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Incidents of Sexual Harassment in Turkey on Elite Sportswomen

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March 14, 2008

THE SPORT JOURNAL

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to examine incidents of sexual harassment by trainers, administrators, spectators, etc. directed at elite sportswomen from different branches. The 356 sportswomen participants voluntarily took part in this study. They completed a twenty-item questionnaire that had been tested for validity and reliability. The Alfa reliability coefficient was found to be 0.86. The data collected were analyzed through SPSS program and data relations were examined via a chi-square test. The significance level was $p<0.05$.

The findings of the study revealed that 200 out of 356 sportswomen stated that they had been sexually harassed. The most frequent time of harassment was found to be after games or training, and the most frequently occurring location of harassment was the sports center. The relationship between branch groups, age, educational background, and the sexual harassment was found to have $p<0.05$ significance. The relationship between years of experience in sports, marital status, the gender of the trainer, and sexual harassment were found to be insignificant ($p>0.05$). The overall findings of this study show that elite sportswomen from different branches are exposed to sexual harassment. This supports the related literature.

Introduction:

As a form of sex discrimination, sexual harassment has a variety of definitions in different domains. However, none is universally accepted (Brackendridge et al., 2000). In general terms, sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual attempts (Fedai et al., 2001); in sports, it takes the form of slang words, teasing, covert jokes, negative comments on a sportsperson's body or performance, and unwelcome physical contact. Whether physical or psychological, it is disturbing to the person, and is given without consent (Brackendridge et al., 2000, Charney et al., 1994; Ian, 2000, Kirby et al., 1997; Lackey, 1990). Research on sexual harassment in sports began in the mid-1980s (Brackendridge, 1997) and was commonly defined as rudeness to women by adult men (Brackendridge, 2000 & Seefelt, 1998).

Sexual harassment is a relatively new area of study in our country, but it has been on the agenda in Western countries for a long time. Though the problem has existed in our country, due to social perceptions, attitude differences, and the socialization process it has not been studied in detail. When considering the damage it causes to a person, to a club, and to the sports community, the significance of the situation becomes obvious. Moreover, sexual harassment has potentially negative influences on performance, economical and social position, self-confidence, mood, and physical health (Brackendridge et al., 2000).

The sub-objectives of the research were to determine whether sportspersons experienced sexual harassment or not. If so, the type of harassment, by whom they were exposed to harassment, the place(s) it happened, the psychological and physical damages, and the rate of reactions needed to be

considered. In addition, the relationship between the sportsmen's branch (team and individual), age, educational background, marital status, active years in sports, and conceptualization of sexual harassment were examined.

Methodology:

The Subjects

Three-hundred and fifty-six elite sportswomen from various branches of athletics: weightlifting (eight), football (thirty-six), taekwondo (fifty-two), basketball (twenty-six), swimming (eighteen), handball (seventy-eight), volleyball (forty-two), table tennis (eighteen) gymnastics (twenty-two), and miscellaneous (fifty-six) voluntarily participated in this study. Before the training, in the changing room, sportswomen from team and individual sports were given information about the study and the questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were returned to the researchers in sealed envelopes by the participants or the coaches.

Data Collection Tool

After a detailed study of the related research, a twenty-item questionnaire was prepared and piloted on fifty students from Ankara University, College of Sports to check validity and reliability. The Alfa reliability coefficient was 0.86. Before asking sportswomen of different branches to fill out the questionnaires, they were given the necessary information and the questionnaires were distributed in closed envelopes. These consisted of twenty questions, the first five of which involved personal information (age, sports branch, training age, educational background, marital status), and the rest of which were multiple choice questions about sexual harassment. The focus of these multiple choice questions concerned the frequency of sexual harassment incidents, the harasser, the affective dimension, actions against harassment, and the location of the incidents.

Statistical Analysis

The data were analyzed by use of SPSS (7, 5) program. The descriptive statistics was referred to in order to identify the relation between data via the chi-square test. For the analysis of personal information and other responses, frequency (f), percentage (%), arithmetical mean (x), and standard deviation (SD) were referred to. By use of the chi-square test, the relationship between the sportsperson's branch (team and individual), age, educational background, marital status, active years in sports, and relation to sexual harassment were examined. Finally, the level of significance was found to be $p<0.05$.

Findings:

Variables	Number	Percentage (%)	Total	
Age	<19	190	53.4	356
	>20	166	46.6	
Educational Background	High School	110	69.1	356
	College	246	30.9	
Marital Status	Married	18	5.1	356
	Single	338	94.9	

Table 1: Personal Information about Participating Sportswomen

Table 1 provides personal information about the elite sportswomen. For age, 53.4% of the participants were under the age of 20 whereas 46.6% were above 20. For education, 69.1% were college graduates while 30. 9% were high school graduates. Finally, the marital status rate was 94: 9% were single and 5.1% were married. The branches of participants are displayed in Table 2.

Sports Branch	Number	Percentage (%)
Athletics	56	15.7
Weightlifting	8	2.2
Football	36	10.1
Taekwondo	52	14.6
Basketball	26	7.3
Swimming	18	5.1
Handball	78	21.9
Volleyball	42	11.8
Table Tennis	18	5.1
Gymnastics	22	6.2
Total	356	100

Table 2: Branch Distribution of Sportswomen

In addition, it was found that the sportspersons had four to ten years of active sport experience.

4-6 Years11632.7

Duration of Participation in Sport	Number	Percentage (%)
1-3 Years	26	7.3
7-9 Years	124	34.8
10+ Years	90	25.3
Total	356	100

Table 3: Experience

The results revealed that out of 356 sportswomen, 56.2% declared that they had been exposed to sexual harassment, whereas 43.8% declared the opposite (see Table 4). The most frequent sexual harassment type was ‘come-ons’ by 26.4%, ‘unwelcome jokes, questions and ‘sexual utterances’ by 25.3%, and ‘unwelcome letters and phone calls’ by 24.2%.

Frequency	Number	Percentage (%)
Yes	200	56.2
No	156	43.8
Total	356	100

Table 4: Frequency of Exposure to Harassment

In addition, the harassers were identified as ‘spectators’ by 40%, ‘teammates’ by 33.1%, and ‘the trainer’ by 24.8% (see Table 5). As to the frequency of exposure to these kinds of problems, once in a sportswomen’s life was 12.4%, once to three times was 30.9%, four to eight times was 7.3%, five to eight times was 5.1% and continuous was 3.9%. Sexual harassment occured during the following times: 21.3% after games, 19.7% after trainings, 9% before or during games, and 6.7% before games. As a reaction to harassment, 29.8% of the participants stated they ignored the harassment. In addition, 18.5% stated, “I told the harasser not to do it” and 16.9% stated, “I stopped the harasser.”

Types of Harassment	Trainer	Manager	Teammate	Spectator	Other	Total						
No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Come-ons	16	4,5	16	4,5	24	6,7	34	9,6	4	1,1	94	26,4
Unwelcome Jokes, Questions or Sexual Utterances	18	5,1	18	5,1	30	8,4	22	6,2	2	0,6	90	25,3
Unwelcome Asking Out	14	3,9	14	3,9	28	7,9	26	7,3	4	1,1	86	24,2
Unwelcome Letters or Phone Calls	14	3,9	8	2,2	18	5,1	28	7,9	6	1,7	74	20,8
Sexual Exposure of the Body	2	0,6	8	2,2	8	2,2	20	5,6	4	1,1	42	11,8
Light Touching	22	6,2	–	–	6	1,7	10	2,8	4	1,1	42	11,8
Clearly Touching	2	0,6	2	0,6	4	1,1	2	0,6	2	0,6	12	3,4
Rape	–	–	–	–	2	0,6	–	–	2	0,6	4	1,1
Total	88	24,8	68	19,1	118	33,1	142	40	28	7,9		

Table 5: Type and Distribution of Harassment

As to location, 45.5% of the sportswomen stated that the gym or game field is the place where sexual harassment primarily occurs (Table 6). A high percentage of sportswomen (69.1%) believed that sport apparel does not promote sexual harassment, while 29.2% accepted that there was a relationshp between the two.

Location	No.	Percentage (%)
Gyms or Game Field	162	45.5
Changing Room	14	3.9
Equipment Room	2	0.6
Other	62	17.6

Table 6: Locations of Sexual Harassment

Whether sexual harassment affects the performances of the sportswomen was a subject of varying opinions. The percentage that answered that it didn't change performance was 36%, the percentage that felt it created a decrease in performance was 18.5%, and the percentage that felt that it increased performance was 2.2%. The duration of the decrease in the performance was felt by most to last "less than a week". The most frequent reaction to sexual harassment is 'anger' by 20.8 % (see Table 7).

Reaction	No	Percentage (%)
Anger	74	20.8
Fear	40	11.2
Desperation	20	5.6
Inferiority and Worry	22	6.2
Depression	_	_
Guilt	4	1.1
No Feelings at All	6	1.7
Other	36	9.1

Table 7: Psychological Reactions of Sportswomen after Being Harassed

As for the physical/physiological reactions to these kinds of incidents, 'headache' was the largest reactant at 37.1 % (see Table 8). The subsequent actions taken by the sportswomen also varied: 53.9% said they "have done nothing", 1.7% indicated "having seen psychological counselors," and 1.7% indicated "having taken tranquilizers.'

Physical Reaction	No	Percentage (%)
Headache	74	20.8
Insomnia	40	11.2
Heartburn	20	5.6
Tiredness	22	6.2
Nausea- Vomiting	–	–
Dizziness	4	1.1
Irregular Menstruation	6	1.7
Other	36	10.1

Table 8: Physical/ Physiological Reactions of Sportswomen after Being Harassed

The harasser was identified as 'a friend' by 37.2%, as 'family' by 9.0%, and as "the trainer" by 5.1%. That sexual harassment is a problem was partially agreed to by 52.2% of the participants; 29.8% saw it as a real problem, and 18% did not see it at all as a problem.

On the other hand, the relationship between the sports branches (especially team sport) and sexual harassment was found to be significant (p 0.05). Likewise, for age (especially 20 or above), educational background (especially college graduates) and sexual harassment, the significance level was found to be

p 0.05. Nevertheless, the relationship between the duration of experience, martial status, gender of the trainers, and sexual harassment was not significant (p 0.05).

Discussion:

To reach the optimum level of performance, training and game conditions for sportswomen should be secure (Brackendridge et al., 2000). More importantly, the low number of female trainers in our country makes this topic more critical. The research shows that the number of sportswomen and female trainers is much fewer than that of men (Anonymous, 1991). In our study, 84.3% of the women's trainers were men, whereas 15.7% were women. The studies conducted in the U.S. also supported this rate (Lackey, 1990). The harassers generally turned out to be sportsmen and male trainers. In addition, as the perceptions of men and women differ, "unwelcome behaviors" may be taken to be less problematic by men. As a result, completely unwanted conduct may be considered acceptable by sportsmen (Brackendridge et al, 2000 & Seefelt, 1998). The studies so far states that the trainers are the ones abusing relationships (Brackendridge et al, 2000).

The fact that spectators are the most frequent harassers underscores the fact that the low education level of Turkey may be reflected by the conduct of spectators. In this study, 56.2% of sportswomen declared that they had been harassed, whereas the study conducted on 301 Israeli and American sportswomen by Fedjin et al. showed a harassment rate of 14% (Fedjin et al., 2001). This study defined harassers in the following manner: 40% were spectators, 33.1% were teammates and 24.8% were trainers. The most frequent type of harassment turned out to be 'come-ons' at 26.4% followed by 'unwelcome jokes, questions, and sexual utterances at 25.3%, which are the highest, according to studies in the U.S. (Lackey, 1990).

Sexual harassment may occur once; on the other hand, unwelcome sexual conduct may take place repeatedly (Anonymous, 2000; Brackendridge, et al, 2000). The first study about sexual harassment on women in Turkey concluded that 56.2% of the sportswomen had been subjected to sexual harassment at least once. In many other countries, findings show that every three to four sportswomen experience sexual harassment before adolescence (Brackendridge, 1997; Brackendridge et al., 2000). More than 90% of the victims of harassment are negatively influenced emotionally (Brackendridge et al., 2000; Ian, 2000). This study acknowledged that having been psychologically affected, sportswomen have feelings of anger, fear, weariness, loss of self confidence, and loneliness.

The findings for the physical/physiological effects of harassment were parallel to those of other studies (Brackendridge et al, 2000; Charney et al., 1994). The location of harassment occurs 45.5% of the time at the gym or sports field and 21.3% of the time after a game; Kirby and Graves (1997) argued that sexual harassment doubled during trips for trainings.

Of the participants, 69.1% did not agree on the relationship between sportswear and harassment; 29.2% did. Furthermore, no clear relation was identified in the related research; it was considered simply a risk factor (Brackendridge et al., 2000).

A significant relationship of p 0.05 between the branches (especially team sports), age groups (especially the group of 20 or above), educational background (especially the college group), and sexual harassment was found. Female athletes in team sports are at higher incidences of harassment than in individual sports in Turkey (GSGM 2006). Indeed, it is highly popular to participate in team sports such as volleyball, basketball, and handball among females in Turkey. Therefore, it can be proposed that sexual harassment in team sports in Turkey is increased due to the increased interest of spectators. The study on the health staff found that young nurses are the most frequently harassed group in Turkey (Kisa et al., 1996). Other studies conducted in Turkey displayed these findings: 14% of working women are harassed (Cumhuriyet Newspaper, 2004; Milliyet Newspaper, 2004). This is widely observed in hospitals (Cumhuriyet Newspaper, 2004). Sportswomen, at the beginning of their professional life, get discouraged if subjected to harassment. They tend to leave the sports club. On the contrary, some of the elite sportsmen declared

that, independent of the trainers, they succeeded in becoming members of the groups that helped prevent harassment. However, due to their lack of self-confidence, they relate their successes to other people (trainers, managers, etc.). Therefore, we can conclude that instead of coping with harassment, they tend to leave the profession (Brackendridge et al., 2000). The relation between active sports years, marital status, and harassment was found to be insignificant (p 0.05).

Conclusion:

Out of 356 participant sportswomen, 56.2% declared that they had been exposed to sexual harassment while 43.8% did not. The most frequent sexual harassment was stated to be 'come-ons' at 26.4% followed by 'unwelcome jokes, questions and sexual utterances at 25.3%, and 'unwelcome letters and phone calls' at 24.2%.

As regards sources of harassment, 40% claimed that spectators, 33.1% teammates, and 24.8% trainers were guilty of harassment. The rate of sexual harassment varied. Of the participants, 12.4%, declared it occurred only once, 30.9% said that it occurred one to three times, 7.3% said that it occurred four to eight times, 5.1% said that it occurred five to eight times, and 3.9% declared continuous harassment.

As to the timing of the harassment, 21.3% stated it happened after the game, 19.7% after the training, 9.0% before/during the training, and 6.7% before the game. Of the participants, 29.8% said, 'I ignored the act', 18.5% said, 'I told that person not to,' and 16.9% said, 'I prevented the behavior.'

The most frequently occurring location for harassment, noted by 45.5%, was the gym or the field. Of the participants, 69.1% did not accept the existence of a relationship between the clothing and harassment, while 29.2% did.

When questioned, 36% stated no change in their performances, whereas 18.5% expressed a decrease in performance in the case of harassment. The duration of the decrease was stated by most as 'less than a week'. The most common psychological reaction to harassment was found to be 'anger,' at 20.8%.

The most frequent physical reaction of sportswomen to harassment was headaches (37.1%). Of the participants, 53.9% declared that they did nothing to overcome the reactions, 1.7% acknowledged that they have seen counselors and 1.7% have taken tranquilizers. In addition, 37.2% have reported the incident to a friend, 9.0% to family, and 5.1% to a trainer. Finally, 52.2% accepted the harassment as a partial problem, 29.8% as a larger problem, and 18% as no problem at all.

Recommendations for Further Study:

Sportswomen are exposed to sexual harassment in Turkey. Therefore, the following recommendations should be considered. Information sessions on 'sexual harassment' for sportswomen from different branches should be inititated. Practical rules, security guidelines, and other materials should be prepared to increase the security of sportswomen. Sportswomen should enroll in self-defense training. Harassers should be punished with a preventative and appropriate punishment. Working conditions must improve to discourage harassment. Sports managers should take measures to prevent harassment towards sportswomen (eg. escorting sportswomen, making the gym and sport fields safer). Harassed women must be helped to recover and regain their status and self-confidence.

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Appendix: The Questionnaire

Dear sportsman,

Sexual harassment, though not a new issue in our country, has been on the agenda of Western countries for a long time. In many of the sport branches, the number of female trainers is low, which makes this issue significant.

The purpose of this study is to examine sexual harassment incidents by trainers, administrators, spectators, etc. toward elite sportswomen from different branches. Your responses to this questionnaire will not be used anywhere else. The success of this study depends on your complete and correct answers. I thank you for your help and cooperation.

The Researchers

1. Age?
2. Sport branch?
3. For how many years have you been actively involved in sports?
a- 1-3 b- 4-6 c- 7-9 d- 10+
4. Educational level?
a- High school b-University d-Other:_____
5. Marital status?

a- Married b-Single c- Separated/Divorced d-Widow/er
6. The following is a definition of sexual harassment: intentional or repeatedly unwelcome words or physical contact. The following are considered to be actions of sexual harassment: come-ons, unwelcome jokes, questions and sexual utterances, sexually explicit hand movements and facial gestures, unwelcome invitations out, unwelcome letters and phone calls, sexual exposure of part of the body, a soft touch to the body, a clear touch to the body (eg. touching breasts), and rape.

7. Based on this definition, have you ever experienced sexual harassment?
a-Yes b-No
8. Please mark the following that apply to your experience.

‘

	Trainer	Administrator	Teammate	Spectator	Other
Come-ons					
Unwelcome jokes, questions and sexual utterances					
Unwelcome asking out					
Unwelcome letters and phone calls					
Sexually exposing any part of the body					
A soft touch to the body					
A clear touch to the body					
Rape -tendency to rape					

9. How many times you have experienced this kind of sexual harassment?
a- once b- 1-3 times c- 4-8 times d- 8-15 times e- continuously

10. When did you experience sexual harassment?
a-before/during training b-after training c-before game d-after game
11. How did you find solutions when you experienced sexual harassment? (may circle more than one choice).

a-I ignored the act. b-I took it as teasing. c-I prevented the behavior.
d- I told that person not to. e-I reported it to my teammates, trainer and administrators.
f-Other, please write _____
12. Where did you experience sexual harassment? (may circle more than one choice)
a- Gym b-Changing room c-Equipment room d-Other (please write) _____
13. Do you believe that there is a relationship between the uniforms on the field and sexual harassment?
a- Yes b- No
14. How has your performance changed since the incident?

a- My performance increased. b- There was no change in my performance.
c- My performance decreased.
15. If your performance decreased, how long did that last? (based on the latest incident).
a-Less than a week b-1 week- 1 month c-1 month- 3 months d-Less than 6 months
16. How did you react to this incident? (You may circle more than one choice.)
a- Anger b- Fear c- Desperation d- Inferiority e- Depression f- Guilt g- No feelings

h-Other reactions (please write)_____.
17. Which of these physical complaints did you have after the incident of sexual harassment? (may circle more than one choice)

a- Headaches b- Insomnia c- Heartburn d- Fatigue e- Nausea-vomiting f- Dizziness
g- Irregular menstruation h-Other:_____
18. To overcome the physical complaints, what have you done?

a-I have changed my eating habits. b-I have taken tranquilizers.
c-I have had psychological guidance or therapy. d- No actions taken

19. Whom did you talk to about this sexual harassment incident?

a-My spouse b-My family c-My sibling d-One club administrator e-My friend f-My trainer
g-Other:_____
20. What is the gender of your trainer:
a- Male b-Female
21. Do you think sexual harassment is a problem in sports?

a- Yes b- No c-Partially

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