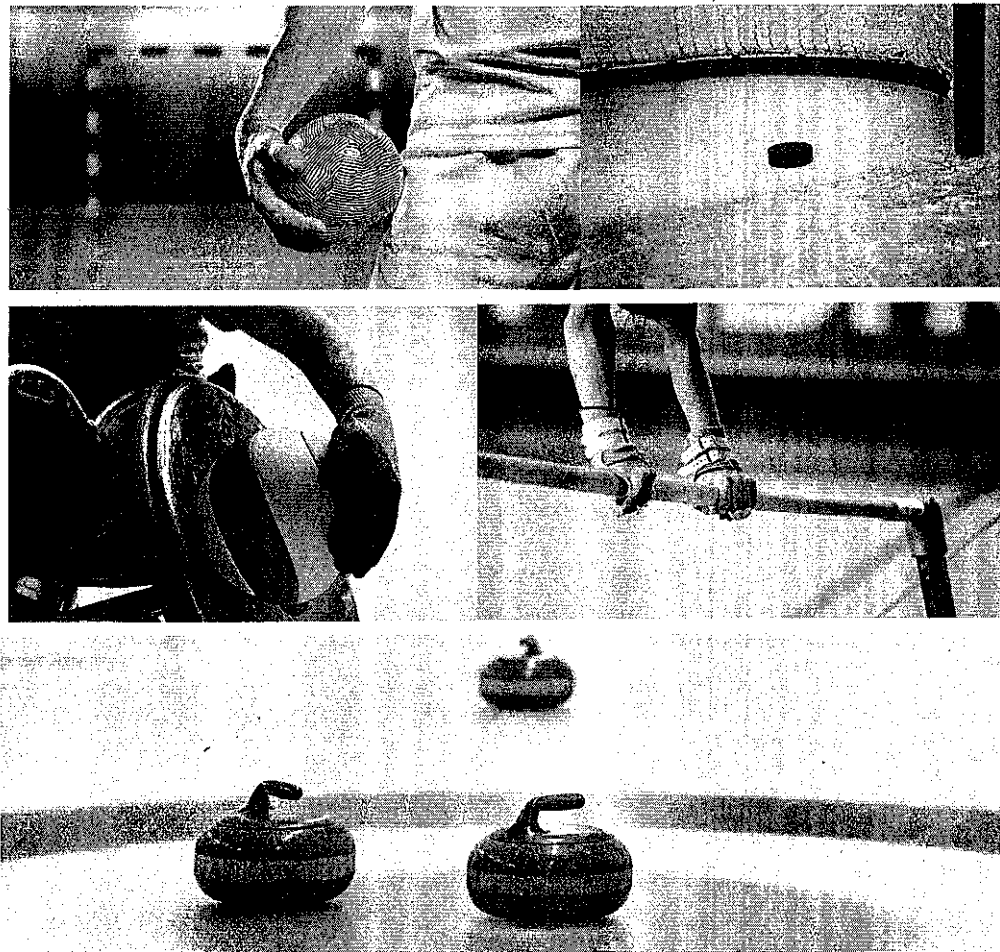


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Prevalence of Maltreatment Among Current and Former National Team Athletes

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In Partnership with AthletesCAN
April 30th, 2019

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Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to all of the current and retired athletes for the time and careful thought they devoted to completing the survey, including offering their recommendations for advancing safe sport. Undoubtedly, the sensitive and emotionally-laden nature of many of the questions posed on the survey must have created discomfort, if not distress, for some respondents but without your voices, initiatives to advance safe sport will be incomplete. We appreciate your courage in responding and thank you for contributing in such significant ways to making sport better for athletes.

The researchers are also very grateful to AthletesCAN, its Executive Director, Ashley LaBrie, the Board members and members of the Safe Sport Working Group including Allison Forsyth, Rosalind Groenweld, Lanni Marchant, Tony Walby and Neville Wright, who helped develop and pilot-test the survey and who worked tirelessly to help solicit athlete participation in the study. We wouldn't have had 1,000 respondents without you!

Finally, we express our gratitude to the Honourable Minister of Science and Sport, Kirsty Duncan, for placing the eradication of athlete maltreatment and gender-based violence in sport at the forefront.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

While recognizing the numerous potential benefits that sport participation has to offer, it is also important to acknowledge that for some athletes, sport is a harmful experience, characterized by various forms of maltreatment. Maltreatment is an umbrella term that refers to: all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (World Health Organization (2010)). Maltreatment includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse, neglect, various types of harassment, bullying and hazing. The current study sought to assess the prevalence of various forms of maltreatment experienced by current and retired National Team members. The last prevalence study of Canadian athletes' experiences was conducted over 20 years ago and since that time, the culture with respect to reporting sexual violence as well as child and youth protection has changed dramatically. Not only does this prevalence study provide a snapshot of athletes' experiences but it serves as baseline data against which to assess the impact of future preventative and intervention initiatives. It also signals the importance of addressing the human rights and welfare of athletes in Canada.

In total, 1001 athletes participated in the study by completing an online survey; of this total, 764 were current athletes and 237 were retired athletes who had left their sport within the past ten years. The most frequently experienced form of maltreatment was psychological harm followed by neglect. Sexual and physical harm were reportedly experienced to a far lesser degree. Across all categories of harm and both current and retired athletes, females reported far more harmful behaviours. Similarly, retired athletes reported higher percentages than did current athletes across all categories. In the case of psychological harm, most behaviours were enacted by coaches, followed by peers and high-performance directors. Neglectful behaviours were experienced from coaches, high performance directors and sport administrators while physically harmful behaviours were enacted primarily by coaches. Finally, most sexually harmful behaviours are reportedly executed by coaches and peers.

The findings revealed significant and positive relationships between all forms of harm (psychological, physical, sexual and neglect) and the negative health outcomes of engaging in self-harming behaviours, disordered eating behaviours/eating disorders, and having suicidal thoughts. The findings also highlight the notion that negative health outcomes are experienced by athletes long after the National Team athletic career has ended. Of those current and retired athletes who experienced abuse, bullying or discrimination, only 15% reported their experiences.

The open-ended questions on the survey enabled athletes to contribute additional comments and recommendations to advance Safe Sport. The themes that emerged from

these comments included athletes' perspectives that numerous harmful behaviours are normalized in sport and as a result, other adults in positions of trust and authority who witnessed harmful behaviours have been complicit in failing to intervene. Athletes also commented on the ways in which they are silenced through threats of negative repercussions in response to raising concerns, and not having a safe and confidential place to disclose or to report concerns. Recommendations for advancing Safe Sport included: (i) establish a mechanism to receive, investigate and adjudicate complaints independent of the National Sport Organizations; (ii) attend to all forms of maltreatment; (iii) enhance the focus on athletes' holistic well-being; (iv) implement mandatory education for all sport stakeholders; (v) strengthen accountability measures; (vi) ensure supports and resources are available for victims of maltreatment; (vii) prohibit sexual relationships and forced intimacy between athletes and those in positions of power; and (viii) conduct a climate survey of athletes' experiences on a regular basis.

INTRODUCTION

Sport is highly regarded for the potential physical, psychological and social benefits of participation across the life span and yet, the recent, highly-publicized cases of athlete abuses in Canada and abroad have challenged the popular discourse of sport being inherently good. In the last year alone, Canada has faced several cases of athlete maltreatment in sport across various sports. Maltreatment is an umbrella term that refers to: all types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (World Health Organization (2010)). Maltreatment includes sexual abuse, physical abuse, psychological abuse, neglect, various types of harassment, bullying and hazing. Previous literature in the fields of psychology, child development, social work, and to a lesser degree, sport, highlight the detrimental long-term effects that maltreatment can have on individuals' health, relationships, performance and productivity, thus signaling the importance of studying maltreatment.

In 2018, the Federal Minister of Science and Sport, the Honourable Kirsty Duncan, addressed the problem of maltreatment and gender-based violence in sport by establishing working groups to advise her on the development of policies, reporting structures, and supports for athletes (<https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/minister-duncan-announces-stronger-measures-to-eliminate-harassment-abuse-and-discrimination-in-sport-685943081.html>). Since that time, she has also instigated a helpline and new reporting mechanisms, among other important initiatives. This prevalence study, conducted in partnership with AthletesCAN, advances the Minister's efforts to address maltreatment in sport.

The last prevalence study of athletes' experiences of maltreatment in Canada was conducted over 20 years ago by Kirby & Greaves (1996). Since that time, there has been a heightened awareness of sexual violence in various sectors, in part due to the #MeToo movement. There has also been a growing awareness of other forms of maltreatment in sport such as hazing, psychological abuse, and lack of appropriate care of athletes' well-being. The high-profile cases of various forms of maltreatment in sport, nationally and internationally, have drawn increasing scrutiny by stakeholders in sport and members of the public alike. For all of these reasons, the time is right to conduct another prevalence study looking at all forms of maltreatment experienced by athletes. Not only will the results of this study provide an important snapshot of the nature of athletes' experiences but will also provide a baseline against which the impact of future interventions to enhance athletes' experiences can be assessed. Conducting this prevalence study in sport is also important because it demonstrates a commitment to addressing maltreatment thus building trust amongst stakeholders in sport and with members of the public.

The study described in this report sought to assess the prevalence of various forms of maltreatment amongst current and former Canadian National Team athletes.

What is Maltreatment?

- All types of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, negligence and commercial or other exploitation, which results in actual or potential harm to health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power (World Health Organization, 2010)
- Acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver (e.g., clergy, coach, teacher) that result in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child (CDC, 2018; CRC, 2019; Crooks & Wolfe, 2007)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to conduct a prevalence study of current and former Canadian national team athletes' experiences of maltreatment.

Research Questions

1. Types and Frequency of Harms Experienced

- What types of maltreatment are experienced?
- Which types are experienced most frequently?
- Who engages in behaviours that constitute maltreatment?

2. Types of Health Outcomes Experienced

- What health outcomes are experienced?
- Are the various types of harms related to health outcomes?

3. Climate Experienced with Respect to Disclosure and Reporting

- Do athletes feel comfortable in disclosing experiences of maltreatment?
- Do comfort levels in disclosing vary with the type of harm experienced?
- Do athletes feel comfortable in reporting experiences of maltreatment?
- Do comfort levels in reporting vary with the type of harm experienced?
- What influences athletes' willingness to disclose or report?
- Do athletes feel supported in the disclosure and reporting processes?

METHODS: HOW WAS THE STUDY CONDUCTED?

The researchers developed the survey items based on the relevant literature and existing surveys. Separate surveys were developed for current athletes and retired athletes; although the questions were the same, present tense was used for current athletes and past tense was used for retired athletes. Retired athletes included those who were former National Team members within the past ten years. Only athletes 16 years of age and older were sent the survey.

Once a draft survey was developed, feedback was received from AthletesCAN Safe Sport Committee which consists of former National Team athletes. After several feedback cycles and revisions, the survey was placed onto an online platform used by the University of Toronto. Once it was put online, we piloted tested the surveys with the AthletesCAN Safe Sport Committee to assess the length of time required to complete the survey; generally 15-20 minutes was required for survey completion. The online survey consisted of 116 closed questions (e.g. choices of "yes", "no", "often", "occasionally" etc.) plus two open-ended questions: "*Is there anything else you would like to add that has not already been discussed?*" and "*Based on your experiences, do you have any other recommendations to advance safe sport?*" Given the sensitivities of many of the questions posed on the survey, a list of mental health resources was included at the end.

The study, including the specific questions on the survey, was approved by the University of Toronto Research Ethics Board. A letter of information about the research and a recruitment message from AthletesCAN was attached to the online survey and distributed on March 12, 2019. The survey was anonymous and therefore all responses were confidential. All submitted surveys were returned directly to the research team at the University of Toronto. Over the period of the subsequent four weeks, AthletesCAN used social media outlets on a regular basis to encourage participation in the study. Upon closure of the study on April 15th, 2019, 1001 current and former athletes had submitted the survey.

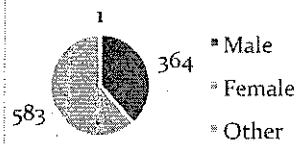
RESULTS

Who Participated?

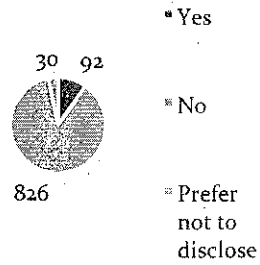
In total, 1,001 athletes submitted the online survey. Of those, 764 were current athletes and 237 were retired athletes. The mean age of all participants 27.7 years: 25.5 for current athletes and 34.4 for retired athletes.

The demographic information of the respondents is illustrated in the figures below. The total number of respondents differs in some cases below as some respondents chose not to answer select questions.

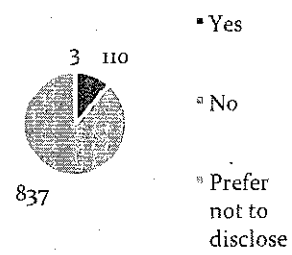
Gender



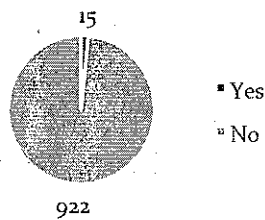
Racialized



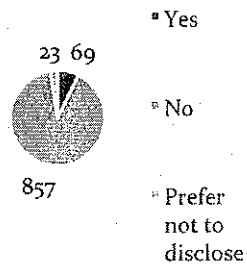
Disability



Indigenous

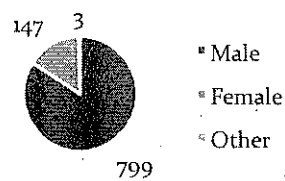


LGBTQ2I+

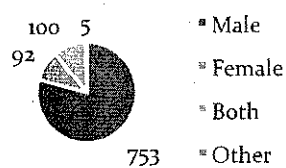


GENDER OF PRIMARY COACH?

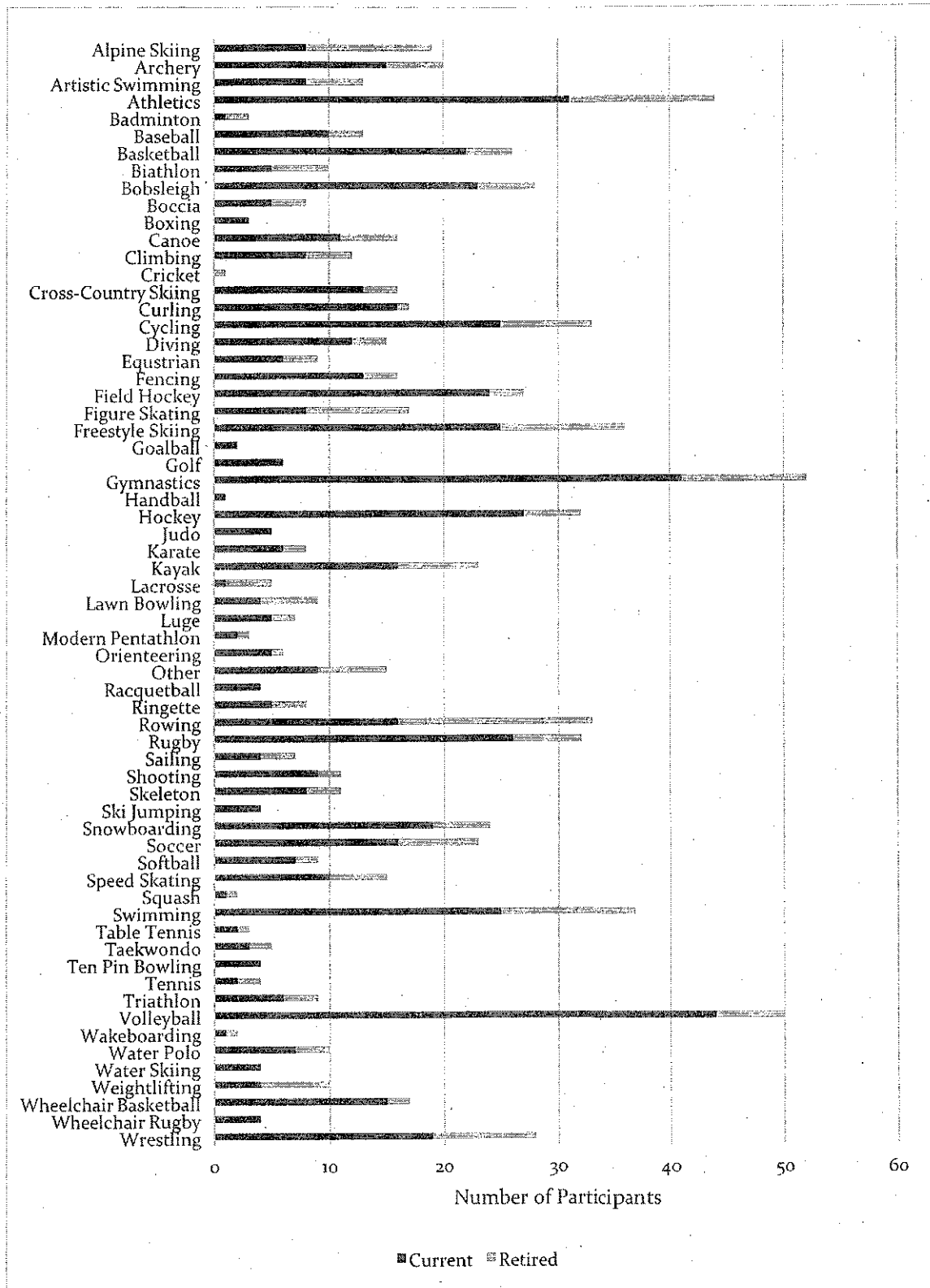
Gender of primary coach in past year on the national team?



Gender of primary coach over the course of national team career?



SPORTS REPRESENTED

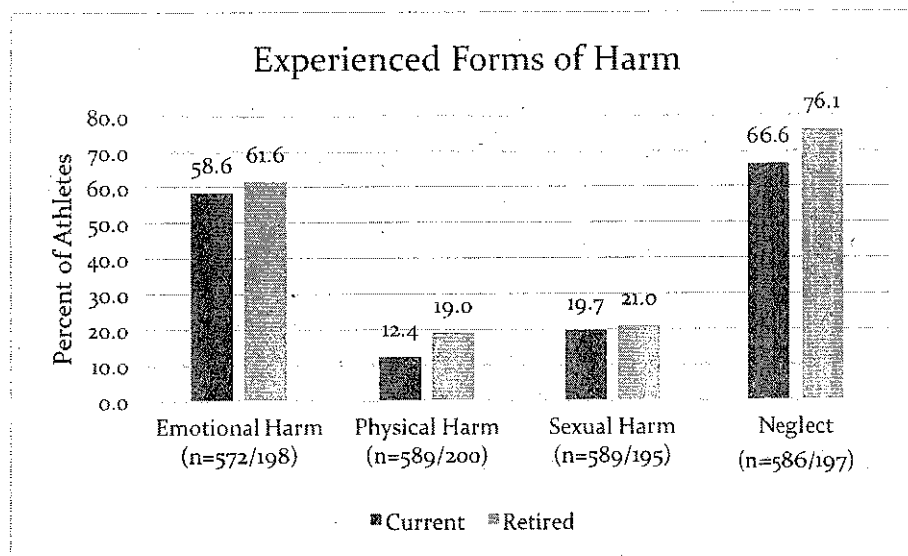


Types of Harms Experienced

1. Percentage of Athletes Reportedly Experiencing *At Least One* Harmful Behaviour in Each Category

The figure below illustrates the percentage of current and retired athletes who answered “yes” to experiencing *at least one* potentially harmful behaviour in each category. The results indicate that the highest percentage of athletes reportedly experienced at least one behaviour in the neglect category with 67% of current athletes and 76% of retired athletes experiencing at least one form of neglectful behaviour. Similarly, 59% of current athletes and 62% of retired athletes reported at least one form of psychologically harmful behaviour. Neglect and psychological harm were reported to a far greater extent than either sexual or physical harm: 20% of current athletes and 21% of retired athletes reportedly experienced at least one form of sexually harmful behaviour while only 12% of current athletes and 19% of retired athletes reportedly experienced at least one form of physically harmful behaviour.

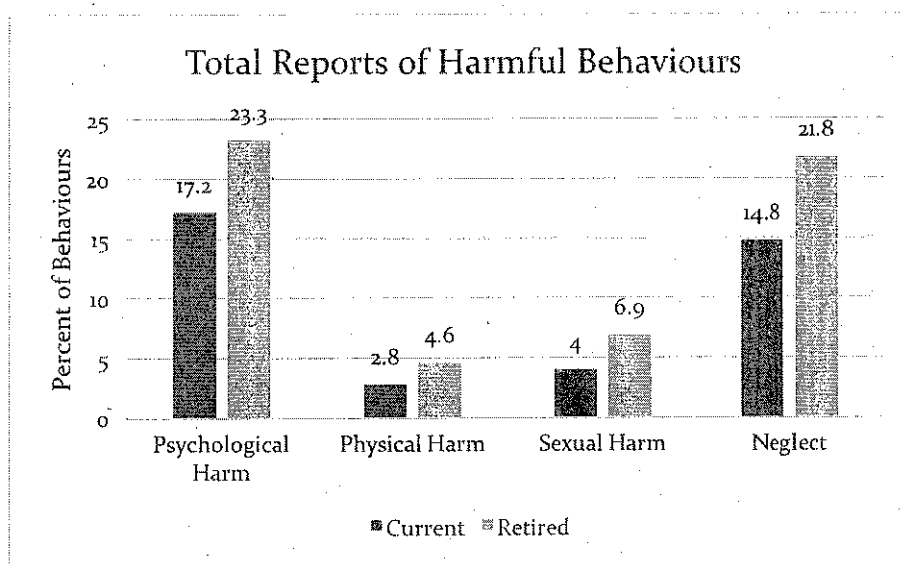
Interestingly, a greater percentage of retired athletes reportedly experienced at least one behaviour across all forms of harm compared with current athletes.



Current and Retired Athletes' Reported Experiences of *At Least One* Harmful Behaviour in each Category of Harm

2. Percentage of Harmful Behaviours in Each Category Reportedly Experienced by Current and Retired Athletes

In addition to assessing the percentage of athletes who reportedly experienced at least one form of harmful behaviour in each category we assessed the percentage of behaviours experienced in each category. In other words, we tallied the number of times athletes reportedly experienced each behaviour within each category of harm out of the total number of possible experiences. This analysis enabled comparisons between forms of harm experienced and conclusions about which forms of harm were most commonly experienced. As seen below, the most commonly experienced form of harm was psychological (current athletes: 17%; retired athletes: 23%), followed closely by neglect (current athletes: 15%; retired athletes: 22%), while far fewer sexually harmful behaviours (current athletes: 4%; retired athletes: 7%), and physically harmful behaviours were reportedly experienced (current athletes: 3%; retired athletes: 5%)

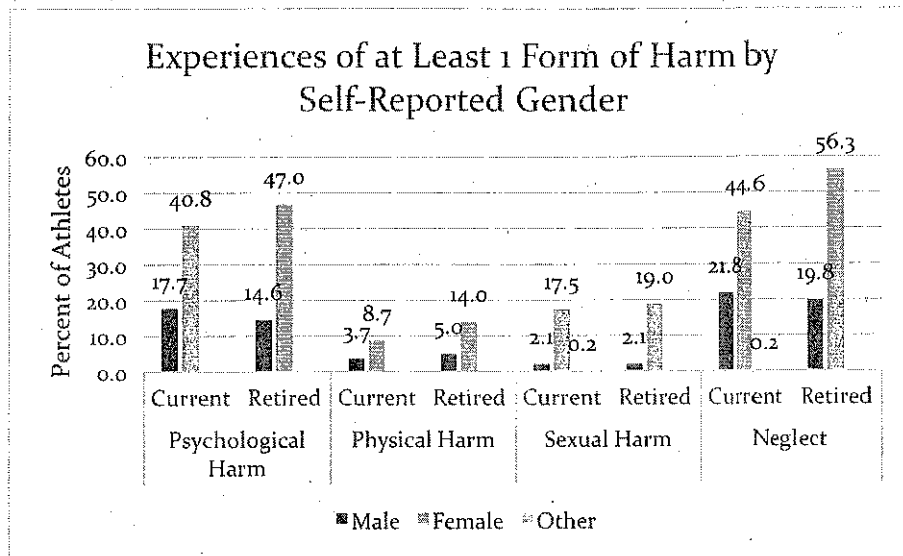


Percentage of Harmful Behaviours Reportedly Experienced

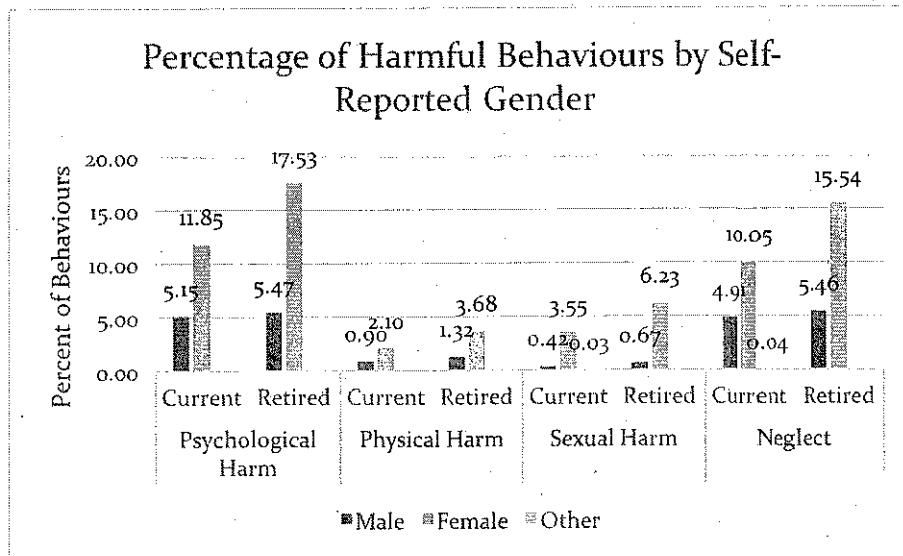
Types of Harm Experienced According to Self-Reported Gender of Athlete

The figure below illustrates the types of harms experienced by current and retired national team athletes categorized by self-reported gender. Despite the problematic nature of binary categories with respect to gender identity, only one respondent did not use the male/female categories. The data clearly indicate that more female athletes reportedly experienced at least one behaviour in each category of harm than did male athletes.

Further, the higher values for females were consistent for both current and former female athletes compared with current and retired male athletes.



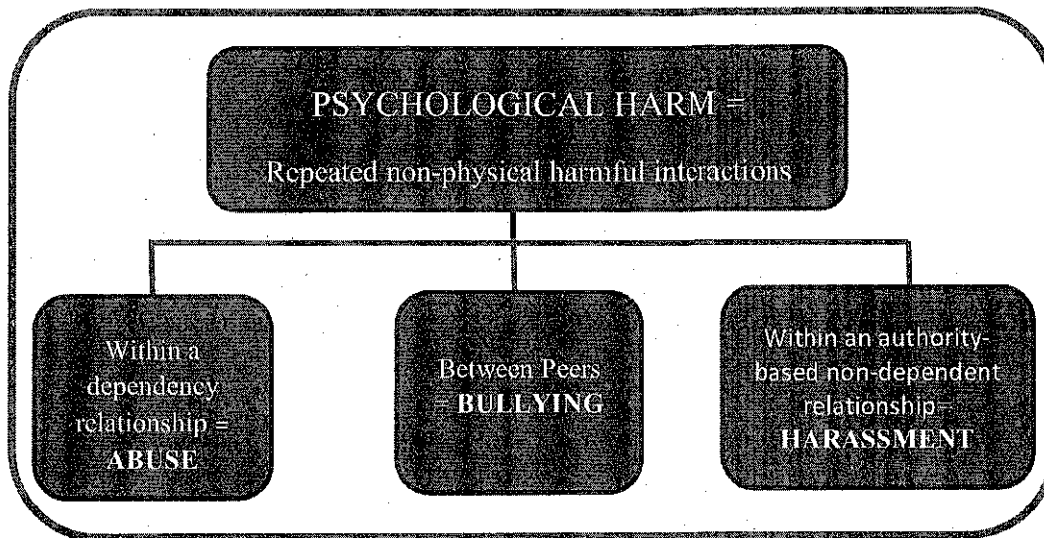
Percentage of Current and Retired Athletes who have Experienced *at Least One Form* of Harmful Behaviour by Self-Reported Gender



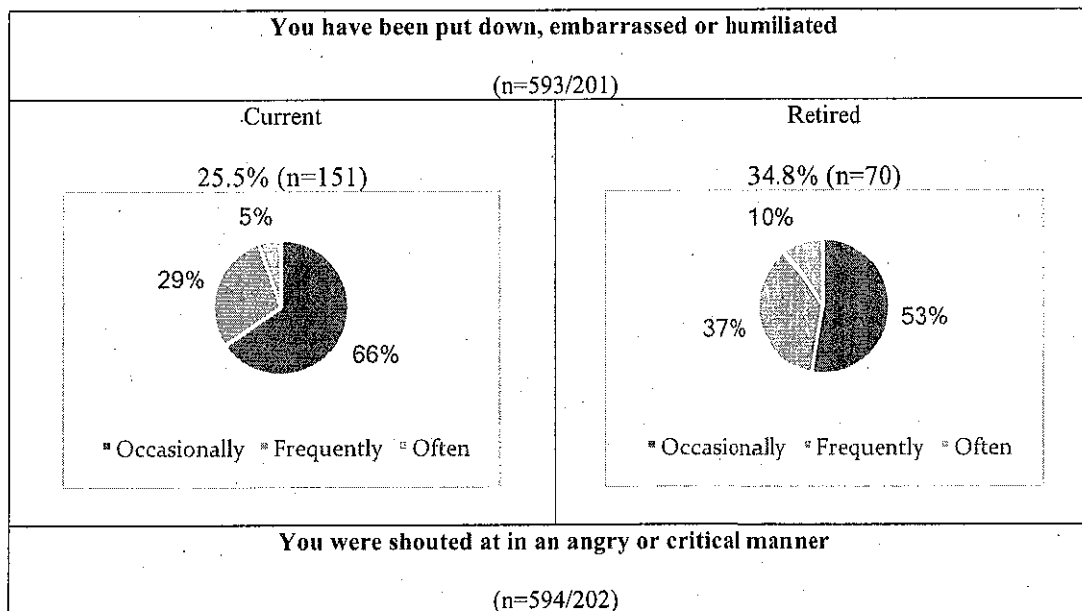
Percentage of Harmful Behaviours in Each Category by Self-Reported Gender

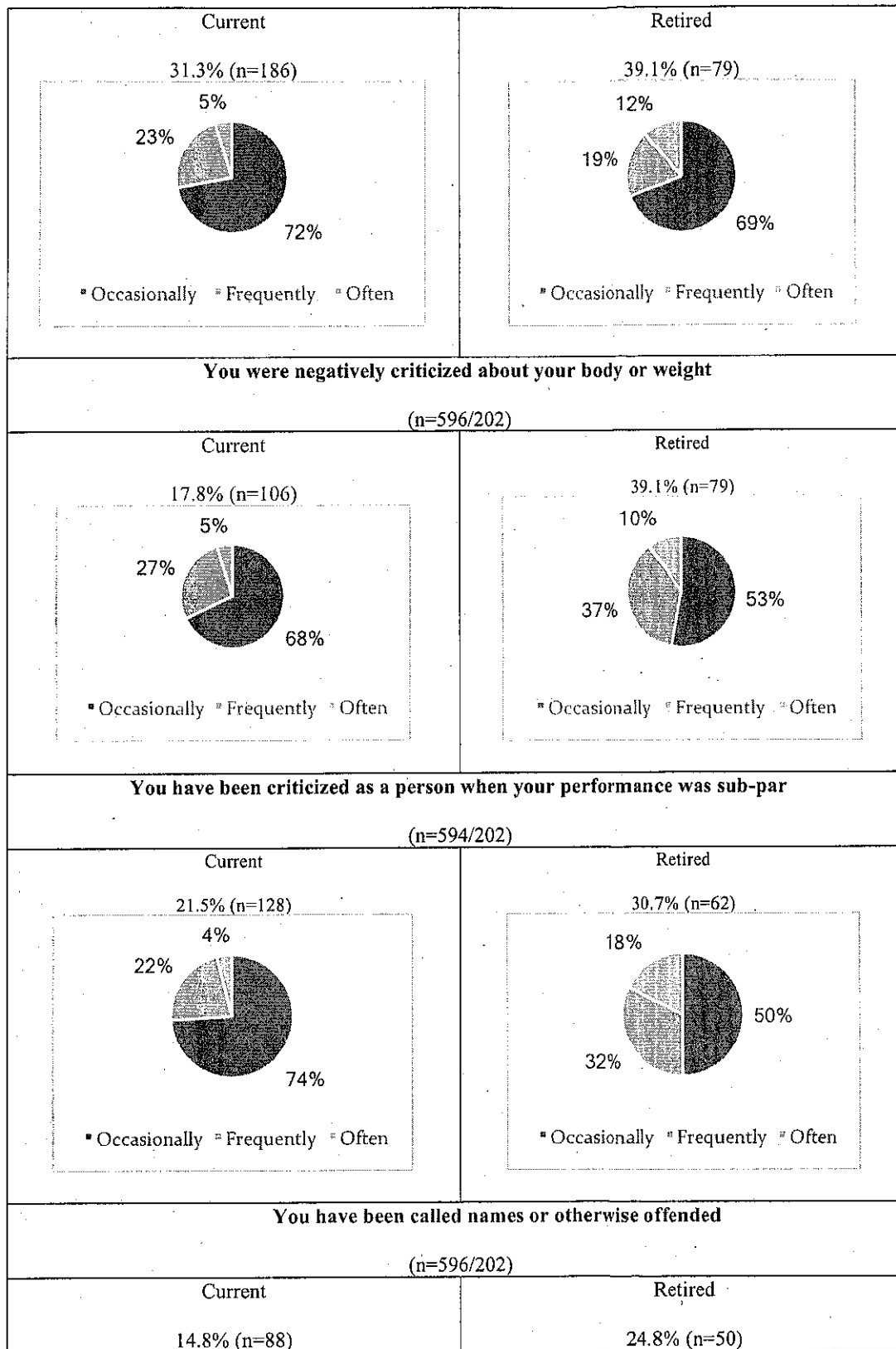
Experiences by Type of Harm

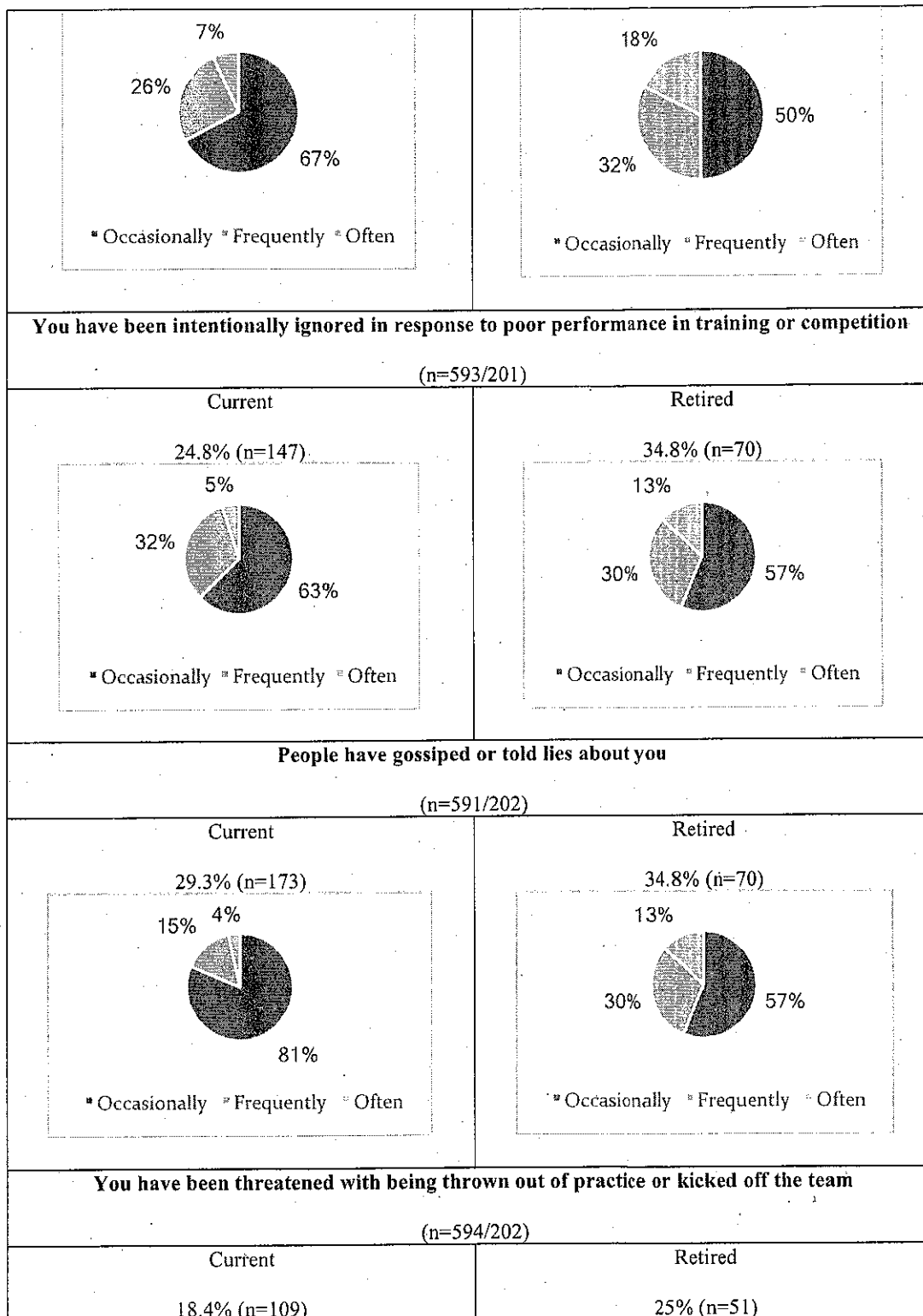
1. Psychological Harm

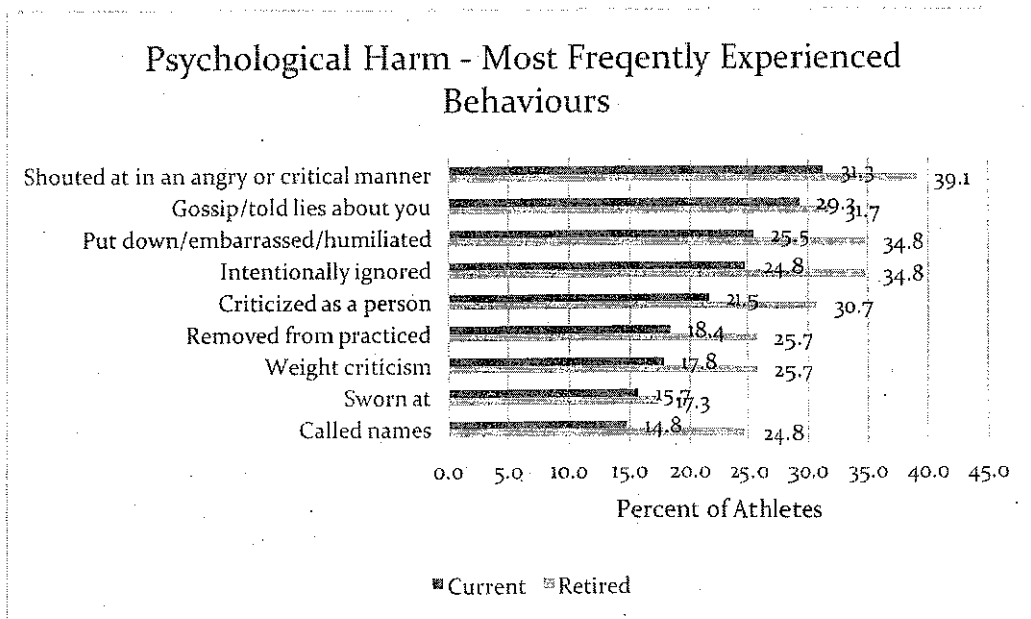
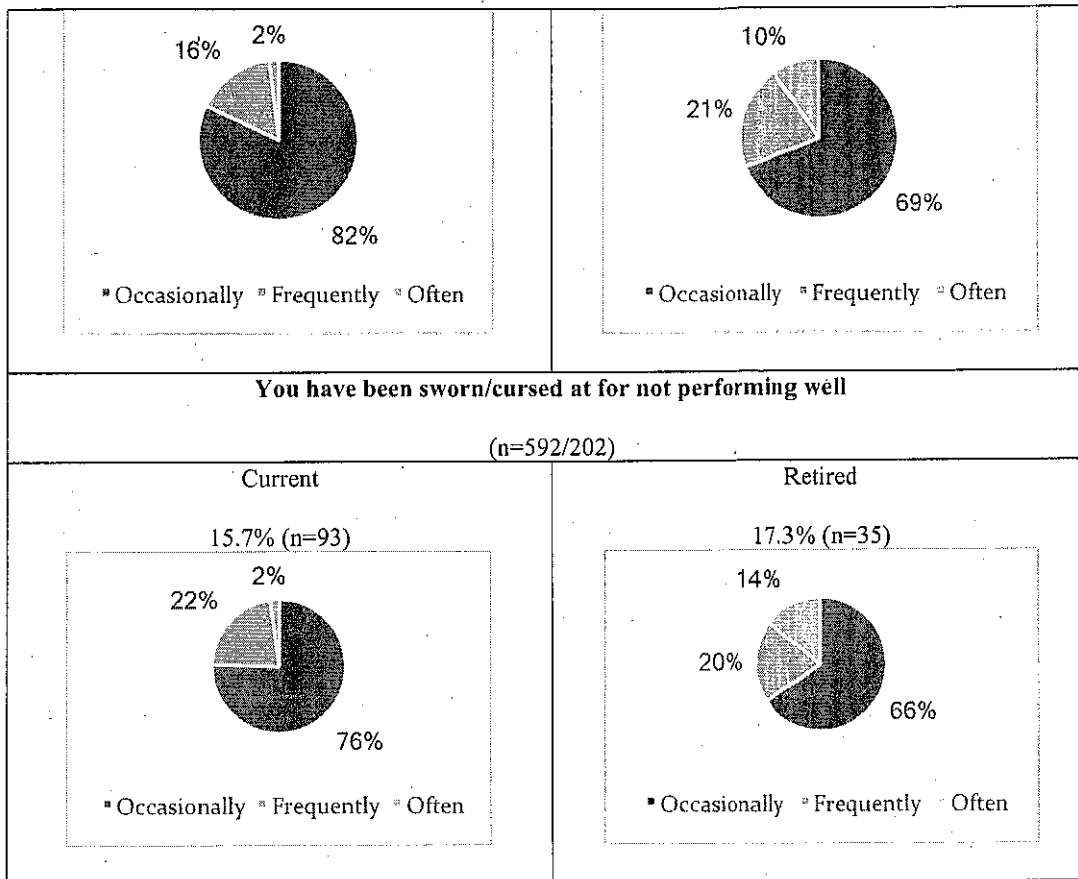


The figures below illustrate the percentages of current and retired athletes who reported they had experienced the various behaviours associated with psychological abuse.





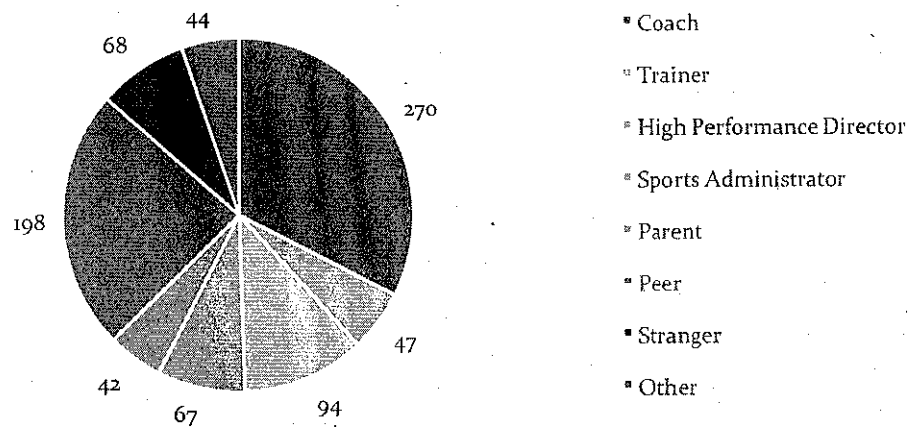




Percentage of Current and Retired Athletes' Reporting of Each Psychologically Harmful Behaviour

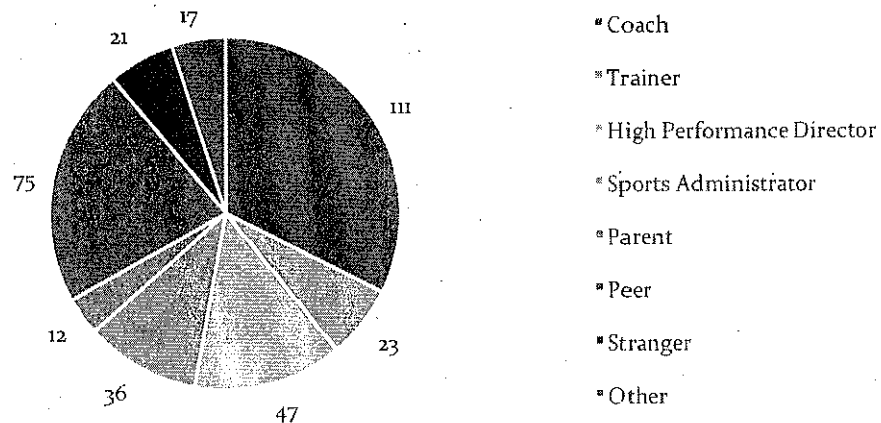
The figures below indicate that both current and former athletes reported that most psychological harm was experienced from coaches, followed by peers.

Psychological Harm - Current Athletes



Current Athletes' Reports of Those Responsible for Psychologically Harmful Behaviours

Psychological Harm - Retired Athletes



Retired Athletes' Reports of Those Responsible for Psychologically Harmful Behaviours

2. Neglect

Neglect is defined as failure to provide for basic needs, or to protect from harm or potential harm

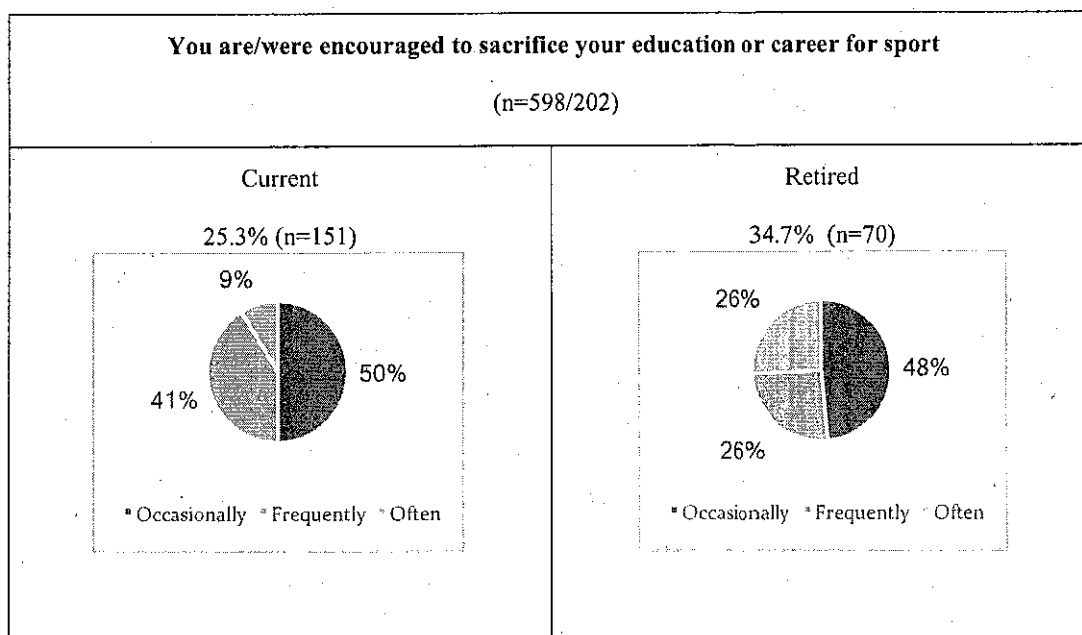
The responses to each question within the neglect category are illustrated in the figures below for both current and retired athletes.

Both current and retired athletes experienced various types of behaviours under the category of neglect. The most commonly reported experience for both current (47.5%) and retired (63.7%) athletes was a sense that athletes are *generally* treated unequally. Of these respondents, 23% and 35% respectively reportedly had these experiences "often." Although this particular question did not ask about the grounds upon which athletes felt they were not treated equally, one can surmise that various reasons, ranging from athletic ability or potential, to discrimination may contribute to athletes' responses. The qualitative comments presented later in this document also inform potential explanations.

The next most commonly reported experience was in response to the question about being forced or expected to continue training/playing/competing while injured or exhausted; 26.3% of current and 41.5% retired athletes reportedly had these experiences. Of these respondents, 5.3% and 16.9% respectively reportedly had these experiences "often."

In response to the question about athletes being encouraged to sacrifice education or a career for sport, 25% of current and 35% of retired athletes claimed to have had this experience, with 9% (current) and 26% (retired) respectively reportedly experiencing this "often."

The figures below illustrate the percentages of current and retired athletes who reportedly experienced the various behaviours associated with neglect.

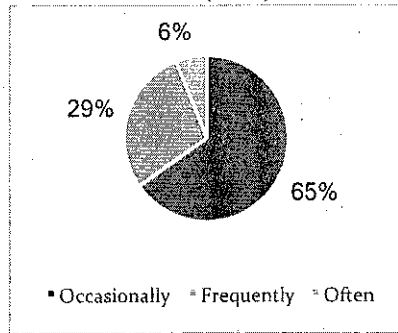


You are/were pressured to try new skills before you feel/felt ready

(n=597/202)

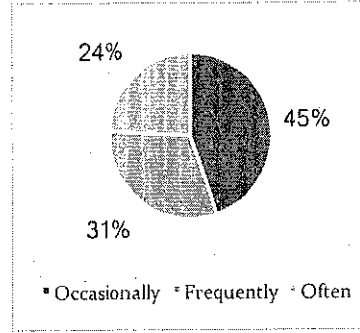
Current

8.2% (n=49)



Retired

14.4% (n=29)

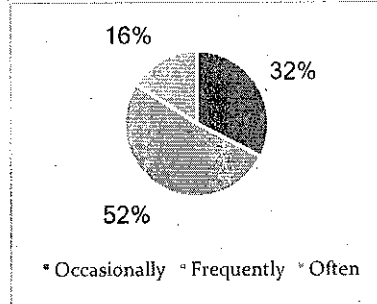


You feel/felt generally ignored

(n=597/200)

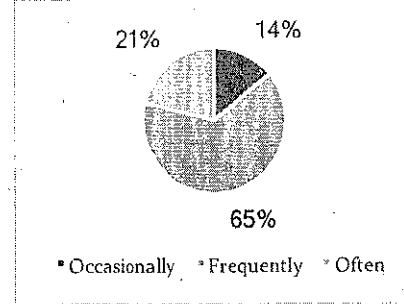
Current

21.3% (n=127)



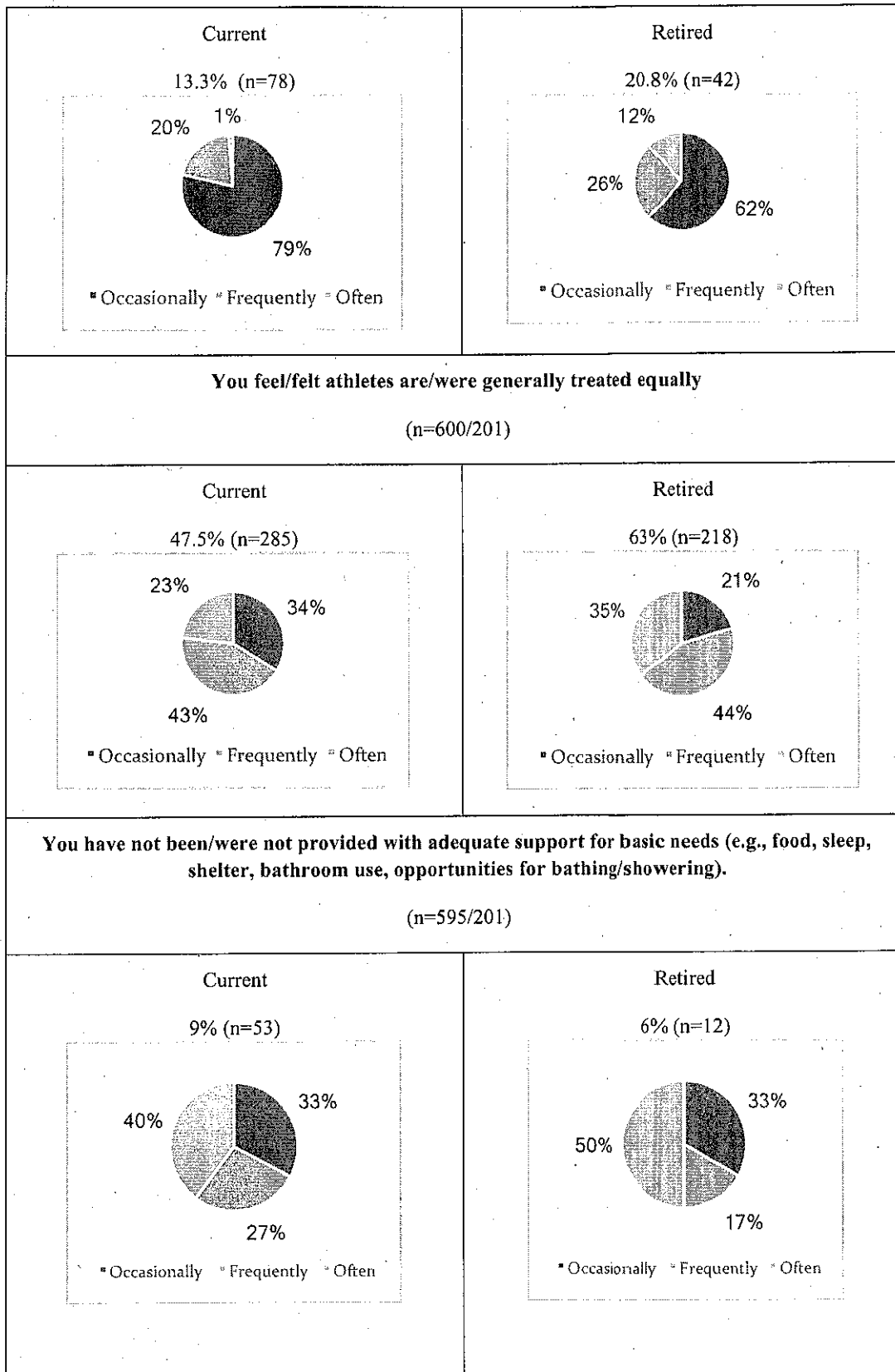
Retired

29% (n=58)



You have been/were forced or expected to train or compete in unsafe conditions

(n=600/202)

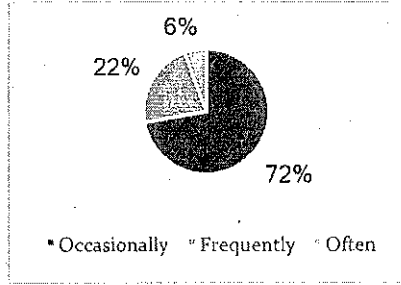


You have been/were inappropriately left alone with no care

(n=595/202)

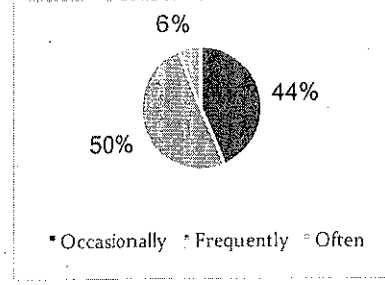
Current

6.4% (n=38)



Retired

7.9% (n=16)

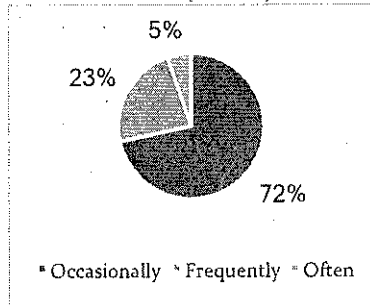


You have been/were forced or expected to go on training/playing/competing while you were injured or exhausted

(n=594/200)

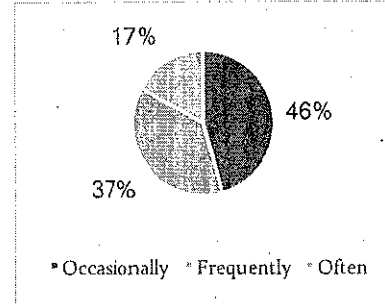
Current

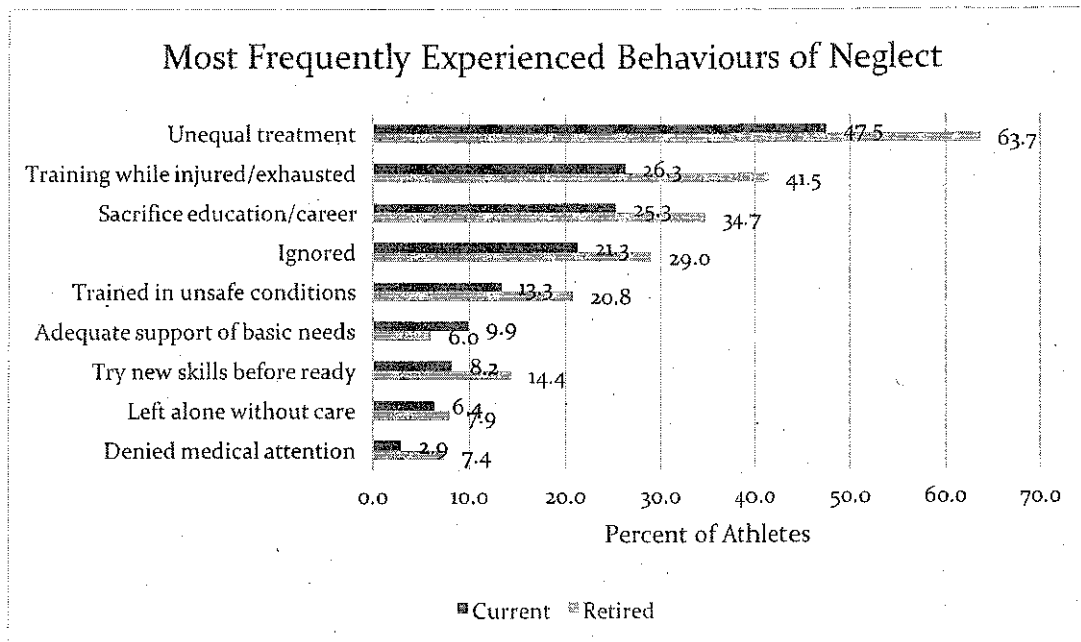
26.3% (n= 156)



Retired

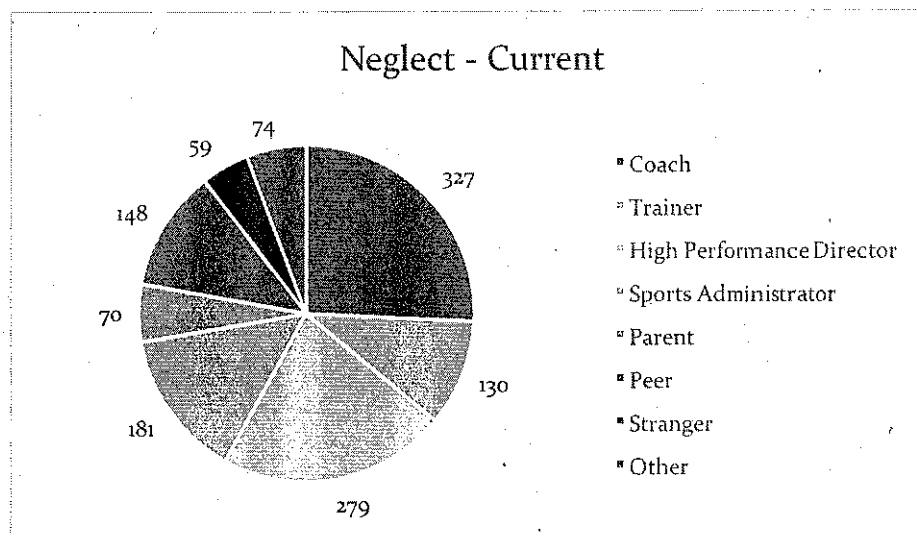
41.5% (n=83)





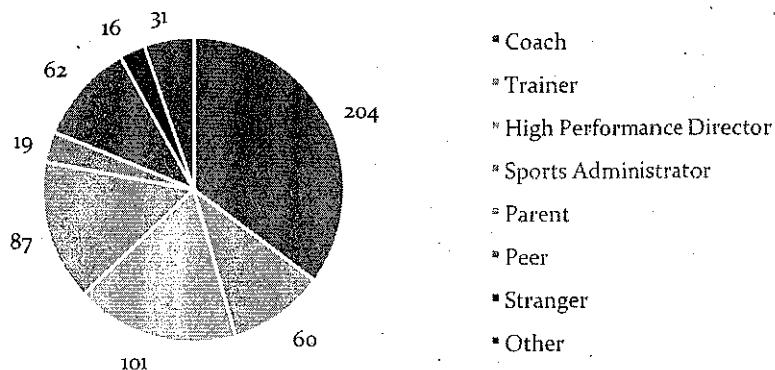
Current and Retired Athletes' Most Frequently Experienced Behaviours of Neglect

Athletes were also asked about who was responsible for the various neglectful behaviours. As indicated by the figures below, both current and former athletes reportedly experienced neglectful behaviours most commonly from coaches followed by high performance directors.



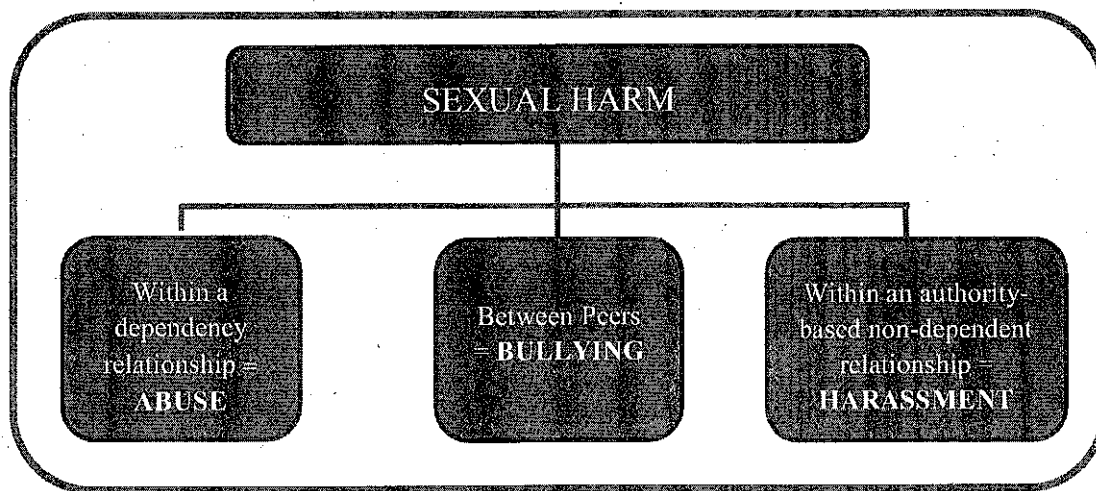
Current Athletes' Reports of Those Responsible for Neglectful Behaviours

Neglect - Retired



Former Athletes' Reports of Those Responsible for Neglectful Behaviours

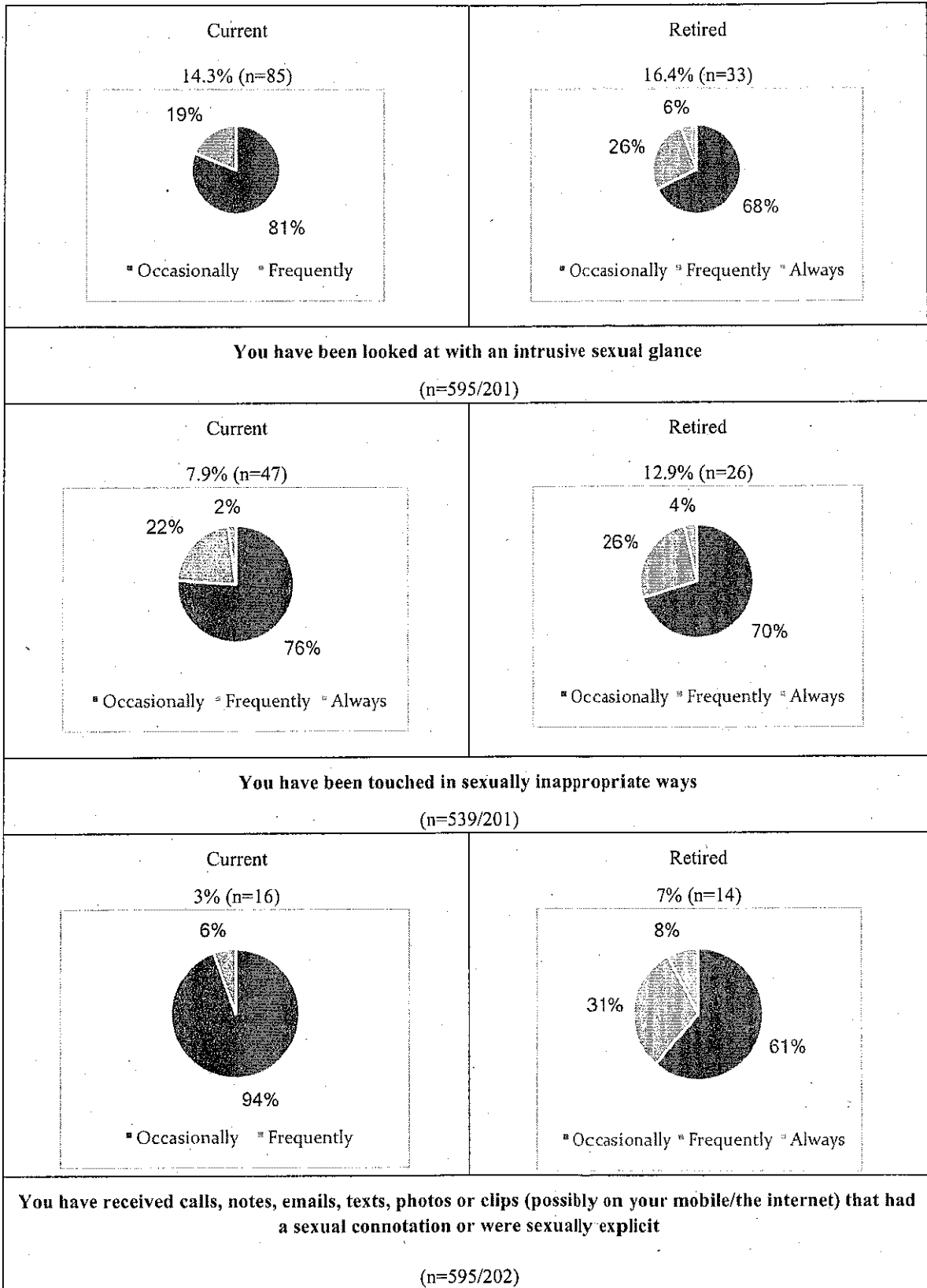
3. SEXUAL HARM

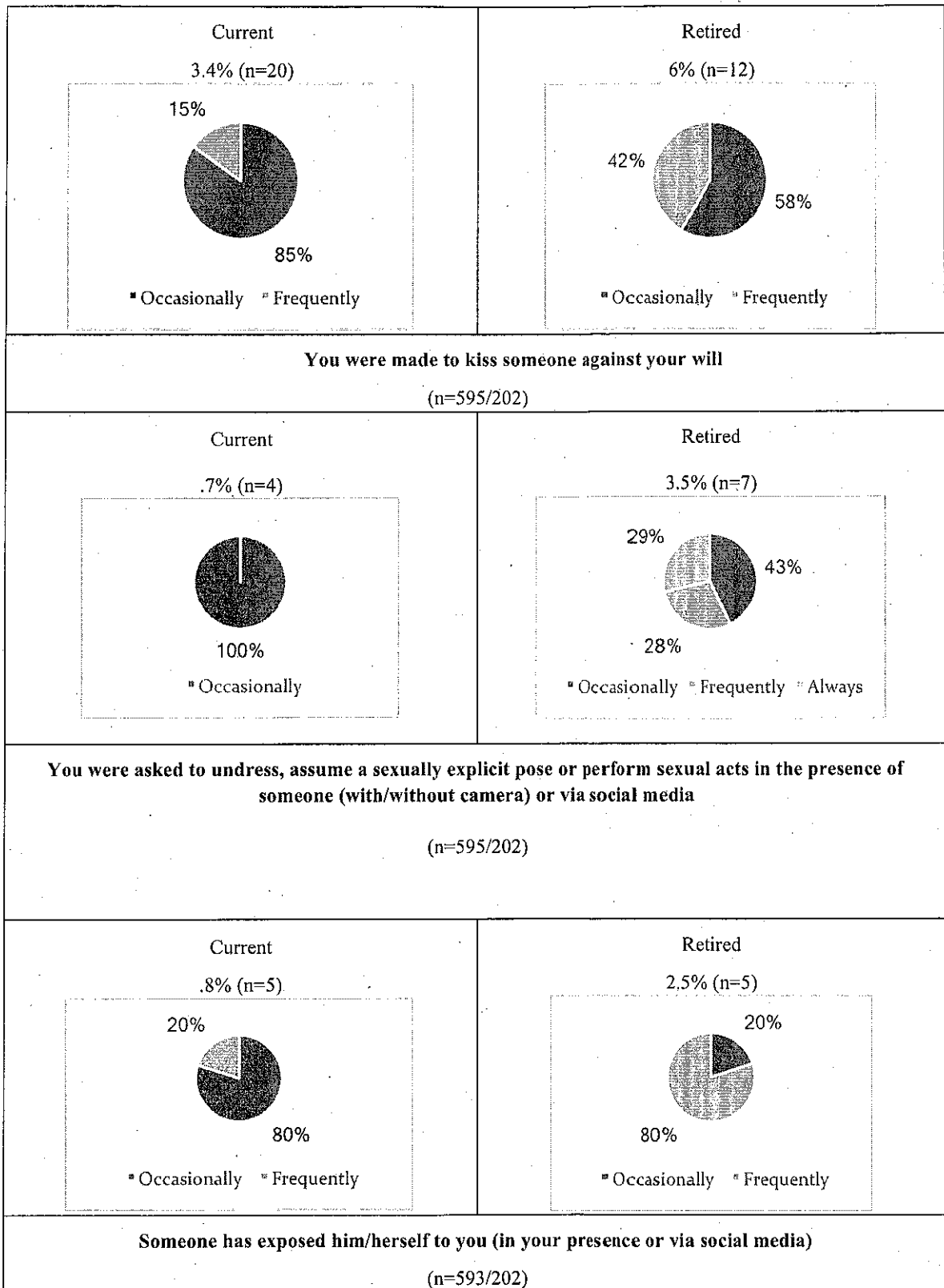


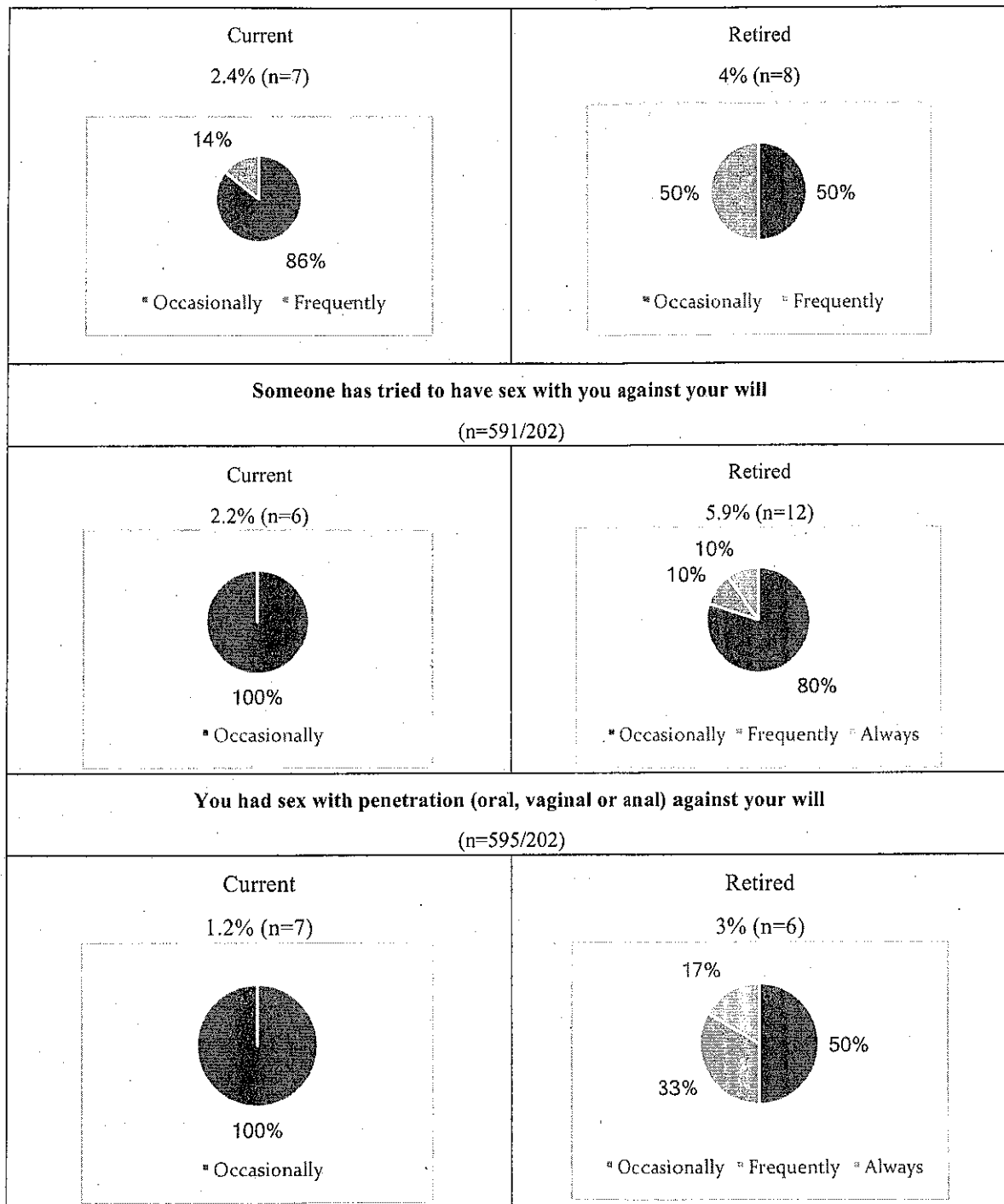
The figures below illustrate the percentages of current and retired athletes who reportedly experienced the various behaviours associated with sexual harm.

You have been the subject or target of sexist jokes/remarks

(n=593/201)

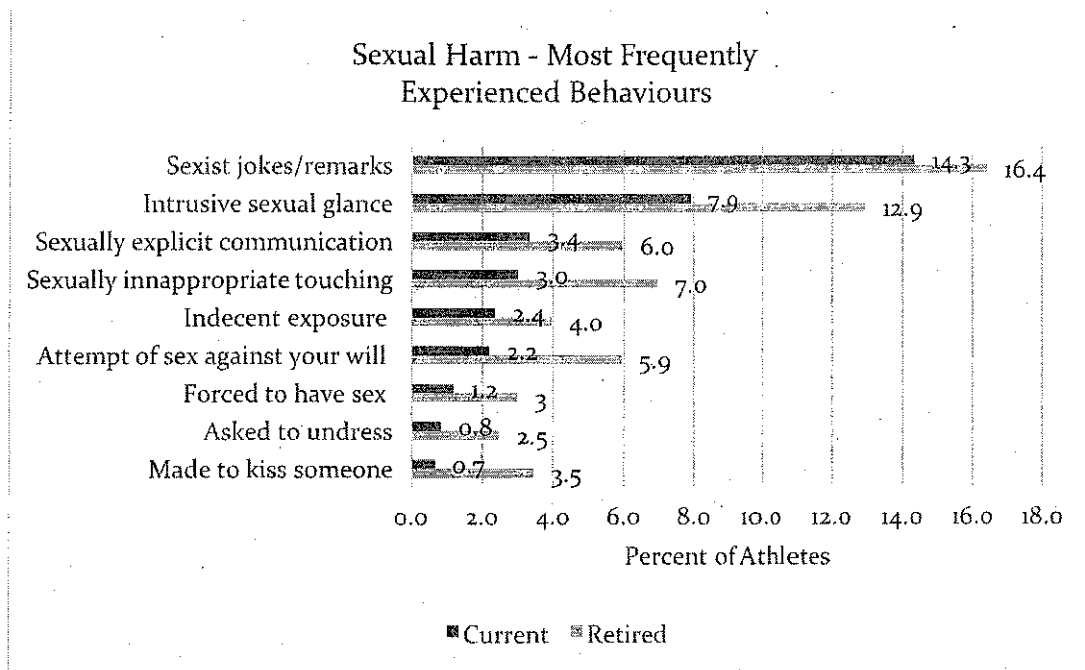






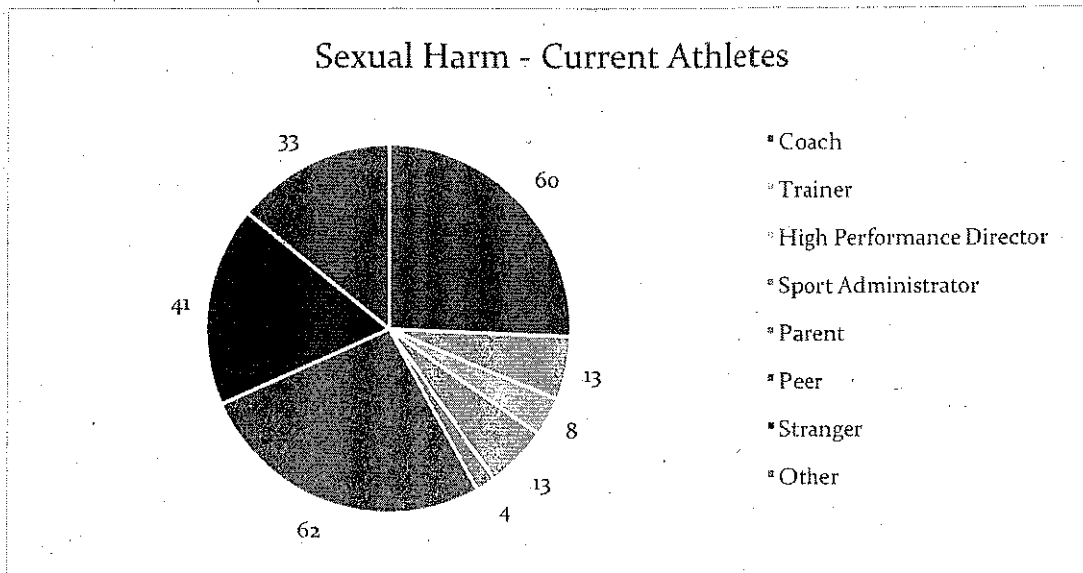
As seen below, the most commonly reported forms of sexual harm experienced by current athletes included sexist jokes/remarks (14%), intrusive sexual glances (8%), sexually explicit communication (3%), and sexually inappropriate touching (3%). Of the retired athletes' reports, the most common experiences were sexist jokes/remarks (16%),

intrusive sexual glances (13%), sexually inappropriate touching (7%), sexually explicit communication (6%), and attempt of sexual activity against your will (6%).

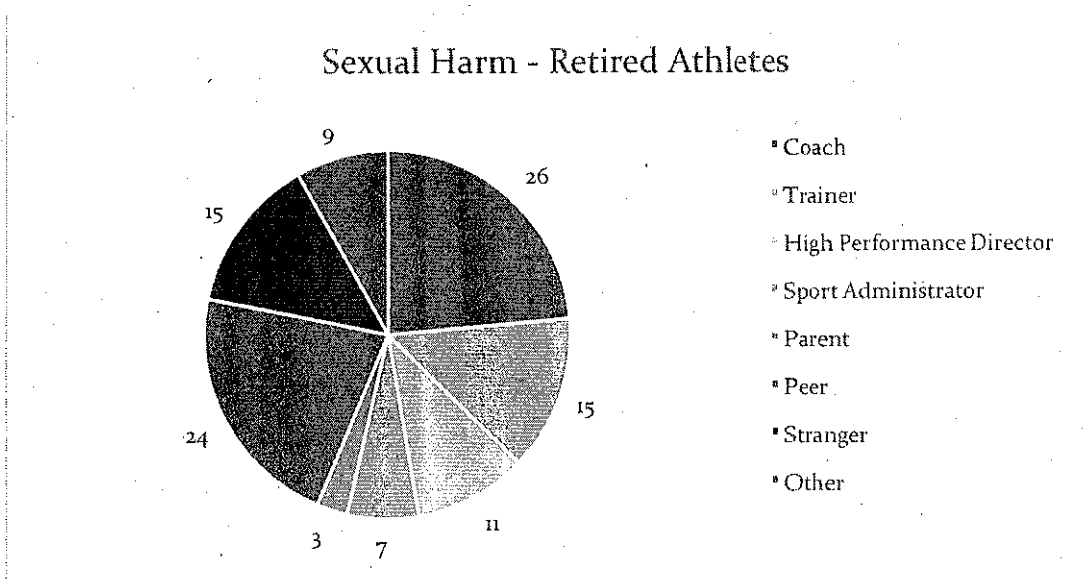


Percentage of Current and Retired Athletes' Reports of Sexually Harmful Behaviours

The findings illustrated in the charts below indicate that both current and retired athletes reported that most sexually harmful behaviours occurred at the hands of coaches and peers. Current athletes reported that of the sexually harmful behaviours experienced, 60% were perpetrated by peers while 62% were perpetrated by coaches. The retired athletes reported that 26% of these behaviours were perpetrated by coaches and 24% perpetrated by peers.

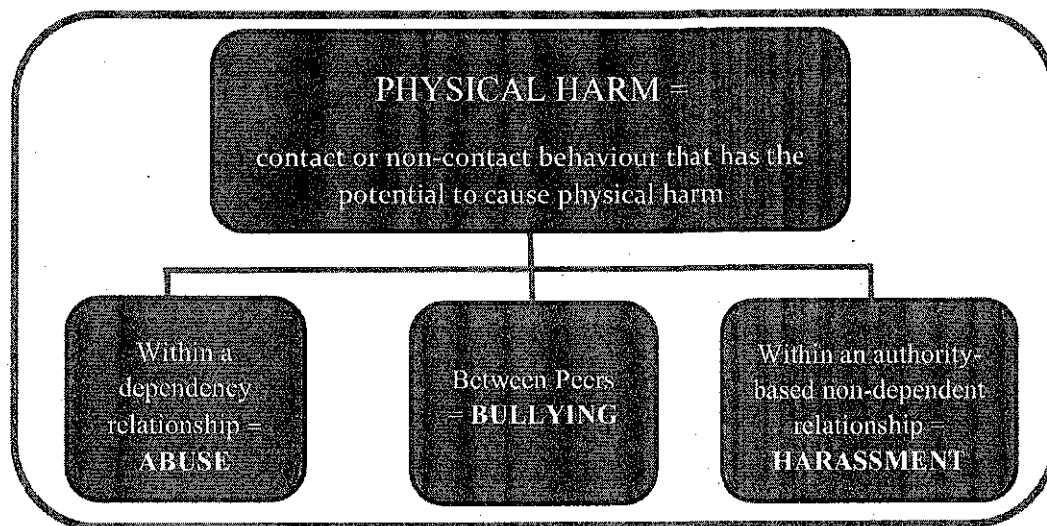


Current Athletes' Reports of Those who Engaged in Sexually Harmful Behaviours



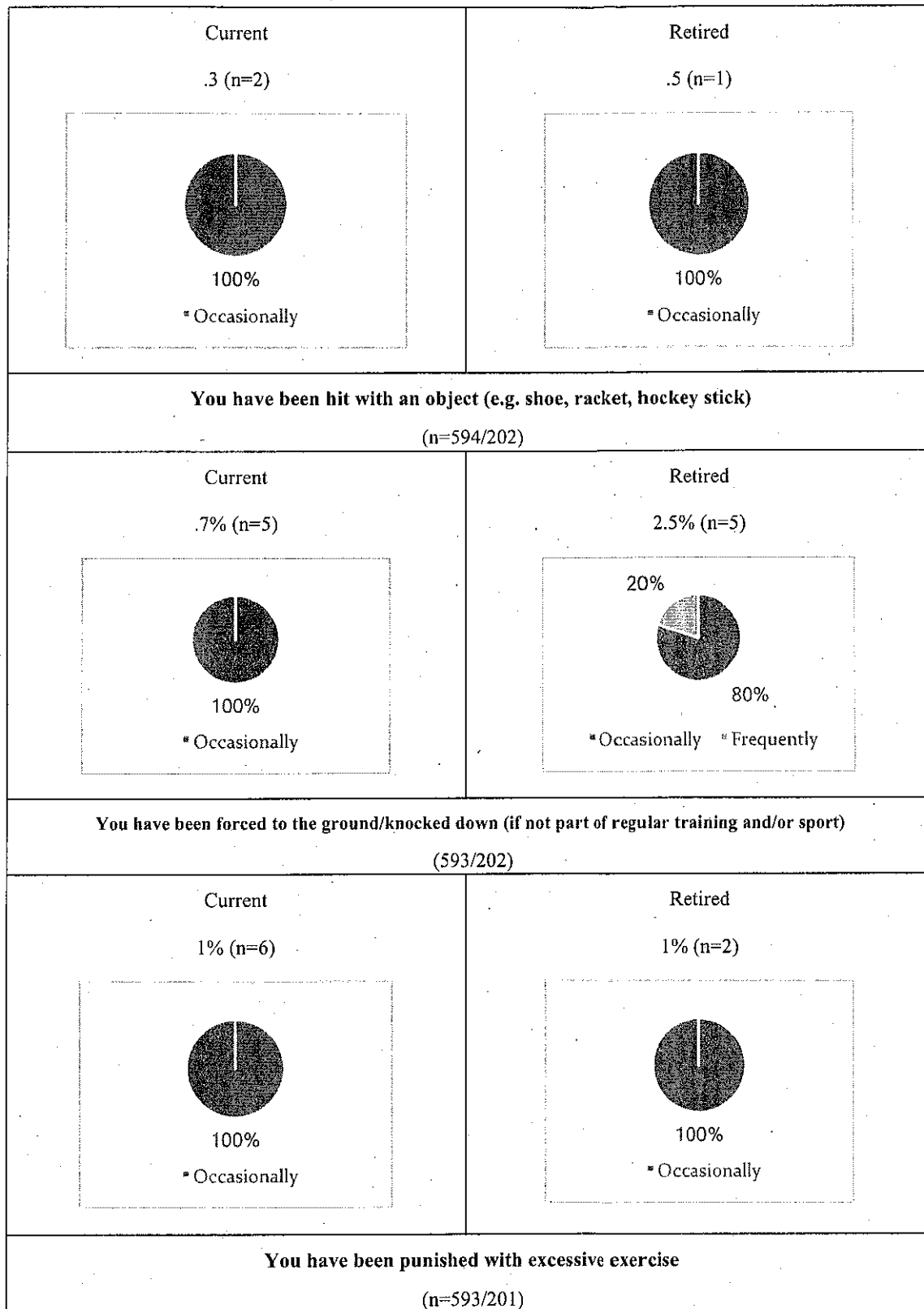
Retired Athletes' Reports of Those who Engaged in Sexually Harmful Behaviours

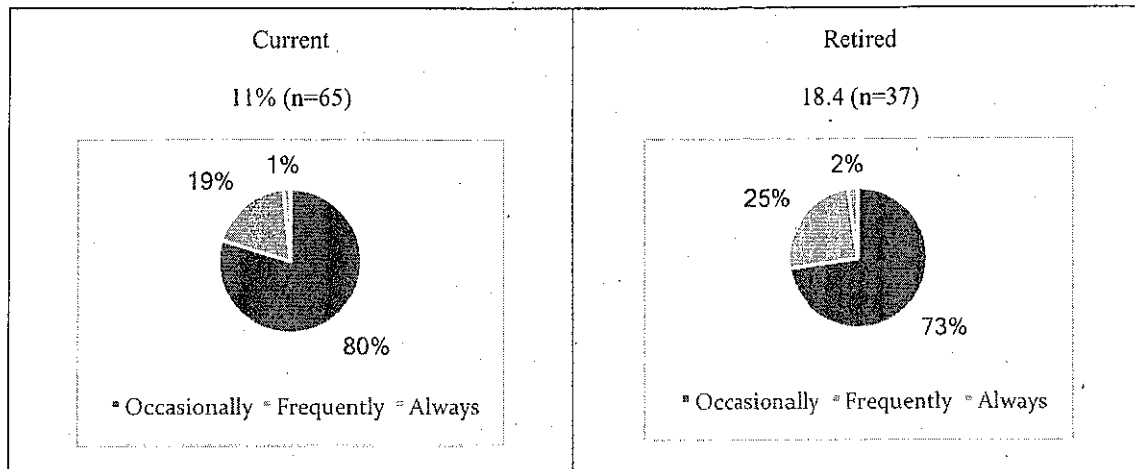
4. Physical Harm



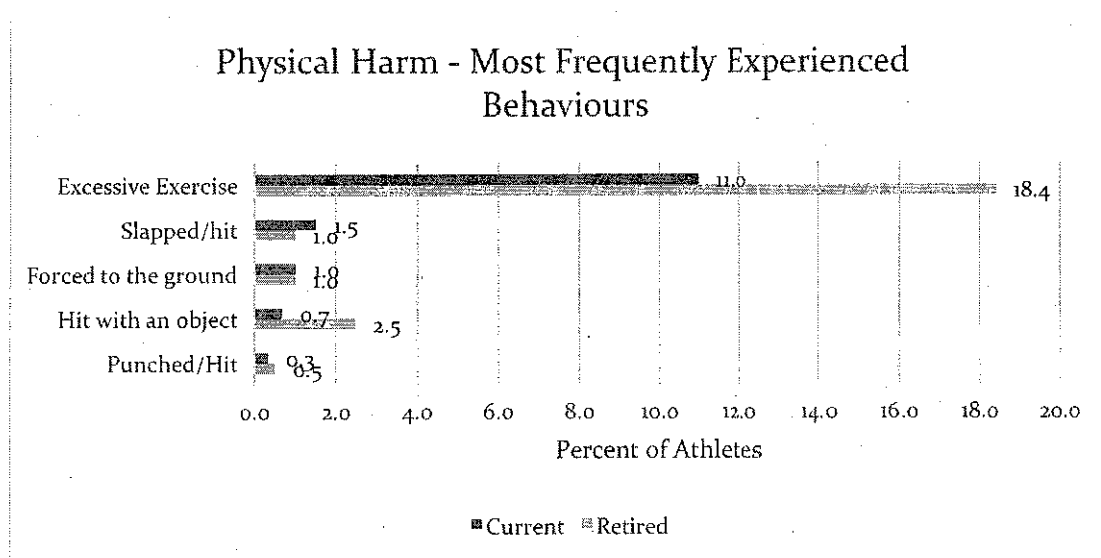
The table below contains the percentages of current and retired athletes who reportedly experienced the various behaviours associated with physical harm, along with the frequency of these experiences.

You have been slapped/hit with an open hand (n=595/202)	
<p>Current 1.5% (n=9)</p> <p>100% * Occasionallly</p>	<p>Retired 1% (n=2)</p> <p>50% * Occasionallly 50% * Frequently</p>
You have been punched/hit with a fist (n=594/201)	



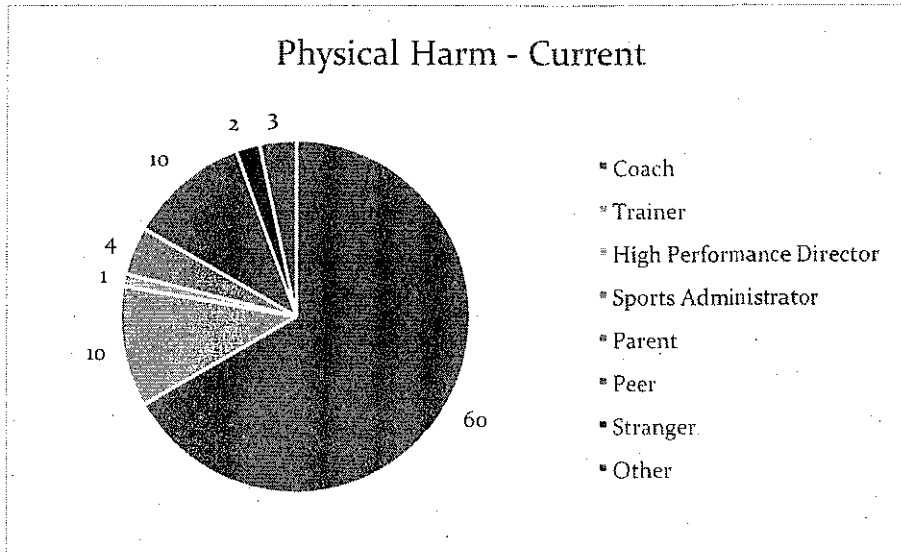


Below are the percentages of current and retired athletes who reportedly experienced each behaviour in the physical harm category.

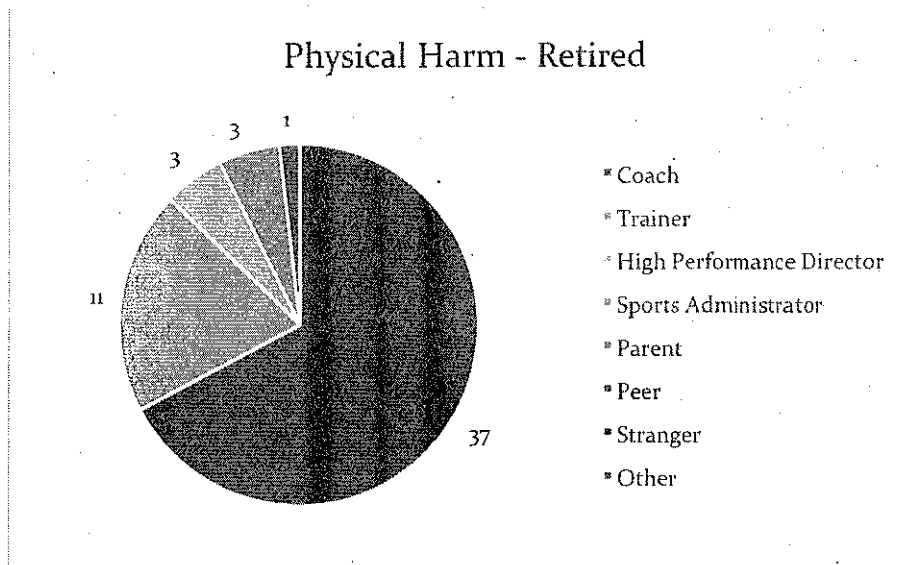


Percentage of Current and Retired Athletes' Experiences of Physically Harmful Behaviours

The figures below indicate that current and retired athletes reportedly experienced most physically harmful behaviours from coaches. This result makes sense given that the most frequently experienced physically harmful behaviour was the use of excessive exercise as punishment.



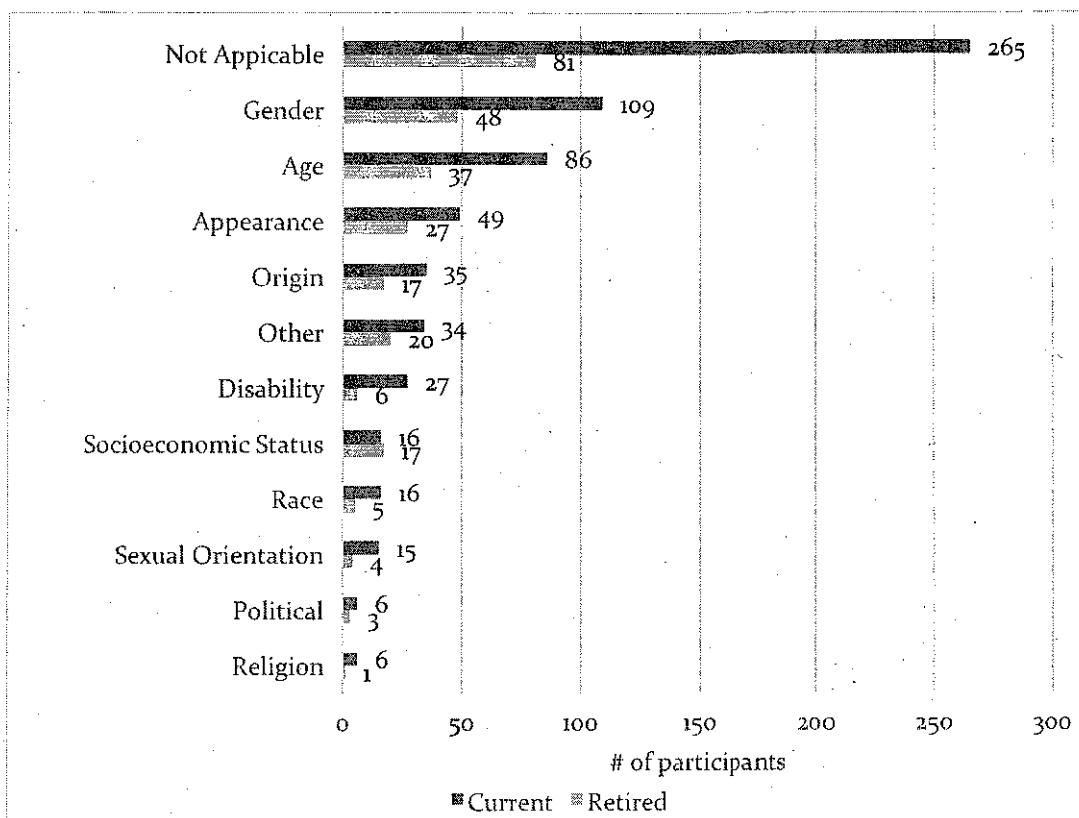
Current Athletes' Reports of Those who Engaged in Physically Harmful Behaviours



Retired Athletes' Reports of Those who Engaged in Physically Harmful Behaviours

5. DISCRIMINATION

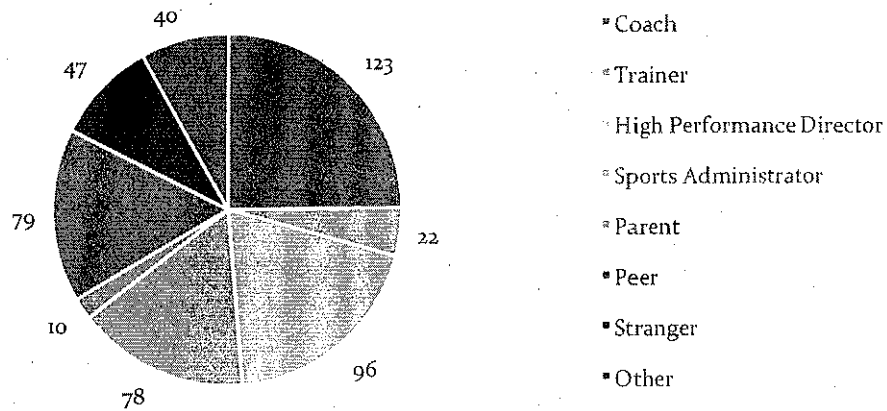
The findings indicate that the most commonly reported bases for discrimination were age, gender, and appearance. Across all dimensions, current athletes reported more discrimination than did retired athletes.



Number of Current and Retired Athletes' Reported Experiences of Discrimination

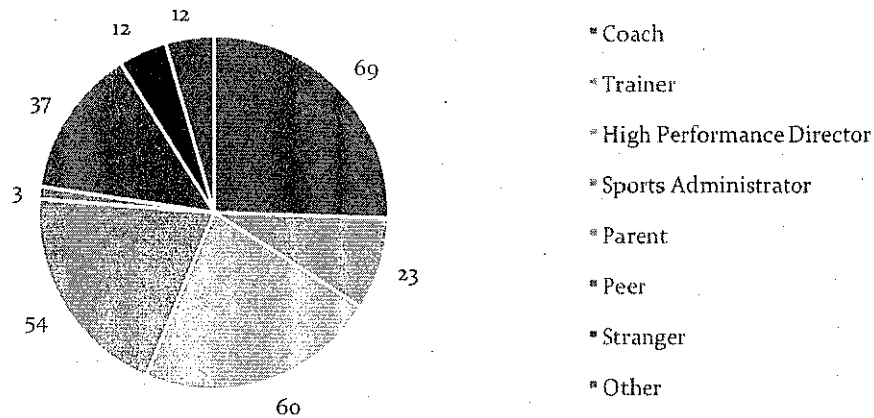
The findings illustrated in the figures below indicate that discrimination was reportedly enacted most frequently by coaches, followed by high performance directors and then sport administrators. These rank orderings were identical for both current and retired athletes.

Discrimination - Current Athletes



Current Athletes' Reports of Those who Engaged in Discrimination

Discrimination - Retired Athletes

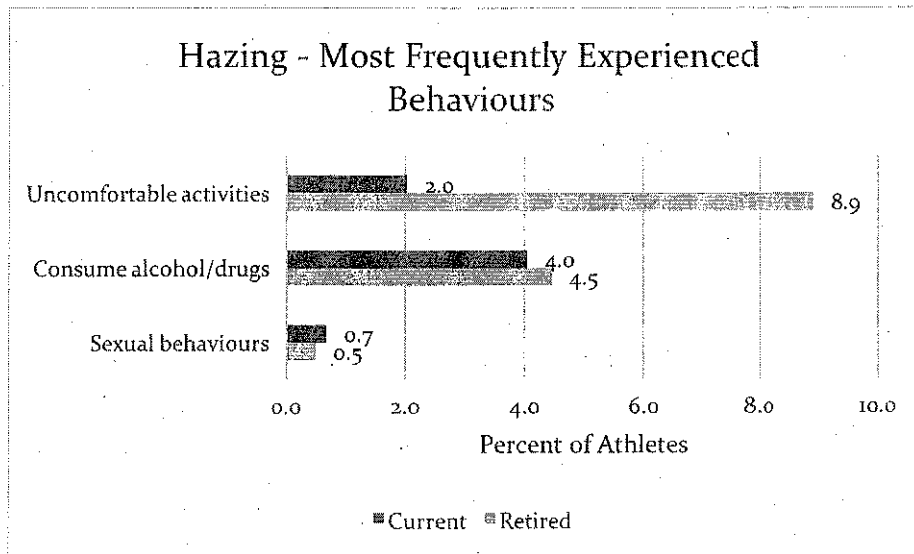


Retired Athletes' Reports of Those who Engaged in Discrimination

6. HAZING

The results illustrated below may suggest that hazing practices are a less common experience than in the past. Retired athletes reportedly were forced/coerced into engaging in uncomfortable hazing practices (9%) moreso than current athletes (2%). It also appears that the consumption of alcohol or other drugs continues to occur as part of hazing

although only 4% of current athletes and 4.5% of retired athletes reported this practice. Further, sexually-related practices were reportedly an uncommon experience associated with hazing.

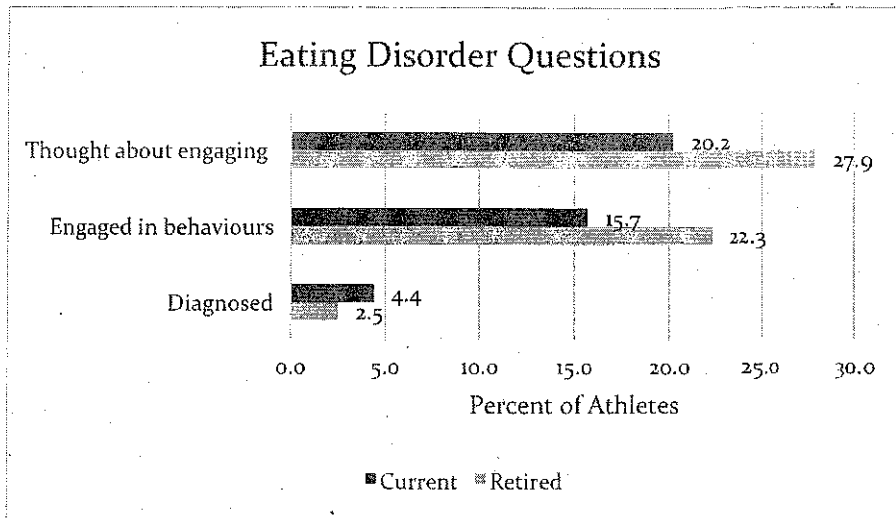


Current and Former Athletes' Reports of Hazing Experiences

Mental Health Outcomes

1. Eating Disorders

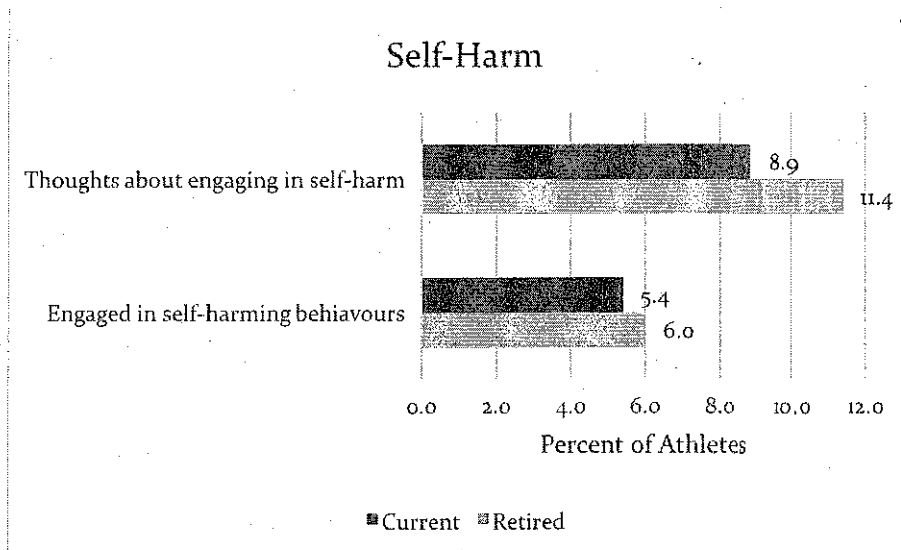
The survey results indicate that of the current athletes, 20% have thought about engaging in disordered eating behaviours, 16% have engaged in disordered eating behaviours, and yet only 4% have been diagnosed or treated for disordered eating or eating disorders. Amongst retired athletes, 28% have thought about engaging in disordered eating behaviours, 22% have engaged in disordered eating behaviours, and only 3% have been diagnosed or treated for disordered eating or eating disorders.



Current and Retired Athletes' Reported Experiences with Disordered Eating/Eating Disorders

2. Self-Harm

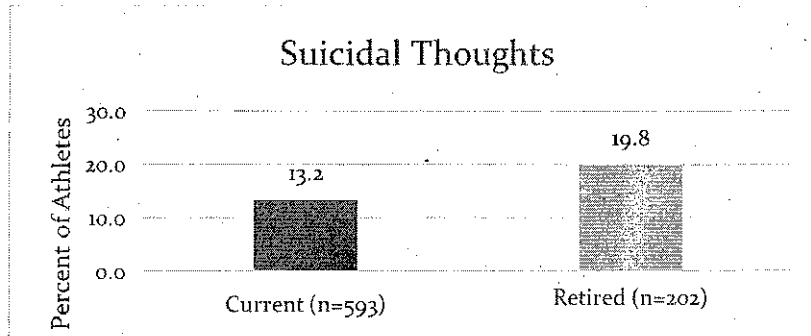
The findings illustrated in the figure below indicate that 9% of current athletes have thought about engaging in self-harming behaviours such as cutting and burning while 5% have engaged in these behaviours. Of retired athletes, 11% have thought about engaging in self-harming behaviours and 6% have acted upon these thoughts.



Current and Retired Athletes' Reported Experiences with Self-Harm

3. Suicidal Thoughts

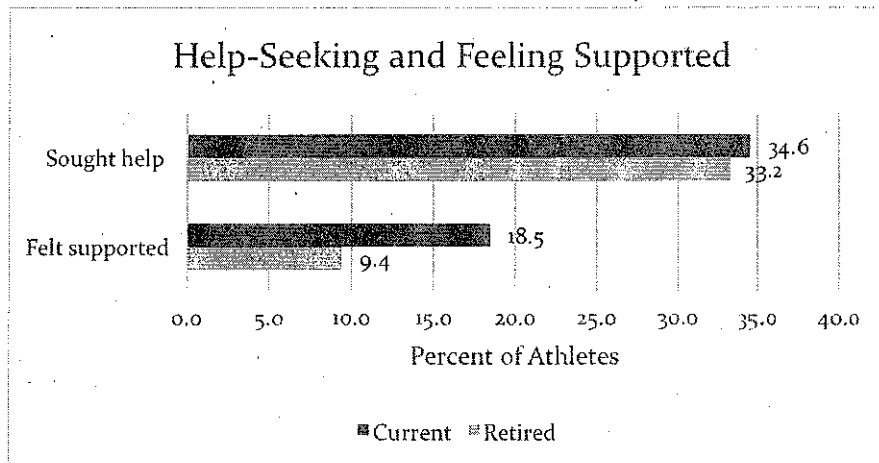
Of the retired athletes, 20% reportedly had had thoughts of suicide. Of the current athletes, 13% reportedly have had suicidal thoughts. Potential explanations for the higher percentage of retired athletes having suicidal thoughts may include: mental health challenges manifesting upon retirement or throughout the retirement transition (e.g. well-documented loss of identity, body image changes, loss of social network, search for new occupation) or reflecting upon and re-interpreting athletic experiences more negatively.



Percentage of Current and Retired Athletes' Reports of Suicidal Thoughts

4. Help-Seeking and Support for Mental Health Issues

As indicated below, 35% of current athletes and 33% of retired athletes sought help for their mental health challenges. Only 19% of current athletes and 9% of retired athletes felt supported by their sport organization while receiving help for a mental health issue.



Current and Former Athletes' Reports of Help-Seeking and Feeling Supported for a Mental Health Issue

Relationships Between Types of Harm and Health Outcomes

The table below illustrates the correlations or relationships between the various forms of harm and health outcomes assessed. Most of the forms of harm are significantly correlated with the health outcomes with the exception of being diagnosed with an eating disorder. This finding is easily explained by the small percentage of current and retired athletes who seek help for their disordered eating/eating disorders. Other exceptions included an absence of a relationship between physical harm and self-harming thoughts and behaviours for current athletes and between neglect and self-harming behaviours for retired athletes.

In sum, these findings confirm the negative health outcomes associated with all forms of harm, in spite of the common misconception that sexual harm is the most deleterious for athletes' health and well-being. These findings also highlight the notion that negative health outcomes are experienced long after the National Team athletic career has ended.

Correlations Between Types of Harm and Health Outcomes

HEALTH OUTCOMES	PSYCHOLOGICAL HARM		PHYSICAL HARM		NEGLECT		SEXUAL HARM	
	Current	Retired	Current	Retired	Current	Retired	Current	Retired
Thought about Self-Harming	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Engaged in Self-Harming	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Thought about Disordered Eating Disorder/Eating Disorder Behaviours	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Engaged in Disordered Eating Disorder/Eating Disorder Behaviours	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Diagnosed with Eating Disorder	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Suicidal Thoughts	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sought Help for Mental Health Issues	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Felt Supported for Mental Health Issues	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗

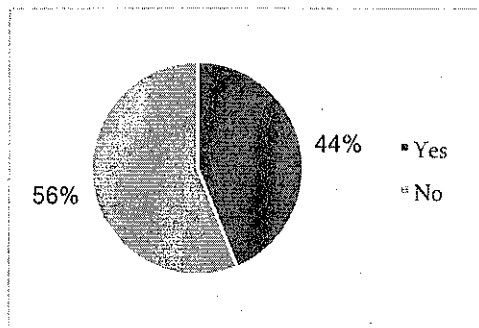
✓ Statistically significant correlation

✗ Non-significant correlation

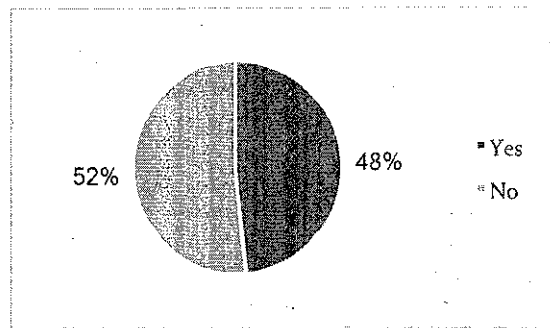
DISCLOSURE AND REPORTING

If you experienced abuse, harassment, bullying or hazing, did you tell anyone?

Current
n=196

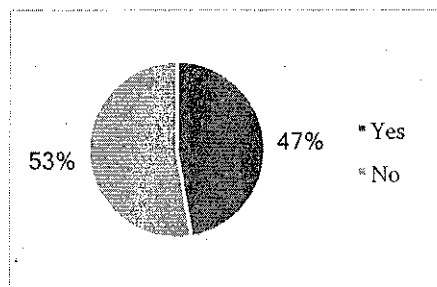


Retired
n=93

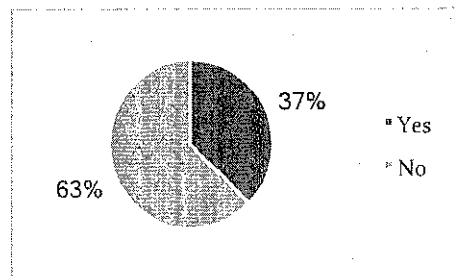


If you experienced abuse, hazing, or discrimination did you have a safe place in sport to go to talk about your experiences (e.g. confidential, supportive)?

Current
n=184

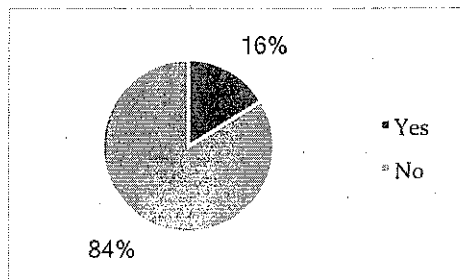


Retired
n=107

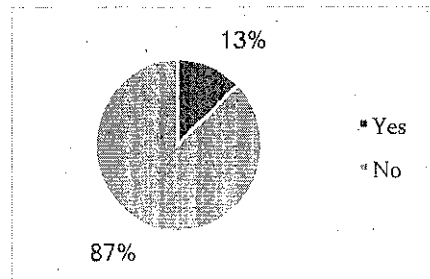


Did you submit a formal report/complaint of your experience(s)?

Current
n=203



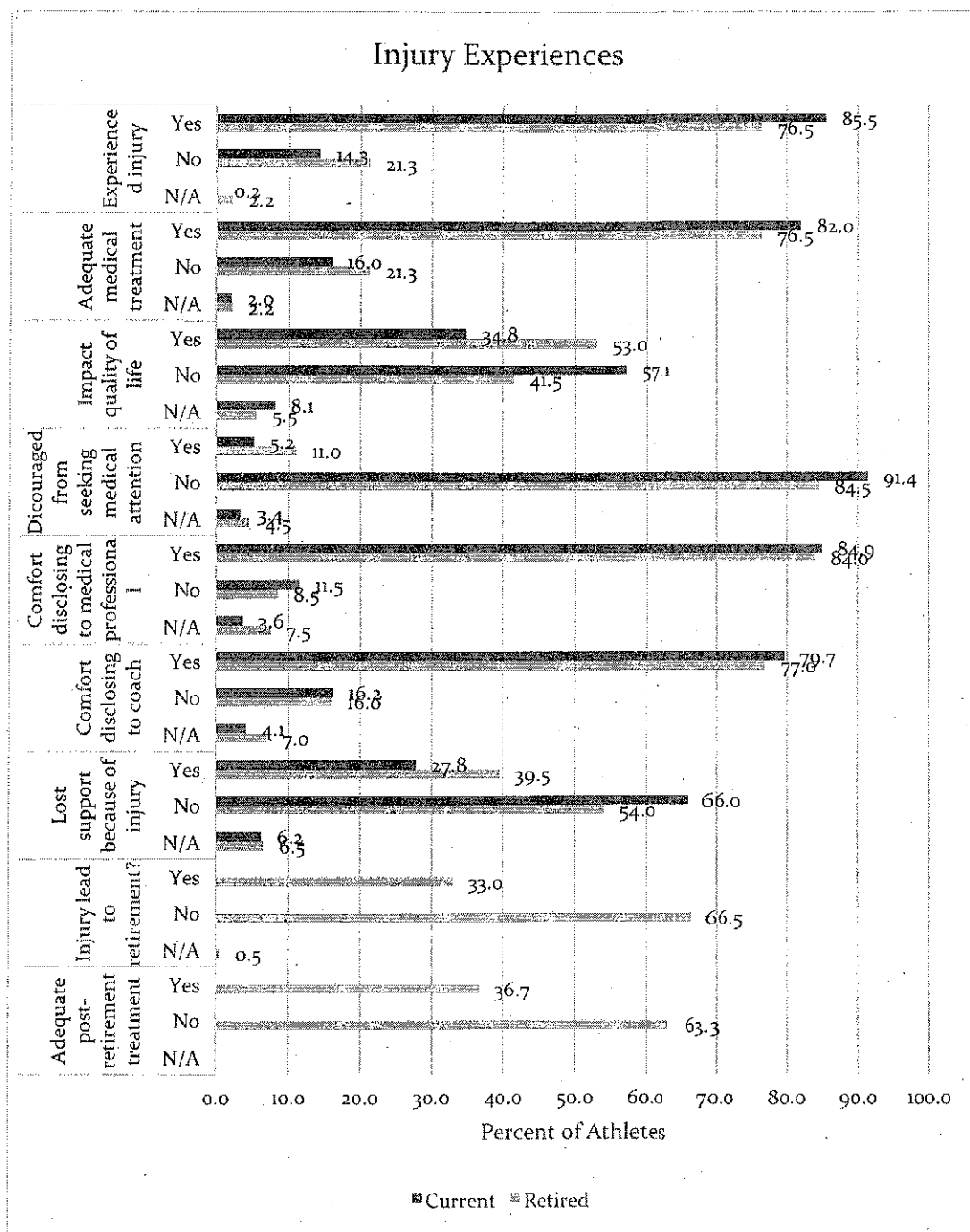
Retired
n=102



INJURY AND CONCUSSIONS

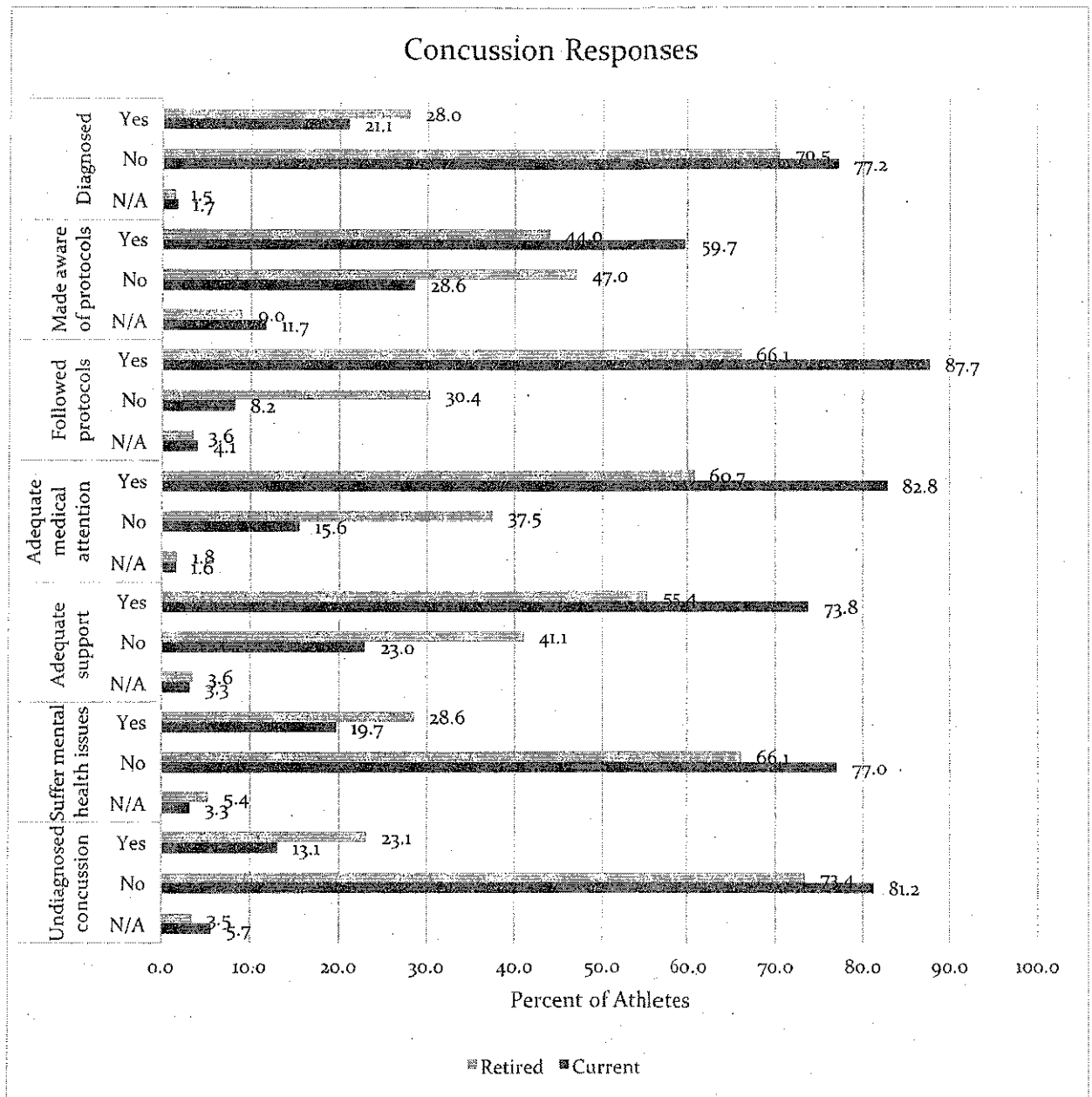
Although injuries are a common and rather expected part of being an athlete, the most glaring findings of this study included: 35% of current and 53% of retired athletes perceived that their injuries impacted their quality of life; 28% of current athletes and 40% of retired athletes perceived they lost support (e.g. attention, resources, funding) due to their injury; 33% of retired athletes perceived their injury to lead to retirement; and 63% of retired athletes perceived inadequate support for their injuries post-retirement.

On a positive note, athletes perceived they: received adequate medical attention for their injuries (82% current; 77% retired); felt comfortable disclosing their injuries to medical professionals (85% current; 84% retired); felt comfortable disclosing to coaches (80% current; 77% retired); and were not discouraged from seeking medical attention (91% current; 85% retired). The findings are illustrated in the following table.



As seen in the table below, more current athletes (60%) reported being made aware of concussion protocols compared with retired athletes (44%). Similarly, more current athletes reportedly followed the protocols (88%; retired 66%); received adequate medical attention (83% current; 61% retired); and received adequate support (74% current; 55% retired). Although these results suggest that progress has been made with respect to enhancing awareness of concussions and concussions protocols, and the provisions of

supports, concussions remain a concern given that 20% of current and 29% of retired athletes reported experiencing mental health issues associated with concussions, and 13% of current and 23% of retired athletes believed they have had an undiagnosed concussion.



Current and Retired Athletes' Responses to Concussion Questions

ATHLETES' COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the end of the survey, athletes were asked two open-ended questions: (i) *"Is there anything else you would like to add that has not already been discussed?"*; and (ii) *"Based on your experiences, do you have any other recommendations to advance safe sport?"* A plethora of comments were received and analyzed, resulting in the following themes. Direct quotes from athletes' reports are included to reinforce the themes.

Additional Comments: Cultural Influences

1. Normalization and Complicity

Athletes expressed concerns about the acceptance or normalization of specific harmful behaviours in sport and as a result of this normalization, no action was taken. Amongst the most commonly normalized behaviours referenced by athletes were psychologically and sexually harmful practices and body shaming. There was also a strong sense that key stakeholders in sport knew of inappropriate or harmful practices but failed to act on their responsibilities over the welfare of athletes. Further, the quotes provided below also imply an assumption within sport that certain practices are not only normalized and harmful but necessary for performance outcomes.

Examples of normalized but harmful practices are illustrated with the following quotes:

"The high performance director thinks that the tougher the coach is the better we will become so horrible conditions and abuse were not just tolerated but in fact, glorified."

"Coaches that weigh their athletes. It shouldn't be allowed; a qualified nutritionist should only have the right to weigh the athlete, and only for the benefit of the athlete."

"My coaches were mentally abusive and it's gone unnoticed. I had an eating disorder and my teammates did too. We were constantly put down and made to feel small and told that we could be kicked off the team and replaced in a heartbeat - it was best to suck it up and work hard. We were replaceable and if we weren't under X pounds we were considered fat and a nobody."

"I had a coach that would post body fat percentage amounts. I've definitely had an eating issue for the last 20 years."

"My teammate was pressured by our national coach to lose weight, when weight has nothing to do with the sport. He would stare at her while she ate at team dinners and make fun of her. No one could say anything because he had the right to kick you off the team if he didn't like you. Also, some coaches would drink with their female athletes and ask them inappropriate questions.... again, couldn't

complain or you would be out of favour with them... you get used to this system pretty quickly, or you don't make it far."

"There is still a culture of excusing inappropriate coach behaviour by labelling them as 'passionate.' Former athletes go on to marry their coaches, with whom they had experienced imbalanced power and underaged sexual relationships. Abusive foreign coaches are excused of their behaviour toward children because they 'produce'. Clubs turn a blind eye/excuse bullying of young LGBT athletes by their peers as 'kids being kids.' Parents are brainwashed into thinking that only the toughest coaches will turn their children into champions, and support them blindly."

"I have seen systemic sexual abuse of female athletes by male coaches at every level of sport. Starting at the grassroots. Nothing was ever done. I have seen abuse of women under 18 yrs of age with a large age gap between the coach and athlete. Other coaches knew about abuse and did nothing. Turning a blind eye was the norm. Everyone feared consequences of confronting the issues."

"I just feel the swearing and being frustrated with the athletes is oftentimes normalized. It may be a testament of the culture fostered in this sport, however, it still isn't fun to be on the receiving end of it."

*"With my coach, boys especially get harassed, humiliated, threatened, bullied on a regular basis. I am routinely told I am obese, f*ing useless, I have no talent, my [skill] is dog shit, I eat wrong, we walk too loud - I could go on forever ... Every day during team activity, I am told I can be replaced, I will be sent home, I am off the team if I don't "x", there is a plane ticket waiting for me I am not allowed to eat much, because I am constantly being told I am fat - I was hungry all the time while travelling this past season - my food was controlled so that I would lose weight. I get treated like this and I am the top male athlete on the[sport] team."*

2. Silencing

Supporting the data on disclosing and reporting are the athletes' accounts of their experiences provided in the qualitative responses.

"Knowing we can be replaced and our careers are on the line, you are regularly forced to ignore issues or maltreatment out of fear. I have witnessed blackmail, intimidation, favouritism, experienced verbal and mental abuse personally. We are silenced or put down if u ask questions. I am fearful that after I speak out, I will be punished."

"I never felt like there was anyone I could speak to about [concerns about harmful behaviours] because [sport] was my life and I didn't want to jeopardize my career."

"Power and funding rules over athletes, and there is nowhere for them to go otherwise that doesn't spit them back into the NSO pocket. Like it, deal with it, or your out, that's what we are told."

"I've never submitted a complaint to [Sport Organization] because I was scared of how it would affect my place on the team because politics plays a major part in our sport."

"The fear of being blacklisted / kicked off a team / losing funding kept me silent when I should have spoken up and done something when I witnessed cases of bullying / harassment."

"I left [sport] because I was the favorite target of an abusive Coach. I was so afraid of him and "what he would do to me" if my Mom found out what he had done - I usually felt sick. Could not really concentrate. I left this sport because of fear."

"I did not make a formal complaint because the process was lengthy and I was afraid of repercussions and mentally it would be difficult to deal with and continue training."

Recommendations Made by Athletes to Advance Safe Sport

1. Independent 3rd-Party Disclosure, Reporting, and Support Mechanisms

The most frequent recommendation posed by retired and current athletes was the implementation of a third party, neutral, independent body where athletes can go when they feel they have faced abuse, discrimination, harassment, etc. Importantly, athletes referred to this independent body as being completely disconnected from their NSO and a place where they can go to disclose an experience and receive support even if they choose not to submit a formal complaint. It would also be a place to submit a formal report and receive support throughout the investigative and adjudication processes. Below are some relevant quotes from the athletes:

"Telling NSOs about a concern means putting them in a position where they have to incriminate themselves."

"Expecting NSOs to run their own investigations is wrong. They have too much to lose."

"Only having reporting systems in the NSO is not sufficient because it is not always in their immediate self-interest to handle it properly, nor do most NSOs

have the skills or capacity to deal with them. I believe that the mechanism should be directed through a body that is based in law and completely independent."

"If we are ever to have truly safe sport, an authoritative, confidential, and INDEPENDENT body must be put in place."

"I would never feel comfortable going to my National Sport Organization if I were harassed in any way and would 100% need an individual body to report the harassment too. I would be far too scared to say anything to my coach or my HPD."

"One centralized, independent reporting agency... would take the burden off NSOs and PSOs that are under-resourced or unwilling to manage."

"Asking for help from the people that hired the abusive coach was like committing suicide"

"I strongly feel that as an athlete, we need a third party organization to report to, or even someone to talk to for advice. Right now, in my sport, we have no outlet for resolution, and I don't even know who I would approach if I had an issue!"

"Provide a central safe reporting space outside of the sport organization that actually has power to make change within a sport without political interference."

"A formal complaint process where I didn't have to fear repercussions and harassment would have been useful."

Athletes commonly referred to the benefit of having a neutral support person to walk them through the investigation process once a complaint is made; this person could also keep them safe and protected from punishment, backlash, or retribution.

2. Attend to All Forms of Maltreatment

Athletes referenced a need to broaden the lens on maltreatment from a predominant focus on sexual harm to other forms of harm. As one athlete reported, *"It needs to be about more than just sexual abuse and harassment. There are so many other ways athletes are abused in the sporting system that can have long last effects/harm."*

3. Implement Mandatory Education for All Sport Stakeholders

The responding athletes made several recommendations for further education – for coaches, sport administrators and high performance directors, as well as for athletes. This education would include evidence-based education about power, all forms of

maltreatment, mental health and everyone's role in facilitating a sport environment that promotes help-seeking and minimizes the risk of maltreatment from arising. Educational programming must be repeated on a regular basis.

Many of the athletes referenced the need for education about the changing landscape regarding the behaviours that are and are not acceptable. For example, one athlete said, *"more education is needed on 'It's not okay to do X anymore.'"* Another athlete wrote, *"Teach male coaches that it isn't appropriate to talk about sexual things, whether or not they relate to the athlete, ever. Teach coaches to not discuss the negatives of their personal/home life with the athlete, ever."* As one athlete wrote, *"Coaches are educators. Most math teachers would be fired for negatively screaming at a person for a wrong answer. Out with the old in with the new."*

It was also recommended that sport administrators, high performance officers, and coaches be educated about the *"implicit cues athletes receive that make athletes feel pressured not to report things and keep quiet about unfair practices (fear of losing funding, support, team selections etc.)"*

Although many athletes referred to maltreatment perpetuated by coaches, they also emphasized the importance of attending to issues that arise between peers. Moreover, they recommended that coaches learn how to prevent and intervene in cases of peer-related maltreatment.

Athletes reported that further education is needed for athletes to know their rights, appropriate relationship boundaries, and appropriate/inappropriate behaviours in sport. Numerous athletes expressed sentiments similar to one athlete who reported, *"I didn't realize that the way I was being treated was inappropriate."*

4. Strengthen Accountability Measures

Numerous recommendations were made by athletes to strengthen the accountability of NSO's including regulatory process to ensure NSOs are adhering to appropriate policies, procedures and practices. Further, athletes recommended regular assessments of NSOs of their actions to change the culture of athlete welfare (through policy, climate survey results, self-evaluations of sport, etc.). In addition, athletes perceived a need for NSOs to hold coaches accountable for their conduct as indicated by the following reports:

"When an athlete or team says that the coach is unfit and that her behaviour is considered harassment, listen! It is not ok to 'wait and see' what will happen and expect that all problems will resolve themselves. When 12 people give you different instances of unacceptable behaviours, that means there is a problem, don't tell your athletes that they are 'just being dramatic and will have to deal with it.'"

"There should be the ability to have the coaching job taken away if coaches are abusive. I believe my coach acts the way he does because he knows he can get away with it. We are all minors and he has all the power. As a young athlete, I am not safe to do or say anything to or about my coach without repercussions - so I just stay silent and endure it."

"I had 3 abusive coaches over a 10 year period. All three eventually "resigned" quietly, this prevented us from accepting what had happened and doing the work to rebuild. It was all very invalidating and detrimental to the physical and mental health of the athletes."

Another recommendation made by some athletes was a regularly scheduled audit of the nature and quality of athletes' experiences. Athletes believed they should have access to safe processes by which they could evaluate their own experiences including the conduct of those in positions of power and authority.

5. Ensure Support and Resources are Available for Victims of Maltreatment

The responding athletes believed that safe, accessible and confidential avenues for disclosure and reporting should be available to those who experience maltreatment. Further, they advocated for sport authorities to provide supports and resources for athletes who are victims of maltreatment. Given their positions of vulnerability and the short- and long-term effects of maltreatment, they believed that help should be provided to help survivors recover.

6. Prohibit Sexual Relationships and Forced Intimacy Between Athletes and Persons in Positions of Power and Authority

A consistent theme in the athletes' recommendations was to prohibit sexual relationships between athletes and persons in positions of power and authority in sport. The following quotes exemplify this point:

"Zero tolerance of coach athlete sexual relationships. The power imbalance is too great to allow for consent."

"Make it against the rules for people within the national team staff (eg coach, high performance director, physiotherapist) to be involved in a romantic relationship."

"I experienced discrimination and was treated negatively while working with a coach that enjoyed flirtation with other female athletes. I maintained a clear coach/athlete relationship and suffered lack of coaching feedback and attention because I didn't engage in flirtation with the male coach."

7. ENHANCE THE FOCUS ON ATHLETES' HOLISTIC WELL-BEING

Athletes recommended a reconsideration of the relationship between funding for sports, the focus on performance outcomes and the well-being of athletes. As some athletes wrote;

"From a larger perspective, sport culture needs to change to value the holistic development of athletes (mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual). That comes with providing evidence-based education to increase literacy surrounding the well-being of athletes."

"To truly advance safe sport Canada needs to take a long hard strategic look at how they are funding athletes. As long as the pressure and bottom line of money for medals exists challenges around safety in sport will remain because the pressure to perform and the impacts of other people on other athletes to perform will continue."

"Negative environments should not be left unchecked just because the club/program is producing results. I know a lot of athletes who produced great international results but are still seeking medical attention from the mental abuse they endured. Canadian sporting results are not worth that kind of damage. This isn't about the pressures of competing at a high level, but mostly the mental abuse that can happen when people turn a blind eye."

"Athletes need to be seen as having value and not as a commodity that is easily replaced."

"I think we need to value athletes as people first, not solely on their ability to get medals. To do this isn't to say winning doesn't matter, but it's to respect a fair and transparent process for everything at all times. This gives athletes agency, which can in turn lead to them feeling better about their sport journey regardless if they achieved their goals or not."

"As long as people are achieving results, the coaches and high performance directors could act with absolute immunity. No medal justifies how we were treated. In all honesty, I will never get over it."

END OF REPORT