

## Conclusions

### **What is the nature and scale of the transgressive behavior in gymnastics?**

- The former athletes look back on their entire gymnastics career; the current gymnastics athletes were interviewed about their last sporting year. Transgressive behavior occurs in gymnastics, especially the former athletes report the constant living among threatening and threats of humiliation, insults, giving negative criticism, making a fool of someone in front of a group, yelling, manipulation, intimidation, isolation, scolding, force, blackmail, control, threatening, continuing to practice with injuries, inciting – unhealthy – loss of weight and speaking about an overall culture of fear.
- A limited number of former athletes also brought forward sexual assault. In one case it concerns a host parent, in other cases it concerned a medical professional and in one case reference was made to a coach.
- It could be that a selection effect has taken place, i.e., that especially victims from the elite athlete levels filled out the questionnaire. However, it goes without saying that the malpractices as reported are of a serious nature.
- Transgressive behavior among current athletes also occurs, especially the continuation of training with injuries has been mentioned, but also other types of mental abuse, such as the refusal to allow an individual to share one's own opinion. They indicate that the transgressive behavior occurs 'sometimes' ('often' is mentioned far less frequently in the questionnaires). The majority does not report persistent transgressive behavior.
- Serious forms of transgressive behavior (physical violence and rape) have virtually not been reported by the current athletes.
- The investigation particularly focuses on transgressive behavior in gymnastics, as a result of which the positive aspects of the sport and the joy children/ youngsters may have as well in practicing the sport, have been addressed to a lesser extent.

### **At which levels and in which disciplines does the transgressive behavior occur?**

- The higher the sports level, the more athletes report transgressive behavior. The prevalence of transgressive behavior is the highest among those gymnasts who perform at an international level; subsequently at a national and regional level, respectively, and the lowest with recreational gymnasts.
- The disciplines in which the highest number of transgressive behavior is reported, are ladies gymnastics, acrobatic and rhythmic gymnastics.
- The trainer's dominance and the isolated world of the elite sports culture, together with the selection at a very young age (early specialization sport) and the many training hours, are important risk factors for the development and continuation of transgressive behavior, especially when taking into consideration that elite athletes regard this as normal within the sport.

### **What are the backgrounds and characteristics of the offender and victims of transgressive behavior?**

- Girls report transgressive behavior more often in gymnastics than boys, both in absolute and relative terms.
- The transgressive behavior takes place at an early age. Then, the athletes are vulnerable in view of their development, dependence on the trainer and their desire to perform.
- In comparison, offenders are more often male, but also women are guilty of transgressive behavior. The vast majority of them performs the role of trainer.
- The context in which the transgressive behavior takes place, exceeds the dichotomy offender – victim. First of all, the parents are responsible for the well-being of their children, even though they temporarily handed over the pedagogic tasks to a trainer. Secondly, clubs and KNGU are responsible as well when they know or should have known about the transgressive behavior at that moment and they did not take enough action or no action at all.

### **Which consequences did/ does the transgressive behavior have for the victims?**

- The consequences for having been confronted with transgressive behavior vary and it seems to depend on the intensity and the duration of such behavior that the victims had to endure. The consequences may be psychological and/ or physical.
- The root of the mental issues – and particularly former athletes, experts report this and it also turns out from literature – is caused by identity problems, their early (identity) development was damaged. A trauma developed due to the excessive negative youth experiences. They talk about PTSS, depression and dissociation, inter alia.
- Sometimes, former athletes report that they have been facing such serious issues as a result of which they have/ had to involve professional help.
- Physical problems at an advanced age are caused by the continuation of training amidst injuries/ pain.
- The issues seem to be less serious among the current athletes, but they refer to weight issues and, additionally, they are still part of the sport (culture). They have not been able to distance themselves from the sport like the former athletes.

### **To which extent can the transgressive behavior be explained and/ or placed in the context of a particular sports and training culture?**

- Gymnastics has particular features which makes the sports vulnerable to undesirable behavior. It is an esthetic, acrobatic sport, but it is also, inter alia, a contact sport. It involves many training hours with a high intensity. As a result of this, there is a dependency relationship and a high vulnerability for serious mental and physical malpractices, among which injuries and eating disorders as well.

- A tough training culture prevailed in gymnastics at higher competition levels during which the individual well-being of the athlete did not play a role, which was originally copied from Eastern Europe after which normalization took place of undesirable behavior, among which yelling, intimidation, manipulation, blackmailing, negative approach, insulting, making a fool of someone, refusal to allow for participation by the athlete, or psychological violence. It is uttered that this tough training culture was normal in elite sports until around 2007. Even though this culture was normalized in sports, it was not normal, not within the system of standards within society either. At present, we have a different view on this.
- At present, the culture is still described as “tough” by gymnasts, when they refer to the training intensity. Less has been reported about undesirable behavior. In order to be able to make final statements about this, the group of (semi-) elite athletes has to be monitored and another assessment will have to be carried out again after a number of years when the gymnasts reflect on their career.
- The “system” is characterized by various actors which all jointly play a role with the child. Thus, they all bear responsibility as well. Insufficient attention has been drawn to the tasks and responsibilities of each individual involved and also to the limits of responsibility.

**To which extent did victims submit a notification about transgressive behavior, and if so, with whom/ which body and with which result?**

- Few notifications of undesirable behavior are made with the appropriate authorities.
- For a long time, the policy was primarily focused on cases of sexual intimidation and, for instance, not on intimidation and violence. An integral approach did not exist in the field of undesirable behavior.
- Many notifications with the KNGU were informally addressed till 2019. This is primarily due to the fact that only in 2020 intimidation and violence were included in the disciplinary regulations (Regulations of General Disciplinary Law).
- Twenty-two disciplinary cases have been addressed since 1999. A number of cases have been declared inadmissible. Additionally, three criminal cases were found as regards undesirable behavior in gymnastics.
- In addressing the notifications, the KNGU is sincerely hampered by the fact that the KNGU has hardly any control on the clubs and it does not have a contractual relationship with the majority of the trainers.
- Since 2019, the notifications have thoroughly been registered in the CMSS- system, which is used by the sports federations, among which the KNGU.
- The Institute of Sports Justice is quite often criticized in addressing notifications. It concerns, for instance, the refusal to submit reports, lack of communication about

the procedure, as regards which the notifiers did not know that the report would be seen by the defendant, the treatment, the reporting, et cetera.

**Which policy and legislative measures have already been adopted with regard to a safe sports environment and to which extent do these yield an effect?**

- Few measures were adopted in the early years.
- The action plan towards a safe sports climate was initiated in 2011. The actions primarily aimed at preventing sexually transgressive behavior. The tools, such as codes of conduct, also focus on this. A ten-point-plan, aimed at safety, will be set up.
- Efforts will be targeted at multidisciplinary teams for the (gymnastics) elite sport programs of the KNGU. This is considered as a good step forward. However, it only concerns the elite sport.
- Since 2017, efforts have been targeted at a pedagogic climate and a pedagogic vision is developed.
- Experts are involved in the further development, among which a neuropsychologist.
- At present, the effect of the wide range of measures cannot (yet) be assessed.

**Recommendations**

**Justice and care for former athletes**

a. Recognition

Apologies shall be made and the victims deserve recognition for the harm that has been inflicted on them.

b. Damages

Particularly victims among the group of former athletes who participated in the highest (inter-) national competitions and who have been subjected to more than thirty training hours per week experienced and experience damages, according to the literature, experts and the gymnasts themselves, from what they went through in gymnastics. We are aware of the fact that NOC\*NSF has not granted damages in earlier investigations into transgressive behavior. At least a compensation is appropriate as a recognition for the harm that was inflicted on them. For instance, by analogy with the investigation as regards the girls of the Good Shepherd (a private institution). The sports organization(s) is (are) not equipped with, and does (do) not have knowledge about and experience with the allocation of monetary funds. It is wise to allocate this with an institution which can adopt further criteria and which has knowledge about and experience with the allocation of funds.

c. Good healthcare

An investigation has to be carried out as regards a good assistance process for the victims. At present, they do not always receive the specialized and long-term care they need. The victims consider knowledge about the elite sports as very important.

d. Contact between fellow-victims

Victims also ask for contact between fellow-victims. It has to be explored where this can be established in the best way possible.

e. Restorative mediation

Explore the opportunities for a perspective and restorative mediation, for those who wish to make use of this.

### **Justice and care for current athletes**

a. Four-eyes principle

The starting point is that the four (or more) eyes principle is ensured in the gymnastics hall. In principle, a trainer is not alone in a gymnastics hall. The more hours an athlete practices gymnastics in the gymnastics hall, the more important it is that another individual is present apart from the trainer, and who is capable to confront the trainer where necessary. Response to research questions, conclusions and recommendations.

b. Give the athlete and parents a voice

Set up an individual plan with the talented young athlete in which enough attention is given to the balance between elite sports and other activities (among which school). To this end, it is important that both the gymnasts and the parents are heard and are given the opportunity to discuss matters at regular intervals, which do not only concern the performances but also the entire well-being of the young athlete. Implement a structural embedding into the structure of the clubs and KNGU.

c. Put the topic on the agenda

It is recommended that gymnastics clubs put the topic of transgressive behavior on the agenda in the broadest sense of the word and that they continue to do so within the board, with the parents, the young athletes and staff. Do not allow that the agenda is dictated by incidents, but draw fundamental attention to the topic on the agenda.

d. Guarantee that conflicts of interest are minimized

Double roles and a mixture of roles take place. It is important that a policy is developed in order to prevent conflicts of interest as much as possible in all reasonableness, and, additionally, to develop a policy how to handle a situation if a conflict of interest is likely to occur.

e. Take care of good follow-up care

Follow-up care is also a task for the sports organizations after a (elite) career in sports. It is preferable to handle this throughout all sports via NOC\*NSF, as a result of which athletes find their way in a suitable position in society after their sports career.

### **Pre-conditions**

a. Trainers and pedagogics/license/obligatory training/ scoring system

Set up a better system throughout all sports as a result of which better training and additional courses can be provided to trainers. Explore the possibilities of a scoring system and a central registration system.

b. Governing role of KNGU: enhance the control on trainers and clubs

Where possible, implement a more centralized system, which has been implemented with men's gymnastics for instance, where the trainers are employed with the KNGU and carry out their activities as trainers at centers recognized by the KNGU (former support centers).

Make sure that the infrastructure, among which the multidisciplinary teams and the knowledge available are provided to clubs within the region. When the number of training hours for the talented child is high (more than 12 hours per week), then the interrelation with this infrastructure and knowledge is required.

c. Facilitating role for municipalities

Draw attention to preventing undesirable behavior in the sports agreements. Allow for a stronger steering role by the municipalities. Municipalities can indicate with which clubs and on which (quality) requirements they cooperate. Municipalities can also enable that a local cooperation takes place with schools and health care institutions, as a result of which a close relation is realized with other organizations and living surroundings of children.

d. International: reorientation on gymnastics by FIG.

As KNGU, continue with the efforts to change the rules, especially in raising the age to 18 years for participation in international games. Draw attention at an international level to more information and knowledge sharing, also when it involves coaches who have been convicted (disciplinary and criminal law).

e. Enhance legal knowledge

Guarantee throughout all sports and more in particular with the Center Safe Sports (*Centrum Veilige Sport*) and the Institute of Sports Justice (*Instituut Sportrechtspraak*) that more knowledge is available about disciplinary measures, the disciplinary system and criminal law, and the limits to the tasks, responsibilities and competences of the board, management, confidential (contact) counselors, disciplinary committee members, complainants and investigators.

f. Professionalize the process from the notification to the disciplinary case and draw more attention to the following points:

- Make the Center Safe Sports independent from NOC\*NSF. Maintain a clear boundary between the notification, referral, assistance to athletes and complainants on one hand, and the (pre-trial) investigation/ detection and prosecution pursuant to disciplinary law on the other.
- End the title of the position of confidential contact counselor within the federation(s). The title of this position and the framework within which confidential contact counselors operate, are unclear and cause confusion for complainants. Clarify beforehand which tasks, responsibilities and competences the federation has. Explain which information is shared with whom, when and why.
- Professionalize the Institute of Sports Justice, inter alia with a better division of competences in performing the tasks and a more prudent implementation of the process from a notification to a disciplinary case. Ensure good communication about the process. Make a clear distinction within the administrative organization between the pre-trial investigation, the investigation as regards disciplinary law, investigation and prosecution. Take care of peer-to-peer coaching.
- Revise and evaluate in time (yearly) all regulations, protocols and guidelines which concern undesirable behavior.
- Consider the introduction of an exploratory talk, in conformity with the working method of the vice police department, so the individual who submits the notification knows what is ahead of him/ her when he/ she continues with the notification towards a report. Provide the investigators and complainants with training, not only as regards the contents/ legal but also as regards treatment, approach and research competences. Further knowledge in the field of false notifications/ reports.

g. Reconsider the financing system in elite sports

Reconsider the funding via performances. Explore other performance indicators as well, in order to prevent that the pressure on performances outweigh a health climate.

h. Vision of elite sports for young children

Develop a vision of elite sports with regard to young children.

i. Professional supervision

Explore the opportunity to increase professional supervision (inspection) for trainers and clubs.

j. Role of NOC\*NSF

Support the federation in developing a vision of age limits and start a lobby to this end. Develop a specific policy for the early specialization sports, also with regard to educational courses. Provide a further impetus to athletes in order to prepare for a life after their sports career. Develop a trainer registration and monitoring system, and a scoring system as regards educational courses. The level of education has to



increase overall at a full scale, and the focus will have to be on, and/ or investments will have to be made for new, talented trainers.

k. Circles of responsibility

Clarify the tasks, responsibilities and competences of all parties involved (circles of responsibility), and, to this end, the limits of responsibility as well.

l. Develop a perspective for trainers

Trainers are a crucial link in the system. As a rule, they hardly receive any remuneration (or no remuneration at all) and they do bear a large responsibility. The trainers must receive sufficient support and monitoring. At present, trainers do not have enough perspective for further development.

m. Minimum age

The minimum age of athletes is a concern. This debate has not ended yet. Even though the average age of the elite gymnasts is relatively high, their elite sports career still starts at an early age. Too little attention is paid to the question "why" and "wherefore"? Why does a young child have to go to a dietician? Why is measuring weight necessary?

n. The right tools

The question is whether the clubs have the right tools to act. The number of volunteers in board positions decreases throughout sports. Not everyone has enough managerial experience. This critical shortage and lack of quality (with some clubs) deserves attention throughout sports. It has to be investigated whether clubs can jointly exchange knowledge/ experience in the region (for instance, headed by the municipality).

o. Additional financial resources

Too little funds are available overall in gymnastics so as to reach decisive big changes, or to allocate funds to recognition, for instance. The question is whether other parties are willing to contribute to this from a societal responsibility.

p. Follow-up investigation

It is recommended that a periodic investigation be carried out in order to 'monitor' the current group of talented and elite athletes in both their athletic and personal development, not only by internal sports experts, but also by external experts. This investigation raises the question as well as to how the sports culture is in other sports divisions. We strongly recommend an independent scientific investigation to this end.