

# Conceptualising elite athlete abuse using narrative learning theory

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Abuse of elite athletes is a global phenomenon that occurs in all sports. Consensus is that abuse in the form of sexual, physical, and psychological abuse and neglect is preceded by a process of normalisation and facilitated by systemic and organisational shortcomings. Research has also shown the myriad of short- and long-term negative consequences abuse and neglect has for athletes, including performance drop, mental health issues, social isolation, and re-victimisation. Researchers have, however, seldom examined the entire abuse process from a child entering a sport to recognizing their victimization.

The purpose of our presentation is to conceptualize abuse as an individual process that shapes lives. Using Clark and Rossiter's (2008) framework of "learning through stories", we adopt their three learning phases to capture the process of victimization in sport: 1. Hearing –the athlete *hears* the story of (elite) sport and how to participate in this context early on, often when very young; 2. Telling – the athlete *tells* the story of elite sport by being and living its culture; and 3) Recognising - the athlete *recognise* the victimisation that has impacted and continues to shape their lives.

Considering abuse from a narrative learning perspective puts into focus what happens to an athlete before and after victimisation. It further captures how this process of learning and recognising is lived while in and once retired from (elite) sport. Lastly, this narration of abuse and neglect offers a means to understand abuse and neglect from the perspective of the athlete.

## References

Clark, M. C., & Rossiter, M. (2008). Narrative learning in adulthood. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2008(119), 61-70.