

Trainers' Practices in Minimizing Ethical Conflicts among Athletes of a Medical College in China



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ABSTRACT: This study aims to analyze the impact of a trainer's guide on trainers' practices in minimizing ethical conflicts. A sample of 150 athletes and 20 trainers from Wannan Medical College in China was selected. Using a designed pre-test and post-test experimental framework, the study systematically evaluated changes in trainers' practices regarding ethical conflicts before and after implementing the guide. The results indicate that before the implementation of the trainer's guide, trainers rarely employed effective strategies and actions to manage ethical conflicts, after the guide was implemented, there was a significant increase in trainers' practices aimed at reducing ethical conflicts, demonstrating a clear positive shift. This finding not only underscores the substantial positive effect of the trainer's guide in encouraging trainers to address ethical conflicts proactively but also highlights the guide's core value as a tool for reducing the incidence of such conflicts. The significance of this study lies in its validation of the trainer's guide as an effective complement to behavioral norms. Additionally, it provides empirical support for incorporating the guide into the trainer training system. Furthermore, the findings offer valuable practical references for other trainers, contributing to the establishment of a healthier and more ethical training environment, thereby reducing the occurrence of ethical conflicts.

KEYWORDS: Trainers, Athletes, Ethical conflicts, Trainer guide, Practices

I . INTRODUCTION

Athletic trainers bear the crucial responsibility of adhering to ethical standards in their professional conduct. However, fulfilling this obligation can often prove challenging. Ethical decision-making not only requires a thorough understanding of ethical principles but also the resilience to withstand the difficulties that accompany morally sound choices (Lützén et al., 2013). In China, the field of school sports competitions is particularly competitive, with athletic performance playing a decisive role in not only determining trainers' salaries but also influencing the evaluation of students' academic achievements. This dual pressure underscores the intense nature of sports competition and raises significant ethical concerns (Jin, 2018). Addressing the ethical dilemmas that arise from this heightened competition has become a critical issue for Chinese trainers, athletes, and the broader sports education system.

Ethics is the study of the rules, standards, and principles that govern right conduct within a society (Fried, J. 2003). These rules are founded upon moral values and have evolved through a long and rich tradition of philosophical inquiry. Ethical principles are deeply embedded in societal governance and conduct, shaping the foundation of norms for social interaction (Kooiman et al., 2009). Over time, these principles have come to form the moral backbone of a conscientious society, guiding critical actions and decisions. In professional settings, ethical behavior serves as a reflection of the profession's collective conscience (Fitzgerald, 2020).

One of the common approaches to addressing ethical challenges in the business world is the establishment of ethical codes (Trevino et al., 2021). Organizations implement these codes to foster ethical behavior, communicate their commitment to ethical practices, and reprimand unethical conduct within their ranks. The sports industry is no exception, as evidenced during the London 2012 Olympic Games, where the World Badminton Federation disqualified several top-ranked players for violating the ethical code (Badminton World Federation, 2012). This incident highlights the growing significance and authority of ethical codes within the sports sector, paralleling their established role in more traditional business environments.

A substantial body of research has focused on the existence and effectiveness of ethical codes, though the findings remain inconclusive (Alwahaby et al., 2022). Ethical codes are considered a crucial component of formal ethics programs, which play a central role in fostering and sustaining ethical behavior within organizations (Hauser, 2020). Despite their importance, this theory

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has yet to be rigorously tested within the sports sector, and there is a notable absence of research examining the prevalence and efficacy of ethical codes in this particular field. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the ethical practices of athletic trainers across various sports disciplines at Wannan Medical College. The ultimate goal is to develop a practical guide for trainers to mitigate ethical conflicts.

Research Question:

Is there a significant difference in the reduction of ethical conflicts among trainers before and after the implementation of the Trainer Guide?

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted at Wannan Medical College in China, involving 170 athletes and 22 trainers from five different sports events. These sports events were categorized into individual/dual and team sports. Table 1 provides an overview of the basic demographic and professional information of both athletes and trainers across the various sports events. The study was approved by the Ethics Review Committee of Wannan Medical College, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the research.

Table 1 Basic information of athletes and trainers

Sample	Individual/Dual		Team Sports			Total
	Table Tennis	Badminton	Football	Basketball	Volleyball	
Athletes (N)	30	20	50	30	40	170
Trainers (N)	4	4	6	4	4	22

The study follows a structured methodology, beginning with the selection of the sports projects to be investigated, followed by the identification of athletes and trainers. The procedure involves conducting pre-tests, implementing the Trainer Guide, and administering post-tests. The experimental intervention centers on organizing trainers to study and apply the ethical guidelines, which were carried out during the first semester of the 2023-2024 academic year. Table 2 presents the outline of the Trainer Guide, which serves as the foundation for the ethical training and implementation process.

Table 2 Outline of the Trainer Guide

Key Result Area	Activity/ies
Setting Ethical Foundations	<p>Understanding Ethical Principles:</p> <p>(1) Define key ethical principles such as fairness, respect, integrity, and sportsmanship.</p> <p>(2) Explain how these principles apply to sports training and coaching.</p> <p>Personal Ethical Reflection:</p> <p>(1) Encourage trainers to reflect on their own ethical values and beliefs.</p> <p>(2) Discuss how personal ethics influence coaching style and decisions.</p>
Integrating Ethical Practices into Training	<p>Emphasizing Fair Play:</p> <p>(1) Discuss the importance of fair play and how trainers can promote it.</p> <p>(2) Provide strategies for preventing cheating and unsportsmanlike conduct.</p> <p>Respect for All:</p> <p>(1) Highlight the significance of respecting athletes, opponents, officials, and teammates.</p> <p>(2) Offer guidance on creating an atmosphere of mutual respect within the team.</p> <p>Promoting Integrity:</p> <p>(1) Explain the role of integrity in sports and life.</p> <p>(2) Share strategies for developing athletes' moral courage and honesty.</p> <p>Effective Communication:</p> <p>(1) Stress the importance of clear and respectful communication.</p> <p>(2) Provide tips for open dialogue with athletes to address ethical dilemmas and concerns.</p>

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Handling Ethical Dilemmas	<p>Identifying Ethical Concerns:</p> <p>(1) Teach trainers how to recognize situations where ethical concerns may arise. (2) Encourage trainers to stay vigilant and address issues promptly.</p> <p>Conflict Resolution:</p> <p>(1) Provide conflict resolution techniques that trainers can use to help athletes resolve ethical conflicts. (2) Discuss the importance of remaining impartial and fair when mediating conflicts.</p>
Creating an Ethical Team Culture	<p>Team Codes of Conduct:</p> <p>(1) Explain how to develop and implement a team code of conduct. (2) Share sample codes of conduct and consequences for violations.</p> <p>Involving Athletes:</p> <p>(1) Encourage trainers to involve athletes in discussions about ethical values and decisions. (2) Promote team ownership of ethical standards.</p> <p>Positive Reinforcement:</p> <p>(1) Highlight the benefits of recognizing and rewarding ethical behavior. (2) Suggest ways to celebrate acts of sportsmanship and integrity.</p>
Continuous Improvement	<p>Self-Reflection:</p> <p>(1) Encourage trainers to regularly reflect on their coaching practices and ethical choices. (2) Provide guidance on seeking feedback and self-improvement.</p> <p>Staying Informed:</p> <p>(1) Advise trainers to stay updated on ethical guidelines and evolving sports regulations. (2) Recommend resources and organizations for further learning.</p>

Statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS version 27.0. Descriptive statistics are presented as means, and a paired t-test was employed to compare the results of the pre-test and post-test. A p-value of less than 0.05 (two-sided) was considered to indicate statistical significance. Table 3 outlines the criteria for qualitative description and interpretation of the results.

Table 3 The criteria for qualitative description and interpretation

Point	Range of Values	Qualitative Description	Interpretation
1	1.00 – 1.50	Never	Not Practiced
2	1.51 – 2.50	Seldom	Slightly Practiced
3	2.51 – 3.50	Sometimes	Practiced
4	3.51 – 4.00	Always	Highly Practiced

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4 presents the changes in the mean scores of trainers on five core evaluation indicators before and after the implementation of the Trainer Guide. The statistical analysis shows a significant improvement in trainers' behavioral performance to reduce ethical conflicts, with highly significant differences observed between the pre-test and post-test results ($P < 0.001$).

Table 4 Comparison results before and after implementation of the Training Guide

Indicator	Prior (Mean)	After (Mean)	t	Sig.	Decision	Interpretation
Setting Ethical Foundations	2.35	3.31	-8.871	<.001	Rejected	Significant
Integrating Ethical Practices into Training	2.01	2.88	-8.375	<.001	Rejected	Significant
Handling Ethical Dilemmas	1.73	3.61	-21.31	<.001	Rejected	Significant

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Creating an Ethical Team Culture	1.55	3.46	-24.20	<.001	Rejected	Significant
Continuous Improvement	1.55	3.15	-19.24	<.001	Rejected	Significant
Overall	1.86	3.28	-21.09	<.001	Rejected	Significant

The preliminary findings of the study on "Setting Ethical Foundations" revealed an average score of 2.35 in the pre-test, suggesting a lack of active engagement by the participants in establishing a framework for sports ethics. Following the intervention, the average score rose to 3.31 in the post-test, indicating a moderate improvement in the trainees' ability to establish ethical foundations, albeit still falling within the "sometimes" category. This is consistent with the findings of Schlabach, which highlight the importance of developing a sound ethical framework to enhance athletes' understanding and integration of ethical standards as a fundamental approach to mitigating conflicts related to sports ethics (Schlabach, 2024).

For "Integrating Ethical Practices into Training", the pre-test average score was 2.01, reflecting a deficiency in incorporating ethical principles into daily training practices. After the implementation of the Trainer Guide, the score rose to 2.88, indicating a growing emphasis by trainers on integrating moral practices into skill training, though still in the "sometimes" range. This shift suggests a positive influence on athletes' ability to translate ethical values into concrete actions in competitive environments, underscoring the importance of embedding ethical considerations into training processes (Lee, 2023).

Regarding "Handling Ethical Dilemmas", the pre-test score was notably low at 1.73, indicating that trainers lacked effective strategies for addressing complex ethical decisions. However, the post-test score increased significantly to 3.61, showing that trainers were able to "always" manage moral dilemmas effectively. Consistent with Smith's conclusions, this substantial improvement highlights the critical role of proactively addressing ethical challenges, which helps reduce the risk of athletes engaging in unethical behaviors during moments of uncertainty (Smith, 2021).

For "Creating an Ethical Team Culture", the pre-test average score was only 1.55, reflecting insufficient efforts by trainers to foster a positive ethical atmosphere. After the intervention, the average score increased to 3.46, indicating that trainers were "sometimes" successful in creating an ethical team culture. Related research (Mo et al., 2023) suggests that this improvement highlights the value of cultivating a team environment that promotes ethical behavior and discourages unethical practices, thereby reducing the likelihood of ethical conflicts.

Finally, the dimension of "Continuous Improvement" showed a pre-test score of 1.55, revealing a lack of systematic self-reflection and mechanisms for optimizing ethical behavior among the trainers. In the post-test, the score rose to 3.15, suggesting that trainers had begun to embrace and practice the principle of continuous improvement. Failure to adjust ethical education methods in response to evolving social values can weaken efforts to reduce ethical conflicts (Andersson et al., 2022). Therefore, maintaining an attitude of continuous improvement is crucial for ensuring the long-term effectiveness of practices aimed at mitigating ethical conflicts in sports.

For "Overall", the pre-test results showed an average score of 1.86, indicating a low frequency of trainers' involvement in reducing ethical conflicts, classified as "Seldom" engaging in such practices. This finding highlights the urgent need to introduce and strictly enforce the Trainer Guide among trainers. The post-test score increased to 3.28, suggesting that while trainers had taken some action in managing ethical conflicts, their practices remained at the "Sometimes" level. This result reveals the limitations and areas for improvement in trainers' efforts to reduce ethical conflicts. Therefore, it is crucial to enhance education and training on ethical conflict management, as this is vital for improving trainers' ethical decision-making abilities in practice.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through empirical analysis, this study demonstrated that the implementation of the Trainer's Guide had a significant positive impact on promoting ethical practices among trainers. This finding underscores the Trainer's Guide as a valuable tool for guiding trainers in addressing ethical dilemmas, suggesting that it can serve as an effective complement to their basic behavioral norms. Given these results, future research should focus on a more in-depth evaluation of the Trainer's Guide, specifically examining its impact and effectiveness on athletes. Such research would allow for a comprehensive analysis of the guide's mechanisms, providing more detailed and scientifically grounded guidance for trainers. Additionally, these studies would offer theoretical insights to further support both trainers and athletes in the pursuit of ethical conduct in sports.

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