

# Gender and age variables of bullying in organized sport: Is bullying “grown out of”?

JOLITA VVEINHARDT<sup>1</sup>, VILIJA BITE FOMINIENE<sup>2</sup> ✉

<sup>1</sup>*Institute of Sport Science and Innovations, Lithuanian Sports University, Kaunas, Lithuania*

<sup>2</sup>*Department of Sport and Tourism Management, Lithuanian Sports University, Kaunas, Lithuania*

## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The article presents the specificity of bullying in organized sport with regard to sport participants' gender and age variables. Trends in bullying manifestation through such constituents as antisocial behaviour and aggression in sport, bullying actions in sport, previous experiences and memories of bullying, lack of bullying control are analysed. **Methodology:** The survey was conducted employing Bullying and Harassment in Sport Questionnaire (BHISQ). A sample of 382 youth amateur athletes (adolescents and young adults), involved in different sports, participated in this study. Written and online surveys and statistical data analysis were chosen. Analyses were made applying Mann-Whitney U test to gender analyses and Kruskal-Wallis H test to three age groups. **Findings:** Athletes men are more aggressive physically, verbally or non-verbally than women. Men, not only as bullies, but also in the role of a victim, are more expressive than women in addition, it has been found that persons who were bullied in the past also apply the same negative behaviour themselves in sport activities later. Athletes' age has a significant influence on the form of bullying as older persons use a more refined arsenal of means of negative behaviour. Although it has been found that male's use bullying more often, it is noted that the environment legitimizing aggressiveness may influence greater openness of men, which should be taken into account in future research. **Keywords:** Antisocial behaviour; Aggression; Bullying; Amateurs sport; Athlete.

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✉ **Corresponding author.** Department of Sport and Tourism Management, Lithuanian Sports University, Sporto str. 6, LT- 44221, Kaunas, Lithuania.

E-mail: [vilija.fominiene@lsu.lt](mailto:vilija.fominiene@lsu.lt)

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## INTRODUCTION

Research emphasize that sport provides social and psychological benefit to young people (Crane and Temple, 2015), but the number of athletes in different age groups varies. Most of sports participants are school-age children and young people with possibly up to 75 percent of boys and 69 percent of girls (Bronner and Clark, 2016). Meanwhile, the age group of 20-29 year-olds makes up only about 15 percent of all athletes (Eime et al., 2016), because as many as 75 percent of those who did sports previously quit sport before they are 15 years old (Breuner, 2012). The causes for this are varied. Alongside with structural constraints – time for training and travel, sports-related injuries, cost and inadequate facilities, changed priorities – quite frequent causes for quitting sport are intrapersonal and interpersonal constraints. This can be both criticism and pressure from coaches and parents, seeking the result and victories, lack of coaches' communicative competence, absence of stimulating training climate or demonstrated autocratic or authoritarian styles of interacting with young athletes (Crane and Temple, 2015; Witt and Dangi, 2018). As a result of these phenomena, up to 35 percent of young people leave organized sport (Vella et al., 2014), of which the higher proportion is females (Sabo and Veliz, 2014).

However, research has revealed a trend showing that quitting organized sport does not necessarily have to be related to persons' decreasing physical activity. It has been identified that adolescents replace participation in organized sports with non-organised and non-competitive modes and settings (Eime et al., 2013). Namely at that age the athlete enters the elite sport pathway (Eime et al., 2016). Competition becomes one of the incentives for emotional abuse (Gervis et al., 2016), which relates to the approach that antisocial and aggressive behaviour in sport is simply a must in order to achieve results (Stirling and Kerr, 2014). Seeking victories and the development of psychologically strong athletes, coaches do not avoid shouting at them, shoving, hitting them (Narwal, 2014; Peltola and Kivijärvi, 2017), and athletes interacting with weaker team members or those who have lower-level sports mastery do not shy away from sneering at them (Steinfeldt et al., 2012). Therefore, negative interrelationships in sport between peers, coaches and parents (Enoksen, 2011; Hassan et al., 2017) can be considered quite an important cause of quitting organized sport among children and young people. The attitude of peers engaged in sport, fear to get negative evaluation from them, and particularly non-correspondence to the athletic model also influence reluctance to continue the athlete's career, while in case of remaining in sport, this can lead to socio-negative attributes of sport participation – emotional and physical damage (Anderson and White, 2017).

One of the negative manifestations of interrelationships, leading to quitting organized sport or socio-negative attributes of sport participation, is bullying behaviour in sport (Fisher and Dzikus, 2017). Therefore, in recent years, bullying is becoming an increasingly common object of research, analysing the context of sport (Steinfeldt et al., 2012; Volk and Lagzdins, 2009; Evans et al., 2016). This phenomenon, being one of the most common expressions of violence in the peer context (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017), in sport falls under the umbrella of athlete relational maltreatment (Stirling and Kerr, 2016) and is attributed to antisocial behaviour (Evans et al., 2016). Bullying is a rather broad concept, which can be understood as a specific form of aggressive interpersonal relationships, designed to hurt another – the intentional kind of aggression in which individuals often and for a longer time behave aggressively with other persons, systematically humiliate and harass them (Smith, 2016). Despite the existing discussions regarding the definition, it is agreed that bullying is related to the intent to harm and to the balance of power between the aggressor and the victim, and this takes place repeatedly (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017).

Analysing the phenomenon of bullying in various contexts, the commonly distinguished types of bullying are physical, verbal, social-relational aggression (Smith, 2016), which may be attributed to direct or indirect forms

of bullying. One of the most visible and common forms of bullying is direct bullying involving physical and verbal acts of aggression – hitting, kicking, punching, shoving, slapping or name-calling, persistent teasing, gossip (Stirling et al., 2011). No less frequent is indirect bullying (Smith, 2016), manifesting itself by social exclusion or rumour spreading. However, manifestation of bullying forms and types and prevalence of bullying are usually determined by the involved persons' age or gender, although findings are not straightforward (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017). It has been identified that direct bullying is common in young children, where direct physical bullying is gradually replaced by verbal (Tsorbatzoudis et al., 2013). Gender differences are also distinct in prevailing forms of bullying. Male gender is more often involved in direct and particularly direct physical bullying, while females are more implementing indirect or direct verbal bullying (Smith, 2016; Jormanainen et al., 2014). Bullying can be also seen as a group process (Salmivalli, 2010) in which its members have different participant roles: of victims, bullies or bystanders. Studies analysing bullying state that male gender tends to be both bullies and victims of bullying, and this is particularly revealed by analysing physical expression (Carbone-Lopez et al., 2010). Other studies confirm that bullies tend to be boys (Beaty and Alexeyev, 2008). It is also assumed that the role of the bully more often comes to prominence in adolescence because of the wish to be popular. Meanwhile, prevalence of the role of the victim may be decreasing with age, which is related to acquisition of social skills (Pouwels et al., 2018).

Analysing bullying in sport, a considerable share of studies reports a relatively low prevalence of bullying among athletes, compared to prevalence of bullying among pupils (Volk and Lagzdins, 2009; Steinfeldt et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2016; etc.). However, studies that have analysed the link between participation in sport and violent behaviour show that prevailing sports culture and social norms, endorsing hegemonic masculinity, determine antisocial and violent behaviour of sports participants (Sønderlund et al., 2013). And research on school-bullying state huge differences in the prevalence of bullying depending on the country (Craig et al., 2009). If, according to research results of Craig et al. (2009), Sweden's rates are the lowest (8.6% of boys, 4.8% of girls), Lithuania's rates are identified as the highest (45.2% of boys, 35.8% of girls). Higher prevalence of bullying, compared with the majority of research conducted in sports context, exceeding 30 percent, was also stated in solitary studies conducted in Lithuanian sports context with female athletes (Vveinhardt and Andriukaitienė, 2017). However, a lack of research analysing bullying in sport is stated (Fisher and Dzikus, 2017; Evans et al., 2016). While still fully unrevealed importance of various socio-demographic variables for bullying behaviour in individual cultural media rightly raise the question how gender and age of the target group relate to bullying in sports context. As stated by Kerr et al. (2016), bullying is part of sports culture, but in this context, seeking to ensure a safe environment for athletes, it is significant both to assess the role of gender in more detail and to analyse bullying prevention possibilities (Jewett et al., 2019). It is also important to draw attention to sports participants' age as potentially significant for the person's behaviour and role related to bullying (Cook et al., 2010).

The research problem of this study is raised by the questions: What gender and age group athletes' anti-social behaviour and aggression in sport is more pronounced? What is the intensity of bullying actions in sport with regard to different gender and different age groups? What are the prevailing previous experiences and memories of athletes' bullying in order to compare them by gender and age? What is athletes' attitude towards control of bullying in their teams/groups, analysing differences in the aspect of gender and age?

The research aim: to identify bullying in organized sport with regard to gender and age variables.

To achieve this aim, the following research tasks are raised: (1) to identify differences in antisocial behaviour and aggression in sport between different genders and different age groups; (2) to identify the intensity of bullying actions in sport by gender and age; (3) to identify previous experiences and memories of athletes'

bullying, seeking to compare them with regard to gender and age; (4) to identify control of bullying in teams/groups from the athletes' standpoint, analysing differences in the aspect of gender and age.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Participants

A sample of 382 youth athletes involved in different sports participated in this study. The selection of the target group took place considering the main criteria: the age of the investigated persons had to be between 16 and 29 and during the research, they had to be participants of amateur's sport for at least 6 months in the chosen sports. The minimum age limit is 16 because in Lithuania, young people of this age are already given a personal passport and they may be subject to administrative or criminal liability for their actions. That is, they can already be personally punished for violent actions (e.g., against team members or competitors). The other group consists of young adults between the ages of 18 and 29. 16 to 18 year-olds in Lithuania are mostly involved in organized after-school sport in sports schools and from the age of 18, they have to leave sports schools and join club sport or choose professional sport.

The groups of investigated persons by gender and age are homogeneous. Male and female groups consisted of 191 respondents each, groups by age were distributed as follows: 133 respondents (34.8%) occurred in the *first* age group (16-17 years), the group of the youngest athletes who took part in the research; 124 respondents (32.5%) fell into the *second* age group (18-20 years); and 125 respondents (32.7%) fell into in the *third* age group (21-29 years), the oldest athletes participating in this study. Thus, such group sizes enable to conduct further analysis of results.

### Measures

The empirical study was conducted using the questionnaire *Bullying and Harassment in Sport Questionnaire* (BHISQ). This questionnaire contains integrated scales/subscales that were adapted upon the receipt of authors' permission; i.e., *Prosocial and Antisocial Behaviour in Sport Scale* (PABSS) (Kavussanu and Boardley, 2009), *Competitive Aggressiveness and Anger Scale* (CAAS) (Maxwell and Moores, 2007), *Illinois Bully Scale* (IBS) (Espelage and Holt, 2001). The part of the questionnaire, covering roles, actions, and emotional state of bullying and harassment participants, was adapted according to the questionnaire *Mobbing as discrimination in employee relations aiming to improve the organisational climate* (MDOC-110) (Vveinhardt, 2012) and the shortened version of MDOC – *Mobbing and Single Cases of Harassment in Employees' Relations* (MSCH-47) (Vveinhardt and Streimikiene, 2015). The detailed logic of drawing up the questionnaire used in this study, the process of adapting original scales and integrating new scales into the questionnaire are presented in detail in another article of the authors (Vveinhardt et al., 2019a). The questionnaire consists of 4 parts, 10 scales encompassing 23 subscales and 155 items. 6 questions are related to information about the athletes. The number of statements making up the sub-scales and Cronbach alpha values are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Structure of the questionnaire at scale and subscale level: psychometric characteristics.

| Parts  | Scales                        | Subscales           | N of items | Explained dispersion % | Cronbach alpha | Spearman Brown |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------|------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| I. Anti-social behaviour and aggression in sport | Antisocial behaviour in sport | Antisocial teammate | 4          | 67.51                  | 0.84           | -              |
|  |                               | Antisocial opponent | 8          | 55.34                  | 0.88           | 0.83           |

|  |  |                                      |                      |       |       |      |
|--|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------|-------|-------|------|
|  | Aggression and anger in competition                                  | Anger                                | 6                    | 49.98 | 0.80  | 0.79 |
|  |  | Aggressiveness                       | 6                    | 59.30 | 0.86  | 0.86 |
|  | Types of aggression during trainings and competitions                | Physical aggression                  | 7                    | 54.63 | 0.86  | 0.84 |
|  |  | Verbal aggression                    | 8                    | 50.43 | 0.86  | 0.82 |
|  |  | Indirect aggression                  | 8                    | 47.33 | 0.84  | 0.78 |
| II. Bullying and harassment actions in sport | Athletes, initiating and experiencing bullying                       | Bully role                           | 9                    | 52.68 | 0.88  | 0.73 |
|  |  | Victim role                          | 4                    | 68.58 | 0.85  | -    |
|  | Communication obstacles in teammates interrelationship               | Communication                        | 10                   | 51.73 | 0.89  | 0.72 |
|  |  | Isolation                            | 6                    | 66.59 | 0.90  | 0.89 |
|  | Formation of negative approach and the pattern of sport tasks        | Reputation                           | 17                   | 46.44 | 0.93  | 0.87 |
|  |  | Tasks                                | 9                    | 58.12 | 0.91  | 0.88 |
|  | Teammates' feelings and consequences                                 | Health                               | 6                    | 61.04 | 0.88  | 0.87 |
|  |  | Damage                               | 5                    | 74.84 | 0.92  | 0.88 |
|  |  | Frustration                          | 6                    | 65.41 | 0.89  | 0.89 |
|  | III. Previous bullying and harassment experiences and memories       | Bullying and harassment experience   | Experience at school | 5     | 46.68 | 0.75 |
| Experience in the previous team              |  |                                      | 5                    | 51.43 | 0.78  | 0.76 |
| Bullying and harassment memories             |  | School memories                      | 5                    | 67.31 | 0.88  | 0.86 |
|  |  | Memories from a previous team        | 5                    | 69.70 | 0.89  | 0.88 |
| IV. Lack of bullying and harassment control  | Affirmation, intervention and prevention of bullying and harassment. | Seeing the situation, fact statement | 4                    | 78.60 | 0.91  | -    |
|  |  | Bullying intervention                | 8                    | 43.28 | 0.89  | 0.81 |
|  |  | Bullying prevention                  | 4                    | 82.96 | 0.93  | -    |

Source: Vveinhardt, J., Fominiene, V. B., Jeseviciute-Ufartiene, L. (2019a), *Methodological and psychometric characteristics of the questionnaire for the diagnosis of bullying and harassment in sport: statistical verification, Transformations in Business & Economics (Manuscript submitted for publication)*.

### Procedure

The study was carried out in 2018. Since it was planned that minors would also take part in the survey, a permission to conduct the social study was obtained from the Committee for Research Ethics in Social Sciences of Lithuanian Sports University. The paper and online questionnaires for data collection were chosen. Sports schools and coaches of sports teams were addressed regarding the survey of minors engaged in sport, informing them about the goals and procedures of the study and confidential treatment of the results. Upon the receipt of their consents, athletes were addressed, requesting them to complete selected questionnaires. Prior to this, all participants were given oral instructions regarding the study and assured of anonymity, confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation. The authors of the study would give out questionnaires to the athletes who chose the paper questionnaire and would create conditions

to fill in the questionnaire under supervision or fill it in at home. In the latter case, the individual agreements regarding returning the filled in questionnaire to the researchers personally were made. The researchers would either send the electronic link to the questionnaire survey or give notes with the electronic link to those who chose the online based questionnaire. It took approximately 35 to 40 minutes to complete the survey for the participants.

### Data Analysis

Statistical analysis of the research data was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package of the Social Science) version 24.0. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to examine gender and age differences in athlete's experience of bullying. The research data was calculated using a non-parametric method, i.e., tested using Kruskal-Wallis H test, when 3 and more groups are compared with each other. When comparing two gender groups, the research data was calculated applying the non-parametric method; i.e., tested using Mann-Whitney U test, when two groups are compared with each other.

## RESULTS

Research results revealed how many respondents who participated in the study acknowledged themselves as victims, bystanders or bullies with regard to the members of their team or others, i.e., opponents. Of the 382 respondents surveyed more than one-fifth of athletes acknowledge the fact that they were teased by the members of their own team/group (victims – 22.3%). As many as 39.8% of athletes confirm that it fell to them to observe bullying in their team/group; i.e., it fell to them to find themselves in the bystander's role. In this context, it comes to prominence that bullying victims themselves are involved in bullying of other athletes. Athletes who did not avoid to identify themselves as bully confirm that they themselves bully their team/group members (13.4%). There is a slightly different situation, to the detriment of one's team, in the opponents' teams, which enables to assume that often being the victim in one's team/group, the person is chosen as the victim in the opponents' team/group too (20.2%). Being the bully in one's own team/group, that person also manifests himself/herself as the bully to opponents even more actively (15.4%). Finally, the bystander's role, watching bullying from the opponents' side (38.5%), practically is the same as the percentage of bullying from one's team members.

Table 2. Antisocial behaviour and aggression in sport: respondents' experiences in the aspects of gender and age.

| Subscales           | Males  | Females | Mann-Whitney U test results |        |                 | 16-17<br>year<br>olds | 18-20<br>year<br>olds | 21-29<br>year<br>olds | Kruskal-Wallis<br>H<br>test results |       |
|---------------------|--------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|-----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------------|-------|
|                     | N=191  | N=191   | U                           | Z      | p               | N=133                 | N=124                 | N=125                 | X <sup>2</sup>                      | p     |
| Antisocial teammate | 203.01 | 179.99  | 16041.5                     | -2.043 | <b>0.041*</b>   | 179.82                | 189.69                | 205.73                | 3.616                               | 0.164 |
| Antisocial opponent | 218.17 | 164.83  | 13146.5                     | -4.729 | <b>0.000**</b>  | 191.10                | 195.02                | 188.44                | 0.224                               | 0.894 |
| Anger               | 191.91 | 191.09  | 18162.5                     | -0.072 | 0.942           | 181.41                | 190.89                | 202.84                | 2.445                               | 0.295 |
| Aggressiveness      | 212.85 | 170.15  | 14163.0                     | -3.797 | <b>0.0001**</b> | 181.55                | 195.69                | 197.94                | 1.701                               | 0.427 |
| Physical aggression | 217.48 | 165.52  | 13278.5                     | -4.610 | <b>0.000**</b>  | 203.33                | 188.46                | 181.92                | 2.574                               | 0.276 |
| Verbal aggression   | 199.50 | 183.50  | 16712.5                     | -1.418 | 0.156           | 180.87                | 197.94                | 196.42                | 1.907                               | 0.385 |
| Indirect aggression | 205.29 | 177.71  | 15606.0                     | -2.446 | <b>0.014*</b>   | 194.45                | 191.56                | 188.30                | 0.201                               | 0.904 |

Note: \* statistical significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; \*\* statistical significance level  $\alpha = 0.01$ .

Analysing the data revealing investigated persons' antisocial behaviour and aggression in sport in the aspects of gender and age, certain differences between separate groups were identified (Table 2).

*Antisocial behaviour* with both team members and opponents as well as *aggressiveness, physical and indirect aggression* is more common to male gender representatives rather than female. Statistically significant differences identified between males and females, analysing by subscale profile, demonstrate that male representatives, compared with female, are more aggressive, more often behave antisocially both with team members and opponents. It was identified that male representatives were more aggressive, used physical and indirect aggression more often than female representatives. No statistically significant differences in the subscales of antisocial behaviour and aggression manifestation in sport were identified with regard to age.

Analysing respondents' experiences in the manifestation of bullying actions in sport, significant differences in some aspects depending on age and gender were revealed (Table 3).

Table 3. Bullying actions in sport: respondents' experiences with regard to gender and age.

| Subscales     | Males  | Females | Mann-Whitney U test results |        |                | 16-17<br>year<br>olds | 18-20<br>year<br>olds | 21-29<br>year<br>olds | Kruskal-Wallis H<br>test results |                  |
|---------------|--------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------|
|               | N=191  | N=191   | U                           | Z      | p              | N=133                 | N=124                 | N=125                 | X <sup>2</sup>                   | p                |
| Bully role    | 209.34 | 173.66  | 14833.5                     | -3.209 | <b>0.001**</b> | 188.15                | 188.34                | 198.20                | 0.706                            | 0.703            |
| Victim role   | 202.71 | 178.16  | 15717.0                     | -2.188 | <b>0.029*</b>  | 176.30                | 187.24                | 208.71                | 5.802                            | 0.055            |
| Communication | 198.70 | 184.30  | 16864.5                     | -1.302 | 0.193          | 181.22                | 190.58                | 203.36                | 2.712                            | 0.258            |
| Isolation     | 194.82 | 188.18  | 17607.0                     | -0.744 | 0.457          | 187.76                | 176.34                | 210.52                | 9.968                            | <b>0.007**</b>   |
| Reputation    | 194.18 | 188.82  | 17728.0                     | -0.497 | 0.619          | 181.05                | 173.19                | 220.78                | 14.682                           | <b>0.001**</b>   |
| Tasks         | 203.06 | 179.94  | 16033.0                     | -2.205 | <b>0.027*</b>  | 179.82                | 177.26                | 218.05                | 12.527                           | <b>0.002**</b>   |
| Health        | 200.07 | 182.93  | 16604.5                     | -1.812 | 0.070          | 173.25                | 178.96                | 223.36                | 22.333                           | <b>0.00001**</b> |
| Damage        | 202.58 | 180.42  | 16125.0                     | -2.924 | <b>0.003**</b> | 183.78                | 176.94                | 214.16                | 17.956                           | <b>0.0001**</b>  |
| Frustration   | 193.15 | 189.85  | 17924.5                     | -0.329 | 0.742          | 176.87                | 172.93                | 225.49                | 22.349                           | <b>0.00001**</b> |

Note: \* statistical significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; \*\* statistical significance level  $\alpha = 0.01$ .

Such subscales as *the bully's and victim's roles, tasks, and damage experienced due to bullying* are more pronounced among male athletes than among female athletes. Statistically significant differences were recorded between groups of athletes aged 21-29 and younger ones (16-17 and 18-20). For example, analysing such bullying actions that manifest themselves with regard to isolating environment, downgrading of reputation, incorrect task formation, worsened health due to damage caused by bullying and frustration, it is identified that athletes aged 21-29 experience that stronger than athletes of two other age groups (Table 3).

Table 4. Respondents' previous bullying experiences with regard to gender and age.

| Subscales                                | Males  | Females | Mann-Whitney U test results |        |               | 16-17<br>year<br>olds | 18-20<br>year<br>olds | 21-29<br>year<br>olds | Kruskal-Wallis H<br>test results |                |
|--|--------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|---------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
|  | N=191  | N=191   | U                           | Z      | p             | N=133                 | N=124                 | N=125                 | X <sup>2</sup>                   | p              |
| Experience at school                     | 200.10 | 182.90  | 16598.0                     | -1.533 | 0.125         | 170.88                | 182.95                | 221.92                | 15.086                           | <b>0.001**</b> |
| Experience in the previous team          | 204.22 | 178.78  | 15810.5                     | -2.316 | <b>0.021*</b> | 182.73                | 184.12                | 208.15                | 4.482                            | 0.106          |
| School memories                          | 195.15 | 187.85  | 17544.0                     | -0.728 | 0.467         | 191.14                | 174.21                | 209.03                | 7.878                            | <b>0.019*</b>  |
| Memories from previous team <sup>a</sup> | 200.20 | 182.80  | 16578.0                     | -1.890 | 0.059         | 192.35                | 177.50                | 204.48                | 5.609                            | 0.061          |

Note: \* statistical significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; \*\* statistical significance level  $\alpha = 0.01$ .

The results show that manifestation of previous bullying experiences in some aspects varies significantly depending on age and gender of the investigated persons (Table 4).

Earlier experiences of bullying are very similar in both men's and women's case, but men are more inclined to distinguish experience in the previous team than women. No further statistically significant differences were found in the case of this subscale. Statistically significant differences were recorded between athletes of the group aged 21-29 and younger ones (16-17 and 18-20) in the subscales of school experience and school memories (Table 4).

Analysing the statements describing how the respondents treat the situation of bullying and state the fact as well as issues of intervention, prevention with regard to gender, no statistically significant differences were found. However, manifestation of statements about bullying, intervention and prevention varies statistically significantly depending on age. Statistically significant differences were recorded between 21-29 year-old athletes and younger ones (16-17 and 18-20 year-olds) (Table 5).

Table 5. Lack of controlling bullying with regard to gender and age.

| Subscales                            | Males  | Females | Mann-Whitney U test results |        |       | 16-17<br>year<br>olds | 18-20<br>year<br>olds | 21-29<br>year<br>olds | Kruskal-Wallis H<br>test results |                |
|--------------------------------------|--------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|-------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|----------------|
|                                      | N=191  | N=191   | U                           | Z      | p     | N=133                 | N=124                 | N=125                 | X <sup>2</sup>                   | p              |
| Seeing the situation, fact statement | 187.68 | 195.32  | 17511.0                     | -0.681 | 0.496 | 179.83                | 173.63                | 221.65                | 14.268                           | <b>0.001**</b> |
| Bullying and harassment intervention | 201.93 | 181.07  | 16247.5                     | -1.856 | 0.063 | 176.15                | 179.12                | 220.12                | 12.648                           | <b>0.002**</b> |
| Bullying and harassment prevention   | 201.70 | 181.30  | 16291.5                     | -1.814 | 0.070 | 181.76                | 172.52                | 220.68                | 13.543                           | <b>0.001**</b> |

Note: \* statistical significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; \*\* statistical significance level  $\alpha = 0.01$

Table 6. The analysis of the phenomenon of bullying in sport with regard to gender and age.

| Scales   | Males  | Females | Mann-Whitney U test results |        |                | 16-17<br>year<br>olds | 18-20<br>year<br>olds | 21-29<br>year<br>olds | Kruskal-Wallis H<br>test results |       |
|--|--------|---------|-----------------------------|--------|----------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------------|-------|
|  | N=191  | N=191   | U                           | Z      | p              | N=133                 | N=124                 | N=125                 | X <sup>2</sup>                   | p     |
| Antisocial behaviour in sport scale                    | 211.15 | 171.85  | 14488.0                     | -3.479 | <b>0.001**</b> | 185.15                | 192.31                | 197.46                | 0.811                            | 0.667 |
| Aggression and anger in competition scale              | 205.20 | 177.80  | 15624.5                     | -2.426 | <b>0.015*</b>  | 180.67                | 193.76                | 200.78                | 2.217                            | 0.330 |
| Types of aggression during trainings and competitions  | 210.89 | 172.11  | 14537.0                     | -3.432 | <b>0.001**</b> | 192.63                | 193.83                | 187.98                | 0.196                            | 0.907 |
| Athletes, initiating and experiencing bullying         | 208.40 | 174.60  | 15012.0                     | -2.996 | <b>0.003**</b> | 181.39                | 187.49                | 206.23                | 3.512                            | 0.173 |
| Communication obstacles in teammates interrelationship | 198.63 | 184.37  | 16879.0                     | -1.283 | 0.200          | 181.96                | 185.68                | 207.42                | 4.068                            | 0.131 |



|   |        |        |         |        |               |        |        |        |        |                  |
|---|--------|--------|---------|--------|---------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|------------------|
| Formation of negative approach and the pattern of sport tasks       | 200.06 | 182.94 | 16606.0 | -1.543 | 0.123         | 180.77 | 173.13 | 221.14 | 14.209 | <b>0.001**</b>   |
| Teammates' feelings and consequences                                | 198.75 | 184.25 | 16856.0 | -1.363 | 0.173         | 176.20 | 171.44 | 227.68 | 22.625 | <b>0.00001**</b> |
| Bullying and harassment experience scale                            | 203.82 | 179.18 | 15888.0 | -2.190 | <b>0.029*</b> | 173.06 | 182.26 | 220.28 | 13.188 | <b>0.001**</b>   |
| Bullying and harassment memories scale                              | 196.71 | 186.29 | 17245.5 | -1.014 | 0.311         | 191.86 | 171.67 | 210.80 | 9.458  | <b>0.009**</b>   |
| Affirmation, intervention and prevention of bullying and harassment | 200.45 | 182.55 | 16532.0 | -1.584 | 0.113         | 178.11 | 166.08 | 230.97 | 24.532 | <b>0.000**</b>   |

Note: \* statistical significance level  $\alpha = 0.05$ ; \*\* statistical significance level  $\alpha = 0.01$ .

Research results according to all three subscales show a high level of statistical significance. Analysing the research results at the level of questionnaire scales, it was found that antisocial behaviour in sport, aggression and anger while competing, forms of aggression during workouts and competitions were more characteristic to men than women, and the latter – men – were also sports activity participants initiating and experiencing bullying more often. At the same time, the problem of controlling bullying comes to prominence, when coaches do not take actions to stop bullying or they themselves use unethical training methods. Manifestation of bullying in sport is seen in such aspects as negative opinion formation and the nature of sports tasks, team members' emotional state and consequences, experience of bullying, memories and lack of control, which are stronger pronounced among older athletes (21-29 year-old) compared with younger age athletes (Table 6).

The high level of statistical significance, applying both Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests, was not identified only in a single scale - *Communication obstacles in teammates interrelationship*.

## DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of bullying, which due to its prevalence has become not only the individual person's but also the whole society's problem, inevitably exists in sport too. This means that bullying can be experienced by all, regardless of sports branch or mastery, regardless of age or gender, as bullying is based on the power difference between several persons: coach/youth athlete, coach/adult athlete, youth athlete/youth athlete, adult athlete/adult athlete, adult athlete/youth athlete (Stirling et al., 2011). Our study has shown that persons who experienced bullying in organized sport, had experienced it at school too. This is also evidenced by other studies, which not only state incessant bullying prevalence in school settings (Craig et al., 2009; Chen and Elklit, 2018) but reveal a greater likelihood of experiencing bullying in further life for those persons who already had bullying experiences at school (Adams and Lawrence, 2011). It is also noteworthy that bullying in adolescence may be a marker of risk for a continuing pattern of anti-social behaviour, especially with regard to men (Renda et al., 2011). More than a quarter of athletes both claimed being bullying victims in their own team and admitted that athletes from other teams also bullied them. Almost 40 percent of athletes stated having participated in bullying episodes as bystanders, and 13.3 percent of athletes named themselves as bullies to their team members. Slightly lower bullying prevalence facts were reported by the study conducted

in Portugal with 1458 male adolescent athletes from different sports (Nery et al., 2018). This study found that about 10% of athletes had reported having been victimized; 11% had participated in bullying episodes as bullies; and 35%, as bystanders. Even smaller bullying prevalence among a sample of 69 girls of ages 12-15 engaged in extracurricular sports, reaching 10 percent, was established by Volk and Lagzdins (2009). The study on prevalence of bullying among 359 adolescent athletes of both genders, conducted in Canada, revealed that 14 percent of the target group had reported having been victimized, while 8% had participated in bullying episodes as bullies. The study conducted by Steinfeldt et al. (2012) involving 206 adolescent males – school football players, aged 14-18, also found a small degree of involvement with constant bullying behaviours.

First, such differences can be explained by the concept of bullying defined in the studies and by choosing the instrument for measuring the phenomenon. Unfortunately, the concept is still not fully purified and may vary depending on the context and determine difficulties in recognizing and assessing this negative phenomenon (Mendez-Baldwin et al., 2017). Second, prevalence can be determined by both the investigated persons' gender, age, sports branch, moral atmosphere prevailing in a particular team and cultural and social differences or differences in the implementation of national policy and programs. After all, overall level of bullying in Lithuania is one of the highest and remained high by world standards (Craig et al., 2009). Besides, girls compared with boys are less involved in bullying episodes (Craig et al., 2009). Meanwhile, boys influenced by social norms, both the norms of moral atmosphere and endorsement of male role norms, are more inclined to get involved into bullying episodes (Steinfeldt et al., 2012).

Our research results demonstrate that men compared with women more often showed antisocial behaviour and aggression in sport, which was more pronounced in physical and indirect forms of aggression. Male representatives were also the ones who more often both initiated and experienced bullying in sports activities. Gender patterns in antisocial and aggressive behaviour have been evident over time. Analysing behaviour in the aspect of gender, it is stated that antisocial behaviour is more often demonstrated by male representatives (Hellström and Beckman, 2019). Comparing it with violence and aggression, the same trend is seen, where men are more inclined to demonstrate aggression in their behaviour than women, and this is especially true speaking about direct physical aggression (Fagan and Lindsey, 2014). On the other hand, studies show that female bullying is more often directed at females; while male bullying, both at females and males (Namie and Namie, 2012). However, in these contexts, Leymann's (1996) notice is meaningful, stating that, considering the trend when men more often direct aggression towards men, traditionally formed activity structures dominated by male or female groups should be taken into account. At the same time, it is also necessary to consider that women better recognize negative nuances of behaviour and react more openly, while men are more concerned about the preservation and demonstration of their power; therefore, are more rarely inclined to admit being victims (Escartín et al., 2011). This is also typical to the sports context (Silva, 1983; Coulomb-Cabagno and Rasclé, 2006) and is explained by the social learning theory stating that aggression is a learned behaviour. Boys are more socialized to use direct physical aggression, while girls have learned to use less aggression or use its indirect form (Lagerspetz et al., 1988). It is no coincidence that in sport, too, male athletes are more supportive of unsportsmanlike play, more justifying fraud and deliberate acts that are damaging. All of this is done, seeking victory (Warner and Dixon, 2015). This is also confirmed by other studies showing that physical aggression among boys is more acceptable and becomes particularly desirable if one wants to be popular (Guerra et al., 2011). Gender differences are also evident analysing bullying as a subset of aggression (Hellström and Beckman, 2019).

It should also be noted that gender differences are particularly distinct analysing the behaviour of children, adolescents and young people (Archer, 2004). Therefore, the age of group members may also determine the

scope of involvement in bullying behaviour and bullying form. However, a considerable share of research emphasizes the bullying peak in the adolescence period, which, with age, is significantly reducing while young people gain better social skills (Carney and Merrell, 2001). Besides, a larger number of bullying can be associated with bullying experienced by younger children not only from peers but also from older persons. Most often, physical manifestation of bullying is related to age. With increasing age, direct and physical forms of bullying are replaced by indirect and relational forms – bullying is expressed in more subtle and complex forms (Von Marées and Petermann, 2010). For these reasons, other research state that bullying behaviour does not decrease with age (Smith and Gross, 2006).

This study also revealed that manifestation of antisocial and aggressive behaviour does not depend on the age groups of investigated young people, but manifestation of bullying actions differs in some aspects. Bullying actions that manifest themselves indirectly – by creating an isolating environment, downgrading reputation or forming incorrect tasks – are more visible by older sportsmen aged 21-29. Athletes of this age state that they are also more affected by the damage of bullying, feel more frustrated, and that their health has worsened. This can be explained by the fact that adolescents tend to ignore the less obvious indirect acts of bullying and are less likely to associate bullying with actions such as social exclusion, spread of damaging rumours, gossiping and the like (Guerin and Hennessy, 2002). With the transition to the young adult age, in the ongoing socialisation process, the person acquires increasingly more skills enabling to understand such behaviour and evaluate its consequences. As a result, older athletes also tended to state bullying experiences and remember them more often, although from the gender perspective these experiences are very similar. Older athletes were also the ones who more often stated ongoing bullying episodes but more often saw ongoing intervention and stated manifestation of prevention, although gender differences were not established. A similar attitude to bullying episodes and a greater need for intervention measures were also stated in the study with students of higher education institutions conducted in Lithuania (Vveinhardt et al., 2019b). This study revealed that older age students (26 year-olds and older), compared with younger ones, put more emphasis on the impact and need for intervention measures that can eliminate or reduce bullying.

## CONCLUSIONS

Male athletes are more aggressive physically, verbally or non-verbally than female athletes. Men, not only as bullies but also in the role of a victim, are more expressive than women. However, we propose that bullying in sport should be seen in a broader social context, where aggressive behaviour positively associates with victories, not only manifests itself in relationships with opponents but also transfers into interpersonal relationships. This is supported by the established tradition of positive assessment of aggressive behaviour in sport, which masks bullying. Here, links can be drawn between bullying experiences at school and in organized sport, outside school. However, in the latter case, not the age difference is that important but experience acquired and peculiar negative learning, when persons who experienced bullying transfer this experience, terrorizing other team members. Besides, those who experienced violence and bullying at school can also experience it in sport, which indicates the presence of continuity. The age difference is significant not that much to the frequency of bullying experiences but to their form. In the older age, bullying becomes less open and more refined, a wider arsenal of measures is used. Older age athletes better distinguish between tolerable and intolerable behaviours, while the possessed knowledge also enables to more critically assess bullying control actions. In other words, certain learning trends of aggressors can be envisaged, where more influential methods of negative impact on victims, yet more difficult to recognise, are learned. Although in other (non-sport) activity spheres, women tend to respond to bullying more sensitively and openly, which statistically shows a slightly higher incidence of bullying experienced by women, aggression in the sports

environment acquires a peculiarly legitimized character, which can determine men's greater openness and at the same time, higher statistical values.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH AND FURTHER RESEARCH

It has been found that measurement of frequencies of bullying in organized sport by age and gender criteria should be seen in the broader context of aggressive behaviour perception established in the sports environment. All of it expands knowledge about bullying in sport and its research possibilities, while the results can serve for the creation of more sensitive research instruments. In addition, our research results are useful, expanding knowledge of the heads of sports organizations about the bullying phenomenon and its control. In the future, it would make sense to extend the study to a broader intercultural context by comparing the results obtained as well as to assess how coaches perceive, are able to identify bullying, and what is the effect of established traditions of athlete's management in different countries. As it has been found that a share of athletes who were bullied at school continue to experience bullying in the older age, the causes determining continuity of bullying should be investigated in more detail.

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

Although research results provide new knowledge about bullying in organized sports, they reflect only the reactions of athletes participating in organised sport in Lithuania, limited to such criteria as age and gender. Experiences of persons under the age of 16 and over the age of 29 have not been investigated. The attitude of sports organizations to bullying has not been assessed.

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