



Child Abuse in Sport  
European Statistics

# Child Abuse in Sport: European Statistics (CASES)

The prevalence and characteristics of interpersonal  
violence against children (IVAC ) within and outside sport  
in six European countries

**FULL REPORT AVAILABLE**

Co-funded by the  
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Edge Hill University





# Background





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# The CASES Partnership



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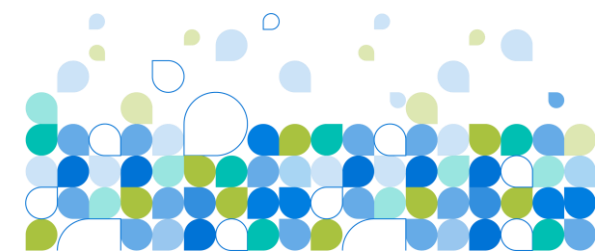
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» YOUR VOICE  
» YOUR LIFE  
» YOUR TRUTH\*

*\*Karen Leach, former swimmer from Ireland*

## FINAL REPORT VOICES FOR TRUTH AND DIGNITY

Combatting sexual violence in European Sport  
through the voices of those affected



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# CASES builds on previous work





# Partnership

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**Project lead: Mike Hartill**

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University Partners



Sport Partners





## Disseminating findings to the sport sector

# CASES Symposia

Belgium: Nov. 17<sup>th</sup>

Germany: Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>

Spain: Nov. 18<sup>th</sup>

Austria: Nov. 24<sup>th</sup>

UK: Nov. 24<sup>th</sup>

Romania: Nov. 25<sup>th</sup>

Monaco: Nov. 26<sup>th</sup>



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# Previous Research



# Previous research

## Authors

Leahy, Pretty & Tenenbaum (2002)

Fasting et al. (2010)

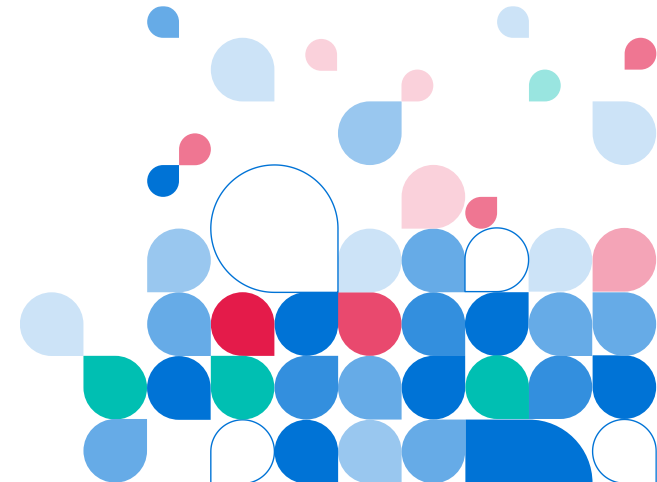
Alexander et al. (2011)

Fasting, Huffmann & Sand (2015)

Vertommen et al. (2016)

Ohlert et al. (2018)

Kerr, Willson, & Stirling (2019)





# Previous research

Authors	Concept / Focus	Sample
Leahy, Pretty & Tenenbaum (2002)	sexual abuse	athletes in Australia
Fasting et al. (2010)	sexual harrassment	female sport students in Norway, Greece, Czech Republic
Alexander et al. (2011)	child abuse	pupils at secondary schools in UK
Fasting, Huffmann & Sand (2015)	gender-based violence	Athletes and coaches in Zambia
Vertommen et al. (2016)	interpersonal violence	panel of the population in Belgium (Flanders) and the Netherlands (18-50 years)
Ohlert et al. (2018)	sexual violence	competitive and elite athletes in Germany
Kerr, Willson, & Stirling (2019)	maltreatment	current and retired athletes in Canada

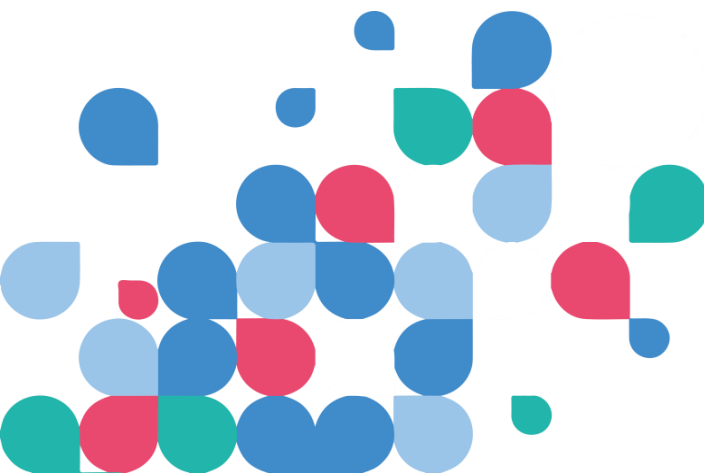
» based on different questionnaires and methods





# Previous research

- lack of studies that allow comparison between nations (except: Fasting et al., 2010)
- studies on the field of sport focus on violence in sport only, with no comparison to outside-sport experiences of violence
- general studies on violence often ignore the field of sport
- Lack of studies on violence against children in sport that allow a comparison with experiences of violence outside sport



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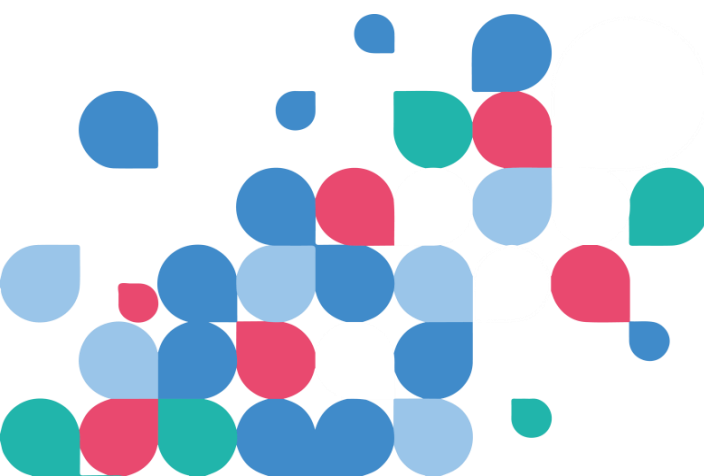


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# Aims of CASES study

- Investigate violence and abuse against children (under age 18) in sport in various European countries
- Development of a joint questionnaire to allow country-comparison
- Study a large, possibly representative sample of young people
- Including various organisational contexts in sport
- Comparison of violence experiences in sport with outside sport
- Include various forms of abuse, violence, harassment and harmful behaviours



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# Methodology



# Approach

UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2011: 8):

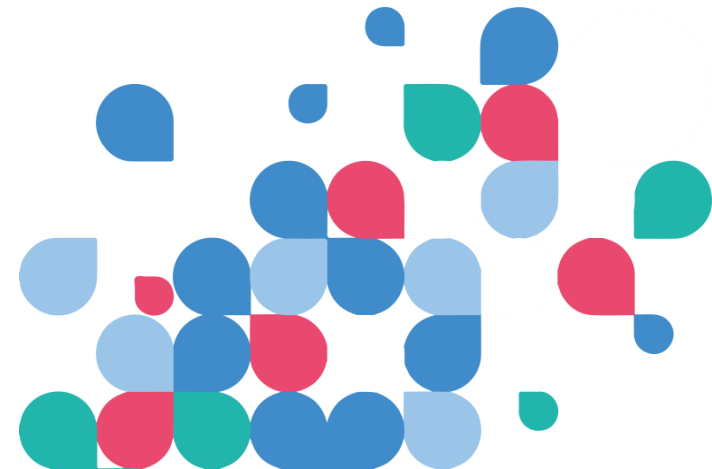
**All forms of violence against children, however light, are unacceptable.** ... Frequency, severity of harm and intent to harm are not prerequisites for the definitions of violence. ...

The World Health Organisation (WHO) describes the nature of violent acts as:

- 1) physical
- 2) sexual
- 3) psychological
- 4) deprivation or neglect

(Krug et al., 2002, p.6).

Conceptualisations of child abuse make the same distinctions



# Approach



WHO separate violence into distinct categories:

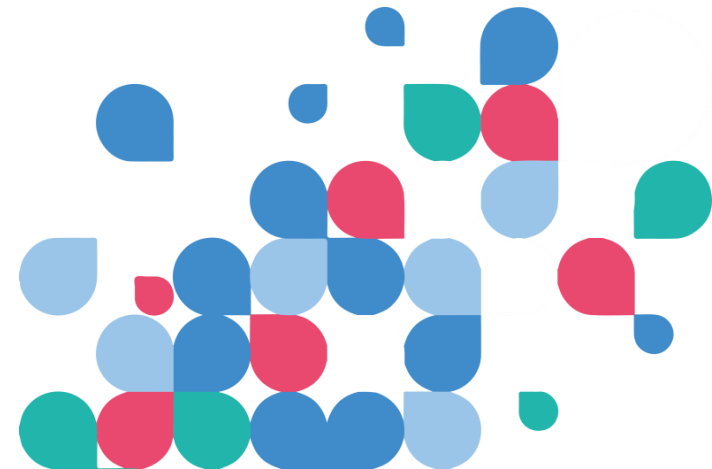
self-directed  
**interpersonal**  
collective

**Interpersonal violence (IV)** refers to:

1. family and intimate partner violence
  - usually in the home
2. community violence
  - generally outside the home

(Krug et al., 2002, p.6).

CASES applies this concept of ***interpersonal violence against children (IVAC)*** and includes all 4 categories of violence (physical, sexual, psychological, neglect).





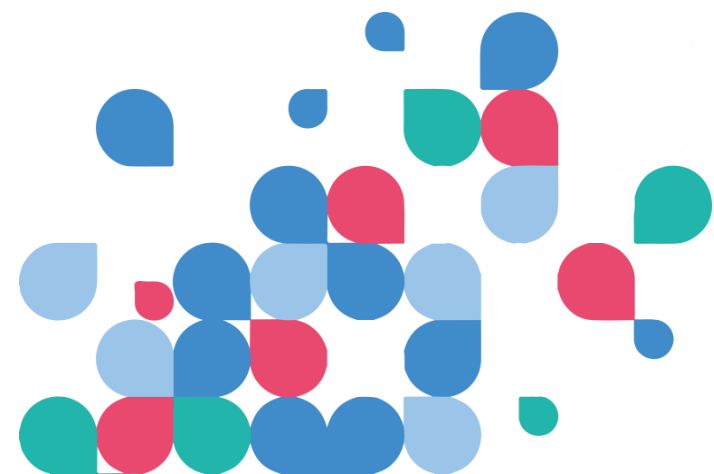
# Research Question

**What is the prevalence of interpersonal violence against children (active in organized sport) inside and outside sport?**

## Sub-questions:

- What are the characteristics of 'victims'?
- What are the characteristics of 'perpetrators'?
- What are the other characteristics of the experience?

Nb a child is defined as anyone under the age of 18 years



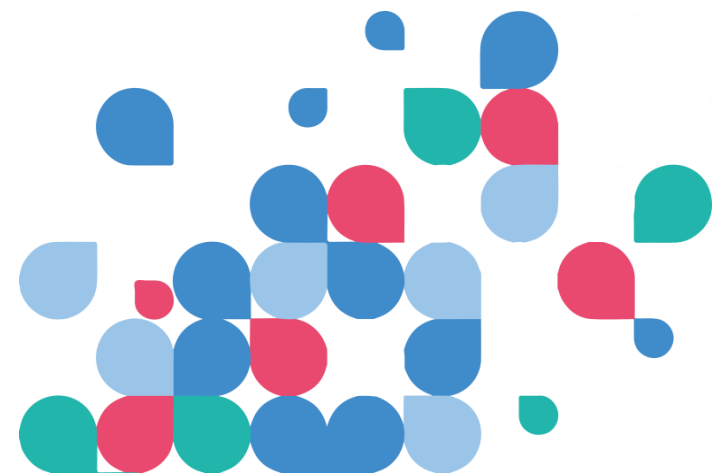


# Instrument

Self-administered, online questionnaire

## Interpersonal Violence Against Children in Sport Questionnaire (IVACS-Q)

1. Socio-demographics and sport participation
2. Experiences of violence
  1. Neglect
  2. Psychological/emotional violence
  3. Physical violence
  4. Contact sexual violence
  5. Non-contact sexual violence
3. Follow-up questions on most serious experience characteristics (age, perpetrator, duration, location, disclosure, etc.)



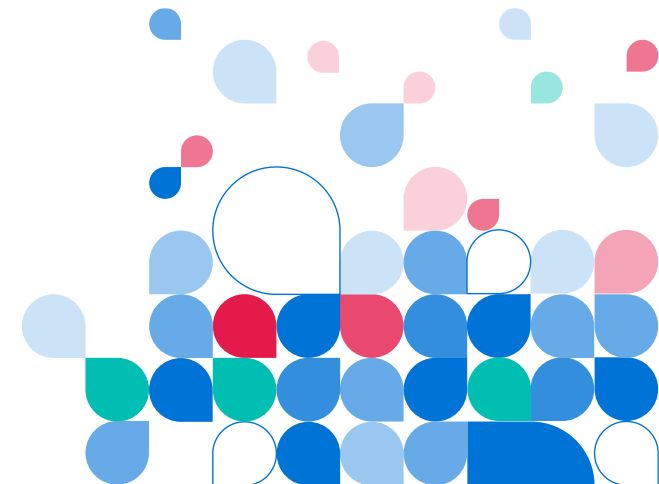


## Definition of “sport” in the questionnaire



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*“Here, ‘sport’ means any sporting activity that you played within the context of an organisation (e.g. sports club or facility, fitness centre). It also includes after-school sport teams but does NOT include timetabled sport activities in your school (e.g. physical education lessons).”*



# List of items (summary)

Neglect	Psychological violence	Physical violence	Non-contact sexual violence (NCSV)		Contact sexual violence (CSV)
inadequate support	humiliations	exercise as punishment	sexual comments		kissing
inadequate medical care	criticised about appearance	initiation rites involving physical harm	sexual looks		sexual touching
inadequate supervision	ignored or excluded, expelled	taking supplements	sexual images	view	genital contact
inappropriate equipment	not praised for efforts	play while injured or at harmful intensity		produce	oral sex
absence from school	verbal aggression/threats linked to performance	physical assault		share	penetration
unsafe conditions	unrealistic expectations		undressing for others		games/initiation rites (sexual contact)
	degrading initiation games/rites		'flashed' at in person/online		
			games/initiation rites (sexualised)		

# Procedure: Testing & Translation



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# Fieldwork



Ipsos MORI

## Sampling & data collection by Ipsos MORI



- contacted panel members aged 18-30 who had participated in organised sport when under 18
- 2 Oct. - 14 Dec. 2020, until net response of 1472 was achieved in each country
- Samples were quoted by gender (male/female) and age group (18-24/25-30).

Country	Fieldwork start date	Fieldwork end date	Duration (days)
Austria	11/11/2020	17/11/2020	7
Belgium (Flanders)	03/11/2020	14/12/2020	41
Belgium (Wal-Bxl)	03/11/2020	22/11/2020	20
Germany	10/11/2020	14/11/2020	5
Romania	29/10/2020	4/11/2020	7
Spain	30/10/2020	2/11/2020	4
UK	22/10/2020	31/10/2020	10

## Sample Description

**Total sample = 10,302**

Aged 18 - 30 years old (avg. 24)



49%

50%

82% Heterosexual

7% Bisexual

3% Homosexual

2% Lesbian

2% Other

5% Prefer not to say



6% indicated a disability

7% participated only in sports for people with disability

14% participated in both, abled and disabled sports

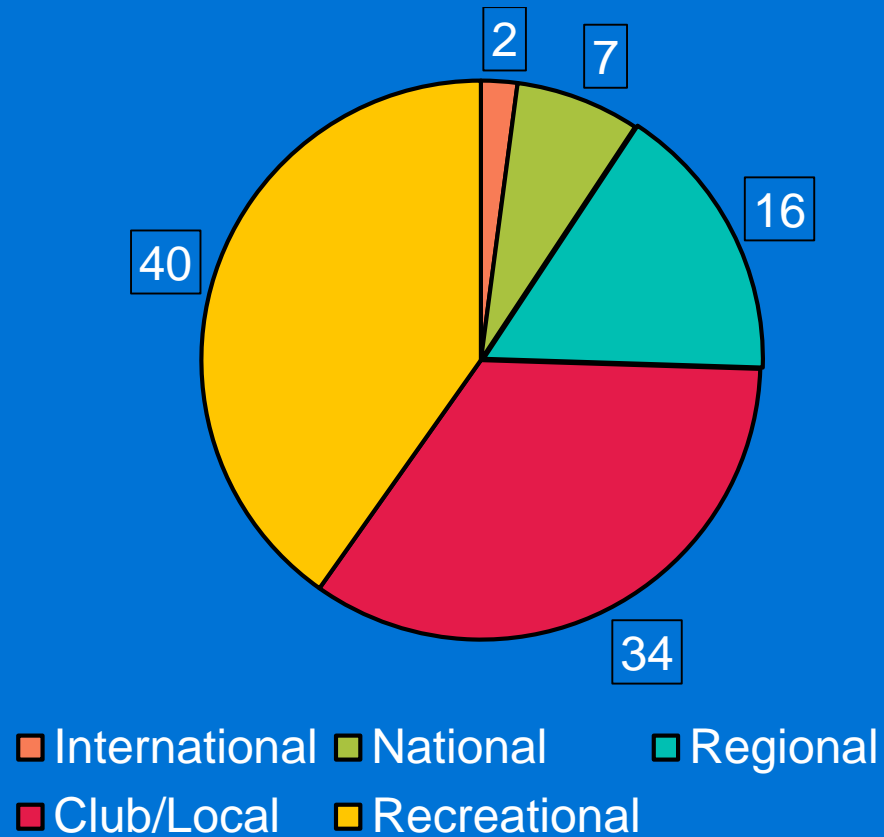
11% belonged to minority ethnic group



# Results



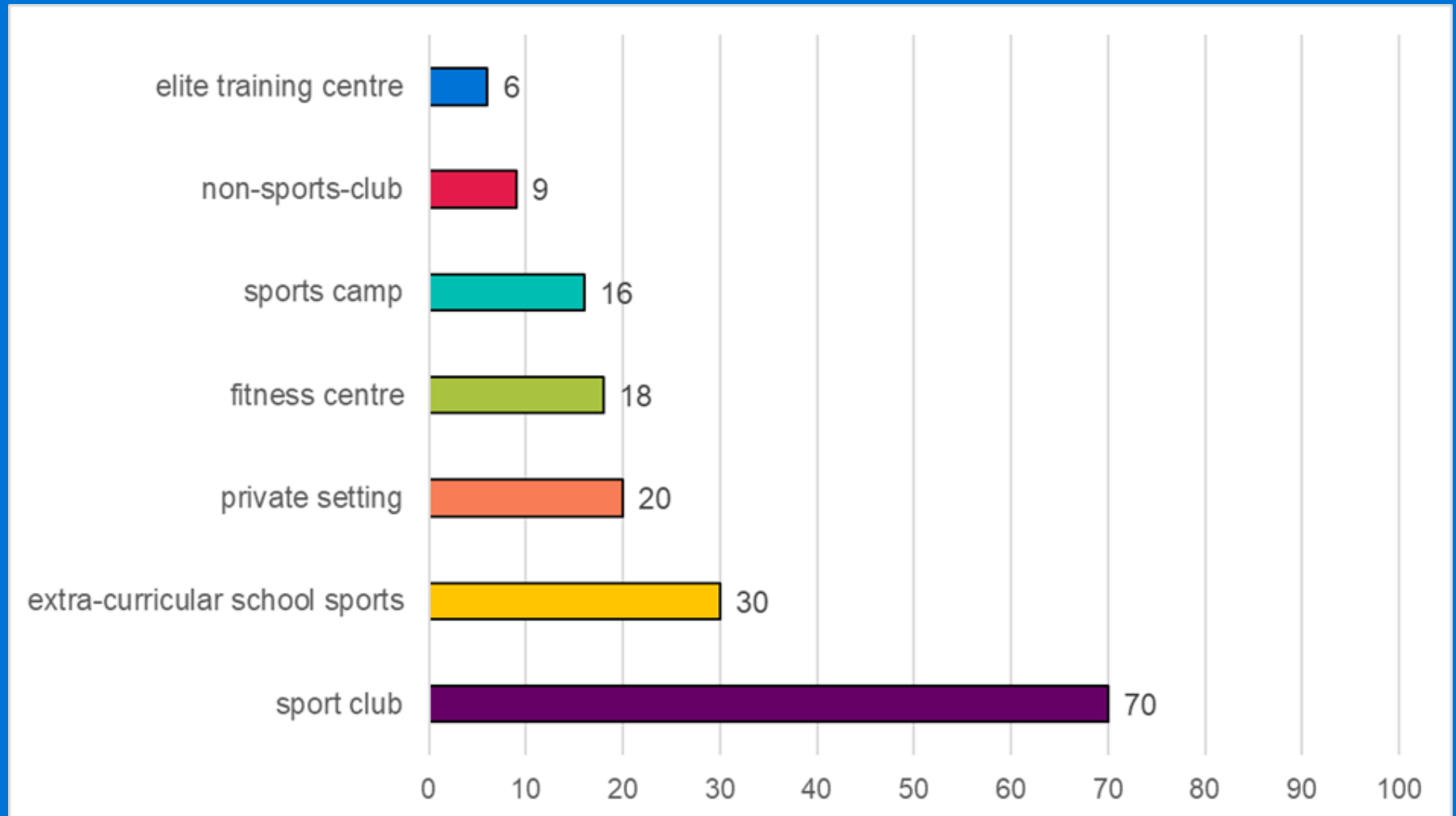
# Characteristics of Sport Participation



Most Popular Sports	
Female	Male
Dance	Football
Swimming	Basketball
Football	Tennis
Volleyball	Swimming

# Characteristics of Sport Participation

## Organisational context (n=10,302; in %)







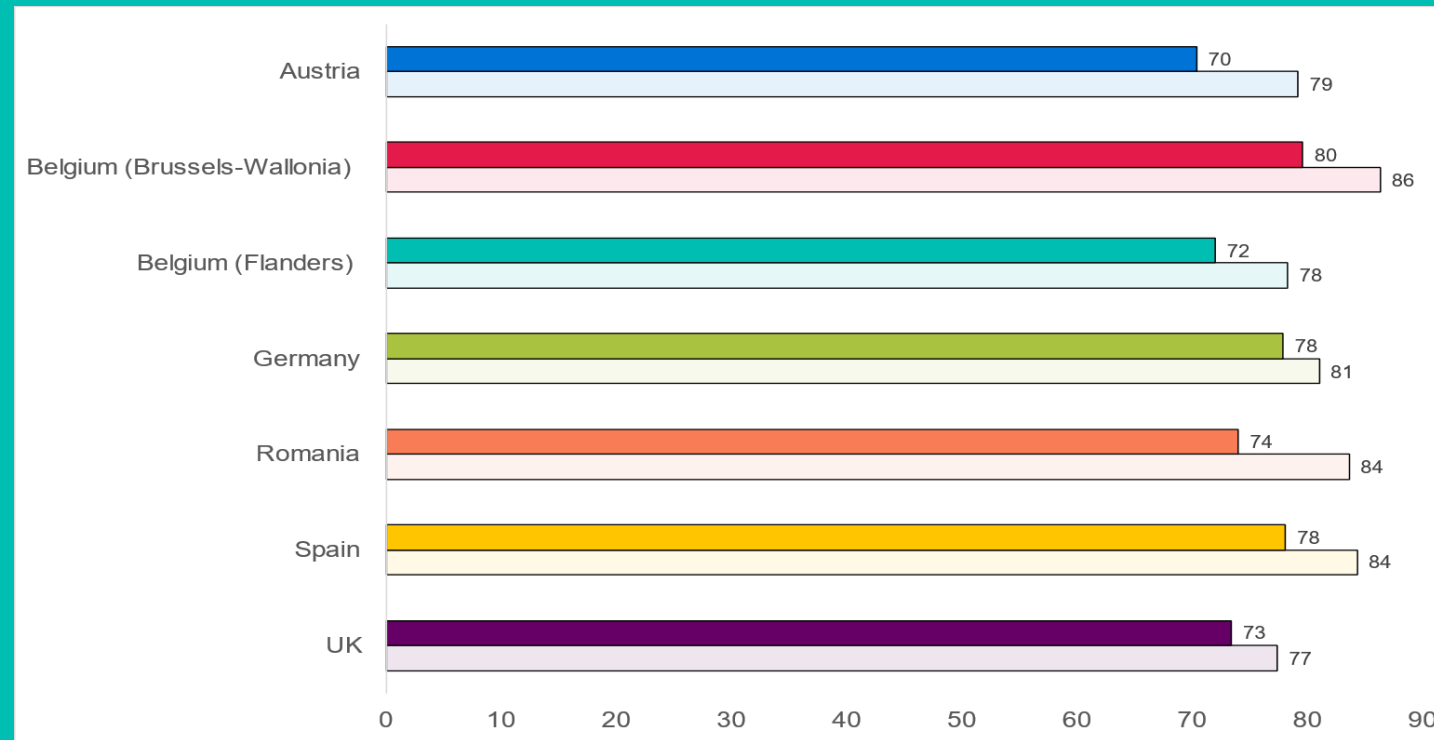
# Key Findings on Prevalence



## Prevalence of IVAC: national context 'at least one experience' (n=10,302; in %)

75% reported at least one  
experience *inside* sport.

82% reported at least one  
experience *outside* sport.



Inside Sport

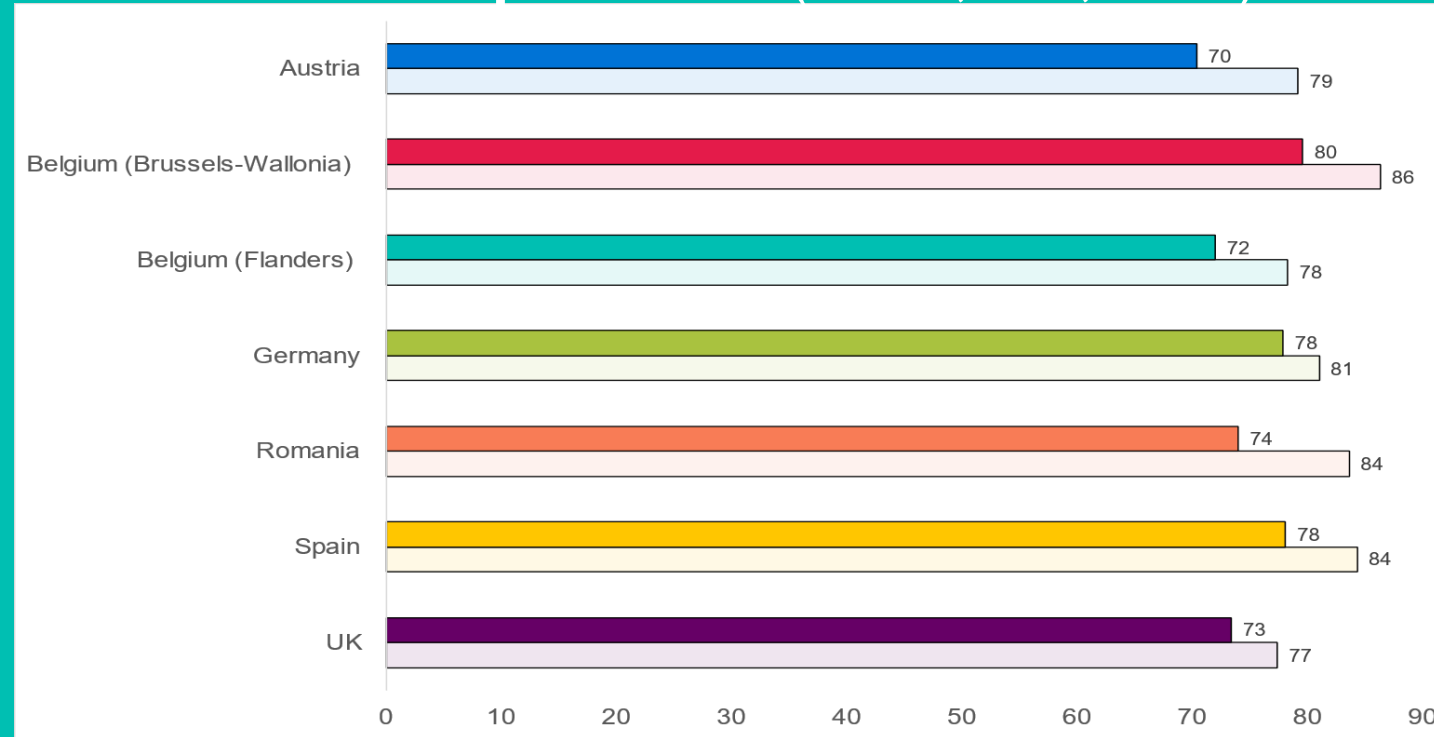


Outside Sport



## Prevalence of IVAC: national context 'at least one experience' (n=10,302; in %)

*Inside sport*, prevalence varies from 70% in Austria (lowest) to 80% in Belgium Brussels-Wallonia (highest).

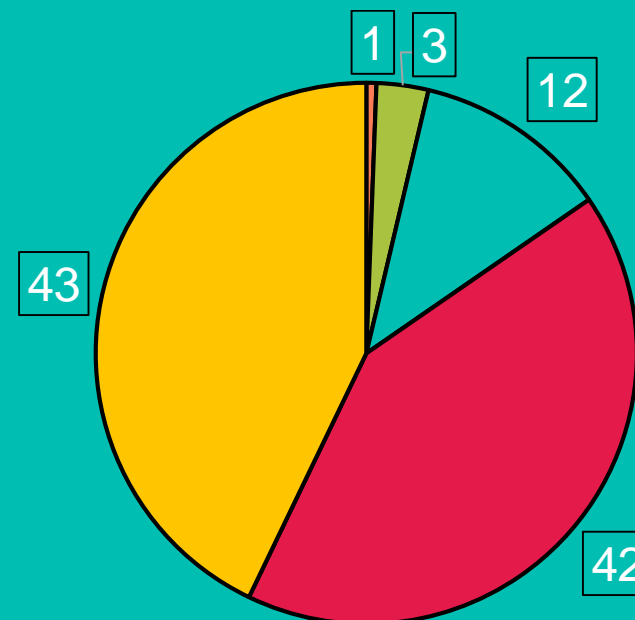


Inside Sport 

Outside Sport 



85% of respondents  
rated their *overall  
experience of sport* as  
either 'good (42%) or  
'very good' (43%).



■ Very Poor ■ Poor ■ Neutral ■ Good ■ Very Good

**General experience of sport**  
(n=10,302; in %)

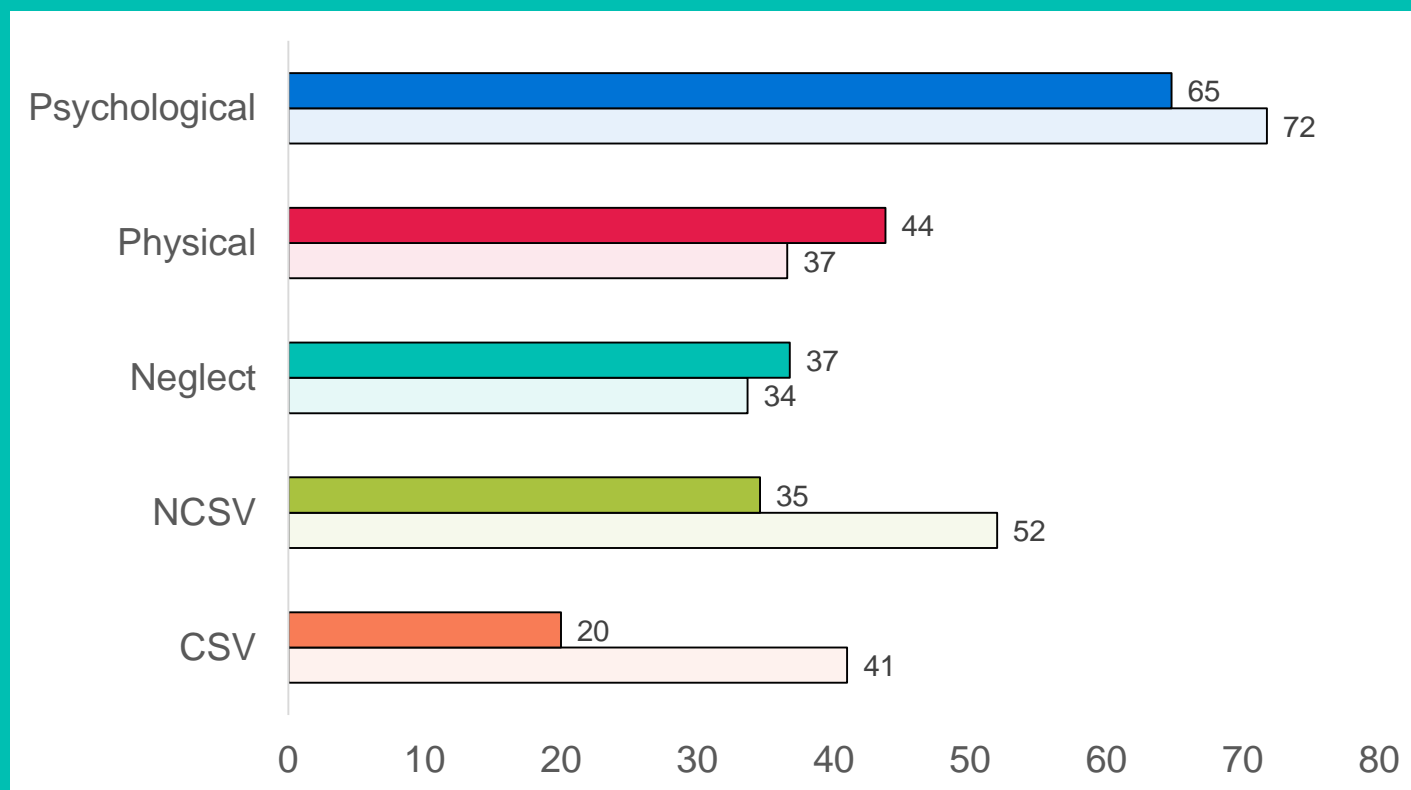


The most common experience in sport is psychological violence.

The least common is contact-sexual violence.

Sexual violence is experienced significantly more often outside sport than inside sport.

## Prevalence of categories of IVAC (n=10,302; in %)

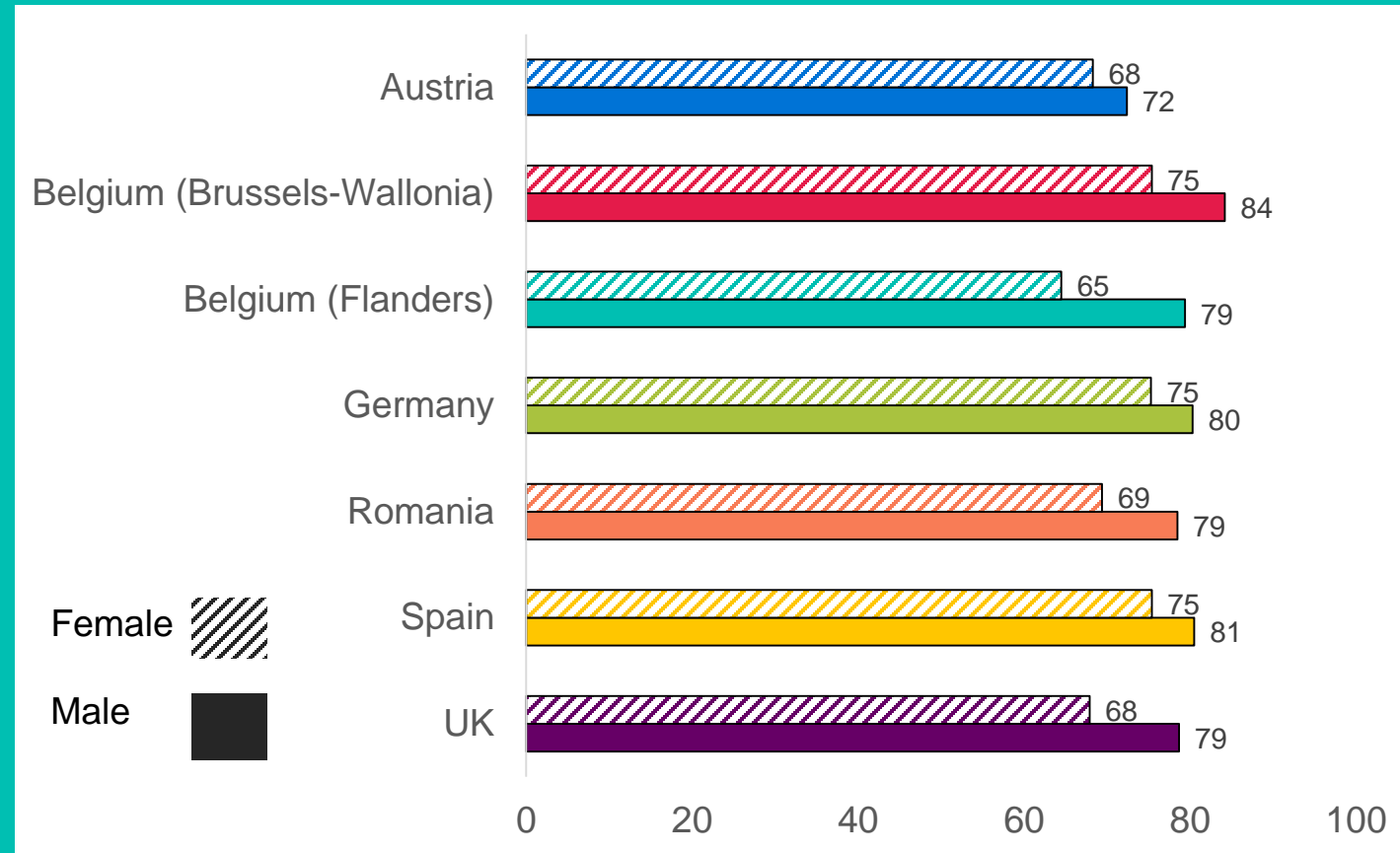


Inside Sport 

Outside Sport 

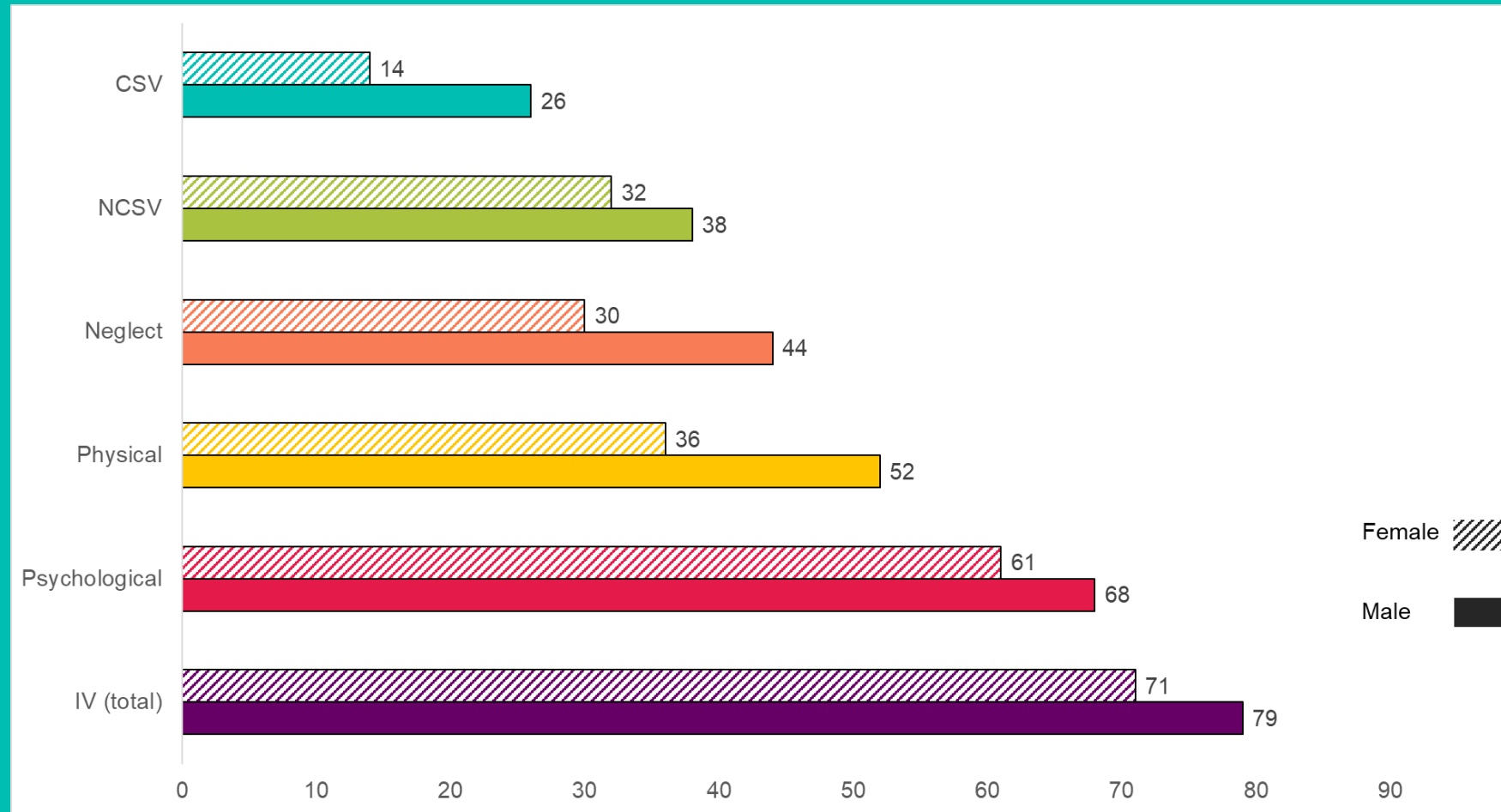
## *Inside sport*

79% of male respondents and 71% of female respondents reported at least one experience of any type of interpersonal violence against children.



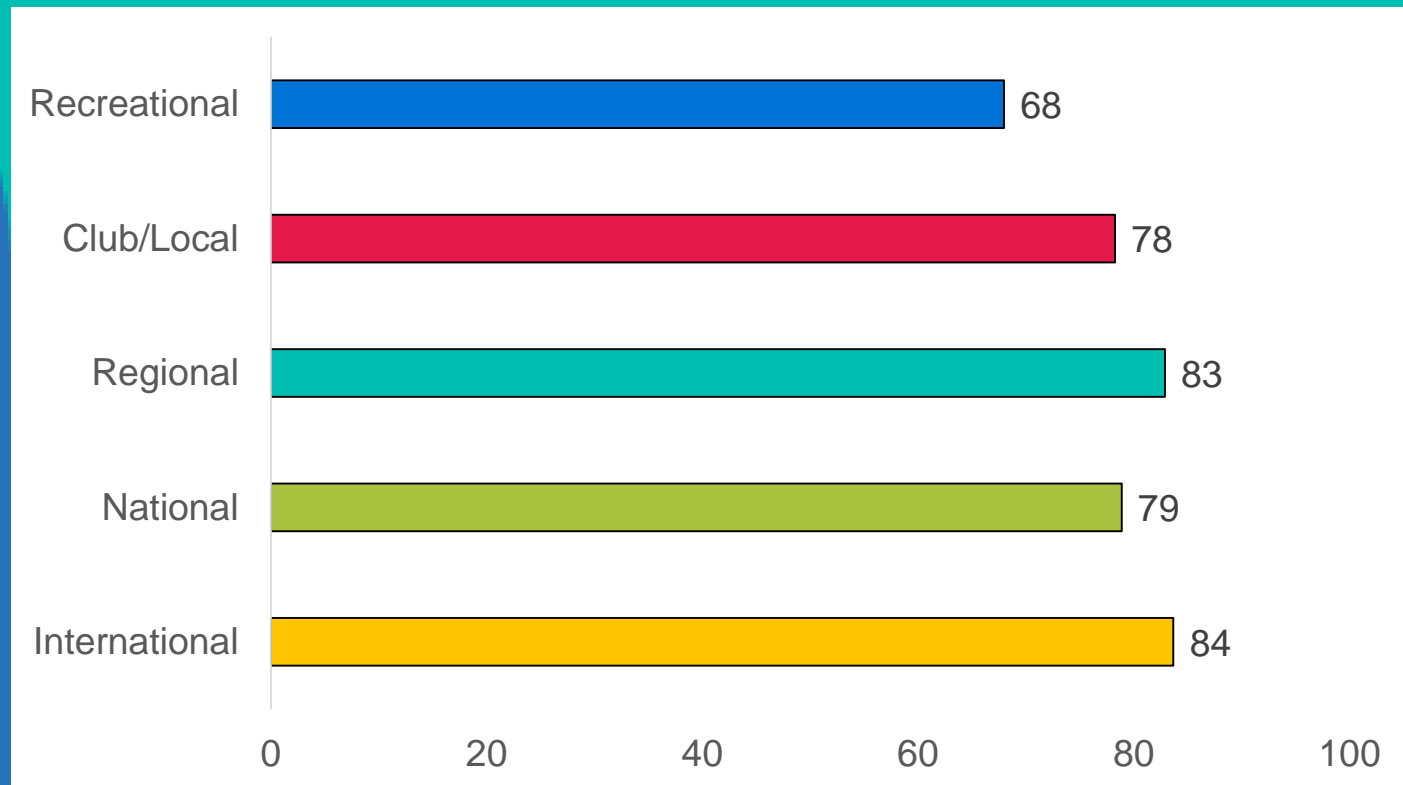
**Prevalence of IVAC: male & female**  
(n=10,302; in %)

In all categories  
men report more  
experiences of  
violence in sport  
than women.



Prevalence of IVAC in sport per category:  
male & female (n=10,302; in %)

The prevalence is lowest for respondents in recreational sport and highest for those who competed in international sport.

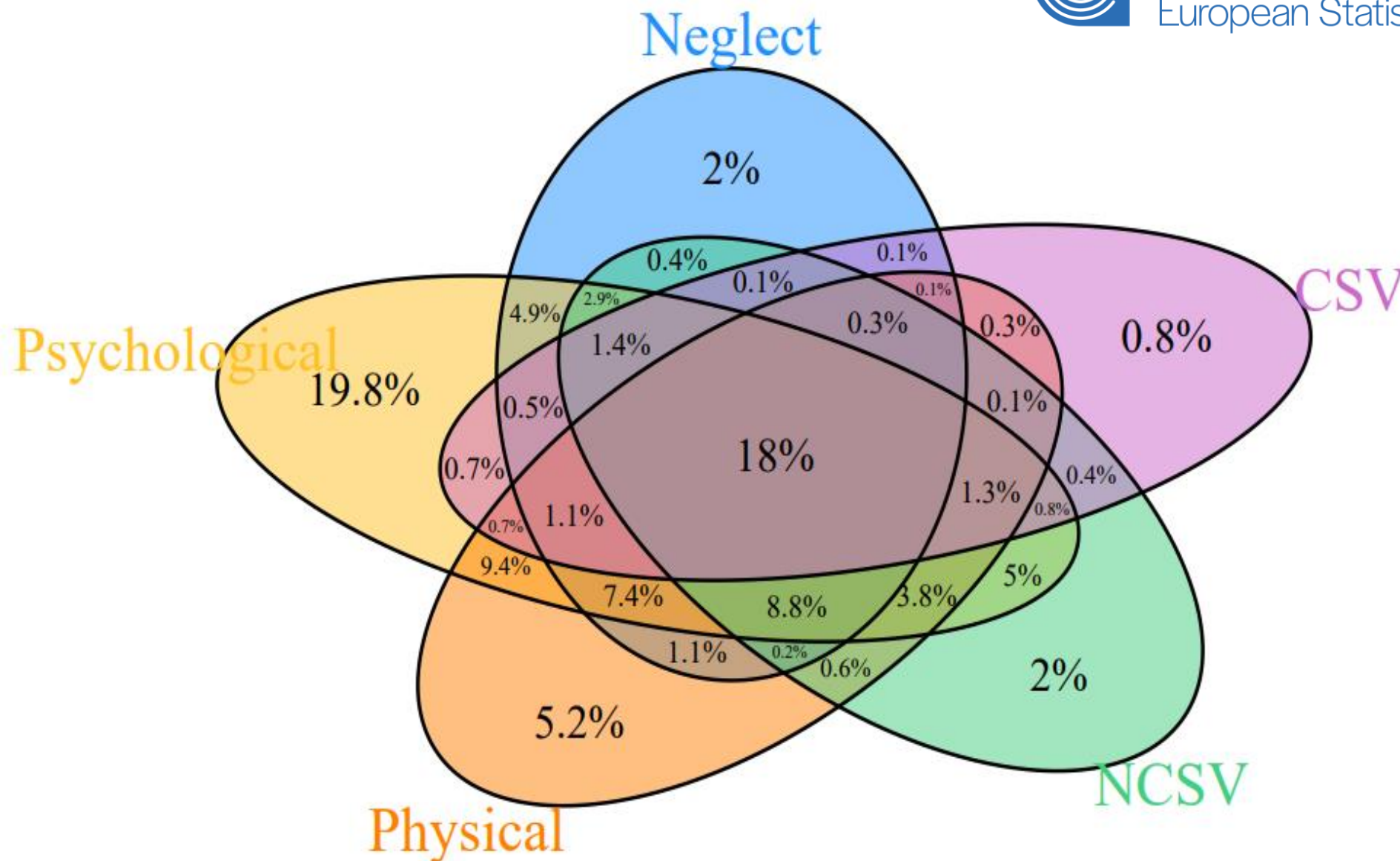


Prevalence of IVAC: sport level  
(n=10,302; in %)



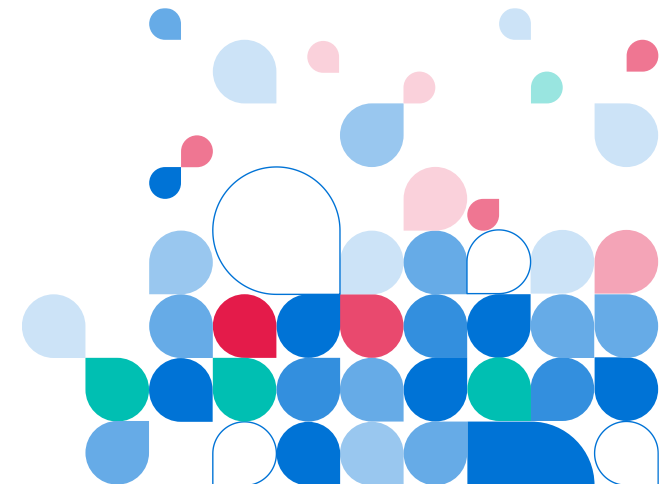


## Overlap



# Country comparison: Range of prevalence rates in sport

Category	Range / county
Psychological violence	59% in Belgium (Flanders) up to 71% in Germany
Neglect	32% in Austria up to 42% in Germany
Physical violence	32% in Austria up to 52% in Belgium (Brussel-Wallonia)
Non-contact Sexual violence	30% in UK up to 41% in Belgium (Brussel-Wallonia)
Contact sexual violence	16% in Austria up to 26% in Germany





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# Further characteristics of IVAC in sport



# Most serious experience – Follow-up questions



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Most serious  
experience =  
*“the one experience  
that had the most  
impact on you,  
either physically or  
psychologically”*

**! The following results only refer to experiences in sport !**

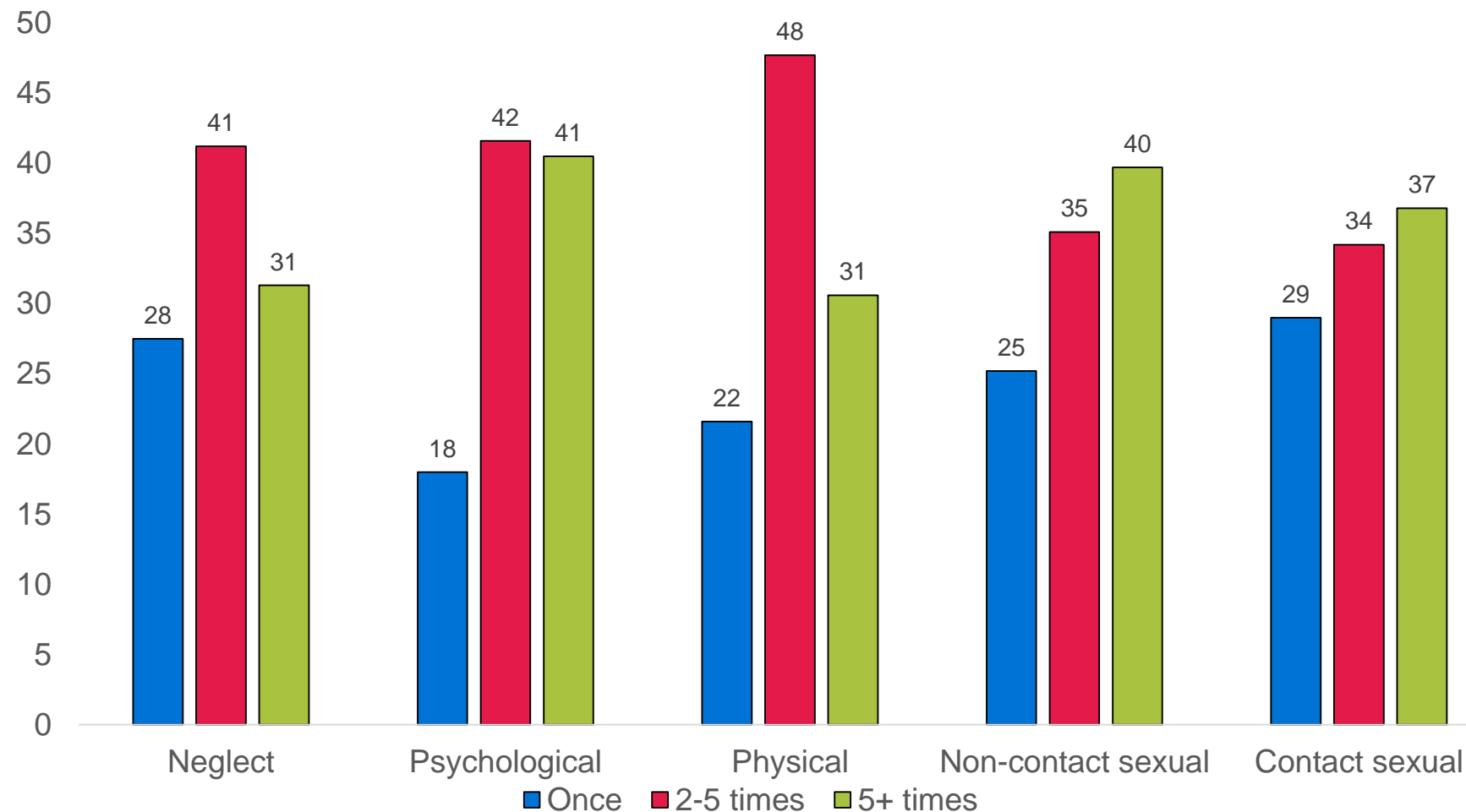
# Frequency of experiences

(n=1180-4846, in %)



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The most common  
answer is 2-5 times,  
yet for sexual violence it  
is more than 5 times !



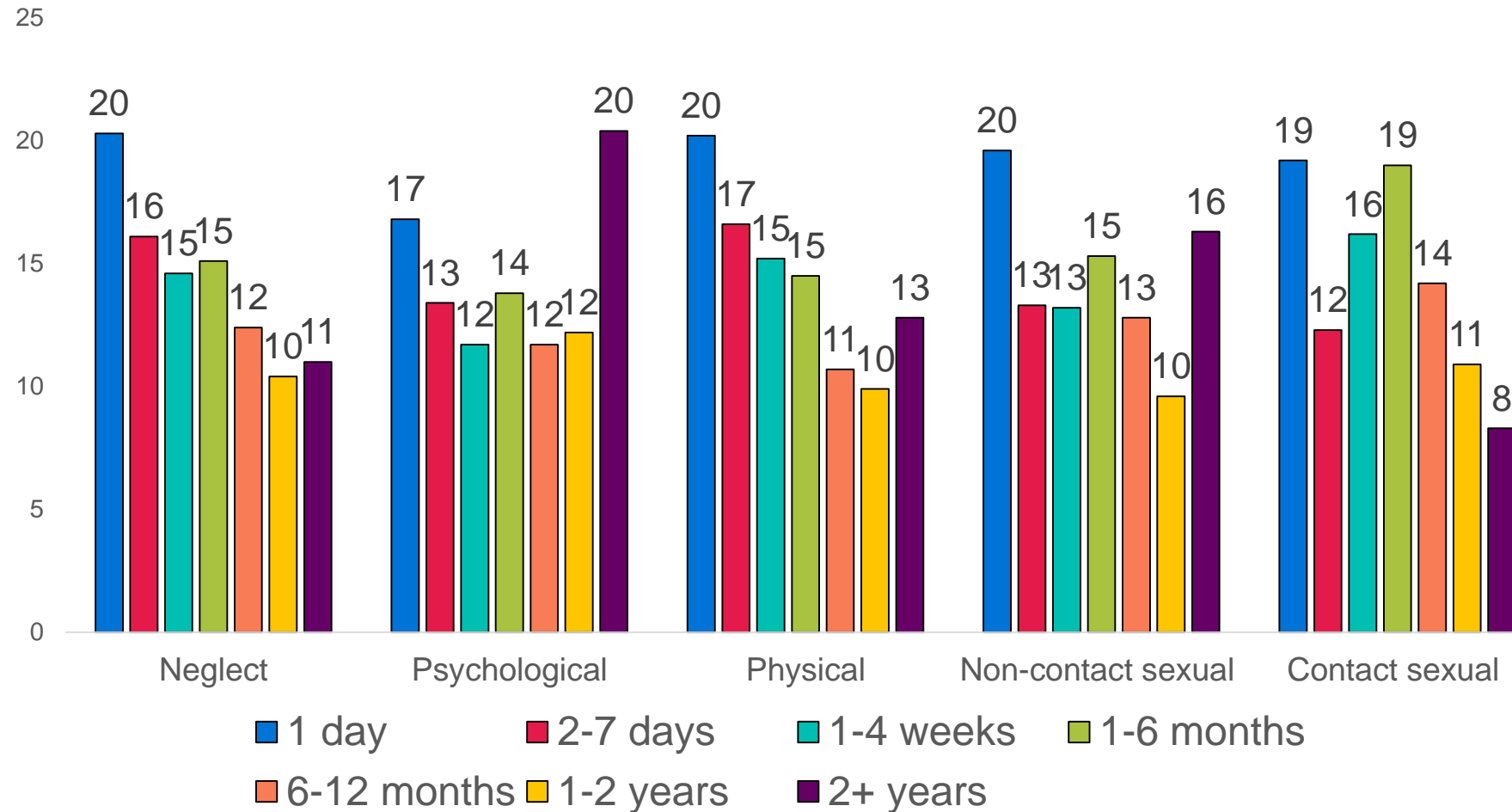
# Duration of experiences

(n=1321-4718, in %)



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The duration of  
experiences  
varies



- » Females experience IVAC over longer periods than males
- » The higher the level of participation, the longer the duration

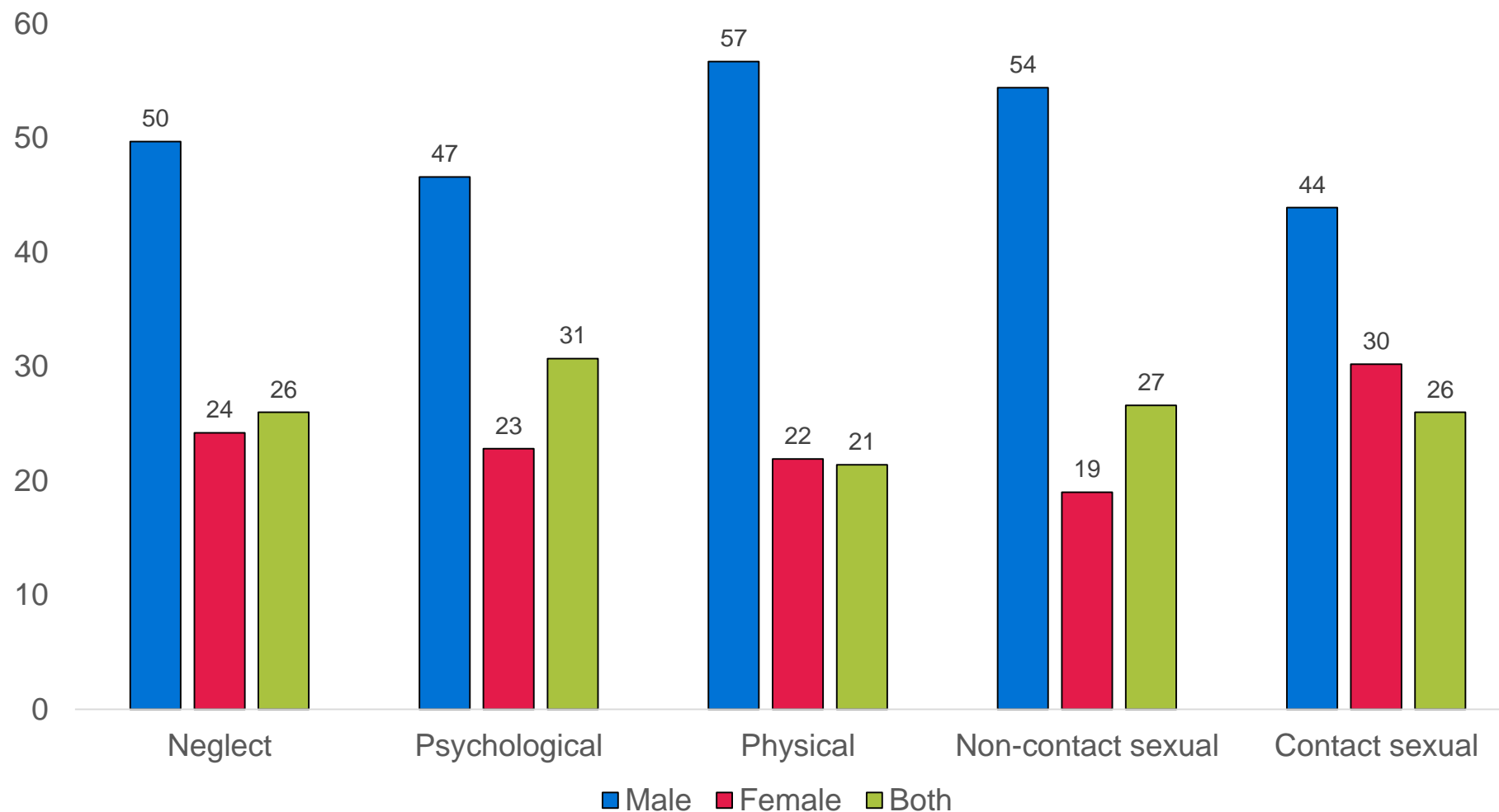
# Characteristics of perpetrator: gender

(n=1256-5264, in %)



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In all categories  
males are  
reported more  
often as  
perpetrators than  
females.



# Characteristics of perpetrator: role

(n=2035-8374, in %)

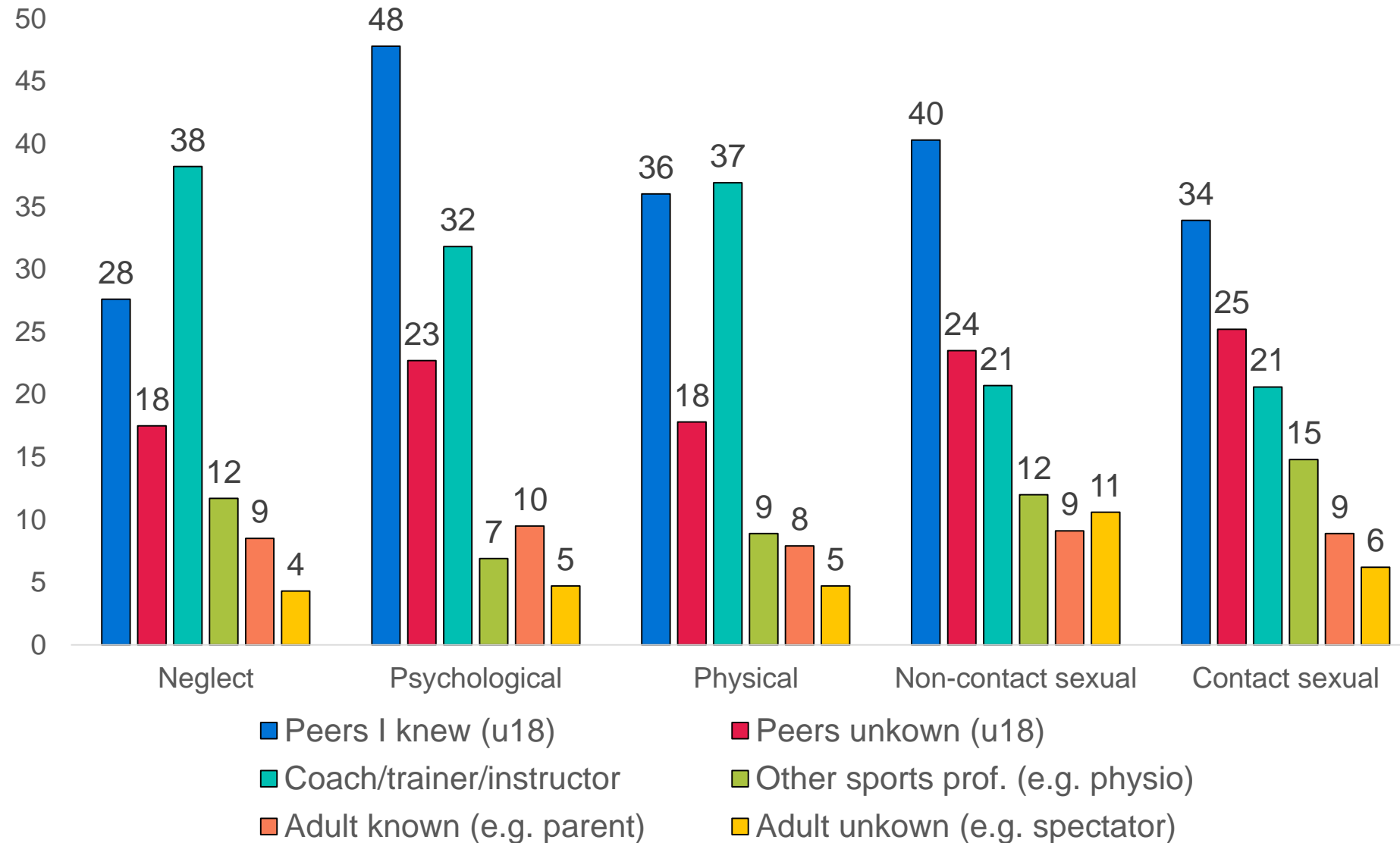


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Psychological and sexual violence is most often perpetrated by team mates and peers.

Neglect by coaches & instructors.

Physical violence by coaches and peers.

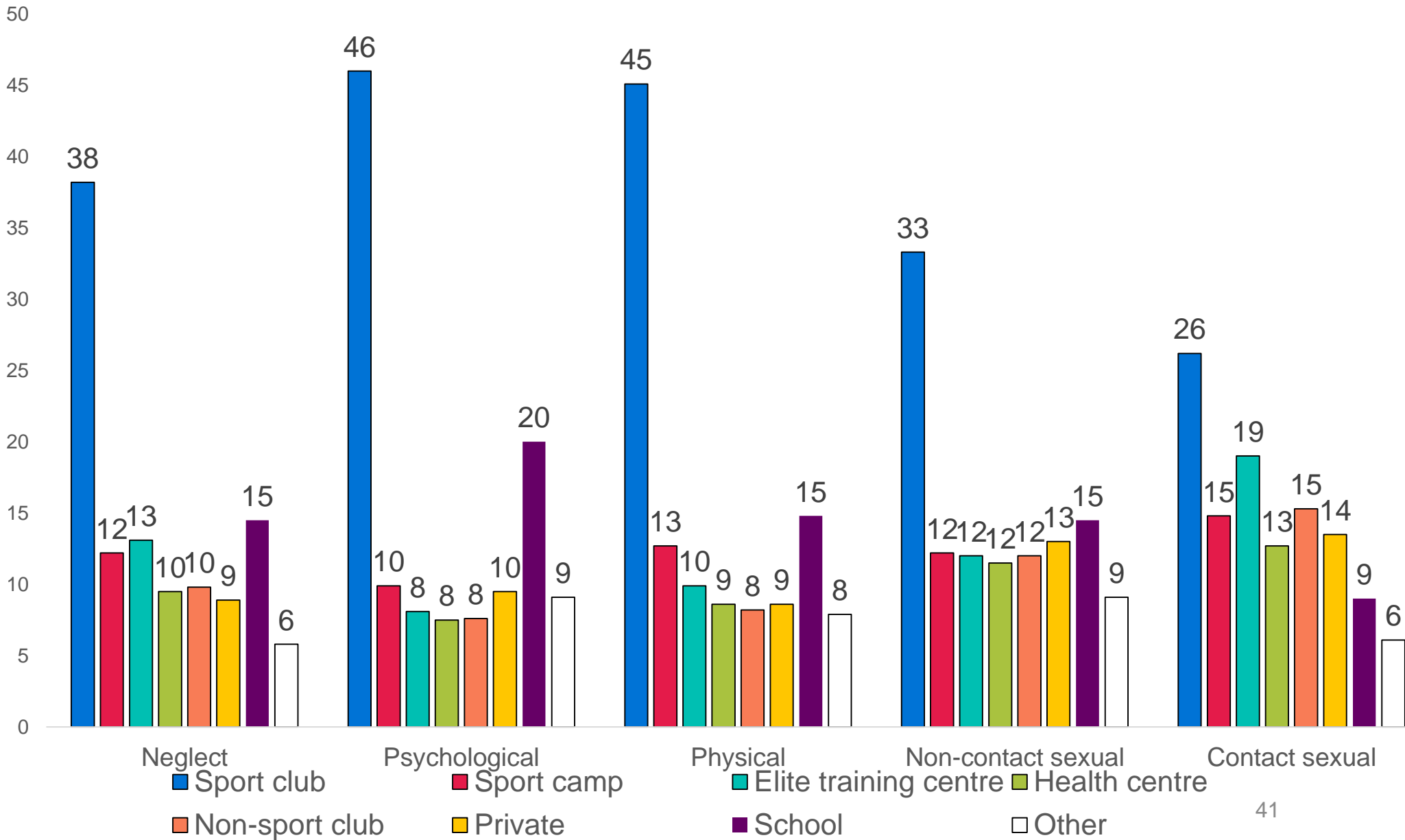




# Organisational context of violence experience

(n=2116-7974 in %)

The sport club is the most-often reported organisational context of violence



# Location of violence experience

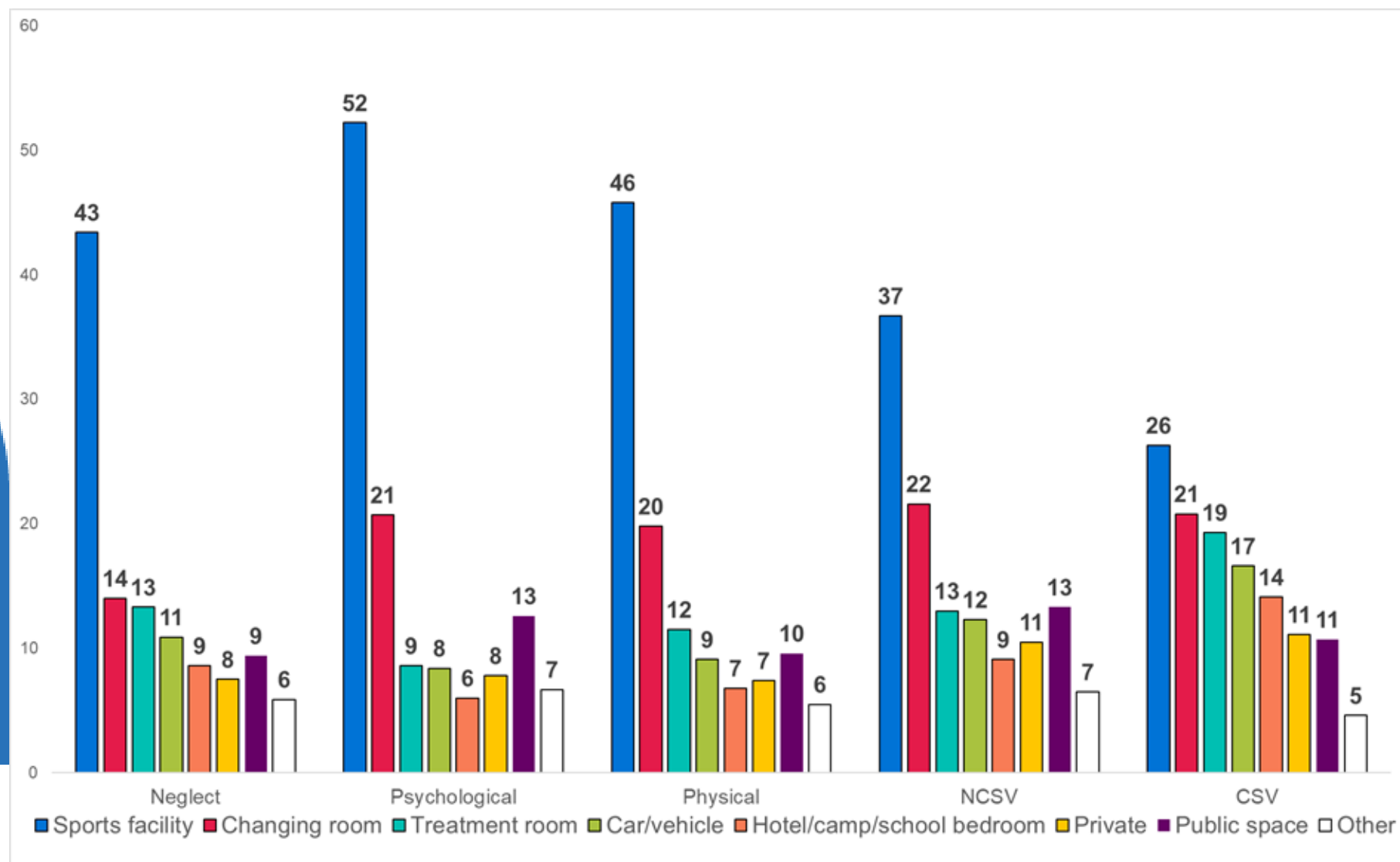
(n=2235- 8541, in %)



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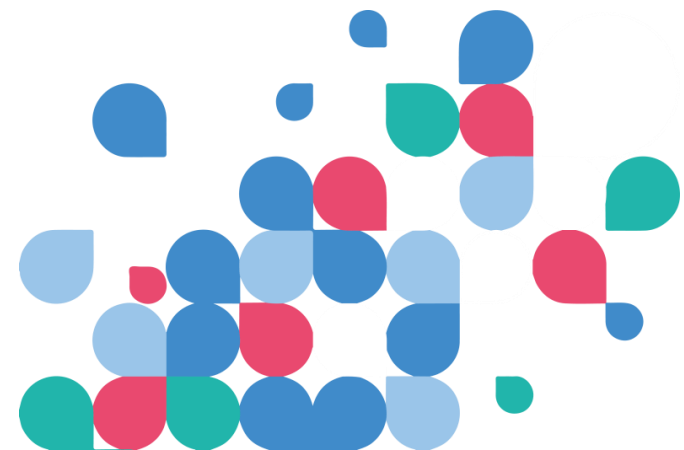
The sports facility is  
the most-often  
reported location  
of violence,

followed by changing  
rooms



# Disclosure

- The majority of respondents (28-46%) reports that they did not disclose at all
- Family, friends and peers were the most frequent chosen contact-points to disclose IVAC
- Only a small proportion (4-6%) chose to disclose to someone from the field of sport





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# Summary of Key Findings





## Key Findings

1. The experience of interpersonal violence against children in sport is a widespread problem.
2. Adults who played sport in their youth are overwhelmingly positive about their overall experience of sport.
3. The prevalence of interpersonal violence against children who participate in sport is marginally lower inside sport than outside sport.
4. The prevalence of specific categories of IVAC inside sport varies.
5. The prevalence of IVAC inside sport is broadly similar across national contexts.
6. The prevalence of IVAC *inside sport* is higher for boys than girls in all categories and in most countries.
7. The prevalence of interpersonal violence against children is lowest for respondents in recreational sport and highest for those who competed in international sport.

## STRENGTHS

- Large sample
- Interlocking quotas for gender and age groups
- Instrument developed in international expert group
- Identical instrument and methodology in all countries
- First multi-national study of this size on IVAC in sport – multiple categories of abuse



## LIMITATIONS

- Cross-sectional design:
  - Respondents surveyed at specific point in time (not longitudinal)
- Participants recruited via internet panel: self-selective convenience sample (not random)
- Self-report questionnaire with closed questions – can't grasp personal and subjective experiences
- Retrospective design (based on recollections) may lead to false negatives and false positives



# Conclusion & Recommendations





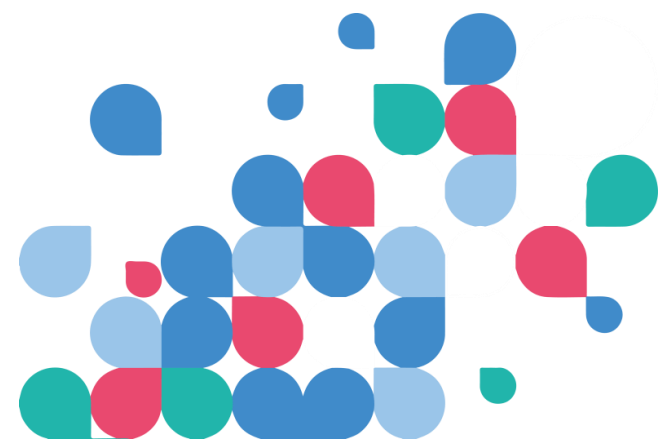
## Conclusions

a serious and widespread problem

prevention responses

strategy is informed by independent evidence

cultural change ... strong, proactive leadership







## Recommendations

### Government should:

1. Ensure general policies and strategies on child protection and 'safeguarding' include and apply to sport.
2. Incorporate systematic, longitudinal research on prevalence of interpersonal violence against children in sport into national strategies and action plans for sport.
3. Provide an independent body or agency where those affected by interpersonal violence in sport can report their experiences and receive help and support.
4. Ensure national agencies or federations are supported and appropriately resourced to introduce and/or increase efforts to raise awareness of and prevent interpersonal violence in sport.
5. Ensure prevention efforts extend to the local level (e.g. voluntary sports clubs) and are not limited to 'umbrella' sports federations.

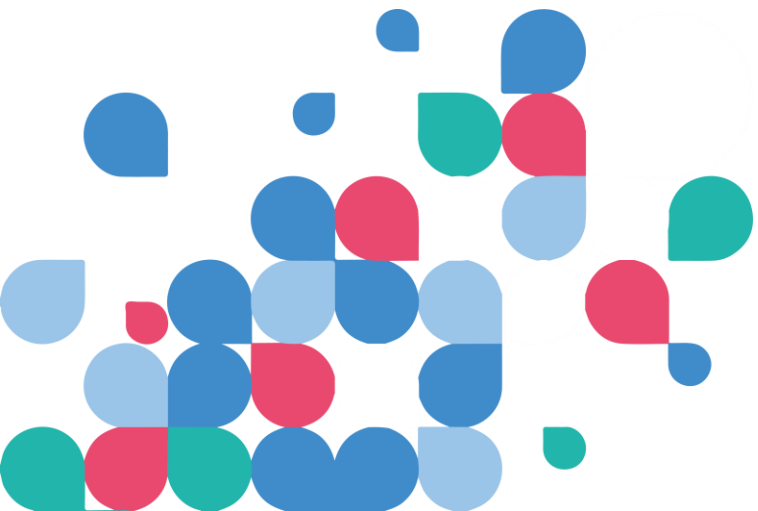


## Recommendations

### Sport federations should:

1. Acknowledge all forms of interpersonal violence against children inside sport.
2. Introduce measures to prevent interpersonal violence in sport and ensure children's rights are incorporated into all levels of organisational structures in sport.
3. Ensure strategic policy is informed by evidence on prevalence rates of interpersonal violence against children.
4. Evaluate and improve the efficacy of prevention measures through longitudinal assessment of interpersonal violence against children in sport.

# Final comment



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Webpage for report: <https://sites.edgehill.ac.uk/cpss/projects/child-abuse-in-sport-european-statistics-cases/>



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