

# Sexual Harassment in Sports: Risk Factors Analysis from A Malaysian Perspective

Sharifah Syahirah\*, S.S. Syarifah Fathynah, Wan Puspa Melati,  
Fadilah Puteh, Bahiyah Abdul Hamid and Habibah Ismail

**Abstract---** *This article attempts to discuss the risk factors related to the occurrence of sexual harassment in sports. There have been many glaring cases of sexual harassment in sports reported in the Malaysian media. Unfortunately, most of these cases end up without any redress for the victim or punishment against the perpetrator. Hence, the objective of this article is to analyze the risk factors faced by sport practitioners and officers in handling as well as preventing sexual harassment and abuse in a few recent cases. A qualitative method was applied and the primary data was collected through focus group sessions comprised of thirty-five (35) experts from sports institutions, enforcement officers, civil society representatives, athletes and related government agencies. The result depicts fifteen (15) risk factors involved in handling cases related to sexual harassment and abuse in sports particularly the lack of a code of practice and unclear procedures for those in charge. Since currently in Malaysia there are no specific rules related to handling sexual harassment in sports, previous cases were investigated under a penal code and it has made it impossible for the victims to receive protection and redress.*

**Keywords---** *Sexual Harassment, Sports, Risk Factors, Malaysian Perspective.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has identified sexual harassment as one of major problems in sports. It is defined as behavior towards an individual or group that involves sexualize verbal, non-verbal or physical behavior that is considered by the victim or a bystander to be unwanted or coerced[1]. Despite efforts to combat this problem, its prevalence is glaring and it has been repetitively reported by the media. There have been various news articles of sexual harassment in sports reported within Malaysia and other countries. Instances of such cases are as follows: a sexual assault committed by a team official against a 26 year-old athlete during the Commonwealth Games in Gold Coast, Australia in 2018 [2]. Meanwhile in Malaysia, a mainland China diving coach was sacked due to his failure to protect his athletes from an environment conducive to rape and sexual harassment after a coach under his supervision raped a 20-year-old diving athlete. Although, the perpetrator was charged at the Kuala Lumpur Sessions court on Oct 11, 2017, under Section 376(1) of the Penal Code for the offence of raping a national diving athlete, the case was dismissed on January 2019 [3][4]. Sadly, most sexual harassment related cases end up without any redress for the victim or punishment against the perpetrator. It is deeply disturbing to realize the vicious

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Sharifah Syahirah\*, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, Humanities and Arts, Kolej University Poly-Tech MARA (KUPTM), Taman Shamelin Perkasa, Cheras, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Email: sharifahsyahirah@gmail.com  
S.S. Syarifah Fathynah, Institut Sukan Negara (ISN), Bukit Jalil, Malaysia.  
Wan Puspa Melati, SEGI University, Damansara, Malaysia.  
Fadilah Puteh, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Shah Alam, Malaysia.  
Bahiyah Abdul Hamid, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Bangi, Malaysia.  
Habibah Ismail, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USI), Nilai, Malaysia.

cycle of sexual harassment reported which have led to double victimization of the victims particularly by criticizing victims' behavior, their outfits and the choices they make instead of focusing on the perpetrators.

The term 'risk factor' refers to the cause that leads to prevalence of sexual harassment. There are various models related to sexual harassment risk factors such as demographic, biological, organizational, sociocultural and sex-role spillover[5], [6]. It also includes characteristics of the environment such as sexist attitudes, unprofessional environments, sex-ratio, awareness on sexual harassment as well as personal characteristics. Meanwhile, sexual harassment in sports refers to the occurrence of verbal, non-verbal, visual, psychological and physical sexual harassment [7], [8]. Therefore, this article attempts to discuss the risk factors involved in the existence of sexual harassment and abuse among Malaysian sports practitioners. Here, the research questions are: (i) what are the risk factors faced by sports practitioners and the community in preventing as well as handling recent cases of sexual harassment and abuse and (ii) To what extent do these risk factors hinder stern actions taken against the perpetrator and to protect the victims.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section consists of discussions on development of research related to sexual harassment. In Malaysia, studies related to sexual harassment have been conducted by academicians, government agencies and civil society organizations (CSOs). Most studies focus on the prevalence of sexual harassment at the workplace and in the public sphere. Ismail et al. (2007)[9], Alagappan et al. (2011) [10], Alagappan & Marican (2014)[11], Hassan & Lee (2015)[12], Yee et al. (2015)[13], Yeoh (2018)[14] studied factors and their impact on victims of sexual harassment, Ismail et al. (2007)[9] identified the factors influencing sexual harassment at the workplace particularly unprofessional working environments, skewed gender ratio, limited knowledge on grievance procedure, sexist attitudes, lack of privacy, physical attractiveness, outfits, job positions and sex roles. Alagappan et al. (2011)[10] concluded that the risk factors are mainly due to demographic factors, informal environments and the nature of jobs especially in the hospitality industry. Alagappan & Marican (2014)[11] highlighted the scarcity of sexual harassment incidents reported in the media. They feel that this has led to the lack of awareness on this issue. While Hassan & Lee (2015)[12] conducted a legal development framework analysis after the enactment of the Malaysian Employment Act 1995 and the guidelines for sexual harassment cases. There were many flaws in the implementation of this Act and victims suffered from lack of protection and redress. Later, the government amended the Employment Act 1955 in 2012 by introducing Part XVA on sexual harassment. It has reduced the negative impact on victims but is unable to help resolve most cases. Yee et al. (2015)[13] examined demographic factors that influence the level of awareness and perception on sexual harassment among youths. This study found that youths are at higher risk and are the most vulnerable group as sexual harassment victims. Although there are various studies conducted on sexual harassment at the workplace and in the public sphere, studies related to sexual harassment in sports are limited although cases related to it are repetitively reported in media.

To date, there are only two published articles related to sexual harassment in sports among athletes in Malaysia. These papers explore the prevalence of sexual harassment in sports from Malaysian athletes' experiences. Fathynah SS & Syahirah SS (2015)[7] identified sports practitioners' perceptions and experiences on sexual harassment

through a cross-sectional survey and through focus group interviews. Meanwhile, the findings of the focus group interviews conducted concluded three main potential perpetrators, specifically those among the athletes, coaches and sports officers. Fathynah SS et al. (2017)[8] discovered negative effects of sexual harassment on victims, particularly impaired performance as well as psychological, health and well-being problems. This paper also revealed more male athletes experienced sexual harassment compared to female athletes and the perpetrators were also males. Unlike in Malaysia, studies related to sexual harassment in sports have been conducted and published extensively in various countries especially in Europe such as Cense & Brackenridge (2001)[15], Mountjoy, Brackenridge, Arrington, Blauwet, Carska-sheppard, et al. (2016)[16], Bringer et al. (2006)[17], Fasting (2014)[18], Fasting et al. (2011)[19], Marks et al. (2012)[20], Stirling et al. (2011)[21], Parent & Bannon (2012)[22], Fasting et al. (2013)[23], Johansson (2013)[24], Rintaugu et al. (2014)[25].

Cense & Brackenridge (2001)[15] and Fasting et al. (2003)[26] discussed specifically on the temporal and developmental risk factors of sexual harassment. Here, the culture of sports, the absence of safe sports policies and adequate reporting procedures of the incidents will be detrimental to victims especially athletes who have invested time, commitment and money to achieve success in their chosen field of sports. Some victims were selected, sexually groomed, being imposed certain amount of authority by the perpetrator and most even believed that the sexual harassment incidents happened due to their own fault. Demographic factors of the victim such as age, maturity and social status are also considered the main risk factors of the occurrences of sexual harassment in sports. Mountjoy, Brackenridge, Arrington, Blauwet, Carska-sheppard, et al. (2016)[16] discussed the International Olympic Committee's consensus statement which has been extended from the 2007 IOC Consensus Statement on Sexual Harassment and abuse in Sports. It states that the highest risk of sexual harassment in sports are elite, disable, child and those with different sexual orientations (LGBT) athletes.

### **III. METHODOLOGY / MATERIALS**

Through the lenses of feminism and social constructivism, a qualitative method was designed for the study. Data was collected through focus group interview sessions comprising thirty-five (35) experts from sports institutions i.e., the Malaysian Sports Commissioner; enforcement officers i.e., Polis Diraja Malaysia (PDRM- Malaysian Police); civil society representatives i.e., Women Aid Organization (WAO) and a few others; athletes and related government agencies i.e., Women Development Department (JPW) and so on. The focus group interviews were conducted concurrently in April 2019, organized by the National Sports Institution (ISN) in collaboration with researchers from five Malaysian universities. The respondents were divided into three groups and their discussions hinged on questions designed by the researchers within a given framework. Each group consisted of 10 to 13 experts, one rapporteur and two facilitators. The discussion was divided into two main topics, namely (i) stakeholders mapping and challenges faced and (ii) organizational mechanism. There were 18 specific and open-ended questions asked during each focus group interview session. Questions are related to challenges faced by the stakeholders by discussing who has the power to take action against the perpetrator, the current grievance procedure, actions taken by the victims and the timeframe of investigation for sexual harassment cases. Three main presentations from the National Sports Council (MSN), All Women's Action Society (AWAM), Malaysian Civil

Service Department (JPA) and University Malaya (UM) during the session are also considered as data for this research. At the end of this focus group interview session, a consensus statement was endorsed by all participants and brought forward to the highest management level of the National Sports Institution (ISN) as well as the Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia (KBS).

#### **IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

With more discussions and realizations on the impact of sexual harassment on individuals, social institutions and the nation as a whole, academics, policymakers and relevant bodies have initiated efforts to manage sexual harassment. However, such ideas and enthusiasm have been argued to not have easily been translated into practice. Based on the focus group discussion by thirty-five (35) members from relevant parties, the following risk factors were discussed and here they are summarized into five categories. They are:

- (4.1) Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and Mechanism;
- (4.2) Culture, Mindset and Stereotyping;
- (4.3) Support and resources;
- (4.4) Awareness and internalization and
- (4.5) Data and Statistics

In these dimensions, there are various risk factors of the prevalence of sexual harassment in sports discussed during the focus group interview session.

##### ***4.1 Risk Factors Related to Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) and Mechanism***

Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) refers to matters related to the policy, rules, structure, timeline and officer in-charge in handling cases related to sexual harassment and abuse in sports. There are four (4) risk factors related to SOP and Mechanism which are:

- i. Lack of clear and necessary safe sports policy;
- ii. Lack of independent platform;
- iii. Lack of a clear timeline and
- iv. Vague organizational structure related to the person in charge (ISN Consensus Statement, 2019)

The first risk factor related to the standard operating procedure (SOP) and mechanism is the lack of clear and necessary safe sports policy which includes code of practice, regulations and standard operating procedures of reporting for both victims and whistleblowers. These are some narratives related to the SOPs;

*Narrative 1: No specific mechanism in sports associations. Next, the Sports Commissioner must have the proper mechanism. We need to train the welfare committee and have a special officer to handle the case and takes the case to the officers. Regular audit, check regulation, places, staff.*

*Narrative 2: Procedure? How? Should have own mechanism like arbitrary court/ own court? Session with the victim? Investigation procedure and process. Do you have a disciplinary board? Proper channel? Do they email / WhatsApp? Coach athlete protocol? The Dos and Don'ts... We need good policy and implement policy.*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019)

Discussions in this focus group highlighted a non-existing specific mechanism to handle sexual harassment cases. Members questioned the procedure and how it should be implemented. Other than that, this group discussed the questions on what mechanism, which mechanism is the most effective and what are the best platform or channels for victims or the third party to report. All members in the group were unanimously concern about who is/are responsible to enforce the policy and the SOPs. This finding is similar to issues related to the lack of knowledge and the absence of grievances procedure in sexual harassment reporting discussed by Cense & Brackenridge (2001)[15] and Fasting et al. (2003)[26].

The second risk factor is the absence of independent centre, agencies and committees to manage reports as well as to execute regulations. The lack of centers, agencies and committees who can handle filed reports independently and carry out necessary actions were also reported as one of the hindrance factors toward managing sexual harassment cases efficiently and systematically. One of the narratives related to this issue is the following:

*There must be an officer to take charge of the case and we must have a clear mechanism for victims to report the case...There is also the need to do integrity/community training for the officer to handle the case. Planning, implementing and evaluating the policy. Who enforces the policy?*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019).

The SOP and mechanisms as highlighted should also include a clear timeline that would allow a reasonable timeframe for victims to gather themselves before they can have the courage to make such reports and for the cases to be fairly handled. The third risk factor related to SOP and mechanism is the lack of clear guidelines on who should be the person in charge, and who can get charged in sexual harassment cases. Even if an institution was set up or assigned to be responsible for managing sexual harassment cases, the current lack of clear criteria on who best would be in-charge of the cases and guidelines for the person in-charged pose an obstacle. There were also concerns among the respondents that the person in-charged would also need to be sensitive and well-trained to manage the cases and not merely taking down the report. One of the members in the focus group said;

*The existing training module for enforcer is only to accept reporting, merely as report receiver.*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019)

This narrative indicates that the training given to the front liner of enforcement officers is merely jotting down reports without being trained to be sensitive to the sexual harassment victim's well-being and trauma. All three focus groups concluded that it is imperative to ensure that the front liners and officers taking up the report to be sensitive emphatic and supportive. This good practice will help increase the likelihood of people coming forward and to 'expose' their experiences. This, in turn, would enable proper action to take place in managing sexual harassment cases. The fourth risk factor is the lack of a clear timeline to manage sexual harassment cases which impose pressure on the victims. The SOP and mechanism as highlighted should also include a clear timeline that would allow a reasonable timeframe for victims to have the courage and make a report against the perpetrator. One of the respondents said this:

*[authorities] don't understand sexual harassment. Victims are afraid to voice out so they made a late report.*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019)

This issue can also be exacerbated when the victims do not have legal literacy and feel overwhelmed or lost by the procedures or even exercising their rights.

#### **4.2 Risk Factors Related to Culture, Mindset and Stereotyping**

The second main dimension of risk factor as raised by the focus group members is related to the culture, mindset and stereo typing. There are six (6) risk factors highlighted and repetitively discussed by experts in all focus groups namely;

- v. Preferential treatments towards people with power;
- vi. Victim and Whistleblower blaming;
- vii. Stigmatize as trivial cases;
- viii. Distrust and credibility;
- ix. Women underrepresentation in sports management and
- x. The existence of stereotype whereby only women are victims of sexual harassment (ISN Consensus Statement, 2019).

The first risk factor related to culture, mind-set and stereotyping is the existence of preferential treatments in the name of 'professionalism' towards people with power. The main issue highlighted was the reality that people in power such as the coaches are perceived as 'professionals', are given preferential treatment and are viewed as more credible in general. Therefore, sexual harassment accusations against them may not hold in many instances. One of the respondents said the following:

*...does association has this type of policy [anti-sexual harassment]? Most athletes are afraid to voice out because the perpetrator is somebody who has power over the victim.*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019)

The preferential perception and the upper hand held by those in power such as coaches have also been found within the sporting environment around the world. Athletes in the United States were found to have been harassed either verbally or physically by their coaches [27]. In another study, Canadian retired Olympic athletes were reported to have had sexual intercourse (21.8%) with authorities in sports while another 8.6% have reported experiencing forced sexual relations with such authorities [28]. Though the prevalence of male athlete peers has been found to contribute more towards female athletes, the experiences were found to be more salient when it was done by their coaches due to their dependency on these role figures [29];[30].

Hence, the evidence of abused power relations by perpetrators in Malaysia is not surprising and has been consistent with those found by earlier scholars Mewett & Toffoletti (2008)[31];Tomlinson & Yorganci (1997)[32]. Tying back to the earlier SOP concerns, it can be argued that the organizational structures enable sexual harassment to take place. The organizations also fail to address the problem because of denial, viewing it as trivial matter or simply accepting it as part of the sporting culture [15]; [33]. The second risk factor is related to culture. Mindset and

stereotyping is 'victim-blaming' and 'whistle-blower blaming' culture. The members of the focus group believe this culture is hindering victims and third parties or witnesses to make reports against the perpetrators. Due to this culture, the victims and third parties or witnesses are afraid of being judged by others. This was well captured in the responses received during the focus groups discussion:

*Victims are doubtful to report due to the blame culture, stigma, embarrassment, fear and they also assume there is limited power of institution/law. They are afraid of being judged and taunted especially from community tradition and perspectives.*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019)

The blame may also arise internally among the victims themselves. Some of them may feel embarrassed or can be categorised as individuals who are introverted, not confident and are afraid to speak up. This may be due to the worry that they will be blamed instead for allowing such incident to happen or just the immense pressure that they experience as a victim of sexual harassment. Some of the feedback from the respondents are as follows:

Narrative 1: *Tradition of feeling embarrassed, silencing and blaming the victim/reporter is rampant.*

Narrative 2: *They, themselves are not confident - victims not confident.*

Narrative 3: *Victim afraid to speak up and come forward to report*

Narrative 4: *There is a various forms of pressure against the person who received the report as well as those who made the report.*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019)

Individual factors that serve as risk factors have also been found in earlier studies. Victims were reportedly found to not want to share their cases due to confusion, self-blame, guilt and shame upon experiencing sexual harassment [15]. Some also may not report because they were unaware that what they were experiencing was indeed an abuse or tried to avoid thinking about the unpleasant experience. The worry that others may not believe in their case or feeling positively towards the perpetrators who they now view as father figures especially when they do not have a strong support system all pose as risk factors in combating sexual harassment [15]. The third risk factor related to the culture, mindset and stereotyping dimension is no action taken to solve sexual harassment cases due to the stigma and pressure by family members, teammates and society.

Some of the respondents believed that some cases go underreported as no follow-up cases or actions are being taken by the person receiving the sexual harassment cases. In fact, the role of significant others of victims and whistle-blowers may also contribute towards hindrance factors for reporting. Victims or whistle-blowers may be placed in a difficult position as they are made to feel guilty for filing such cases against their coach, teammate or organizational leaders. Some of them may even label such cases as trivial and the victims were discouraged from formally filing the complaints. In their own words, it was reported that:

Narrative 1: *There were cases whereby the family of the victims encouraged them to let go of the case.*

Narrative 2: *Parents told us [athletes] to take our responsibility towards ourselves.*

(Narrative from Focus Group Discussion, 19 Mac 2019)

The discouragement by parents may be the reason why earlier studies found that female athletes did not report their cases to their parents or authorities. Rather, some may mention this to fellow girlfriends who may serve as whistle-blower instead[29]. The significant others may socialize these athletes that the sporting arena is indeed a site that is relatively tolerable to sexual exploitation and such culture and norm is to be expected and managed[34]. The pressure may be heightened among those who aspire to make it big in this industry or in cases where dropping out is not an option. This is because it has been argued that the more invested the athletes are, the less likely they will be willing to report as the cost of leaving would be more than what they aimed for [35]. The fourth risk factor is distrust towards authorities' credibility and being ridiculed by the person in charge. The factors outlined above, coupled with distrust towards authorities in managing sexual harassment cases, were reported as hindrance factors towards case reporting by victims and whistle-blowers. This is also considered as risk factor towards the prevention and elimination of sexual harassment in sports. There were anecdotes shared by the expert respondents that the police officers were sharing stories that were being reported to other officers in front of the complainant and even showing the videos to other front desk officers. Quoting one of them,

*Lack of privacy when reporting sensitive issues by the police officers. There was an incident where the victim went to report her case, the police at the front desk was asking for the video and showed the video to other officers – I don't think that is right and the video should be treated with confidential and investigated by the IO.*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019)

Such experience would not only leave a negative impact on the victim but they may also not gather such courage again in the future should the history repeat itself. The anecdotes being shared with others may also hinder others from coming forward to avoid such embarrassing and traumatising experience. The fifth risk factor identified by the focus group discussion is an unequal opportunity for women in managerial positions in sports. It was also raised by the experts the fact that fewer women are in the managerial and decision-making position even though there is a sizeable population of female athletes. The lack of a higher stratified position does not help in pushing through the massive revamp and seriously follow-through of actions to protect victims of sexual harassment which are predominantly women. This is problematic as previous scholars have argued that male-dominated settings at work in general and in sports organizations in specific tend to correlate with higher cases of sexual harassment [36]. It was also argued by the members of the focus group that should there be more women in such positions, the policy, procedures and strategies will also be more effective as they would understand better either due to their empathy as well as may have better insides from female victims.

The last risk factor related to culture and mindset is the existence of stereotype whereby only women are victims of sexual harassment. The power struggle also tends to reflect the stereotype that men are more powerful and therefore abuse cases that male athletes may face would be dismissed or not treated with equal importance as those experienced by women (Focus Group Discussion, 19 Mac 2019). Male athletes were also reported to have experienced harassment but their cases may be underreported as they were reluctant to report them especially if they are perceived as 'soft' or effeminate. As for those who were viewed as effeminate, studies around the world have shown that harassment is not uncommon. As high as 80% out of 9500 respondents studied have experienced or

witnessed homophobia in sports and it may also manifest via its sporting culture and team selection[37]. Even just among boys, there were evidence in Denmark that two-third of the cases that were brought forth in court were reported by boys with the average age of 12 years old and a study by Leahy et al. (2002)[38]found that 29 % of males were abused within sports environments.

#### **4.3 Risk Factors Related to Support and Resources**

The focus group discussions unanimously pointed out the risk factor related to the lack of support and resources. Implementation of reporting and handling the cases of sexual harassment need resources in terms of budget allocation and human resource. There are two (2) risk factors related to support and resources identified by the respondents specifically addressing the following factors:

- i. The lack of manpower and
- ii. Lack of cooperation (ISN Consensus Statement, 2019)

The lack of manpower and resources to carry out duties to prevent sexual harassment is one of the significant risk factors highlighted in the focus group discussions such as uncertainty of responsibility and the right person to handle the issue. Respondents highlighted the following narratives in the situation and which are based on their own experience when the report is lodged.

Narrative 1: *It was not clear who should take charge of the report and where should this report be channelled to.*

Narrative 2: *Due to lack of manpower, they are passing the buck” to another person. Their resistance could be due to a heavy workload or have no expertise and experience to handle this delicate matter.*

(Narrative from Focus Group Discussion, 19 Mac 2019).

The second risk factor related to lack of support and resources are the lack of cooperation from committees and authorities (especially police and security officers) to listen and receive reports from victims. It was found that the prevention and elimination of sexual harassment in sports faced a great challenge where the relevant authorities are less sensitive to the victims. It is argued that this hampers the effective prevention and elimination of sexual harassment in sports. The discussions also added that the person in charge of the case is ill-trained and not sensitive about this issue. Many informants were also dissatisfied with the attitude of the person in charge in that they were visibly insensitive. These officers usually regard sexual harassment-related cases lightly and have no clue as how to handle the case in the right or appropriate way. The discussion went on and highlighted the lack of cooperation from relevant authorities as one of the significant challenges. The respondents reported the following:

Narrative 1: *The front liner & officers taking up the report should be sensitive, emphatic & supportive.*

Narrative 2: *Person in charge of receiving the report, handle the cases are not well-trained”.*

Narrative 3: *The disciplinary committee is not gender sensitive.*

Narrative 4: *Attitude of committee members, a police officer showed uninterested and perceived this as an isolated issue thus paid less attention on this matter.*

(Narrative from Focus Group Discussion, 19 Mac 2019).

Concerning the lack of support and resources, a study by Fasting & Massao (2010)[39] has highlighted that in a culture where women or females are underrepresented, the power balance is even narrowed to masculinity and traditional male values that dominate most sports entities. As such, this will make the underrepresented or minority group in sport experience lots of difficulty due to tensions that occur between the two groups. Fasting & Massao (2010)[39] further echoed that due to reinforcement of patriarchal power, the support and resources that are supposed to be exercised against the minority group have now become institutionalized and have become officially supported power for the majority group.

#### ***4.4 Risk Factors Related to Awareness and Internalization***

Awareness and internalization is a well-known risk factor and has been mentioned by various researchers such as Marjorie R et al. (2006)[40], Ebaid (2010)[41] and Manish & Rakesh (2017)[42]. The focus group has identified two (2) main risk factors related to awareness and internalization which are:

- i. Unaware of existing policy and rules and
- ii. Lack of visible promotion and training (ISN Consensus Statement, 2019)

The respondents unanimously agree that policies and regulations regarding sexual harassment are vague, unknown and ill-understood by society, including the sports community. The lack of awareness is one of the critical hurdles. Many sports practitioners are unaware of the policies and regulations. These are some narratives collected during the focus group discussion:

Narrative 1: *Many people including the sports community do not have legal literacy. They also unaware of their rights, and do not the procedures regarding sexual harassment.*

Narrative 2: *We have a policy but people do not know about it.*

Narrative 3: *There is serious awareness, information and education related to sexual harassment in sport.*

Narrative 4: *There is an absent regarding awareness and education that focus and concentrate on the victims and witnesses.*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019).

These descriptions of the current scenario portray a serious damaging risk factor due to the lack of awareness and internalization. The discussion went on and raised an issue related to the existing officers. The experts agreed that existing officers and committees are ill-trained and insensitive to sexual harassment in sports. The experts believe that these officers need to be exposed to periodic gender sensitization workshops and evaluation. These are some of the experts' comments:

Narrative 1: *They need to be familiar with the basic do's and don't between and among the athletes and coaches as well as "sensitive topics that should not be discussed openly.*

Narrative 2: *The absent of proper training to the investigator.*

Narrative 3: *Ineffective investigation which quite challenging from all angles: the victims, the witness and the perpetrators*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019).

The above narratives also depict the lack of visible promotion and training to curb sexual harassment incidents in sports. This has made the sports community have less awareness, information and training on sexual harassment. The experts brought up the following:

*Narrative 1: Training for trainers on sexual harassment in sports helps to create awareness.*

*Narrative 2: The committee needs to be trained on how to preserve and take care of the welfare of the victims” that experience such anomalies.*

(Narrative from Focus Group, 19 Mac 2019).

Therefore, there is an urgent need for visible awareness campaigns and training to ensure the victims’ wellbeing and protection as well as cases are handled professionally by the sports community. According to Cense & Brackenridge (2001)[15], to curb sexual harassment in sports, an open culture of communication helps to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment. Good communication about rules of conduct is essential that prevent the situation from becoming worse. Advocating healthy interaction between all parties involved in sports develop more confidence and assertiveness among the sports practitioners. A study by Fasting et al. (2003)[26]also revealed that sports practitioners experienced more sexual harassment in sport settings than in a controlled setting such as in a workplace or an educational setting. However, the more they are exposed to the information and interaction about deviant behaviour in sports, they experienced lesser sexual harassment. This proves that awareness plays a significant role in preventing and eliminating sexual harassment in sports.

#### **4.5 Risk Factors Related to Insufficient Data and Statistics**

The lack of data and statistics on sexual harassment cases and convicts was also identified as one of the main dimensions of risk factors leading to prevalence of sexual harassment in sports. It was found that there is a serious challenge in keeping track and getting an accurate report about sexual harassment in sports cases in Malaysia. As few comments made by the experts during the focus group discussion are as follows:

*Narrative 1: Due to afraid to speak up and to come forward to lodge a report, it is hardly to have the data or statistics to prove that this is a serious phenomenon occurs in sports.*

*Narrative 2: There are no official statistics available. If victims or witness reluctance to lodge a report, thus there are no statistics to show the prevalence of sexual harassment cases in Malaysia.*

(Narrative from Focus Group 1 Discussion, 19 Mac 2019).

These narratives portray the extent of severity in terms of the absence of official data and statistics on sexual harassment in sports. Fasting et al. (2003)[26] argued that cases of sexual harassment were not systematically surveyed and reported, thus, making it difficult to present valid statistics to act upon. Fasting & Massao (2010)[39]further highlighted that due to the lack of sexual harassment statistics, it is difficult to determine the involvement or proportions of sexual harassment cases.

## **V. CONCLUSION**

The result depicts fifteen (15) risk factors in handling cases related to sexual harassment and abuse in sports particularly lack code of practice, unclear procedures for the person in charge and preferential treatment towards

individuals with more power. The respondents highlighted these risk factors based on five main dimensions which are mechanism, culture, conscientization, resource and statistics. Lack of code of practise has been repetitively mentioned by the experts and sports practitioners. There are no specific rules and regulations that address cases related to sexual harassment in Malaysian sports. The previous cases were handled by the police and investigated under a penal code which made it impossible for the victims to receive the necessary form of protection and redress. The risk factors faced by sports practitioners in Malaysia are intense yet these risk factors could be solved through various recommendations and initiatives. However, there is an urgent need for an introduction of a national act specifically to address cases related to sexual harassment and a means of redress so that it can be adopted by sports institutions and associations. It is important to construct and introduce the code of conduct and ensure the standard operation procedure specifically for sports since its nature is different from the workplace situation. This SOP should be visible to the public and victims and witnesses must be fully protected under the Whistle-blower Act. Although there are complexities in solving cases related to sexual harassment, thorough and detailed enabling rules and regulations will enable various stakeholders in sports to bring all cases related to sexual harassment forward and to ensure that all cases are fairly and adequately dealt with instead of being dismissed in courts like many previous reported cases.

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