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Research Article

Coach-Perpetrated Emotional Maltreatment in Organized Sport Settings: Differences by Sport-Related and Demographic Variables

***Erol BAYKAN** [1]

[1] Yozgat Bozok University, Faculty of Sport Sciences; Yozgat/Türkiye

* *Corresponding author: Erol Baykan; erol.baykan@yobu.edu.tr*

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Abstract: This study examined coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores among individual- and team-sport athletes according to gender, age, sport type, weekly training frequency, and duration of working with their current coach. An exploratory, cross-sectional, comparative survey design was used with 368 athletes recruited through convenience sampling. Data were collected online using a Personal Information Form and the Coach–Athlete Relationship Emotional Maltreatment Scale (CAREMS). Welch's independent-samples t tests were used for two-group comparisons and Welch's one-way analysis of variance for three-group comparisons; effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d and eta squared (η^2). No significant gender differences were found in total or subscale scores. Athletes aged 22–25 had higher Performance-Based Degradation, Intimidating Behaviors, and total scores than those aged 18–21. For sport type, only Indirect Personal Degradation differed significantly, with higher scores among individual-sport athletes. Significant effects were small and based on unadjusted p values; therefore, they were interpreted as exploratory. No significant differences were found by weekly training frequency or duration of working with the current coach. Overall, coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores differed only to a limited extent across the variables examined. The findings may inform safe sport practices that prioritize athlete welfare.

Keywords: Coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment, safe sport, athlete welfare, coach–athlete relationship, sport management.

1. Introduction

In recent years, increasing attention has been given to the need to evaluate sport environments not only in terms of athletic performance but also with regard to the organizational structures and practices that support athlete safety and well-being (Gomez & Schoch, 2026; Khomutova et al., 2025). Within this framework, safe sport and safeguarding approaches position protective policies and practices aimed at preventing physical, psychological, and social harm to athletes as core responsibilities of sport organizations (Khomutova et al., 2025). Evidence also suggests that factors such as coaching style, the ethical climate of the club, and organizational practices may be associated with athlete safety and experiences of psychological maltreatment (Gomez & Schoch, 2026; Schyvinck et al., 2025). Accordingly, creating safer sport environments extends beyond responding to incidents of maltreatment and includes the development of preventive policies, clear definitions of acceptable conduct, education and reporting mechanisms, and organizational monitoring of safeguarding practices (Gomez & Schoch, 2026; Khomutova et al., 2025). Supportive and autonomy-promoting coaching environments have been associated with more positive athlete experiences, whereas psychologically and emotionally maltreating coaching behaviors have been linked to adverse outcomes related to athletes' well-being, development, and sport experiences (Alexander et al., 2023; Chroni et al., 2026; Li et al., 2025; Schyvinck et al., 2025).

Interpersonal violence in sport is conceptualized as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing physical, sexual, and emotional maltreatment, as well as neglect (Khomutova et al., 2025; Parent & Fortier, 2018; Parent & Vaillancourt-Morel, 2021). Previous research has identified emotional maltreatment as a commonly reported form of interpersonal violence in sport settings (Alexander et al., 2023; Muhonen et al., 2024; Parent & Fortier, 2018). In a large-sample study of Canadian National Team athletes, 75% of participants reported experiencing at least one form of maltreatment, with psychological harm and neglect among the most frequently reported forms (Willson et al., 2022). Emotional maltreatment encompasses behaviors that may undermine an athlete's psychological integrity, including humiliation, belittling, threats, persistent criticism, exclusion, intimidation, and psychological pressure (Çetin, 2022; Dietz et al., 2015; Stirling & Kerr, 2008).

Such experiences have been associated with adverse outcomes including anxiety, stress, reduced self-confidence, burnout, depressive symptoms, withdrawal from sport, lower life satisfaction, and poorer psychological well-being (Alexander et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Stirling & Kerr, 2013). In addition, athletes may normalize certain emotionally maltreating behaviors within contexts characterized by high performance expectations and established sport cultures or may refrain from reporting such experiences. These circumstances may coincide with reduced visibility of the problem and greater challenges in developing effective prevention mechanisms (Khomutova et al., 2025; Muhonen et al., 2024).

The quality of the coach–athlete relationship has been associated with athletic performance, motivation, psychological well-being, sport commitment, and continued participation in sport (Jowett, 2025). At the same time, because coaches hold authority in evaluating performance, defining athletes' roles within the team, and making decisions, the coach–athlete relationship may involve power asymmetries (Dietz et al., 2015; Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Recent research has further linked controlling coaching behaviors with higher reports of coach-perpetrated psychological and emotional maltreatment (Birr et al., 2023; Li et al., 2025; Schyvinck et al., 2025). In contrast, empowering motivational coaching climates have been associated with more favorable athlete outcomes, while psychological safety has shown positive associations with athlete well-being and the quality of the coach–athlete relationship and negative associations with reports of interpersonal violence (Birr et al., 2023; Boudreault et al., 2026).

Within this context, coach-perpetrated psychological maltreatment should be considered not only in relation to individual coaching behaviors but also within broader organizational conditions, such as the ethical climate of the club (Schyvinck et al., 2025). At a broader institutional level, safeguarding policies have been emphasized as part of sport organizations' governance responsibilities for athlete safety (Gomez & Schoch, 2026).

Although some studies suggest that characteristics such as age, gender, sport experience, and training intensity may be associated with experiences of emotional maltreatment (Muhonen et al., 2024; Parent & Vaillancourt-Morel, 2021), findings concerning age and gender have varied according to the type of psychological violence or neglect examined, and some studies have reported no statistically significant differences (Greither et al., 2026). Direct comparisons of coach–athlete interactions across individual and team sport settings also remain limited, highlighting the need for further research in this area (Li et al., 2025). Previous studies have additionally shown that patterns involving weekly training duration and interpersonal violence may differ according to both the type of violence and the level of training exposure (Greither et al., 2026; Parent & Vaillancourt-Morel, 2021). Findings concerning the duration of working with a coach and emotional maltreatment have likewise varied across studies (Altınışık, 2026; Çetin, 2023).

The existing literature also differs in terms of the populations and variables examined. Some studies have focused on specific athlete groups, such as intercollegiate athletes (Alexander et al., 2023), or on a particular sport and performance level (Schyvinck et al., 2025), whereas broader samples have been used to examine factors such as athletic identity and demographic characteristics (Muhonen et al., 2024). However, relatively few studies appear to have examined gender, age, sport type, weekly training frequency, and duration of working with the current coach comparatively within the same sample. Examining these variables within a single study may therefore provide a more integrated perspective on how coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores vary across athlete and sport-participation characteristics.

Within this context, the present study aimed to compare coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores among athletes participating in individual and team sports according to gender, age group, sport type, weekly training frequency, and duration of working with their current coach. The findings are expected to extend the available evidence on coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment in Türkiye and to contribute to the evaluation of managerial processes related to safe sport practices, athlete welfare, and coach–athlete interactions. Accordingly, the study addressed the

following research questions: (1) Do total and subscale scores differ by gender, age group, and sport type? (2) Do total and subscale scores differ according to weekly training frequency? (3) Do total and subscale scores differ according to the duration of working with the current coach?

2. Materials and Methods

Throughout the study, the principles set out in the Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions were followed.

2.1. Research Model

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional, and comparative survey design to compare coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores among athletes participating in individual and team sports across demographic and sport-related variables. Survey research is intended to describe an existing or previously existing condition as it occurs, without researcher intervention (Büyüköztürk et al., 2022; Karasar, 2020). Data were collected from participants at a single point in time, and group comparisons based on gender, age, sport type, weekly training frequency, and duration of working with the current coach were treated as exploratory. The study did not aim to establish causal relationships among the variables.

2.2. Research Group

A total of 368 athletes aged 18–25 years were included in the study. Eligibility criteria required participants to be actively engaged in either an individual or team sport, to have worked with their current coach for at least one year, and to provide voluntary informed consent. Because age was recorded in the data collection form using the predefined categories of 18–21 and 22–25 years, this classification was retained in the analyses. Participants were athletes engaged in individual or team sports within sport clubs and university teams in Türkiye. As specific sport disciplines were not examined as a separate variable, participants were classified only as individual-sport or team-sport athletes. Classifications of demographic and sport-related characteristics were based on participants' self-reports.

Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, a non-probability sampling method, using an online survey link distributed through sport clubs and athlete communication groups accessible to the researcher. Convenience sampling allows researchers to collect data from individuals who are readily accessible and willing to participate in the study (Büyüköztürk et al., 2022). Participants' demographic and sport-related characteristics, including gender, age, sport type, weekly training frequency, and duration of working with the current coach, are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Participants

Categorical Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	193	52.4
	Female	175	47.6
	Total	368	100.0
Age	18-21 years	154	41.8
	22-25 years	214	58.2
	Total	368	100.0
Sport Type	Individual sports	241	65.5
	Team sports	127	34.5
	Total	368	100.0
Weekly Training Frequency	1-2 days	128	34.8
	3-4 days	182	49.5
	5 days or more	58	15.8
	Total	368	100.0
Duration of Working with the Current Coach	1-2 years	151	41.0
	3-4 years	145	39.4
	5 years or more	72	19.6
	Total	368	100.0

As shown in Table 1, of the 368 athletes who participated in the study, 193 (52.4%) were male and 175 (47.6%) were female. Regarding age, 154 participants (41.8%) were 18–21 years old, whereas 214 (58.2%) were 22–25 years old. By sport type, 241 athletes (65.5%) participated in individual sports and 127 (34.5%) in team sports. In terms of weekly training frequency, 128 participants (34.8%) trained 1–2 days per week, 182 (49.5%) trained 3–4 days per week, and 58 (15.8%) trained 5 days or more per week. Regarding the duration of working with their current coach, 151 participants (41.0%) had worked with the same coach for 1–2 years, 145 (39.4%) for 3–4 years, and 72 (19.6%) for 5 years or longer.

2.3. Data Collection Tools

Data were collected through an online survey comprising a Personal Information Form and the Coach–Athlete Relationship Emotional Maltreatment Scale (CAREMS). The survey was created using Google Forms and distributed electronically to individual- and team-sport athletes who voluntarily agreed to participate. Data collection took place between March 24 and May 20, 2026, through institutional e-mail, WhatsApp groups, and sport club communication groups. Because geographic location, sport discipline, institution type, and competition level were not recorded in the data collection form, these characteristics could not be reported.

At the beginning of the survey, participants were informed about the purpose and scope of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw from the study at any time without providing a reason, and the use of the data solely for scientific purposes. An informed consent form was then presented, and only participants who provided consent were allowed to proceed to the survey questions. After data collection was completed, the records were checked for missing, erroneous, or duplicate responses. Because all questions relating to the study variables were mandatory, there were no missing data. The records were also reviewed for duplicate entries and responses inconsistent with the study eligibility criteria; no cases were excluded. Accordingly, data from all 368 participants were included in the analyses.

2.3.1. Personal information form

A Personal Information Form developed by the researcher was used to obtain participants' demographic and sport-related characteristics. The form included questions on gender, age, sport type (individual or team sport), weekly training frequency, and the duration of working with their current coach.

2.3.2. Coach–athlete relationship emotional maltreatment scale (CAREMS)

The Coach–Athlete Relationship Emotional Maltreatment Scale (CAREMS) was used to assess the frequency of athletes' exposure to coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment. The scale was originally developed by Dietz et al. (2015) and adapted into Turkish by Çetin (2022). CAREMS assesses the frequency of emotionally maltreating behaviors experienced by athletes in their relationships with coaches during the previous year.

The scale consists of 19 items across five subscales: Performance-Based Degradation (6 items), Direct Personal Degradation (4 items), Humiliating Behaviors (3 items), Indirect Personal Degradation (3 items), and Intimidating Behaviors (3 items). Items are rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = Never to 5 = Always. Total scores range from 19 to 95, with higher scores indicating more frequent exposure to coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment. The scale can be evaluated using both the total score and the individual subscale scores (Çetin, 2022).

In the Turkish adaptation study, Cronbach's alpha was reported as .983 for the total scale. The corresponding coefficients for the subscales were .906 for Performance-Based Degradation, .968 for Direct Personal Degradation, .974 for Humiliating Behaviors, .949 for Indirect Personal Degradation, and .950 for Intimidating Behaviors (Çetin, 2022). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .968 for the total scale and .909, .878, .849, .860, and .867 for Performance-Based Degradation, Direct Personal Degradation, Humiliating Behaviors, Indirect Personal Degradation, and Intimidating Behaviors, respectively. These coefficients indicate adequate internal consistency for the total scale and all subscale scores in the present sample.

2.4. Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 24.0. Prior to analysis, the dataset was screened for missing, erroneous, and duplicate records. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were used to summarize participant characteristics and scale scores. The distributional properties of the total and subscale scores were evaluated using skewness and kurtosis values. According to Kim (2013), absolute skewness values greater than 2 and absolute kurtosis values greater than 7 may indicate substantial deviation from normality. In the present study, skewness values ranged

from −0.706 to −0.307, whereas kurtosis values ranged from −0.799 to −0.149, all remaining below these thresholds. Accordingly, no departure from normality substantial enough to preclude the use of parametric analyses was identified.

Homogeneity of variance was assessed using Levene's test. Because the assumption of equal variances was not met for some scale scores and group sizes were unequal, Welch's independent-samples t test was used for all two-group comparisons. For weekly training frequency and duration of working with the current coach, each of which comprised three groups, Welch's one-way analysis of variance was applied. Games–Howell post hoc comparisons were planned in the event of a statistically significant omnibus Welch test. However, because none of the omnibus tests reached statistical significance, no post hoc comparisons were conducted.

Cohen's d was calculated for two-group comparisons, whereas eta squared (η^2) was used as the effect size measure for three-group comparisons. Based on Cohen's (1988) conventions, values of .20, .50, and .80 for Cohen's d were interpreted as small, medium, and large effects, respectively; corresponding benchmarks for η^2 were .01, .06, and .14. Values below these thresholds were treated as negligible. Cohen's d was calculated by dividing the difference between the two group means by the pooled within-group standard deviation and was reported as an absolute value. For three-group comparisons, η^2 was calculated as the ratio of the between-groups sum of squares to the total sum of squares and was interpreted descriptively alongside the Welch test results.

Group comparisons were conducted separately for the total scale score and for each subscale, which represent theoretically distinct constructs. Because the study involved exploratory multiple comparisons, no adjustment for multiple testing was applied, and all reported p values are unadjusted. Accordingly, the findings were interpreted cautiously and in conjunction with the corresponding effect sizes rather than on statistical significance alone. All tests were two-tailed, with statistical significance set at $p < .05$.

2.5. Ethical Approval

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Social and Human Sciences Ethics Committee of Yozgat Bozok University on March 23, 2026 (Decision No. 3/47). Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and the data were anonymized and used solely for scientific purposes.

3. Results

Table 2. Comparison of Coach–Athlete Relationship Emotional Maltreatment Scale Scores by Gender

Scale and Subscales	Gender	n	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Performance-Based Degradation	Male	193	21.49	6.19	-.487	357.40	.626	0.05
	Female	175	21.82	6.56				
Direct Personal Degradation	Male	193	15.32	4.33	-.628	364.85	.530	0.07
	Female	175	15.59	4.16				
Humiliating Behaviors	Male	193	11.39	3.38	-.713	362.23	.476	0.07
	Female	175	11.65	3.39				
Indirect Personal Degradation	Male	193	11.60	3.36	-.392	363.77	.696	0.04
	Female	175	11.74	3.30				
Intimidating Behaviors	Male	193	11.44	3.57	-.732	365.87	.465	0.08
	Female	175	11.70	3.30				
Total	Male	193	71.24	19.38	-.623	363.18	.534	0.06
	Female	175	72.49	19.19				

Reported p values are unadjusted

As shown in Table 2, scale scores were compared between female and male athletes using Welch's independent-samples t test. No statistically significant gender differences were found for Performance-Based Degradation, $t(357.40) = -0.487$, $p = .626$; Direct Personal Degradation, $t(364.85) = -0.628$, $p = .530$; Humiliating Behaviors, $t(362.23) = -0.713$, $p = .476$; Indirect Personal Degradation, $t(363.77) = -0.392$, $p = .696$; Intimidating Behaviors, $t(365.87) = -0.732$, $p = .465$; or the total scale score, $t(363.18) = -0.623$, $p = .534$. Cohen's d values ranged from .04 to .08.

Table 3. Comparison of Coach–Athlete Relationship Emotional Maltreatment Scale Scores by Age Group

Scale and Subscales	Age	n	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Performance-Based Degradation	18-21 years	154	20.81	6.80	-2.10	303.04	.036*	0.23
	22-25 years	214	22.25	5.97				
Direct Personal Degradation	18-21 years	154	15.01	4.71	-1.62	288.25	.106	0.18
	22-25 years	214	15.76	3.86				
Humiliating Behaviors	18-21 years	154	11.21	3.66	-1.41	299.05	.160	0.15
	22-25 years	214	11.73	3.16				
Indirect Personal Degradation	18-21 years	154	11.29	3.71	-1.77	285.59	.078	0.19
	22-25 years	214	11.93	3.00				
Intimidating Behaviors	18-21 years	154	11.10	3.80	-2.13	288.80	.034*	0.23
	22-25 years	214	11.89	3.12				
Total	18-21 years	154	69.43	21.23	-1.98	290.56	.049*	0.22
	22-25 years	214	73.57	17.59				

*Reported p values are unadjusted. *p < .05.*

As shown in Table 3, Welch's independent-samples t test was used to compare scale scores between athletes aged 18–21 and 22–25 years. Statistically significant differences were observed for Performance-Based Degradation, t(303.04) = −2.10, p = .036, d = .23; Intimidating Behaviors, t(288.80) = −2.13, p = .034, d = .23; and the total scale score, t(290.56) = −1.98, p = .049, d = .22. For each of these outcomes, mean scores were higher among athletes aged 22–25 years than among those aged 18–21 years. No statistically significant differences were found for Direct Personal Degradation, t(288.25) = −1.62, p = .106, d = .18; Humiliating Behaviors, t(299.05) = −1.41, p = .160, d = .15; or Indirect Personal Degradation, t(285.59) = −1.77, p = .078, d = .19. Cohen's d values ranged from .15 to .23.

Table 4. Comparison of Coach–Athlete Relationship Emotional Maltreatment Scale Scores by Sport Type

Scale and Subscales	Sport Type	n	M	SD	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Performance-Based Degradation	Individual	241	22.01	6.80	1.635	311.56	.103	0.17
	Team	127	20.95	5.38				
Direct Personal Degradation	Individual	241	15.63	4.51	1.234	303.53	.218	0.13
	Team	127	15.09	3.69				
Humiliating Behaviors	Individual	241	11.75	3.49	1.888	280.51	.060	0.20
	Team	127	11.07	3.14				
Indirect Personal Degradation	Individual	241	11.92	3.44	2.078	284.08	.039*	0.22
	Team	127	11.19	3.06				
Intimidating Behaviors	Individual	241	11.79	3.53	1.811	277.30	.071	0.19
	Team	127	11.13	3.23				
Total	Individual	241	73.10	20.55	1.864	309.49	.063	0.19
	Team	127	69.43	16.40				

*Reported p values are unadjusted. * p < .05*

As shown in Table 4, Welch's independent-samples t test was used to compare scale scores between individual- and team-sport athletes. A statistically significant difference was found only for Indirect Personal Degradation, t(284.08) = 2.078, p = .039, d = .22. Individual-sport athletes had a higher mean Indirect Personal Degradation score (M = 11.92, SD = 3.44) than team-sport athletes (M = 11.19, SD = 3.06). No statistically significant differences were observed for Performance-Based Degradation, t(311.56) = 1.635, p = .103, d = .17; Direct Personal Degradation, t(303.53) = 1.234, p = .218, d = .13; Humiliating Behaviors, t(280.51) = 1.888, p = .060, d = .20; Intimidating Behaviors, t(277.30) = 1.811, p = .071, d = .19; or the total scale score, t(309.49) = 1.864, p = .063, d = .19. Cohen's d values ranged from .13 to .22.

Table 5. Welch's One-Way Analysis of Variance Results for Coach–Athlete Relationship Emotional Maltreatment Scale Scores by Weekly Training Frequency

Scale and Subscales	Training Frequency	n	M	SD	Welch F	p	η^2
Performance-Based Degradation	1-2 days	128	20.65	6.80	2.274	.106	.013
	3-4 days	182	22.16	6.18			
	≥5 days	58	22.22	5.73			
	Total	368	21.65	6.36			
Direct Personal Degradation	1-2 days	128	14.75	4.86	2.374	.096	.015
	3-4 days	182	15.77	3.85			
	≥5 days	58	15.97	3.86			
	Total	368	15.45	4.25			
Humiliating Behaviors	1-2 days	128	11.05	3.85	1.585	.208	.010
	3-4 days	182	11.76	3.10			
	≥5 days	58	11.76	3.09			
	Total	368	11.51	3.38			
Indirect Personal Degradation	1-2 days	128	11.32	3.67	0.956	.387	.006
	3-4 days	182	11.85	3.13			
	≥5 days	58	11.84	3.13			
	Total	368	11.67	3.33			
Intimidating Behaviors	1-2 days	128	11.07	3.81	1.810	.167	.011
	3-4 days	182	11.80	3.19			
	≥5 days	58	11.90	3.26			
	Total	368	11.56	3.44			
Total	1-2 days	128	68.84	21.65	2.113	.124	.013
	3-4 days	182	73.35	17.78			
	≥5 days	58	73.69	17.70			
	Total	368	71.83	19.27			

Reported p values are unadjusted.

As shown in Table 5, Welch's one-way analysis of variance was used to compare scale scores across weekly training frequency groups. No statistically significant differences were found for Performance-Based Degradation, $F(2, 159.55) = 2.274$, $p = .106$, $\eta^2 = .013$; Direct Personal Degradation, $F(2, 154.78) = 2.374$, $p = .096$, $\eta^2 = .015$; Humiliating Behaviors, $F(2, 155.16) = 1.585$, $p = .208$, $\eta^2 = .010$; Indirect Personal Degradation, $F(2, 155.03) = 0.956$, $p = .387$, $\eta^2 = .006$; Intimidating Behaviors, $F(2, 153.81) = 1.810$, $p = .167$, $\eta^2 = .011$; or the total scale score, $F(2, 155.28) = 2.113$, $p = .124$, $\eta^2 = .013$. Eta-squared values ranged from .006 to .015. Because none of the omnibus tests reached statistical significance, no post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted.

Table 6. Welch's One-Way Analysis of Variance Results for Coach–Athlete Relationship Emotional Maltreatment Scale Scores by Duration of Working With the Current Coach

Scale and Subscales	Time with Current Coach	n	M	SD	Welch F	p	η^2
Performance-Based Degradation	1-2 years	151	21.11	6.82	1.230	.294	.007
	3-4 years	145	22.28	6.17			
	≥5 years	72	21.50	5.67			
	Total	368	21.65	6.36			
Direct Personal Degradation	1-2 years	151	15.20	4.75	0.738	.479	.004
	3-4 years	145	15.77	3.87			
	≥5 years	72	15.32	3.86			
	Total	368	15.45	4.25			
Humiliating Behaviors	1-2 years	151	11.32	3.87	1.431	.242	.007
	3-4 years	145	11.86	2.87			
	≥5 years	72	11.22	3.23			
	Total	368	11.51	3.38			

Table 6. Continue

Scale and Subscales	Time with Current Coach	n	M	SD	Welch F	p	η^2
Indirect Personal Degradation	1-2 years	151	11.54	3.79	0.190	.827	.001
	3-4 years	145	11.78	2.98			
	≥5 years	72	11.71	2.97			
	Total	368	11.67	3.33			
Intimidating Behaviors	1-2 years	151	11.47	3.80	0.560	.572	.003
	3-4 years	145	11.77	3.06			
	≥5 years	72	11.32	3.39			
	Total	368	11.56	3.44			
Total	1-2 years	151	70.64	21.48	0.895	.410	.005
	3-4 years	145	73.46	17.62			
	≥5 years	72	71.07	17.53			
	Total	368	71.83	19.27			

Reported p values are unadjusted.

As shown in Table 6, Welch's one-way analysis of variance was used to compare scale scores across groups defined by the duration of working with the current coach. No statistically significant differences were found for Performance-Based Degradation, $F(2, 199.65) = 1.230$, $p = .294$, $\eta^2 = .007$; Direct Personal Degradation, $F(2, 196.59) = 0.738$, $p = .479$, $\eta^2 = .004$; Humiliating Behaviors, $F(2, 190.04) = 1.431$, $p = .242$, $\eta^2 = .007$; Indirect Personal Degradation, $F(2, 197.37) = 0.190$, $p = .827$, $\eta^2 = .001$; Intimidating Behaviors, $F(2, 189.91) = 0.560$, $p = .572$, $\eta^2 = .003$; or the total scale score, $F(2, 196.53) = 0.895$, $p = .410$, $\eta^2 = .005$. Eta-squared values ranged from .001 to .007. Because none of the omnibus tests reached statistical significance, no post hoc multiple comparisons were conducted.

4. Discussion

The main finding of the study was that coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores varied only to a limited extent across the demographic and sport-related variables examined. No statistically significant differences were identified by gender, weekly training frequency, or duration of working with the current coach. Significant differences were observed for three age-related outcomes and for only one sport-type subscale, all with small effect sizes and based on unadjusted p values. Accordingly, these findings are discussed as exploratory patterns.

In the present sample, there was no evidence of statistically significant gender differences in coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores. Neither the total scale score nor any of the subscale scores differed significantly between male and female athletes, and Cohen's d values ranged from .04 to .08. Within the context of the present sample and measurement instrument, this suggests that no meaningful gender-based difference was detected. However, this finding should not be interpreted as indicating that gender is unrelated to emotional maltreatment or that male and female athletes necessarily have comparable experiences across all sport settings.

Previous findings regarding gender and psychological or emotional maltreatment in sport have been inconsistent. Muhonen et al. (2024) reported higher levels of coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment among female athletes and athletes with other gender identities than among male athletes. Parent and Vaillancourt-Morel (2021) similarly found that female athletes were more likely than male athletes to report psychological violence and neglect. By contrast, although Greither et al. (2026) reported higher levels of interpersonal violence overall, particularly sexual violence, among women, no significant gender differences were identified for psychological violence or neglect in multivariable models. In this respect, the present findings are more consistent with those of Greither et al. (2026) for psychological maltreatment, while differing from the results reported by Muhonen et al. (2024) and Parent and Vaillancourt-Morel (2021).

These differences across studies may be related to variation in age ranges, sport levels, sport disciplines, and the ways in which maltreatment was defined and measured. In the present study, sport discipline, competitive level, coach gender, and potential interactions between gender and sport type were not examined. Therefore, the absence of a gender difference cannot be attributed to any specific contextual factor on the basis of the current data. Further research examining these variables within the same analytical model may help clarify the conditions under which gender-related differences in coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment are more or less likely to emerge.

Coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores differed to some extent across age groups. Athletes aged 22–25 years had significantly higher scores for Performance-Based Degradation, Intimidating Behaviors, and the total scale than athletes aged 18–21 years. No statistically significant age-group differences were found for Direct Personal Degradation, Humiliating Behaviors, or Indirect Personal Degradation. Cohen's d values for the significant comparisons ranged from .22 to .23, indicating small effects. Moreover, because the corresponding unadjusted p values ranged from .034 to .049, these findings should be interpreted cautiously as exploratory. They do not provide evidence that age exerts an effect on emotional maltreatment; rather, they indicate that specific scale scores differed between the two age groups in the present sample.

In the literature, Parent and Vaillancourt-Morel (2021) found that, among athletes aged 14–17 years, the likelihood of reporting psychological violence and neglect increased with age and interpreted this pattern as potentially reflecting longer exposure. The higher scores observed for some outcomes among athletes aged 22–25 years in the present study are partly similar in direction. However, direct comparison is limited because the studies differ in age range, the forms of maltreatment assessed, and sample characteristics. Muhonen et al. (2024) reported higher levels of coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment among athletes aged 12–17 years than among adult age groups. Greither et al. (2026), by contrast, found no significant age-group differences in psychological violence and reported that age-related patterns varied across the forms of interpersonal violence examined. In this respect, the present findings differ from those of Muhonen et al. (2024) and suggest that age-related patterns in emotional maltreatment may vary according to the sample, the way age groups are defined, and the measurement instrument used.

The fact that age-group differences emerged only for Performance-Based Degradation and Intimidating Behaviors indicates that the pattern was not consistent across all dimensions of emotional maltreatment. At the same time, the cross-sectional design, the use of only two age categories, and the absence of variables such as total sport experience, age at the time of maltreatment, coaching style, and organizational climate from the same analytical model limit the interpretation of the conditions associated with these differences. Accordingly, the higher scores observed among athletes aged 22–25 years cannot be attributed, on the basis of the present data, to longer exposure to sport environments, perceptual differences, or the quality of the coach–athlete relationship.

Findings related to sport type did not reveal a consistent pattern of differences across all dimensions of coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment. A statistically significant difference was observed only for Indirect Personal Degradation, with individual-sport athletes reporting higher scores than team-sport athletes. However, the small effect size associated with this difference (Cohen's d = .22) indicates that the magnitude of the between-group difference was limited. The absence of statistically significant differences for Performance-Based Degradation, Direct Personal Degradation, Humiliating Behaviors, Intimidating Behaviors, and the total scale score further suggests that the sport-type pattern did not extend across emotional maltreatment more broadly. In addition, because the p value for Indirect Personal Degradation was unadjusted and relatively close to the conventional significance threshold (p = .039), this finding should be interpreted cautiously as exploratory.

The higher Indirect Personal Degradation scores observed among individual-sport athletes suggest that the sport-type difference was confined to a specific dimension rather than reflecting a general pattern across all forms of emotional maltreatment. This limited difference may have emerged in conjunction with contextual features of individual and team sports, such as variation in coach–athlete interaction and feedback processes. However, because the frequency of one-to-one coach interaction, the manner in which feedback was delivered, team communication structures, and coaching style were not assessed in the present study, the observed difference cannot be attributed to these factors. Li et al. (2025) examined mechanisms linking adverse coaching behaviors with athlete outcomes but did not directly compare individual- and team-sport contexts. The authors highlighted the need for future research comparing such processes across these settings. Accordingly, further studies that examine sport type alongside contextual characteristics such as coach–athlete interaction, feedback practices, and coaching style may help clarify the conditions associated with the difference observed in the present study.

Çetin (2023), in a study of 340 athletes aged 18–25 years, found no statistically significant difference in total scale scores between individual- and team-sport athletes. Similarly, Altınışık (2026), based on data from 301 athletes, reported no significant sport-type differences in either the total score or the subscale scores. The absence of a difference in the total score in the present study is therefore consistent with these findings, whereas the significant difference observed for Indirect Personal Degradation differs from the earlier results. This discrepancy may be related to variation in the sport disciplines represented in the samples, athletes' performance levels, the structure of coach–athlete interactions, or

discipline-specific communication practices. Because these characteristics were not directly examined in the present analyses, the conditions underlying the differences across studies cannot be determined. Given the small effect size and the unadjusted p value, replication across different samples is particularly important before drawing stronger conclusions regarding Indirect Personal Degradation.

Schyvinck et al. (2025), in a study of sub-elite gymnasts, found that controlling coaching styles and an ethically unfavorable club climate were associated with higher reports of psychological maltreatment. Because that study did not compare sport types, it does not explain why individual-sport athletes in the present study reported higher Indirect Personal Degradation scores. Nevertheless, its findings suggest that organizational factors, including coaching behaviors and the ethical climate of the club, may warrant consideration alongside sport type when evaluating coach-perpetrated maltreatment. Overall, the present findings do not indicate a consistent sport-type difference across emotional maltreatment as a whole; rather, they point to a limited difference confined to one subscale and characterized by a small effect size.

The findings for weekly training frequency indicated that coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores did not differ significantly across the groups in the present sample. No statistically significant differences were found among athletes training 1–2 days, 3–4 days, or 5 days or more per week for Performance-Based Degradation, Direct Personal Degradation, Humiliating Behaviors, Indirect Personal Degradation, Intimidating Behaviors, or the total scale score. Effect sizes ranged from .006 to .015, indicating negligible to small between-group differences. Descriptively, mean scores among athletes training 1–2 days per week appeared lower than those of the other two groups, whereas the means for the 3–4-day and ≥5-day groups were relatively similar. However, because the omnibus Welch tests were not statistically significant and no linear trend analysis was conducted, the results do not support an interpretation that emotional maltreatment scores systematically increased with the number of training days.

Weekly training frequency provides a general indication of how often an athlete participates in the training environment, but it does not necessarily reflect the duration or quality of interaction with the coach. Athletes training the same number of days per week may differ in session duration, direct contact with the coach, group size, performance level, and competition schedule. Accordingly, weekly training frequency may be more appropriately considered as a participation indicator distinct from total time spent with the coach and the quality of coach–athlete interaction. The comparatively smaller size of the group training 5 days or more per week (n = 58) should also be considered when interpreting the findings for this category.

Previous studies have examined related indicators with differing results. Parent and Vaillancourt-Morel (2021), in a study of Canadian athletes aged 14–17 years, found that greater weekly training hours were associated with a higher likelihood of reporting psychological violence and neglect. Greither et al. (2026), using a large sample of current and former members of German sports clubs, reported that patterns involving weekly training duration and interpersonal violence varied according to both the type of violence and the training-duration category. Although some training-duration groups showed higher odds of reporting psychological violence, the same pattern did not persist in the highest training-duration category, and findings for neglect and physical violence also varied. Taken together, these results suggest that patterns associated with weekly training duration may differ across forms of interpersonal violence and levels of training exposure.

These studies are not directly comparable with the present research because the indicators used were not equivalent. The current study assessed weekly training frequency in days and focused specifically on coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores, whereas Greither et al. (2026) and Parent and Vaillancourt-Morel (2021) primarily operationalized training exposure in terms of weekly hours and examined broader forms of interpersonal violence. The samples also differed in age, sport level, and the forms of maltreatment assessed. Consequently, close correspondence between the present findings and those of earlier studies would not necessarily be expected. One possible source of variation is that frequency of attendance and total time spent with a coach may capture different aspects of sport participation. Evaluating this possibility more directly would require studies in which both indicators are examined concurrently.

Schyvinck et al. (2025), in a study of sub-elite gymnasts, found that controlling coaching styles and an ethically unfavorable club climate were associated with higher reports of psychological maltreatment. Although weekly training frequency was not examined directly, these findings suggest that coach-perpetrated maltreatment should be considered within the broader behavioral and organizational context in which coach–athlete interactions occur, rather than solely in terms of how often athletes attend training. From a sport management perspective, this may support consideration

of organizational characteristics such as coaching practices, ethical climate, and psychologically safe communication environments alongside quantitative indicators of training participation when evaluating athlete safeguarding and safe sport practices. Future research examining these factors jointly may provide a more detailed understanding of how findings related to weekly training frequency vary across sport settings.

In the present sample, coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores did not differ significantly according to the duration of working with the current coach. No statistically significant differences were found among the 1–2-year, 3–4-year, and ≥5-year groups for the total scale score or for Performance-Based Degradation, Direct Personal Degradation, Humiliating Behaviors, Indirect Personal Degradation, and Intimidating Behaviors. Eta-squared values ranged from .001 to .007, indicating that differences across duration groups were negligible. Although mean scores were descriptively higher in the 3–4-year group for some outcomes, this pattern did not continue in the ≥5-year group. Thus, the findings did not indicate a systematic increase or decrease in emotional maltreatment scores as the duration of working with the current coach increased. At the same time, the absence of statistically significant differences should not be interpreted as evidence that athletes with different durations of working with their coaches necessarily had identical experiences; rather, no statistically distinguishable differences were detected within the present sample and the duration categories used.

This finding is broadly consistent with the results reported by Çetin (2023), who used the same measurement instrument in a sample of 340 athletes aged 18–25 years. Çetin (2023) found no significant association between the number of years athletes had worked with their coaches and coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores. Similarly, Altınışık (2026) reported no significant associations between duration of working with the coach and the total scale score or the Direct Personal Degradation, Humiliating Behaviors, Indirect Personal Degradation, and Intimidating Behaviors subscales. However, a small negative association was identified for Performance-Based Degradation. Accordingly, the present findings are largely consistent with the overall pattern reported by Altınışık (2026), while differing with respect to Performance-Based Degradation. This limited divergence may be related to methodological differences, including the use of categorical duration groups in the present study versus correlational analysis in the previous study, as well as variation in sport disciplines and the distribution of coach–athlete relationship duration across samples. Taken together, the available findings do not suggest a stable pattern in which duration of working with a coach is consistently associated with emotional maltreatment in the same direction across samples and across all dimensions of the scale.

Jowett (2025) conceptualizes the quality of the coach–athlete relationship through the components of closeness, commitment, complementarity, and co-orientation. This perspective suggests that time spent with a coach alone may not adequately represent the quality of the relationship. Athletes who have worked with the same coach for similar periods may still differ in communication patterns, mutual trust, and perceptions of coaching behavior. Therefore, the absence of significant differences by duration in the present study should not be interpreted as indicating that the length of the coach–athlete relationship is unimportant. Rather, the findings suggest that duration may be more meaningfully considered alongside characteristics such as relationship quality and patterns of interaction.

Schyvinck et al. (2025), in a study of sub-elite gymnasts, found that controlling coaching styles and an ethically unfavorable club climate were associated with coach-perpetrated psychological maltreatment. Because that study did not compare athletes according to the duration of working with their coach, it does not directly explain the present finding. Nevertheless, its results suggest that future research may benefit from examining relationship duration together with coaching style, coach–athlete relationship quality, weekly contact time, and the ethical climate of the club. Longitudinal studies that follow athletes from the beginning of their work with the same coach may be particularly useful for examining how relationship duration and emotional maltreatment scores change over time.

Practical Implications and Recommendations

Given the absence of significant gender differences and the fact that age- and sport-type differences emerged only for selected outcomes and with small effect sizes, safeguarding policies should not be restricted to specific athlete groups. Sport organizations may instead benefit from implementing core safeguarding practices that apply to all athletes, while allowing age-, gender-, sport-type-, and performance-level-specific needs to be monitored within this broader framework. On the basis of the present findings, athletes aged 22–25 years and individual-sport athletes should not be classified directly as high-risk groups.

Sport clubs, federations, and training centers may also consider adopting written codes of conduct that clearly define behaviors constituting emotional maltreatment. Regular communication of these standards to coaches, athletes, and

administrators, together with education on recognizing, preventing, and reporting maltreatment, may strengthen safeguarding practices. Confidential reporting channels that allow athletes to raise concerns without having to report directly to their coach may also be useful. Organizational policies should clearly specify who is responsible for reviewing reports, the procedures to be followed, and the expected time frame for handling concerns.

The absence of significant differences by weekly training frequency and duration of working with the current coach does not provide sufficient evidence to support the use of these variables alone when determining safeguarding priorities. Monitoring and protection practices should therefore not rely solely on the number of training days per week or the length of time an athlete has worked with the current coach. Sport managers may also consider periodically assessing the quality of coach–athlete interactions, the training environment, and athletes' perceptions of safety. Confidential athlete feedback may provide additional information for identifying areas in which coaching practices or organizational procedures could be improved.

The implementation of safeguarding policies should be reviewed regularly using indicators such as participation in safeguarding education, awareness of codes of conduct, accessibility of reporting channels, and the procedures used to evaluate reported concerns. Such an approach may support a more comprehensive sport management framework in which emotional maltreatment is addressed not only after incidents occur but also through prevention, early identification, reporting, and appropriate response mechanisms.

Limitations and Future Directions

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. The cross-sectional design does not allow changes in group differences over time to be examined or causal inferences to be drawn among the variables. The use of non-probability convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings to broader athlete populations. In addition, the use of online self-report data may introduce potential biases related to recall, social desirability, and individual perception.

Age was classified into only two categories, and sport type was limited to individual and team sports, restricting a more detailed examination of within-category variation. Weekly training frequency was assessed in terms of the number of training days and therefore did not capture total training duration or the intensity of direct contact with the coach. Similarly, treating the duration of working with the current coach as a categorical variable provided no information about relationship quality or changes in the relationship over time. The absence of measures of coaching style, coach–athlete relationship quality, power dynamics, coach gender, club ethical climate, and organizational safeguarding practices also limited the extent to which the conditions associated with the observed group differences could be evaluated. Geographic scope, sport discipline, and competitive level were not recorded. This limited the assessment of contextual variation within the sample and the generalizability of the findings to specific sport settings. Although multiple comparisons were conducted for the total scale score and five subscales, no adjustment for multiple testing was applied. This may increase the likelihood of false-positive findings, particularly for the age- and sport-type results with p values close to the .05 threshold. In addition, because the variables were examined separately, the independent contributions of gender, age, sport type, and other sport-related characteristics, as well as their potential interactions, could not be evaluated.

Future research may benefit from using larger and, where feasible, probability-based samples that include a wider range of age groups, sport disciplines, and performance levels. In addition to weekly training days, total weekly training hours, direct coach-contact time, overall sport experience, and experiences with previous coaches should also be considered. Examining coaching style, coach–athlete relationship quality, power dynamics, club ethical climate, and organizational safeguarding practices within the same analytical model may provide a more comprehensive understanding of factors associated with emotional maltreatment scores. Longitudinal studies could examine how these experiences change over time, whereas mixed-methods research may help clarify how athletes interpret the quantitative patterns identified. In confirmatory research, prespecifying primary outcomes and applying appropriate adjustments for multiple testing may improve the robustness of the findings.

5. Conclusion

No statistically significant gender differences were identified for either the total coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment score or any of the subscale scores. Cohen's d values ranged from .04 to .08, indicating that the differences between male and female athletes were negligible in the present sample.

In the age-group comparisons, athletes aged 22–25 years had significantly higher scores for Performance-Based Degradation, Intimidating Behaviors, and the total scale than athletes aged 18–21 years. However, Cohen's d values ranging from .22 to .23 indicated that these differences were small. With respect to sport type, a statistically significant difference was found only for Indirect Personal Degradation, with individual-sport athletes reporting higher scores than team-sport athletes. The effect size for this difference was also small (d = .22). Because the significant findings for age and sport type were based on unadjusted p values close to the .05 threshold, they should be interpreted as exploratory.

No statistically significant differences were found in the total scale score or any of the subscale scores according to weekly training frequency or duration of working with the current coach. The eta-squared values for these comparisons ranged from negligible to small, suggesting that the differences among the categories used in the study were limited.

Overall, coach-perpetrated emotional maltreatment scores varied only to a limited extent across the demographic and sport-related variables examined. Statistically significant differences emerged only for three age-related outcomes and one sport-type subscale, and all corresponding effect sizes were small. Accordingly, the present findings do not indicate that any particular gender, age group, or sport type is generally exposed to higher levels of emotional maltreatment, nor do they support causal interpretations regarding the variables examined.

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Abbreviations

CAREMS	Coach-Athlete Relationship Emotional Maltreatment Scale
ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
SD	Standard Deviation
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

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