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## EDITORIAL

### VIOLENCE, EXCLUSION AND THE ROLE OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS MORAL FEATURES IN THE SPORT DOMAIN: THE SAVE PROJECT

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#### ABSTRACT

*The prevention of violence and exclusion in the sport domain is one of the principal priorities of the European Union Programs. Sport Against Violence and Exclusion (SAVE) Project is an initiative co-founded by the Erasmus Plus Programme of the European Commission, whose aim is to train coach to recognize and manage violent and exclusion episodes in the sport situation. According to the psychological literature, one of the predictors of aggressiveness and antisocial tendencies is morality. In particular, for what concerns children, a less mature moral reasoning is associated to a greater tendency to aggress, while for adolescents, the moral atmosphere, in particular, the perception of the coach norms, seems to have the greatest influence on their behavior. For this reason, an in-depth training for coaches has been developed within SAVE Project. Furthermore, a scientific research involving seven countries has been conducted. The current Editorial Letter shows one year progress of SAVE Project. This and other initiatives, if supported by scientific community, could be an inspiration for broader policy reform.*

**Keywords:** Aggressiveness, Social Exclusion, Moral reasoning, Moral atmosphere, Children, Adolescents

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Sport Against Violence and Exclusion - SAVE Project is an initiative cofounded by the European Commission under the Erasmus + Sport Program (Key action: Sport- 590711-EPP-1-2017-1-LT-SPO-SCP). The aim of the project is to fight violence and exclusion in the sport domain by training coaches from grass-roots sport clubs to recognize and manage violent and exclusion episodes<sup>(1)</sup>.

The identification of effective prevention strategies should keep into consideration the indications of scientific literature. Specifically, the psychological literature has focused on issues as sport morality for the prediction of aggressive tendencies or antisocial behaviors in children<sup>(2,3)</sup>.

Several studies confirmed that children displaying a less mature moral reasoning were more likely to aggress or behaving in antisocial way<sup>(3,4)</sup>.

For what concerns adolescents, it seems that the moral atmosphere of the sport team has greater influence than the maturity of moral reasoning. In a sport team, individuals interact with lots of figures that have an influence upon their behaviors and decisions<sup>(5)</sup>. Factors as perception of team norms, perception of coach norms, conformity to the masculine role, performance motivational climate, have been taken as predictors of potential and actual aggressive behaviors<sup>(6,7)</sup>.

Among those people with whom adolescents interact, the coach seems to have the greatest in-

fluence in shaping their behaviour in a sport situation. The main finding of the study of Miller, Robert and Ommundsen<sup>(6)</sup> is that the perception of coaches' norms and standards influences the most the athletes' sport morality, both for positive and negative behaviors.

Since the coaches seem to be the most influential actors in the athletes' educational process, the structure of SAVE Project gives importance to their role for a healthy psychological development of children and adolescents, oriented to solve conflict without harming the others or excluding them from the team dynamics.

The Project duration is 30 months and started in January 2018, involving nine Partners, both Universities and NGO, from seven European Countries (Italy, Lithuania, Spain, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Austria). To obtain an intervention respecting the peculiarity of each country, the very first Project activity was Desk Analysis and Needs Assessment, assessing the general policies regarding social inclusion in the sport domain and the prevention of violence at local, national and international level (Desk Analysis) and detecting through 7 focus group (more than 70 coaches involved) the needs of the target group, made up of coaches from grass-roots sport clubs, in terms of knowledge and skills for the prevention of these behaviors (Needs Assessment).

The results of this activity were then used to:

- Define a model of competency according to the scientific literature,
- create possible combination of competencies that a coach should acquire for preventing and managing conflicts.

For the aim of the Project, Partners agreed to adopt the American KSA model, according to which each job requires Competencies that are characterized by a specific pattern of Knowledge, Skills and Aptitudes. Once the model has been defined, the needs emerged from the focus group with coaches were transformed into two competencies, that were the Prevention of Violence and Exclusion behaviors and the Recognition and Resolution of Violence and Exclusion behaviors. For each competency, two learning objectives (Knowledge), three practical skills (Skills) and two aptitudes (Aptitudes) were chosen, in agreement of all the Consortium Partners.

Specifically, for what concerns the Prevention of Violence and Exclusion behaviors, the chosen learning objectives concern the prevention

strategies based on the psychological features of violence and exclusion, and the general mechanism of prejudice. The chosen skills for the first competency, as observation, problem solving, decision-making, networking, active listening, and negotiation, were used to create macro-skills, as the reduction of prejudice, the cooperation with children's families and inclusive education strategies, closely connected to cognitive (Creativity, Critical Thinking) and relational abilities (Communication Abilities, Empathy).

Regarding the Recognition and Resolution of Violence and Exclusion, the Consortium chose the psychological aspects of the offender and the victim and the management of the violent/exclusion episode consequences as learning objectives. The chosen skills for the second competency, as problem solving, networking, coping, active listening, and mediation, were included into the macro-skills concerning the transformation of the violent/exclusion episode in an educative moment, the management of negative emotions and the communication with the victim and the offender, that are connected to cognitive (Creativity, Critical Thinking) and relational abilities (Communication Abilities, Empathy).

The competencies, together with the relative knowledge, skills and aptitudes, were then used to create five training modules contents: The violence and exclusion recognition and its psychosocial features in sport, the development of personal and social (group) relations in sport, developing family and coach relations based on trust and reciprocity, Empowerment through sport for societal change, Prejudice and problem solving aspects of violence and exclusion. These modules will be implemented in May 2019 with a training course of 30 hours (6 hours per each model), and in parallel, in Austria, the experimental on-line version of the training course through the SAVE Moodle Platform will be implemented. However, the Moodle Platform will be available in each of the Partners language and its functionality has been shown in the first SAVE Multiplier Sport Event, organized in each country involved.

After the Pilot Training, the following step will consist in the evaluation of the training course and in the adaptation of training material for the final SAVE Training Kit.

In parallel, a scientific research has been conducted in all the Partners' countries, by administering an instrument made up of two separated

parts: one for the assessment of youth environment and one assessing the youth characteristics. For the assessment of the youth environment, the Prosocial Behaviour Scale<sup>(8)</sup>, the Direct and Indirect Aggression Scale<sup>(9)</sup>, and the Group Environment Questionnaire<sup>(10)</sup> and one item measuring the general satisfaction with the team were used, while concerning the assessment of youth characteristics, the Sport Motivation Scale<sup>(11)</sup> and the motivation of PE classes<sup>(12)</sup>, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale<sup>(13)</sup>, the Optimism subscale of Life Orientation Test - Revised<sup>(14)</sup> and the Children Hope Scale<sup>(15)</sup> were used. Children from the school environment and from the sport environment completed these measures, to see the psychological differences between the two social context, and the Consortium is currently analyzing the data.

SAVE Project represents the need for the presence of high-qualified coaches, seen as educators able to train children and adolescents in both physical and psychological healthy lifestyle. As stated before, the role of the sport coach in the education process of children and adolescents is fundamental for their development<sup>(6)</sup>. For this reason, initiatives as SAVE Project should be organized, for stimulating National and European Government to take these results into consideration for future policy reform. In parallel, scientific research should collect information about moral features in children and adolescent for the development of practical tools that coaches could use in several sport situations.

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