

Reviews. Questionnaires on sexual violence in sports: a systematic review. Vol. 10, n.º 3; p. 762-781, september 2024.
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Questionnaires on sexual violence in sports: a systematic review
Cuestionarios sobre violencia sexual en el deporte: una revisión sistemática

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Abstract

The increasing number of cases of sexual violence in sports practiced by minors justifies the need to have valid and reliable instruments to identify these violent behaviors and know their incidence. The objective of this systematic review was to analyze the psychometric characteristics of retrospective questionnaires assessing perceptions and experiences of sexual violence in school sport (12-17 years). A review of the literature was conducted between 1960 and 2023 in Pubmed, Dialnet, Eric, Scopus and Psycinfo, five studies (questionnaires) were selected and, after evaluating their methodological quality using the Qualitative Attributes and Measurement Properties of Physical Activity Questionnaires (QAPAQ) checklist, they were analyzed its general, structural characteristics and psychometric properties. The results showed that the few questionnaires found are of acceptable methodological quality, providing values of internal consistency (except one study) and content validity. The questionnaires were developed to evaluate sexual violence behaviors in sports perpetrated by coaches or other athletes using Likert scales and in a self-administered manner. We believe that it is still necessary to evaluate the measurement properties of sexual harassment in sport questionnaires and try to unify the questionnaires in order to contrast the results on perceptions and experiences.

Keywords: retrospective questionnaires, sexual violence, perceptions, experiences, athlete.

Resumen

La cada vez mayor constatación de casos de violencia sexual en el deporte practicado por menores justifica la necesidad de contar con instrumentos válidos y fiables para identificar estos comportamientos violentos y conocer su incidencia. El objetivo de esta revisión sistemática fue analizar las características psicométricas de cuestionarios retrospectivos que evalúan las percepciones y experiencias de violencia sexual en el deporte practicado durante la etapa escolar (12-17 años). Se realizó una revisión de la literatura entre 1960 y 2023 en Pubmed, Dialnet, Eric, Scopus y Psycinfo, fueron seleccionados cinco estudios (cuestionarios) y, después de evaluar su calidad metodológica utilizando la lista de comprobación Qualitative Attributes and Measurement Properties of Physical Activity Questionnaires (QAPAQ), se analizaron sus características generales, estructurales y propiedades psicométricas. Los resultados mostraron que los escasos cuestionarios encontrados son de una calidad metodológica aceptable, aportando valores de consistencia interna (excepto un estudio) y validez de contenido. Los cuestionarios fueron desarrollados para evaluar comportamientos de violencia sexual en el deporte perpetrados por entrenadores/as u otros deportistas mediante escalas Likert y de forma autoadministrada. Creemos que sigue siendo necesario evaluar las propiedades de medición de los cuestionarios de acoso sexual en el deporte e intentar unificar los cuestionarios con el fin de contrastar los resultados sobre percepciones y experiencias.

Palabras clave: cuestionarios retrospectivos, violencia sexual, percepciones, experiencias, deportista.

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Introduction

Sport itself constitutes a micro-culture (Antúnez, 2009) in which different types of violence are present that affect athletes, among others, and that are often normalised (Fernandez et al., 2022). For this reason, it is important to know how athletes perceive and experience this violence, in order to identify it and propose effective prevention strategies (Auweele et al., 2008; Martín-Horcajo and Juncá-Pujol, 2014). Currently, among the different forms of violence suffered by athletes, sexual violence has gained special relevance (Fasting et al., 2011). Sexual violence in sport means any unwanted sexual behaviour, along a spectrum ranging from non-contact verbal sexual harassment to rape (Hartill et al., 2021). In the words of Parent and colleagues (2019), violence of this type is not easy to define because of the normalisation of physical contact, the intense coach–athlete relationship and the diversity of leadership styles. According to Blanco et al. (2020) and Mountjoy et al. (2016), sexual violence can take the form of insults with sexual connotations, gestures or facial or body expressions of a sexual nature, suggestions and comments of a sexual nature in relation to one’s body, clothing, private life, or sexual orientation, touching of a sexual nature, phone calls, messages with sexual content, sending or showing photographic material or objects with sexual content, sexist jokes, repeated sexual propositions, or insinuations related to sexual conduct and non-consensual sexual acts, among others. Under this umbrella of sexual violence, Fasting et al. (2011) defined sexual harassment as “unwanted attention based on sex” and, in the same vein, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) considered it as “any unwanted conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal, non-verbal or physical” (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Similarly, Suecia et al. (2008) pointed out that sexual abuse refers to any sexual activity to which consent is not (or cannot be) given. In the words of these authors, this type of sexual abuse usually involves the manipulation and deception of the athlete. It should also be noted that interpersonal sexual violence can be perpetrated by peers or by adults (in which case the perpetrator is usually the coach) (Hartill et al., 2021).

Sexual violence has been extensively studied in different contexts (Olweus, 1986), but not very much in the field of sport (Ohlert et al., 2020). It is worth mentioning that, according to Sáenz et al. (2022), the interactions that occur in sport mean that sport can be a favourable

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context for avoiding or helping to overcome situations of harassment or, on the contrary, causing an increase or aggravation of such situations (Prat et al., 2020). Along these lines, an increasing number of studies are being published that record the experiences of people who have been bullied in sports contexts (e.g., Hartill et al., 2021; Ríos et al., 2022). The analysis of these experiences reveals two relevant aspects: (1) the role of the coach can be decisive in producing or avoiding cases of sexual violence in sport (Prat et al., 2020); and (2) the intense physical and emotional interactions that are often created between coach and athlete make it difficult to define and identify those behaviours that constitute sexual harassment in sport (Blanco et al., 2020).

In this relational framework, it is relevant to remember the androcentric nature of sport (Fernandez et al., 2022), which generates gender inequalities in the sporting context as in other areas of society. Gender-based violence in sport is present in different countries (Stevela et al., 2011). The media have also contributed to perpetuating male dominance by excluding women in sports broadcasts, or by broadcasting only those events that reinforce social gender stereotypes (Coche and Tuggle, 2016). Gender equality implies that the preferences, interests and needs of both women and men are considered equally. This is a multi-factorial concept and, although sport is a double-edged tool, it has the potential to be used as a tool to combat the difficulties created by inequity (Coche and Tuggle, 2016). Gender inequality means that the belief has taken root that women are not as capable as men to do sport, to compete or to exert physical effort, with gender being identified as one of the determinants of sporting performance (Puig and Soler, 2004). In relation to this, Chroni et al. (2012) concluded that these motives are generators of the acts of sexual harassment and abuse perpetrated in hypermasculine environments and mostly by men against women and girls. However, the need for research on sexual violence by female athletes in sport has been accentuated (Hartill et al., 2021).

Research (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2020) has shown that a significant proportion of athletes have experienced sexual violence in sport. For example, the *Child Abuse in Sport: European Statistics* (CASES, Hartill et al., 2021) study conducted between 2019 and 2022, which involved 10,000 athletes from the UK, Germany, Belgium, Romania,

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Austria and Spain, found that approximately 75% of the respondents reported having experienced at least one example of interpersonal violence in sport before they reached the age of 18. In addition, the study found that 35% of respondents had experienced an episode of non-contact sexual violence and another 20% had experienced sexual violence with physical contact (Hartill et al., 2021). However, the different data collection methods used (e.g. semi-structured interviews, narratives and questionnaires) make it difficult to compare results (Branckenridge, 1997; Vertommen et al., 2022). In addition, despite multiple questionnaires being used to measure sexual violence suffered by children aged 12-17 years, many of these do not meet the criteria of validity, reliability and reproducibility. The existing literature focuses on research into the prevalence and consequences of sexual violence in sport (Hartill et al., 2021), but there has been no review of retrospective questionnaires specific to sexual violence in the 12-17 age group. Such a review would allow us to examine the questionnaires used in different studies and identify those that are most effective in detecting and measuring sexual violence against minors in sport. This could lead to the standardisation of assessment instruments and facilitate comparisons between different studies, thus improving the quality and consistency of research in this field.

According to Useche et al. (2019), a questionnaire is an effective tool for gaining and generalising results from a specific population. Furthermore, in the words of Parent et al. (2016), it is an effective strategy for detecting cases of sexual violence and, according to Marks et al. (2012), this method is effective in obtaining information on the frequency of the actions assessed and in measuring cognitive and emotional factors that are difficult to observe with the naked eye. For all of the above reasons, and after no systematic reviews on this object of study were found, the aim of this study was to identify and analyse the existing retrospective questionnaires on sexual violence in sport that assess the perceptions and experiences of sexual violence in sport of school students (aged 12-17 years).

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Method

Search strategy

A comprehensive search was conducted for studies published between 1960 and 7 June 2023 that provide the validity and reliability characteristics of retrospective questionnaires assessing perceptions and experiences of sexual violence (harassment, bullying and sexual abuse) in sport suffered by those of school age (12-17 years). This search was conducted in the Pubmed, Dialnet, Eric, Scopus and Psycinfo databases. Table 1 summarises the search terms associated with the object of study.

Table 1.

Search terms

Dialnet: sexual abuse AND sport; sexual harassment AND sport; sexual harassment AND physical activity; sexual harassment AND sport questionnaire; sexual abuse AND sport questionnaire; sexual harassment AND psychometric properties; sexual abuse AND psychometric properties
Pubmed, Eric, Scopus and Psycinfo: sexual abuse AND spor*; sexual harassment AND spor*; sexual harassment AND sport quiz; sexual abuse AND sport quiz; sexual harassment AND psychometric properties; sexual abuse AND psychometric properties.

Inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria used to select the studies are shown in Table 2. They are listed according to the type of participants who completed the questionnaire, the context the participants were asked about, the type of violence analysed, the psychometric properties of the questionnaire and the language in which the study was published. Studies that did not use retrospective questionnaires, that were carried out in other contexts (such as physical education or informally organised physical activities), that addressed other types of violence in organised sport that were not of a sexual nature, that did not provide evidence of the reliability or validity of the questionnaire, or that were not written in English or Spanish were excluded.

Table 2.

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Inclusion criteria

Variable	Inclusion criterion
Participants	Study used retrospective questionnaire completed by all participants
Context	Study used questionnaire on organised sport (school sport and federated sport) played at school age (between 6 and 18 years old)
Type of violence	Study used questionnaire on sexual violence (associated with terms such as sexual harassment and sexual abuse)
Psychometric properties	Study provided evidence of the reliability or validity of the questionnaire
Language	English or Spanish

Selection of studies

As can be seen in figure 1, a study selection process was carried out. Initially, a total of 3,648 studies were obtained (Pubmed: 764; Dialnet: 67; Eric: 1,158; Scopus: 985; Psycinfo: 674), with five studies that met the inclusion criteria established for this review ultimately being selected. The level of concordance between reviewers, measured through the kappa coefficient, was 0.94, 0.87 and 1.00, respectively, for the selection processes of titles, abstracts and articles.

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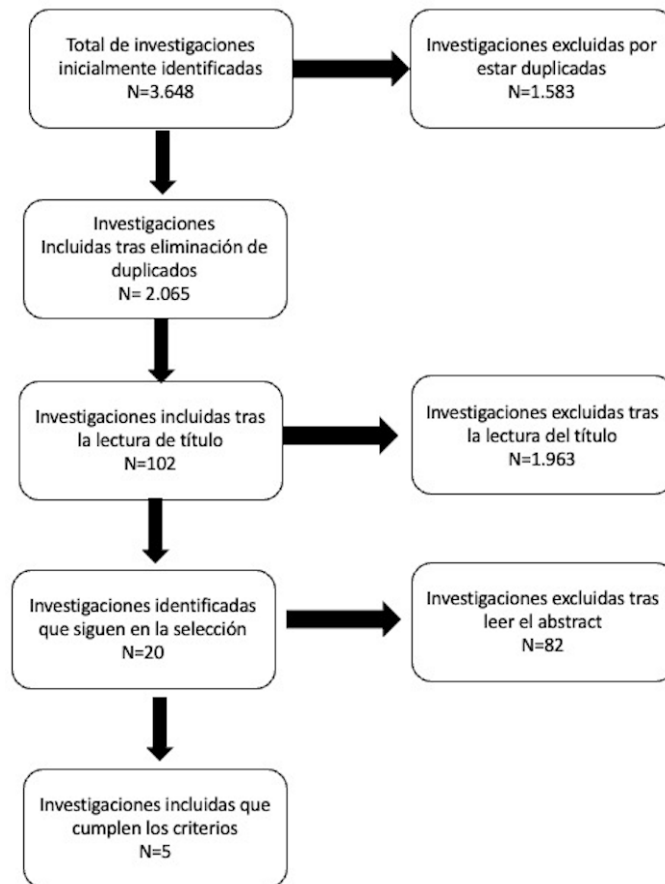


Figure 1. Flowchart

Methodological quality

The methodological quality of the selected studies (questionnaires) was assessed using the *Qualitative Attributes and Measurement Properties of Physical Activity Questionnaires* (QAPAQ) checklist of Martínez-Lemos et al. (2016), which includes the following criteria: 1) Study population; 2) Study design; 3) Administration; 4) Reliability-measurement error; 5) Reliability-test-retest; 6) Apparent validity; and 7) Content validity. Table 3 presents the qualitative attributes and measurement properties of the selected questionnaires.

In general, the five selected questionnaires met most of the criteria set out in the QAPAQ checklist. However, no questionnaire provided information on a test-retest analysis,

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and the study by Martín-Horcajo and Juncà-Pujol (2014) did not provide any reliability coefficient for the questionnaire.

Table 3.

Qualitative attributes and measurement properties of the selected questionnaires

Authors	Questionnaire	General			Reliability		Validity		Total
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004)	CART-Q	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	6/7
Kozee et al. (2007)	ISOS	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	6/7
Martín-Horcajo and Juncà-Pujol (2014)	CASD	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	5/7
Parent et al. (2019)	VTAQ	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	6/7
Volkwein et al. (1997)	SHSCS	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	6/7

CART-Q (The Coach–Athlete Relationship Questionnaire); ISOS (The Interpersonal Sexual Objectification Scale); CASD (Cuestionario de acoso sexual en deporte); VTAQ (Violence Toward Athletes Questionnaire); SHSCS (Sexual harassment in sport by coaches survey). 1: Sample (population participating); 2: Design (process of making the instrument); 3: Administration (description of the application of the instrument); 4: Reliability coefficients (statistical analysis); 5: Test-retest (reliability of the instrument); 6: Face validity (degree to which a questionnaire measures what it is intended to measure); 7: Content validity (degree to which all aspects related to the construct to be assessed have been included in sufficient detail as content).

Content analysis

In the present psychometric review, content analysis was carried out, organising the information according to the following categories: a) General characteristics of the questionnaire (language, type of participant); b) Structural characteristics of the questionnaire (dimensions, variables analysed, number of items and type of administration); c) Psychometric properties of the questionnaire (internal consistency and content validity); d) Psychometric properties of the questionnaire (internal consistency and content validity); and e) Structural characteristics of the questionnaire (language, type of participant).

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Results

The results show that different questionnaires have been used to retrospectively assess perceptions and experiences of sexual harassment in school sport. The five selected questionnaires assess sexual violence occurring in the coach/athlete relationship (CASD and SHSCS) or in interpersonal relationships between athletes in the same team (CART-Q, ISOS and VTAQ).

As can be seen in Table 4, four of the questionnaires analysed were published in English, while one was written in Catalan and Spanish. The first retrospective questionnaire on sexual violence in sport selected in this review (SHSCS) was published in 1997 and the most recent (VTAQ) is from 2019. As for the participants in the studies, *N* was between 120 and 1055, with the participants being mainly women, except in the study by Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) in which both men and women participated. Also, all the participants were legally adults, except that the study by Parent et al. (2019) involved 16-year-old adolescents. In three of the five studies the participants were university students.

Table 4. General characteristics of the questionnaires.

Author	Questionnaire	Language	Participants
Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004)	CART-Q	English	N=120 33% women and 65% men (50% athletes and 50% coaches) Great Britain
Kozee et al. (2007)	ISOS	English	N=711 100% female university students United States
Martín-Horcajo and Juncà-Pujol (2014)	CASD	English Catalan	N=214 100% female university students Catalonia, Spain
Parent et al. (2019)	VTAQ	English	N=1055 100% female teenagers (14-17 years old) Canada and France
Volkwein et al. (1997)	SHSCS	English	N=210 100% female university students (18-22 years old) United States

All the questionnaires were self-administered and collected between 9 and 54 items in order to analyse the participants' perceptions and experiences of behaviours that may

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constitute sexual violence in sport. They all used Likert scales, which ranged from one to between four and seven (Table 5). The questionnaires were mostly self-administered, except for the Parent et al. (2019) study which was implemented online. All of the questionnaires used variables on behaviours associated with sexual violence in an attempt to assess the perceptions and experiences around behaviours that may be termed sexual violence. All five questionnaires assessed physical and verbal violence; Parent et al. (2019) also assessed psychological violence in the VTAQ questionnaire. In addition, only two of the questionnaires (CASD and SHSCS) included as a variable the consideration of whether or not the behaviour was related to instruction.

As shown in Table 6, in terms of internal consistency, four studies provided Cronbach's alpha values (which ranged from 0.65 to 0.92) and one provided no information on this issue. Content validity was analysed in all the studies in different ways. In the studies by Kozee et al. (2007) and Parent et al. (2019), an analysis was carried out using correlations of the different existing items; in the study by Volkwein et al. (1997) the content of the items was analysed through semi-structured interviews. The sexual harassment in sport questionnaire by Martín-Horcajo and Juncà-Pujol (2014) was translated into Catalan once the content had been analysed in a previous pilot study with participants with the same characteristics, and the content of the questionnaire developed by Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004) was analysed through expert judgement.

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Table 5.

Structural characteristics of the questionnaires

Authors	Questionnaire	Dimensions	Variables	Unit of measurement	No. of items	Administration
Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004)	CART-Q	Psychological Social	Proximity, commitment and complementary behaviours or actions	Likert scale (1-7)	23	Self-report On-site
Kozee et al. (2007)	ISOS	Psychological Physical Social	Physical and verbal victimisation; Social manipulation	Likert scale (1-5)	15	Self-report On-site
Martín-Horcajo and Juncà-Pujol (2014)	CASD	Psychological Social Sexual Physical	Behaviours related to instruction; Behaviours not related to, but dependent on instruction; Sexist behaviours; Physical contact and verbal approaches	Likert scale (1-4)	48	Self-report On-site
Parent et al. (2019)	VTAQ	Psychological Physical Sexual Social	Psychological violence, physical violence, sexual violence, neglect	Likert scale (1-4)	9	Self-report Online
Volkwein et al. (1997)	SHSCS	Psychological Social Sexual Physical	Behaviours related to instruction; Behaviours not related to, but dependent on instruction; Sexist behaviours; Physical contact and verbal approaches	Likert scale (1-4)	54	Self-report In person

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Table 6.

Psychometric properties of the questionnaires

Authors	Questionnaire	Internal consistency	Content validity
Jowett and Ntoumanis (2004)	CART-Q	Proximity: 0.80 Coorientation: 0.78 Complementarity: 0.85	Expert judgement
Kozee et al. (2007)	ISOS	Cronbach's alpha = 0.92	Correlations between the different items
Martín-Horcajo and Juncà-Pujol (2014)	CASD	No information	Pretest pilot study with participants with similar characteristics
Parent et al. (2019)	VTAQ	Psychological = 0.81 Physical = 0.80 Sexual = 0.79	Correlations between the different items
Volkwein et al. (1997)	SHSCS	Cronbach's alpha above 0.65.	Semi-structured interviews

Discussion

The aim of this systematic review was to analyse the psychometric characteristics of retrospective questionnaires assessing perceptions and experiences of sexual violence in school sport (athletes aged 12-17 years). The increasing occurrence of sexual violence against minors in sport justifies the need to investigate the behaviours that trigger experiences of sexual harassment in sportsmen and sportswomen. Despite the increase in awareness-raising activities in recent years, this remains an under-researched topic (Roberts et al., 2020). This may be the reason for the predominance of English-language questionnaires as opposed to Spanish ones, as most studies have been conducted in the international context (Hartill et al., 2021; Ohlert et al., 2020).

Despite the fact that sexual violence can be perpetuated and/or experienced by both women and men (Fasting et al., 2011; Parent et al., 2016), all the questionnaires were administered to an all-female sample, with the exception of the CART-Q questionnaire which was also administered to male coaches. This prevalence of female samples may be a response to issues associated with gender inequalities in sport, as indicated by Stavela et al. (2011). In relation to this, nationally recorded rates of sexual abuse and harassment (Blanco et al., 2020) show that, in sport, the vast majority of harassment is suffered by women. If we focus only on abuse committed by coaches, female athletes are the most affected by this problem (Fasting et al., 2011). For this reason, investigating the sexual violence suffered by young women would allow us to delve deeper into the characteristics of the violence, with the aim of eradicating violence

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against women and achieving equality in the field of sport (International Olympic Committee, 2007).

The questionnaires analysed in this review mostly analyse violence perpetrated by male and female coaches. This may be because coaches stand out among the different types of perpetrators (Joy et al., 2021). The physical and emotional contact that often occurs in sport within the coach–athlete relationship makes it difficult to define and identify those behaviours that may be deemed to be sexual violence (Branckenridge, 1997). Along these lines, three of the questionnaires make it possible to determine what is appropriate and what is inappropriate in coach–athlete relationships (Roberts et al., 2020). However, it is not only coaches who engage in this type of violent behaviour, as perpetrators may include other athletes from the same team (Joy et al., 2021). The role of the coach, together with approaches based on competitiveness and non-cooperation that foster an absence of sound values, may be factors that condition the behaviour of athletes and their moral development (Prat et al., 2020; Ríos et al., 2022). Thus, being able to identify the behaviours through which this type of interpersonal violence takes place and how it occurs will be key to eradicating it and making sport a safe environment (Sáenz et al., 2022).

There are multiple behaviours associated with sexual violence in sport (Fernández, 2000). The selected instruments allow us to identify unacceptable situations, attitudes and behaviours in the coach–athlete relationship and to prevent such situations by taking into account the perceptions and experiences of athletes (Poczwardowski et al., 2006; Stirling and Kerr, 2009). In addition, the SHSCS and CASD instruments have items differentiating between instruction-related and non-instruction-related but instruction-dependent behaviours, which allows for the analysis of sexual violence in its entirety, as it takes into account the different manifestations of sexual violence as well as the different possible locations (Roberts et al., 2020). Sexual violence can have serious physical, social and psychological health consequences for athletes (Sweden et al., 2008). Thus, ISOS and VTAQ provide insight into the experiences of behaviour by peers in the sports context by combining harassment, bullying and abusive behaviour that could give rise to different forms of sexual violence. The experiences of these forms of violence are linked to psychological

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aspects, and it is important to be able to know and determine the psychological consequences, which are often difficult to observe (Marks et al., 2012).

Women are often objectified in social interactions through appearance-related comments, unwanted touching and degrading acts of a sexual nature (Davidson et al., 2013). Thus, the ISOS scale allows us to analyse the types of behaviour related to both dimensions. All questionnaires analysed in this review were self-administered. This allows people who may have suffered a situation of sexual violence in sport not to feel influenced by the researcher or those around them; thus the answers achieve greater reliability (Del Valle and Zamora, 2021). The existing literature confirms that there are numerous studies that use this method of administering a questionnaire in the sports context (Hartill et al., 2021; Prat et al., 2020). The difference between the number of items in the different questionnaires selected is considerable and, over the years, the number of items has decreased. In any case, each questionnaire analyses different variables, and each variable has a different number of items. This makes it difficult to compare the number of items, except insofar as the study by Martín-Horcajo and Juncà-Pujol (2014) modified the original questionnaire previously developed by Volkwein et al. (1997), reducing the number of items.

In reference to the measurement of the variables, this was carried out entirely by means of Likert scales. Scales of this type are psychometric instruments where the respondent must indicate his/her agreement or disagreement with a statement or item using an ordered and unidimensional scale (Bertram, 2007). These instruments are usually used for measurement in the social sciences (Cañadas and Sánchez-Bruno, 1998). In relation to the topic of study, the first questionnaire for the measurement of harassment was created by Olweus (1986), and this subsequently served as a reference for the creation of instruments with themes similar to sexual harassment. Thus, numerous studies analysing sexual harassment in sport use this type of measurement (Hartill et al., 2021; Ohlert et al., 2020; Vertomen et al., 2022).

In the studies that carried out a reliability analysis, the questionnaires showed good internal consistency according to Oviedo and Campo-Arias (2005). As for content validity, different methods were used, within the methodological options contemplated

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by Urrutia et al. (2014). Both aspects determine the methodological quality (Martínez-Lemos et al., 2016) of the selected instruments.

Conclusion

The results showed that the few questionnaires found are of acceptable methodological quality, providing values of internal consistency (except for one study) and content validity. The questionnaires were developed to assess sexually violent behaviour in sport perpetrated by coaches or other athletes, used Likert scales and were self-administered. We believe that there is still a need to evaluate the measurement properties of questionnaires on sexual harassment in sport and to attempt to standardise these questionnaires in order to compare their results on perceptions and experiences.

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