

# **Paralympic athletes' perceptions of their experiences of sports-related injuries: a qualitative study**

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## Introduction

Our knowledge of sports-related injuries in Paralympic athletes is limited (1), and there are no data on how the athletes themselves perceive an injury and how the disability itself influences their perceptions.

## Purpose

The aim of this study was to explore Paralympic athletes' perceptions of their experiences of sports-related injuries.

## Methods

Eighteen elite athletes were recruited by a purposive sampling from the Swedish Paralympic program. Athletes with vision impairment, spinal cord injury, cerebral palsy, intellectual disability, myelomeningocele, dysplasia and neuromuscular disorders participated. They represented goalball, wheelchair rugby, athletics, cycling, skiing, boccia, ice sledge hockey, table tennis and swimming. Data were collected through individual interviews. For the detection and interpretation of the athletes' perceptions of their experiences a qualitative phenomenographic design was used.

## Results

The analysis revealed eight different categories of Paralympic athletes' perceptions of their experiences of sports-related injuries. The athletes perceived that the disability itself influences the cause and consequences of an injury. The perception was that Paralympic athletes have more problems with injuries, and that a disabled body with different body movements can never be better than a non-disabled body. Another perception was that the impact of elite training was seen as a cause of injury, and this may be explained by the inability to train correctly. Also, a majority of the athletes perceived that injuries could be self-inflicted. The domain to this category was described as one's own performance and the essence as guilt. Other categories identified and described were: the normalized pain, the impact of injury, individual possibilities to prevent injuries, the dangerous elite sports and the unequal prerequisites.

## Conclusion

The results from this study indicate that Paralympic athletes' perceptions of their experiences of sport-related injuries are complex and multifactorial. This needs to be considered in the design of future injury surveillance systems, prevention programs and rehabilitation strategies. Also, these perceptions need to be taken in account in the sports safety work within the National Paralympic Committees to be able to secure a safe future sports career for young para-athletes.

## Acknowledgements

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## References

1. Fagher K & Lexell J, Sports-related injuries in athletes with disabilities, Scand J Med Sci Sports. 2014 Oct;24(5):e320-31