



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SPORT IN SENEGAL: THE CASE OF WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

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### ABSTRACT

This work, which is the first in the sporting field, focuses on non-accidental violence in general, sexual violence in particular at the level of women's basketball in Senegal. It corresponds to the first diagnostic step of global research on the health of Senegalese athletes. Its objective is to capture the representations that female players have as well as proven cases of violence. It highlights the perpetrators, the reactions to these acts, and the contexts in which they take place. The survey is carried out using a questionnaire given the sensitivity of this study. The main results reveal that players are actually victims of sexual abuse from individuals around the club ecosystem. They often react by confiding in a loved one (sister or brother). However, they do not file a complaint despite their level of education and the fact that they are not afraid to do so.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sexual violence seriously harms the physical and mental health of the individuals who are victims of it. Women are often more exposed to violence worldwide; 12.5% of them are said to be victims (UNICEF, 2024). Senegal is not left behind (Lèye & al, 2019), even if the cultural context does not favor the revelation/denunciation of these situations (Fall, 2003). According to this author, this culture of silence is based on perceptions such as shame, individual and family dishonor, avoiding a double sanction: psychophysical and social. Most research on this issue has been carried out directly or commissioned by non-governmental organizations<sup>1</sup>. A UN Women study (2012) on violence against women, identified in law enforcement agencies (police and gendarmerie), courts and health services (hospitals and health centers) showed that cases are increasing. It shows that 60% of the violence against women reported to the police correspond to rape cases in the Senegalese penal code, in its article 320, as " any act of sexual penetration, of whatever nature, committed on the person of another by violence, coercion, threat or surprise.

It should be added that these figures refer to reported situations, bearing in mind that some cases may be concealed. Moreover, the same study specifies that this violence is orchestrated by people in the close circle (father, maternal uncle, etc.). Almost 10 years later, another study published by UN Women confirms the resurgence of violence against women in public spaces (Sar, 2020). ). They are the subject of harassment as defined by the Criminal Code in its article 319a, such as "the act of harassing another by means of orders, gestures, threats, words, writing or coercion in order to obtain favours of a sexual nature by a person abusing the authority conferred upon him or her by his or her office". Thus defined, sexual harassment may be repetitive or non-repetitive. It can alter an individual's dignity by conferring a degrading and humiliating image. While rape and harassment are considered sexual assaults because of the force and threats that characterize them, they are distinct from the abuse of which they are a part. Abuse is much more encompassing, taking into account "all sexual activities practised against the will and consent of the victim" (Kirby & Greaves, 1997). Thus, abuse, which often leads to a relationship of trust on the part of the aggressor, is possible without the victim being harassed or assaulted; the latter may not be aware of or know her tormentor (exhibitionism, voyeurism).

<sup>1</sup> Examples include NGOs such as UN Women (2012, 2020), Human Rights Watch (2018), Réseau Africain pour le Développement Intégré (RADI, 2018)...

Violence characterizes the level of civilization of human societies and is present in sport even if it is controlled and supervised (Elias, 1996). In other words, sport is a reflection of society; it does not escape abuse, social and cultural deviance (Becker, 1963 & 1985). The main players (athletes, coaches, managers, etc.) meet there and build relationships with each other. These individuals, who are an integral part of society, can also adopt deviant behaviours that are offences or even crimes (Lassalle, 1988). Indeed, in the field of sport, we find violence qualified as non-accidental in the sense that it is implemented in a thoughtful way outside of any sporting rules. Non-accidental violence in sport refers to any form of harassment or abuse by athletes (Mountjoy, 2016) in general and children in this case. It does not take place in training and competition fields, but often in places peripheral to these spaces (changing rooms, massage room, green area, etc.).

These abuses and assaults raise the issue of child safeguarding defined by the association Keeping Children Safe (2014, p 3) as "the responsibility of organizations to ensure that their staff, activities and programs do not harm children, in other words that they do not expose children to a risk of harm and abuse, and that any concern of the organization relating to the protection of children within the communities where it operates, shall be reported to the competent authorities". Indeed, non-accidental violence in an organization is due to the lack of an effective safeguard mechanism that involves raising awareness and education about the rights of children and athletes. A child- or athlete-centred approach also ensures that children, young people, athletes or sports professionals are aware of their rights and how they can be protected (Decamps et al, 2008). This violence is certainly not specific to girls; some boys are victims of it (Jolly and Decamps, 2006).

Despite the need to protect and prevent such violence, most sports organizations in Senegal have no system in place to prevent non-accidental violence. This exposes young people seeking sporting and social success to intimidation, abuse and aggression. In 2022<sup>2</sup>, a case of paedophilia was reported in the Senegalese press. It involved a young player from an academy who had been blackmailed and abused by a member of the coaching staff. However, the vulnerability observed among young women means that they are more exposed and more victimized. That's why this study, which focuses on young female basketball players, is analyzed from the angle of the violence they suffer. This may take the form of harassment, abuse or rape, with the possible consequences of social stigmatization, socio-emotional problems, reduced performance, social isolation or other disorders. A form of double punishment inflicted by individuals and a society where the subject remains taboo. This study is a pioneering one in the field of sport in Senegal. It involves questioning facts of particular sensitivity linked to the omerta that characterizes gender-based violence in general and sexual violence in particular. This sensitivity explains why the young women basketball players targeted are surveyed as witnesses and/or victims. In addition to socio-professional information on these sportswomen, the aim is to analyze their perceptions of sexual aggression or abuse in the sporting arena. This violence can take the form of inappropriate propositions, harassment, rape or attempted rape, or even touching or caressing without their

consent. Secondly, the study looks at how they manage and react in the event of sexual violence. These attitudes are related to their willingness to talk to someone about it, to lodge a complaint, according to those involved in the violence. In addition to their perceptions of sexual violence and the possible reactions of others and themselves, this research looked at the same facts among female basketball players who are particularly victims of sexual violence. This latter perspective enables us to grasp, beyond what they may think, their reactions after having been subjected to deviant behavior. What do young female basketball players think about sexual violence in sport? How do they see themselves reacting in such circumstances? Have these young women been victims of sexual violence during their sporting careers? How did they react when they were victims of such deviant behavior?

## METHODOLOGY

The methodological choices made - in terms of location, survey population profiles, sampling and research techniques - can be explained by the sensitivity of the issue. The survey was carried out in the Dakar region, where it is more likely to find young, sporty women who can express easily themselves on this taboo subject. However, these young women must be at least 18 years old. This age also gives them relevant sporting experience in the sense that they will have done all categories of youth practice. They can participate as witnesses or victims. They are all basketball players. The choice of this discipline is justified by the fact that this sport confers on Senegal the status of the most successful country in the women's game on a continental scale. The African women's basketball championship has been won eleven times. Basketball is also one of the most feminized disciplines, with 1,141 or 34.96% of licensed players in 2016 (Ndongo, 2021). As the subject is taboo, a questionnaire survey is used to gather the information sought. This research technique avoids embarrassment caused by the intimacy of the questions to be asked. Players can administer the questionnaire in complete freedom, while realizing the importance of revealing the truth and nothing but the truth. The sample is designed to be random and simple. The omerta that symbolizes sexual violence meant that every young woman had to be given the chance to take part in the survey. Seventy-six questionnaires (76) were filled in voluntarily by the respondents. They were processed using the SPS21 data processing tool. The results are presented by means of a flat sort and a cross sort.

## RESULTS

The results of this study are presented in three sections. The first will present the socio-demographic data of the young women basketball players. The second will outline their perceptions of non-accidental violence, the reactions that should be taken and the potential perpetrators. The final section will highlight the young female basketball players who are victims of such deviant behavior, and the ways in which they react to difficult situations.

### SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

This section presents the age of the participants in this study, their marital status, their level of education and their number of children.

<sup>2</sup>[https://www.dakaractu.com/Affaire-Olivier-Perrin-Mor-Talla-Seck-d-une-affaire-d-homosexualite-a-une-affaire-de-simple-chantage\\_a221197.html](https://www.dakaractu.com/Affaire-Olivier-Perrin-Mor-Talla-Seck-d-une-affaire-d-homosexualite-a-une-affaire-de-simple-chantage_a221197.html), lien consulté le 23 juin 2024 à 16 heures.

Analysis of this table shows that the majority of young women surveyed are aged between 25 and 27, with 28 people, or 36.8% of respondents. They are 9 points ahead of their peers aged 22 to 24. The two other most represented age categories are those between 22 and 24 on the one hand, and 18 and 21 on the other. They account for 25% and 15.8% of sportswomen respectively. Finally, the over-30 age group is the least represented in this study. There are 6 women in this age group, i.e. 7.9% of the sample. With regard to marital status, the information gathered reveals that 88.2% of the young women surveyed are single, i.e. 67 out of 76. The remainder are married (7) and divorced (2), i.e. 9.2% and 2.6% respectively.

In terms of level of education, the data show that the sportswomen have a fairly high level. A total of 76.3% (58) have obtained the baccalaureate and gone on to higher education. They are followed by their peers with an intermediate-secondary level. There are 13 young women (17.1%) who have attended secondary school. The survey shows that the representation of sportswomen with no schooling or elementary education is very low, at 3.9% and 2% of the total population respectively. The over-representation of young women in higher education can be explained by one of the characteristics of the study population: the minimum age of 18 set for reasons justified in the methodology. However, this choice will enable us to see whether the level of schooling will have an impact on young women's reactions. The responses recorded in relation to the number of children indicate that one (1) girl in seven (7) has had a child. This represents 14.5% of the female practitioners surveyed. In other words, with 85.5% of the sample, the vast majority remain childless.

#### **PERCEPTIONS OF THE FREQUENCY, REACTIONS AND PERPETRATORS OF NON-ACCIDENTAL VIOLENCE:**

The intention in presenting the results below is to reveal the perceptions that female basketball players have of non-accidental violence. In particular, we want to show their perceptions of the frequency, reactions and perpetrators of such acts. This table analyzes female basketball players' perceptions of the frequency (never, often and always) of non-accidental violence in sport. This refers to an analysis of their perceptions of the frequency of inappropriate comments, harassment, possible unwanted touching or fondling, and attempted rape or rape. As far as inappropriate comments are concerned, the young women surveyed think that 53.9% of sports girls receive them often. They represent the dominant trend, followed by their peers who think that 38.2% of sportswomen never receive it. Three of them, or 3.9%, believe that sportswomen are always the victims of inappropriate comments. On the other hand, the remaining 3.9% refrained from answering the question. In short, the majority of girls have a high belief in inappropriate behavior. When it comes to harassment, which is more serious than inappropriate comments, there are variations in young women's perceptions. The highest proportion believe that sportswomen are never harassed, corresponding to 51.3%. However, 28 women basketball players, or 36.8%, believe that sportswomen are often harassed, and 4% believe that they are always harassed. As the severity of non-accidental violence increases, so does the number of women basketball players who believe it doesn't exist. Thus, 55.3% of them believe that sportswomen are never victims of sexual touching or fondling, as opposed to third parties. The latter, characterized by 35.5% of respondents, believes that such acts are often overt.

There is still a small proportion (2.6%) who believe that these acts are always present in the women's sports sub-sector. Perceptions of the frequency of rape are in line with those of other abuses or aggressions in women's sport in Senegal. As the most serious offence that has even been criminalized, 61.8% believe that sportswomen are not victims of rape. However, less than a third (1/3) still believe in the reality of rape cases, with 30.3% of respondents. Finally, 2.6% of female basketball players believe that this crime still exists in sport, as do perceptions of fondling or touching. The conclusions drawn from this table still reflect a belief in the existence of these deviant behaviors. A third of respondents believe that inappropriate comments, harassment, unwanted touching, attempted rape or rape do exist in sport. Girls in sport are said to be victims, although the figures become lower as the level of seriousness increases.

This table highlights the perceptions that women basketball players have of the reactions of victims of non-accidental violence in terms of communication. It looks at whether they think victims would talk about it, with whom they should talk about it, and whether they would be afraid to talk about it. The majority of female basketball players surveyed think that sportswomen who are victims of sexual abuse or assault would talk about it. This corresponds to 56.6% of the responses received, as opposed to 40.8% who think that female players would not talk about it. However, this majority contrasts with the data when asked whether they are afraid to talk about it or not. 60.5% think that victims will be afraid to talk about it. If sportswomen were to talk about it as victims, 42.1% of respondents thought that friends would be the best people to talk to. Apart from friends, the person they would talk to second most is their brothers (38.2%). Other people with whom victims might discuss such a situation are parents and sisters. At 14.5% and 3.9% respectively, these were the people chosen by female basketball players. Only 1 young woman thought of talking to a medical psychologist.

This table shows the perceptions that women basketball players have about making a complaint. In this respect, it is worth noting that 67.1% of them believe that victims of non-accidental violence will not press charges, as opposed to 30.3%. These data are consistent with their manifestation of fear of filing a lawsuit, insofar as 80.3% believe that victims are afraid to file a lawsuit; this is a difference of 12.9%. Paradoxically, they are more likely to recommend that victims sue, at 55.3%. Analysis of this table shows that respondents rank the perpetrators of sexual harassment in ascending order, with their respective percentages. Female basketball players think that coaches are the main perpetrators of non-accidental violence. They are in the majority with 41 people, or 53.9%. The data collected show that managers are behind coaches with 37 individuals, or 48.7%. As far as perpetrators are concerned, partners come third with a proportion of 27.6%. Processing the information reveals that members of the medical team or technical staff other than the coach are among the perpetrators of abuse or aggression; each entity accounts for 23.7%. The category of actors identified by respondents as the least represented perpetrators are club presidents, with a percentage of 6.6%.

#### **ANALYSIS OF REAL CASES OF NON-ACCIDENTAL VIOLENCE AMONG WOMEN BASKETBALL PLAYERS:**

Having analyzed perceptions of non-accidental violence, the tables below show the reality of abuse and

aggression suffered by women basketball players. Firstly, they show the extent of such violence and the contexts in which it occurs. Next, the reactions of the victims and the perpetrators will be indicated. Finally, a correlation between level of education and reaction will be established. Analysis of this table reveals the young female basketball players who are subjected to acts of sexual violence. This includes inappropriate comments made to more than twenty players. Of these, 9.2% and 18.4% had received such remarks once and several times respectively. In the majority of cases, they have never received inappropriate remarks, with 51 players questioned out of a total of 76, representing 67.1%. With regard to harassment, 6 players (7.9%) felt they had been harassed several times. 5 other young women (6.6%) said they had been harassed once. 59 girls (77.6%) had never been touched or caressed. On the other hand, 9.2% said they had been victims once, while 6 women (7.9%) said they had been subjected to this form of violence several times. Of course, cases described by young women as rape are rarer. Three women basketball players were victims once and 2 several times. The conclusions to be drawn from this table correspond to the existence of cases of non-accidental violence in women's basketball. The most serious cases of rape are evident. Analysis of this table reveals the context in which this sexual violence took place. The information gathered shows that the majority of cases occurred during competition. This is confirmed by 14.5% of the women basketball players questioned. Outside competitions, 10.5% had been assaulted during training sessions and 5.3% during clinic. They are rarer during national team training camps (1.3%). This table shows that 21 practising women surveyed who were victims of non-accidental violence mentioned it to someone; this represents 27.6% of the survey population. The first person they mentioned it to was their friend. Of the twenty or so female basketball players who were victims of abuse or aggression, 14 confided in a friend. This represents 18.4% of the total population, but 58.33% of the victims. After friends, the second category of people with whom they talk about violence is their sisters. These account for 6.6% of the sample, but 20.83% of players who have experienced deviant behavior. The remainder refer to parents, coaches and doctors (3.9%, 1.3% and 1.3% respectively).

It should be pointed out that 13, or 17.1% of the total population, or 54.16% of the victims were afraid to talk about it, and only 3.9% took legal action against the perpetrators. Analysis of the above table highlights the perpetrators of non-accidental violence in women's basketball. While coaches are perceived as the main perpetrators, in reality it is club presidents who are identified by the majority of victims. 26.3% of women basketball players identified them as the perpetrators of non-accidental violence. They are followed by coaches with 15.8% of responses. Particular attention is paid to the insignificant representation of these two categories of people in the individuals with whom they communicate or think they would communicate in the event of violence. In addition to coaches and club presidents, the other perpetrators are managers and partners, with 7.9% and 6.6% of responses respectively. This table is analyzed to understand whether the level of education could have an impact on the denunciation and prosecution of women basketball players. Indeed, the higher the level of education, the more freedom of expression and thought the individual should have. However, the data seem to confirm the weight of socio-cultural determinants in that, of the 66 female players with higher

education, 43 do not plan to press charges, and 46 are afraid to do so. Responses from the other levels of schooling follow the same pattern, with fewer complaints to be made and a high level of fear of doing so, with the exception of middle and secondary school, where 8 against 5 filed a complaint. However, the majority of high school players (12 out of 13) were afraid to lodge a complaint. In short, level of education does not have a significant effect on filing a lawsuit against the perpetrators of non-accidental violence.

## DISCUSSION

Non-accidental violence is a real problem in Senegal (UN Women, 2012; Sar, 2020; Fall, 2003). Kirby and Greaves (1997) have pointed out that sexual abuse and assault exist in Western countries such as Canada, England and elsewhere. The results of this survey show that sexual abuse and aggression are a reality in the Senegalese basketball sector. These forms of deviance are manifest. These include 7.9% harassment, 7.9% touching or fondling and 2.6% rape. These data are more or less similar to those of Jolly and Decamps (2006), who report that almost 8% of undergraduate and graduate STPSA (Science and Technology of Physical and Sports Activities) students have been sexually assaulted. In Senegal, such violence is perpetrated by people close to the victim, within the family environment (UN Women, 2012), but in women's basketball too, most of the perpetrators are individuals within the club ecosystem. With the exception of the very rarely announced doctor, these include the club president, the coach, other managers and partners. The omerta that characterizes sexual assault and abuse in Senegalese society (Fall, 2003) is also evident in women's basketball. Most players are afraid to talk about it, or fear prosecution, despite their willingness to do so. Silence is observed despite the fact that 56% of them have a high level of schooling, in the sense that they have attended an institution of higher education.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined non-accidental violence in women's basketball, a sensitive and taboo subject in Senegal. Its aim was to understand these deviant behaviors, their manifestations, the perpetrators and the reactions to be undertaken. From a dual perspective, the perceptions of women basketball players are analyzed, followed by real-life cases. The study reveals the existence of sexual abuse and aggression in this sub-sector of the sport. Inappropriate comments, harassment, fondling or touching and rape are all mentioned. These acts are caused by individuals in the sports club ecosystem (president, coach, partner, other manager). The young women recommend taking legal action or speaking out, but very few do. When they do talk about it, their preferred confidants are their friends and then their sisters. This issue deserves further investigation in other sporting disciplines, on the safeguard mechanisms and on the consequences of such acts in terms of the physical and mental health of the victims.

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