

DO DISCOURSE STUDIES MATTER WITH REGARD TO PROTECT MINORS AGAINST VIOLENCE IN SPORT?

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Abstract

The research topic refers to issues regarding child's abuse and violence in sports. The article argues that discourse can be viewed as a tool to protect minors' against sexual violence in sports.

The research materials included international and national legislation, academic papers on the mentioned challenge, mass media coverage of the cases under study, examples of practical toolkits that are designed for those who engage in child protection.

Comparative analysis of various types of texts and the language they use confirmed the hypothesis and laid to the conclusion on social importance of discourse studies within the context under study.

The analysis paves the way to further consideration of methodology and materials to identify and produce discursive models that would meet the societal agenda on child's protection from violence and abuse.

Keywords: discourse, violence, sport, sexual abuse, minors.

1 INTRODUCTION

The modern worldviews sport as a critical phenomenon within social, political, economic, and cultural life across nations. It influences the vision of international politics, ideology, and human interaction across nations.

However, international organizations (International Olympic Committee -<https://www.olympic.org/sha>, Council of Europe - <https://www.coe.int/en/web/sport/start> -to-talk), academic community, Russian and foreign social media have noted such a negative phenomenon as violence against minors in sports.

The present paper states that it is high time to draw attention of specialists in the field of verbal communication, since the phenomenon of sports is present in the processes of modern social and intercultural communication, reflects different contexts of verbal interaction of people with different social status in society as a whole, and sports, in particular.

The research hypothesis is the following: discourse can be viewed as a tool to protect minors' against sexual violence in sports.

The paper goal is to prove the current importance of the proposed research topic from the angle of the international, regional and domestic (Russian) legislation.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research material included research articles on the topic under study, examples of texts of international and national legislations, extracts from mass media coverage of the cases and discussions related to minors' sexual abuse in sports.

The research methodology follows the tradition of review approach to materials study and comparative approach to their analysis.

The first stage of analysis included theoretical analysis of relevant literature.

Further legislation texts related to the research object were explored.

Next, publications in mass media became subject to consideration.

The analysis was conducted from the angle of the mentioned types of texts impact on parents' and their children awareness of the potential risks of sexual abuse in sport.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discourse studies regarding minors' protection from violence have consistently drawn researchers' attention (Gordon, 1997). The phenomenon is studied from various angles, including psychology (Kerr, Stirling 2018), pedagogy (McMahon et al 2018), ethnography of education (Bittner, Wittfeld, 2018), sociology of gender (Lang, et al 2018), theory of power (Silva, 2018), sexology (Johansson, 2018).

Researchers use narratives of sexual abuse victims to explore the conditions and settings that result in further abuse (Fasting, Sand, 2015). Scholars underline different contexts including peers' abuse in sports and sexual relations between an athlete and a coach (Johansson, et al 2016).

Latest research of the situation confirms that there is high level of explicit or implicit sexual violence against children in sports with both genders being affected; the risk of sexual abuse by a coach increases with the level of the competition, minority group representatives become victims more often, fellow athletes perpetrate as often as coaches, those abused fear any disclosure of sexual violence due to possible subjective vision of the situation (Bjørnseth, Szabo, 2018).

Specific attention is drawn to measures and policies to prevent minors' sexual abuse in sport (Bates, Army, 2015, Parent, Demers, 2010).

A considerable number of papers focuses on behavioural issues and argues for "no-touch" behaviour of coaches and teachers engaged in minors' education and training. This aspect is considered within the framework of children's rights, their protection and safety.

Scholars underline the role of language that can affect children (Risner, 2005) and argue that children should be protected from speech that damage their mentality and psychology (Etzioni, 2004).

However, researchers agree that there is empirical and ethical disjuncture between humanitarian discourses and practices (Giulianotti, 2004). Thus, C. Brackenridge, one of the well-known researchers of the topic of sexual violence in sports agrees that the "power of discourse is undeniable" (Brackenridge, 2002)

Nevertheless, in general, research papers do not focus on language/ discourse issues while considering the challenge of minors' sexual abuse in sports and consider the matter within extra linguistic social or scientific contexts using appropriate discourse models that are typical for the respective domains of communication.

There is international legislation in force that covers issues related to child sexual abuse in sport.

First, the UNO Convention on the Rights of the Child should be mentioned. As far as the Council of Europe is concerned, the Lanzarote Convention (2007) can be set as example. Its provisions can be applied to cases of minors' abuse in sports though it does not mention the issue under study explicitly. The discourse of the mentioned document is typical for legislative documents models where prescriptive dominance is obvious (Tiersma, Solan, 2012). The above dominance is verbalised through *shall + infinitive* structure, the sequence of infinitives to list actions, verbs in present simple tense to define agreed consolidated positions of the State Parties to the Conventions.

Regarding the national legislation, it is possible to state that they either focus directly on child protection from sexual abuse in sports or contain more generalised provisions that allow to the law enforcement and judicial authorities to prosecute perpetrators. Thus, in the USA the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act has been adopted. It specifies legal measures and administrative measures to

enhance children's safety in sports. The discourse models follow the respective genre traditions and include the speech patterns with subject + shall (shall not) + semantic verb while identifying legal measures for specific settings. The documents discourse models follow the genre traditions that are typical for laws wording.

The provisions of the UK Sexual Offences Act (2003) assume the punishment of those who commit child sexual abuse in sport, among other settings. The text of the document differs from the above-mentioned USA law. The UK Act bears more interpretative nature describing possible settings, conditions, actors, their deeds and consequences thereof. The verbs are mostly used in present simple; the nouns identify types of offences, key actors, types of procedure and punishment from the legal point of view (a child, a person, a defendant, family members, spouse, civil partner, summary conviction, conviction on indictment, imprisonment, etc.).

The Russian legislation on the issue included the Criminal and Criminal procedural Codes and follow the style of the above mentioned UK law.

In general, the discourse of legal documents that aim to prevent minors' sexual abuse in sports follows the tradition of legislation language patterns that are important for normative development of national language and speech. However, the wording can hardly be perceived by children in terms of their awareness of sexual abuse risk in sport settings.

Regarding the mass media coverage of cases, related to child's sexual abuse in sports it is possible to agree with those authors who mention that the respective discourse tends to sensationalise the event (Ducat et al 2009). Scholars identify breaking news style (Dorfman, et al 2012) and "staging" effects in mass media coverage of the cases under study that are deemed to attract public attention to alarming situation in the fields. Subjective interpretations and contextual ambiguity also take place (Collings, 2002a, 2002b). Generally, mass media tend to commercialise the respective stories through victimhood, fear, to have readers enhance their emotions.

Some examples of mass media headlines follow:

"Is Your Daughter's Coach a Sexual Predator? Men Coaching Girls A Special Problem?"

(source: <https://www.momsteam.com/health-safety/sexual-abuse/girls/is-your-daughters-coach-a-sexual-predator>)

- Penn State Scandal Fast Facts

(source: <https://edition.cnn.com/2013/10/28/us/penn-state-scandal-fast-facts/index.html>)

- CONGRESS'S FORGOTTEN PEDOPHILE. Former Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert was a celebrated politician — and a serial child molester.

(source: <https://theoutline.com/post/2500/dennis-hastert-congress-forgotten-pedophile?zd=1&zi=fo5rhkro>)

Questions of prevention and awareness raising, especially among children and not only their parents, tend to be second if not last in the coverage (Mejia et al 2012).

Within the above-mentioned framework, the importance of public activities that aim to raise awareness really matters. At the international level, the 2018 campaign of the Council of Europe "Start to talk" can be set as an example. Other initiatives include the EU-COE joint project "Pro Safe Sport" (PSS, 2014-2015), Pro Safe Sport + (PSS+2017).

The practical importance of the materials developed within the mentioned initiatives is due to their clear recommendations to those who engage in preventing the challenge under study. Moreover, the materials include verbal-visual presentations of the situations that explain to minors what settings and behaviours can lead to sexual abuse (visit the above sites to view videos).

Language models that explicitly talk about possible signs of negative consequences express the above sources of information. They bear clear message in terms of semantics and wordings direct meaning. All these features contribute to minors' raising awareness.

However, there are very little materials of this kind. Meanwhile, the development of verbal-visual sources for minors to help them understand that there is something wrong with their peers and coach's actions seems to be critical. Discourse matters would play a crucial role in the process of such material development as the language models used in communication flow should be very carefully selected to reach the target audience's minds and feelings.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The research results lead to the conclusion that the topic under study responds to the UNO 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The issues of language use within the actions aimed to protect children from sexual abuse in sports correlate with the above Agenda's Goals. Discourse can be viewed as a tool to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages (Goal 3), to achieve gender equality (Goal 5).

Moreover, the language issues considered for awareness raising process regarding child's protection from sexual abuse in sports contributes to the implementation of Goal 16 (Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels).

The proposed angle of studies also matches the current agenda of the Council of Europe, including the "Start to Talk" initiative (2018) and Pro Safe Sport projects in 2014 and 2017.

All the above confirms the research hypothesis about the potential of discourse for child protection against sexual abuse in sports. Therefore, further research should focus on concrete language models that those responsible for child's safety can use efficiently in their communication with minors.

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