

“We have to empower each other”

An assessment on the development of a global
solidarity network among athlete survivors

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Sport & Rights Alliance

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About the Sport & Rights Alliance

The Sport & Rights Alliance's mission is to promote the rights and well-being of those most affected by human rights risks associated with the delivery of sport. Our partners include Amnesty International, The Army of Survivors, Committee to Protect Journalists, Football Supporters Europe, Human Rights Watch, ILGA World (The International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association), the International Trade Union Confederation, Transparency International Germany, and World Players Association, UNI Global Union. As a global coalition of leading NGOs and trade unions, the Sport & Rights Alliance works together to ensure sports bodies, governments and other relevant stakeholders give rise to a world of sport that protects, respects, and fulfills international standards for human rights, labor rights, child rights and wellbeing and safeguarding, and anti-corruption.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the inspiring and courageous athlete survivors and victims, network representatives and allies who spoke with us and provided information for this report. Following a trauma-informed and ethic of care approach, all survivors consulted for this report were compensated for their expert time and contributions, and access to holistic support was provided and made available throughout the entire process.

Executive Summary

Inspired by the movement of mothers against police violence in Argentina, Brazil, US, UK and other countries, the idea of peer-to-peer support and power of connection was brought to light in the context of sport.¹ Athletes' support groups have been scientifically scrutinized and proved to provide various benefits for their participants. In the US, The Army of Survivors was founded by more than 40 athlete survivors of sexual violence and advocates for and supports athlete survivors through resources, accountability and education. Previous analysis of athletes' experiences found that initiatives such as online support forums have proven to be very effective tools. They have the power to overcome geographical and time constraints as well as providing a safe space for athletes to share their feelings and experiences, resulting in emotional relief and grief management.²³⁴

With this in mind, the Sport & Rights Alliance sought to research whether an international community of people connected by their lived experiences from all over the world could be a place of advocacy and opportunity to share experiences, knowledge, and facilitate learning across regions. The goal of this project was to explore interest in, capacity for, and opportunities among athlete survivors and representative organizations to facilitate greater worldwide connection, exchange, advocacy, and support for survivors of abuse in sport.

Conducted by the Sport & Rights Alliance from May to November 2022, the present study was composed of four phases: (1) Expert engagement; (2) Desk research; (3) Consultation; and (4) Report. Three main groups took part in the Consultation phase: (I) Individual Survivor Athletes; (II) Representatives of Existing Athlete Survivors' Organizations; and (III) Representatives of Other Survivor Networks. In order to gather perspectives and contributions from individuals and organizations in the most diverse way possible, an approach to start from the margins was adopted in terms of: geography (North and Global South), social origin, ethnicity, disability, gender (including trans and other gender-diverse groups), sexual orientation, and other diverse characteristics.

¹ In 1977, the Asociación Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) began demonstrating in the public square located in front of the Casa Rosada presidential palace, in the city of Buenos Aires, to petition for the reappearance of their disappeared children. Inspired by them, in 2006, the group Mães de Maio (Mothers of May) was created after clashes between the police and armed groups resulting in the killing of more than 500 people. Similar groups have been created in other countries, including the US, UK and other parts of the world.

² See more here: Helena Kita, Kylie D. Mallory, Andrea Hickling, Katherine E. Wilson, Emily Kroshus & Nick Reed (2020) Social support during youth concussion recovery, *Brain Injury*, 34:6, 784-792, DOI: 10.1080/02699052.2020.1753243

³ See more here: Ahmed, O. H., & Pulman, A. J. (2013). Concussion information on the move: the role of mobile technology in concussion management. *J Community Inform*, 9(2).

⁴ See more here: Pennebaker, J. W., & Harber, K. D. (1993). A Social Stage Model of Collective Coping: The Loma Prieta Earthquake and The Persian Gulf War. *Journal of Social Issues*, 49(4), 125–145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1993.tb01184>.

A trauma-informed approach was adopted throughout the entire consultation process in order to avoid retraumatization and distress of athletes. Project leads consulted 2-5 participants at a time in 90-minute online meetings to obtain data about thoughts and recommendations on the topic as well as their experience. A total of 9 focus groups were held, interviewing 25 athlete survivors, and 2 other interviews with 3 representatives of similar networks in other sectors. Every participant with lived experience received compensation for their expert contribution. This compensation also included a portion designed to allow participants to connect with psychological, legal or any other support needed. The World Players Association local support services list was made available to participants throughout the consultation and at least one individual contact was made after the consultation to ensure any additional requirement was supported.

Consultations were inspired by anti-oppressive and intersectional trauma-informed principles and were guided by a harm reduction focused ethic of care. Simply, the safety, wellbeing, and autonomy of participants were prioritized. This approach to facilitation sought to create a space where participants' experiences would be acknowledged, affirmed, and heard.

Throughout the focus groups, there was a strong consensus on the need for an international solidarity network focused on survivor athletes' needs, which can be summarized in three overarching areas:



Healing

Create an empowering and informative website that offers a variety of information on available support systems, peer-to-peer support guides, national network building tools, and forum for exchange on how to report and seek support, including networks of expert lawyers;

Develop spaces for collective peer-to-peer support groups;

Establish an emergency fund to provide individual or collective legal, emotional, physical, or digital support, as required.

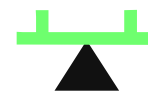


Voice

Develop a model of good practices for sports' governing bodies through an athletes' perspective to improve their understanding of international human rights and the ability to make reforms;

Capacity building and training programs, including exchange on trauma-informed approaches, survivor representation, media training for survivors wishing to speak publicly;

Providing awareness raising and education for grassroots athletes on what constitutes abuse, how to be heard and how to build spaces of representation.



Justice

Conducting a state-level mapping process to identify where each country/region stands in terms of management, prevention, advocacy, awareness-raising and initiatives aimed at ending maltreatment in sport;

Advancing advocacy knowledge in various forms such as: exchange around country-level policies and best practices; as well as developing representation channels with national and highest levels of sports governance;

Solidarity with survivor campaigns to pressure governments and/ or sport governing bodies at national or global level to seek accountability.



From an athlete's standpoint, a global network should promote engagement of not only people with lived experiences and existing national coalitions, but also those allies who care deeply about athletes' safety but may not have first-hand experience. Values of solidarity, transparency, independence, accountability, care and respect should be maintained throughout the entire process.

With the mission of building a mutually supportive community around the world, a global network of athlete survivors would provide space for healing through connection, promote athlete voice and representation by improving advocacy strategies and tactics.

To challenge the common sports hierarchy, a linear, non-hierarchical and horizontal model of governance should be sought. To build on existing initiatives and knowledge such a network should be co-hosted by the Sport & Rights Alliance and The Army of Survivors, as well as maintaining ongoing exchanges and close partnerships with similar networks from other sectors, such as the BRAVE Movement and International Justice Mission's Global Survivor Network. The network should develop a three-year strategic plan as a way to further develop, implement, and evaluate each activity before scaling the network's operations. It is important to highlight that there is no committed funding for the development of such a network. All participants have been informed that this study is a basis for understanding and evaluation, and the Sport & Rights Alliance and its partners cannot guarantee nor commit to building such a network without the appropriate resources.

01

Introduction



The world of sport has been riddled with systemic physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and harassment – leading to its own #SportsToo moment. From high-profile cases such as the decades-long abuse of hundreds of women and girls and subsequent cover-up in the US, to the culturally accepted and institutionalized physical violence against young martial arts athletes in Japan, a tidal wave of reports over the past decade has unequivocally established that athlete abuse is endemic to the world of sport.⁵⁶⁷

In pursuit of its strategic goal to support and advocate for the people of sport and build the sport and human rights movement by centering the voice of survivors, the Sport & Rights Alliance has harnessed, organized, and amplified the work of its partners in cases of systemic physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in sports. Our work with affected people on the ground has revealed gaps in the availability of resources and support for athlete survivors as well as a lack of representation in discussions and decision-making at the highest levels of sport governance, policy, and action. Through this experience, we developed the hypothesis that a global network connecting athlete survivors could potentially fill this gap by creating the opportunity for survivors across the world to come together for mutual support, advocacy and mobilization.

We firmly believe that the change we want to see and how it is supposed to be done needs to start from the voices of the athletes with lived experience. It is only in close consultation with individuals who have been through adverse situations within sports that we will be able to understand the complexities of preventing and addressing systemic abuse in sport. **Because everyone has unique experiences, it is important to hear from as many people as possible, as diverse as possible, and to establish a solid foundation for any future endeavors.**

5 See more here: https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/media_2020/08/Japan0720_web.pdf

6 See more here: <https://oig.justice.gov/reports/investigation-and-review-federal-bureau-investigations-handling-allegations-sexual-abuse>

7 See more here: <https://sites.edgehill.ac.uk/cpps/projects/child-abuse-in-sport-european-statistics-cases/>

02

Methodology



This report is the result of a short-term project conducted by the Sport & Rights Alliance from May to November 2022.

Detailed information on the Methodology (Section II) and Trauma-Informed Application (Section III) used in this project are provided due to feedback from focus group participants, outside reviewers and partner colleagues, who praised the ethic of care applied in the project and expressed wishes for other studies on abuse and harassment to adopt the same. Information on the results of the project's methodology is presented in Section IV: Key Findings.

The needs assessment methodology consisted of the following four phases of work:

1

Expert Engagement

Set up an independent steering committee composed of experts on safeguarding and violence in sport to oversee the overall implementation of the project. An expert consultant with lived experience was engaged to lead the project as “Senior Project Manager”, and a trauma-informed expert moderator was hired to review the methodology and moderate the consultations (see Section III for details).

3

Consultations

Conduct qualitative structured interviews through focus groups and individual follow-up meetings to gauge interest, need, and capacity for a global network of survivors; explore needs and preferences for specific resources and activities to be provided by any such network; and ensure the prioritization of survivor needs and voices in the ideation and formation of this potential network.

2

Desk Research & Outreach

Map partners and organizations who have ties to athlete survivors and affected groups; explore available research and current status of survivor-led advocacy, networking, and participation on a global level, in sports and other fields of industry; as well as reviews of previous work from Project CARE and other partner studies. Identify potential participants using the Alliance's own contacts, those of the Steering Committee members, as well as through online research and via contacts of the Alliance, Steering Committee, online research and participant referrals. Conduct outreach via email and/or social media (private channels) when appropriate.

4

Report

Prepare a short report detailing the methodology, mapping, analysis and assessment on the need and feasibility of a “Global Survivors Network” and preliminary recommendations for its design, development, and operation.

To accomplish the goals of this project three main groups of stakeholders were consulted:

Individual Survivor Athletes

Those who have come forward (whether publicly, or privately, to one of the Project Leaders or Steering Committee Members) but may not necessarily be connected to athlete survivor groups.



Representatives of Existing Athlete Survivors' Organizations

Survivors or representatives of national or regional sports' survivor networks.



Representatives of Other Survivor Networks

Survivors or representatives of global networks of survivors outside of sports.





The following definitions were adopted in the methodology of this project to include not only violence at the interpersonal level, but also all types of maltreatment and injustices athletes are exposed to while engaged in sports:

Survivor

Recognizing that athletes face an increased threat of all forms of abuse and maltreatment due to their participation in sport, and that this threat often increases with the level of elite competition, this Project used a broad definition of the term survivor to mean any athlete with lived experience of abuse — including whistleblowers and teammates who were affected by abuse or by the resulting effects and responses within the sport organization.

Athlete

Though many people involved with sport have been and are impacted by abuse, both within the sports context and outside of it, this Project aimed to focus on the athletes and players who experienced abuse within the context of sport.¹

Abuse

This Project adopted the UN's definition of abuse² which includes physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic, institutional behaviour pattern or threats of actions that influence another person. This includes any behaviors that frighten, intimidate, terrorize, manipulate, hurt, humiliate, blame, injure, or wound someone. Abuse also includes discrimination, microaggressions, racism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia, or other harms, especially those experienced by marginalized persons. It is critical to recognize that human rights are inalienable, and that violence against marginalized populations is a long-standing problem.

¹ See more here: https://stillmed.olympic.org/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/IOC/What-We-Do/Protecting-Clean-Athletes/Safeguarding/IOC-Consensus-Statement_Harassment-and-abuse-in-sport-2016.pdf

² See more here: https://hr.un.org/sites/hr.un.org/files/SEA%20Glossary%20-%20-%205BSecond%20Edition%20-%20202017%5D%20-%20English_0.pdf

With the aim of gathering perspectives and inputs from individuals and organizations using an intersectional and transversal approach, it was decided to reach out to individuals from the most diverse backgrounds possible, especially since the desk research conducted revealed that survivors from the Global South are the least likely to be supported by formal networks.

The following criteria were considered to design the consultation model:

Geography

Global South and Global North; at a minimum 60% Global South, with over 60% being preferable

Networks

Athlete survivors/representatives involved in networks, athlete survivors not involved in networks, and survivors/representatives of networks outside of sport

Disability

Disabled/Para-athletes

Gender

Women, men, trans and gender-diverse athletes

Ethnicity

Racialized groups

Other diversity characteristics

Such as type of abuse, type of sport (individual vs team, professional vs grassroots), age, and financial background were considered where possible



03

Trauma-Informed Application



The project leaders decided to conduct the consultation through focus groups, a qualitative research technique often used to advance knowledge about a certain population with respect to conscious, semi-conscious and unconscious psychological and social-cultural characteristics. Inspired by the resources and expertise offered by The Army of Survivors with respect to trauma-informed approach, this consultation was committed to the understanding of the impact of trauma on the individuals involved and the need for constant attention and sensitivity.⁸

Each session had a duration of 90 minutes, with groups of 2-5 participants. The main objective was to understand the participants' feelings, experiences, and opinions on the need to develop global connections between survivors in sport. **Every participant was offered compensation for their contribution, including additional financial compensation for any psychological, legal or other support that may be needed.**

In terms of outreach to the participants, special needs were taken into account in order to reduce potential distress, and evidence-based ethic of care procedures were adopted and will be described in the following section:

a) Principles and Approach

Facilitation was inspired by anti-oppressive and intersectional, trauma-informed principles, and was guided by a harm reduction ethic of care. Simply, the safety, wellbeing, and consent of participants were prioritized.

'Intersectional' acknowledges the ways in which social categories, including but not limited to race, socio-economic status, ability, body, gender, and sexuality, interact to shape experiences of trauma. It is the recognition of marginalization, meaning that the threat of harm and access to resources to redress that harm are not evenly distributed. Some groups of people are under higher threat of experiencing harm and have decreased access to support and resources.

'Anti-oppression' signifies the acknowledgment of power dynamics and the role we all play in creating and perpetuating social and structural power imbalances and inequities. Facilitation was steered by a humble reflection on power, privilege, values, history, beliefs, and trauma experiences to avoid recreating abusive and inequitable dynamics and structures.

This approach to facilitation aimed to create a space where participants would be acknowledged, affirmed, and heard. Feelings of safety and affirmation are unique to each individual and participants were welcomed to provide feedback on what would contribute to the space feeling safer and more supportive for them. Creating a safe and affirming space was not seen as a list of checkmarks to be completed. It was invited and encouraged through a community agreement and commitment to ongoing listening, learning, and growth between each other.

⁸ See more here <https://thearmyofsurvivors.org/trauma-informed/>

b) Application: Before, During and After

A trauma-informed approach was carried throughout the process of participation. To start the consultation, an evidence-based mode of outreach was adopted.⁹ Each participant was formally invited by email, given advance notice that they would receive financial compensation for their participation, and provided with a detailed informed consent document that explained the project's purpose, leaders and involved organizations, types of questions, support services provided, policy on voluntary participation and withdrawal, confidentiality and use of data.

Before the focus groups, a list of other participants involved in the same focus group, including names of people involved in the project and moderator, was shared with participants to avoid any additional distress or re-traumatization and a summary of the needs assessment guiding questions was shared. At this stage, an option to provide written feedback or individual call was provided, and the link to World Players' Project CARE website local services resources available worldwide was also shared.¹⁰ The focus groups were organized based on participants' availability. They were informed of the focus group participants' details prior to the consultation and given the option to decline participation if necessary. No one did so, except for one participant who had digital connectivity issues (they later responded to our questions via email).

During the consultation, the moderator provided an overview of what to expect and emphasized that the participants' safety and wellbeing was the top priority. Participants were informed that they would not be asked to share any details of their story or experience in sport. They were also asked if they were comfortable if another participant did choose to share details of their experiences. Participants were offered choice in the level and method of participation which felt best for them and supported their safety and wellbeing. This included, but was not limited to, turning off the video for periods of time or for the entire focus group, leaving the focus group for a break, or leaving the focus group and not returning. Participants were also given the choice to leave the focus group and have a one-to-one interview or provide feedback on the questions via email. It was made clear that exercising any of these options would not at all influence the participants' compensation or relationship with the Sport & Rights Alliance.

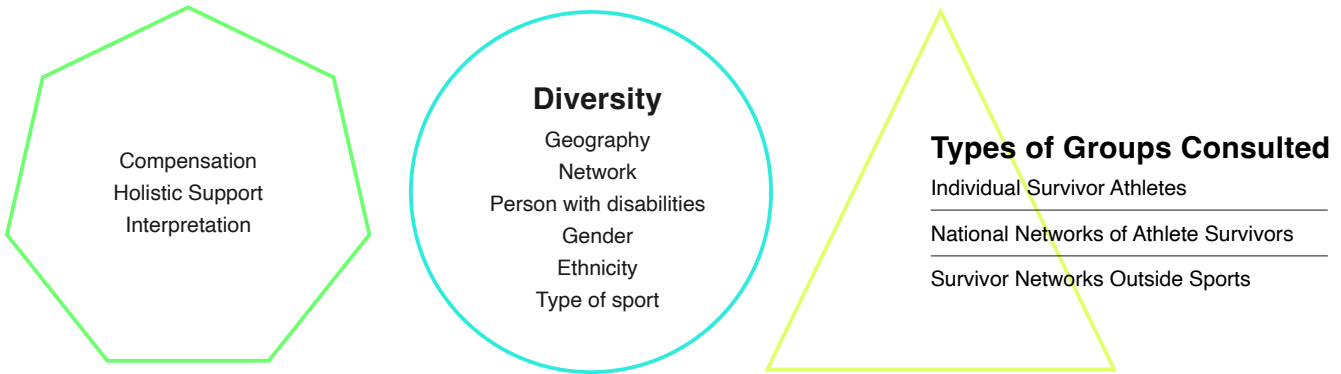
Participants were also welcomed to communicate any feelings of discomfort or distress throughout the focus group either verbally or by writing the words 'yellow' or 'red' in the chat. These words indicated that the conversation was starting to feel uncomfortable and a request for the conversation to be redirected by the moderator. The moderator made sure that every participant had the same amount of time and opportunity to contribute. Although an easier flow was observed among those participants who previously knew each other, the exchange between those who had not met previously was still fruitful.

After the focus groups, participants received a 'thank-you' email and were encouraged to provide any additional insights they had. At this time the link to World Players' Project CARE website local services resources was also shared and an invitation to reach out for any additional support was included.

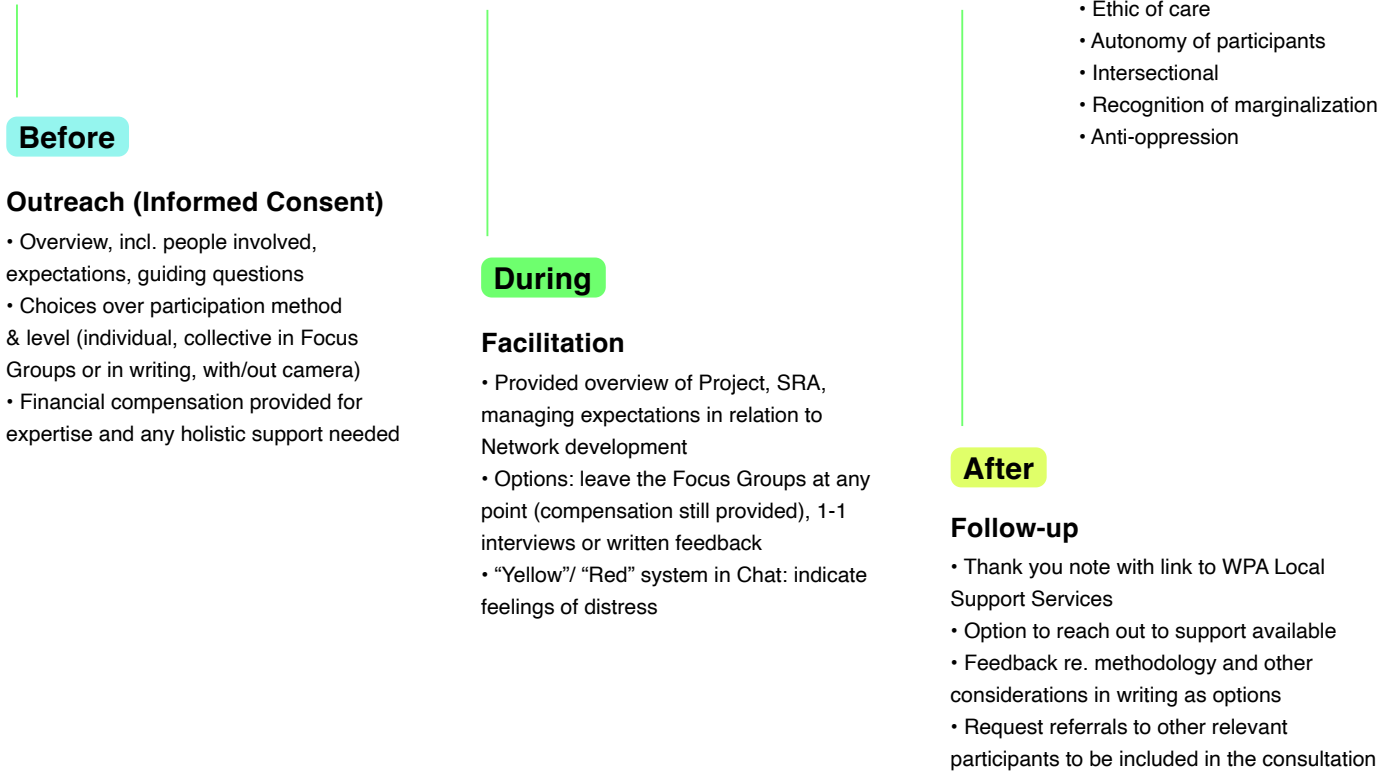
9 See more here: DiLillo, D.; DeGue, S., Kras, A., Di Loreto-Colgan, A.,R., & nASH, c. (2006) Participant responses to retrospective surveys of child maltreatment: Does mode of assessment matter? *Violence and Victims*, 21(4), 410 - 24. <https://doi.org/10.1891/0886->

10 See more here: <https://worldplayerscare.co/local-support>.

Consultation Methodology



Trauma Informed Approach (Ethic of Care)



04

Key Findings



A total of 9 focus groups were held between August and September 2022: 7 focus groups were held in English (with French interpretation provided in 1 of them), and 2 in Portuguese. After reaching out to approximately 50 individuals, a total of 25 athlete survivors or representatives of athlete survivor groups agreed to participate in the focus groups – 20 women, including 1 trans woman; and 5 men.

Facing challenges of identifying and contacting athletes from the Global South,¹¹ the initial objective of reaching 60% majority participation from the Global South was not met – 10 participants were from the Global South (Afghanistan, Argentina, Brazil, Iran, Kenya, Mali, South Africa) and 15 were from the Global North (Australia, Canada, France, Ireland, United Kingdom, United States). For consultation purposes, diversity in terms of ethnicity and sexual orientation was also accounted for but participants were not compelled to disclose or identify themselves concerning that aspect.



Furthermore, 2 additional interviews were held with leaders of similar survivor networks outside of sport, the BRAVE Movement (childhood sexual assault) and International Justice Mission's Global Survivor Network (survivors of human trafficking and other forms of violence) in order to learn from their experiences in mobilizing and building survivor-led advocacy groups. The participants in these groups were all women (3), including 2 women from the Global South.

¹¹ Outreach began with athletes who have publicly spoken about their experiences with abuse, which poses challenges due to the limits of public information and research capacity, as well as the potential stigma around reporting abuse and/or public advocacy, in many contexts in the Global South especially. At the end of each consultation, participants were also asked for recommendations for others to include, and provided several. We were able to identify and contact 50 individuals in total, 29 from the Global North and 21 from the Global South, with approximately a 52% response rate for the Global North and a 48% response/participation rate for the Global South.

The results of the focus group discussions are described below following the order of the guiding questions:

(A) Is there a need for and utility to an international network connecting survivors in sports?

“The network should be about human, peer-to-peer contact between people - that’s the most important.”

“I think it’s a great idea. It’s really hard to prioritize because there’s so much good that could come from this, to help athletes struggling feel like they’re not alone. There are a lot of groups, but not enough.”

“For me this network is really important because of the experience I had. The institutions are broken.”

“Inequity has kept us apart and this network must work to bridge that gap because the gap exists.”

“Not feeling alone is a huge part.”

“It should definitely exist. I would think of different ways - support athletes, to understand what they are going through, to give names to the violations; legal support as well, would be important.”

“I think it’s important to have help. I need to be able to reach out to a place that has that clout that can advocate on my behalf. Being accessible and actionable.”

“I think there should be a safe space that athlete could reach out, a mechanism that can help athletes.”

“Networks are fundamental, they provide support. It is rare that we can achieve something on our own. In a network we can achieve much more.”

“I feel there is a need for this network.”

All athletes, from both the North and Global South, all agreed on the value and need for such a global network. Participants generally agreed with the premise that feeling heard and seen is a crucial component of safety, and that there is a need for a trusted place to access support and advocacy. As a result, the presence of such a network could, among other functions, mitigate microaggressions and other injustices experienced by athletes when engaged in sports. It is crucial for survivors to have access to an ecosystem of trustworthy contacts in a range of fields, including legal, mental health, and from accessible peer support.

(B) What kinds of activities should this network focus on?

● Assess local safeguarding context & map resources:

“It would be cool to have a map or list so you can see local organizations that are working in your country, so there’s more safety.”

“I think for better communications, it is good to have a group of experts that each come from a country that they can share what’s going on in their respective countries and they build a network. This way we will have a sort of database.”

The mapping process should identify where each region stands in terms of management, prevention, advocacy, awareness-raising and initiatives aimed at combating maltreatment in sports. This would entail areas where combined forces are needed to support the most impacted stakeholders, enforce policy review and advocacy, or it could minimize duplication of efforts where safeguarding arrangements are already firmly established. An emergency fund should be established to provide individual or collective legal, emotional, physical or digital support, as required and analyzed through a detailed and holistic needs assessment.

● Advocacy

“We have to empower each other.”

According to the recent International Olympic Committee (IOC) Strategic Framework on Human Rights:

“...Affected stakeholders are those people or groups whose human rights are or may be negatively affected in connection with the organization’s operations. For the IOC this can include many different groups of athletes – such as women, LGBTI+ athletes, young athletes, or athletes from racial or ethnic minorities – as well as journalists, volunteers, fans, workers and local communities connected to the hosting of the Games. Affected stakeholders can often lack voice or influence in decision-making processes, yet they are the ones most deeply affected by them. We believe that the IOC is aware that their views matter, yet currently lacks the structures to support regular, meaningful engagement with them across the IOC’s operations as part of how the organization identifies and takes action on human rights risks...”¹²

The network could advocate for and facilitate knowledge exchange (a two-way street where institutions can share and learn together); operate as a channel, between survivors and the highest level of governance; act as a shield to pressure sports governing bodies to build better accountability structures as well as a providing support for those already doing similar work at the national level.

¹² See more here: https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Documents/Beyond-the-Games/Human-Rights/IOC-Strategic-Framework-on-Human-Rights.pdf?_ga=2.105529475.1065323001.1668893890-2144897693.1668893890

● Develop a model of good practices and case studies for sports' governing bodies:

"The sport leaders ruin things then ask us to fix it. We can be advisors. Putting the burden on us is like modern slavery."

There are a substantial number of available resources on good governance, including guidelines for what an organization should put in place and standards against which to benchmark a modern model of good governance. These projects, however, are typically not founded on human and/or child rights and/or the needs of those people made most vulnerable inside sports.¹³

In order to address all forms of injustice and maltreatment in sport, sport must develop a solid understanding of international human and child rights and make adaptations to specific contexts. Providing benchmarks and case studies (especially in terms of case management) can offer greater comprehension. To date, very few sports organizations have a strong track record with successful cases or appropriate safeguarding systems in place. The network could learn and benefit from investigated cases where appropriate sanctions were posed and an ethic of care was offered to the victims. Through cross-case analysis, the network can also have a clear grasp of good, poor and bad management practices, and advocate for solutions.

● Mentoring or buddy scheme:

"Maybe even a buddy system so they can share what this experience has been like for them, to prepare them to go through the legal process."

"The network should be very comfortable for survivors."

The concept here is to offer initially a 'friendly ear' and guidance, a 'buddy system'. Buddies must have a non-judgmental outlook as well as the ability to offer empathy, encouragement and support. A buddy can provide the survivor with the opportunity to choose the course of action most suited to their situation.

The buddying scheme should be shaped on a peer-to-peer light support, be flexible and mutually beneficial since it is based on a less hierarchical model and built on mutual trust, allowing participants to communicate more easily.

● A resource hub:

"I would like to see wellness activities and networking. With a combination of just allowing members to bring out issues that are challenging to them and their communities"

"We need a group of 25-30 people who meet, get together, share workshops, the same way as other human rights activists."

"It is important to have a database/hub of information."

This resource hub could take the shape of a website that offers a variety of sources and relevant information on education, advocacy and media training, raising awareness, available support services and systems, and other topics mostly directed to and built by survivors. Participants could also be provided with a weekly or monthly newsletter and monthly focus groups on various subjects relevant to the network's scope.

13 Kumar, B. Prashant, et al. "Where Is Interpersonal Violence in the Academic Sport Integrity Discourse? A Systematic Review of the Scientific Literature." *First Conference of the Research Chair in Security and Integrity in Sport, Abstracts*, 2021. <https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8725966>

● Pressure for accountability from the sports governing bodies:

“It’s really important to know what survivors want if you’re in a room with people who can make those changes.”

“We have seen accountability in other sectors of society, we could bring this to sport. Redress is a big one as well. Organizational change (governance), you were hurt, we are sorry this is what we’ve done (public).”

“The number of times I have to tell sports bodies that they are not the victims. Just be humble, and realize it’s not about you.”

“I’m struggling with the fact that sporting federations are not being held accountable.”

A network of survivor voices could be an extremely powerful catalyst in driving accountability for sport governing bodies and governments whose systemic failures have allowed abuse to happen. Survivors’ expectations related to accountability, monitoring and remedies are key to inform the design of systems and mechanisms and build trust from those affected by injustices that occurred inside sports.

When the legal process is intangible, remedies can take different forms such as monetary compensation from sport governing bodies or governments, apologies and/or commitment to prevent future harm from happening. A global network of survivors could raise awareness of what survivors really need and want from remedy processes.

● Capacity building for survivors:

“A mentoring process with someone who knows what best practices are in sport, help athletes find their voice, perhaps even someone who could come to a meeting like that and support me.”

“Survivor burnout is real. It can happen when you least expect it.”

“If there was something there to prepare athletes or whoever before they speak up. So they’re fully informed about what they’re about to get themselves into.”

“Such a network is very important. One of the most important gaps is where athletes can find resources to educate themselves.”

The network could work as an independent body bringing together survivor-advocates, and survivors that want to begin advocacy activities, within a process of leadership development and/or media training processes in a way that survivors might be able to better understand how media operates, how to build a connections with reporters among other things. The purpose is to empower survivor-advocates to advance towards shared advocacy goals in a humanistic, evidence-based, survivor-centered, and culturally adapted manner to build participants’ capacities.

Survivors often experience mental health crises and distress due to their advocacy work, and risks can be compounded by intersecting inequalities. Without adequate ethical care, initiatives like these can cause more harm than good. The network must therefore avoid burnout among survivors at all costs.

● Provide awareness raising and education for grassroots sports:

“Once you call yourself an athlete, you stop calling yourself a human. And you certainly stop being a kid. Athletes have a hard time articulating that they are a survivor let alone being abused.”

“Especially grassroots athletes need a lot of support in terms of advocacy and policy.”

“Something different we have is that we look at athletes that are not elite, we see access to sport as a right.”

Because children are inherently more vulnerable than adults, and with the additional power dynamics inherent in sport, it is crucial to educate child athletes on what constitutes acceptable behavior and what doesn't, such as abuse, harassment, bullying and microaggression in sports. The needs of each region and cultural context should be considered in any education or training program. It is crucial to engage with athletes who are not necessarily in the spotlight and have not disclosed or not yet recognized that what they have suffered is abusive behavior.

Participants interviewed expressed that the IOC, National Olympic Committees and International Federations are mostly focused on performance and winning medals, not giving much attention to grassroots sports. Some participants expressed that young athletes in grassroots are subjected to various forms of violence, particularly those who are from the Global South and those experiencing intersecting inequalities. These forms of violence include physical, sexual and emotional abuse, economic exploitation, recruitment scams, illegal immigration and even discrimination by talent when children are labeled as unskilled and denied their right to play sports.

● Facilitate ongoing communication with international governing bodies:

Safeguarding in sports rarely receives media coverage unless there is a high profile, contentious issue or an abuse scandal – usually at elite level. Additionally, communication between athletes and institutions is frequently difficult due to the hierarchical nature of sports, continuous failures of sport's duty to protect, and little to no participation of athletes or their representatives in decision-making. For victims of abuse in sport, it is difficult to be thrust into the media while also dealing with the system of sports governing bodies. The network could enable greater communication and proactive (rather than reactive) advocacy within sports governing bodies, and elevate athlete's position so they can have an impact and spark cultural change. The network could also protect athletes from excessive exposure that could lead to retaliation.

● **Campaigning on vulnerability and cases of harassment and abuse of male athletes:**

“When you tell your story as a male athlete, they often don’t want to hear the full story. Males are squashed and kept pressed down so they can’t tell their story.”

“Helping survivors come forward more easily, especially for male survivors. To see others who have come forward really helps.”

Men participate in sports more than women. Despite the large percentage of male victims, female victims have received more attention from both the academic and governance world with efforts to reduce incidents of harassment and abuse. Sexual violence of male athletes is rarely reported, recognized or properly addressed. The patriarchal society we live in, the misconception that men are not victimized and homophobic notions that stigmatize male survivors, demonstrate that education is essential to acknowledge.¹⁴¹⁵

● **Raise awareness for the particular vulnerabilities experienced by gender diverse athletes:**

“The worldwide politicization and polarization of trans participation in sports are incredibly traumatic. Body policing, ostracization, isolation, abandonment, rejection, dismissal, and other negative experiences cannot be overlooked and is essential to get recognized as nothing less than emotional abuse.”

It is crucial to prevent interpersonal violence against athletes of all gender identities, sexual orientation, and sex characteristics. Athletic environments are disproportionately hostile for athletes that identify as queer, trans or any identity outside the cisgender binary. Several prevalence studies have shown that a non-heterosexual athlete is an associated factor for violence of a psychological, physical and sexual nature.¹⁶ A sports environment that is not supportive and thriving towards equity is likely to constrain the participation of gender diverse athletes.¹⁷ Apart from that, other dimensions of aggression related to access to sport and the right to participate should also be a matter of concern and topic of advocacy within the network.¹⁸

14 See more here: Hartill, M. (2014). Exploring Narratives of Boyhood Sexual Subjection in Male-Sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 31(1), 23–43. <https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2012-0216>

15 See more here: Hartill, M. (2009). The Sexual Abuse of Boys in Organized Male Sports. *Men and Masculinities*, 12(2), 225–249. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X07313361>

16 See more here: Vertommen, T., Schipper-van Veldhoven, N., Wouters, K., Kampen, J. K., Brackenridge, C. H., Rhind, D. J., Neels, K., & Van Den Eede, F. (2016). Interpersonal violence against children in sport in the Netherlands and Belgium. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 51, 223–236. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.10.006>

17 See more here: Ayala, E. E., Waniger, K. J., Faulkner, K. P. A., & Riley-Schmida, A. (2020). Experiences That Affect Participation of Women and Gender Diverse Athletes in Competitive Cycling. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation, Education, and Leadership*, 12(1), 10–26. <https://doi.org/10.18666/jorel-2020-v12-i1-9912>

18 See more here: Davis, E. C. (2009). Situating “FLUIDITY.” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 15(1), 97–130. <https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-2008-020>

● **On what the network should not do:**

“Safeguarding is being hijacked by sports federations who really do not care. They want to be the heroes. So we really need to be careful about allies and who’s funding them.”

“We stay in our lane to ensure the safety of athletes. If we step out of that lane to meet sports federations wishes, etc. But if we stay in our lane, people will see that we are doing this for the right reasons.”

“I believe that something we should not do as a global network is to be a generalist. We need to focus and have a specific target.”

“Legal support would be the last point - because institutions are not equipped to hear our case, we need to be ok first to be able to deal with abuse.”

The network should not duplicate work in this area.

The network should instead offer the opportunity to connect through a strategic coalition with existing networks in order to amplify and empower athletes rights.

The network should not be the gatekeeper of survivors’ voices.

Athletes should be free to choose for themselves when, how, and with whom they will discuss their experience (if they choose to). By no means should the network decide whether they should speak or shape their discourse.

The network should not instrumentalize survivors by any means.

Typically, the people who are violated are usually the ones asked to do the work – or they are co-opted to “check the box” for an organization’s reputation but not to enact meaningful change. It is not the network’s nor participants’ job to fix the system’s problems. Avoiding activism burnout and engaging people in a positive way is at the utmost priority.

The network should not prioritize legal action at the forefront.

Legal action and prosecutions are based on a variety of factors, starting with particular national laws. Additionally, the formal legal process is a lengthy process and might last up to five years or longer. As a result, the majority of participants did not prioritize this as at the network’s most important function. However, it was acknowledged as a later focus after a solid foundation of the network was established.

The network should not be generalist.

It is very important that the network has a focus and specific target.

(C) Who should participate and what should it include (in terms of types of abuse as well as whistleblowers, allies, organizations, etc.)?

“Having allies within the group would be great. It’s more about people engaged in networked thinking.”

“Shouldn’t exclude anyone, but it should be a careful process.”

“For me, it’s important to switch off and do something completely different.”

“Offering the possibility of choice - people coming in and out of the network as they want.”

“There should be survivors on the board and survivors informed. Trauma-informed therapists and lawyers who could be beneficial and provide a lot of resources.”

Participants agreed on including athletes from all levels (grassroots to elite) from organized sports, as well as whistle-blowers, and allies in general. Observations were made regarding the significance of exercising caution when involving new members in the network and upholding the goal of providing a safe space for those who are interested in the subject but may not have first-hand experience.

It should be possible for athletes to participate in various ways in accordance with their preferences and availability. Whether it is public-facing in a more outspoken way, internally in a behind-the-scenes manner or even anonymously.

(D) What could be potential names for this network?

“The terms are very different from one country to another. The word survivor is a strong one – I don’t think random people would come to identify with that, so that dismisses some people.”

“The term survivor is accepted by many. I personally don’t identify with it. I would feel uncomfortable with that label.”

“I do have an issue with survivors. I always feel like it takes me right back to the incident that happened. Even when I use it myself.”

“When I hear survivor, I think of the TV series.”

“I personally don’t connect with the term survivor. I don’t like victims either. I usually say ‘I experienced abuse in sport’.”

“Survivor burnout is real. It can happen when you least expect it.”

“The network should be very comfortable for survivors.”

“I don’t like the word survivor, I think it implies sexual abuse.”

“I hate being called a survivor. You either call me a victim or nothing at all. I am a human being and an athlete. We don’t need to be labeled.”

“Survivor isn’t a term I’ve sat with before. I’m not there yet.”

“All athletes are survivors.”

“Maybe an acronym would be interesting.”

“Name is really important as it directs how you will be known - it should also be translatable.”

Coming up with a name has proven a challenge. The weight, shame, and non-identification with the term of survivor have been raised in several discourses. “Survivor” for some is a term that implies sexual abuse only, whereas for others it takes them right back to when the violence happened or does not translate into their own language. Participants agreed that terminology should be carefully considered and that terms should acknowledge an athlete’s vulnerability when positioned lowly in a hierarchical structure. Some have also suggested that the name may need to change over the course of time and as the network evolves. Following a brainstorming session, the following suggestions were made by the participants:

“Athletes for Safe Sport”

“Athlete Alliance for Safe Sport”

“Global Alliance for Safe Sport”

“Survivors for Change”

“Global Athletes & International Networks for Safe Sport”

“Global Network of Athlete Survivors”

(E) In which ways can global engagement be ensured?

“We would need to have interpretation. But what intrigues me is that independently from the cultures, we are experiencing abuse everywhere.”

“We could have regional partnerships, we would of course need support from local groups. Build through these existing networks. There are many networks that say they are global and they are only in the US and Europe.”

“To learn from other countries to see how they handle these claims and provide best practices. Comparison to other countries would also be helpful, there are so many differences from sport to sport.”

“The most important aspect is inclusivity. For me it is unity, one voice. We run a risk of having white anglo-voices leading this because of resources.”

“Cultural shock is the first barrier - religion, the way you see each other as a human being. It is hard but it would be important.”

Participants stressed the importance of adding translators, interpreters and sign language specialists to decrease linguistic obstacles. Another point raised was the importance of concentrating on the margins and considering diversity from a wide range of views, including those of geography, gender, sexual orientation, and race. The idea of establishing regional branches to address specific cultural aspects while preserving a shared global reference point was also mentioned.

(F) In terms of governance, how it should be governed, also in relation to the Sport & Rights Alliance and its core partners?

“Needs to be both skill-based and survivor-informed. Should be an organization informed by survivors; important to compensate survivors.”

“This network should not go near the national or international federations. As an athlete I have zero trust in those organizations.”

“For this to be successful, you need trust from athletes. There are limits to independence, because you need funding but it’s how you mitigate that.”

“The fact that the network is not built within sports bodies is already really an important step to be independent.”

Recently, the sporting world has acknowledged the need for better standards of administration. Good governance derives from the corporate world and, sometimes may be reduced to a general checklist of criteria by including: accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, transparency, anti-corruption strategy, among others.

Participants expressed the idea that the network should go beyond a set of principles by embracing a democratic process based on human rights in every aspect of it. This requires the network to be athlete driven and skill based, adopting a very clear governance model, clear purposes and strategies, and to be collaborative and supportive from the outset.

The network should address real or perceived conflicts of interest, primarily to avoid lack of trust from the stakeholders involved within the network. Regarding the network’s leadership position, it all starts with a fundamental motivation to serve, to be consistently people-focused, supportive, purpose-driven, hospitable and inclusive.

Internal decisions should be made following a consensus principle, to set a common agenda based on similar tested and effective project models, motivated by the premise that: without an open and respectful space for disagreement, and divergence, there can be neither consent nor consensus.¹⁹

A co-management framework is intended to let athletes participate in accordance with their preferences, availability, and, most importantly, their wellbeing. Steering Committee Members must agree to practice equity, to share administrative, programmatic, and fundraising obligations, and to make decisions by agreement within this framework. This coalition method can be highly effective and allow skill development through encouraging or facilitating bringing together of ideas, applying a consensus principle, and supporting community agreement.

The flat structure and practices surrounding it has the potential to challenge normalized imbalanced power positions that have become so commonplace in sports. It is vital to envision what is possible with collective action.

According to participants, financial support should go beyond lip service and come from those who continuously demonstrate a genuine commitment to the network’s pillars and frameworks.

¹⁹ See more here: Inter Pares. (2011). *DOES IT WORK? Feminist Analysis and Practice at Inter Pares*. Canada’s International Development Research Centre. <https://interpares.ca/resource/does-it-work-feminist-analysis-and-practice-inter-pares>

05

Conclusion and Recommendations



Participants of the consultations highlighted three main overarching principles and approaches that are relevant to any global initiative connecting and engaging with survivors of abuse in sport:



Geography Participants from the Global North focused more on governance and other policy solutions, whereas participants from the Global South pointed to issues such as getting stakeholders such as peer athletes, coaches and managers to acknowledge and address the problem. Project leads noted that participants from the Global South disclosed their experiences in higher detail during the consultations in comparison to those from the Global North, who focused on advocacy activities and policy reforms.

Intersectionality Survivors acknowledged the need for an intersectional and culturally affirming approach to network participation. Due to intersecting inequalities, athletes who identify as gender-diverse, queer, a person of color or someone with a disability, face additional risks of abuse, as well as risks in reporting, accessing support systems, leaving the abuser, and returning to sport. There is often a dome of silence for male-identifying athletes who face stigma given the prevailing culture of toxic masculinity in sports. These groups are likely also under-represented in studies on child abuse because of these stereotypes and barriers to coming forward.²⁰



Additional Dimensions of Violence The participants also described additional instances of microaggressions that go outside the scope of existing documents such the IOC consensus and others. This confirms that it is important to listen to athletes from these areas in order to understand unique situations and deal with maltreatment in general that are out of the scope of current dimensions of violence. Participants expressed events such as experiencing xenophobia while competing abroad, getting refused entry from hotels or being harassed by skinheads, and searching for a network of protection with those outside of sports who are also socially ostracized.

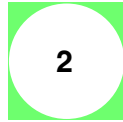
20 See more here: Okur, P., van der Knaap, L. M., & Bogaerts, S. (2020). A Quantitative Study on Gender Differences in Disclosing Child Sexual Abuse and Reasons for Nondisclosure. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 35(23–24), 5255–5275. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260517720732>

After careful analysis and exploring the findings from the consultations with athletes and existing networks, the following recommendations for further action are put forward:



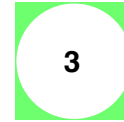
Building Global Connection

There is a need to build an open space for athlete survivors to connect and serve as advocates. Participants highlighted that by sharing their experiences they could more clearly comprehend that resistance against one form of violence is inadequate without resistance against all forms of violence by having a basic understanding of race, class, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, and other categories. By building cross-country and cross-culture connections, sports could advance the understanding of reasons behind why some athletes are marginalized, while others are not, or are not in every situation, and identify structural root causes for a sporting environment that is beneficial to some, while others are detrimental.



Purpose and Method

People with lived experience can offer understanding and empathy sometimes far superior to those provided by well-intended acquaintances. Meaningful solutions can be provided through the power of dialogue among those who have been through similar experiences. Networks such as The Army of Survivors have proved the power of a diverse group of athletes with similar experiences in raising awareness to a systemic problem within sports.



Governance Guidelines

The network should empower athletes from all over the world who have experienced injustices and maltreatment in sport by offering a place where they can feel safe, heard, appreciated and supported – and where they can be equipped and supported to advocate for and advance a safer world of sport.

The purpose of the structure and framework of the network is to start from the margins in, working in a model of collective action that encompasses:



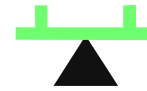
Healing

To provide space, information, funding, and connections to increase access to individual and collective support for survivors and allies, and ensure a resourceful, resilient and sustainable network.



Voice

To provide spaces for athlete-led advocacy, representation and meaningful engagement of people with lived experience, victims and survivors of abuse in sport.



Justice

To increase pressure for and strengthen development of trauma-informed and survivor-led global sport policy and governance structures that ensure accountability.

The network’s foundation will be based on the following agreements:

| |
|--|
| Ensuring that participants safety and security is the top priority (do no harm principle) |
| Ensuring that debates center on ideas rather than individuals |
| Ensuring that each person feels heard and unjudged |
| Discussing, debating and sharing ideas towards common goals (action oriented) |
| Being mindful of impact vs. intent - even with the greatest of intentions, it is possible for your words or actions to do harm, it is crucial to stay vigilant |
| Evaluating to see if you are using anti-discriminatory methods and supporting members fairly |
| Being conscious that nobody is an expert, and nobody has all the answers |
| Concentrating on topics that will advance a safe world of sport as well as the network and the community as a whole |

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