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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Investigation of Male Elite Athletes with Criminal Records Using Narrative Research Method

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EXTENDED A B S T R A C T

Introduction

Sport is recognized as a positive tool for crime reduction; however, doubts exist regarding the assumption that participation in sports always leads to positive outcomes. Involvement in sports does not necessarily prevent negative behaviors, and the world of athletes, like other parts of society, includes individuals who commit crimes. The extent of criminal behavior among athletes, or how sports may contribute to criminal conduct, is not entirely clear. Limited research has been conducted on the experiences of athletes who engage in crime. Although past studies have suggested links between sports participation and violent or sexual offenses, there is still a lack of extensive empirical evidence in this area.

Methodology

In this study, narrative research was employed, which is a qualitative research approach that focuses on examining and analyzing individuals' stories and narratives. The researcher seeks to understand people's experiences, perspectives, and the meanings of their lives through the stories they tell. In the field of sport, significant advances have been made in the use of narrative research methods. For sample selection, there were two main criteria: participation in sport and engagement in criminal activities. The focus was on athletes who had openly broken the law and committed crimes. Non-random purposive sampling was used to select the samples. The use of this method is based on logical reasons to ensure that only athletes who, through their responses, contribute to the research question are interviewed. After initial contact was established, snowball sampling was used to establish connections with other participants through existing contacts. In order to collect the research data, the elite interview method was used to examine the narratives of 12 elite male athletes who had committed crimes during or immediately after their sports careers. Thematic analysis was used to explore the narrative research data. The first phase was familiarization with the data set; therefore, the texts were read

several times to achieve familiarity and understand their significance. Each interview was transcribed in the shortest possible time and with the assistance of a research assistant. In the second phase, the texts were carefully reviewed several times. In the third phase, the codes were reviewed to identify themes. In the fourth phase, the data were critically examined, and care was taken to ensure that participants' stories were not lost. It was important that each of the final themes addressed the overall research question. In the fifth phase, it was ensured that the final findings went beyond merely describing the emerged themes.

Findings

The aim of this article was to examine the experiences of elite male athletes who had committed crimes. By employing narrative research, accounts of crimes were presented that made possible a comprehensive understanding of crime within the context of the participants' sport. To go beyond anecdotal evidence, this study included an analysis that emphasized, as much as possible, the application of criminological perspectives. The thematic analysis conducted identified five main themes in the data: the sports experience, the criminal experience, the influence of external factors, the role of drugs and alcohol, and finally, reflection on the participants' personal journeys. The themes were then divided into smaller sub-themes. In the findings chapters, existing theories were used to explain the participants' criminal experiences. By combining descriptions, analyses, and interpretations, an attempt was made to provide a complete picture of each theme and to tell the story from both the participants' perspective and the researcher's perspective. The new themes and sub-themes expressed the participants' experiences and shared their narratives about crime with the reader. None of the themes is more important than another, and each was determined based on the interpretation of the data during the analysis process. Participants were treated with care and caution at all stages, and before scheduling the interviews, they were informed of the research objectives and the possible emotional risks arising from discussing their experiences. Participants were reminded at the beginning of the interview that they could only speak about past convictions, and that the interviewer was obliged to report any potentially dangerous behavior toward others. In some cases, sensitive issues were raised, and participants became visibly emotional, but none requested that the interview be stopped or withdrew from further cooperation. Given the nature of the research, the identity of the participants was protected at all stages, and all data remained confidential. All participants were assigned a pseudonym, and they were also given the option not to disclose the details of the sport they practiced. Information related to third parties mentioned in the interviews also remained confidential. The findings suggest that the pursuit of new boundaries may be a factor in criminal behavior, with offenses occurring as a result of such boundary-pushing actions. Overall, this study expands our understanding of criminal behavior among athletes and provides deeper insight into the role of sports in their experiences.

Discussion and Conclusion

The criminal experiences were clearly harmful to the participants and had significant and, in many cases, lasting effects on their lives. It is therefore essential to consider various methods to reduce the likelihood of future criminal behavior. The practical implications of this study revolve around the duty of care toward athletes; it is essential that sports organizations

support the welfare of their athletes and take measures to ensure their protection. It is essential to consider how the duty of care is fulfilled, particularly when an athlete may be expelled from sport as a result of their crime. Given that sport may be partly responsible for their behavior, this doubles the importance of attending to the duty of care for athletes who find themselves in this situation. Sports organizations should consider utilizing the experiences of athletes who have previously committed crimes so that future athletes can learn from their mistakes.

KEY WORDS

Athletes, Criminal Behavior, Crime Reduction.

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