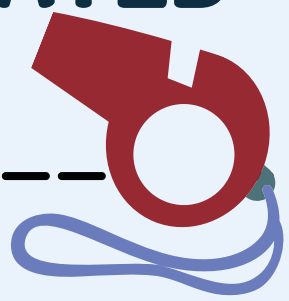


EXPLORING THE MODUS OPERANDI OF COACHES WHO PERPETRATED SEX OFFENSES IN CANADA



OBJECTIVE

The study aimed to explore the **modus operandi (MO)** of coaches who perpetrated sexual abuses toward athletes under their authority in a sport context. MO is a concept that refers to a perpetrator's behaviors prior to, during, and following a criminal act. To this end, the researchers analyzed court judgements and media reports concerning 120 cases of sexual abuse perpetrated by Canadian coaches on 331 athletes between 1967 and 2020.

The MO process of sexual abuse usually occurs in 6 stages:



- 1) Targeting a potential victim
- 2) Gaining trust
- 3) Developing dependency & exerting control
- 4) Isolating the athlete
- 5) Gaining cooperation
- 6) Maintaining silence



HIGHLIGHTS

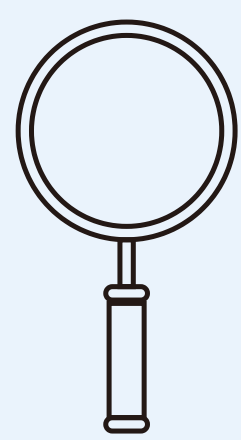
- There were 51 strategies used in the six MO stages that were identified.
- In 25 % of the cases (n = 30), sport organizations had been formally or informally made aware of the abuse but did not report it to authorities.
- The results showed that most coaches in the study did not use any strategy to maintain the victim's silence following the abuse.
- In contrast to other perpetrators in positions of authority in institutional settings (i.e., teachers, priests), coaches in the study appeared to use a larger repertoire of strategies to exert control over their athletes.

FINDINGS/OBSERVATIONS

MO strategies

- In almost half of the cases coaches admitted to **targeting a potential victim** by deliberately selecting a vulnerable athlete as a victim.
- The most common strategies used by coaches during the **Gaining trust** stage were to establish emotional closeness by becoming the athlete's friend or confidant and to groom parents by befriending them, offering services or financial help.
- In more than half of the cases (56.7 %; n = 68), coaches did not use any strategy to **develop dependency and exert control** over athletes under their supervision. However, about a third of the coaches had an authoritarian coaching style that made athletes feel intimidated.
- Taking the athlete to an isolated location aside from the training site or their home (36.2 %; n = 42) and taking the athlete to their home for athletic or non-athletic reasons (35.3 %; n = 41) were the most frequently used strategies during the **isolating the athlete** stage.
- With respect to **gaining the athlete's cooperation** during the abuse, more than half of coaches gradually touched the athletes in a more sexual way (60.0 %; n = 72). Quite frequently (42.5 %; n = 51), coaches had normalized sexuality by making sexual innuendos or asking questions about the athlete's sexuality.
- Most coaches (62.5 %; n = 75) did not use any strategy to **maintain the silence** of the athlete after the abuse.

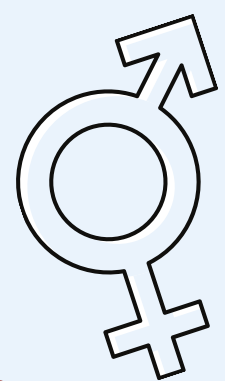
MO strategies & coaches' sport level



- Strategies such as making the athlete feel special, complimenting the athletes' sport performances, encouraging parents to relinquish some or all parental control to the coach, controlling the athlete's personal life & promoting their expertise were significantly more likely to be used by **coaches at elite levels** than non-elite levels.
- Not using any strategy to exert control was the only strategy employed more often by **non-elite coaches**.

MO strategies & victims' gender

- Strategies with **female victims** :
- (1) making the athlete feel special, making them feel like the "chosen one" to gain trust
 - (2) exchanging sexual content with their athlete
 - (3) making a love declaration or being in a romantic relationship with them to gain cooperation
- Strategies with **male victims** :
- (1) taking advantage of the athlete's sleep
 - (2) initiating sexual contact in the form of play



RECOMMENDATIONS

Educate athletes and parents, as well as all sport stakeholders who can act as a capable guardian, on the characteristics of sexual abuse in sport.

Clarify the boundaries of the coach-athlete relationship by discouraging coaches to spend time alone with one athlete during activities outside of the sport context.

Future studies should investigate male victims specifically and consider the possible influence of victims' gender on MO strategies.

Prioritize group conversations online and refrain from using apps where photos or conversations are automatically deleted or tracking athletes' positions.

RESSOURCES



When to file a complaint?
File a complain as soon as there are reasonable grounds to believe that abuse, harassment, negligence or violence has occurred in a sport environment. Avoid judging situation to determine if it's worth filing a complaint

How to file a complaint?
Via the "I file a complaint" platform (universal button) found on the site of all sports federations in Québec and certain partners, or by contacting Sport'Aide at 1 833 211-HELP (4357).

WHAT YOU EXPERIENCE IN YOUR SPORT IS IMPORTANT

REFERENCES

- To cite this capsule :**
- St-Pierre, E., Parent, S., Deslauriers-Varin, N., Radziszewski, S. & Topart, J. (2022). Infographic #5: Exploring the Modus Operandi of Coaches Who Perpetrated Sex Offenses in Canada [Infographic]. Research Chair in Safety and Integrity in Sport (SIMS). (<https://sims.chaire.ulaval.ca/>)
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