

# Whistle

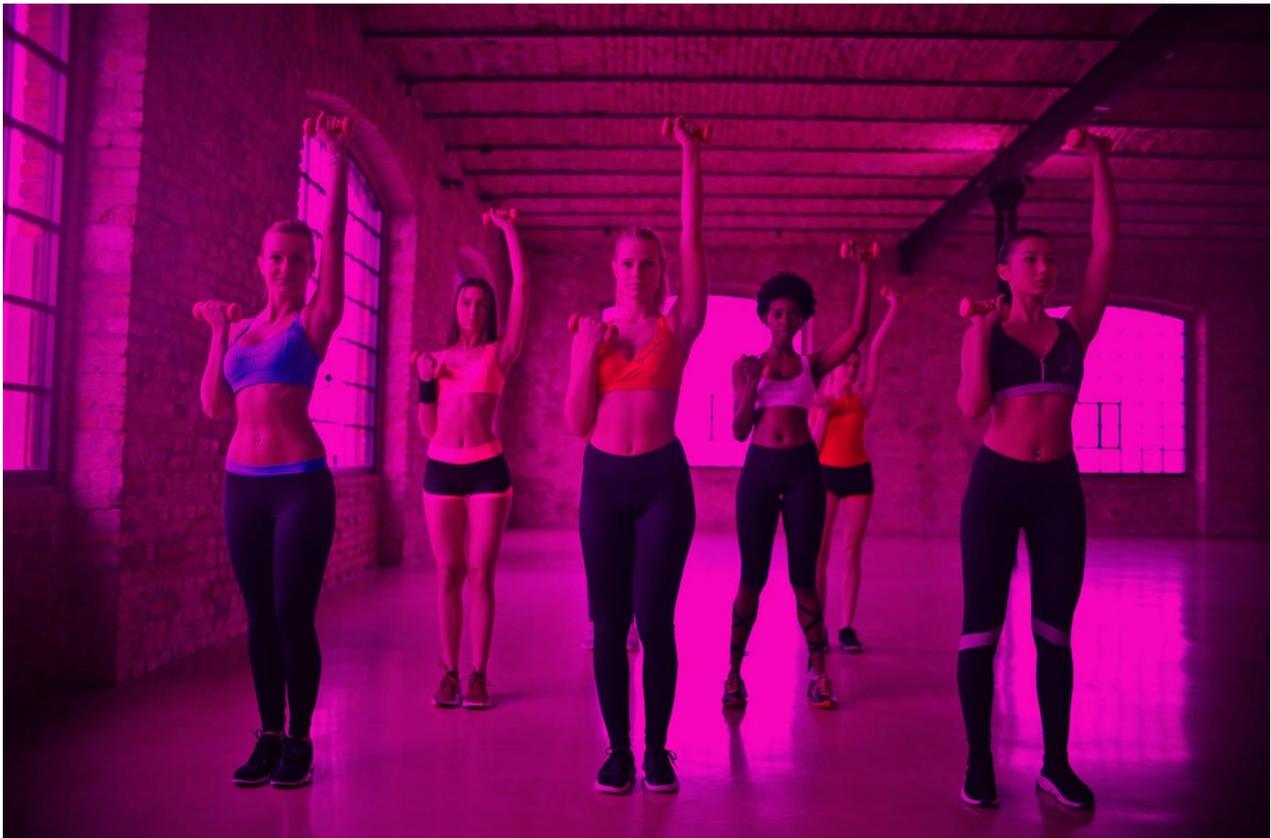
**Women's  
Healthy and active lifestyle  
Is Threatened by  
verbal sexual harassment:  
Let's stop CATCALLING in sport**



Co-funded by  
the European Union



## Deliverable D2.2: Impact of VSH on Female participation in sport and active lifestyle



### Project Reference

**Acronym:** WHISTLE

**Title:** "Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment: LET's stop CATCALLING in sport"

**Programme** Erasmus + Programme of the European Union

**Grant Agreement:** "101049134-WHISTLE"

### Partnership

*Lead Partner:*

P1 USMA CASELLE ASD – Italy

### Partners

P2 Si può fare cooperativa sociale, Italy

P3 Municipality of Padova, Italy

P4 KEAN, Greece

P5 VOLLEYBALL Foundation Greece

P6 Actividades Alternativas, Spain

P7 Fondatzia Kurazh/Courage foundation, Bulgaria

P8 Spor Elçileri Derneği, Turkey

P9 Fundacja Instytut Partnerstwa Strategicznego-, Poland

### Deliverable reference

**Work Package:** WP2 #BETTERUNDERSTANDING of sexual harassment impact on women participation in sport and PA

**Deliverable ID/title:** D2.2 Impact of VSH on Female participation in sport and active lifestyle

**Version:** Rev. 4.0

**Language:** English

**Format:** electronic

Estimated number of pages in the proposal: 80

**Due date** 30.04.2023

**Deliverable Leader:** P4 KEAN

Edited by P4 KEAN

**Authors list:** E. Salvatori, N. Hondronasta (KEAN)

**Peer review by:** A. Vagaggini, R.Lioce (USMA)

**Contributors:** All partners collecting stories



**Deliverable Scope (as in the DoA):**

The scope of this Deliverable is to report stories and surveys analyzed about the impact of sexual verbal harassment and catcalling on female participation in sport and outdoor training.

**The document is structured as following:**

- Title
- Project and Deliverable details
- Credit and disclaimer
- Table of contents
- Project overview and context
- Literature review about verbal sexual harassment in sports
- Countries reports on stories
  - Bulgaria
  - Greece
  - Italy
  - Poland
  - Spain
  - Turkey
- Analysis of the stories
  - Analysis of interviews
  - Analysis of online surveys
  - Analysis of stories from the web
- Conclusions: non-shared stories as an indicator

Evidence: D2.2 and minutes of the meeting during which the Deliverable is discussed, structured and fine-tuned.



## Partners involved in the elaboration of the document

Participant No	Organization name	Short Name	Specify if involved
1	USMA CASELLE ASD	USMA	YES
2	Si può fare cooperativa sociale, Italy	SiPF	
3	Municipality of Padova, Italy	CPD	
4	KEAN, Greece	KEAN	YES
5	VOLLEYBALL Foundation Greece	VF	
6	Actividades Alternativas Spain	ACAL	
7	Fondatzia Kurazh / Courage Foundation, Bulgaria	CF	
8	Spor Elçileri Derneği, Turkey	SPELL	
9	Fundacja Instytut Partnerstwa Strategicznego, Poland	SPI	

## History of changes

Rev. n.m	Date	Changes
Rev.1.0	25th July 2022	Baseline > first issue
Rev 2.0	22nd February 2023	Structure, table of contents, Chapter 1
Rev 2.1	10th March 2023	Chapter 2
Rev 2.2	7th April 2023	Chapter 3
Rev 2.3	12th April 2023	Chapter 2 and 3
Rev 3.0	13th April 2023	Chapter 2 and 4
Rev 3.1	18th April 2023	Finalized chapter 2, 3, 4 and 5
Rev 4.0	25th April 2023	Reviewed and approved

## Target group of the deliverable

The target groups of the deliverables are the project partners.



## CREDITS AND DISCLAIMER

This document is the collective effort of many individuals and the partner organizations working on behalf of the project "WHISTLE" and every attempt has been made to ensure that the contained information is true and accurate. Every reader and user is expressly advised to use the content and information of this document on his/her own responsibility. The European Commission's support of the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

### Disclaimer

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them

### Dissemination level

PU	X	Public
PP		Restricted to other programme participants (including the Commission Services)
RE		Restricted to a group specified by the consortium (including the Commission Services)
CO		Confidential, only for members of the consortium (including the Commission Services)



## Table of Contents

1. Project overview and context
2. Literature review about verbal sexual harassment in sports
3. Countries reports on stories
  - 3.1 Bulgaria
  - 3.2 Greece
  - 3.3 Italy
  - 3.4 Poland
  - 3.5 Spain
  - 3.6 Turkey
4. Analysis of the stories
  - 4.1 Analysis of interviews
  - 4.2 Analysis of online surveys
  - 4.3 Analysis of stories from the web
5. Conclusions: non-shared stories as an indicator



# 1. Project overview and context

WHISTLE project wants to **prevent and fight Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH) and catcalling in sport**, as this behavior has a negative influence over women's practice of sport and it is one of the causes of dropout from organized sports and one of the barriers that limits women to practice outdoor physical activity.

Catcalling is not a new phenomenon, the novelty lies in the fact that in recent years there has been talk of it, women's movements have been born. **Catcalling** is not only something that just happens to female runners or cyclists on the streets; it also **affects organized sport**, even if there is not copious evidence about it; but the lack of data does not mean the lack of the problem.

The lack of data is much more due to the **fear of reporting**, the absence of a support system specifically designed for women who practice sport, the shortage of information within sports clubs, the lack of awareness of catcalling as a subtle and devious form of gender-based violence.

In this scenario, **WHISTLE increases knowledge** to better understand the phenomenon, particularly in the organized sports; it educates sport clubs practitioners, women associations and local authorities providing them with **tools to detect the problem** and to take the right **measures to support VSH victims**.

**Specific activities** directly address 150+ women, who are engaged both to **share stories**, and take part in pilot empowering programs. A creative awareness campaign on the effect of catcalling on women participation in sport is strategically developed to impact the larger group of males, coaches, sport professionals, managers, and fans.



## 2. Literature review about verbal sexual harassment in sports

To date, there is still an important lack of data regarding verbal sexual harassment and catcalling in sport fields. The project "WHISTLE - Women's healthy and active lifestyle is threatened by verbal sexual harassment: let's stop catcalling in sport!" aims to understand whether sport environments are especially risky for women in terms of sexual harassment to occur. Sports mirror in many ways the reality of the current society, and the same issues may arise in different physical activities settings.

Generally speaking, sexual harassment is often underconsidered and very little is known about the characteristics, causes and consequences of verbal sexual harassment in this field. From the few researches that have been conducted in European contexts until now, women were actually reporting cases of verbal or physical harassment and catcalling from coaches, fans and/or co-athletes, and the reported consequences were mostly negative, ranging from not being able to react for internal and/or external factors to having to quit their sport activities.

Until only a few years ago, maybe for the fact of considering sports as healthy environments for its own nature of exercising the body and the mind, and for the fact of not having many famous national and international cases of sexual harassment in this field among Europe, the problem has been underestimated, untackled and understudied. In the last few years, thanks to the movements such as #MeToo and the campaign "Starttotalk" from the European Council, a new awareness has been raised among the public opinion about the topic.

A British study<sup>1</sup> from 2001 used an inductive method to identify a specific temporal sequence of events in the development of episodes of sexual abuse in sports, and outlined a risk assessment model by identifying a series of critical and unfortunately common situational factors.

---

<sup>1</sup> CENSE, M., BRACKENRIDGE, C., Temporal and developmental risk factors for sexual harassment and abuse in sport, in European physical education review, 2001, vol.VII, fasc.1, 61-79.



<i>Variables related to the instructor</i>	<i>Variables related to the athlete</i>	<i>Variables related to the type of sport</i>
Male	Female	Individual/Team sport
Mature	Young	Frequency of physical contact required
Massive physical appearance	Slim/Weak physical appearance	Type of uniform
Frequent travel opportunities	Low awareness of the possibility of being a victim of abuse and sexual harassment	External authority checks on transparency and meritocracy in athlete selection are weak or non-existent
High ability to determine athletes' career advancements	Histories of abuse in the family	Weak or non-existent moral code of conduct
Criminal records	Poor or inadequate parental emotional support	Lack of a pre-established contract between parents and instructors on rights and responsibilities of the sport relationship for which the child is entrusted



High perception of reliability by parents of students	Rare or no presence of parents during sports practice	Low debate within the sport on the specific topic of abuse and sexual harassment
High chances of being alone with athletes	Medical problems, particularly eating disorders	
Generally poor ethical and moral conduct on any issue	Dependency on the instructor to advance in the sport	
	Low self-esteem	

Table 1 - Risk Assessment Model for Sexual Abuse - CENSE, M., BRACKENRIDGE, C., Temporal and developmental risk factors for sexual harassment and abuse in sport, in European physical education review, 2001, vol.VII, fasc.1, 61-79.

Regarding the temporal sequence, the study in question highlighted six phases:

- the determination of the abuser to carry out the offense, on whose profile we still know little, but whose profiling could prove useful given the varied cases, ranging from the "monster" who acts serially to the psychologically fragile/immature subject who expresses their need for domination and appreciation by exploiting those who are most vulnerable;
- the selection of the victim;
- the overcoming of external barriers (rules, control activities), generally weak, of the reference environmental context;
- the psychological manipulation activity aimed at "winning the athlete's resistance" (so-called sexual grooming);
- the beginning and development of the abuse, or rather, the abuses;
- which generally only end with the intervention of third parties or when the athlete distances themselves from the sport. In particular, it has been emphasized that the minority



of athletes who reveal the abuses suffered do so years later and at a time when they are less focused on competitive activities, a symptom of a retrospective awareness of what happened.

In another relevant study<sup>2</sup> conducted in Canada, the main factors that influence the implementation of adequate preventive measures and management of abuse in the sports context were identified through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (administrators of federations and sports organizations, coaches, athletes, and parents of athletes) using an inductive method. Three main factors were identified:

a) a negative view of prevention activities, mainly driven by the fear of creating a climate of concern about the actual existence of abuse cases within the association and the fear of incentivizing the formulation of unfounded accusations, as well as a general attitude of complacency towards the effectiveness of any preventive action, given the impossibility of eradicating the phenomenon entirely;

b) a lack of guidance, skills, and resources, both economic and human, which significantly reduces the priority of combating the phenomenon in the scale of sports organizations' priorities;

c) actual cases of sexual abuse, which, unlike the previous factors, played a positive role (in a management rather than a preventive sense), forcing a realization of the existence of the problem and the absence of adequate measures to address it, and requiring the identification of measures for its management, albeit ex post facto.

This reactive approach must, however, be connected with the tendency to underestimate the severity of certain episodes and to procrastinate action to avoid problems in contexts where, as highlighted by several sources, "everyone knows."

The study in question then highlights what it believes to be the main effects of the three factors just mentioned, namely:

i) null or poor pre-employment checks: due to the fact that the world of sport relies heavily on volunteer contributions, most sports organizations do not conduct criminal background checks to select candidates for staff positions, despite the fact that such checks are a key recommendation for prevention;

---

<sup>2</sup> PARENT, S., DEMERS, G., Sexual abuse in sport: a model to prevent and protect athletes, in Child abuse review, 2011, 20, 120-133.



ii) poor training and awareness among the main stakeholders, in particular it emerged that athletes, parents, and coaches did not know what procedures they should follow or what resources would be available in case of problems;

iii) unclear inter-relational boundaries and absence of precise behavioral rules: the study revealed the absence of instructions or written rules regarding showers, changing rooms, travel, sharing hotel rooms, telephone contacts, etc.; only one federation had a written rule prohibiting romantic/sexual relationships between coaches and athletes; codes of conduct were rare and, where they existed, did not require coaches' signatures, nor did they provide for disciplinary action for any violations;

iiii) few measures for the management of cases of sexual abuse and ineffectiveness of existing measures: only two sports federations had a policy on sexual abuse, which, moreover, applied only to immediate employees of the federations and not to coaches of local clubs; furthermore, in discussing such policies, all sports administrators considered them to be complex and difficult to apply in practice.

What has been said demonstrates serious shortcomings in protecting athletes from the risk of sexual abuse within sports organizations, but also a new focus on phenomena that are unfortunately widespread and often characterized by subtle and less conspicuous violence, which exploits the weaknesses and needs of others. In a context, such as sports, that should instead contribute to the personal development of individuals, especially minors, by transmitting high moral values such as the spirit of sacrifice, respect for rules, loyalty, the ability to endure defeat and recognize one's limits, and a sense of belonging.

The particular relationship that is established between coaches and their athletes constitutes one of the most significant risk factors for the occurrence of episodes of sexual abuse, as evidenced by a recent report<sup>3</sup> on women's football published by the World Footballers' Association, which states that 40% of the abuses suffered by female footballers come from the coach or his staff. The coach is in fact in a position of power and authority, which allows him/her wide margins of undisturbed action and can be easily exploited.

The spirit of emulation, also through the mirrored teaching of sports techniques, creates a sort of "engaging attraction" towards the coach, whose teachings are followed unquestioningly. Often in gyms, a climate of dialogue and confrontation is not cultivated,

---

<sup>3</sup> COCCIA, P., The scenario. Harassment and abuse in sport: the map of a submerged continent, published on Avvenire.it on February 7, 2018.



athletes are not involved in the elaboration of the training plan, but are instead imposed to "follow orders," forgetting the immensely formative value of sports, especially for children and adolescents. The coach, willing or not, always participates in the formative process of the young people they train, to whom they should provide those basic cognitive, emotional, and relational skills that allow them to operate with competence both on an individual and social level. It follows that any abusive action, in not yet adult and easily suggestible individuals, determines profound psychological consequences that are difficult to repair.

In individual sports, athletes often keep the same coach for many years, growing together with him or her, who inevitably becomes a beloved and sometimes hated point of reference, a psychological confessor, a friend with whom to share strong emotions and intimate situations (physical proximity, locker rooms, gestures and expressions of that sporting language that would be out of place in an ordinary context), ultimately a real center of interest.

The influence that coaches can have over athletes is immense, however, we must not forget the other side of the coin: the coach also develops intense feelings towards their students, which can be mismanaged by "young coaches who are not yet fully aware of their role and responsibility, who cannot avoid the attraction of young athletes, or who misunderstand the weakness of athletes, mistaking it for a sexual invitation."

In continuation, recent years was observed that there has been a huge increase in verbal and sexual violence in the field of sports (specifically towards women's groups) and there are several studies detailing the recorded incidents of violence in various sports. A typical example of academic research<sup>4</sup> was in April 2021 where former athletes, members of the Greek national gymnastics team, reported physical and verbal violence, blackmail, punishments and insults to sexual dignity by their coaches.

In January of 2022, a complaint of sexual abuse of a former athlete by her coach was added to the above. A lot of cases of abuse, published internationally, especially from 2015 onwards, with the scandal of abuse of female athletes on the US national gymnastics team and also in Greece since 2020, have created concern and skepticism about extreme training methods that seem to have prevailed in many countries of the world as a whole.

In the research mentioned above, in Texas, female gymnasts were reported to have been sexually abused by the team doctor for the US national gymnastics team, as well as abusive

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://doi.org/10.26248/sport-soc.vi1.1628> Η Σοφία Τασσοπούλου είναι απόφοιτη του Μεταπτυχιακού Προγράμματος "Αθλητικές Σπουδές: Κοινωνιολογία, Ιστορία, Ανθρωπολογία" του ΕΑΠ και ανεξάρτητη ερευνήτρια, e-mail: stasso1001@gmail.com



behavior they suffered during practices at the national training center. In addition, in January 2021, Olympic sailing gold medalist Sofia Bekatorou spoke about the sexual abuse she suffered from an important figure in the Hellenic Sailing Federation at the age of 22. The complaint of Sofia Bekatorou cultivated a stream of disclosure, sportsmanship and abusive behavior.

In the narratives of the athletes/three former members of the national team, on which this text is based, it is recorded that they suffered physical, psychological and sexual abuse from their coaches during their sports career. The case of underage gymnasts in Greece 103 practices and methods that limited the sports bodies but also their lives as a whole. There were many factors that they talked about, the long hours of training, the sports school and the "confinement" in the sports facilities deprived them of a "normal" childhood, their friends and even their families themselves, at the same time becoming in the minds of the athletes the coach substitute for the role of parent.

As above, of witnessing incidents it appeared that the deliberate underestimation, neglect or even indifference to physical injuries by the coaches and the federation and giving priority to the competitive goal over the physical and mental health of the athletes was also a manifestation of violence against the same.

Violence is, of course, considered physical punishment by the coaches as well as verbal/psychological punishment, which was given special weight by the athletes in terms of the imprint on their psyche and the chronicity that the trauma can last. Sexual harassment and abuse is the culmination of violence against the athlete, including all other forms of violence, which was particularly strongly emphasized by the athlete who reported being sexually abused.

Finally, the athletes consider as violence the indifference or lack of concern for their protection from people who may not have been using violence but "watched", for mainly utilitarian reasons, as well as the attitude of the entire "system", coaches, associations, federation, who believe that he used them exploitatively and in a way that was "callous" and "indifferent" to their mental and physical health. The athletes argued that in every form of violence, the way to deal with it was uniform: death. They observed that no one is interested and that their behavior and tactics are "normal", so they cannot intervene as long as they do not notice anything strange. Athletes at the stage of imminent achievement, burdened by dreams of distinction and huge investment at great cost at every level, suffered in silence.

In the case of sexual abuse, fear of repudiation, unconvincing disclosure, guilt and shame, which are manifestations of Child Sexual Abuse Concealment Syndrome, further reinforced the choice of silence. The coach's authority and dependence on them, not only for athletic



progress but even for staying on the field itself, emerged as one of the key factors that make athletes "obedient bodies"<sup>5</sup>, productive and beneficial sports.

In 2021, within just a few 24 hours, the complaints started from a lot of female athletes who decided to see the light of day and succeed one another. Women of all ages, from different sports, "broke" their silence and spoke about the sexual harassment or abuse they received from agents or from men who were in key positions in the field of sports.

It is worth nothing that in the complaints we often find a doctor as the abuser, a fact that is really scary for the situation that prevails in places where many of us do not have access to information. In several cases the abuser was the person who was supposed to protect and heal.

Victim complaints show that sexual harassment and abuse is a common occurrence in sports - more common than we might have thought. The victims were scared, silent, ashamed. But these feelings should belong only to the abuser. And this shows that when there is empathy, sympathy, support and solidarity, when we are all together and no one is alone, we can break the chain of silence.

Such incidents happen all the time. Each of them deals with it as best as they can. But no one ever complains about it.

**-Why?-**

Many are wondering. Because even if they don't make her crazy, or that she wants them too, the least that will happen is that she will find herself in the disfavor of the coach, the sheriff or the federal governor.

**"I was panicking, I didn't know how to react"**

**"I erased it from my memory and dug it up now"**

**He said not to be afraid, everything that happens is for my good"**

**"Coaches to get the athletes to their senses - they hit them with cuffs on the face and body, as well as kicking, pushing and all kinds of other blows. They grabbed the little girls by the hair and dragged them from the landing point to the starting point to repeat their program while they cried non-stop."**

---

<sup>5</sup><https://www.dimokratiki.gr/17-01-2021/quot-ntomino-quot-kataggelion-apo-athlities-gia-sexoyaliki-parenochlisi-eisaggeliki-paremvasi/>



Most of the reports, however, concern incidents when the sportsmen and women were young children, as most report that they started the sport from the age of 5. **At the age of 9, they already participated in competitions.**

However, the complaints go a step further, alleging **sexual harassment**.

"The female gymnasts were forced to do splits by touching the coach's palm with their genitals, under the pretext of improving flexibility. They would pull the little girls by the vulva with force to show them 'how to do the exercise properly'.

There have also been cases where the harassment was outside the scope of the coaching process. Persons sexually harassed minors and advised them to keep it a secret. It all got to the point of obsession, with kids hiding and locking themselves wherever they could to avoid these people."

The same complaints state that coaches forced the athlete to remain in their underwear during training as a form of "punishment" for performing an exercise incorrectly, while in other cases they did not allow young children to go to the bathroom, resulting in on them their need and to stay like this throughout the training, so that they "come to their senses".

Reading a complaint from a 16-year-old student: "He told me to stay out of practice and stretch as I had an injury. He came over to me whispering in my ear that he wants to kiss me. I couldn't react, I was in shock," said the minor student. As the 16-year-old complains, on the same day she was attacked by the coach again while the rest of the athletes had left.

"He cornered her, stroked her hair and told her again I want to kiss you," her father said. According to the 16-year-old's complaint, the coach tried to rape her in the hotel room during the team's stay abroad for matches. "He violently grabbed me by the hair with one hand and with the other he held both of my hands tightly. I started sobbing. He put his hand in my mouth and pushed me to the bed" the athlete reportedly complained.

The sudden change in her behavior made her parents seek help from a child psychologist. The girl thus broke her silence about the nightmares she allegedly experienced. "My child, after the sessions he did, suddenly came to me one day and said, 'Dad, if you don't help me file a lawsuit, I'm going to do something crazy.'"

In her report, the child psychologist points out: "In the five sessions we did, the child constantly narrates the specific incidents that cause her intense sadness and anxiety, irritability, trouble concentrating at school and aversion to any physical contact, nightmares and difficulties sleeping."



Another incident was the revelations against the 44-year-old taekwondo coach of the "Irida" Club in Ilioupoli, who allegedly raped at least five female underage athletes, aged between 12 and 16, for over 10 years, are causing horror.

The girls, who are now adults, found the courage to report their coach, revealing the nightmare they were living. As they complain, from 2009 to 2020 the 44-year-old, father of a 6-year-old boy, approached minor students aged up to 16. After honing their skills in the sport, he convinced them to join the competition section so they could have long hours of one-on-one training with him.

Thus, he managed to lure them to a room of his gym that he had set up in an apartment in Ilioupoli, to his house, and even to his car, where he repeatedly abused them sexually, in a brutal way. In fact, he threatened them not to reveal anything about his sick activity to anyone, telling them that he would either destroy them or kill himself. So the girls kept their mouths shut out of fear and shame. But when the girls grew up, they found the courage to reveal their coach's sick appetites.

After the lawsuit filed against the 44-year-old at the beginning of January, an investigation began with statements from other athletes, to establish that at least five minors had been victims of rape. In fact, there is information in the Authorities that he continued his activity even recently, with a 15-year-old athlete, and for this reason the Prosecutor's Office issued an arrest warrant against him.

The parents in their report speak of continuous abusive behavior by people who, without having any pedagogical training, are called coaches and ask for the intervention of a prosecutor to stop this phenomenon from "breaking the abscess", as they say, which has been plaguing for a number of years the Naval Club of Chania.

Furthermore, there is talk of insulting expressions and heaps of racist attacks (smelly, fat, gypsy, etc) aimed at underage girls, allegedly at the altar of championships, forcing many - and many promising ones - to leave the sport .

The Kenyan runner who retired from active action in 2021, revealed<sup>6</sup> that at the age of 16 there was a person who told her that in order to be able to run in an important race for her, she would have to pass through his bed.

"He tells me that if I want to run abroad at such a young age, I know what I have to do... And it wasn't the first time it happened. The answer was always no. All they were interested

---

<sup>6</sup><https://www.pulsesports.co.ke/athletics/2023032508065001951/mary-keitany-on-how-men-in-power-blackmail-female-athletes-into-sex>



in was sex, said Keitani, the world record holder in the marathon, who even hinted that among the people who sexually harassed her, there were also top athletes of her country.

She's not the only one:

"They told me that in order to reach the top, that I knew they had to go through this... stage. There are female athletes who suffered" added Keitani who, however, was one of the lucky ones since she had a whole team around her who protected her, plus her coach and husband.

"I was spared, but there are athletes out there who are still suffering," she added. And as it appears from the show's investigation, there are indeed other female athletes who eventually fell victim to abuse, however they made the complaints anonymously as they fear for their lives.

In what they complain about, they emphasize, among other things, that they experienced abuse or harassment from coaches, agents, but also men from other positions who asked for sex in exchange for helping them in their careers.

The matter has already reached the World Federation and the Integrity Unit which is starting to investigate the case which not only concerns Kenya, but also other East African countries.



### 3. Countries reports on stories

During the process of collection of stories, all the partners noticed and shared with the rest of the Consortium some important findings that we agreed it was necessary to present in this report in order to give a wider and more precise idea about the topic of verbal sexual harassment and catcalling in each one of the partners' countries.

We have divided this Chapter, in which we will report the main findings of the stories, in subchapters per country, as to be able to analyze the national situation about verbal sexual harassment and catcalling in sports and highlight differences and similarities among the different partners' countries.

The collection of stories took place during a period of 6 months and, even after having reached the amount of stories necessary to gather enough data to report, the partners have decided to keep collecting stories during the whole length of the project, as there is need for women in sports to be heard and to share their own first-hand experiences.

#### 3.1 Bulgaria

The Bulgarian partner remarked that the geographical factor was really relevant in the collection of stories and that has to be taken in consideration: it has been noticed that interviewees coming from big cities were more willing to share their stories and experiences as they were more familiar with the topic of raising awareness and fighting against sexual harassment, while, on the other hand, people interviewed coming from villages, rural areas of the country or even small cities were not even comfortable talking and sharing their opinion about the general topic.

Here's an example of story of a sport woman from a big city:



### Have you witnessed or experienced personal situations of Catcalling or Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH) during your activity in sports organizations?

As a professional athlete, I have witnessed sexual and demeaning comments on a daily basis. Coaches or other athletes have on many occasions bullied me, saying that women will never be good enough in sports, that we are not dedicated enough, that we are not strong enough, that we never give it all, or we do not maintain a good physical shape. *Thanks to my training abroad I have been lucky enough to see how other federations and teams are doing. And what I saw there is that people support each other and have fun, which I don't see and feel in most cases in my country.*

### How did you react?

At first, I kept quiet, thinking that this was a way for the coaches to motivate us, but when the attacks became a daily occurrence, I realized that they were part of a rigid system that does not pay attention to the personal relationship and has no code of ethics. After having given my all to develop as a professional athlete in Bulgaria, I decided that I could no longer tolerate such an attitude and made the final decision to leave the professional team.

### What was the impact of this episode, both on your sport's life and in general on your opinion and views?

I have temporarily interrupted my professional career, in which I have invested a lot of time and effort. *I still don't know if I will continue skiing or not, but if I do, it will be in a much different way.* I am determined not to allow such behavior in the future.

### Anything else you want to share with us?

I believe that such situations are a daily occurrence in Bulgarian professional sports, they harm our professional development as athletes and must be overcome, through the clear and firm position of athletes who are victims of similar situations, and this is the only way to end such a toxic attitude in the future. *I have so much respect for all the women and girls who have gone through this or are still going through this. What saddens me the most is that so many talented athletes have come and gone over the years, sacrificed so much just to have someone tell them how crappy they are (which they aren't). Many athletes and coaches have complained and still complain, but no one actually dares to talk about it.*



Furthermore, in Bulgaria there is a general lack of knowledge about the topic of verbal sexual harassment and catcalling, and sport associations were reluctant to collaborate in the framework of WHISTLE project. Even after explaining to women who practice sports what is verbal sexual harassment and catcalling and shared the definitions, girls and women were generally not willing to share their personal stories and, in the few occasions in which they did share, they were not taking a clear and defined position against the harassers and even less against the passive witnesses of violent actions; they were rather normalizing aggressive behaviors towards themselves and women in general and having no idea of how to react.

The Bulgarian partner noticed that the stories were easier to collect with the methodology of the online survey because people were not feeling comfortable to share their stories in a face-to-face interview, but even the stories collected from the online surveys showed a general resistance to share, and the answers received were mostly very short and synthetic.

Sport associations were difficult to contact, and even when it was possible to do so, they were not willing to engage nor showed any kind of contributions.

An exception to the general silence on the topic of verbal sexual harassment and catcalling in the field of sports was made by Nadia Mladenova, former shotokan karate competitor, strength and conditioning fitness coach, Adidas Runners, Sofia team captain, and sports blogger, who agreed to release an interview in the framework of the project WHISTLE about this topic. Here's the script of the interview:

#### VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

00:00 -- 00:07

*Hello Nadia. Thank you very much for responding to our invitation to talk today.*

00:08 -- 00:30

*I am Lucia Veleva and I represent the Courage Foundation. Rada Stoynova, who works at the foundation, is also with us today. Our foundation was established in 2007, we work on many anti-violence projects, which is exactly why we invited you for this conversation.*

00:33 -- 00:52



*Before we start to comment on the unpleasant case you had as a victim of violence, I would like to invite you to share who you are. You have many personal and professional interests, but which ones represent you?*

*00:53 – 01:27*

*A lot of people know me as a trainer. I work with women and I actually train mostly women, strength training in the gym, I have a holistic approach, for health, for strength, for energy. Basically, what I help women do is to start feeling their bodies and start feeling good in their bodies. That's what I mainly do as a coach at the moment.*

*01:28 – 01:58*

*I also work with the sport brand Adidas, I lead a running community called Adidas Runners. Otherwise, I have been involved in karate for a long time, I trained as a main sport since I was a child, from about 13 years old more actively and I competed for about 8 years for the national Shotokan karate team.*

*01:59 – 02:21*

*That was until 2016 when I got viral meningitis and I stopped competing after recovering. I quit my job at the IT company that I was working at and I started to work as a coach, something that was close to my heart and that's what I'm still doing.*

*02:22 – 02:50*

*Great! I see that you have met and you are meeting many, many women. Could you tell us briefly what happened on that unpleasant day when you were with teammates from the national karate team? What exactly happened that years later remains a very, very strong and unpleasant memory for you?*

*02:51 – 03:21*

*In fact we just went out with two of my teammates to see each other after this meningitis that I had, to meet at a pizzeria for lunch and this teammate of ours, his name is Sylvester, he came along with one of them and while we were talking about some topic that was very unemotional and in no way related to him.*

*03:23 – 03:39*

*It was about the sport of karate for children and sports in general, the way the coaches treat children, the results required of them, for high sports achievements from children...*

*03:40 – 04:08*

*I started blogging right after I recovered and this was one of my first articles. And it was something about this article that he began to argue. I saw that there was no point in arguing*



*and tried to stop it, but he continued and finally hit me and bit my lip, and then he just got up and left.*

*04:09 – 04:35*

*I have never been assaulted by a man before and for me it was very shocking what happened, my teammates were also shocked, we were all so scared, we stayed after for a long time discussing what happened, we cried...*

*04:36 – 05:01*

*What we talked about then was that maybe it would be better to keep quiet. I realize now, when I rewind the tape, because I was younger then, now I see things differently, I see how our first instinctive reaction was indeed to shut up. And this is something that I see even now with many women, when I've talked to women who have experienced something similar, the instinctive reaction is this.*

*05:02 -- 05:18*

*Later I talked with my sister. I have a twin sister, and I told her that we were thinking of keeping quiet. And she said to me: How are you going to shut up? Someone else may suffer in the same way and... it's not good to be silent about such things, it's important that you communicate it somehow.*

*05:19 – 05:46*

*I felt that she was right, and then I went and did what I thought was right, which was to file a report with the police. I gave the contacts of my teammates if they decide to testify and I told them that I will understand if they don't do it, but I do what I think is right. So that was the situation.*

*05:47 – 06:17*

*I understand, but till today there is still no solution on the case. Yeah, I hadn't really checked so I didn't really know what was going on with the case, but now after I wrote my post, probably I should say for the people who didn't read my post, I wrote a post on Facebook , and actually the reason I wrote this post was because I saw another woman who suffered from violence, who is a Bulgarian actress,*

*06:17 – 06:56*

*who had also written an emotional post about how five years ago, which is the same time that it happened to me, that something like this happened to her, but she did not report then, she has not filed a complaint. She told what had happened to her and below the post the comments written on the subject were so negative, in fact many were from women who*



answered like: "It's clear that she was looking for it." or "Who knows how she will provoke it."

06:57 – 07:06

and from the inside something rose up, I reacted very strongly emotionally, it was something like fire I felt inside myself.

07:07 – 07:29

Indeed, you must have experienced this pain again, but how do we explain exactly these negative comments and the fact that in our society many people either ignore such cases, saying: "What so serious happened?" or they react in a negative way towards the victim.

07:29 – 08:18

I also read the comments under your post and I was also very surprised how people who had not read even the content of the post, but they had negative phrases ready, very sharp and very aggressive. In fact, a part of our society is absolutely against the victims and does nothing to support them, quite the opposite. Why do you think it's like that and what could we do as a society, or what should the state do, who should intervene so our society becomes intolerant of such cases, since we all know how negative the consequences of violence are?

08:20 – 08:53

Well, I thought a lot about this topic because I didn't really realize how people react to such situations, it was another slap for me. And in fact, what hurts me the most in this situation and for what I saw the woman who wrote the other post also hurt her a lot is that actually many people, for example in my team, my teammates, those who heard what happened, most of them heard.

08:54 – 09:17

I didn't feel any support from them and there was even such a belittling of the situation with: "What so serious happened? You know him, he has a hot-tempered character, you are just different personalities... and my feeling was that I had no protection and it was like my family had betrayed me in some way.

09:18 – 09:36

and actually one of the reasons I stopped competing was this realization that I had no support in this team, in fact in this circle in which I was living. And of course, I do not judge anybody, because I understand that many people really do not know how to react in such a situation.



09:36 – 09:56

*And in fact, this public awareness of what is acceptable and what is not is lacking. But actually, as a society we have a very high tolerance for something like that. I then I checked what happened with my report, I never checked after, but also I never received any information about it,*

09:57 – 10:39

*and then, the result was that this case was closed under Article 9 of the Criminal Code and Article 9 is actually for insignificance. In fact, as far as I understood, the person has been summoned and there is some kind of warning system asking him to not do it again, and the case is closed. The police officer I spoke with said: "We have full boxes of cases of women who have filed a report but when it's mild, when it's not medium or severe, the legislation doesn't really take it as something important."*

10:40 – 11:00

*And actually giving that message somehow, through our legislation and our laws, that it's not really important, it gives the opportunity for men who have that inclination to permit themselves do something similar, because there is a sense of impunity for this act.*

11:01 -- 11:43

*Of course, a very wrong approach, because it creates a sense of impunity, the abuser can continue to inflict minor bodily harm ad infinitum, and the victims are hardly obliged to suffer, which of course is absolutely unacceptable. And it is for sure necessary, as you mentioned, that men and boys themselves be prepared and educated at an early age, both by the family and by society, what is permissible and what is not.*

11:44 – 12:15

*And also girls, whether or not to endure similar situations of violence. We in our project also fight against verbal violence because we believe that starting from the first step of violence, which is usually verbal violence, if we can stop it, then physical and any other kind of violence can be stopped.*

12:16 – 12:40

*Now, I would like to include Rada as the project coordinator, as she is very interested in the topic of verbal violence in sports and working together with our partners, to join the conversation with a few questions on violence in sports and more specifically verbal abuse.*

12:41 – 13:14

*I want to ask Nadia a few questions related to the professional environment in which you work - sports environment. Sports are recommended as one of the methods to deal with*



*aggression, because through sports a person controls his emotions, his strength, but in what cases in sports can violence occur, does violence occur and in what cases, no matter verbal or physical violence?*

13:15 – 13:42

*I find it very interesting that we are having this conversation today, because at the moment with Adidas, the brand I work with, we have a global project called " With women we run " and it's aimed at violence against women and a lot of it is actually about verbal abuse.*

13:42 – 13:55

*In general, in sports circles, also in professional sports, I see verbal violence is very prevalent, and it's completely downplayed as almost non-existent.*

13:56 – 14:33

*Even among us women there is a feeling of: This is the way it should be, this is normal. Because when someone whistles at you or makes some sexist comment while you're running, I've received quite a few of those, especially if you're running in shorts or something slightly more exposed in the summer when you're hot, it feels like you need to put more clothes so you don't get such comments and many women actually dress up as much as possible when they run, even though they are very hot so they don't get such comments.*

14:34 – 15:01

*And the feeling is: "This is something normal, If it hurts me it should be because I have a problem". This is something that we can observe in many countries on a global level. Even in Saudi Arabia the captain of the running society Adidas Runners says that she was actually the first person with whom these women went out running alone or in a group with other women.*

15:02 – 15:30

*They never actually ran outside, precisely because men don't perceive this normal. As we know, in other countries there is much more pronounced violence, women's rights are being trampled on in a much stronger way, we know what's going on in Iran and so on, so the feeling here is: Look what's going on there, women have very few rights, here we have many rights, but you still complain and you don't even want them to whistle at you in the streets.*

15:31 -- 15:50

*And in consequence, we perceive this as something normal and just walk with a feeling of wormwood after someone whistled at us, or we dress up as much as possible, or we don't*



*go on group runs, or in the gym, because in the gym it is also very common to have comments from men to women.*

15:51 -- 16:07

*Many men don't really realize that they are bothering or offending in this way, they think of it as a joke. They don't think that it could hurt and that someone who is timid might close in and not go running anymore.*

16:07 – 16:33

*So, it's about that sense of tolerance for the other person's differences: " It wouldn't hurt me, so why should it hurt you?" I would even be flattered if someone pays attention to me. Ok, but we are different people and this thing is really very prevalent, in professional circles I have also seen it, so we need to work on that as a society as a level of tolerance.*

16:34 -- 17:15

*I feel that this really starts from the family and a mother who, by educating and raising her son, lets him understand that women are actually different and should be respected. Women from their side, little girls, they are not raised in a way to not... Yes, they are very often told when to shut up, and when to behave, and when not to contradict, and so on, but they are not educated on how to set their own boundaries.*

17:16 – 17:25

*And really, the idea here is not to set men against women..., because there are many violent women also...*

17:26 – 17:50

*Of course, it's not just from one gender to the other, but somehow we have to express it, bring it out from inside ourselves, show society that this is not okay, that we don't agree with this aggression, that we don't agree to be treated this way and to cross some boundaries that are not healthy.*

17:51 – 18:29

*I also wanted to ask you if there are any organizations inside the Bulgarian sport that are monitoring such things to not happen, is there any code of ethics that prevents these situations in gyms, in federations, in sports clubs in general? If something like this happens in a sports club, who can I contact, is there any institution to which a person who suffered from aggression in a sports club can contact?*

18:30 -- 18:57



Very good question! Very good question because I don't think there is. While I was competing, certainly no such thing existed. I haven't competed for 6 years now but no, as far as I know there isn't and it would be really good to have, because as we said violence is not only against women, there could be violence against men too, there is violence against men by men and by women.

18:58 – 19:32

This Article 9 of the Constitution, for example, which undervalue minor bodily injury, should be somehow corrected and changed, because actually this realization that from minor bodily injury, we will go to medium, then we will go to severe and very often, not in every case of course, but there are some men who, because they are not punished for the minor injury, they allow themselves to go to a higher level and cause very severe suffering or even death, as we have seen recently, this a case of a woman who was killed by her husband.

19:32 – 19:50

The fact that we ignore these little signals, the verbal violence as a first step, these little comments, people say: This has nothing to do with murder, how can you compare it? We are not comparing it in any way to murder, but... it can start there.

19:51 – 20:15

Yes, it provokes such an uncomfortable state for a person, and when you were the victim of verbal abuse in some way you felt uncomfortable, you can abandon your sports activity or an entire career because of one such incident or because of repeated such incidents.

20:16 – 20:44

The reason for all this is fear, somehow you feel threatened in some environment, be it in a gym, be it on the street, in the park while running or in the sport federation, you feel threatened. When you feel threatened you can't prove yourself or you can't be yourself and work the best way you could work without that threat.

20:45 – 21:11

Yes, it is really very complex and we need talk about it, make the society's understand this problem, raise awareness, just talking like we are now talking, because many men do not realize that they are causing suffering or discomfort to a woman, but if this subject is talked about, as we speak now, they could understand it.

21:12 – 22:00

Because their mothers didn't tell them, their fathers didn't tell them, and actually the way we can change this thing is to talk about it. And it's not our goal here to divide men against women, our goal here is to talk about the different phases of violence, when a violence



*starts from the first phase, which is verbal violence, and when starting from then we can influence and say as a society: This is not okay!, then we can have a much more positive impact in the next phases of violence, when there is really physical violence, mild, medium or severe. And it would be much more difficult to reach physical violence or extreme consequences.*

*22:01 – 22:27*

*Exactly. There were some comments under my post: "How could a woman who played such a combat sport, for such a small thing, how could you give up, you had to continue training, why do you live in fear?" Things like that. I don't live in fear, I just don't want to be in an environment that supports violence, because not taking action against it that environment supports violence.*

*22:28 – 22:50*

*I do not stay in a place where this thing is tolerated. And actually, this is my message to women who are going through something like this, like this actress who said that many of her colleagues witnessed what was happening and kept quiet. In fact, my message is when we are in such an environment, not to stay there.*

*22:51 – 23:27*

*Yes, it's sometimes really difficult to make a change, as women we often have children, for example, our children depend on us and we cannot make this decision so easily. But I really believe that in order for our children to feel well we have to feel well but we cannot feel well in an environment that oppresses us or makes us feel bad, so in a place where we feel that we do not have support from the environment, this is not our place and the more we stay there the more we are nurturing these processes to continue.*

*23:28 – 23:57*

*Yes, but we also have to... I live in a small town and here, for example, you don't have many opportunities to go to another place. I mean, for example, if I do sports in a gym, and this place is not okay for me, someone doesn't treat me well, I go to a second gym and it's not okay there neither, I go to a third one and at some point in the small town the options are running out...*

*23:58 – 24:37*

*You are right, I am not saying that you are not right, but somehow we should also show the society that we are not okay with this, because yes I can look for another place where I feel well, but it is much more important for me to take the big step, as a society, to stop tolerating such manifestations, let the people know where their limits are and to limit*



*ourselves. Even if you are an aggressive person or I am an aggressive person, I should know that I cannot behave like that with the other person.*

24:38 – 25:05

*And it's also important to work in a network, it doesn't matter men or women, but the people who say that they do not tolerate violence to help the people who have suffered, so that we do not run away from the places where there is an oppressor, and together with the others to make the oppressor retreat or change.*

25:06 – 25:35

*We should not feel like those who have to run constantly to look for a peaceful environment where everyone will support us, but to change the environment with the help of like-minded people, in order to have more environments in which we work or play sports, or whatever we do, to be non-tolerant of violence.*

25:36 – 25:54

*That's right, what we can do as a society is to work together, men and women, against this thing. First, to inform each other, and second, to teach our children where their limits are and how to put them in a healthy way.*

25:55 – 26:32

*There is a lot of work that we as women have to do and also our relatives, friends, the people we work with and the whole society. The issue is very difficult and complex, there are no ambiguities, but one thing is certain - violence should not be tolerated. This must be set as a goal in our daily life and in the education of children, young people so society in general is not tolerant of violence.*

26:33 – 27:10

*Yes, indeed, because what I notice is that we actually have a very high tolerance for violence, as a society, and a very low tolerance for people's differences. This is what I have noticed. When someone is different, we don't tolerate it, but we have a very high tolerance for violence. "It's just a slap in the face!" And the fact that someone has a different sexual orientation, or dresses differently, or expresses a different faith than us, it happens very often that we don't have tolerance in such cases. This thing, if somehow, we can turn it with a magic wand....*

27:12 – 27:28

*It's a question of time, maybe a long time, but let's hope that little by little and through such conversations we are opening some loopholes for this to happen. I really hope so.*



27:29 –

*Well, thank you very much, Nadia, for this conversation, it was very useful. Thanks for everything shared. We hope that many people will see the video and realize some things about themselves, about our society and in general about what we should not tolerate.*

*- Thanks to you for the invitation.*

### 3.2 Greece

From the stories collected by the Greek partner KEAN, it's important to notice that the sports women contacted were either not willing to share stories, claiming to have never experienced nor witnessed verbal sexual harassment and catcalling in sport fields, or, even when willing to share, they admitted they have experienced and witnessed several cases during the years but they didn't share many details during the interviews, even less in the online surveys.

As some of the people that were being contacted already knew the organization and the work done in KEAN, having - in some cases - even personal relations with the members of the NGO, it was easy to create a familiar and cozy environment in which these women felt free to share their stories. Different were the cases of women who didn't know the organization from before, as they seemed more hesitant to share their own experiences.

Mostly, it was noticed that the answers collected in the online survey were very synthetic - when answered "YES" to the question: "Have you ever experienced or witnessed situations of catcalling or VSH?" -, but the majority of the surveys collected reported non-shared stories:



Have you witnessed or personally experienced situations of catcalling or verbal sexual harassment (VSH) during your activity in sports organisations?
No
Yes
Yes
No
No
No
Yes
No
No
No

The methodology of the one on one interview was more successful as a higher percentage of the people interviewed actually shared their own stories and it facilitated the process of gathering data for the Greek country.

Many stories were about sexual comments received during training or sport lessons from coaches or co-athletes, in some cases even from the fandom, and often the victims and the witnesses didn't know how to react to the situation.

In some cases, the interviewees reported having talked about the problem they were facing with friends, family or co-athletes as they thought this was the only thing they could do or they were afraid of taking stronger solutions, sometimes perceived as too drastic.

Here's an anonymous story in which the interviewee decided to talk about what was happening with people she trusted:

#### **Details of the interviewee:**

Age: **23**

Nationality: **Greek**



Role of the Interviewee: (ex. athlete, trainer, coach, manager, fan, referee, other...) – **Athlete**

Role in the episode: (ex. victim in first person, witness, other ...) **Victim and Witness**

Sport: (team or individual structured sports) **Team sports**

Location where the episode occurred: (ex. field, gym, grandstand, changing/locker room, on the way to/from the training/match, other...) **Gym**

Moment when the episode occurred: (ex. before the match/training, after the match/training, on the way to/from the venue, during the match/training, etc ...) **During the training**

Historical period collocation of the episode: (ex. present; '90s, 5 year ago, and so on...) **3 years ago**

**Date/Country of the Interview: 24/10/2022, GREECE**

**Interviewer partner: KEAN GREECE**

**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment:  
LET's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

*Please, tell us your story!*

The following fields are designed to help you to write your story. For every field, write around

1. Have you witnessed or experienced personal situations of *Catcalling* or *Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH)* during your activity in sports organizations?

Yes!



2. Tell your story. What has happened? How has the story started?

At the beginning the dance coach of the university dance team was "ok". After a small period of time he started saying "things", only to the female dancers/team members of our team. He used to make sexual comments about our bodies and clothes. If one of us replied to his sexual comments, he used to insult her in front of the team. The whole situation was too uncomfortable!

3. How did you realize what was going on? What kind of signals could you detect?

I understood that something was wrong with him, but I wasn't sure what it was. When I started to be a victim of him and a witness of his cat-calling and his abusive behavior... I was sure what was wrong with him!

4. Have you tried to cope with this situation? What was possible to do? What have you done?  
Have you involved other people/organizations? Who was involved?

The only thing that I could do, at that time, was to talk with other team members (females and males) about his inappropriate behavior.



5. Did you feel you had the skills to manage this kind of situation? Which was the most difficult part of it? Did you ask for help or support? Did you receive any form of support during or after the episode?

I informed my family and my friends asking their opinion and their help. They were supportive.

6. What was the impact of this episode, both on your sport's life and in general on your opinion and view?

The whole situation had a negative impact on my psychology. I love dancing and I was really happy and excited with the fact that I was a member of the uni dance team. However, his inappropriate behavior made me feel very uncomfortable with myself while I was dancing in front of him.



7. End of the story: how did the story end up? What would you say to people who are living similar situations?

In the beginning I started wearing too loose clothes, because I had thought "He will stop!". However, he didn't!

I was too sick of his sexual comments and his whole behavior, so I quit the uni dance team. Gradually, all the members (females and males) quit the team. We all were so sick of him!

I would advise them not to hesitate to talk to their family and ask for their help and I would reassure them that they are not to blame for that situation.

Some of the interviewees also reported cases of physical sexual harassment that sadly accompanied the catcalling/verbal sexual harassment.

Here's an example:

**Details of the interviewee:**

Age: **30**

Nationality: **Greek**

Role of the interviewee (e.g. athlete, coach, trainer, manager, fan, referee, other...): – **athlete**

Role in the episode (e.g. victim in first person, witness, other...): **victim**

Sport (team or individual structured sports): **both**

Place where the incident occurred (e.g. stadium, gym, grandstand, locker room, on the way to/from training/match, other...): **in the court and in the training area**

Historical period of the episode (e.g. present, 1990s, 5 years ago, etc...): **8 years ago**

Date/Time of the interview: **25/11/2022, GREECE**

Interviewer's associate: **KEAN GREECE**



**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment:  
Let's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

*Please, tell us your story!*

The following fields are designed to help you to write your story. For every field, write around

<p>1. Have you witnessed or experienced personal situations of <i>Catcalling</i> or <i>Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH)</i> during your activity in sports organizations?</p> <p>Yes.</p>
<p>2. Tell your story. What has happened? How has the story started?</p> <p>The story is about the time I was training at the gym, and a man that I was meeting every day and had small conversations with, one day suddenly grabbed my bum. I was shocked and he commented that he was curious about how much I have been working out.</p> <p>Another story was during a volleyball game, my bum hit the net and the referee commented that with such a big bum, how is it possible not to hit the net.</p>
<p>3. How did you realize what was going on? What kind of signals could you detect?</p> <p>Both were unexpected and direct to me and referring to my body.</p>
<p>4. Have you tried to cope with this situation? What was possible to do? What have you done? <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>Have you involved other people/organizations? Who was involved?</p>



In both situations I was shocked. During the game I did nothing. However, I never spoke to this referee again. No one was involved since I was the only person close to him and listened to this comment.

At the gym the trainer watched the scene, but he did nothing at this point. After this I never went close to this guy and tried to avoid any conversations.

5. Did you feel you had the skills to manage this kind of situation? Which was the most difficult part of it? Did you ask for help or support? Did you receive any form of support during or after the episode?

At the gym I could not react since I was shocked. Later I did not ask for help, I just stopped talking to this guy.

The trainer that watched the incident, told me that in case I experience something similar to the same person I should speak.

At the volleyball game it was a moment that no one reacted.

6. What was the impact of this episode, both on your sport's life and in general on your opinion and view?

At the gym I realized that there are a lot of people that are disgusting and because they have trained bodies think they can flirt so badly with women and have insulting or harassing behavior.

I realized that the referee probably due to its power made this comment and he knew that I cannot react.



7. End of the story: how did the story end up? What would you say to people who are living similar situations?

After some days, I stopped going to the gym.

In volleyball I just did nothing and hoped not to meet again.

I would say to any person experiencing this, that this is so bad and we should speak out even if this is hard. To anyone we could think that might listen.

As the story above-shared, many others end with sports women quitting their physical activity/training/sports in order to avoid being harassed and catcalled.

### 3.3 Italy

In Italy the same kind of struggles that the Bulgarian partner found in collaborating with sport associations were reported: although some of them showed an initial interest in the project and its content, the willingness to collaborate was lost as soon as the collection of interviews and gathering of stories started.

It was easier to gather interviews from sportswomen who practices individual sports, such as the following case:

#### Details of the interviewee:

Age: 43

Nationality: ita

Role of the interviewee: (e.g. athlete, trainer, coach, manager, fan, referee, other...): ---athlete, runner

Role covered in the episode: (e.g. victim in first person, witness, other ...): ---victim in first person

Sport practiced: (team or individual, structured or free): individual, running

Place where the episode occurred: (e.g. pitch, gym, grandstand, locker room, traveling to/from training/match, other...) street



Time when the incident occurred: (e.g. before match/training, after match/training, traveling to/from venue, during match/training, other...): *during training, in the afternoon but it also happens in the morning*

Historical period in which the episode takes place: (e.g. present, 90s, 5 years ago and so on...)

*It happens all the time, current period*

Date/Country of the interview: *2/11/2022, Vicenza*

Partner collecting the interview: *Spf*

**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment: LET's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

*Tell us your story*

Have you personally witnessed or experienced situations of catcalling or verbal sexual harassment (MSV) during your sports activity/in the sports club where you work?

*The interviewee reports that she has experienced such episodes firsthand, quite frequently. She runs, alone, and tells of cars that honk, and people, men, who boo or stare as she passes, with looks that make her uncomfortable*

Tell us your story. What's happened? How did the story start?

*she says he started running about a year ago, which however often gets boos, horns or unpleasant appreciations (“subscribe”, “go slowly”), so much so that he started looking for the safest roads, those without construction sites for work, for example, as well as choosing more modest clothing, even in the summer.*

How did you realize what was happening? What type of signals did you detect?

Have you tried to cope with this situation? What was possible to do? What have you done? Did you involve other people/associations? Who was involved?

*She says she felt very uncomfortable, ashamed and afraid. When this happens to her, she tends to do nothing, except quicken her pace, and stiffen. She hasn't involved other people, but she has also changed her attitude towards her daughter, who when she goes out alone she tends to accompany as much as possible, to avoid walking down the street alone.*



Did you feel you had the skills to handle these kinds of situations? What was the hardest part? Have you asked for help or support? Did you receive any form of support during or after the episode?

A. reports feeling able to handle these situations, despite feeling afraid. She finds it "demeaning" that this only happens to her as a woman, while her husband can go for a run in the morning, in the evening, in the light or in the dark, and he certainly has never considered the problem.

What was the impact of this episode both on sports life and, in general, on your opinion of these behaviors?

The opinion remains that those are unpleasant and annoying episodes. The biggest impact is the concern that if it happened to the daughter, who is less "structured", they would be even more conditioning.

End of Story: How did the story end? What would you say/advise? End of story: How did the story end? What would you say/advise to people who are experiencing similar situations?

A. does not feel like recommending anything, even if she has decided to adopt some of the strategies listed above, such as carefully choosing roads, times and outfits

Many Italian female athletes didn't even engage or reply to first contacts such as initial emails, messages or calls; the few of them who did, expressed a general sympathy towards the WHISTLE project and the work to be done in WHISTLE framework, but nevertheless they were not engaging or contributing in any way.

It has been noticed that sometimes it was easier to share stories that were not experiences first-hand in the role of the person harassed, but as witness of a situation of VSH or catcalling in which the victim was a third person:



**Details of the interviewee:**Age: **23**Nationality: **ITALIAN**Role of the Interviewee: (ex. athlete, trainer, coach, manager, fan, referee, other...) **Other. No longer an athlete**Role in the episode: (ex. victim in first person, witness, other ...) **Indirect witness**Sport: (team or individual structured sports) **Team sport (basket)**Location where the episode occurred: (ex. field, gym, grandstand, changing/locker room, on the way to/from the training/match, other...) **University Center Gym Campus**Moment when the episode occurred: (ex. before the match/training, after the match/training, on the way to/from the venue, during the match/training, etc ...) **Training, practical lesson**Historical period collocation of the episode: (ex. present; '90s, 5 year ago, and so on...) **2021****Date/Country of the Interview:** (Ex. 02/10/2022 Italy)**Interviewer partner:** (SPF)

**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment:  
LET's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

*Please, tell us your story!*

The following fields are designed to help you to write your story. For every field, write around

1. Have you witnessed or experienced personal situations of *Catcalling* or *Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH)* during your activity in sports organizations?

Not directly, but I received and viewed a video in which there is a girl who is the subject of verbal sexual harassment by her basketball teacher.



2. Telling your story. What has happened? How has the story started?

I received this video from my roommate. In this video there were a girl subjected to verbal sexual harassment by one of her professor. Because of the health emergency, not all students could participate in the basket practical lessons, so the university guaranteed the recordings of that. One day, in one of these recording lessons, some guys noticed that the professor was verbally sexually harassing one of his female students. These kids have immediately recorded this video with their smartphone, I don't know if to keep it to report or to laugh about it.

3. How did you realize what was going on? What kind of signals could you detect?

4. Have you tried to cope with this situation? What was possible to do? What have you done? Have you involved other people/organizations? Who was involved?

From what I know, the catcalling girl didn't report. She hasn't done anything. She played down and this made me think a lot. It's possible that someone reported this out to the university rector, or the video was spammed within the university students, because the recording has been immediately removed. But no one intervened. The professor kept his role, but it seems he'll be replaced by a female basket teacher this year.

5. Did you feel you had the skills to manage this kind of situation? Which was the most difficult part of it? Did you ask for help or support? Did you receive any form of support during or after the episode?



6. What was the impact of this episode, both on your sport's life and in general on your opinion and view?

This episode had a really strong impact on me, while some others laughed about it. This bothered me a lot. I was especially annoyed by the fact that it was mainly girls who laughed about it. The reaction (or non-reaction) that occurred around the episode almost bothered me more than the episode itself, because I think that if there is a slimy and rude person, we can't do anything about it, but we can attend to our reactions to that action. So what shocked me was the reaction of my classmates, the university students, who reacted in a completely unacceptable way.

7. End of the story: how did the story end up? What would you say to people who are living similar situations?

We need to sensitize those who laughed about this event. I would ask the girl who suffered the verbal sexual harassment why she didn't expose herself about it. In my opinion, these facts should be denounced, not let these things slide. I think some people laughed because they didn't think about what really happened. I was actually pleased that many males had the same thought and reaction as me. The others...I don't know...I think there isn't enough awareness. Personally I would introduce in schools more lessons about the issue of gender. The WHISTLE project can be a helpful tool in terms of prevention, because, in my opinion, these issues are not talked about enough and therefore it could be a way to reach and raise awareness of many more people.

The few sports women who decided to participate in the interviews and collection of stories had troubles in recognizing catcalling and verbal sexual harassment for what it is and - even when they did, sometimes by themselves and sometimes after a conversation with the interviewer - they considered it as a normal action to receive, at best a bit annoying but not taking it seriously as it should have been perceived.

Here's an example of interview in which the woman didn't recognize VSH at the moment it happened:

**Details of the interviewee:**

Age: -----31-----



Nationality: -----ITALIAN-----

Role of the Interviewee: (ex. athlete, trainer, coach, manager, fan, referee, other...)

--ATHLETE-----

Role in the episode: (ex. victim in first person, witness, other ...)

-----VICTIM IN FIRST PERSON-----

Sport: (team or individual structured sports) -----BODYBUILDER-----

Location where the episode occurred: (ex. field, gym, grandstand, changing/locker room, on the way to/from the training/match, other...) -----GYM-----

Moment when the episode occurred: (ex. before the match/training, after the match/training, on the way to/from the venue, during the match/training, etc ...)

Historical period collocation of the episode: (ex. present; '90s, 5 years ago, and so on...)

-----2021-----

**Date/Country of the Interview:** (20/10/2022 Italy)

**Interviewer partner:** (SPF)

**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment:  
LEt's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

*Please, tell us your story!*

The following fields are designed to help you to write your story. For every field, write around

1. Have you witnessed or experienced personal situations of *Catcalling* or *Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH)* during your activity in sports organizations?

Yes, I was practicing 4 times/week in the same gym for years. A new trainer came and he started talking to me and expressing personal opinions on me that made me feel very embarrassed. I did not understand I was a victim of VSH but I was feeling very uncomfortable.



2. Telling your story. What has happened? How has the story started?

I have always trained, the gym was my second home. I went to that gym for many years and that's where I met my husband. At the beginning of 2021, a new trainer arrived who was supposed to follow the most active athletes. I was among them but his way of coaching started to embarrass me right away. He complimented my shorts and top too much, my tone and the way I moved. He never defined it as well done but always very feminine and seductive. He was stressing the situation so much that I started going to the gym less and less. I couldn't react because the 'compliments' always made me uncomfortable and because I was not able to understand that he was on the wrong side.

3. How did you realize what was going on? What kind of signals could you detect?

Once he asked me to date him even at his place.

4. Have you tried to cope with this situation? What was possible to do? What have you done? Have you involved other people/organizations? Who was involved?

Unfortunately I could not react, I never talked of this situation with anyone, I felt frozen, embarrassed and afraid of what my boyfriend and all other people could have thought about me. I gave up going to the gym explaining my decision in a silly way and I feel very ashamed of it now.



5. Did you feel you had the skills to manage this kind of situation? Which was the most difficult part of it? Did you ask for help or support? Did you receive any form of support during or after the episode?

I did not ask for help because I am not used to doing it because I always run away from embarrassing situations.

6. What was the impact of this episode, both on your sport's life and in general on your opinion and view?

My sports life has changed completely. As I said I stopped training, my husband complains saying that I am lazy now and my self-confidence has been deeply affected.

7. End of the story: how did the story end up? What would you say to people who are living similar situations?

I am in therapy with a psychologist because I realized that I need to work on myself not to act this way when I face similar situations. I need to be more self-confident and I would advise all the women to shout their anger and to not be afraid to report or simply to feel free to say "NO, Stop!" to anyone who is asking too much from you.

### 3.4 Poland

For the partner of the Consortium in Poland, it was a challenging task to reach women who do sports or physical exercise on a regular basis, and even when this obstacle was



overcame, sportswomen were not often willing to share their stories about verbal sexual harassment and catcalling. However, through networking, it was possible to collect a significant number of stories.

Following, an example of story collected through the methodology of one on one interview:

### Details of the interviewee:

Age: 19

Nationality: Kazakh

Role of the Interviewee: Student

Role in the episode: Witness

Sport: Physical education (PE)

Location where the episode occurred: School gym

Moment when the episode occurred: During class

Historical period collocation of the episode: 3-4 years ago

Date/Country of the Interview: 15/10/2022

Interviewer partner: SPI

**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment: LET's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

*Please, tell us your story!*

The following fields are designed to help you to write your story. For every field, write around

1. Have you witnessed or experienced personal situations of *Catcalling* or *Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH)* during your activity in sports organizations?

I have witnessed VSH



2. Telling your story. What has happened? How has the story started?

Our casual physical education (PE) lessons usually unite several different classes. Thus, my class was exercising with the upper grade one at the same time. Girls were approximately 16-17 years old in those days. Their bodies started to change and become more mature. But, it started to attract our coaches, even though they are adult teachers. We noticed their looks at girls, but further, some inappropriate jokes were made by male trainers towards high school students. Something like, "Try better, work harder, you see your male classmates are watching." When there were stretching exercises, they put those girls in front.

3. How did you realize what was going on? What kind of signals could you detect?

Mainly males were laughing, and girls mostly felt awkward and uncomfortable, which would have been noticed from facial impressions.

4. Have you tried to cope with this situation? What was possible to do? What have you done? Have you involved other people/organizations? Who was involved?

Unfortunately, I haven't done anything. We talked about it with other girls, sadly, we were blaming victims actually, saying that girls should not wear such shorts or tiny t-shirts to PE lessons. I don't know whether it is due to us being young and uneducated or due to cultural bias. Probably, both.

5. Did you feel you had the skills to manage this kind of situation? Which was the most difficult part of it? Did you ask for help or support? Did you receive any form of support during or after the episode?

No, but after some time, I was talking with the administration and found out that one of the coaches was fired due to complaints from parents. And when we met with some of the girls who

have experienced too much inappropriate attention from coaches, they also pointed out that no matter what they wear, it is never allowed to act rudely or harass others. That was a new perspective I've never thought about before.



6. What was the impact of this episode, both on your sport's life and in general on your opinion and view?

I'm concerned about sports wear even now, actually. Sometimes, you want to look pretty when doing sports, but you usually choose comfy, oversized pants and hoodies over stretch ones to avoid extra attention.

7. End of the story: how did the story end up? What would you say to people who are living similar situations?

I'm glad that those victim girls spoke up and raised that situation with both parents and administration, so it was solved quickly. They were older than me, and I'm actually grateful that I witnessed that situation even though it wasn't a positive one, I know how we should react and not keep silent.

Most of these stories were collected online, which allowed people to feel more secure while giving their answers, compared to the one on one interviews. Many women, when asked directly, did not identify situations of catcalling and verbal sexual harassment. Despite that, through interviews and examples, women were able to recall situations where they felt unsafe, uncomfortable or threatened.

#### Details of the interviewee:

Age: 30

Nationality: Polish

Role of the Interviewee: Athlete

Role in the episode: Victim

Sport: Tennis

Location where the episode occurred: In the mall



Moment when the episode occurred: after the class

Historical period collocation of the episode: 90's

**Date/Country of the Interview:** 25/10/2022, Poland

**Interviewer partner:** SPI

**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment: Let's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

*Please, tell us your story!*

The following fields are designed to help you to write your story. For every field, write around

1. Have you witnessed or experienced personal situations of *Catcalling* or *Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH)* during your activity in sports organizations?

Yes

2. Telling your story. What has happened? How has the story started?

During the school years, my father signed me up for tennis lessons. He played well himself. There was one sports club in the town. I remember the coach was around 60 years old, and his classes were not expensive. I was going to train 2-3 times a week, alone, each class lasting an hour. My father was coming to check the progress sometimes, but not intrusively.

Without exaggeration, he only touched me when he put his hand on the racket. He suggested what to eat, he advised me to run and develop my muscles better. And when we left the court, he asked privately what was up. I'm outgoing, I was going through high school then, and I didn't think it could excite an older guy. There is a specific relationship with the trainer, which is essential. I trusted him. After some training, he suggested: help me choose a perfume for my daughter. I'll drive you home later, he said. I joined and helped him. At one moment in the mall, he asked me, “Do you



have a boyfriend?”. At that moment, I got terrified and said, “Yes, of course.”. Even though I didn't have any, I lied. It was a very awkward moment for me because I got scared of the question, because I had heard stories of how trainers try to flirt with their athletes. Luckily, nothing bad happened to me. After that moment, I started to keep my distance while talking to him.

3. How did you realize what was going on? What kind of signals could you detect?

It was instant just because he asked if I had a boyfriend.

4. Have you tried to cope with this situation? What was possible to do? What have you done? Have you involved other people/organizations? Who was involved?

I just lied to prevent any further conversation about the topic. I didn't tell anyone about the situation. Because it's kind of stopped, I didn't feel the need.

5. Did you feel you had the skills to manage this kind of situation? Which was the most difficult part of it? Did you ask for help or support? Did you receive any form of support during or after the episode?

I believe I reacted in the best possible way, even if he didn't have any bad intentions. I think it's the best way to react in this kind of situation.

6. What was the impact of this episode, both on your sport's life and in general on your opinion and view?

It did not have any major impact on me. I continued doing sports and never experienced anything similar.



7. End of the story: how did the story end up? What would you say to people who are living similar situations?

I recommend for people to play safe and prevent any type of catcalling or flirting from the coach side at the early beginning and if you don't feel good about the situation you can change the team/trainer

### 3.5 Spain

The Spanish partner, as the Italian one, declared that the sports women interviewed were likely to not identify catcalling and verbal sexual harassment at first, thus when they were asked if they have ever experienced first-hand or witnessed such situations, they were denying as they weren't aware that they actually did. In this manner, women reached through online surveys mostly answered "NO" when asked, "Have you ever experienced or witnessed situations of catcalling or VSH?". Only after the interviewer shared examples of what VSH and catcalling mean, they were recollecting memories of episodes during which they have felt unsafe, uncomfortable or even threatened.

All in all, the experience from the interactions with interviewees in Spain shows a lack of understanding, given that most women don't know what Verbal Sexual Harassment and Catcalling mean. The lack of information and definition of the term negatively affected the online survey results, as many women were confused about the actual definition of VSH in the interviews and needed some examples and information. Some of them said 'No, I haven't experienced VSH or catcalling' and then remembered several situations after the explanation, which makes us think that this was probably the reason why some people answered with a "no" in the survey, although the phenomenon was described at the beginning of the survey.

In the one on one interviews most women were very happy to finally be able to share their experiences and voice their opinions. Most expressed opinions such as "finally we address this topic". Most of them could choose one story from the many experiences they had.



Some women who answered "no" also declared they had been subject to some of these behaviours, "but not in a sports environment or situation".

### Interview A.C.T 23 January 2023

**Age:** 29

**Gender:** Female

**Sport/Activity:** Hiking, yoga, functional training.

**Nationality:** Spanish

**1. Taking into account the following examples of Verbal Sexual Harassment (obscene remarks, honking from a car, insinuations, insistent requests...), do you consider that you have ever witnessed or experienced Verbal Sexual Harassment either in elite sport or doing any other type of exercise?**

I have experienced verbal sexual harassment in many situations and circumstances, but fortunately none while doing sport or exercise.

Five major points came out from these interviews:

- **Outfit:** the majority of athletes underline constant hesitation and worrying about sports outfit, referring to the inability to wear whatever they feel more comfortable with in order not to be a target for harassment;
- **Fear:** most of them are afraid something bad could happen one day, and some declared they felt in danger in some episodes;



- **Lack of support** in terms of wide acceptance of the problem as something normal or something they just have to "put up with";
- **Impact in their life:** most of them agree this affects their life when doing physical activity and some even refer to abandonment of an activity to avoid these situations;
- General feeling of the **need to speak up and talk about these situations:** some even agree we should all confront the harasser and make him understand that these sorts of behaviors make all women uncomfortable.

The famous Thai boxer Amber Kitchen agreed to release an interview for the WHISTLE project, which is also available on the official website of the project (<https://whistleproject.eu/interviews/>) . Being a popular sport woman also on social media, Amber Kitchen has to deal with verbal sexual harassment on a daily basis.

Here's the script of the interview:

## Amber Kitchen - The princess of Muay thai -

Age: 27 | Gender: Female | Sport: Karate | Nationality: Spanish

*'I receive inappropriate videos and photos from strangers every day'*

[→ See full interview](#)





### **Interview with Amber Kitchen**

Today at Whistle project we're talking with Amber Kitchen

Amber Kitchen is a Thai Boxer, she's competing at the 'One Championship' league, which is the biggest Martial Arts promotion company in Asia, if I'm correct?

**Amber: Yeah, yeah**

You already won 19 fights, is that updated?

**Amber: Yeah, so 19 fights, 6 losses and one draw is my record, so far...**

That's absolutely brilliant

Also, you run your own business, you run your own gym...

**Amber: Yeah, I have done for about 3 years now so...I'm 23 now so I was quite young when I started but all my life I've kind of grown up around the gym so it was easy for me to take over as it's family business**



So the first question I wanted to ask you was...

For a girl who has to travel a lot for competitions and stuff...what is it like to travel alone and have you ever felt unsafe by any chance or in danger?

**Amber: Yeah, so...I have been very lucky and I have traveled a lot since I was young so I think those first couple of times I have a twin sister so...we both flew to Holland on our own when we were about 15, that was my first kind of travel without an adult and that was a short trip... around the age of 18, 19 I started going to Thailand on my own so that's a long journey... I really try to make sure I go to safe places, I kind of went to Thailand with family before...I'm quite savvy with it and where to go, where not to go...I'm training all the time so it's not like I'm going out in the evenings or walking about or going out drinking or anything so I'm quite...I keep myself quite safe but otherwise I'm quite comfortable walking around on my own and I think I'm just extra aware of some of the dangers**

But the first time we talked and I remember this as a highlight because you told me you were at an air bnb or something

**Amber: Yeah... This was actually recent I come up to Leeds ...which is in my country it's in the UK but it's an eight hour journey for me and it's where I prefer to train now so when I had a fight coming up I had a local airbnb so that I could get to the gym quick and there was this guy and he was also staying at the airbnb apartment and every time I would come back he would comment on my gym clothing or like the shorts and thai boxing shorts are normally quite short because obviously you have to do high kicks they've got to be comfy..**



That's what I was going to say because obviously for many people, I mean, for me even if I don't do any organized sports...everytime I go out for a jog for me it's a big thing to... you know, the moment you have to decide what to wear it's like...Is it going to be too short? Is it going to be too tight?...Am I showing too much? Am I going to get unwanted attention or whatever but for you guys it's your uniform so I mean...there's no way someone can think, well, she's wearing that because she wants attention, I mean, you have to be comfortable...

**Amber: Yeah, In the gym no one blinks an eye at shorts, it's just...it's completely normal wearing a t-shirt like I'm wearing now, just a normal training top and some shorts but...and it was summer anyway so whether you're wearing shorts doesn't matter and this guy just kept on coming out the corridor every time I got back to the airbnb: - Oh, I like your shorts and trying to start a conversation so**

In a creepy way I guess...

**Amber: It was creepy yeah...and then I guess because I had my uniform on from the gym, I was on a top but he then started..I guess he found me on instagram...I have quite a large following so if you just click on the gym then I was probably on there training and then you can find me quite easily that's the hard thing about media so then I went up to my room and all of a sudden I had a message request and I clicked in it was him from downstairs asking me to go down and do really inappropriate things so ...I'm in a situation where it's like oh my god this guy is downstairs and it was really quite full on what he was saying.**

So, what happened in the end?



**Amber: I blocked him straight away but I mean...that day I was due to move anyway but if I go downstairs now with my suitcase, he's going to hear me coming and thinking I'm going to go and do what he's asked me to do so...first I was like : - That's grose...but the more I thought about it I thought : - God, this is actually quite serious because it's like a small bnb...he's going to hear me coming down the stairs, he's right by the exit and I did panic**

And there's nothing you can do about it really cause...he's not touching you or anything

**Amber: Yeah, it's just messages, I mean, I did block him straight away and in fact it can make some people even more angry or kind of , you don't know what people...people nowadays, well, people are a bit crazy so you never know and in the end I just, I rang someone from my gym because it was local, that's why I stayed so close and he actually came and waited outside, came in, let me come out of my room and luckily the guy didn't come out but I'm glad I rang for the backup, just in case, cause you just never know, I mean, the messages were really full on so ...**

Did that ever affect your training or your competition by any means?

**Amber: Well, maybe, in my head for a couple of days I was a bit, just like creeped out or, how dare someone like even say that to me? and it did play on my mind...it didn't affect my training and such because when I was at that environment I didn't feel uncomfortable cause I was in a whole different place I moved to London then for the rest of my camp but yeah, I mean it does play on your mind...like, even when I'm telling even when I'm telling you or even when I'm saying it now it's a bad feeling cause it was like OMG, what do I do?!**

Yeah, you're still getting that feeling today, right?!



**Amber: Yeah, because, you never know what could happen If I'm in an airbnb now I mean, there's hundreds of people in this dorm, I mean, could happen again, it's just...yeah, it's one of those things, it's so common...**

Exactly, that's what we were talking about cause when you get those messages it's just talking so you can't do anything about it so, for us we know that there's so many stories so much data nowadays more than like it was before...10 years before there's so much data about sexual abuse and stuff like that but there's nothing, no stories about Verbal Sexual Harassment so I think it's very valuable that you're talking about these things today cause If you're telling us this affects your state of mind it is a big thing for sports women in general

Also, I wanted to ask you, we also spoke about...The first time I talked to you ammm, you told me about a very serious story about a video that came out and it went viral and at some point this became a nightmare because of the messages you're getting and pictures and stuff

**Amber: Yeah, so, I mean, mainly I use instagram...instagram... I never really had, I had like a following of maybe eight thousand from when I was younger and then a local radio station done like a video of my training before a big fight and for some reason it just blew up it was, it's amazing how quick it spread..I think it got a million views, for a local radio station to put on a video it on facebook and instagram so that was amazing, my instagram blew up, I was only just gone eighteen so...and probably went like fifteen thousand in 2 days, maybe more but then that was when I was eighteen and you think: -wow, this is cool, I've got followings...But along with that I had weird messages like men were filming themselves inappropriately and sending it to me and it wasn't sent like a simple image so you just click on it so...on instagram sometimes it comes up with a blue thing you don't know what it is until you click so lots of things I would press and then I was like...Oh I cannot believe it so like...obviously I rang my mom and said: -Listen, people keep doing this, it's like loads! But even like, now I still get videos sent to me inappropriately all the time and now I can't see what people would think ...**

Exactly, what crosses your mind to say: -hey! you know what?! I'm going to take a picture of my private parts and send it to a complete stranger...what do you think you're going to get in return?...



**Amber: Why would you think I would respond positively to that?...when that happened first I just used to block everyone and now I still do but, I mean now it's more so as well as that like the constant messages like people constantly like 'Would you marry me?' or 'You're fit' ' shall we meet up' or 'We should be dating' or like...to other people it's like when I ignore it people start getting nasty...**

And that's what I was going to say...Then they'll go 'Hey witch! I told you you're beautiful!' and that happens a lot...

**Amber: Yeah, and like, I've got a lot on my plate so I do fighting, I own the gym so I've got so many media things to go through and I do want to live my life so I don't want to be on my phone answering every little question, every little thing but when I get messages like that, especially...It's not going to be first on my list to click and respond...**

Exactly, because they're not talking about the work you do, they're not talking about your competition, they're talking about things that have nothing to do with your job...

**Amber: And people request really weird things as well like...'Can you kick me in my privates' 'Send me photos of your feet' I get that a lot...I don't know what it is with people but for me I'm used to it but for other people...getting messages like that...it's really horrible ...**

You're saying you're used to it now but the first time when you were 18...I mean, you were a teenager...What was it like back in the days?...



**Amber: Yeah, it's disgusting, I did make me like...really...I don't even open videos now, if someone sent me a video I just don't even bother, I mean, especially from strangers like, any sort of video, I don't know what it would be, there's no point in opening it and I mean 18 at that time you obviously don't think you're still young but you are like compared to were I was 5 years ago and my frame of mind now I wasn't that grown up and I was like: Oh! My god, like, that's disgusting and it does play on your mind, especially if it's some old guy from across the world you never know, you're eighteen, you're young**

One of the things I wanted to ask you was precisely that, because you spoke about talking to your mom when you started receiving those messages...did you...cause obviously Thai Boxing is a big thing in your family as your mom id Julie Kitchen and she's 'the queen of Thai Boxing ' did she ever tell you stories? Did she ever warn you about these things?

**Amber: Well we was quite young, me and my sister was quite young around my mom doing Thai boxing...Facebook and Facebook wasn't really a thing it just started coming out when she was fighting and yeah, she did get it but we never got told like the extent of what it was and we haven't really spoke too much about what her experience is, but I know she had the same...I mean, when I said : - What do you think I should do? And she said: - Just block them, ignore them, don't open any messages like that so, from her tone of voice and what she said she has been through it as well but, I mean, It's just hard, I think nearly every single woman with big following would have it but even just it can happen to a random girl anyway...So yeah, I think everyone has I just haven't really dealt into it with my family but...**

And also, I don't know if you ever responded but...Did you ever reply to any of those messages...Did you ever say: Listen, I don't know why you're sending me this or whatever or if you could have the chance to say something to all of these who do that, what would you tell them?



**Amber: I would just say it's not attractive and I don't want it, you're not getting anything out of it and if anything it's making it worse for you I'm going to completely ignore you, I'm going to block you so this message is pointless, there's no need for it and it's disgusting and no one wants it...It's as simple as that.**

Also...you run your own gym and this is going to be the last question so you have to help guys with their training every day . My question is. Do you ever feel undermined or treated like an object?

**Amber: Yeah, there's definitely guys who come in and try and undermine me, I mean, I'm young, I'm a female and being like a male dominated sport and I'm teaching so there's always someone who thinks what they're saying is funny or, you know they go: - 'I know better'. But I think a lot of gyms have that, any sports have that, even if it's not a male dominated sport but...I mean I just...If it gets to a point if someone is commenting on a girls clothes and that or undermining me or just genuinely have no respect in the gym it's like: -You just got to leave...It's hard enough for women just to come in and out of, especially at martial arts so we just have zero tolerance for it and, I mean, even that...at this day and age you should know what is appropriate to say and what's not, what's humour and what's not...Most of it is not funny...Sometimes it might not even be the person's fault but there's a time and place and way to say things so you got to be careful it doesn't come across wrong cause we have all ages in our gym...I mean, our adults class starts from 15 and up so that's still quite young and it needs to be an environment for everyone so I definitely I'm very strict with it in our gym back at home...**

I'm sure your family is very proud of you

**Amber: Thank you.**



Well, I think that's it...If you want to add anything?...Well, we just wanted to say, first of all, thank you very much, we appreciate the time you took to be here with us today...We know you're a very busy person and we really appreciate it...I think you're very good at communicating and this is going to be very valuable for the project so thank you very much

**Amber: Yeah, no, it's nice to finally voice this other side of sport that people don't see because I never speak about this personal kind of things obviously so it's nice to voice it and I hope other girls start listening and think: - Yeah! I'm not putting up with that block or just talk to someone about it.**

An important data that came out from the collection of stories in Spain is the generational variable: most of the women who are open to talk about these situations are women of the age of 35 or younger, showing to be overall more aware and sensitized about the topic; in contrast, women over 35 are usually more inclined to normalize and accept these situations as "normal behaviour in men" rather than calling it harassment and recognizing it as catcalling or verbal sexual harassment.

Below, the example of an interview with a 35+ years old woman:

### **Interview P.M. 17 January 2023**

**Age:** 61

**Gender:** Female

**Sport/Activity:** Hiking, yoga.

**Nationality:** Spanish



**1. Taking into account the following examples of Verbal Sexual Harassment (obscene comments, whistling from a car, insinuations, insistent requests...), do you consider that you have ever witnessed or experienced Verbal Sexual Harassment either in elite sport or doing any other type of exercise?**

No.

And following, the example of an interview with an under 35 years old woman:

**Interview L.S.F 9 February 2023**

**Age:** 31

**Gender:** Female

**Sport/Activity:** Yoga, hiking.

**Nationality:** Spanish

**1. Taking into account the following examples of Verbal Sexual Harassment (obscene remarks, honking from a car, insinuations, insistent requests...), do you consider that you have ever witnessed or experienced Verbal Sexual Harassment either in elite sport or doing any other type of exercise?**

Yes.

**2. Tell the story or stories that have marked you the most.**

One day I was running along the promenade and suddenly I stopped to buy a bottle of water and a guy on a bicycle passed by, touched my ass and shouted 'Hottie'. The smack on my ass was so hard that it brought tears to my eyes from the pain.

**3. Did you identify at the time that this was harassment?**



**4. What did you do about it?**

I was in shock, also because of the pain. By the time I wanted to say something to him he was already gone.

**5. Did you talk to anyone about it and did you feel supported when it happened to you?**

I was running with a friend that day. It was about 15 years ago. At that time we saw it as something normal. In fact, at that time in high school it was a normal thing for boys to go around the corridors touching butts.

**6. How does this affect your sporting and personal life?**

It makes me think about what kind of clothes to wear when doing sport because you don't want to feel like a sex object... You try not to wear too flashy or too tight clothes so you don't draw attention to yourself and sometimes it even makes me rethink about doing outdoor sport because of these issues.

**7. What would you say to girls who have suffered or are suffering from verbal sexual harassment in sport/exercise?**

That they don't have the problem, the harasser does, and that they should do everything they can to bring this type of practice to light and create safe spaces. Please continue to give visibility because fortunately there are more and more tools every day. Express yourselves freely and without fear.

Another reason why some women were not willing to share their stories in the WHISTLE framework is because of the political barrier: they refused to participate in the interviews and to collaborate on the project in general as they were describing it as "political propaganda", so some women less in line with the ideas of certain political parties will refuse to talk about their experiences: they generally claimed that the issue of verbal sexual harassment and catcalling don't really exist and consequently don't make anyone uncomfortable, and even if some comments happen, they are never badly intended or simply it never happened to them in first person.

The collection of questionnaires and interviews has been a hard task for various reasons, creating an issue of non-participation. First of all, the rates of women of all ages who do sports or physical exercise on a regular basis are not so high. Second, when getting in contact with athletes and sports women in general we found the following problems:



- Most of them didn't even answer;
- Some of them did answer and declared to feel 'highly in line with the aims of the project' but told us their manager wouldn't allow them to do an interview even if it was anonymous;
- Some of the ones who accepted were scared to provide personal information to strangers.

It's hard to reach these athletes as they have very busy agendas and their job is highly demanding. Hard disciplines and hectic schedules, combined with the fear of being pointed out for talking about controversial matters translates into low rates of participation.

### 3.6 Turkey

During the collection of stories, the Turkish partner has referred to have noticed a pattern on the quality of the stories collected - in terms of amount of information shared by the interviewees - that follow a relevant, binary difference between the Western and the Eastern side of the country, remarking (as the Bulgarian partner) the importance of the geographical factor.

The interviewees from the Western side of the country were more willing to share their stories and talking openly about verbal sexual harassment and catcalling in the field of sports, compared to other athletes from the Eastern side of the country being interviewed; this can be related to a geo-political motivation: as the Western side of Turkey is geographically closer to Europe, the Turkish partner underlines they have less gender pressure there compared to the other side of the country, thus they feel free to share their own stories and experiences more comfortably.

Here's an example of an interview with a person from the Western side of the country:

**Details of the interviewee:**

Age: 18

Nationality: Türkiye



Role of the Interviewee: (ex. athlete, trainer, coach, manager, fan, referee, other...) **Athlete**

Role in the episode: (ex. victim in first person, witness, other ...) **Victim**

Sport: (team or individual structured sports) **Handball**

Location where the episode occurred: (ex. field, gym, grandstand, changing/locker room, on the way to/from the training/match, other...) **Sport Hall**

Moment when the episode occurred: (ex. before the match/training, after the match/training, on the way to/from the venue, during the match/training, etc ...) **During a match**

Historical period collocation of the episode: (ex. present; '90s, 5 years ago, and so on...)

**4 years ago**

**Date/Country of the Interview: 26/09/2022 Türkiye**

**Interviewer partner: SPELL**

**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment:  
Let's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

*Please, tell us your story!*

The following fields are designed to help you to write your story. For every field, write around

<p>1. Have you witnessed or experienced personal situations of <i>Catcalling</i> or <i>Verbal Sexual Harassment</i> (VSH) during your activity in sports organizations?</p> <p><b>Yes, I did. In an away handball match, I was met with sexually explicit swearing and hand signals by the opposing team's supporters.</b></p>
<p>2. Telling your story. What has happened? How has the story started?</p> <p><b>In a handball match, in the stands where the opposing team was, voices were heard by the supporters of the opposing team: you are stupid, you play like a commodity, curses etc.. They were using insulting words such as I will catch you at the exit. All together, hand gestures were made from the stands. I even noticed that a fan was taking a video of me with his cell phone.</b></p>
<p>3. How did you realize what was going on? What kind of signals could you detect?</p> <p><b>I understood from the cheering. In addition, the hand signs made were understood to be sexually explicit signs. Later, insulting words were used to insult my entire team individually. Hand gestures, ugly signs.</b></p>



4. Have you tried to cope with this situation? What was possible to do? What have you done? Have you involved other people/organizations? Who was involved?

**I didn't try to cope and I didn't react in any way, of course I should have focused completely on the match. I told the team coaches about the harassment I heard from outside. They also told the referee. Despite being warned a few times, the fans were still going on. The referees took the whole tribune out as a precaution. The referees, the observers there and my coaches were interested in this issue.**

5. Did you feel you had the skills to manage this kind of situation? Which was the most difficult part of it? Did you ask for help or support? Did you receive any form of support during or after the episode?

**Of course, I think I can handle such situations. The most difficult part was the insulting words in the match, this was reflected in my game. I was having trouble concentrating. I asked for help, of course, the referees and coaches helped.**

6. What was the impact of this episode, both on your sport's life and in general on your opinion and view?

It had no effect at all. What happened there remained there. They were left with what they did. It had an effect on the match at that time, but not in the future. I decided not to hear the tribune any longer and said I would focus entirely on the match and only listen to the coaches.

7. End of the story: how did the story end up? What would you say to people who are living similar situations?

**At the end of the story, they were kicked out of the stands. Such situations happen a lot and my advice to you is not to hear the tribune. Don't listen at all. Focus on the match completely, trust yourself and listen only to your teachers.**

On the other hand, it has been way more challenging to collect stories and consequently gather data about the topic of the project in the Eastern side of Turkey. Sports women - and women in general - are afraid to speak up because of the social and family pressure they receive, which is very high in the Eastern side of the country. There were cases reported in which families reached the point to kill their daughters, either if they had spoken up or not, because of shame and a strong conservative mentality.

Here's an example of an interview with a sport woman from the Eastern side of Turkey:



Chronological information	Do you agree?
11/23/2022 15:31:03	Yes
Have you witnessed or personally experienced situations of catcalling or verbal sexual harassment (VSH) during your activity in sports organisations? I complained to the field police.	
How did you react?	
It feels uneasy	
What was the impact of this episode, both on your sporting life and your opinion and views in general?	
No	
Would you like to tell us more?	

As it can be noticed, the questions are short-answered and in some cases not even answered at all.



## 4. Analysis of the stories

The methodologies that have been used during the collection of stories are the three following:

- one on one interviews;
- online surveys;
- stories from the web.

From all the stories that have been gathered, a pattern emerged based on the different methodology of collection.

In this chapter we will analyze how the methodology used had an impact on the stories gathered, and consequently how the stories were shaped differently based on the tool used to collect them.

### 4.1 Analysis of interviews

The first methodology used in the collection of stories was the one on one interview. The Consortium has prepared a template with a series of questions to be used during the interviews.

The interviews were held in comfortable and cozy places in order to spring the feeling of safety for the interviewees. At the beginning of the interview, the interviewer always made sure that the definitions of verbal sexual harassment and catcalling were clear and commonly understood. After the interviewer reminded the interviewees that the participation was voluntary and they had the right to decline any answer they were uncomfortable with, as well as to interrupt the discussion whenever they wanted, the interviews started. The interviewers structured the interview as an informal discussion and the questions were flexible based on how the discussions were proceeding.

Here's the template used for the interviews:

## 1. TEMPLATE FOR THE INTERVIEW:

**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment: LET's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

---

### Investigating Catcalling and Verbal Sexual Harassment in Sport

#### INTERVIEW GUIDELINES:

##### Conducting an interview:

First Phase: Introduction (10 min)

- clarify the general needs of the project
- verify the understanding and the principle of the general lines of the project
- collect consent for the use of data and for recording

Second Phase: Content (45 min)

- establish the interview
- make the interviewee feel comfortable (she has the right to end the session at any point)
- take notes and record the session for transcription and podcast

Third Phase: Leave (5 min)

- Collect hot impressions/comments
  - ask for impressions on the interview and on the project in general.
- 

The questions you find in this template have the aim to help structure the interview and help the interviewee tell her story. They can be submitted by adapting them to the specific interviewee and the context.

Make sure the interviewee understood the aim of the project and the definitions listed below before you start.

Please, keep in mind the project's and research's goals when doing the interviews.

- comprehend what *catcalling* and *verbal sexual harassment* are and how they can happen both in organized and not-organized sports settings.
- This call for stories/interviews focuses on organized sports, both for teams and individuals (such as football, volleyball, basketball, pool sports, athletics, tennis, pole dance etc.).
- This call for stories/interviews is open also to self-organized sports (such as running, jogging etc.)
- consider balancing the number of interviewees according to sport, role, age etc.
- understand which capacities and competencies should be upgraded for better use of sport in facing societal challenges.



Before describing the scope of the project and analyzing the needs, we would like to recall the meaning of the word catcalling. Catcalling is defined as a series of behaviors including whistles, gestures, comments and unwanted sexual advances, implemented to attract the attention mainly of women in the streets and other public places by strangers. Including a strong component of objectification, catcalling can be considered a form of verbal harassment, as it is an unwanted behavior with a sexual connotation that offends a person's dignity. It is a discriminatory attitude since it is practiced mainly by men toward the female gender. These kinds of gestures, based on gender discrimination, violate the principle of equal treatment between men and women. Catcalling is a growing phenomenon that happens every day to many young women and girls and affects their lives: many start to feel uncomfortable or afraid walking down the street and wearing whatever they want, or practicing their favorite sport, to a point that can lead to sport drop-out. Catcalling can be hidden in statements that, at first glance, may seem like appreciation.

Verbal sexual harassment in sports environments refers to repeated and continuous inappropriate behaviors of a sexual nature, including comments, touching, sending or posting photos, messages and/or requests. All of these are a type of sexual harassment and are a violation of the victim's civil rights.

- a coach or manager asking an athlete for sex or a date
- Referring to an adult as a girl, hunk, doll, babe, or honey
- Whistling at someone, cat calls
- Making sexual comments about a person's body
- Making sexual comments or innuendos
- Turning training discussions to sexual topics
- Telling sexual jokes or stories
- Asking about sexual fantasies, preferences, or history
- Asking personal questions about social or sexual life
- Making kissing sounds, howling, and smacking lips
- Making sexual comments about a person's clothing, anatomy, or looks
- Repeatedly asking out a person who is not interested
- Telling lies or spreading rumors about a person's personal sex life

---

#### **To be filled in by the interviewer:**

The information below is very important for the following analysis phase of this project/research. The details can be collected through direct questions or extrapolated from the story description completed by the interviewee/participant of the survey.

The questions you find in the following list and in the survey table have to be submitted by adapting them to the interviewee and the context.

#### **Details of the interviewee:**

Age: .....

Nationality: .....

Role of the Interviewee: (ex. athlete, trainer, coach, manager, fan, referee, other...)

.....



Role in the episode: (ex. victim in first person, witness, other ...)

-----

Sport: (team or individual structured sports) -----

Location where the episode occurred: (ex. field, gym, grandstand, changing/locker room, on the way to/from the training/match, other...)

-----

Moment when the episode occurred: (ex. before the match/training, after the match/training, on the way to/from the venue, during the match/training, other ...)

-----

Historical period collocation of the episode: (ex. present; '90s, 5 year ago, and so on...)

-----

**Date/Country of the Interview:** (Ex. 02/08/2018 Italy)

**Interviewer partner:** (Ex. USMA)

**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment: LEt's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

*Please, tell us your story!*

The following fields are designed to help you to write your story. For every field, write around

1. Have you witnessed or experienced personal situations of *Catcalling* or *Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH)* during your activity in sports organizations?



2. Telling your story. What has happened? How has the story started?

3. How did you realize what was going on? What kind of signals could you detect?



4. Have you tried to cope with this situation? What was possible to do? What have you done? Have you involved other people/organizations? Who was involved?

5. Did you feel you had the skills to manage this kind of situation? Which was the most difficult part of it? Did you ask for help or support? Did you receive any form of support during or after the episode?



6. What was the impact of this episode, both on your sport's life and in general on your opinion and view?

7. End of the story: how did the story end up? What would you say to people who are living similar situations?

In case the one on one interview was impossible to be held in person, the partners sent the template directly to the interviewees for them to fill it.

What has been noticed with the use of this methodology is that generally the sports women felt more comfortable to share their stories in more details compared to the methodology



of the online survey. When the interviews were held in a safe and cozy environment, and especially with trusted interviewer from the interviewed perspective (e.g. another woman or a person that they already knew), the stories were shared openly and exhaustively, in some cases the women felt free to share even more than one episode they had experienced first-hand or witnessed.

Although the issue of women not willing to share their stories was noticed even in the one on one interviews methodology, generally this methodology has been proven to be the most successful of the three used, as the stories collected (when the interviewers answer "Yes" to the first question) were not short-answered as it has been registered in the online surveys.

Furthermore, despite the differences highlighted in the previous chapter in which the collection of stories was analyzed per country (e.g. in Turkey, even with the same methodology of interviews sportswomen from the East side of the country shared less than sportswomen from the West), overall the interviews have registered a general success for the goal of the project to gather data on the topic of verbal sexual harassment and catcalling in sport fields.

Here's an example of a successful story shared under the frame of WHISTLE project:



**Details of the interviewee:**

Age: 35

Nationality: Bulgaria

Role of the Interviewee: (ex. athlete, trainer, coach, manager, fan, referee, other...) ex athlete, actress

Role in the episode: (ex. victim in first person, witness, other ...) ex. victim

Sport: (team or individual structured sports) yoga, fencing, horseback riding

Location where the episode occurred: (ex. field, gym, grandstand, changing/locker room, on the way to/from the training/match, other...) in the field

Moment when the episode occurred: (ex. before the match/training, after the match/training, on the way to/from the venue, during the match/training, etc ...) during a training

Historical period collocation of the episode: (ex. present; '90s, 5 years ago, and so on...) 15 years ago

**Date/Country of the Interview:** 29/10/2022, Bulgaria**Interviewer partner:** Courage Foundation

**“WHISTLE - Women's Healthy and active lifestyle Is Threatened by verbal sexual harassment:  
LET's stop CATCALLING in sports”**

*Please, tell us your story!*

The following fields are designed to help you to write your story. For every field, write around

1. Have you witnessed or experienced personal situations of *Catcalling* or *Verbal Sexual Harassment (VSH)* during your activity in sports organizations?

I do yoga, and I practice walking and jogging after the kids. Before I became a mother, I did swimming, fencing, riding, but since I have children, I don't relieve stress with sports, but with meditation, reading and walking. I have been a victim of verbal abuse many times.

2. Telling your story. What has happened? How has the story started?

In fencing, I have not had such cases, but in riding, while I was riding, I regularly heard insinuations about the continuation of my spine, i.e. my butt and that I have very nice "peaches". It was probably almost every practice. I have been riding regularly for 1 year, not from my trainer, but there were other people there, men, and very often I have actually heard such things, because while you ride your whole body is tense and sways and all your forms jump accordingly.



3. How did you realize what was going on? What kind of signals could you detect?

Well, every time someone tells me something like that, I lose my temper for a bit, it's like I've been stripped naked for a bit, and then I gather myself and decide that I have to jump over, but I see that they treat me like a piece of meat.

4. Have you tried to cope with this situation? What was possible to do? What have you done? Have you involved other people/organizations? Who was involved?

I don't answer, I try to change the subject, quickly change the subject and show that I also have a brain, I'm not just meat. My generation doesn't see me as a sex object, but everyone above my age has this point of view. In my family I have a professional athlete, a volleyball player, and around her I have also met others, I have a master's degree in sports at school, I studied with professional basketball players and they shared that sometimes their profession also depended on this, on the coach, if the coach likes you or he doesn't like you. In most cases he likes them and wants them, and if you don't give in, you'll be a reserve, you won't be in the first place.

5. Did you feel you had the skills to manage this kind of situation? Which was the most difficult part of it? Did you ask for help or support? Did you receive any form of support during or after the episode?

6. What was the impact of this episode, both on your sport's life and in general on your opinion and view?

This kind of situation has affected me personally in the sense that I don't like older men and my husband is younger than me. Because I say again, men above my age, somehow they grew up with the perception that the woman should be in the kitchen, you should be this and this and this... in my opinion boys born in the 90s grow up in a completely different world, I'm not saying you cannot find also guys like this, there is, it depends on what kind of family you're from, but they're a bit more open and don't constantly see us as a piece of meat that moves and you're a sexual object. But it has affected me because I haven't had, I don't like... I've had older partners, but I feel that. I feel a power over me that I don't like, no matter how I prove myself, and then subconsciously I have chosen a younger that me.



7. End of the story: how did the story end up? What would you say to people who are living similar situations?

I would tell girls who are victims of similar situations not to keep silent. The intelligent person will ignore, but it is good to comment on it, to put the person in his place, because it is not right, you are like him, with absolutely equal rights, and suddenly in public places you are put like a piece of literal meat, which I do not perceive as 21st century. So, don't be silent.

I've had other similar cases while I've been in prison, because I've worked with inmates, a lot of men initially perceive me exactly like that, as a sex object, it's normal, I know that, in a place where testosterone is very high, this is normal, but it has happened to me, as I teach them different exercises, in one of the exercises, a single gentleman allowed himself, literally he said, the sentence was: "You know what, you will be here and now my fish and swing like a fish and I'll pretend to catch you with a line." At which the whole group of men had a laugh, but some of them are self-conscious because they have daughters, and I'm their daughters' age, and they imagine how this happens to their daughters and stop it. In this case, that situation ended with me making it very clear that the rules are not what he says, but what I say, and that right now, unfortunately, if he wants to be in my place, he'll have to complete everything that I have studied and then there is no problem as a theater director he can stand in front of me and tell me what he wants me to do. And he fell silent. But maybe if we weren't in a

prison environment and there wasn't a corresponding warden, the man in question would have been aggressive and things wouldn't have ended like this. It's not pleasant. No matter that we are in the 21st century, when you are born a woman you are with fewer rights.

## 4.2 Analysis of online surveys

The second methodology used for the collection of stories was the online survey. Compared to the one on one interviews, this methodology produced short-answered stories and not so many in terms of quantity as the Consortium was expecting.

Although it was communicated that the interviewees were feeling safer and more comfortable to share their own experiences - thus we were expecting a higher numbers of stories collected -, on the other hand many forms gathered reported the answer "no" to the first question: "Have you witnessed or personally experienced situations of catcalling



or verbal sexual harassment (VSH) during your activity in sports organisations?", and consequently the rest of the questions were not answered as there was no story to share from the perspective of the questionnaire's participants.

Have you witnessed or personally experienced situations of catcalling or verbal sexual harassment (VSH) during your activity in sports organisations?
No
Yes
Yes
No
No
No
Yes
No
No
No

As, with the methodology of the one on one interviews, it was noticed that the first answer was often "no" just because it was not clear what verbal sexual harassment and catcalling meant, and after the interviewer shared definitions and examples some sports women realized that they had indeed experienced it and changed their answers, it is safe to assume that the same situation could have happen while filling the online form: since the sport women were not aware that they have actually experienced it - maybe for lack of knowledge on the definitions of VSH and catcalling, maybe for not having developed awareness on the topic until that moment -, they answered "no", and there was no informal discussion that made the participants reflect with examples or correct definitions on their past experiences to check if this "no" was actually true or not, because they filled the form individually and without any supervision from a trained interviewer.

Even when the stories were shared, the answers collected were very short and synthetic, thus it has been difficult to gather qualitative data from this methodology of collection of stories.

Here's an example of a filled questionnaire:

Chronological information	Do you agree?
25/10/2022 17.14.00	Yes

Have you witnessed or personally experienced situations of catcalling or verbal sexual harassment (VSH) during your activity in sports organisations?
Yes



How did you react?
I was shocked. Sometimes I reacted with a response, sometimes I didn't.
What was the impact of this episode, both on your sporting life and your opinion and views in general?
Its quite a thought of why I should tackle it and its past influence on my general involvement with sport.
Would you like to tell us more?
One result of how much the verbal and psychological violence I faced from my coach affected me, was the onset of the panic attacks that accompanied every corresponding condition and stressful situation in the midst of sports.

The above questionnaire can be taken into account as the perfect prototype of the questionnaires received in which the first answer reported was "yes": the story - although being shared - is short and not detailed.

### 4.3 Analysis of stories from the web

Thanks to emerging movements such as "MeToo", it was pretty easy to find stories on the web of sexual harassment and catcalling in sports. In the last few years, this topic seemed to emerge overbearingly in most European countries. According to the sources gathered, and all the testimonies shared by newspapers, the issue of VSH and catcalling didn't suddenly appear, but victims decided to start speaking up and encouraging each other to do the same through the examples of fellow sportswomen who finally sued, released interviews, accused harassers.

Although not everyone has found the courage to speak up and report abuses yet, based on what emerged until now, it looks like we have just scratched the surface of a much bigger problem than what society was expecting. Verbal sexual harassment, catcalling and even physical sexual harassment seem to be a structural problem in nowadays society.

In Italy, for instance, sexism in sports is rooted even at amateur levels, and passes by anyone involved, being athletes, kids, coaches, parents, supporters, etc. The following article, translated in English for the purpose of this report, reports a case of sexual offenses towards a woman referee (link to the original article: <https://www.vanityfair.it/news/cronache/2019/05/27/offese-sessiste-allarbitra-quando-gli-ultra-sugli-spalti-sono-genitori/amp>):



## **Sexist offenses against the referee, when the ultras in the stands are the parents**

**Parents who, in some cases, become a bad role model, forgetting that they should be a positive and constructive example for their children.**

**They insult, they scream, sometimes they even come to blows. No, they are not kids, they are their parents** who, when their children find themselves in the stands during the basketball, volleyball and football championships, turn into ultras of the worst kind, even ready to beat up their opponents, even whether they're eight or nine, and anyone who gets in the way of their little one's victory.

**Not to mention how to blame the referee, especially when the result betrays expectations: and if the referee is a woman, well, there it almost reaches madness: the classic cuckolded referee is an affectionate observation compared to what those mouths can come out against the one who is questioning the future career of the child. There are so many of them and they infest (the term is a must) the bleachers of football pitches throughout Italy, a bad model of what they should be: a positive and constructive example for one's children.**

The latest case was a few days ago: we are in Mestre, during a match in the Giovanissimi category between the Treporti and Miranese teams. The parents of the Treporti kids are particularly agitated and from the beginning of the match **they start insulting the young referee Giulia Nicastro, 22 years old, in every way up to inviting her, if one can say so, to devote herself to the "oldest job in the world."** And if the parents were already not enough, one of the players, a 14-year-old, also, continuing in the wake of the adults, chose provocation, lowering his shorts on the field and daring the referee to either eject him or perform sexual practices with him. Of course, he was ejected from the field. At least that.

Gestures that, however frequent, affected everyone, both the Miranese management and the tournament staff, who at the end of the game profused in big apologies. "Kids are allowed to make mistakes, but not make so many mistakes," confirmed Giuseppe Ruzza, president of the Figc Veneto. "It was a disgusting assault and there are no other words to comment on it." **It will be up to sports justice to determine the action to be taken against the 14-year-old**, who for now has been suspended from all Figc activities pending investigations by the Veneto Regional Committee. The Treporti sports club, where he plays, has already been ordered to pay a fine of 100 euros.

**Not just parents.** This is not the first, nor will it be the last such case. From just a few months ago, the affair of **sexist insults to lineswoman Annalisa Moccia of the Nola section**, in the province of Salerno, during the Agropoli-Sant'Agnello match. The speaker of a local broadcaster opened his commentary this way, "I would ask the director to frame the female assistant, which is unwatchable. It sucks to see women coming to be referees in a league where teams spend thousands of euros, a joke of the Federation."

A few weeks earlier **it was Ilaria Possanzini who had been targeted:** as soon as she finished refereeing the match between Casa del Diavolo and San Marco Juventina, the coach of the former, not digesting the defeat, launched herself far beyond tactical analysis: "Match conditioned by the referee: **soccer women either stay in the kitchen or do the cleaning**, they cannot be on a playing field." Alè. A moment and the hands of sport and our society go back decades.



**Women referees in Italy? A problem that does not arise, but for the wrong reasons.** In Italy the problem of female refereeing does not arise, but not because we are a country in the vanguard: quite the contrary. More so because there just aren't any, neither in Serie A nor in Serie B. The only one, in Serie C, is Maria Marotta of Sapi, while Cristina Cini and Romina Santuari, have come along and been assistants in the major league. Getting to whistle a penalty or a hand foul for a woman seems virtually impossible.

And yes, because in front of that woman in shorts with the whistle, there is always a commentator or pundit who can't stand the idea. So he throws out the joke, which if it were witty would also be acceptable. But very often it is just a disguised insult. In short, unless something changes, the refereeing future "made in Italy" seems to remain male. For the sake of commentators, pundits and commentators.

Yet they, **the girls, train like their male colleagues, study the rules perhaps even more than their colleagues, and referee as much as the males.** But nothing. Overcoming prejudice is really tough. They knew, these men, how many women referee sometimes even better than males. One only has to look in Germany, for example, to realize this: **in the Bundesliga, Bibiana Steinhaus, police commissioner, whistles, and the Czech Dagmar Damkova is one of Uefa's most feared referee observers.**

In Italy, we don't see any of these things at the moment. And when it happens, like the China-United States quarterfinal refereed at the 2015 World Cup by Carina Vitulano, we are careful not to highlight it. **If the AIA (Italian Referees Association) is there, strike a blow and value these judges on the field once and for all as they deserve.**

Italy is not alone facing the problem of sexual harassment. The situation in Greece described by many newspapers seems to be even worse. Abuse and physical sexual harassment is present in both amateur and professional levels. Here we report an article of the Greek newspaper "LIBRE", translated in English for the purpose of this report, in which the situation in Greece is extensively represented (link to the original article: <https://www.libre.gr/2021/01/17/chionostivada-apokalypseon-kataggeli/>):

### **Avalanche of revelations: complaints from other champions and Olympians for abuse or harassment - Bakoyannis, Iatridou, Bikouf, Psychogiou**

**As it seems that the case of the sexual abuse of Sofia Bekatorou is not the only one in the field of sports. After her shocking revelations and the prosecutor's intervention, other athletes have found the courage to speak openly, revealing that they have suffered sexual abuse or harassment.**

Unfortunately, it is not excluded that more will follow in the coming days, bringing to the forefront the dark side of sport.



***Rabea Iatridou, Niki Bakoyannis, Marina Psychogiou and Mania Bikouf were the ones who followed the example of Bekatorou and were shocked with their revelations.***

*Mania Bikouf spoke to ERT and described her own traumatic experience when she visited a doctor at a young age to overcome a shoulder injury.*

*A few hours later from Mania Bikouf came the post of swimmer **Rabeas Iatridou** who revealed her experience with **a doctor examining her naked for no apparent reason.***

### **The post**

*The revelation of the sexual abuse of our Olympic champion Sophia Bekatorou exploded like a bombshell as if crimes of this category are something rare for our "civilized" society and everyone was shocked that Greek athletics is not pure and not staffed by virtuous people...*

*After the shock the rain of easy commentary and the opportunity for many to judge behind their keyboards and for many of the complexes to feel superior by blaming the victim either directly or by innuendo for the timing of her choice to make her story public.*

*In reading her story I was silent for hours. I thought about how much this woman with the national emblem on her chest and sails has achieved and tried to put myself in her shoes. I thought about how I would feel, what I would think, what I would do. What I would choose to do and how I would breathe it in... Surely you can't feel it I thought if you haven't experienced it..*

*The next day came the post of my friend Mania Bikouf about the doctor of the national water polo team forcing the athletes to take off their swimsuits, to stir my own waters with a chain reaction that took me back many years, like a fall down a slide that I couldn't stop before I landed in a clinic in Thessaloniki, almost 27 years ago.*

*During my athletic career I have had only male coaches and chaperones on missions and they have all been impeccable, I have never had a complaint.*

*Shortly before I turned 19, at the resumption of intensive training after a short break for the national exams in a moment of immaturity at Jimmy Samaras' gym, without a good warm-up I accepted a challenge for an exercise that resulted in a bad biceps contusion of the right leg. I immediately called the athletic trainer who was monitoring me but due to workload he would see me late the next afternoon. My fear that something bad had happened led me to make an appointment with an orthopedist at the insurance provider near the house as well. The doctor immediately asked me to stay in my underwear. After asking brief questions and examining me on the special bed, constantly gripping my body in places the exam did not warrant, he asked me to get up and bend over. I stood facing him and went to bend forward. No, he said, not like that, you will turn around and bend over in front of me. I was panicking, it felt completely wrong but I didn't know how to react, the no was stuck like a sob in my throat and it didn't make it out. I did as he asked and the disgusted man stood right behind me and groped my thighs and buttocks under the pretext of examining them. With an equally disgusted smile he prescribed me medication shortly after. As soon as I closed the door behind me I burst into tears and tore the prescription into a thousand pieces. I made time to go home*



*until my crying was no longer visible because if I said what happened my father would go and throw him off the balcony after he had beaten him to a pulp..*

*That same night I went to my audiologist's office like a scared puppy.. "We take off our shoe covers and stockings and get on the cot" he sweetly told me. "Doctor, can I take off my overalls?" "Of course not," he replied calmly, "you don't need it for the exam". The exam included movement commands, running and the following question about the type and intensity of pain and all he touched was my ankle and shin to correct movement. With treatments and therapy in a few days I was able to swim again but the scene at the first doctor took me years to get over and the way I chose to handle it was to make fun of it until I finally forgot about it. I was young, scared and completely unloved.*

*On the occasion of your story, Mania, which, on the occasion of Sophia's story, you dug it out of your memory, I dug it out of mine... Of course it is in no way equal to that of a rape but harassment and abuse regardless of the severity of the incident fill the victim with feelings of shame.*

*I fear that many female athletes have similar or much more serious stories to tell. The fault is not that we drown the stories in ourselves. The mistake is that we didn't feel we would be (sub)supported to tell them and of course we were afraid of commentary and criticism from the "judges" so we didn't have the courage. Every woman needs our support if and when she decides to speak out, when she finds the courage within herself.*

#### **The details of what he wrote to Sportsfeed.gr:**

*"I read Sophia's testimony and no, I am not falling from the clouds. I am not surprised by what she describes, it sounds so familiar. There are many messages of support but also many disparaging comments, the top one being from the national authority of our sport, who seems to find it hard to believe.*

*Such incidents happen all the time. Each one deals with it as they can. But never, no one ever reports it. Because even if they don't think she's crazy, or that she wants it too, the least that will happen is that she will be in the disfavor of the coach, the curator or the federation boss. And she will feel embarrassed in front of family, friends, and social circle. So, for her own sake especially, but also for the sake of her loved ones, she tries to manage it as best and painlessly as possible. The abusers go on unabated, and if they don't fit, or stop fitting one, they move on to the next.*

*In the spring of 1993, I was 20 years old. I had just won nationals/qualifying and was begging the feds to include me on the national team. I had just finished a meeting on the matter at the NOTK, in Delta Faliro, and was leaving to go back home by bus. An EIO board member approaches me and offers me a ride. My grandfather's solar class gentleman, at that age that's how you measure older people. It was cold and I thought why not, thank you very much. Coming out of the NOTC then had a bus station, the 450 and 550 lines.*

*So the gentleman stops the car and starts a conversation that in order for the EIO to support me there must be someone who fights for me and he can take it upon himself to help me if I am a good girl. With kindness and nice words and flattery he spread out. He would grab my leg, get very close*



*to me, tell me not to be afraid, that whatever happens is for my own good. It was a very uncomfortable situation, I was trying to understand how it was possible for this great man to approach me like that, I was trying to decide what to do.*

*It wasn't easy to react, it would have been rude to tell him that I didn't want him to take me home or to talk badly to him. At one point he went to kiss me and I told him that I would win at sea and I don't need that kind of support because it's unfair to everyone else who won't have someone to support them. I opened the door, got out of the car and ran and got on the bus that was waiting at the starting line. On the way home I decided that I wouldn't say anything to anyone because if my parents found out my parents would stop me from sailing.*

*And of course there was no way I was going to say anything to anyone in the sport because that would mean even more disgrace. I just made sure I never gave him the opportunity to be alone with me ever again. Not to this guy or anyone else; I don't remember it now. But now it's time to do something about it. Not so much to punish the perpetrators of the various incidents in the past, but more importantly, to create a safer environment for everyone in the society we live in. To ensure that the conditions do not exist for such situations to arise.*

*Marina Psychogiou, member of the 1988-98 national sailing team, Olympic sailing team member of World Sailing".*

***The Olympic champion, Niki Bakoyannis, revealed that she had been a victim of sexual harassment by an agent of the SEGAS.***

***The Olympic silver medalist of the high jump at the Atlanta Games, Niki Bakoyianni, spoke to "sports3.gr" about her own traumatic experience.***

*The incident of harassment that he complained about occurred at the age of 29, a year after the Atlanta Olympics, referring to an agent of the SEGAS who is no longer alive.*

*"I buried that thing at the time and never got involved again. Once I was no longer bothered by this man, he ceased to exist, and I never met him. Probably out of shame we don't talk about it." He stressed.*

***The statements of Niki Bakoyannis***

***Niki, Sophia Bekatorou and then other champions of sport complained of some kind of harassment...***

*"This has happened to all of them, I think. Me too. Not in the way that it happened to Sophia, but harassment has happened in the past."*

***What kind of harassment have you been subjected to?***

*"Not sexual abuse, but harassment."*



**From a sports agent?**

*"From an agent of the ACLU. Now he's dead... for God's sake it's not Stratos Molyvas. 'I wanted to tell you about this case in the past. But I think sport is a field that has 'these' in it. You accept things. And when you wear what you wear, when you work out you get weird looks, when you walk around in leggings... In training you get one more look, you get looked at a little bit differently."*

**When this harassment happened, how old were you and what exactly happened?**

*"It was after the 1996 Olympics, completely by accident this came up. You meet people who had some posts in the past... I remember, my mind never went to that: That someone might want to have a coffee with you in a public place and have something else in mind."*

**The same year of the Atlanta Olympics?**

*"The following year. We went out amicably, you know, there was a guy who said he'd like to meet me, talk about sports and all that. But this man's mind was on something else, which at first I didn't realize, but as the conversation went on, I started to realize that he wanted something else and ... I remember at that point I asked for the help of a girl who lived very close by and she came. 'She was also an old athlete and she came to the place where we were having coffee so I could get rid of him. I couldn't find another solution, I was even embarrassed. 'I was saying this man who is 50 years older than me - I don't know exactly how many - and he was thinking about something like that. I was surprised, I was shocked, my mind hadn't gone to this thing."*

**At least in your case it only stayed in the sentence.**

*"By implication, too, because he couldn't do anything else. And I remember in the other one the track girl who came in, he continued the story to her and then tried to approach her, pushing her some things. Helping her professionally and stuff like that."*

**Just to be clear, was he on the Board of Directors of the ACLU?**

*"Yes, he had a great position. Everybody knows him, I can't say a name now...like I said, the man is dead. But you know what? In these places, because I've stayed in the Olympic Stadium and on trips and at the games, it was isolated cases to receive such things from an agent. It didn't happen often. I have not heard from anyone else about this man and this issue. But I also remember at the Olympics when we went with 20,000 people in, if you behaved 'inappropriately', you could easily get a suggestion of 'something else'."*

**Has this man bothered you again since then?**

*"No, he didn't bother me again because I didn't follow up on that thing. At the time I was shocked because I could see that this man didn't want to talk to me and tell me about sports, but he had other things on his mind and I cut him off completely. He was more concerned with ... next ..."*



**The case of Sofia Bekatorou, however, is different. The factor was not just left to words!**

*"I condemn any action taken by anyone on a person who is either a minor or an adult. Especially to underage children, who come for a purpose and when they come in contact with a person, he is looking not to help them to become better athletes or sports women, but to exploit it in another way. I condemn that, that should not happen. I observe it in my daily life when I coach the kids I have or with the coaches. Back when I used to organize sports camps, when I had young children, a child who was very young never went to the toilet without being accompanied by someone appropriate or myself."*

**You condemn exploitation in sports...**

*"I condemn any effort made by an agent whose goal is not to help the athlete get better. You can't have a position to exploit sensitivity, inexperience. I would also like to refer to younger players. In adolescence or younger children do not recognize how to avoid such a person."*

**Sophia was 22 years old when it happened and said that in the person of the agent who sexually abused her she saw a father role model.**

*"Well, of course it can happen at an older age. The coaches have not had such issues. All my life I've had this stuff happen to me that I'm talking about. This former SEGA agent, who I met with for another purpose, had something else on his mind that I understood with the innuendos and gestures. Again, I asked for the help of a friend of mine who came and sat with us so I could avoid him and I...deleted him completely. On the other hand, I have heard of female athletes who have had affairs with their coaches."*

**And the coaches "took advantage" of a situation?**

*"Yes, I've heard that too, but I don't know how much of it can be true until I ... see it with my own eyes."*

**Why are you saying this now, Nikki, 24 years later? And Sophia let many years pass before she went public with her own story.**

*"I buried that thing then and never bothered with it again. Once I was no longer bothered by this man he ceased to exist, I didn't meet him anyway. Probably out of shame we don't talk about it."*

**Do you agree, however, that there should be reporting, that every athlete and woman should publicize any abuse?**

*"We need to come out and speak directly about the abuse we shouldn't hold it in. I don't know if the timing is right then, in the past to say it. I don't know about the athletes if they're going to believe them, or if they're going to get some bullying from the outside world, or if some people are going to come out and say 'she wanted it and she's coming out and talking now. There are different things."*



*Some who are very famous may not come out and speak out about a shameful thing, maybe to avoid being labeled with that thing and it follows them throughout their lives.*

***Sophia found the strength and said it.***

*"Sophia came out at this moment to say it because she has made a path in her life and she wasn't afraid to come out and say it. She is a well put together girl, she has her family, her children, she has been through various stages she is a psychologist and she has now found the strength to say it. She did well to say it, and I congratulated her. But know that there are these things in sports. The federations, in places where there are female athletes, should involve more women. We don't see a large percentage of women involved in administrative, coaching, etc. They are "outside". However, there is sexism in sport, which is underground, but it exists."*

Furthermore, the data emerged by a statistic in Poland is alarming too. Our Polish partner published an accurate summary of the situation in their website (link to the article: <https://spiwarsaw.eu/whistle/catcalling-in-sports-alarming-statistics-in-poland/>):

#### Catcalling in Sports: Alarming Statistics in Poland

Sexual harassment and catcalling in sports have been a growing concern in Poland, as in many countries around the world. Recent statistics reveal the extent of this problem in Poland's sports industry and the urgent need for action to prevent such behavior from occurring.

According to a survey conducted by the Women's Rights Center, over 40% of female athletes in Poland have experienced some form of sexual harassment or catcalling while participating in sports. Of those who reported incidents, only 30% said that they were satisfied with the way their complaints were handled.

The survey also found that harassment and catcalling were most prevalent in team sports, with volleyball and football being the most affected. This is consistent with a report by the Polish Football Association, which found that incidents of sexual harassment and violence were on the rise in Polish football stadiums.

The consequences of sexual harassment and catcalling can be devastating for women athletes, leading to decreased self-confidence, anxiety, and even dropping out of sports altogether. It also creates a toxic environment for female athletes, making it difficult for them to thrive and succeed in their chosen sports.

Several initiatives have been launched in Poland to address the issue of catcalling in sports, such as the "Stop the harassment" campaign and the "Safe sports" program. However, the statistics show that more needs to be done to prevent sexual harassment and catcalling in sports and to ensure that victims are properly supported.



The sports industry has a responsibility to create a safe and inclusive environment for all athletes, regardless of gender. This includes implementing measures such as training programs for coaches and athletes, reporting mechanisms for incidents of harassment, and support for victims. It also requires a cultural shift in attitudes towards women in sports, where they are respected and valued as athletes rather than objects to be objectified or harassed.

In conclusion, the statistics on catcalling in sports in Poland are alarming and highlight the urgent need for action. It is time for the sports industry to take a proactive stance on this issue and work towards creating a safe and inclusive environment for all athletes. Only then can we ensure that sports are a space where everyone can thrive and succeed.

This article is part of the WHISTLE project, a movement funded by the European Commission that aims to prevent verbal sexual harassment and catcalling in sports. The project involves municipalities and associations from several countries, including Poland, and promotes a safe and inclusive environment for women in sports through awareness-raising campaigns and the implementation of reporting mechanisms. To learn more about the WHISTLE project, visit <https://whistleproject.eu>

Out of the three methodologies used, the stories from the web have surely gathered the most extensive qualitative data, as in the last few years the topic of sexual harassment and catcalling was widely spoken in the European context, although the general situation, as proven by the above-mentioned articles, is still undermined and facing denials.

Even after the amount of cases has arisen all over Europe and some of them became quite famous, it is still challenging for our societies to admit the problem of VSH, catcalling and physical sexual harassment is structural and concerns everyone, everywhere. It is easier to present them as isolated cases, but athletes from every country - we have at least proven from the partners' countries of the WHISTLE project - are trying to reverse this narrative.



## 5. Conclusions: non-shared stories as an indicator

Having analysed the stories collected both per country and per methodology, we can now reach our conclusions. What strongly emerged through any kind of methodology and in every country who is participating in the WHISTLE project, is the consistent number of non-shared stories.

There were different reasons why many sports women didn't share their stories. For instance, the one that was noticed since the very beginning of the collection of stories, is the lack of knowledge of the definitions of verbal sexual harassment and catcalling. During one on one interviews, so many interviewees have instantly answered "no" when asked if they have ever experienced first-hand or witnessed episodes of VSH and catcalling in sports. Thanks to informal discussions with the interviewers, in which the correct definitions were shared together with useful examples of what VSH and catcalling are, it often happened that the interviewee had decided to change their answer to the first question, and consequently shared the episode they have either experienced or witnessed.

With the methodology of online surveys, of course, the informal discussions were not possible as the forms were filled individually. This means that all the women who could have potentially changed their mind with the one on one interviews through the informal discussions, after having listened to the correct definitions and examples, couldn't do it with the survey, resulting in many non-shared stories, despite having inserted the written definitions of VSH and catcalling at the beginning of the online form.

A well-related reason to the above-mentioned one is the lack of awareness in the topic of the WHISTLE project. Even when definitions and examples were clear, some participants still perceived episodes that happened in their life as something "normal" and common, to not be worried about, and to which harassers' behaviors they are used to. In some cases, catcalling was even perceived as a compliment. Because of this perception of VSH and catcalling, these specific participants were reluctant to share their stories and often diminished the issue.

Some women, as we saw in the case of Spain, refused to share their stories for political reasons. Certain delicate topics, in nowadays society, are perceived by the general public



as related to specific political parties. Although the data collected in this report and in previous online articles can be proof of how VSH and catcalling can happen to any woman and these episodes are not related to political parties, participants who believed that refused to share their stories and referred to the WHISTLE project as "political propaganda", taking clear distance from the project and the partners' organizations working on it.

In addition to the already mentioned reasons, there is the fear and the shame that women feel when talking about VSH, catcalling and even more physical sexual harassment. This is also why many women wait for years before reporting a case of abuse, and sometimes never report it. These feelings of shame and fear of being judged are found to be common as proven by the stories from the web and even among the participants who shared their stories, thus it is safe to assume that women who decided to not share their stories were feeling uncomfortable for the same reason.

Especially in the case of women who practice sports in sports associations' environment, that were the most reluctant to collaborate - as in the case of Italy - it was even harder to take the decision to share their stories because of the lack of support from their associations. In the case of individual sports it was easier as they didn't have to refer their decision to anyone, but even in these cases the sense of shame was difficult to fight.

In conclusion, the non-shared stories are found to be a strong indicator, not of the absence of the problem but, on the opposite, of how much VSH, catcalling and even physical sexual harassment are rooted in sport environments, where victims are still blamed and not supported if they want to speak up and fight against harassers.

