

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The U.S. Center for SafeSport contracted with Prevention Strategies and the Institute to Promote Athlete Health & Wellness (IPAHW) at the University of North Carolina Greensboro in 2020 to develop a survey to assess athlete experiences and the culture and climate within U.S. Olympic and Paralympic sport.

3,959 adult athletes (including 151 Olympians/Paralympians and 56 medalists) from more than 50 sports responded to the survey between October 6 – November 30, 2020. While shared broadly across the United States Olympic and Paralympic Movement, participants were mostly white (87.6%), heterosexual (88.6%), female (76.1%) athletes, and athletes without disabilities (93.1%). Though some minority demographics are less represented than others, this report aims to also shed light on the unique experiences of diverse athletes and the notable experiences they shared in this survey.

Current and former athletes responded to survey questions on the following topics: athlete satisfaction; discriminatory or unfair treatment in their sport setting; mental, physical, and sexual harm within sport setting; impact of sexual harm; mental health; awareness of resources to help address misconduct; and other important topics. Though nearly 4,000 athletes completed the survey in whole or in part, these findings may not reflect the experiences of all athletes.

Key findings: Overall

- 27.5% of athlete participants think sexual, emotional, or physical misconduct is a problem in their sport—but far more (48%) are aware of coaches developing sexual relationships with athletes.
- 93% of individuals who experienced sexual harassment or unwanted sexual contact did not submit a formal report/complaint of it.
- 18.1% of individuals having unwanted sexual experiences also indicated they were retaliated against.
- More than half of athlete participants who indicated having unwanted sexual experiences said that some or all of those experiences happened when they were under 18.
- Approximately 65% of athlete participants indicated experiencing at least one of 18 indicators of psychological harm or neglect.
- 21.7% of athlete participants indicated being physically harmed.
- 9% of athlete participants experienced inappropriate sexual contact during their sports involvement.

Key Findings: Athlete Satisfaction

- 90.8% of survey participants agree that they are satisfied with their athletic career.
- 83% of survey participants agree that they would recommend being a member of their National Governing Body of sport to other athletes.
- White survey participants were more likely to report satisfaction with their sport than Black survey participants. Athletes with a self-reported disability were less likely to report satisfaction with their sport.

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Key Findings: Diversity & Inclusivity

- 72.4% of athlete participants indicated they had experienced an anti-inclusive behavior.
 - Examples of anti-inclusive behaviors indicated by survey participants include:
 - You were given a lower score or ranking than you earned
 - You felt other players repeatedly excluded you from team/group activities
 - People assumed that your injuries weren't as significant or painful as they actually were
- Approximately 48% of athlete participants indicated they had experienced discrimination in some form during their involvement with their governing body.

Key Findings: Psychological Harm

- Approximately 65% of athlete participants indicated experiencing at least one of 18 indicators of psychological harm or neglect.
- Athletes with a disability noted significantly more experiences with psychological harm and neglect than those without a disability. Additionally, women and gender-nonconforming participants experienced higher rates of psychological harm and neglect compared with men.

Key Findings: Physical Harm

- Black, Multiracial, and Asian athletes were more likely to experience physical harm.
- Rates of physical harm experienced by those who indicated that they were bisexual were almost double when compared to any other sexual orientation.
- Rates of physical harm were higher for athlete participants who were ever a collegiate athlete compared to athletes who did not participate in college varsity athletics.

Key Findings: Sexual Harm

- 48% of participants were aware of coaches developing sexual relationships with athletes.
 - Nearly 32% of athletes surveyed indicated that a sexual relationship between a coach and another athlete negatively impacted the coaching they received as an athlete.
 - Similarly, 56% reported a negative impact on the coaching other athletes receive when a coach has a sexual relationship with an athlete.
- 9% of athlete participants experienced inappropriate sexual contact during their sports involvement.
- Black athletes (compared with other races) and bisexual athletes (compared with other sexual orientations) experienced nearly double the rates of inappropriate sexual contact. Athlete participants with a self-reported disability also had more experiences of inappropriate sexual contact, compared with those without.
- Nearly 34% of participants indicated having had an experience with unwanted sexual comments or looks from another individual.
- 3.2% of athlete participants reported a sexual assault or attempted sexual assault.
 - Athletes who experienced sexual assault indicated that it most often happened with coaches, trainers, or another sport administrator (55%), or with an athlete peer (45%).

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- Black athletes (followed closely by Asian, Hispanic, and multiracial athletes) reported the most experience with sexual assault. Athletes who are gender nonconforming indicated greater likelihood of experiencing sexual assault than those who identify as male or female. Participants who self-report as having a disability also indicated significantly greater likelihood of experiencing sexual assault. Athletes who indicated they had ever participated in a NCAA/NAIA varsity sport also indicated experiencing sexual assault more than athletes who did not participate in collegiate sport.

Key Findings: Impacts of Sexual Harm

- Overall, athletes who experienced sexual harm reported that the biggest impacts included their perception of themselves being negatively impacted (37.5%), their mental health suffering (33.9%), and their friendships and other important relationships being negatively impacted (31.4%).

Key Findings: Mental Health

- 34% of athletes reported mental health impacts as a result of sexual harm experiences.
- 53.4% of athletes surveyed indicated experiencing at least one of six mental health indicators.
- Nearly half of athlete participants reported experiencing depression or anxiety symptoms, whether their sport experience is past or present.
- Nearly 49% of athletes indicated that they have sought treatment to deal with mental health concerns.

Key Findings: Reporting Sexual Harm

- Nearly 68% of athletes who experienced unwanted sexual contact or sexual harassment indicated that they did not feel they had a place to talk about their experiences within their governing body of sport.
- Only 6.7% of the athlete participants who reported experiencing sexual harm indicated that they had made a formal report/complaint about sexual harassment or unwanted sexual contact they experienced during their involvement with the sport.
- Those who have been an NCAA or NAIA varsity athlete (13.9%) were more likely to have reported their experience with sexual harm compared to those who have not been a varsity athlete (4.1%).

Key Findings: Resource Knowledge

- 79% of participants indicated having heard of the U.S. Center for SafeSport.
- 41% of athletes indicated that they have NOT within the past 24 months received written or verbal information from anyone at their governing body of sport or the U.S. Center for SafeSport about how to report retaliation.
- Approximately 45% of athlete participants believe that the U.S. Center for SafeSport and the leadership of their NGB is a trusted resource by individuals within their sport organization, compared with 27% who did not.
- Of the three types of abuse the Center addresses (sexual, physical, and emotional), knowing what emotional misconduct is and where to report it is less known than other forms of abuse.

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Next Steps and Key Actions

This 2020 Athlete Culture & Climate Survey establishes baseline measures of key indicators of abuse and misconduct and related well-being aspects in the Olympic and Paralympic Movement. Going forward, this survey data will help us develop benchmarks—against which we can gauge progress in future culture surveys toward measurable and meaningful culture change in sport.

These survey results will inform specific actions and initiatives to promote better, safer sport cultures, and will align with other education and outreach and initiatives in the Center's 2021-23 Strategic Plan, including:

1. Developing additional educational resources focused on reporting abuse, retaliation, and power imbalance
2. Establishing a web resource connecting athletes with available mental health resources
3. Developing a feedback mechanism to inform the Center's response and resolution process
4. Releasing an annual Public Impact report, starting in 2022, to provide insights on what we learn from athletes and updates on our progress
5. Releasing new video resources to better guide participants through the Center's Response and Resolution process
6. Evaluating the 2022 Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAPP) implementation and impact, with feedback informing MAAPP updates planned for 2025
7. Publishing annual SafeSport audits of each NGB
8. Issuing a follow-up Culture Survey in 2023 to solicit continued feedback from athletes

The Center will also meet with individual athlete groups, National Governing Bodies, and sport groups to discuss the findings, share future prevention and outreach strategies, and solicit additional feedback from athletes. These conversations will further shape the Center's strategic path toward creating safer sport environments for all athletes.