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VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY COACHES IN WOMEN'S FUTSAL[1]

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Abstract
This study aimed to identify instances of violence perpetrated by coaches in the narratives of female futsal athletes. This is a qualitative study, with data collected through semi-structured interviews with six athletes residing in Juiz de Fora/MG, Brazil. The analysis was conducted using thematic content analysis. The results showed that all participants reported experiencing or witnessing some type of violence in the sporting context, characterized as gender-based violence, symbolic violence, moral harassment, neglect, psychological violence, and physical violence. The normalization of these violent practices was observed, as well as a lack of literacy among the athletes regarding violence in sports. It is recommended to promote training programs focused on the prevention and confrontation of gender-based violence in sports, for both athletes and coaches, contributing to the construction of more ethical, safe, and inclusive sporting environments.
Keywords: Violence in sports; Gender violence; Futsal; Coaches; Women athletes.

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1. Introduction

In the social and media imagination, Brazil is frequently presented as the "country of football," a label repeatedly disseminated on the international stage as one of the main metaphors of national identity. Nevertheless, this association coexists with the fact that football constitutes a cultural phenomenon of global scale. Even so, this widely celebrated cultural practice has not historically been an equally accessible space for everyone, since football was marked by strong gender boundaries and consolidated as a territory of masculinity. In the Brazilian case, this gender hierarchy was also institutionalized through policies and legal instruments that restricted women's participation in sport.

Decree-Law No. 3,199, of April 14, 1941, created the National Sports Council (CND) and was part of the set of measures of the Estado Novo aimed at organizing and centralizing sporting practices in the country. Among its main provisions, it established the CND as the body responsible for guiding, regulating, and overseeing sport in Brazil; setting guidelines for the organization of sporting entities; and granting the council the power to regulate sports modalities and practices. In Article 54, the decree determined that "women shall not be permitted to practice sports incompatible with the conditions of their nature" (Brazil, 1941). However, the text did not specify which modalities would be considered incompatible, delegating to the CND the responsibility of regulating this definition at a later time.

According to Bonfim (2019), at the time football played by women was considered an inadvisable, violent sport, incompatible with the so-called "feminine nature," which is why its practice was banned. This conception, anchored in the moral and scientific values of the period, sustained the prohibition of women's participation in football in Brazil for almost four decades. Later, in 1965, a ruling by the National Sports Council (CND) reaffirmed this restriction by listing modalities forbidden to women, among them football, futsal (then called futebol de salão), water polo, and rugby.

Historically constituted as a space crossed by representations of masculinity,

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football consolidated values and cultural codes that were also incorporated by derivative modalities, such as futsal, which spread in Brazil from the 1950s onward. In this context, women's presence in football-related practices was marked, for decades, by social and institutional restrictions that sought to control their participation in sport.

Even so, even at the risk of legal punishment, including the possibility of imprisonment for taking part in matches (Carvalho; Prado, 2023), many women persisted in playing the game. In different contexts, futsal was mobilized as a strategy to get around the barriers imposed on women's participation. Thus, far from a passive position, they pushed back against the prevailing norms and maintained ties with the football universe, even if through informal circuits, throughout the nearly four decades in which such restrictions remained in force (Nascimento, 2020).

Only with the repeal of these restrictions in the late 1970s did the possibilities for women's involvement in football-related practices expand, favoring, in the following decades, the growth and greater visibility of the modality in the country.

Futsal[2], present today on neighborhood courts, in clubs, schools, and universities, is one of the most widely played sports in the country (Kessler, 2015; Marques; Marchi Júnior, 2019), and, driven by the achievements of men and women in continental and world competitions, the modality is undergoing a growing process of media recognition and professionalization in the country.

However, women still face the consequences of the long period in which their participation in football-related practices was banned, as well as the patriarchal structures historically rooted in the sporting field: underfunded leagues, limited access to adequate training facilities, pay disparities, and recurring cases of harassment and abuse.

Such asymmetries also manifest at the institutional level. FIFA (the International Federation of Football), responsible for organizing the main

[2]In 1990, under new FIFA (International Federation of Football) guidelines, futebol de salão underwent some changes and came to be recognized as futsal.

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international men's futsal competitions since the 1990s, only officially recognized the modality for women in 2015. The first Women's Futsal World Cup organized by the entity took place only in 2025, highlighting the belated institutionalization process of the modality. Despite this history of marginalization and the challenges that remain, the Brazilian national team won the title of the competition, a result that reaffirms the country's sporting relevance on the international stage.

The restrictions historically imposed on women's participation in certain bodily practices were frequently justified by biological-scientific arguments that took the anatomy of bodies as a social destiny. From this biologicist perspective, bodily differences between men and women were mobilized to legitimize social inequalities and to delimit the spaces considered appropriate for each sex (Goellner, 2013).

This conception contributed to the construction of gender identities based on socially expected behaviors, in which gender was supposed to correspond rigidly to the sex assigned at birth (Oliveira, 2014). This logic rests on a binary model that opposes categories such as male/female and man/woman, producing a simplified and exclusionary reading of identities.

As Scott (1995) points out, gender binarism tends to render invisible the multiple forms of identification and experience of subjects, restricting the understanding of the diversities and plurality that constitute being and existing in the world. In this sense, the social production of gender differences operates as a mechanism of hierarchization and normalization of identities, and, as Louro (2001) argues, the social organization of gender is anchored in a matrix of intelligibility that establishes normative expectations regarding bodies and behaviors.

This formulation is in dialogue with the contributions of Butler (2003), for whom genders are produced and reiterated through discursive and performative practices that regulate the intelligibility of subjects. Therefore, women are expected to perform femininity and conform to heteronormative standards that presuppose coherence among biological sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. As Seffner (2013) summarizes, this normative regime naturalizes the correspondence between being born male or female, becoming a man or a woman, and expressing affective-sexual

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desire for the opposite sex.

Heteronormativity, in this sense, acts as a device that regulates identities, producing classifications that associate femininity with the heterosexual woman and masculinity with the heterosexual man (Oliveira, 2014). As a consequence, subjects who do not fit into this alignment among sex, gender, and sexuality become targets of social, symbolic, and institutional sanctions. In the sporting field, such mechanisms contribute to processes of exclusion, surveillance, and marginalization of women who challenge the normative standards of femininity and sexuality (Knijnik, 2006).

Based on this matrix of intelligibility, it can be observed that gender norms operate as mechanisms of surveillance and regulation of identities in the sporting context as well. Just as boys who do not practice certain modalities may have their masculinity questioned by their peers, girls who take part in sports historically associated with the male universe frequently have their sexuality placed under suspicion. In this scenario, the relationships established between coaches and athletes constitute a space crossed by hierarchies and power asymmetries.

In the sporting field, such hierarchies are reinforced by institutional and symbolic structures that have historically privileged masculinity as the normative reference for performance and authority. As Connell (1995) argues, hegemonic masculinity organizes social relations that tend to subordinate other forms of masculinity and, above all, femininity. In this context, sporting practices can function as privileged arenas for the reproduction of these hierarchies. Furthermore, as Bourdieu (2010) points out, social relations marked by power asymmetries can produce forms of symbolic violence, often naturalized by the very subjects involved. In the sporting environment, this dynamic can manifest itself in the relationship between coaches and athletes, especially when technical and institutional authority combines with gender and age inequalities.

As Messner (1992) highlights, modern sport was historically structured as a space for the affirmation of masculinity, which contributes to the reproduction of practices of control, discipline, and, at times, violence against bodies that challenge dominant gender norms. Problematizing the coach-athlete relationship, therefore,

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implies recognizing how such asymmetries can favor the occurrence of different forms of symbolic, psychological, physical, and sexual violence that particularly affect female athletes. Such practices, often silenced or naturalized within sporting institutions, reveal how power relations structure experiences of vulnerability and exclusion in sport.

In recent decades, international studies have increasingly shown the occurrence of different forms of violence in elite sport, especially within the relationships between coaches and athletes (Stirling; Kerr, 2009; Hartill et al., 2023). The power asymmetry characteristic of this relationship, marked by the athlete's strong dependence on the coach and by the extension of the coach's authority beyond training, constitutes an important risk factor for physical, sexual, and, above all, emotional abuse (Stirling; Kerr, 2013; Fournier; Parent; Paradis, 2021).

More recent research indicates that these dynamics can take the form of humiliation, intimidation, disproportionate punishment, exclusion, and other strategies of psychological and verbal control, often naturalized as part of the process of forming elite athletes (Strand, 2021; Lang et al., 2023).

Studies with European elite athletes indicate that experiences of psychological, physical, and sexual violence remain relatively widespread in organized sport, with particularly high rates of psychological violence and overlap between different types of victimization (Hartill et al., 2023; Ohlert et al., 2021). In line with this, international documents from the International Olympic Committee on harassment and abuse in sport emphasize that structural factors of elite sport, such as rigid hierarchies, relationships of dependency between athletes and coaches, and highly competitive, result-oriented sporting cultures, favor both the reproduction and the invisibilization of these practices (Mountjoy et al., 2016).

However, qualitative studies focused on the Brazilian context, particularly on women's futsal at non-professional levels, especially regarding situations of abuse, harassment, and other forms of violence against women in the sporting context, are still relatively scarce. In this sense, this research engages with a legitimate gap in the field.

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This gap is particularly significant given the centrality that such relationships assume in the organization of sporting practices and in athlete development. At the same time, recurring episodes reported by the media have highlighted the existence of a problem that remains little investigated in the academic field, and insufficiently made visible and reported within sporting institutions (Alves, 2024).

According to the Yves de Roussan Center for the Defense of Children and Adolescents (CEDECA) (2014, p. 41), "[...] for fear of stigma and of losing their big chance in football, many victims take refuge in silence," and when they do report it, "[...] the punishment of the guilty still runs up against deeply rooted prejudices, or even a perverse logic that places part of the responsibility for the violence committed against them on the victims themselves." That said, cases of harassment, abuse, situations of exploitation, and violence within the world of futsal are still underreported.

Considering that it is mainly elite female athletes who are at greater risk of being abused, harassed, and sexually exploited by their coaches and members of the coaching staff (Lang et al., 2023), most research addressing abusive relationships between coaches and athletes focuses on athletes who have already competed at the elite level. On the other hand, it fails to consider the accounts, experiences, and lived realities of other athletes who make up the base of the sport's pyramid, concentrating the largest number of practitioners spread across school and university sport, as well as amateur practice.

In light of this, the present study addresses this gap in the research by considering it necessary to hear and make visible the discourse of women who practice futsal regarding the violence committed by their coaches throughout their sporting trajectory. To that end, the study seeks to identify how different forms of violence are experienced or normalized within the power relations between coaches and athletes.

2. Methodological procedures

This study is situated within the field of qualitative approaches, guided by the

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interpretation of social realities and the meanings produced by subjects within their contexts of interaction (Bauer; Gaskell; Allum, 2008). From this perspective, priority is given to an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, attending to symbolic, relational, and contextual dimensions that cannot be captured by measurement procedures alone (Minayo, 2009). Methodologically, the investigation focuses on the analysis of social microprocesses, carrying out an intensive reading of the empirical material and articulating it with the plurality of theoretical-methodological perspectives that characterize the contemporary field of qualitative studies (Martins, 2004).

The research was carried out with six women futsal athletes over 18 years of age, who had taken part in the modality at different competitive levels, intentionally selected, residing in the city of Juiz de Fora, Minas Gerais. All participants had relevant trajectories in futsal, considered significant for understanding the phenomenon investigated. The selection of interviewees was intentional, given their experience and involvement in the modality, aspects that contributed to producing narratives relevant to the objectives of the research. The choice of a small number of participants is aligned with the qualitative perspective adopted, which favors in-depth analysis of the experiences and meanings attributed by the participants to their trajectories within their social contexts.

As inclusion criteria, participants had to be residents of the city of Juiz de Fora and have turned 18 at the time of signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF). As exclusion criteria, women who had been coached by the researcher, who had no prior experience with futsal, or who had not taken part in tournaments or competitions during childhood and/or youth were disregarded.

In order to preserve the participants' anonymity, their identities were replaced with alphanumeric codes (A1 to A6), in which the letter “A” refers to athlete and the number corresponds to the chronological order of participation in the research. The study was only carried out after approval by the Research Ethics Committee for Human Subjects of the Federal University of Juiz de Fora, under Certificate of Presentation for Ethical Appraisal (CAAE) No. 60579622.1.0000.5147, in

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accordance with Resolution 466/12. The participants read and signed the ICF virtually, agreeing to take part in the research voluntarily.

The interview script was drafted by the researchers, with the critical input of research methodology professors acting as judges and experienced members of the Study Group on Gender, Physical Education, Health and Society (GEFSS), and was built around three blocks. These blocks were structured from sets of questions that sought to explore different dimensions of the participants' experience in the sporting context.

This organization guided the approach to situations potentially related to violent practices present in the relationships between coaches and athletes, allowing us to identify how these experiences were perceived, interpreted, and narrated by the participants. These blocks addressed: i) these women's experiences with futsal (when they started in the sport, length of practice, experience with coaches); ii) instances of neglect, situations of violence or abuse; iii) the impact of coaches' behavior on their performance in training and games (situations potentially associated with violent practices).

The semi-structured interviews were conducted and recorded virtually, via video call, using the Google Meet communication service, between November (2022) and January (2023). The script was given to the participants together with a support document[3] prepared by the researchers. The interviews were transcribed verbatim. After transcription, each participant received a file containing her respective interview so that she could review the content, with the possibility of correcting her statement if she deemed it necessary. All six athletes ratified their statements.

The analysis of the empirical material was carried out through thematic Content Analysis, understood as a set of systematic analysis techniques that allows

[3]This support document was designed to guide the athletes regarding the concepts present in the interview questions about violence, neglect, moral and sexual harassment, and sexual abuse. It served as a literacy strategy for them and was based on official documents of the Brazilian Olympic Committee, namely: the “Policy for the Prevention and Confrontation of Violence, Harassment, and Abuse” (Comitê Olímpico do Brasil, 2021) and the Casebook, with Suggested Actions for Confrontation and Support (Instituto Olímpico Brasileiro, 2021).

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the identification, organization, and interpretation of meanings present in discourse, following the assumptions of Minayo (2012). Initially, a floating reading of the transcribed interviews was carried out, with the aim of grasping the whole of the narratives and identifying recurring elements related to the participants' experiences in the context of futsal. Next, a coding process was carried out, guided by the thematic blocks that structured the interview script, seeking to identify units of meaning associated with the relationships established between coaches and athletes and with possible situations of violence emerging in these contexts.

From this procedure, the three thematic blocks that organized the interview script (participants' experiences in futsal, accounts of situations of violence, neglect, abuse, or harassment, and the impacts of coaches' behavior on sporting performance) were used as initial analytical axes for building an a priori conceptual framework on practices of violence and abuse in coach-athlete relationships. These axes made it possible to problematize the participants' narratives, linking their individual experiences to broader dimensions of power dynamics and everyday practices present in the sporting context, allowing for a systematic interpretation of the meanings these women attributed to the situations they experienced throughout their trajectories in futsal.

Finally, the lead researcher of this study is also a futsal and football athlete and coach, and, acknowledging that such experience can contribute to the discussion, we chose to ground our work in autoethnography, given that it [...] “is one of the approaches that acknowledges and gives rise to subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on their work, rather than obscuring these issues or pretending they do not exist” (Ellis; Adams; Bochner, 2015, p. 252, our translation). At the same time as this methodological choice, we constantly questioned our own inferences, sought multiple perspectives in the literature, and mitigated possible biases, while upholding the ethical aspects of the research.

3. Analysis and discussion

The analysis of the interviews conducted with the six futsal athletes made it

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possible to identify different aspects that run through their sporting trajectories and the relationships established with coaches throughout their experiences in the modality. Based on the content analysis procedures used, the accounts were organized into three thematic axes that dialogue directly with the blocks that structured the interview script: i) the participants' trajectories in futsal; ii) accounts of situations of neglect, violence, abuse, or harassment in the sporting context; and iii) the impacts of coaches' behavior on sporting performance.

In this way, the analytical organization based on these axes made it possible to understand not only the events narrated by the participants, but also the meanings they attributed to the experiences lived in the sporting environment. In this process, the narratives revealed how the relationships established with coaches constitute a central element in shaping these women's experiences in futsal, influencing both their sporting trajectories and their perceptions of the training and competition environment.

In general, the testimonies show that the presence of practices potentially associated with forms of violence in sport is manifested not only in explicit episodes of harassment and abuse, but also in everyday dynamics marked by hierarchical relationships, power asymmetries, and naturalized behaviors in the sporting context. Thus, the analysis of the participants' statements made it possible to identify different ways in which such practices are experienced, perceived, and interpreted by the athletes, revealing tensions between processes of sports development, performance expectations, and forms of treatment adopted by coaches.

In the thematic axes that follow, the main elements that emerged from the interviews are presented and discussed, organized according to the three blocks defined in the analysis process.

a. Participants' trajectories in futsal

The athletes taking part in this research identified with the female gender and were between 19 and 29 years old, with an average age of 24. When asked about their ethnic/racial identification, they self-declared as white (A1, A2, A3, A4), Black

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(A5), and mixed-race/parda (A6). Regarding ethnic-racial identification, a predominance of white athletes can be observed among the research participants. Even though the group includes Black and mixed-race women, this distribution suggests that the processes of access to and permanence in institutionalized sport may be crossed by racial inequalities that reflect structural dynamics present in Brazilian society.

Regarding their introduction to sport, all participants reported having had their first contact with futsal or football in childhood. Noteworthy is the case of A1, who started playing at four years of age, although she only had her first coach at eight. A similar situation was observed with A4, who began playing futsal at eight in school Physical Education classes and started training under technical supervision at ten. A6, in turn, reported having started playing also in the school context, only gaining access to systematic training at 17, when she began to be guided by her first coach, a woman.

The time gap between first contact with the modality and the start of structured training under a coach is a recurring aspect in the literature on women's football and futsal. Studies indicate that many girls begin playing in informal settings, such as streets, public courts, backyards, or through interactions with family and friends (Kessler, 2010; Altmann; Reis, 2013; Costa et al., 2018; Novais, 2018). Moreover, they face difficulties in accessing institutionalized sporting spaces and structured training programs (Pires, 2018). These trajectories show that their entry into sport often occurs in contexts marked by lower institutionalization, which implies a later contact with the figure of the coach and, consequently, with the formal structures of sporting socialization.

On the other hand, participants A2, A3, and A5 reported having started in the modality already under a coach's supervision, at seven, eight, and eleven years of age, respectively. This diversity in the trajectories of entry into the sport suggests different forms of institutional mediation in these athletes' sporting development, which may influence both learning processes and the ways in which relationships of

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authority are built in the training environment.

Considering that this research is dedicated to analyzing the relationships established between the six participants and their coaches, it is relevant to gauge the timespan and the range of professionals who crossed their sporting trajectories. In this way, it was possible to identify approximately 45 coaches who, at different times, were involved in their development and performance in futsal. This set of relationships shows that the participants' sporting trajectories developed within a relatively wide network of coaches, which reinforces the importance of understanding how different leadership styles, ways of exercising authority, and conceptions of gender and sexuality may run through the interactions established in everyday training.

Considering these aspects, the literature has pointed out that social experiences are constituted by multiple markers that operate jointly, producing different positions of privilege and vulnerability. In this sense, the perspective of intersectionality proposed by Crenshaw (1989) and later developed by authors such as Collins (2019) and Akotirene (2019) highlights precisely that gender, race, and class do not operate in isolation, but are intertwined in the production of social experiences. In the sporting context, this approach makes it possible to understand that women's involvement in football and futsal is crossed not only by gender inequalities, but also by racial hierarchies that can influence opportunities for participation, visibility, recognition, and legitimacy (Martins; Silva; Vasquez, 2021).

Thus, even though racial relations are not the central focus of this investigation, the ethnic-racial diversity present among the participants highlights the importance of an intersectional reading to more broadly understand the social dynamics that run through football and futsal played by women.

Regarding the participants' sexual orientation, three athletes identified as bisexual (A4, A5, A6), two as lesbian (A1, A3), and one as heterosexual (A2). Thus, five of the six athletes interviewed are situated outside the heteronormative standard. Oliveira (2014) identified a predominance of lesbian and bisexual women among futsal and football practitioners, and similar results are pointed out by Mennesson

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and Clément (2003), Silveira (2008), and Rosa et al. (2020). These studies indicate that football and futsal played by women may constitute spaces of sociability marked by homosocial relations, in which the presence of lesbian and bisexual women is significant (Kessler, 2020).

However, it is important to distinguish between understanding these spaces as environments of sociability among women that challenge the heteronormative matrix, and the recurring stigmatizing association between playing football and homosexuality. As Altmann and Reis (2013, p. 223) argue, there persists a "[...] classification, or even the recurring suspicion, that women who play football are homosexual [...]." This association operates as a discursive strategy that seeks to regulate both gender and sexuality simultaneously, marking football as a practice that challenges traditional expectations of femininity. In this sense, the strong presence of athletes who identify outside the heterosexual norm cannot be interpreted as a causal relationship with the sporting practice itself, but rather as an element that reveals the complexity of the dynamics of belonging, recognition, and resistance present in these spaces. This discussion becomes particularly relevant when considered within the scope of relationships established with coaches.

Sports training is crossed by relations of power and authority that have historically been structured from masculine and heteronormative references. Thus, the coexistence between athletes with diverse identities and sexual orientations and professionals responsible for conducting training can produce tensions, negotiations, and different forms of recognition or invisibilization of these identities in everyday sporting life. In this context, understanding who these athletes are and what social and identity trajectories run through their experiences contributes to a more in-depth analysis of the relational dynamics established within teams.

Finally, it is worth noting that most of our interviewees hold a degree in, or are currently studying, Physical Education, and half of them work professionally as futsal and/or football coaches (A2, A3, A5), an aspect that deserves attention. This condition reflects a pattern of these women remaining in the sporting field beyond the position of athlete, going on to occupy spaces of technical direction and team

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formation as well. In modalities historically marked by male predominance, such as football and futsal, the presence of women in leadership roles is still relatively limited, which makes these trajectories particularly significant.

In this sense, the transition from the position of athlete to the role of coach can produce important shifts in the ways these women perceive and interpret the relationships established in the sporting environment. By experiencing both the position of receiving guidance and that of exercising technical authority, these participants come to occupy distinct places within the power dynamics that structure the sporting field. This experience can foster a more critical reading of naturalized practices in the relationships between coaches and athletes, including behaviors that are often legitimized in the name of discipline, performance, or athlete development.

Thus, the presence of interviewees who also work as coaches broadens the analytical possibilities of the research, since their narratives are shaped not only by the experiences lived as athletes, but also by the reflections stemming from their professional work in sport. This double belonging to the sporting field helps to problematize the ways in which practices of authority, care, neglect, or violence are produced, perceived, and, at times, reproduced in the everyday life of teams.

b. Accounts of situations of neglect, violence, abuse, or harassment in the sporting context

It was observed in this research that none of our participants reported sexual abuse or harassment by their coaches throughout their sporting journeys, and, with the exception of (A2), the other participants suffered or witnessed other forms of violence from their coaches.

The category of gender occupies a fundamentally central place in this research. Drawing on Scott's (1995) perspective, which understands gender as a constitutive element of social relations and as a form of organizing power relations, we analyzed the athletes' narratives considering that the situations of violence reported emerge within a relational context marked by gender hierarchies. In this scenario, the position of authority occupied by male coaches in the sporting field

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shows how such relationships can produce power asymmetries that run through the athletes' experiences.

Moral harassment was the form of violence most present in the athletes' accounts, and, on several occasions, they normalize it, considering it inherent to sport or to competitive environments, especially in moments of pressure for results. This type of harassment is characterized "by exposing people to humiliating and embarrassing situations, generally in a repetitive and prolonged manner, which offend a person's dignity or psychological integrity" (Ministério Público do Trabalho, 2018, p. 8), and "offending, cursing at, or threatening athletes so that they improve their performance in sport" (p. 13) on a recurring basis is understood as a type of moral harassment. Participant A1 does not report ever having been cursed at by any coach in her interview, but when asked about changes in his behavior during training and competitions, she says that: *"if we made a mistake, he would get pissed off, curse at us, and everything else." (A1).*

Abreu (2022) states that verbal aggression, as exemplified by the athletes through cursing, can be naturalized and encouraged in our society due to its embedded sexist values and the normalization of violence against women. According to her, "there is a thin line of permissiveness – as if violent reactions were part of natural behavior" (Abreu, 2022, *online resource.* In the context of football and futsal in Brazil, shouting and cursing are often perceived and discussed as a constitutive part of the sporting dynamic, being naturalized as expected reactions of the competitive environment, which tends to render invisible or minimize situations potentially associated with violent practices.

Cursing and shouting were frequent responses from our interviewees to questions about coaches' demands and displays of dissatisfaction during training, but especially during games. "[...] Behind violence lies a specific powerlessness that seeks to be resolved through action. Whoever cannot speak can always start cursing" (Tiburi, 2018, *online* resource), and based on this excerpt from professor Márcia Tiburi's text, we ask: "Do coaches notice this difficulty in communicating with the athletes?"; "Why is it necessary to resort to cursing and shouting to get the team's

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attention when things are not going well?"; "Are there really no other ways to communicate this dissatisfaction?".

We highlight other cases of moral harassment and/or psychological violence experienced by athlete A5, who also experienced elite sport during her adolescence:

> *"The coaches were evangelical, so, like, they tried at all costs to impose his religion on us. [...] And the fact that they didn't accept my sexual orientation and that of other girls. [...] he said he was afraid of one of my friends, since she's straight, and he was afraid this girl would be influenced because of me." (A5)*

We can see, in a single account, religious intolerance and homophobia perpetrated by a coach. Such forms of violence are characterized as moral harassment by the Ministério Público do Trabalho (2018) and the Brazilian Olympic Institute (2021); according to the definitions of the Brazilian Olympic Committee (2021), both can also be characterized as psychological violence. The athlete's account indicates that the relationships established within the team went beyond the technical scope of training, taking on contours of moral regulation and control over aspects of the athletes' personal lives. By mentioning that the coaches sought to impose their religious beliefs and expressed rejection of some players' sexual orientation, the narrative reveals an environment in which certain identities are delegitimized or treated as problematic.

In this context, the coach's discourse, in stating that he was "*afraid*" that a heterosexual athlete could be influenced by a lesbian teammate, suggests the construction of a negative representation of the athlete's sexual orientation, associating it with a kind of threat or risk to the group. Such a stance can produce effects of embarrassment, stigmatization, and isolation, elements frequently associated with forms of psychological violence, which manifest through discourses, attitudes, and practices that disqualify or belittle subjects.

Athlete A5 self-identifies as bisexual, and through her account we can see the coach's fear that she might influence the sexuality of a heterosexual teammate. The literature has shown that, although the environment of women's football and futsal is often characterized as a homosocial space, homophobia is still present and persists in the sporting scene (Kessler, 2020; Rosa et al., 2020; Silveira, 2008; Oliveira, 2014).

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In many cases, these manifestations are perpetrated by individuals who occupy positions of power in the athletes' sporting trajectories, such as family members, coaches, and managers (Mennesson; Clément, 2003).

Furthermore, studies indicate that LGBTQIAP+ people are among the groups most susceptible to suffering different forms of violence (Mountjoy et al., 2016). Despite this, homophobia in the sporting context is still little investigated within international research on violence in sport (Lang et al., 2023), revealing an important gap in scientific production and indicating the need for greater attention from the academic community.

Furthermore, athlete A5 also told us about an episode of neglect that she and her teammates suffered when, still minors, they moved to another city to represent a football team in a specific competition:

> *"[...] at first we were going to go there, we were only going to help with the food... We were going to stay there, they were going to pay for the house, cover the accommodation and everything else, and we would only have to help with a fee at the beginning. Fine. But when we got there, right off the bat, we already had to start helping with food and everything else. Up to that point, okay. But then two weeks went by and a water bill showed up for us to pay, an electricity bill, things that hadn't been included before [...]" (A5)*

The notion of neglect can be defined as "anyone with a duty of care toward another person who, due to that omission, allows some harm to be caused or creates a risk of imminent harm" (Comitê Olímpico do Brasil, 2021).

The athlete's account shows that the conditions initially presented for her to remain in the sporting project were progressively changed after the players arrived at the location. According to the narrative, there was a promise that housing and accommodation costs would be covered by the organization, with the athletes responsible only for an initial contribution. However, as the weeks went by, new expenses began to be charged, such as food costs, water and electricity bills, aspects that, according to the athlete, had not been included in the initial agreement.

When one considers that the athletes were minors, this situation becomes even more problematic. Young people involved in sports development processes find themselves in a position of dependence on the institutions, coaches, and managers

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responsible for their stay in the sporting environment. In this context, the change in previously established conditions may indicate situations of vulnerability and lack of protection, especially when financial responsibilities come to be assigned to athletes who do not yet have legal or economic autonomy to deal with such demands, away from their home cities and far from their families. The players' dependence contributes to the acceptance of precarious conditions,

The players' dependence on housing arrangements and sporting opportunities can limit their possibilities of contesting or negotiating, contributing to the acceptance of conditions that are recognizably violent and exploitative in sport.

And it was not only athlete A5 who described an episode of omission on the part of her coach. Athlete A3 shows below how her coach acted in a way that allowed harm to occur regarding her health condition following an injury during a competition:

> *"I played as a pivot, and I went to contest the ball with the other girl, and she stepped on my ankle and I twisted it. It was... At that moment I asked to come off, I wasn't in any condition to keep playing, and he said 'no, you're going to keep playing.' In a lot of pain, I kept playing, my foot swollen like a ball, but even so, in the JEMG state finals I was playing because he kept saying: 'it's nothing' [...]" (A3)*

The athlete's account shows a situation in which the continuity of her sporting participation was prioritized over her physical condition and well-being. We found similar situations in the report "Census of Athlete Rights Experiences (CARE)," in which 20% of participants said they had been forced to compete even while injured, and, besides being a form of neglect, this can also be considered physical violence (Rhind et al., 2021).

Continuing with the forms of violence reported by the participants, A4 describes a situation that can be understood as physical violence in her team's everyday routine:

> *"[...] they sort of saw that sometimes it wasn't working out and we weren't playing well, then they'd say they were going to [...] sort of squeeze us to see if we'd improve. Like, I don't know, sometimes, doubling the physical training, for example, sort of putting pressure on us, so that we'd sort of react, let's say. [...]" (A4).*

In the account, the athlete indicates that, faced with performances considered unsatisfactory, members of the coaching staff resorted to significantly increasing the

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physical training load as a form of punishment or performance correction. According to the participant, in some situations these exercises were seen by her teammates as excessive and beyond bearable physical limits. This type of practice can be characterized as physical violence when it involves imposing activities that put athletes' bodily integrity or health at risk, including forced exercises or exercises carried out under inadequate conditions (Instituto Olímpico Brasileiro, 2021). Empirical evidence indicates that such practices are not uncommon in the sporting context. In the “CARE” report, for example, 27% of participating athletes reported having already been punished through physical exercises or strenuous training (Rhind et al., 2021).

Practices of this nature frequently occur in sporting contexts marked by hierarchical power relations, in which coaches and members of the coaching staff occupy positions of authority and trust in relation to athletes (Hartill et al., 2023; Strand, 2021). In these situations, potentially violent behaviors that go beyond the pedagogical limits of sports training can be naturalized or legitimized as strategies of discipline, motivation, or performance improvement, even though they involve risks to athletes' physical health and well-being (Mountjoy et al., 2016).

In this context, it becomes essential both for athletes to recognize these practices and for coaching staff to become aware of the ethical and pedagogical limits of training, in order to promote safer and healthier sporting environments.

This same athlete (A4), when asked whether she had ever felt humiliated by a coach for being a woman, reports that a coach: *“[...] used to make little jokes, I don't think he even noticed, but there was a bit of a sexist tone to it [...]” (A4)*. We link athlete A4's statement mentioned above to the verbal violence experienced by female coaches throughout the training courses offered by the CBF Academy (Guimarães; Barreira; Galatti, 2023). The researchers discuss these microaggressions made by the course instructors, sometimes disguised as jokes. Furthermore, they reveal the female coaches' fears of exposing the violence and being professionally harmed as a result. In this sense, the scholars reinforce the need for instructors to become aware of gender-based violence, culminating in “[...] a distancing from jokes and comments

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that reflect unequal power relations [...]" (Guimarães; Barreira; Galatti, 2023, p. 10), reflecting a safer and more comfortable place for them.

That said, we reflect that, given this scenario, it becomes necessary to problematize the role of coach education spaces in reproducing these practices. If, within the training courses themselves, professors responsible for the professional qualification of the modality reproduce sexist comments and jokes, including in the presence of female students, this reinforces a process of naturalization of these practices. Considering that these instructors occupy positions of authority and reference in the sporting field, their statements tend to be legitimized and internalized by future coaches, who may later reproduce them in their relationships with athletes, interpreting them as acceptable or even normal behaviors in everyday sporting life.

In this sense, the data show that the environment in which coaches are trained must take on an active role in dismantling gender stereotypes, in promoting pedagogical practices grounded in respect, ethics, equity, and the integrity of athletes, avoiding the reproduction of sexist, prejudiced, and potentially violent representations in the sporting context.

c. Impact of coaches' behavior on athletes' sporting performance

According to Guiramand (2017), the closeness between coaches and athletes creates a deep and complex connection that goes beyond corrections regarding actions on the pitch or court. This relationship carries meanings and emotions due to the construction of "[...] a strong bond, permeated by a mix of feelings that range from affection, anger, admiration, trust, and even disappointment" (Guiramand, 2017, p. 8).

In any human relationship, whether romantic, institutional, or economic, power is present (Foucault, 2022). It can therefore be said that the bonds between coaches and athletes are no exception to this reality, and, over time, through everyday contact and routine, the coach may also come to accumulate different and important roles in the athlete's life (Guiramand, 2017). The coach's figure goes beyond the limits of technical and tactical advice about the game and can come to interfere in other

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common relationships of human life (Pires, 2018; Fournier; Parent; Paradis, 2021).

Athlete A3 described what her relationship was like with the coach responsible for representing the team in school sports during high school, and told us how he expressed demands and dissatisfaction:

> *"'Why aren't you doing this? Don't you understand what I'm telling you? Are you stupid?' [...] And he never actually corrected anything, he'd just keep saying: 'It's wrong. It's wrong!'" (A3)*

In addition to the verbal aggression, the coach evidently could not communicate effectively with his athlete, because whenever she made mistakes on the court, he would insult her, and she would carry on without understanding which of her actions were wrong or how she could improve. Another of our interviewed athletes, A5, also mentions that one of her coaches always shouted to give instructions and correct mistakes; however:

> *"Sometimes, in training or in a game, we'd make a mistake and the coach would try to lift us up, we got it right much more often than we got it wrong, and he'd already be shouting or cursing at us in some way." (A5)*

It is worth pointing out that athlete A5 mentions that when the coach acted differently from usual, that is, when he tried to encourage them instead of just demanding more from them, shouting and cursing, their performance improved.

Athlete A4 vents, saying that:

> *"Many times, when the person would sort of shout, like, or I'd get 'chewed out,' let's say, I didn't feel comfortable, and then I sort of couldn't play, I sort of disappeared, like, I sort of got scared of trying anything and getting it wrong." (A4)*

A4's statements can also fit into situations of psychological violence which, unlike moral harassment, can happen just once. It can be understood as "humiliation, threats, cursing, blackmail, insults, control, and behaviors that diminish, isolate, and embarrass someone" (Instituto Olímpico Brasileiro, 2021), and as "conduct that causes emotional harm and a decrease in self-esteem, or that harms and disrupts full development" (Comitê Olímpico do Brasil, 2021).

> *"So, I think what stood out most was the high school coach, because of the way, the manner he treated us. I can even give an example: there was the*

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> *JEMG state final, we conceded a goal thirty seconds into the first half, the ball went out, it was a goal. He called a timeout and tore into us. We didn't need that at that moment, we needed his support, and he used a lot of words, I won't remember them all, but it was like we were nothing, like we didn't deserve to be in the final and everything, and that day stayed with me." (A3)*

Adolescence is considered by the World Health Organization (WHO) to be a period that deserves special attention because it is a time of many changes in young people's lives, and it is also a period characterized by high participation in sporting environments (Mountjoy et al., 2016). These young people are "[...] more vulnerable to abuse at this time due to their need for care, protection, and supervision during development" (p. 1023, our translation), and research shows that coaches' harsh comments about skills or sporting aptitude are important in determining whether women, in particular, stay in or drop out of sport (Eliasson; Johansson, 2021). The following account demonstrates this:

> *"I knew I could give more of myself when I was younger, but there came a point, in my third year, when I even stopped playing with them. I just couldn't take it anymore, it was only negative feedback... Until I stopped playing." (A3)*

Just as happened with A3, the participants in Eliasson and Johansson's (2021) research said that coaches' behavior, communication, and pressure affected their decision to give up practicing the modality. That said, and recognizing the impact that coaches have on their athletes' lives, I propose an intrapersonal reflection: what share of responsibility do these coaches bear when the athletes quit?" "What contributions do futsal/football coaches make so that women athletes remain in the modalities in Brazil?

According to information brought forward by Mountjoy et al. (2016), psychological violence stemming from relationships between coaches and athletes has prevailed as an object of study in academic research worldwide.

> The personal harm of violence (non-accidental) to athletes can be extremely damaging in the long term. The impact of such experiences can spread and affect family members, friends, teammates, and can persist for a long time even after the athlete leaves the sport. Violence (non-accidental) in sport can also have serious negative effects on athletes' physical, social, and psychological health. (Mountjoy et al., 2016, p. 1023, our translation)

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We highlight that not all athletes seemed to recognize some of the violence they suffered; that is, they regarded the violence they experienced as part of their coaches' way of training. It is therefore important to stress that we face, in sport, this literacy gap (Cazden et al., 2021) among athletes regarding violence in sport — that is, the non-recognition by athletes of some types of violence. Such situations seem to be associated with a lack of knowledge of the definitions of violence, insufficient awareness of the subject, difficulties in recognizing these practices, and their naturalization within a sporting context historically marked by patriarchal structures, as is the case with football and futsal.

Corroborating this, there is a symbolic violence hovering over the relationship between coach and athlete, in which “the dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to relations of domination, thereby making them seen as natural” (Bourdieu, 2010, p. 46) — that is, athletes who are oppressed by their coaches accept their ways of thinking and acting, without questioning or resisting, because they believe this situation is normal or natural within the sporting scene. Although they recognize the violence, athletes may accept it so as not to be excluded, passed over, or even cut from their teams.

According to Bourdieu (2010, p. 50), “symbolic force is a form of power that is exercised over bodies, directly, and as if by magic, without any physical coercion [...]” and it “[...] is established through the adherence that the dominated cannot help but grant to the dominant, since the only instrument of knowledge they have is shared with the dominant [...]” (Souza Júnior; Reis, 2023, p. 258). It is through this symbolic violence that many coaches act to “control their working group,” for example, by justifying their aggressive attitudes, silencing athletes' opinions, especially when they disagree, and not offering opportunities for them to gradually become more independent.

In cases of moral harassment and gender-based violence, such conduct can be naturalized, and its manifestations can be cyclical — that is, they can combine calmer attitudes with, later on, “[...] more aggressive episodes, always in the direction

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of pushing the limits of what is acceptable or appropriate" (Cotta, 2022, *online* resource), making it even harder for athletes to perceive the violence.

We also consider the possible failures in recognizing violence in sport among professionals working in the field, whether coaches, members of the coaching staff, and/or managers. At times, we do not recognize (and I am also writing as a coach at this moment) the violence that we ourselves perpetrate and that our teammates and colleagues in the profession perpetuate, whether due to a lack of knowledge of its definitions or due to a culture of training and of the sporting environment.

In a brief dialogue with Becker (2008), we consider that within the sporting sphere of futsal/football there is a subculture that "justifies" deviant behaviors, that is, violent behaviors such as shouting, excessive demands, cursing, physical punishment, among other forms of violence highlighted by our athletes and consistent with the literature. And, in many moments, these attitudes are masked by the relentless pursuit of victory at any cost; by strictly hierarchical values that do not recognize athletes as protagonists and do not allow them to express their opinions and feelings; and by patriarchy, the social and cultural system that values male authority and power over the feminine, established between coaches and athletes.

We refuse to say that there is a single essence to sport, because we know and believe in its virtues; but it is inevitable to say that patriarchal, hierarchical, violent, and oppressive ideals may be perpetuated on fields and courts throughout our country.

4. Final considerations

What we can observe in this research is that the interpersonal relationships between coaches and athletes are permeated by social complexities that revolve around a culture of violence. In this sense, we affirm the need to elucidate, exemplify, and demonstrate that these violent situations, as much as they may be silenced and/or underreported, are present in the discourse of the athletes interviewed.

The world of amateur women's futsal that we investigated thus becomes a singular object of study that allows us to broaden and deepen our understanding of

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the complexity and multiplicity of cultural phenomena intertwined in the sporting context, and which carries enormous significance for women's continued participation in sport.

Considering the interplay between the futsal court and the academic field, this research has the potential to engage with and impact coaches, athletes, sporting entities, managers, and other institutions and people involved in the management and teaching of women's sport. Its political dimension can thus maximize opportunities to offer safe and positive sport for women, as well as minimize and raise coaches' awareness of the impacts of abusive relationships.

The lack of literacy regarding gender-based violence in sport is a problem that can have negative consequences for victims and for sport as a whole. Thus, there is a clear need to expand educational actions and training processes concerning gender-based violence in sport, enabling the recognition of these practices and the development of appropriate strategies to address them. Close attention must be paid to the formal and informal education of coaches who work (or intend to work) with women's football/futsal, so that this group can have access to courses, texts, content, or information aimed at preventing abuse/harassment in sports.

Furthermore, it is hoped that this study will contribute to broadening the debate on the subject within the academic community, encouraging the development of new research. It is also intended that its results may engage with sporting entities, encouraging the creation and strengthening of protection and prevention mechanisms, as well as the implementation of specialized listening and reporting channels. Finally, it is hoped that this work may serve as a basis for encouraging futsal coaches in Brazil to reflect on and further study this subject, and to recognize its importance.

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