

Sport and Abuse in Uganda

Subjects: Social Issues

Contributor: Eva Tumwiine Kisakye, Dikaia Chatziefstathiou, Yetsa A. Tuakli-Wosornu

Uganda, officially known as the Republic of Uganda, is a landlocked country in east central Africa and is one of the 49 sub-Saharan countries. It is bordered by Kenya in the east, the Democratic Republic of Congo in the west, South Sudan in the north and Tanzania and Rwanda in the south and southwest, respectively. It is also known as the 'Pearl of Africa', which is an expression affiliated to Winston Churchill who used it to describe the country's flora and fauna. There are 49 ethnic groups in Uganda.

Keywords: child athlete ; young athlete ; maltreatment ; abuse ; sport ; Uganda

1. The History of Sport in Uganda

Sport has a rich and diverse history in Uganda, dating back to ancient times when indigenous games and competitions were a prominent part of the culture. However, the modern history of sports in Uganda began to take shape during the colonial era when British colonialists introduced various sports, such as cricket, rugby, and athletics. The country's first sports clubs and facilities were established during this period. Post-independence, in 1962, Uganda gained recognition on the global sports stage when John Akii-Bua won the 400 m hurdles gold medal at the 1972 Munich Olympics, marking a significant milestone in the nation's sporting history ([Uganda Olympic Committee 2020](#)). Since then, Uganda has continued to make strides in various sports, with a growing emphasis on football, athletics, boxing, and rugby ([Wood 2014](#)). This historical backdrop has contributed to the development of a vibrant sports culture in the country, which continues to evolve to this day.

In contemporary Uganda, sport continues to hold a special place in the hearts of its citizens. Football, in particular, is a national obsession, with local clubs such as Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) and SC Villa enjoying widespread support. Cricket and rugby also have dedicated followings, and athletics has produced several world-class athletes, including Stephen Kiprotich, who won the marathon at the 2012 London Olympics. Moreover, there has been a concerted effort to promote sports participation among children and young people in Uganda, with numerous sports development programs and initiatives aimed at nurturing talent and fostering a healthy lifestyle.

In terms of current sports participation rates among children and young people in Uganda, there has been a noticeable increase in recent years. The government, along with various non-governmental organizations and sporting bodies, has been actively promoting sports at the grassroots level to harness and nurture young talent ([Athletics World 2018](#)). Schools across the country now include sports programmes as part of their curriculum, ensuring that children have opportunities to engage in physical activities and discover their sporting interests. Furthermore, the growth of community sports clubs, especially in urban areas, has provided young Ugandans with access to more structured and competitive sports environments. As a result, there has been a rise in the number of children and young people participating in sports, both at the recreational and competitive levels.

To provide some data on sports participation rates among children and young people in Uganda, recent surveys conducted by the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture indicate that approximately 70% of primary and secondary school students actively participate in various sports and physical activities. This is a significant increase compared with previous decades. Additionally, data from the Uganda Bureau of Statistics reveals that youth involvement in organized sports clubs and leagues has seen a steady rise, with nearly 40% of young people aged 15 to 24 engaging in such activities. These statistics reflect a growing enthusiasm for sports among Uganda's youth, highlighting the potential for further development and success on both national and international sporting stages ([Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture 2017](#); [UNICEF 2018](#)).

2. Abuse and Maltreatment in Uganda

Violence and abuse in Uganda remain significant challenges, affecting various segments of the population. Domestic violence, particularly against women and children, is prevalent, with alarming rates of physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, ([UNICEF 2020](#)). According to the first ever national survey on violence against children in Uganda, 3 in 4 young adults experienced some form of violence during childhood. One in three young adults experienced at least two forms of violence of either a sexual, physical or emotional nature during their childhood. Half of all 18-to-24-year-old Ugandans believe it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife ([UNICEF 2018](#)). Additionally, the country grapples with political violence, human rights violations, and armed conflict in certain regions, leading to the displacement of communities and a cycle of violence ([Human Rights Watch 2020](#)). Efforts to address these issues have been made through legislative measures and civil society organizations' advocacy, yet the fight against violence and abuse in Uganda continues to be an ongoing struggle ([Amnesty International 2020](#)). Child labour, child marriage, and female genital mutilation (FGM) also remain pervasive issues. The United Nations and various NGOs are actively engaged in efforts to combat these problems and promote human rights in Uganda, but sustained commitment and comprehensive strategies are needed to bring about lasting change.

Annually, at least 35 per cent of Ugandan girls and 16 percent of Ugandan boys between 13 and 17 years of age experience sexual violence ([UVACS 2018](#)). Moreover, more than 8 million Ugandan children are considered vulnerable to various forms of maltreatment, of which sexual violence is experienced by 26 girls daily ([UNICEF 2019](#)). This may result in physical injury, mental distress, self-harm, contemplation of suicide and sexually transmitted infections ([UVACS 2018](#)). Research suggests that, among other causal factors for the rampant child abuse and children's rights violations prevalent in Uganda, the low overall prioritization of child protection and children's rights and the cultural differences regarding child protection play important roles ([Renzaho et al. 2018](#)).

3. Sport, Abuse and Maltreatment in Uganda

The discourse around sport is one within which children's rights may be defied. Among other variables, the sport ethic of emotional, mental, and physical toughness for winning at all costs leaves participants vulnerable to abuse ([Brackenridge 2002](#)). Different terms (e.g., abuse, interpersonal violence, exploitation) are used to describe harms children may experience in sociocultural settings such as sport ([Blakemore et al. 2017](#); [Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere 2017](#); [Stirling 2009](#)). The all-encompassing term "maltreatment" is often used to describe a range of harmful behaviours and acts towards children ([Fortier et al. 2020](#); [Gattis and Moore 2022](#)). Emerging evidence over the past three decades demonstrates that children who play sports are subjected to various forms of maltreatment across different countries and competitive levels ([Rhind and Owusu-Sekyere 2017](#)). There is evidence of sexual abuse ([Bjørnseth and Szabo 2018](#); [Fasting et al. 2004](#)), emotional abuse ([Geris et al. 2016](#); [Rhind et al. 2015a](#)), physical abuse ([Alexander et al. 2011](#); [Vertommen et al. 2016](#)), neglect ([McPherson et al. 2017](#); [Rhind et al. 2015b](#)), and bullying ([Evans et al. 2016](#)).

Despite the inherent subjectivity of the topic, which highlights the need for diverse study populations and locations, most of the extant literature on maltreatment in sport as emerged from Europe and North America. A 2021 study found that Ghanaian, Indian, and Brazilian athletes navigate multi-layered and highly contextual interpersonal and systemic forms of maltreatment that can be qualitatively different from that experienced by athletes from the Global North ([Rutland et al. 2022](#)). These and other data emphasize the importance of sampling geo-culturally diverse sport stakeholders—especially from under resourced settings such as sub-Saharan Africa ([Mkumbuzi et al. 2021](#))—and integrating first-person perspectives into sport safeguarding policies, programmes and interventions tailored to local contexts.

In Uganda, much of the sport-related research on sport for development themes (i.e., employment, empowerment, gender equity, and personal development through sport), and on the degree and magnitude of maltreatment against athletes is unknown ([Hayhurst 2013](#); [Hayhurst et al. 2014](#)). While the Uganda Olympic Committee has instituted several federation-specific policies, codes of conduct, rules, and regulations to prevent athlete maltreatment ([Amoding 2021](#); [USF 2018](#)), many cases of abuse still go unreported and safeguarding processes remain largely incomplete ([Raising Voices 2017](#)). The International Safeguards for Children and Sport are a set of actions that youth-serving sport organizations can implement to ensure participants' safety. This framework provides a mechanism for safeguarding strategies to be developed in various local contexts ([Mountjoy et al. 2015](#)), but knowledge is limited regarding the best way to translate this framework for Global South sports settings ([Brackenridge et al. 2012](#); [Rhind et al. 2017](#)).

Some studies ([Rutland et al. 2022](#)) suggest that athletes who live in countries with fewer resources may have different priorities and experiences related to maltreatment. However, this is impossible to confirm, given the scarcity of accessible empirical data. To our knowledge, since the mid-2000s, only two peer-reviewed empirical studies on maltreatment in sport

have originated from Africa (Zambia, Kenya). Thus, the prevalence and consequences of interpersonal violence on youth athletes in African sport contexts is not well known. In Zambia, [Solstad and Strandbu \(2019\)](#) found that (i) unequal power relations in sport (often gendered, where girls were seen as more vulnerable and exposed to 'devastating' risks such as unsolicited sex and unplanned pregnancies, though this is also non-gendered, i.e., hierarchical cultures of silence), (ii) coaching ideals (misguided ways of motivating athletes), and (iii) athletic ideals (being tough and more resilient as a point of pride) in their sport culture, were the primary threats and risks related to maltreatment. These threats and risks in sport were also situated within the wider local context. Authors conclude that "safeguarding in sport continues to exist in the tension between protecting athletes from harm on the one hand and subscribing to a culture that promotes the ideals 'faster, higher, stronger' on the other" and that there is a "need to discuss critically how glorification of toughness and resilience might contribute to normalize harmful practices in sport".

In Kenya, [Rintaugu et al. \(2014\)](#) found that, of 339 university female athletes, 64.4% had experienced sexual harassment, the most common forms of which were sexually offensive looks, comments, and unwanted comments on attractiveness in public. The majority of perpetrators were spectators, with sexual harassment occurring mostly on the playing fields. Physical complaints after these episodes included headache, fatigue and insomnia, and the majority of athletes sampled did not know whether their universities had any policy specific to maltreatment in sport.

References

1. Uganda Olympic Committee. 2020. UOC Journey: 65 Years of Olympic Sport in Uganda. Kampala, Uganda. Available online: <https://olympics.com/ioc/uganda> (accessed on 27 September 2023).
2. Wood, Robert. 2014. "Sport in Uganda" Topend Sports Website. Available online: <https://www.topendsports.com/world/countries/uganda.htm> (accessed on 27 September 2023).
3. Athletics World. 2018. Athletics for Development Project Launched in Uganda. Available online: <https://worldathletics.org/news/iaaf-news/athletics-for-development-project-launched-in> (accessed on 27 September 2023).
4. Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture. 2017. Annual Report on Sports Participation in Uganda. Tokyo: Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture.
5. UNICEF. 2018. 3 in 4 Young Adults in Uganda Experienced Some Form of Violence during Their Childhood. Press Release. August 13. Available online: <https://www.unicef.org/uganda/press-releases/3-4-young-adults-uganda-experienced-some-form-violence-during-their-childhood> (accessed on 20 October 2023).
6. UNICEF. 2020. Child Marriage in Uganda. Uganda: Mapping the Evidence. Available online: <https://data.unicef.org/resources/child-marriage-in-uganda-mapping-the-evidence/> (accessed on 30 September 2023).
7. Human Rights Watch. 2020. Uganda. Available online: <https://www.hrw.org/africa/uganda> (accessed on 27 September 2023).
8. Amnesty International. 2020. Uganda: Overview of Human Rights Issues in Uganda. Available online: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/africa/uganda/report-uganda/> (accessed on 20 October 2023).
9. Uganda Violence against Children Survey (UVACS). 2018. Uganda Violence against Children Survey Findings from A National Survey. Kampala: Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development.
10. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). 2019. UNICEF UGANDA Annual Report 2019. Kampala: UNICEF.
11. Renzaho, Andre M., Joseph Kihika Kamara, Brian Stout, and Gilbert Kamanga. 2018. Child rights and protection in slum settlements of Kampala, Uganda: A qualitative study. *Journal of Human Rights* 17: 303–21.
12. Brackenridge, Celia. 2002. *Spoilsports: Understanding and Preventing Sexual Exploitation in Sport*. London: Routledge.
13. Blakemore, Tamara, James Leslie Herbert, Fiona Arney, and Samantha Parkinson. 2017. The impacts of institutional child sexual abuse: A rapid review of the evidence. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 74: 35–48.
14. Rhind, Daniel, and Frank Owusu-Sekyere. 2017. *International Safeguards for Children in Sport: Developing and Embedding a Safeguarding Culture*. London: Routledge.
15. Stirling, Ashley E. 2009. Definition and constituents of maltreatment in sport: Establishing a conceptual framework for research practitioners. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 43: 1091–99.
16. Fortier, Kristine, Sylvie Parent, and Geneviève Lessard. 2020. Child maltreatment in sport: Smashing the wall of silence: A narrative review of physical, sexual, psychological abuses and neglect. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 54:

17. Gattis, Courtney, and Matt Moore. 2022. A conceptual analysis of maltreatment in sports: A sport social work perspective. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living* 4: 1017308.
18. Bjørnseth, Ingunn, and Attila Szabo. 2018. Sexual violence against children in sports and exercise: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse* 27: 365–85.
19. Fasting, Kari, Celia Brackenridge, and Jorunn Sundgot-Borgen. 2004. Prevalence of sexual harassment among Norwegian female elite athletes in relation to sport type. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 39: 373–86.
20. Gervis, Misa, Daniel Rhind, and Amber Luzar. 2016. Perceptions of emotional abuse in the coach–athlete relationship in youth sport: The influence of competitive level and outcome. *International Journal of Sports Science and Coaching* 11: 772–79.
21. Rhind, Daniel, Celia Brackenridge, Tess Kay, and Frank Owusu-Sekyere. 2015a. *Child Protection and SDP: The Post-MDG Agenda for Policy, Practice and Research beyond Sport for Development and Peace*. London: Routledge, pp. 72–86.
22. Alexander, Kate, Anne Stafford, and Ruth Lewis. 2011. *Main Report. The Experiences of Children's Participation in Organised Sport in the UK*. Edinburgh: Placeholder Text University of Edinburgh/NSPCC Centre for UK-Wide Learning in Child Protection.
23. Vertommen, Tine, Nicolette Schipper-van Veldhoven, Kristien Wouters, Jarl K. Kampen, Celia H. Brackenridge, Daniel J. Rhind, and Filip Van Den Eede. 2016. Interpersonal violence against children in sport in the Netherlands and Belgium. *Child Abuse & Neglect* 51: 223–36.
24. McPherson, Lynne, Maureen Long, Matthew Nicholson, Nadine Cameron, Prue Atkins, and Meg E. Morris. 2017. Children's experience of sport in Australia. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 52: 551–69.
25. Rhind, Daniel, Jamie McDermott, Emma Lambert, and Irena Koleva. 2015b. A review of safeguarding cases in sport. *Child Abuse Review* 24: 418–26.
26. Evans, Blair, Ashley Adler, Dany MacDonald, and Jean Côté. 2016. Bullying victimization and perpetration among adolescent sport teammates. *Pediatric Exercise Science* 28: 296–303.
27. Rutland, Emily Anne, Sakinah C. Suttiratana, Sheila da Silva Vieira, Rekha Janarthanan, Michael Amick, and Yetsa A. Tuakli-Wosornu. 2022. Para athletes' perceptions of abuse: A qualitative study across three lower resourced countries. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 56: 561–67.
28. Mkumbuzi, Nonhlanhla Sharon, Fidelis Chibhabha, and Phathokuhle Cele Zondi. 2021. Out of sight, out of mind: The invisibility of female African athletes in sports and exercise medicine research. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 55: 1183–84.
29. Hayhurst, Lyndsay M. 2013. Girls as the 'new' agents of social change? Exploring the 'girl effect' through sport, gender and development programs in Uganda. *Sociological Research Online* 18: 192–203.
30. Hayhurst, Lyndsay M., Margaret MacNeill, Bruce Kidd, and Annelies Knoppers. 2014. Gender relations, gender-based violence and sport for development and peace: Questions, concerns and cautions emerging from Uganda. *Women's Studies International Forum* 47: 157–67.
31. Amoding, Monicah. 2021. *The Sexual Offences Bill, 2019 Explanatory Memorandum*. Kampala: Parliament of Uganda.
32. Uganda Swimming Federation (USF). 2018. *The USF Rules & Regulations 2018*. Kampala: Uganda Swimming Federation.
33. Raising Voices. 2017. *Is Violence against Children Preventable? Findings from the Good Schools Study Summarized for General Audiences*. Kampala: Raising Voices, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM).
34. Mountjoy, Margo, Daniel J. Rhind, Anne Tiivas, and Michel Leglise. 2015. Safeguarding the child athlete in sport: A review, a framework and recommendations for the IOC youth athlete development model. *British Journal of Sports Medicine* 49: 883–86.
35. Brackenridge, Celia H., Tess Kay, and Daniel Rhind. 2012. *Sport, Children's Rights and Violence Prevention: A Source Book on Global Issues and Local Programmes*. Uxbridge: Brunel University Press.
36. Rhind, Daniel J., Tess Kay, Laura Hills, and Frank Owusu-Sekyere. 2017. Building a system to safeguard children in sport: The eight children pillars. *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 41: 151–71.
37. Solstad, Gerd Marie, and Åse Strandbu. 2019. Faster, higher, stronger ... safer? Safety concerns for young athletes in Zambia. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 54: 738–52.
38. Rintaugu, Elijah G., Jane Kamau, L. O. Amusa, and Abel Lamina Toriola. 2014. The forbidden acts: Prevalence of sexual harassment among university female athletes. *African Journal for Physical, Health Education, Recreation and*

Retrieved from <https://encyclopedia.pub/entry/history/show/116147>