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Caring Coaching in Norwegian Elite Handball

Coaches and Athlete's on Giving and Receiving Care

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Content

Forword	3
Abstract	4
Sammendrag.....	5
Introduction	6
<i>Care as concept, care in sport and coach-care</i>	<i>7</i>
<i>The Norwegian conext of sport and elite handball</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Purpose of study, research question and significance of the topic</i>	<i>9</i>
Review of the Literature	11
<i>Theoretical background: Ethics of care-theory</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Care in sport coaching.....</i>	<i>13</i>
<i>Coaches perspective of care</i>	<i>15</i>
<i>Athletes perspective of coach-care.....</i>	<i>18</i>
<i>Care in the context of Norwegian sport and sport coaching.....</i>	<i>20</i>
Methodology	23
<i>Approach and design</i>	<i>23</i>
<i>Participants.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Data collection.....</i>	<i>27</i>
Pilot interview	28
Interviews with participants	29
<i>Data analysis</i>	<i>30</i>
Secondary Analysis.....	33
<i>Ethics and trustworthiness</i>	<i>33</i>
Findings and discussion	37
<i>Coach-care by the coaches</i>	<i>37</i>
Enacting the caring coach-athlete relationship.....	39
Elements of the caring coach-athlete relationship.....	42

<i>Coach-care by the athletes</i>	47
Elements of the caring coach-athlete relationship	48
Actions building the caring coach-athlete relationship.....	51
Deal breakers in the caring coach-athlete relationship	53
<i>Coach-care and athlete-needs: A meeting point</i>	54
Conclusion	59
<i>Contribution and implications</i>	60
Limitations and future research	61
Literature	62
Appendix A	69
<i>Report from The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)</i>	69
Appendix B	72
<i>Research log</i>	72
Appendix C	74
<i>Consent form</i>	74
<i>“Care in Norwegian Elite Handball”</i>	74
Appendix D	78
<i>Interview guide for coaches</i>	78
<i>Interview guide for athletes</i>	80

Forword

Five years at Inland Norway University has come to an end, and I must admit it is a bit melancholy and scary to let go of the safe student-life and the milieu here at Campus Elverum. This master's degree program has been a process of learning, mastering, happiness, frustration and last but not least good academic conversations with both teachers and fellow students.

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences and views of elite coaches and athletes active in Norwegian handball on coach-care; how is coach-care given and received and whether the care coaches give meet the needs of the athletes. Two coaches, with an average of four years of coaching experience at the elite level, and six athletes, with an average of eight year of playing at the elite level, participated in semi-structured interviews. Data analysis was conducted, separately for the coaches and the athletes, using the thematic analysis method. The analysis led to the development of two themes for the coaches: *enacting the caring coach-athlete relationship* and *elements of the caring coach-athlete relationship*. Three themes were identified for the athletes: *elements of the caring coach-athlete relationship*, *actions building the caring coach-athlete relationship* and *deal breakers in the caring coach-athlete relationship*. The themes and underlying codes presented in the results, are illuminated with direct quotations from the coaches and athlete's data and discussed in relation to existing research on coach-care and Noddings' ethics of care theory. Overall, the present study findings agree with the previous research conducted in the UK and USA and the ethics of care theory. According to the findings, the way coaches give care shares strong similarities with how athletes perceive the receiving of coach-care, with one exception on how the two think about 'trust' as an element behind coach-care. Both the athletes and coaches find trust important yet a possible communication gap between them became apparent on who's responsible for the building of trust. On the whole, the way elite handball coaches give care meet the elite handball athletes need for care in Norway. While, to my knowledge, this is the first study that approached both coaches and athletes within one context on the topic of coach-care, limitations are discussed along with practical implications for elite sport, coaches and athletes and ideas for future research.

Sammendrag

Hensikten med denne kvalitative studien var å utforske elite-trenere og utøvere i Norsk håndball sin opplevelse av trener-omsorg; hvordan det blir utøvd og hvordan det blir mottatt, og dersom omsorgen trenere gir møter utøvernes behov for omsorg. To trenere, med gjennomsnittlig fire år trener-erfaring på elite nivå, og seks utøvere, med gjennomsnittlig åtte år erfaring som utøver på elite nivå, deltok i semi-strukturert intervju. Data ble analysert separat for trener og utøvere, ved å bruke tematisk analyse metode. Analysen resulterte i to temaer for trenere; *Utøve trener-utøver forholdet* og *Element i trener-utøver forholdet*. Tre temaer blant identifisert blant utøvere: *Element i trener-utøver forholdet*, *Handlinger i trener-utøver forholdet* og *Avgjørende faktorer i trener-utøver forholdet*. Temaer og koder er presentert i resultatene, med direktesitat fra trenere og utøvere, og videre diskutert med tidligere forskning på trener-omsorg, i tillegg til Noddings' teori om 'Ethics of care'. Samlet sett viser resultatene i denne studien likheter med tidligere forskning fra Storbritannia og USA, i tillegg til 'Ethics of care' teori. Ut ifra resultatene viser det seg at måten trenere gir omsorg på deler store likheter med hvordan utøvere opplever og mottar trener-omsorg. Både trenere og utøvere finner også tillit som viktig, men det er trolig et kommunikasjons-hull om hvem som er ansvarlig for å skape tillit. I sin helhet, måten elite håndball trenere gir omsorg på møter elite håndball utøvere sine behov for omsorg i Norge. Basert på kunnskap vet vi også at dette er den første studien som tilnærmer både trenere og utøvere i samme omgivelser på temaet om trener-omsorg, og til slutt er svakheter med studien diskutert sammen med praktiske implikasjoner for elite idretten, trenere og utøvere, og deretter forslag for videre forskning.

Introduction

Within the realm of elite sport in Norway, and internationally, handball has a strong presence. Norwegian handball's international success is attested by medals of all colors won in most prestigious levels, like the Olympics and World Championships and its national success is, among other indicators, attested by the number of children and youth playing handball all over the country. Attracting so many children and youth in sport, can be explained by handball having developed as a national team sport through the years but also could be interpreted by handball being a sport arena that provides quality opportunities, quality support and quality experience to its participants hence many choose to join. Care and in particular coach care, can be viewed as a piece in the puzzle of quality opportunity, support, and experience within any sport arena. While Norway's sport values underline the importance of care in sport, there is a lack of knowledge on the construct of care from a national perspective. We do not know how the coaches care about the athletes and how the athletes perceive the care they receive in a pressure-filled and high-stake context like Norway's elite sport, and not surprisingly in elite handball. Researchers in USA and UK have explored caring coaching practice, mostly from the coach's perspective (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Fisher et al., 2017; 2018) while research from athlete perspective is recently growing (Schools et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2020). Cronin and Lowes (2018) stated that good caring practice does exist, but it is not as widespread and explicit as it should be when coaching should be a very caring activity.

Coaches are considered as important and central persons in the world of sport (Official Journal of European Union, 2017) and coaching at the elite level demands multiple skills and can be stressful for all (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). Care is considered as a fundamental quality and key factor for good coaching, but how coaches care for their athletes in a given sport is situated and temporal and is influenced by the coach, the athletes, and the contextual factors (Cronin & Lowes, 2018). Most coaches care passionately about the sport and do their best for their athletes. Many coaches take the time to nurture their athletes' wider skills, like social life and coping with challenges, and when coaching is done well it is recognized as a caring activity (Cronin & Armour, 2019). Therefore, the coach-athlete relationship is also crucial for caring coaching, as caring is based on the coaches' commitment to care *for* the athletes and not only care *about* the athlete (Cronin & Lowes, 2018). The coach-athlete relationship is seen as one of the most essential relationships in sport (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007; Jowett, 2007), and is defined as "a situation in which a coach's and an athlete's cognitions, feelings

and behaviours are mutually and causally interrelated” (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007, p. 4). Within this context, the coach and the athlete interact with the aim to develop and succeed in their sport. Nonetheless, we always need to remember that athletes’ health and well-being are important, and to consider the social, emotional and physical elements impacting the athlete as we try reach optimal performance (Lemez & Rongen, 2017).

Care as concept, care in sport and coach-care

Duty of care is assumed as a minimum standard to expect from coaches and others involved in sport (Cronin & Armour, 2019). In good coaching care is acknowledged as a fundamental factor and quality, and it is stated as complex and difficult to acquire (Cronin & Armour, 2019; Jones, 2017). Good coaching and caring coaching exist but receive less attention than bad coaching and uncaring coaching (Cronin & Armour, 2019). Care in sport can refer to many things and be very individual in how people define and perceive care in sport. McCulloch and Safai (2020) talk about care in sport as reality, because it is about everything that coaches do in the daily work of coaching; whether it is to adjust the practice content or load, engage in the athlete’s life, adapt to suit athlete development and/or show support. Hence, it seems hard to describe what coach-care is about. Nonetheless, researchers have shown that coaches work in a dynamic, complex and messy environments where there are several factors to consider (Walsh, 2011). So, while care is complex, coaching is also complex and context specific.

Coaching has to do with people involved and the interactions between them, and it requires understanding oneself, the athletes, how the athletes learn and what happens in their life (Jones, 2009; Walsh, 2011). Personal style is therefore seen as key in effective coaching (Jones et al., 2004), which means that as a coach you have your own personal style and understanding of self, but also being able to weave together knowledge from others and bringing these into your personal manner. According to Jones et al. (2013), to succeed when coaching you also need to know how to pass on feedback to the athletes, recognize that athletes learn in various ways and different pace, develop the balance between team needs and individual needs and strengths, and make the athletes understand their role within the team framework. Cronin and Armour (2017) define care as “a relational and dynamic construct that envelops safeguarding and serving the beneficence of athletes” (p. 4). Bringing together Jones et al. (2013) factors of ‘successful coaching’ and Cronin and Armour’s (2017) definition of

care, we get one way of explaining coach-care. This means, coach-care is about the interaction between the coach and the athletes, where the coach is able to see, understand and adjust in order to the athletes. Within this shall the coach also contribute to bring out the best in the athlete in a safeguarding environment. Being a coach has to do with interaction with other people, thus the coach-athlete relationship is central in coach-care. For some athletes, the coach-athlete relationship is the most important relation in their life (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007).

In the heart of the coach-athlete relationship we find consideration with both performance enhancement and psychological well-being (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). This ‘coach-athlete relationship’ as explored by Jowett and colleagues, resembles with Noddings’ (1984) notion of a caring relationship between two people – a relation dyad between one who is caring and one who is the cared for. Within a caring relationship both ‘the carer’ and ‘the cared-for’ bring in their own emotions, thoughts and behaviour to justify the label of caring (Noddings, 1984; 1988). Noddings’ care theory (1984; 1988) has been widely used in the talk about coach-care, the care coaches give, and the care athletes receive. As a caring relation is characterized by responsibility and response (Noddings, 1984; 1988), both the carer and the cared-for must contribute in the relation to justify the label of care, and this is dependent of knowing something about what one does and with what effect (Noddings, 2007).

The Norwegian context of sport and elite handball

Sports in Norway promote and serve the values of joy, ambition, honesty and inclusion (NIF, 2019). Within these values, honesty and inclusion stands strong suggesting that the sport environment should provide athletes with safety and be a place that takes care of the athletes as who they are (NIF, 2019). Looking closer on the values of the Norwegian Handball Federation (NHF), respect, fair play, commitment, and empowerment are central ones. For the NHF the responsibility for following up and living up to these values lies in all members of NHF, in every action, coaching and athlete-performances, and is a fundamental part of the work both on and off the field (NHF, 2019).

A priority area for the NIF is ‘better elite sport’, which entails ambitions at the highest performance level, quality in practice and developing Norway’s performance-focused culture. To do so, the NIF needs to build strong framework conditions for the national federations, the

sport and the athletes under its umbrella (NIF, 2019). The Norwegian Handball Federation as part of NIF, has the main responsibility of organizing Norwegian handball and making sure to offer competitions at all levels. They shall also contribute towards the development of handball at the national and international level (NIF, n.d.). Accordingly, the NHF has the responsibility of developing education and courses for coaches and to contribute to athlete development. Norwegian elite handball is the highest level for competition in Norway. Men and women participate in the same level and compete within the same conditions (NHF, n.d.). Within NHF's 2019-2022 strategic plan, one goal aims to improve the framework conditions for the national elite handball clubs and develop a higher level for elite handball (NHF, 2019). Understanding coach-care in the context of Norwegian elite handball can provide the NHF with valuable knowledge on how coaches and athletes at elite level can contribute to developing the sport as well as developing athletes and bring out performance and team results.

Purpose of study, research question and significance of the topic

Taking into account the impact of culture in sport, and particularly the mingling of national and sporting cultures (Skille & Chroni, 2018) on sport, coaches and coaching, exploring coach-care outside the Anglo-Saxon realms of UK and USA appears to be necessary. The purpose of this study was to learn about coach-care in Norwegian elite handball. In particular, I explored coach-care in Norwegian elite handball coaches and athletes upon scrutinizing their experiences with giving and receiving care to capture the meaning of coach-care based on their experiences, how it is practiced, and how it impacts the athletes. The study was conceived based on my own interest in coach-care as a handball athlete and coach in present time and shaped upon reviewing the existing literature. Today there is still little knowledge on how athletes view coach-care and how they perceive the care enacted by their coaches (Morris et al., 2020; Schools et al., 2020). Two research questions guided this project asking, "How do coaches give care, and how do athletes perceive coach-care?" and "Does the care coaches give meet the athletes' needs for care?"

In-depth knowledge on athletes' and coaches' experiences, perceptions and views on coach-care provide essential information on how coach-care is manifested in Norwegian sport, and whether there's coherence in the experiences of athletes and coaches for what is given and what is received. The findings can contribute to the development of the sport by adding to our understanding over athlete needs and coach practices on the basis of care, being a fundamental

factor and key quality for good coaching, yet complex and difficult to acquire (Cronin & Armour, 2019). The findings of the present study can also give new insight about the coach-athlete relationship at handball's elite level, considering the importance of this dyad's relationship (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Upon scrutinizing coach-care we could find new meaning in what role the coach-athlete relationship plays for the athletes. Upon reviewing the existing sport literature, I did not locate any research focusing on coach-care particularly in Norway. Understanding how coach-care is given and received inside Norwegian elite sport allowed me to reflect anew on the existing sport vision, values, and plans of NIF and NHF and to consider how well linked the concept of care with the Norwegian sport context. Lastly, the new knowledge also allowed me to discuss coach-care in parallel with USA and UK where studies have already been conducted. This discussion was done while considering the different national and sport cultures and the impact these have on how sport is performed (Skille & Chroni, 2018).

To address the scope of the study, semi-structured interviews (Brinkman & Kvaale, 2015) were conducted with coaches and athletes who shared their experiences and meanings of coach-care. The collected data was analyzed with Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, to explore coaches and athletes' lived experiences around the coach-care phenomenon. When reading this study one can expect honest thoughts and lived experiences of how the coaches and athletes give and receive care. The elite level in handball is all about chasing results, and sometimes the results appeared to be prioritized over the humans. In reading this study one will see that the athletes are aware about how the coach finds it difficult to balance team and individual needs, and that the coaches have a feel for the athletes when making a decision for the team and not the individual. Hence, though coach-care is not an openly addressed concept within Norwegian elite handball, both coaches and athletes expressed a common understanding of caring for each other.

My own anticipation of the study, as the researcher, was to gain better understanding and insight into how coaches and athletes give care and receive care, in a milieu of chasing results and performance, and to advance my thinking about the athlete and the person behind the performance. Even though the elite level is about results and performance, I believe taking care of the whole person and aiming for each other's best are fundamental.

Review of the Literature

To meet the aim of gaining better understanding on how coach-care is provided, received and perceived by coaches and athlete, we need to know what the existing literature says about the phenomenon. Care as a concept has a long history within the literature and research (e.g., Noddings, 1984; 1988). However, care in sport and coach-care started attracting researchers' attention only in the last ten years (Cronin & Armour, 2019). In the following section, Noddings' care theory, which is the most commonly used theory of care in sport, is first presented, followed by a review of the research conducted on coach-care in sport and care in the Norwegian context of sport and coaching.

The reviewed literature in the section of 'Coaches perspectives of care' and 'Athlete's perspectives of care' was recommended and supplied by my super-visor. From January to April 2021, I conducted regular literature searches in case new literature was published on the topic of coach-care (see Appendix B) and found two new studies that explored care in the sport context. One focused on the experiences of care in football among coaches and managers (Agnew & Pill, 2021), and the other was a doctoral dissertation on athletes lived experiences of care in competitive volleyball (McCullogh, 2020). These are not included in this review.

Theoretical background: Ethics of care-theory

The ethics of care as an approach, first appeared in the 1980s and since then researchers' interest on it have rapidly (Noddings, 2012). Noddings' care theory has been the dominant theory used to explore and better understand care in sport coaching (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Morris et al., 2020; School et al., 2020). When talking about Noddings' view of care, to care and to be cared for is central, and both parties contribute to the relation of care (Noddings, 1984), which is analogous to how both parties contribute to the coach-athlete relationship in the work of Jowett (2007). Noddings' (1984) claimed that there is a form of caring accessible to all human beings, which is an idea of interest for the present study looking into how coaches and athletes view coach-care.

Caring as an ethical orientation has often been viewed from the feminine perspective, because it is said that care arises more naturally in women's than men's experiences (Noddings, 1988). Noddings' (1984) stated that "as human beings we want to care and to be

cared for” (p. 7), which make caring very important. Care has been defined in many ways, but according to Noddings (1984) it is a state of mental suffering or of engrossment, as “to care is to be in a burdened mental state, one of anxiety, fear, or solicitude about something or someone” (p. 9). Noddings’ (1984) pointed out that individuals flourish through interdependent and caring relationships with others (e.g., parents, siblings, coaches), and we need to appreciate the care we receive because it can have positive influence on the individual’s growth and of course on the community within one inhabits. To be caring means that the person credited with caring exhibits an attitude of warmth, solicitude or conscientious attention, and the carer is the one who regularly and dependably establishes or maintains the caring relations (Noddings, 2007). Further on, Noddings’ (2012) wrote that establishing a caring climate is fundamental and lays underneath all that one does, in this case what the coach does, and not ‘on top of’ all tasks and demands in coaching.

The ethic of care is often characterized by responsibility and response, and a relational dyad consists of ‘the carer’ and ‘the cared-for’ (Noddings, 1984; 1988). Both the carer and the cared-for must contribute something to justify the label of caring, but to credit a person with care one needs to know something about what she or he does and with what effect (Noddings, 2007). Noddings’ (2007) claimed that those who regularly form caring relations are often happy people. When caring relations flourish, caregiving is a way of life that enriches both the carer and the cared-for. A supportively respond from the carer to the cared-for will contribute to the well-being of both the cared-for and the relation (Noddings, 2007). For the carer, care involves ‘feeling with other’, as she/he is attentive, and the attention of the carer is receptive (Noddings, 1984). The carer will act on behalf of the cared-for, because the carer discovers that the cared-for express’s some sort of needs, wants and initiations (Noddings, 1988; 2012). To respond to the needs of the cared-for, the carer will put aside temporarily his/her own tasks/projects and evaluative structures and will listen to the cared-for. The response of the carer is characterized by what Noddings’ calls engrossment and motivational displacement (Noddings, 1984; 1988; 2012). Engrossment is where the carer sets aside temptations to analyse, to see and to feel with the other. Motivational displacement is about how the carer’s motive shifts in the direction of the cared-for’s needs (Noddings, 1984: 1988; 2012).

It is central that the carer understands what the cared-for is experiencing and needs. By listening and reflecting on one’s expressed needs, the carer can respond positively and maintain the caring relation (Noddings, 2012). The cared-for, on his/her side, has both a simple and crucial role. Initially, one should express some kind of need and eventually somehow

show that the caring from the carer has been received. Noddings' (2007; 2012) is clear about the response from the cared-for being a crucial one; to complete and call a relationship a caring one, the cared-for must, in some way, signal that the caring was received and recognized as caring. Without a response from the receiver end, there is no caring relationship, no matter how hard the carer tries (Noddings, 2007; 2012). Dialogue and listening are therefore fundamental aspects of caring (Noddings, 2007; 2012). Dialogue requires openness, flexibility and patience, and is emotionally and intellectually important. Dialogue can help the carer to learn the expressed needs of the cared-for, hence the carer can respond to these needs in the best possible way (Noddings, 2007).

In the ethics of care, it is important to differentiate between what the cared-for needs and wants, and what the carer thinks that the cared-for needs and wants (Noddings, 2012). Therefore, Noddings' separated the 'natural caring' and 'ethical caring' (1984; 2007). Natural caring is the preferred method of care, because it comes from love, where "characteristic attention and motivational displacement occur without recourse to principle or any special effort of will" (Noddings, 2007, p. 45). With natural caring the relationships also appear to be strengthened, and the carer, the cared-for and the relation are all sustained (Noddings, 1984; 2007). But sometimes the carer will fail or might be lacking resources to care. Ethical caring will then appear, when the carer employs a care reference in order to respond as the carer, one refers to the memory of caring and the memory of being cared for and then responds (Noddings, 1984; 2007). As such, the ethics of care involves modelling, dialogue, practice and confirmation, and Noddings' set in her writings that these combinations and interpretations are central.

Care in sport coaching

The ethics of care offer standards for coaching behaviour and practice that are context-specific and grounded in lived experiences. Ethics of care require coaches to constantly displace their own desires in the effort to understand the athletes' experiences from their perspective and serve to protect and enhance the athlete's welfare above all (McCullogh & Safai, 2020). As a caring coach, one should identify the motivation of the cared-for and listen and direct the cared-for's interests and energy towards goals and performance. Nonetheless, because athletes do not have the same level of power and authority as coaches, one cannot say with clarity whether athletes respond to caring methods in the way ethics of care purport the

cared-for should be (McCullogh & Safai, 2020). Being a coach at the elite-level places the person in a powerful role position where the aspect of power needs to be considered (Fasting & Pfister, 2000; Sand et al., 2011).

Care is a complex concept and is concerned with building affective, reciprocal and dialogical relationships that serve the needs of others (Cronin & Armour, 2019). Care is acknowledged as a fundamental factor and quality in good coaching yet is complex and difficult to acquire (Cronin & Armour, 2019; Jones; 2017). Being a coach is an interpersonal act between the coach and the athlete, and coaching is about being complementary to the athletes' needs, being committed to the athletes, as well as being 'close' with the athletes (Cronin & Armour, 2017; Jowett, 2007). Coaching is also about viewing own tasks in connection with a wider set of beliefs, like ethical and moral questions, but also broader social issues related to athletes' health and well-being, and to caring about the athletes as performers as well as human beings (Annerstedt & Lindgren, 2014).

Jones (2017) stated that key in coaching is how coaches develop the disposition to care and how coaches instantiate care at any given moment. As a coach one needs to learn and to know how to care and to be reflexive within their relations of care; particularly in the realm of elite sport because the complexity of this level requires coaches to 'take care of' the whole person and consider the athlete's emotional and social aspects both as a person and performer (Cronin & Armour, 2019; Dohsten et al., 2020). Annerstedt and Lindgren (2014) suggested that getting to know the athletes properly, by building trust, safety and understanding is important, so the coaches can adjust their coaching and understand the players better. According to Jones (2009) and Jones et al. (2013) coaches are in constant dialogue with themselves in relation to the decisions they make. It is also stated that it is easier to care for those who accept care appreciatively, because it appears to be problematic to care for somebody who does not want to be cared-for (Jones, 2009; Jones et al., 2013). To involve the athletes in the training environment by having clear roles and leadership assignment was suggested by Annerstedt and Lindgren (2014) as a way of listening to the players and showing respect for the athletes' needs, which can contribute to nurturing a caring relationship.

Coaching at elite level has a powerful role and being a coach is a male-dominant profession with masculine characteristics (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). The coaching education and coaching practice also seem to be orientated towards males needs and ideals, even though female coaches are expected to be more caring and inclusivity on the job (Sand et al., 2011).

Fasting and Pfister (2000), who looked at male and female coaches, from the athletic perspective and experiences, stated that “players seem to have been more satisfied with the female coaches than they were with their male coaches” (p. 103). The female coaches’ style of communication is described as understanding and caring, and when working with female players a coach needs to have empathy and a high degree of social competence (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). Sand and colleagues (2011) looked at authoritarian coaching behaviours and found that athletes have experienced more authoritarian behaviour from male coaches than female coaches. Furthermore, enjoyment and commitment were found to positively correlated with caring behaviour and caring climate (Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010). A perception of caring climate was also positively associated with attitude and caring behaviour toward coaches and teammates; and in addition, when coaches engaged in caring behaviour it led the coach-athlete relationship toward the modelling of caring behaviours between each other (Fry & Gano-Overway, 2010). A great coach was also found to be one who is able to talk to the team and players, while the coach’s personality was highlighted as a factor making them a good coach (Fasting & Pfister, 2000).

In the last ten years coach-care has gained attention and coaches’ definitions, experiences and perceptions for how they give and develop coach-care have been explored (Knust & Fisher, 2015; Fisher et al., 2017; 2018; Dohsten et al., 2020). Today, little is known about how athletes perceive coach-care and how they know that their coaches do or do not care for them. Fisher and her colleagues (2015; 2017; 2018) in a series of studies explored head and assistant coaches’ perceptions of caring practice and how they enacted it in practice. Further, suggested they that future studies should explore athlete’s perception of coach-care to obtain a better understanding for how athletes know they are taken care of. Morris et al. (2020) and Schools et al. (2020) did so recently, and the latter wrote that “without knowing how athletes perceive coach-care, it cannot be assumed that coaches are acting in a caring way or that their vision of caring is being perceived in the way they intended” (p. 3).

Coaches perspective of care

Knust and Fisher (2015) explored female head coaches’ experiences of care in coaching. Twelve female head coaches participated upon being identified as ‘exemplar caring coaches’ by colleagues. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, with questions based on the definition and demonstration of care and how care was influenced by coaches at their level of

coaching. The analysis revealed four main themes describing the coaches' experiences of care; (1) team as 'family', (2) holistic care for athletes, (3) development of the 'self-as-coach', and (4) institutional care. In the first theme, 'team as family', the participants considered their team as families and cared for them in the same way as their 'traditional' family. As a coach they saw their role as a traditional parent and took responsibility for the athlete's growth and development and treated them in the same way as their own children. The theme of 'holistic care for athletes' was described with skills like listening, communication and individualizing. These skills were mentioned as important so they could care about the athletes as 'people' and not only 'athletes.'. In the fourth theme, 'institutional care', the coaches mentioned the National Collegiate Athlete Association (NCAA) system where the participants perceived that "the NCAA presented obstacles to caring for athletes because of rules and revenue" (p. 101) when 11 of the 12 participants shared negative or mixed opinions about the NCAA. Further, the researchers suggested that care appears to be an important aspect of coaching, but they were unsure about how "do" coaches care, as some of them expressed that they did not know if their athletes considered them as caring. Others believed they knew they cared because of their own motives, thoughts, feelings and actions (Knust & Fisher, 2015). Knust and Fisher (2015) suggested interviewing athletes to see whether they appreciate their coaches' care.

Fisher and colleagues in a series of two studies addressed head coaches (2017) and assistant coaches' (2018) perceptions and definitions of care as well as how they enact and implement care in practice. Both studies employed interviews with head (n=18) and assistant (n=23) coaches. The researchers used the same interview guide, but language was adjusted to reflect the participants' setting and apt splitting questions. Fisher et al. (2017) found six domains of care for the head coaches: (1) definition of care, (2) manifestation of care, (3) limits to the capacity to care, (4) development of care, (5) factors facilitating the care of athletes, and (6) factors hindering care. Similarly, Fishers et al.'s (2018) analysis of data with assistant coaches revealed three of the same domains within care as in Fisher et al. (2017); 'the development of care', 'the definition of care' and 'the manifestation of care', and the new domain of 'factors influencing care'. The domain of 'developing care' revealed some slightly different understandings in the two studies. Developing care, for head coaches, meant learning from previous coaching experiences, both good and bad, as well as becoming a parent (Fisher et al., 2017). Meanwhile, for the assistant coaches (Fisher et al., 2018), developing care meant playing for, watching and being mentored by other coaches. With regard to 'defining care',

both head and assistant coaches described the holistic development of athletes, both inside and outside of sport; physical, social and mental aspects.

The ‘manifestation of care’ was about the skills of listening, communication, individualization and building relationships, for both head and assistant coaches (Fisher et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2018). The two studies also came up with the domain of “factors hindering care” (Fisher et al., 2017) and ‘factors influencing care’ (Fisher et al., 2018) mentioned in both categories of “NCAA” (Fisher et al., 2017) and “NCAA rules” (Fisher et al., 2018). Within these categories both head and assistant coaches expressed their dissatisfaction with “how the NCAA often hindered the care for the athletes” (Fisher et al., 2017, p. 89) or “how certain NCAA rules either facilitated or inhibited their ability to care for athletes in the way they wanted” (Fisher et al., 2018, p. 480). In concluding, Fisher et al. (2017) suggested that this study can create a curriculum focusing on caring as the foundation of excellence and with an ‘athlete-centered’ model. Both studies of Fisher and her colleagues (2017; 2018) were very clear on the fact that the responses from, and the findings about head and assistant coaches cannot be seen as ‘best practices’ for engaging with care, only as an illustration about how coaches perceive they should care. The researchers also suggested for future researchers to talk to athletes and understand their perception of coach-care; even if coaches think that they are caring (Fisher et al., 2017; Fisher et al., 2018).

Recently, Dohsten and colleagues (2020) explored “care as sustainable coaching in elite athletics” (p. 48). The aim was to identify coaches care with coaches at the highest level of coaching. Seventeen coaches participated in semi-structured interviews, but only seven coaches, all male, were identified as ‘purposive sample’, because of having experience at the international championship level. The researchers asked questions about the coaches’ coaching philosophy, method and approach, the challenges of elite coaching and experiences of creating training environments for athletes (Dohsten et al., 2020). They reported three main themes on how the coaches described and identified caring actions. The first theme, a holistic coaching approach, demonstrated that focus on the athletes’ personal development and building relationships with the athletes was important because of a long-term perspective and it would build trust and communication in the athletes’ development. The second theme was about creating a developing and inclusive elite environment. Within this, the coaches mentioned “acting as a role model” and “building community, spirit and positive attitude” as important factors (Dohsten et al., 2020, p. 61). The last theme was about focusing on athlete individual needs. To demonstrate the individual needs, the coaches mentioned ‘well-planned

training programs’, ‘adapt[ing] training to the athletes’ needs’ and ‘using experts and networks’. This was important for the athletes to be able to balance training and rest, to develop and build progression, as well as a contribution to the athletes’ own goals and motivation. Dohsten et al. (2020) concluded that these coaches show an understanding of the balance between the athletes’ focus on development and the pressure to perform, and that they focused on individual needs in order to keep the athletes satisfied and appreciated. The findings also showed that practical wisdom, like responsibility and moral dilemmas, is of great importance to practicing care as a sustainable practice. Once again, for future research, Dohsten and colleagues (2020) suggested exploring elite athletes’ expression and views on sustainable care.

Athletes perspective of coach-care

To this day, only two studies have looked into coach-care from the athlete perspective. Morris et al. (2020) employed a qualitative approach aiming to investigate elite women rugby players’ perceptions of caring coaching practice for gaining better understanding on how the athletes know that their coaches do or do not care for them. In-depth semi-structured interviews with 10 rugby athletes were conducted, focusing on the athletes’ views over how coaches learned to care, how they defined coach-care and how they knew their coaches were caring for them or not. The interview guide was based on Fisher and colleagues (2019) interview guide used to study American coaches’ caring practice. The researchers reported six domains in their results; (1) perception of how they learned coach-care, (2) definition of coach-care, (3) description of the demonstration of coach-care – athletes-centred coaching, (4) definition of a lack of coach-care, (5) description of the relationship between coach caring and athletic performance, and (6) additional influence. The athletes’ perceptions on how they learned about coach-care was built on their past experiences with coaches, as well as on hearing about other athletes’ experiences of coaching and seeing how other coaches treat their players. Within the definition of coach-care, holistic care was described. This encompassed the athletes’ physical, mental and emotional well-being, and “the athletes felt cared for as a player on the pitch as well as a person outside of rugby” (Morris et al., 2020, p. 17). Also “safety” (p. 18) was mentioned and deemed important for the athletes, in the definition of care, considering that rugby is a full contact sport. The domain of ‘description of the demonstration of coach-care’ contained three categories. The first, “relationship-building” (p. 19), was described as getting to know each player, how they worked, providing individual attention and being approachable. The second category, “giving feedback and challenge them” (p. 20), was

about communication and give the athletes feedback, both positive and instructional, as well as the coaches needed to be open to listening and taking feedback from the players. The last category, “perspective-taking” (p. 21), was about understanding the athlete’s perception of that rugby was not the only thing or most important thing in their life, and the focus should be more than just on the outcome of a game or season.

In the fourth domain about ‘definition of a lack of coach-care’, it was defined as “feeling ignored, a disconnection between the players and no opportunity to grow or develop as a player” (Morris et al., 2020, p. 23). The athletes also described it with the word ‘authoritarianism’ which implied the coach behaviors as aggressive, physically punitive and manipulative, and because of coaches who yelled at them, they were afraid to make mistakes or fail. In the domain of ‘relationship between coach-care and athletic performance’ the athletes described the reciprocal relationship as increased motivation and efficacy. The more care the athletes perceived the harder they worked and gave more effort. Team cohesion and culture were also highlighted, with regard to the coach being understanding of the type of environment or culture the team worked best under. The last domain, ‘additional influences’, contained three categories of (1) power dynamics, (2) unethical behavior, and (3) gender differences. Team politics or cliques and coaches engaging in unequal treatment and unhealthy behavior was mentioned in this domain. According to Morris et al.’s (2020) findings, “feeling safety” (p. 18) was a unique finding and a factor the participants repetitively mentioned as important for them, yet it could be a factor related more within the sporting context of rugby and less with the concept of care. Their findings showed how both athletes and coaches described caring coaching in a similar way and held similar perceptions for the relationship between caring coaching and athlete performance. This is also in agreement with existing studies related to caring coach practice. For future research, Morris et al. (2020) suggested exploring the relationship between players identity categories and their lived experience and perception of caring coach practice.

Similarly, Schools et al. (2020) attempted to understand student-athletes’ perceptions of coach caring practice. Eleven male and female student-athletes were interviewed, based on Fisher and colleagues (2017) semi-structured interview guide, modified to fit the exploration of student-athletes’ perceptions of coach caring practice. The researcher reported five domains with subcategories: (1) how student-athletes learned coach-care, (2) how student-athletes defined a lack of coach-care, (3) how student-athletes defined coach-care, (4) how student-athletes perceived the expression of the caring climate, and (5) how Christian University

athletes perceived the expression of the Christian caring climate (Schools et al., 2020). The first domain about how the athletes learned coach-care was constructed on four categories; they had learned care from a family context, through the metaphor of team as ‘family’, through past experiences with coaches as well as by other athletes’ stories, even if it was a poorly treatment of care. The second domain, how the athletes defined lack of coach-care, was described through the categories of; focusing on winning vs players well-being, ‘win-at-all-costs’ attitude, negative coaching behavior like yelling and screaming to get them do what they wanted, lack of communication and not explaining as well as coaches using favoritism. In the domain of defining coach-care, holistic care and love were mentioned. The athletes wanted to develop and experience growth as athletes as well as personal growth outside of sport. Love was described as “being both unconditional and relational” (Schools et al., 2020, p. 488). The fourth domain, the athlete’s perception of the expression of the caring climate, contained five categories. First, athlete-coach dialogue was about the athletes expected the coach-dialogue to include checking in on the athletes’ lives, relationship-building was mentioned as a vital part of demonstration care, growth as player and person was explained as a technical skill and being a better athlete and a better person. Also, team cohesion, were the athlete felt togetherness and part of a family was related to coach-care, and the final category, goal setting, where coaches encompass goal setting for both individuals and for the team. The final domain, how the athletes perceived the expression of the Christian caring climate, consisted of two categories of teaching Christian values, like prayer devotions and spiritual growth, and higher expectations for Christian coaches and to show care in the way of being a Christian. The athletes meant that this outlook influenced their views on caring coaching, and that it represented individuals’ perceptions of care. Schools et al. (2020) stated that creating and fostering a caring relation and climate is crucial, but a caring relation must be nurtured in a way that allows all athletes to reach their fullest potential. For that reason, coaches should be chosen for the job with more qualifications than being “excellent in sport”, considering also their quality in interpersonal relations (Schools et al., 2020). Schools and colleagues (2020) also highlighted the need for coaches to create an open dialogue with the athletes so relationships can be built and care to be given to the athletes in an individualized way.

Care in the context of Norwegian sport and sport coaching

In Norwegian sport and sport coaching few studies implied or touched on the phenomenon of coaches caring for the athletes, but without going labelling it as such or going

in-depth about it. A study done by Skille and colleagues (2020) looked at the culture of the Norwegian men and women's national team in handball. They found development as a core element, as they employ a process-oriented approach, rather than result-oriented one, to focus on development. The Norwegian national handball coaches also emphasized the importance to develop the individual within the team. Through an athlete-centered approach there is a close interaction between the coach and the athletes, which reveals a caring behavior and climate. Within this are the athletes more than just elite athlete performers, instead are they seen and understood as whole persons, and that there are several demands to consider in a performance-life (Skille et al., 2020). Also, Hansen and colleagues (2021) studied three Norwegian national teams as institutions and their coaches' leadership. They found that "Norwegian elite sports benefit from holistic and purposeful institutional leadership" (p. 17) and when coaches lead their team it is important to recognize environmental expectations. This study did not touch on the concept of care, but is of relevance in order to understand the context of Norwegian sport and the sport coaching approach to it.

Another Norwegian study, investigating Norwegian swimming athletes' satisfaction with their coach-athlete relationship (Moen et al., 2018), found that the athletes experience mutual understanding between the coaches and self. Closeness, commitment, being heard, seen and understood were important elements for the athletes, while their coaches had succeeding in meeting the individual needs of the different athletes (Moen et al., 2018). While the researchers did not mention the concept of care or coach-care, indirectly, all above mentioned findings describe what care is about as we know it from the coach-care literature.

Recently, Frøyen and colleagues (2020a; 2020b) looked at world-class coaches' interpersonal knowledge and their use of expertise and communication when coaching and building relations with athletes. In both the papers, the coach's mentioned care as important element and that they cared for their athletes with a whole person approach. In the study of Frøyen et al. (2020a) one coach believed that to care about each athlete as a whole person was key for creating an optimal development environment for the athlete, and she was convinced that feeling empathy for the athletes was of great value. At the same time, the same coach, expressed difficulties to balance both setting clear performance standards for the athletes of what she expected, while also being equally clear about that she cared about the athletes as people. Further on, she expressed that it is important for the athletes to trust her and feel cared for as a whole person. It was also important for her to show, and in some way prove to the athletes, that she sees the whole person behind the athlete and their performance (Frøyen et

al., 2020a). In Frøyen et al. (2020b) one coach highlighted that caring about the athletes as people was also important to him. This involved to care about who the athletes are as people and about their lives as well as seeing things from the athlete's perspectives, to have empathy and through communication. Talking with the athletes, being present and looking them in the eyes when talking was a way of showing care, he explained. In the same study (Frøyen et al., 2020b), one athlete confirmed that her coach genuinely cared about the athletes. The athlete described this by saying that the coach makes an effort to get to know the athletes, and the better the coach knows the athletes the easier it is to pick up on and notice things (Frøyen et al., 2020b). Moreover, Frøyen (2020) articulated that the ultimate purpose of the coach-athlete relationship is performance and achieving results. Therefore, "coaches and athletes at the world-class level can undoubtedly have a close, meaningful relationship where both partners care for one another" (p. 42). These findings give us plenty of indications of that coach-care is a factor in Norwegian sport coaching, while these researchers also did not focus directly their work on the concept of care. The fact that the researchers choose not to consider any existing theories and research on coach-care while studying the coach-athlete relationship and seen that the concept of care was emerging as a finding, can raise questions for the interpretations provided around the studies' findings.

To summarize this literature review, coach-care has been recognized as a factor that can influence the quality of coaching as well as athlete development and performance. Researchers have looked at how coaches and athletes define coach-care, how coaches learned and developed coach-care, what lack of care signifies, and what factors may hinder coach-care (Fisher et al., 2017; 2018; Schools et al., 2020). Most of existing studies have explored coach-care from the coaches' point of view and only recent studies are considering the athletes' perspective (Morris et al., 2020; School et al., 2020), following earlier researchers' acknowledgment how hard it is to know how and whether coaches care when relying on perceptions of their own praxis. The athletes need to confirm the reception and perception of coach-care for it to exist. Morris et al. (2020) and Schools et al. (2020) pioneered in exploring athletes' experiences of coach-care and suggested for future research to expand in different sports and levels to better understand how to develop care and coach-care in relation to the athletes' performance and well-being. Considering that the research on coach-care has been conducted in UK and USA, knowledge from other countries with different cultures and sport contexts is deemed to be necessary.

Methodology

In this study the aim was to understand how coaches give care and how athletes perceive care and whether coaches meet the athletes' needs. To meet this aim, a closer look at the participants meaning of care and coach-care, and their lived experience of coach-care was needed. This aim required a qualitative approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In methodology section I present the study's approach and design, the participants, the data collection and analysis done, as well as how I cared for the rigor of the study and my ethical considerations.

Approach and design

A qualitative approach was chosen for this study as it allowed me to collect rich data to go in-depth on the topic of coach-care and to gain better understanding of coaches' and athletes' experiences and perceptions of coach-care (Creswell, 2014). The methodological design chosen as most suitable for this study in order to "seek out new knowledge" (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 104), was phenomenology. With the intention to better understand coaches' and athlete's experiences and perceptions of coach-care in handball, how coach-care is given and how it is being received; the phenomenological design gave me the opportunity to collect in-depth views of the participants lived experiences of a phenomenon, as well as to identify the essential characteristics of the phenomenon (Allen-Collinson, 2017; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Patton (2015) described phenomenology as an approach that "aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 115). The phenomenological design offered me the opportunity to probe into the participants' experiences with the phenomenon of coach-care in focus, which was important for understanding coach-care in the way that the participants perceive it. The phenomenological approach encourages the researcher to remain open and curious at all times, from data collection to data interpretation, about the participants' lived experience with the phenomenon under study. In the present study of coach-care, in depth semi-structured interviews helped me to collect data, rich in perspectives, meanings and experiences of elite handball coaches and athletes with coach-care (Allen-Collinson, 2017; Patton, 2015; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). This study is an exploratory one over the phenomenon of coach-care in the Norwegian sport context. Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest qualitative research to be exploratory and use

it to probe a topic or research problem. In this case, exploring the phenomenon of caring coaching in the elite level of Norwegian handball. In searching the literature, I found that we lacked evidence on coach-care from both coaches and athletes' perspectives while care is identified by the NIF and NHF as instrumental for athletes and sport development which then created the need to explore the phenomenon of coach-care in Norway (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A social constructivist perspective was employed to seek better understanding of individuals subjective, varied and multiple meanings of lived experiences (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The social constructivist view gave me the right ontological, epistemological and methodological 'tools', for learning from the participating coaches' and athletes' views and experiences about coach-care and the complexity of it (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ontology is about "the nature of social entities" (Bryman, 2012, p. 32) and seeks to ask questions about the reality. It can take of two different positions, objectivism and constructivism, which can serve different purposes (Bryman, 2012). Objectivism informs research on social phenomena and how their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors, while constructivism sees that social phenomena and their meanings are accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2012). Epistemology is about what knowledge is and how we acquire knowledge, and how our knowledge of the world is formed by individuals' experiences (Bryman, 2012; Ulum; 2016). A researcher's epistemological assumptions also direct the choice of research questions, methodology and underlying theories (Ulum, 2016).

In this study, I endorsed the constructivism ontological and epistemological position (Bryman, 2012; Lincoln et al., 2011). A constructivist ontology is about how we construct knowledge through our lived experiences and our interactions with others, while social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors (Bryman, 2012; Lincoln et al., 2011). A constructivism ontology also assumes that "the reality as we know it is constructed intersubjectively through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially" (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 103). In this study this position helped me to understand coaches and athletes lived experiences about coach-care in elite sport. Considering that a phenomenon like coach-care is accomplished through social actors (Lincoln et al., 2011), the key actors here are the coach to athlete and athlete to coach, along with other significant actors in the sport. The reality about coach-care that coaches and athletes know of is constructed as something that is accessible for more than one. Their meanings and understanding are developed in the social context of sport based on their experiences. To

understand the participants experiences, it was important to participate in the process, as a researcher, with subjectivity to ensure that new knowledge would be reflective of the participants reality and perceptions (Lincoln et al., 2011). The constructivism epistemology is about the relationship between what we know, like Noddings' care-theory (1984; 1988), and what we see and the unique experience of each person (Patton, 2015). People construct their own understanding of the reality, while meanings are constructed based on our interactions with our surroundings (Lincoln et al., 2011). This means that attention ought to be paid in the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched, as findings can be influenced by the interaction between the researcher and the participants.

As a researcher I believe that there is no one-single truth characterizing one participant, but multiple ones that arise as coaches and athletes interact among them and with their surroundings. It is also important to mention that as a researcher (and person) I have been shaped by my own experiences as a handball athlete and a coach. This may have influenced in some way the knowledge generated via this study (Lincoln et al., 2011). On the basis of that there is no one-single truth and each person's experiences are unique were the underlying assumptions for this study. As an athlete, I experienced receiving coach-care and felt how it can influence the performance, both positively and negatively, and that the coach-care you receive is based on the coach's personality. As a coach I have also experienced the giving of care which for me means a lot because you see that caring for someone influence the person and is appreciated. I also think that the way of giving care as a coach comes from your own fundamental values, that is important for you as a person and that you want for others the best and to succeed.

Participants

The participants for this study were sampled purposefully in order to collect information-rich cases that could contribute with interesting and relevant data towards the purpose of the study. Patton (2015) described purposeful sampling as "selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated" (p. 264). In the present study, elite handball coaches and athletes based on their extensive years of experience with handball, made up the cases that could illuminate the research questions on coach-care in a rich way.

A total of ten participants were invited, through a strategic selection (Patton, 2015), of which six were athletes and four were coaches in Norwegian elite handball. The participating coaches were identified based on my own knowledge (but no personal relation or knowledge) about coaches in Norwegian elite handball from both men and female handball teams. The coaches were first contacted via email, with information about the study and their rights when participating within the consent form (see Appendix C). The participating athletes were also identified and contacted based on my own acknowledgement with an elite handball athlete that I knew about. I informed the athlete about the project and what it entailed to participate and then the athlete helped me to recruit two more athletes. This recruitment approach led to a small snowball-effect (Patton, 2015). The three last athletes were contacted via email within a geographical distance that I had knowledge about being elite handball athletes but without any more knowledge.

Both male and female athletes and coaches were invited to ensure representation of both gender in exploring their experiences and perceptions. Being an ‘information-rich participant’ (Patton, 2015) was the only criterion for selecting participants, which in practical terms was set at inviting participants with minimum of two years of playing or coaching experience at elite handball of Norway. Of the six athletes invited all of them accepted the invitation. Three of the athletes were women and three were men. These athletes had an average experience of 15 years in playing handball overall, and an average of eight years playing for elite handball league teams of Norway. Of the four coaches invited, two accepted the invitation, a woman and a man and two declined due to lack of time. The participating coaches had an average experience of 16 years in coaching handball overall, and an average of four years as coaches with the elite handball league of Norway. The participating coaches also had an average of ten years of experience themselves as athletes from different levels of sport ranging from youth to elite level. An overview of the participants with pseudonyms and information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of participants with pseudonyms and years of experience.

	Pseudonyms	Years in Elite Handball	Years in Handball as coach/athlete
Coach 1	Kari	3	10
Coach 2	Hans	6	22
Athlete 1	Astrid	6	16
Athlete 2	Hanna	10	18
Athlete 3	Ine	6	18
Athlete 4	Jonas	5	10
Athlete 5	Elias	10	16
Athlete 6	Thomas	10	14

Data collection

The data was collected with semi-structured interviews. The power of semi-structured interviewing is in obtaining in-depth knowledge about the participants own lived world and perspectives (Smith & Sparkes, 2017; Brinkmann & Kvaale, 2015). A semi-structured interview usually employs a preplanned interview guide, through which the researchers asks relatively focused but open-ended questions. This is for learning about and understanding the interviewees' world and every day as it relates to a specific topic, the phenomenon of coach-care in the present study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The reason for choosing semi-structured interviewing for data collection was based on the flexibility it offers in exploring all that the participants cares for and allowing me to create conversations with the participants where and when they felt comfortable to share stories and insights with their experience about coach-care (Smith & Sparkes, 2017).

Two interview guides were developed for the present study, one for the athletes and one for the coaches (see Appendix D). The interview guides were inspired by the work of

Schools et al. (2020), Dohsten et al. (2020) and Knust and Fisher (2015) on coaches' and athletes' perceptions and experiences with coach-care. The aim of the coaches' interview was to probe on how coaches experience, use and live by coach-care in their daily work with athletes. As a researcher, I wanted to break into the coaches lived experiences and thoughts about the phenomenon of coach-care; listen and understand what care meant to them, how they learned to care, how they cared on a day-to-day basis or how they failed to care at time. On interviewing athletes, I wanted to understand their experiences with coach-care, listen and learn about coach-care from their point of view; what it meant for them to be cared-for, how they received coach-care from their point of view; what it meant for them to be cared-for, how they received coach-care and of course whether they received the care they need.

Pilot interview

Before the data collection started, pilot interviews were conducted. Bryman (2016) describes that "pilot interviews have a role in ensuring that the research instrument as a whole function well" (p. 260). The aim of the pilot interviews was to 'test' the interview guide and see how the interviewee would react to the questions I asked and the setting, and for me to gain some experience in acting as an interviewer.

Two pilot interviews were carried out, one with an athlete and one with a coach. They were not participating or coaching at the elite level, but I saw them as information rich for testing the interview setting because of their experiences in being a coach and athlete. The two pilot interviews gave me good experience and made me feel more secure with the interviewer role. During the process I was also consciously allowing myself to think about how I should ask questions and make sure to ask questions I was a bit unsure about, or how the question formulation and order would work. It was also important for me to 'practice' on giving the person I was interviewing ample time to think over the questions I asked and to fully answer before I asked follow-up questions or a new one. After the first pilot I noted some keyword about the process, what questions/topic to bring more forward and what to think about for the next pilot interview. After the second pilot interview I also noted more keywords for the process that I should follow in the actual data collection.

These two pilot studies were a great experience and gave me confidence before I started the actual interviews with the coaches and athletes, based on that this 'interview' setting was quite new for me. The piloting allowed me to test the interview guide and changes that needed

to be made in the interview guide according to the research questions to make this flow (Bryman, 2016). It also made me see more ad led quality in my questions, how well the questions flowed and how they were understood by the interviewers. After the pilot interviews I did some changes in the interview guides, which made me confident of that the interview guides were of good quality for gaining knowledge on coach-care.

Interviews with participants

The interviews started with me informing the participants about the theme and the aim of the interview. The consent form was also signed before the interview started, while I also informed them orally for the rights as participants in this study. The interview-guide started with open-ended questions asking the participants to share their sport stories as coaches or athletes and their reason for playing handball. My aim here was to get each participant to feel comfortable with the interview process by sharing stories of themselves and also get to know them through the stories they told. During the interview was it important for me to create a connection, because when interviewing a power relation may arise (Brinkman & Kvaale, 2015). I tried to smile, be friendly and chose my words wisely, so the participants would feel comfortable to share while I also tried to listen actively, show respect and interest for what they were telling me. I was aware of their body language (and mine) and gave them time to think over the questions I asked (Smith & Sparkes, 2017).

Further on, I started asking open-ended questions about care and coach-care. To the coaches I asked questions like; “As a coach, what do the concept of care and coach-care mean to you?”, “Can you share an example of good coach-care that you noticed at work?”, “When coaching, do you care, how?”, and “Do you think your athletes see your care?”. Sub-questions were asked when necessary to push and pull for more depth or clarity in the participants answer. Examples of sub-questions used are, “What does care for the athlete (team, club or sport) mean to you?”, “What does athlete-need-for-care mean to you?” and/or “When you care, what do you do or say, what is your body language?”. The questions asked to the athletes were somewhat similar yet focused on the athletes’ side of coach-care. Examples of questions asked to the athletes are, “As an athlete, what does care and coach-care mean to you?”, “When and how did you understand that receiving coach-care is important (of value) to you?”, and “What do you see as important in building a good and caring coach-athlete relationship?”. Also, here, sub-questions were asked, like “Your description of care, have you received it from coaches?”, “What is important for you to feel cared for?”.

The interviews were conducted in Norwegian language, and they lasted between 25 and 60 minutes. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim into 70 pages of single-spaced text to be used in the analysis. The transcription was done in Norwegian language. Three of the eight interviews were done online, due to the covid-19 pandemic. An audio recorder was used to record the interviews. The recordings were saved on an external drive to keep the files safe of unwanted access. Limitations with the interviews and recordings are further discussed in the section of 'Ethic and trustworthiness'.

In the total of eight interviews only two interviews were with coaches. Upon completing these two interviews and considering the exploratory nature of the study, the rich depth of information elicited from the two coaches, the limited timeframe for conducting the study and covid-19 restrictions, I did not invite more elite coaches to an interview. With the athletes' interviews, after completing six of these I started hearing some patterns in what the participants shared. This was perceived by the researcher as a sign of data saturation, even though saturation is a challenging matter to assess in qualitative research (Patton, 2015). Overall, the information from all participating coaches and athletes was perceived as rich information (Patton, 2015), based on the wealth of experiences and some unique stories was shared by the interviewees.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis (TA), following Braun and Clarke (2006) and Clarke and Braun (2013) 6-step approach, was used to analyze the data in order to search and identify pattern (themes) in it to answer the research questions. TA is the most widely used approach for the qualitative researcher (Clarke & Braun, 2017) and it provides a robust systematic framework for identifying, analyzing and interpreting patterns of meaning in the data as well as it is flexible for describing the importance of the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013; 2017; Braun et al., 2017). TA has also been used successfully earlier in exploring the sport context and elite coaches (Skille et al., 2020; Chroni et al., 2019). Through the six steps of TA, I worked gradually towards analysing and synthesising the participant's lived experiences, perspectives, behaviors and practices to understand coach-care within elite handball of Norway through patterns within and across my data (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

An inductive process was followed to discover the patterns, themes and categories in the views and experiences of the coaches and athletes (Patton, 2015; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). The inductive process is data-driven and useful to explore and generate new explanations and patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton; 2015). The data was therefore the basis for answering the research question and then it was looked in conjunction with the theoretical framework for any nuance of something new that had not been discovered before. The analysis was a process of ongoing interaction with my data so findings could emerge. When patterns and themes were identified and organized into a table (one for the coaches and one for the athletes), the final stage of my work (step 6 of TA) became more deductive in order to position my data with Noddings' ethics theory (1984; 1988; 2007; 2012), and later see whether my findings offered any new insight. According to Patton (2015), later deductive process helps the researcher "in testing and affirming the authenticity and appropriateness of the inductive analysis" (Patton, 2015, p. 542).

In particular, the steps of TA were taken as follows:

- Step 1 of the TA was all about getting to know and familiarizing myself with the data, by transcribing the recorded data and reading and re-reading the transcriptions one by one. I also noted keywords that gave me an overview of what the data was about.
- Step 2 involved producing initial codes that identified a feature of the data and as the "most basic segment of the raw data that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 88). The codes were produced with the research questions in mind. This gave me a wealth of different codes across the data, and I identified codes that had the same meaning with the keywords I noted at step 1, or new keywords were made.
- In step 3, I started searching for themes and sorting the codes into potential themes. All coded data was organized into subthemes and then themes. It was a lot of work 'back and forward' in order to sort the codes into themes. In the end, the themes and sub-themes I identified were placed into a first draft of a table (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013).
- In step 4 I started reviewing the collected themes and discussed them with myself, within two levels. Level 1, checking if the themes I found worked in relation to the coded extracts, and level 2, if these themes worked in relation to the whole data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through these levels I also worked out a thematic map, one for the coaches and one for the athletes (see Table 2 and 3). This was a comprehensive

job, and I had to keep reviewing the codes and themes several times to make sure I got the best meaning. Upon reviewing these myself I also discussed the codes and themes with a person acting as a critical friend. This made me see the codes and themes from a different perspective (Tracy, 2010), which was very useful. Within this step the codes and themes collapsed together and split when reviewing them, in order to tell a convincing and understandable story about the data in the best possible way.

- Step 5 started with the thematic map outlined in step 4. This entailed naming and defining the themes, by giving the themes a definition that identifies the essence of the theme and the story of the data. The essence and relevance of what each theme is about was made upon the relation to the study and research question. The definition and content for each theme were refined several times before presented in the findings section (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013). These were also discussed with the critical friend (Tracy, 2010).
- In the final step (6), the findings and report were produced. This was done by weaving together the analysis and data extracts in order to tell a coherent and persuasive story about the data while also contextualising it in relation to the existing literature (Clarke & Braun, 2013). All work with the analysis until step 6 had an inductive approach, while step 6 had an inductive-to-deductive approach in order to see if the analysed data was about new knowledge or it acknowledged with chosen theoretical framework (Patton, 2015).

The two first steps of the TA were done in Norwegian language. From step three I started translating codes and themes in English. Between step 2 and 3 segments of the raw interview data that were chosen as appropriate for illustrating the themes and subthemes were translated to English and presented in the result section. Squires (2009) pointed out that as a researchers you can improve the study by paying close attention to how you describe the identity and the role of it that the translation has in the study, and also explain why one language is chosen for the analysis in place of another. Nonetheless, conducting a cross-language research can bring methodological challenges (Squires, 2009), and it is therefore important for the rigor and trustworthiness of the study that the translation is done precisely to avoid losing essential segments of the raw data because of an imprecise translation. The interviews and transcriptions in this study were done in Norwegian in order to take care of the participants' side of the stories and experiences within the topic, but also in the best possible ways make them comfortable to talk about care in a language they know well. By doing so I also think it brought

out more unique and specific descriptions of the participants experiences, and during the process we understood each others in the best possible ways.

Secondary Analysis

To answer the second research question “Does the care coaches give meet the athletes needs of care?” an implicit qualitative secondary analysis (QSA) was conducted. Secondary analysis is defined as “the reuse of existing data to investigate a different research question” (Tate & Happ, 2017, p. 308). When conducting a QSA a key is to maximize the use of existing data. In my study the primary data was revisited, reused and reanalysed with the aim of performing additional analysis on the original data set and to apply a new perspective of focus to the original data, to ensure a more robust set of findings (Tate & Happ, 2017; Miles et al., 2020). To answer the second research question, I had to look one more time at the existing data from the interviewed coaches and athletes in order to see if and/or how the care the coaches give do, or do not meet the athletes needs for care. Doing a reanalysis strengthened the analysed data by ‘double checking’ it, so the research question would be answered in best possible way.

Ethics and trustworthiness

The study proposal, interview guides and consent forms were submitted for review and were approved by The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) (see Appendix A) prior to the onset of the study. All participants (coaches and athletes) signed a consent form (see Appendix C) providing them with information about the study, what was asked of them, and about their rights. The consent form informed them on how their anonymity would be protected as their highly visible careers in Norwegian elite handball could make a person identifiable and thus any sensitive information (e.g., hometown or training site) would be omitted or altered as suitable and their names replaced with a pseudonym. They participated voluntarily and were informed about how they could withdraw from the study at any time. Studying the topic of ‘coach-care’ is non-invasive but could be felt as sensitive for some when personal experiences, meanings and issues could surface on which they might have never before reflected. Therefore, as a researcher, it was important for me to protect them from feeling uncomfortable and to respect any sign of unwillingness to answer a question or to elaborate further. In this case I asked them to let me know and I would withdraw the question.

Upon concluding all interviews, I can report that there was no incident during these when I was asked to withdraw a question.

To establish trustworthiness in this work, the work of Tracy (2010) on eight ‘big-tent’ criteria for qualitative research were considered, as a list of criteria to work with throughout the process of conducting research. The eight ‘big-tent’ criteria consist of (1) worthy topic, (2) significant contribution, (3) rich rigor, (4) credibility, (5) resonance, (6) sincerity, (7) meaningful coherence and (8) ethical considerations (Tracy, 2010). Tracy’s list on eight ‘big-tent’ is not a simple list to follow or check off, and in this study, I tried to follow the criteria from the beginning starting with the worthiness of the topic and contribution to data collection, data analysis, credibility and finally the ethical considerations. How the eight criteria were assured for this study is presented below.

The worthiness of the topic (Tracy, 2010) of coach-care was identified through the review of the existing literature, its position in the literature today and the Norwegian sport context. Coach-care from the perspective of coaches and athletes is not a well-researched phenomenon while it is of value in Norwegian sport, and therefore I recognized worth in gaining knowledge for both coaches and athletes and bettering our understand for how coach-care is perceived and carried out. The significant contribution of the study was taken care of through the researcher’s extensive research and reviewing of the existing literature which led me in identifying relevant needs and gaps that required more knowledge (Tracy, 2010).

To ensure rich rigor Tracy (2010) says it requires sufficient, abundant, appropriate and complex data collection, samples and data analysis. Data collection and analysis were guided by the qualitative methodology, with the phenomenological approach employed for exploring the phenomenon of coach-care in Norwegian elite handball (Patton, 2015), via semi-constructed interviews for data collection (Smith & Sparkes, 2017; Brinkmann & Kvaale, 2015) and a thematic analysis which is the most widely used analytical approach for qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013) overall and in the context of sport. Rigor in the interviews and data analysis was marked by the researcher’s transparency for the analysis process of sorting, choosing and organizing the data as well as explanation and descriptions of the participants, inclusion criteria and the length of the interview process and questions asked.

The credibility of the study was substantiated through the use of thick description for the whole process, steps, choices and decisions made from early stage. The knowledge produced in the study might help athletes and coaches, as well as coach education, to better understand each other in the context of sport, performance and athletes' well-being. Therefore, it was important to present the results with resonance and transferability, so the overall story overlaps with the participants' stories, actions and experiences (Tracy, 2010). As mentioned, the translation-part also played a role in order to retell the participants own story but in a different language, with respect to their position and role within the sport. The recorded interviews did in some cases give problem in order to fully hear what was said by the participant. But this was just for some words in between, and when hearing out the full sentence it made sense for what word that was missing or was unclear. In the analysis I also discussed the data, codes and themes with a person acting as a critical friend. This was done in order to seek input during the analysis and understand and see the data from a bigger perspective. Using a critical friend also provides a credible result in a way that the data and analysis is not influenced by what I as a researcher want or hope to find, but rather the 'reality' in the data (Tracy, 2010).

It is also worth mention that the participating coaches and athletes were of significant contribution. The interview-process and the quality of the interviews may have been weakened because of my own experience of interviewing, which is small. During the process I learned more about the process about how to ask questions and when to ask follow-up questions and became aware that the last interviews were of higher 'quality' than the first one. In the last interviews I also had more confidence with being the interviewer. Finally, is it important to discuss potential biases within the research, on the topic of ethics, rigor and trustworthiness (Tracy, 2010). As a researcher I have a close relation to the sport of handball, both as an athlete and coach of myself. Therefore, I wanted handball to be presented in a good way, but without letting my own opinions or experiences take over. I knew this was something I had to be aware of when interviewing, so as I worked and reflected on this 'problem', I tried being objective and not letting it influence the work of collecting data, analyzing and presenting my findings.

A final term within Tracy's (2010) eight "big-tent"-criteria is 'meaningful coherence'. This is about the study and if it achieves what it purports to do. With the aim of this study to better understand coaches and athletes lived experiences and perceptions of giving care and receiving care, purposeful participants was chosen to provide additional data, reflections and complexity about coach-care in a sport-context. Furthermore, the reviewed literature, chosen

theory and analyzed data and findings presented based on the research question helped me achieve what the study purported to do.

Findings and discussion

Seeking answers, the questions “How do coaches give care, and how do athletes perceive care?” and “Does the care coaches give meet the athletes needs for care?” was the aim of this study. In this section, findings from the TA analysis conducted on the interview data from coaches and athletes is presented and discussed with the existing related literature. Combining the presentation and the discussion of findings in one section, is rather common practice in qualitative research, chosen by the researchers when a joint presentation of these enhances the meaning one can take away (Patton, 2015). Accordingly, presenting results and discussion jointly has already been used in coach-care research with both coaches and athletes (e.g., Fisher et al., 2017; 2018; Schools et al., 2020).

The present chapter is organized into three parts. In the first part, coach-care is presented as perceived by the coaches, followed by part two on coach-care as perceived by the athletes, and lastly part 3 where I attempt to answer whether coach-provided-care and athlete needs of care meet. The first and second part opens with a summary presentation of the themes and codes and continues with a detailed presentation of these, while what I found about coach-care in the Norwegian setting is situated within the literature relating to each segment. Tables 2 and 3 show the thematic maps of my analysis, encapsulating the codes identified and themes which I reduced the coaches’ and athletes’ data, respectively. The knowledge obtained from the participating coaches were organized into two themes; *Enacting the caring coach-athlete relationship* and *Elements of the caring coach-athlete relationship* (see Table 2), and from the participating athletes organized into three themes; *Elements of the caring coach-athlete relationship*, *Actions building the caring coach-athlete relationship* and *Deal breaker in the caring coach-athlete relationship* (see Table 3).

Coach-care by the coaches

Coach-care is about getting to know and understanding the athlete as well as the person. Caring coaches see their athletes as more than sportsmen and sportswomen, they see them as being more than what they do on the handball court, as being more than highly skilled performers; they see a whole individual. In light of this view, knowing the athlete as a person, understanding the needs of the person and the performer, and being considerate and compassionate for the whole person, on and off court, is important. Coach-care is also about

providing clear athlete roles within the team setting and communicating clear expectations with every athlete. In the coach view, increased clarity in roles and expectations feeds athlete confidence and bestows ownership to the athletes for the process of which they are a part. The backbone in getting to know and understanding the athlete is open communication, active listening and a dialogical approach that allow the athlete-person and the coach to talk about all kinds of situations that appear. To care means that the coach is actively present, that the coach will show up for the athlete and the person in need of support. The coach's honesty and dependability help build trust with athletes, and while the two intersect they are also dynamic thus central factors in the caring coach-athlete relationship. Nevertheless, the caring coach-athlete relationship also requires boundaries; it is key for the coach and the athlete to find their balance within the relationship with regard to closeness and power between the two of them. In Norway's sport context the values of NIF and NHF stand strong. The values of honesty and inclusion (NIF, 2019), commitment and empowerment (NHF, 2019) imply that the sport environment is expected to be a place that takes care of the athletes and provides them with safety.

Table 2: Thematic map of coach-care by elite handball coaches in Norway

Codes	Themes
Being an inclusive coach	Enacting the caring coach-athlete relationship
Providing sense of competence	
Managing power position/relationship	
Responding to individual needs of care	
Individualized approach	
Balancing individual needs and team needs	
Seeing each individual within the bigger picture	
Showing support	Elements of the caring coach-athlete relationship
Honesty	
Communication based on listening and dialogue	
Dependability	
Clarity about athlete roles	

Clarity in communicated expectations

Embracing a whole person approach

Relationship based on trust

Relation with respect and authority

Enacting the caring coach-athlete relationship

Enacting the caring coach-athlete relationship is about what the coaching role consists of and what coaches do on a daily basis to perform their role with a caring approach. This entails coaches showing commitment and offering to the athlete's opportunities to take initiative along with understanding their athlete's motives, individual needs and goals for development. Being inclusive and interacting with the athletes, providing the athletes with competence, and being capable to balance the power position they are in, are also crucial within this theme.

Balancing individual and team needs was something the participating coaches identified as an important yet challenging thing to do. They elaborated that while handball is a team sport and many decisions are made based on the team, they also need to see the individual needs within the team. As Kari shared, "I am going to make a team to work together and everybody to fit into the same system, but [I] also work on how the team can adjust to each individual so we can use the strengths of each athlete". Dohsten and colleagues (2020) stated that the caring coaches in their study understood the balance between focus on athlete development and the pressure to perform, and that they focused on individual need in order to keep the athletes satisfied and appreciated. The coaches of Dohsten et al.'s study appear to be sharing Kari and Hans' thoughts for balancing individual needs and team needs, in order to act with care for every athlete. They are also in agreement with the study on Norway's national team coaches of handball who stressed the importance of balancing team and individual needs and while caring for the team to also see the person's strengths and fit within the team (Skille et al., 2020). Both Kari and Hans talked about a 'struggle' in the coaching role where the coach is the one who needs push the right 'buttons' at the right time to reach results while taking care of the athletes as well. In Hans words, "you [the coach] become the one who shall challenge and support, and there are all these different factors to consider for all athletes in every practice or [in] conversations we have together". Kari explained that while team rules are in place,

there are no two athletes who are treated the same way; for her, everyone receives individual treatment. For Kari, with regard to caring for both the individual and team needs in practice,

We [the coach team] need to show care and understanding when the athlete is in a difficult situation. So, while we complete the practice because we need to develop and lift the team, we also have the given athlete in the back of our heads for decisions we make during practice. In this way I think we show care and understanding to the athlete and the different situations he/she is in.

For Hans enacting care is also about the “need to notice those athletes who are searching for ‘help’ being open and reading the signals the athletes show, which can be small but visible, even if it’s only a talk or something more from me.” He elaborated further on how being a caring coach is about recognizing the athlete’s signals and going beyond the coach’s comfort zone, “I need to be open and use my time on those who need it, not those who I find it nice to talk to”.

When talking about individual and team needs, the two coaches expressed the importance to see and act on behalf of everyone within the whole team. For Kari this meant being conscious of her own role in practices, making sure to show equal attention and initiative in feedback and to talk with each athlete, and for Hans “to care is to see every individual in the big collective [picture], show attention to them and make sure to bring out the best in the individual”. Hans also talked about how important it is for him to work with the individual and to approach the athletes individually, because they all have different starting points and qualities. The element of individualizing was also found to be important for the national team coaches of Norway (Skille et al., 2020) and the caring coaches of Fisher and colleagues’ studies (2015; 2017; 2018). For latter, individualizing was a part of how care is manifested and providing holistic care to the athletes. Dohsten et al. (2020) also found ‘focusing on athlete needs’ as an essential theme alignings with elements that Kari and Hans mentioned here. Dohsten et al. (2020) described focusing on athlete needs as the coach’s ability to plan and adapt the training to meet the athletes’ needs and to contribute to the athlete’s development, progression as well as individual goals and motivation. Using an individual approach, Hans sees it as a way of taking care of the athlete and of making the coach-athlete relationship a better one. In his words,

Individualizing is important for me – to guide the individual in the collective field. I truly believe that working with the individual, the totality of the athlete, is good because it will bring out the best in them [the athlete] and their best performance.

It is said that being a coach is an interpersonal act between the coach and the athlete (Cronin & Armour, 2019; Jowett, 2007), and the coaching relationship is founded on being complementary with the athlete's needs, close with and committed to the athletes. Noddings' (1984) supported this thought of acting on behalf of others. She said that for a carer, like the coach, care involves feeling with the other. This means that the coach will act on behalf of the cared-for, the athlete, when the coach can notice that the athlete expresses some sort of needs and wants. For a coach to respond to the needs an athlete expresses, temporarily he/she will put own projects to listen to the athlete. This way of response from the carer is what Noddings' call engrossment – when the carer sets aside own temptations to analyse, see and feel with the other (Noddings, 1984; 1988; 2012). These elements parallel what Kari and Hans explained about individual and team needs. From the Norwegian perspective, Skille and colleagues (2020) found that the national coaches of the men and women's handball teams also employing a process-oriented approach. They focused on developing the individual within the team and on building an athlete-centered approach which entails a close interaction between the coach and the athlete. Their approaches has great similarities with both Kari and Hans' approach, and according to the literature is indicative caring coaching (Noddings; 1984; 1988; 2012), even though not labelled as such by Skille and colleagues (2020).

A factor both the participating coaches mentioned, as part of their caring role is to control their power and to handle any relationship imbalances that arise between the coach and the athletes. Hans explained how he sees the coach and athletes as being more or less equal based on the high level of expertise his players possess:

For me is a part of the job, as a coach, to decrease the power relation with the athletes, because we are working at elite level, and I think that the best players in the team know more about handball than I do.

Kari second this view over the use of power by saying “I have become more conscious about my power position and how much I actually can influence the athletes and the club”. Based on the data collected, it appears that Hans and Kari manage their power by being inclusive coaches and providing the athletes with competence about the team being one unit and dependent on all athletes in order to reach results and team goals. Kari said, “I believe that I, or at least I try to, in my leadership to be inclusive [of the athletes] and to see every individual even though it is a team sport”. Hans further elaborated,

We need to spread the word [to the athletes] that “if we as a team shall succeed, we need every athlete to succeed”, and then we [the team] need an internal understanding

about being 20 different athletes with different needs. So, what my coaching role is about is to spread this word and competence to the team.

Fasting and Pfister (2000) stated that coaching at elite-level furnishes the coach with a powerful role which needs to be considered and managed when coaching, because as Kari said, “when being the coach you can influence in so many ways”. McCulloch and Safai (2020) also touched on the fact that the athletes do not have the same level of power and authority as the coaches, which places them at a lower position, one under the coach. For some coaches this is the way of thinking, but when considering a caring climate in the way Noddings’ (2012) explained it, care is fundamental and should lay underneath all that coaches do and ‘not on top of’. Fitting well with this caring climate approach, Kari and Hans see their coaching role and power position as rather equal with the athletes, and found ways to work with this power relation between the coach and the athletes.

Elements of the caring coach-athlete relationship

This theme is about cognitions, feelings and behaviours that can bring out the best in the athlete and the coach through thoughtful and respectful communication. It was constructed based on essentials shared by the coaches when talking about the caring coach-athlete relationship. In sport the coach plays a central role when it comes to building a good and mutual relationship with the athlete, while due to multiple demands this can be stressful (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). According to Cronin and Lowes (2018), how the coach-athlete relationship develops is both dependent and influenced by the coach as well as the contextual factors.

An element the interviewed coaches mentioned as important within the caring coach-athlete relationship was communication. They explained that communication is key to success as the athletes feel seen, and that they take the time to communicate with the athletes. Kari was clear how within her role and relationship with the athletes, communication is a central element, “I think it is the dialogue we have, that I am honest and show understanding [for the athletes]”. Hans elaborated how in his team it is crucial to talk about the importance of communication, “I think there is a clear understanding that the team is dependent on all individuals and the vice versa, and to talk with the athletes and the group about it, is necessary.” Kari in explaining how she enacts care, she said, “I take the time to talk to them [the athletes]

and maybe give an extra explanation, but I also let them react and I listen to them so we can find a solution together”.

Noddings’ (2007; 2012) mentioned listening and dialogue as central elements for responding to the cared-for’s expressed needs. Along these lines, Kari and Hans referred to communication as being key to success, in agreement with Noddings’ (2007; 2012) who stated that dialogue can help the carer, here the coach, to better understand and learn the expressed needs of the cared-for, and then be in position to respond to those needs in the best possible way. To care is about checking in with the other and for care to occur one needs to begin with dialogue, which means to listen and talk (Noddings, 1984), alike Hans and Kari’s communication, who listen to and have dialogue with their athletes. Noddings’ believed that care is about actions and responses, like paying attention to, listening to and responding to another person’s needs, and ‘to be a carer’ means that you *do* something for someone who expresses having some needs (Noddings, 1984; 1988).

Much earlier than coach-care attracted research attention, Fasting and Pfister (2000) had noted that female coaches’ way of communication is understanding and caring. They also reported that when working with female athletes, the coach needs to have empathy and high degree of social competence (Fasting & Pfister, 2000). Kari, as a female coach, working with female athletes, said that it was important for her to always be open for a talk and at cases listen to the athletes and to hear the explanation they provide, rather than offer the athletes with her explanation. Fisher and colleagues (2015; 2017; 2018) also found communication being a factor for how the coaches enacted care and built the coach-athlete relationship, but they did not elaborate further on it.

When talking about communication, the participating coaches also mentioned ‘clarity in communicated expectations’ as an important element for the caring coach-athlete relationship. Kari explained that without these clarifications she thought the relationship could be in danger to be ruined:

I think clarifications of expectations are very, very important! I think that when athletes are insecure or don’t really know their role, they will start thinking “what does the coach think about me, am I good enough, why am I here?” And if that happens there’s failure in the clarifications and our communications, and then I think it will be hard to build trust in the athlete and a relationship.

For Hans the clarifications of expectations are about informing the athlete about where they stand and what to expect when they start playing for the club and in the beginning of the season. Sometimes, communicating clarifications may bear brutal news as Hans said on this matter,

With clarification of expectations you [the athlete] know on beforehand that we might have considered one or two athletes before you, or as better than you, so therefore you will be number three in the line. And if the athlete can live with that, he is welcome to stay in the club, if not, he has to play for another club. As brutal as that.

Clarifications of expectations is mentioned in the literature to be a crucial element in building trust, understanding and safety within the coach-athlete relationship (Annerstedt & Lindgren, 2014). Annerstedt and Lindgren (2014) also explained how the communication of clear athlete roles and leadership assignment is a way of listening to the athletes and showing respect, which can contribute to nurturing a caring coach-athlete relationship, while the coaches can always adjust their coaching to have better understanding for the athletes. Beyond clear expectations, Hans and Kari also shared the importance of having clear athlete role. As Hans said, “it is important to know what your role in the team is [as an athlete], and we need to deliver on what we have told the athlete about his role and use him when he should play”. Role clarity is a part of building the coach-athlete relationship, so the athlete knows where they stand within the relationships and the coaches shows to the athletes that their words matter. Hansen and colleagues (2021) reported that defining athlete roles in light of skills (and team values, not mentioned by interviewed coaches) was the prominent way of leading the national teams of men and women’s handball of Norway.

Further on, embracing a whole person approach was essential for the coaches as a sign of care. Through this approach they could better understand the athlete and bring out the best performance in them. Kari articulated,

We talked about seeing the athlete on the field, but I think it is important to take care of the whole person as well. We can all have a bad day at work, which may affect the practice, and we need to understand that.

According to Noddings’ (1984; 1988; 2012), motivational displacement is a way of a carer’s response referring to how a carer’s motive goes in the direction of the needs of the cared-for. This way of response shows similarities with the whole person approach, as the carer takes the time to listen to and understand the needs the cared-for is experiencing, which can be both inside and outside of sport-needs. For the interviewed coaches the whole person approach is

part of caring of the athletes' physical, psychological and social aspects, along with knowing how to handle and deal with the different athletes in different situations. Hans shared with me his approach:

I care about the human and the situations he or she is in. So, when people come to me with a difficult situation, I am available for them, and then they use the help they need. What happens outside of practice is important for us [coaches]. All the elements in an athlete's life are creating the person we are 'dealing' with, and this can have huge influence on who the athlete is. But while the factors outside the field are important for us, we don't have any rights to know about them.

The whole person approach, or holistic coaching, emerged in the Fisher et al. (2015; 2017; 2018) and Dohsten et al. (2020) studies. The researchers described the approach as important for caring about and understanding the athletes as persons and performers as well as for development inside and outside sport. For Knust and Fisher (2015) the 'holistic care for athletes' entailed the skills of listening, communicating and individualizing. According to Fisher et al. (2017; 2018), the holistic development for athletes is about how coaches defined care and to Dohsten et al. (2020), the holistic coaching approach is about personal development of the athlete and building the coach-athlete relationship. From a Norwegian perspective, the recent studies of Frøyen et al. (2020a; 2020b) and Skille et al. (2020), both share how important it was for the coaches to have a whole person approach. Frøyen et al. (2020a; 2020b) reported that with a whole person approach coaches could care about who the athletes are as people and what is going on in the athlete's life, while the approach also contributed towards creating an optimal environment in the coach-athlete relationship. According to Skille et al. (2020), their coaches emphasized about seeing and understanding the athletes as whole persons and the athletes' needs in performance and life as well as culture as essentials in the way they coach.

Nonetheless, in this whole person caring approach, the coach ought to pay attention to what Hans said, "we [coaches] have no rights to know about it [the athlete's personal life]". This suggests that a coach in this whole person care approach, should know how much is enough to know to respect personal boundaries and how to behave when s/he wants to know something about the athlete's personal life. Sand et al. (2011) reported that the coach needs to understand the value of good communication and that a coach's behavior may have consequences for the athlete, in a study on how authoritarian coach behavior might relate with female athlete's sexual harassment experiences. They found that a coach with a more holistic

approach will be more focused on the athletes' individual needs and better understand what behaviors of his/hers are perceived as not welcome or offensive (Sand et al., 2011). As reported earlier here, both Kari and Hans mentioned the ability to managing the power position and relation they are in, as a coach, and according to Sand and colleagues (2011), how the power of the coach is carried out is a crucial point in the coaching role and the coach-athlete relationship, as the power relation and power differences will always be there. Therefore, it is important that coaches, like Kari and Hans, know how to 'use' their power in order to get to know something about the athletes' personal life, and contribute towards the athletes, rather than use their power 'over' the athletes, acting with authority and most likely influence the coach-athlete relationship in a negative way (Sand et al., 2011).

For Hans, a caring coach-athlete relationship is also about trust, respect and authority. He believed that trust is a fundamental factor in the coach-athlete relationship and that trust needs to be built with each athlete. He said that "building fundamental trust with every athlete is important. We build this trusting relationship if they [athletes] know us [coaches] as persons who keep our words, and they feel that they can trust us". Even though Hans perceive trust as an imperative element, he sees that it is the athlete who decides whether the relation will be a trusting one or not. Looking at the literature, only Dohsten et al. (2020) reported trust as an element in how their coaches identified and described caring actions in the theme of 'holistic coaching approach' the coaches thought that having an athlete-focused development and building the relationship with the athlete will contribute towards building trust within the athletes. Annersted and Lindgren (2014) found trust and respect to be outcomes instead of coach-care elements, as they reported that getting to know the athlete properly will build trust and having clear athlete roles is a way of showing respect. For Annerstedt and Lindgren (2014) it is other elements, like getting to know the athlete properly and clear roles lead to trust and respect, while in the present study trust is a fundamental element in building the coach-athlete relationship and showing care. In addition to trust, Hans also saw respect and authority as essential elements, and keeping appropriate distance with the athletes is important for having their respect and trust. With regard to authority, Hans elaborated that "the hardest part as a coach is to not get too close with the athlete and not keep them in distance. You have to find a distance where you keep your authority".

Coach-care by the athletes

Coach-care for the athletes is about coaches seeing the whole person and going the extra mile to get to know the athlete on the court as well as the person off the court. The caring coach finds the best way for communicating, for treating the athlete, and for bringing out the best in the athlete's performance. Open communication is made of good listening and lots of dialogues between the coach and athlete as well as taking the time to explain good and bad things in ways the athlete understands. Coach behaviors and actions when working together with an athlete show a lot; to feel cared for requires trust, respect, role clarity, a plan for athlete development with room for adjustment, a pat on the shoulder, a supportive nod, a vote of confidence and a sense of safety – all of these shared need to be present in the coach-athlete relationship for it to be a caring one. How the coaches enact their care often means more than what words can say; while a mismatch between words and action is a sign that care is absent. Along this line of thinking, NHF's values of commitment and empowerment could further support the concept of care (when going hand-by-hand with earlier mentioned inclusion and honesty), to provide an environment where the athlete feels assured and strong to belong (NIF, 2019; NHF, 2019).

Table 3: Thematic map of coach-care by elite handball athletes in Norway

Codes	Themes
Communication based on listening and dialogue	Elements of the caring coach-athlete relationship
Clarity about athlete roles	
Mutual trust	
Being appreciated as a person	
Room to be yourself	
Meaningful relationship	
Getting to know the athlete as a person	
Whole person approach	Actions building the caring coach-athlete relationship
Building confidence in the athlete/team	
Understanding the athlete's positive and negative sides	

Giving individual feedback and approval	
Showing support and believes in the athlete	
Adapting in order to develop the athlete/team	
Embracing a growth approach through confidence votes and acceptance	
Explaining choices and mistakes	
Differential treatment	Deal breakers in the caring coach-athlete relationship
Mismatch between the coach's words and action	

Elements of the caring coach-athlete relationship

The caring coach-athlete relationship entails cognitions, feelings and behaviors that can bring out the best in the athlete and the coach through thoughtful and respectful communication. The elements were identified upon essentials shared by the athletes when talking about the caring coach-athlete relationship. It is important for the athletes that the coach-athlete relationship is a connection where the athletes feel seen and understood for who they are, and that there is clarity over the roles and the relationship. According to Jowett and Poczwardowski (2007), the motives for initiating a coach-athlete relationship shape the quality of the relation and its outcomes. Care is then a fundamental factor to establish within the relation, and according to Noddings' (2012), a caring climate lays underneath all that coaches do and as a caring coach one should identify the motivation of the athlete and listen to and direct the athlete's interests and energies towards goals and performance (McCulloch & Safai, 2020).

Communication was mentioned as a key element in the coach-athlete relationship, by all interviewed athletes, Hanna articulated that "knowing how to communicate is key". The athletes explained how important is for them to be able to talk to the coach when they need to, and for the coach to be open and have time to talk. As Jonas said, "it is important for me that I can talk to my coach when I need it and want to and to have reciprocal communication". The athletes also talked about how good communication can make the difference for them; Ine stressed how important is, "having open communication with coach where it is acceptable [for the athlete] to tell the coach if you don't feel good or cared for; it is important, because I don't

want a coach who doesn't accept me". The communication the athletes talked about parallels with Noddings' (2007) fundamental factors of caring, dialogue and listening, which she described with openness, flexibility and patience (Noddings, 2007), and as contributing to a better understanding between the coach and the athlete. Dialogue and listening give room to the coach to better understand and respond to the needs of the athlete. Astrid connected coach openness with athlete development and success, by saying that "the feeling of being heard, and showing that they [coaches] want to help me develop, to make me a better athlete and want me to succeed – that's important for me."

Communication was also a finding in the studies of Morris et al. (2020) and Schools et al. (2020). The athletes of Morris et al. (2020) study explained that communication needs to go both ways, and coaches need to be open to listening and receiving feedback from the players, which align well with what Jonas and Astrid shared in their interviews. In the Schools et al.'s (2020) study, the athletes mentioned expecting the coaches to include them in the dialogue and to check about their athletes' lives. Fasting and Pfister (2000) also suggested that a good coach is one who can talk with the athlete, and Thomas supported this when he said that "for me it is important that we [coach and athlete] can discuss a situation and what we perceived, so there is not one person who break through with his opinion, rather we have a mutual and professional dialogue and relation". Nonetheless, according to Fasting and Pfister (2000) to meet the athlete's needs via open communication and the initiative to talk requires that the coach has an open personality and behavior, which was not in the scope of the present study to explore.

Another component the athletes cited as vital for them in order for the coach-athlete relationship to be considered a caring one was mutual trust. They told me how much it mattered to them to have trust in the coach's words and for the coach to show trust in the athlete. In Elias words,

You need to trust the coach, that you can be yourself in practices and matches and the coach respects you for who you are, and you do not feel insecure. Especially in the relationship between the coach and athlete, that you know where you stand with your coach.

As Ine said, "[the] coach needs to trust me and show that he believes in me". Thomas second the need of feeling that coach believes in you and added that "the feeling of being wanted and [being] an important person because of your skills is important".

Building trust is something that takes time, just like building a relationship. When the athletes talked about how it is important for them to trust the coach, they clarified that it is mainly the coach who needs to show trust to the athlete. Additionally, a meaningful relationship and with room to be yourself were also revealed as important factors for labelling the relation a caring one. Ine said:

I think you become a better version of yourself when you feel cared for. And it should be like that in sport as well, because if you can be yourself in practice and with the team it will also bring better performance [in games].

Morris et al. (2020) also reported trust as a vital part of demonstrating care in their study. However, Annerstedt and Lindgren (2014) found that if the coaches involve the athletes in the training environment it is a way of showing trust and listening, which then contribute to a caring and trusting relation. Hanna was clear about trust:

For me coach-care is about being seen and the coach managing to give you clear tasks and show your role within the team, no matter if you are the one who plays the most or the least. It must be clear for you what role you bring into the team.

An element majority of the athletes mentioned was ‘getting to know the athlete as a person’. For this element it was important for the athletes that the coach shows initiative and makes an effort to get to know the athlete on a more personal level. The coach and the athlete need to get to know each other, as Hanna told me, “I think the coach-athlete relationship will be better when you put effort to get to know your athletes on a personal level, not just the athlete”. For Jonas, “coach-care is when the coach cares about the athlete’s interests outside the sport as well cares about how the players are doing”. Ine and Jonas mentioned the ‘whole person approach’ as a key part of the Norwegian culture. For them, it is about how the coaches take care of the athletes; assuming the whole person approach connects with how the Norwegian (and Scandinavian) culture is built (Frøyen et al. 2020a; 2020b; Skille et al., 2020). Ine explained, “here in Scandinavia we are raised to take care of the whole person. I think that’s the reason why Norway is doing so well in sport”.

In the study of Morris et al. (2020) the participants explained that it was important for them to feeling cared for both on and off the pitch, and that the coach got to know the personal sides of the athlete. For the participants of Schools et al. (2020) study, it was important to feel cared for in a way that they could grow as athletes as well as persons. Analogously, Annerstedt and Lindgren (2014) suggested that coaches need to get to know their athletes properly and

understand them, in order to build trust and safety for the athletes, and with this approach the coaches are in better position to adjust their coaching.

The interviewed athletes' indication to the importance of the coach getting to know them and endorsing the whole person approach, points out similarities with Noddings' motivational displacement for the coach to be in place to put aside own motives and settle for what the athlete needs and wants, and credit another person with care, (e.g., from coach to athlete), the coach needs to know something about the athlete's needs and/or the athlete as a person (Noddings, 2007). At the same time, the coach-athlete relationship and the caring climate is a relational dyad which is depended of that coach and athlete contribute to the relationship (Nodding; 1984; Jowett, 2007). This means that the athletes also need to show interest towards the coach for getting to know each other, as Astrid said, "the coach and the athlete need to learn to know each other". So, if the athletes do not show the openness to let the coach get to know them, it will be difficult for the coach to know something about the athletes. Along when Fasting and Pfister's (2000) suggestion that the coach's personality is a decisive factor in the relationship, it appears that the athlete's personality is also of relevance.

Actions building the caring coach-athlete relationship

This theme is about how the athletes perceive the coaches showing care and the coach's actions that contribute to building a caring coach-athlete relationship. This entails that the coach develops understanding for the athlete in both good and bad occasions, shows support, and adapts to the athlete's needs. With regards to how coaches can build the caring relationship, the athlete's think it is through showing understanding and support and adapting practice to the athletes' needs.

A vital element for the athletes with regard to actions that build the caring coach-athlete relationship is the coach's ability to understand the athletes positive and negative sides. It is important for the athletes that the coach knows how to give feedback in different ways to different athletes and knows the athlete's strong and weak sides. Thomas explained it like:

I mean that the best coaches are able to understand what kind of person and athlete you are, they know how to give feedback in best possible way and bring out results, that's important for me. So, knowing how to communicate with me is important, because to me you can't yell with a negative tone, that will have a negative effect on me, but for

others it will have positive one. So, doing it the right way will bring more positive effect, I think.

The elite handball athletes also thought that understanding will impact the coach-athlete relation in a positive way and were clear that this is a reciprocal connection where both parties need to bring in something. Hanna specified, “I think this [getting to know the athlete] will increase the trust from the athletes, because you feel safe with the person you know”. When talking about understanding the athlete, the interviewees also mention individual feedback and approval being central. Astrid thought these can contribute to building confidence in the athlete and subsequently impact the performance. For her, “it’s the small things that not everybody observes. And coach-care is a bit special because you receive quite little, so the small things can have huge value and mean a lot” she described. The findings of being understood, of receiving individual feedback and approval also share similarities with Moen et al.’s (2018) findings, where the participants talked about the importance of being heard and the coach’s ability to meet the individual needs of different athletes. Moen et al. (2018) upon studying Norwegian athletes, explained how important is for the coach-athlete relationship that the coach can meet individual needs and show closeness, commitment, along with athletes feeling heard, seen, and understood. This was also mentioned by the participants of Morris et al. (2020) who explained that giving individual attention and being approachable was important for them, and part of how coaches provided coach-care. If the coach can meet athletes’ demands, like understanding, individual feedback and approval, the coach meets Noddings’ idea of engrossment; engrossment is when the carer sets aside temptations to analyse, and rather sees and feels with the other (Noddings, 1984; 2012). The coach is susceptible to the athletes needs and shows support to understand their needs. If the coach can act in this way, he/she is also capable to differentiate between what the athlete actually needs and wants, and what the coach thinks the athlete needs and wants (Noddings, 2012).

Other actions the athletes found important in building a caring relationship with the coach, were development and support. It is important for the athletes that the coach adapts in order to develop and take care of both the team and the athlete, as well as gives room to and embraces an approach that accepts failure and builds confidence. Elias shared an experience of his:

He [the coach] gave me a lot of faith as an athlete, and I got to play a lot no matter if I was good or bad. He didn’t sit me on the bench if I played bad but showed that he trusted me and gave me the opportunity to develop.

This approach was common for several athletes in the present study. The actions of the coach at practice or how the coach planned practice for the athletes are indicators of care. Thomas explained:

It is important for me that when I go to practice, I know that it gives me the opportunity to develop, every day, that it is high level and prepared for many repetitions and a chance to develop. Because you can have a bad practice but still got the opportunity to get better. And that's important for me!

In Morris et al.'s study (2020) the participants explained that a reciprocal relationship with the coach increases the athlete's motivation and efficacy, because the more care the athletes perceive the harder they work and the more effort they give. Hence, the way the participants of Morris et al. study explained perceiving coach-care has similarities with how the athletes in the present study perceived coach-care. Schools et al. (2020) reported some more precise factors like goal setting, where the coach embraces goal setting for both the athletes and the team. These findings show how is important for the athlete in all three studies, that the coach is capable to adapt and settle for individual development in a way that the athletes feel cared for, seen, appreciated and safe in the relation with the coach. If we look at the study by Skille and colleagues (2020), the Norwegian national team coaches for men and women's handball emphasized the approach to develop the individual within the team and have an athlete-centered approach, thinking this would build more care. For the participating athletes, the development approach and feeling cared for also entails that the coaches will share with the athletes the rationale for choices they make and offer explanations to help the athletes understand the circumstances and stay positively focused on development. Elias shared his experience with this:

We played a match where I sat more on the bench than I expected to do. Then he [coach] came to me after the match and explained why this happened and gave me a reason for his choices, so I wouldn't go home after the match and start thinking about why I didn't play. I got the explanation right after.

Deal breakers in the caring coach-athlete relationship

The interviewed athletes also talked about good and poor coach-care. The deal breakers in the coach-athlete relationship are circumstances where the coach diverts from meeting the athletes' needs and does not show understanding for the athlete's position. Two codes were used for building the theme, 'differential treatment' and 'mismatch between the coach's words

and action'. All athletes mentioned in some way or another, that they had experienced deal breakers, when a coach did not care for what the athlete thought or felt upon facing different situations. In Astrid's words:

I think it [good and poor coach-care] is overlapping but also very clear, because there are a lot of coaches who have pedagogical education and know what is right and not. But often they say one thing and act in a different way.

When the coach's words and actions do not match, the athletes perceive it as the coach not caring. With regard to the code of differential treatment, it is about some athletes getting treated in a 'better' way than others within the same team. In this case, the athlete perceives the incident as the coach not caring or as bad care. For the athletes this is a sign that challenges the coach-athlete relationship. Jonas shared about this, "I mean that coaches sometimes give both too much and too little treatment. It can be very clear that they [coaches] treat some players better and different from other players". In the study of Schools et al. (2020) 'lack of coach-care' was also reported, and the participants explained this as coach's lack of communication and explanations, as well as engaging in favoritism. Their findings show similarities with what the athletes of this study mentioned particularly favoritism.

Deal breakers for feeling cared for are vital, as Hanna told me: "I think the biggest challenge as a coach, or in the coach-athlete relation, is when the distance between words and actions becomes too big. It can breach the trusting relation, because the coach doesn't keep his words". When athletes experience deal breakers like this with the coach it can also affect the coach-athlete relationship and make the athlete may feel more insecure. This way of behaving can be linked to Noddings' 'ethical caring' (1984). Ethical care is the least preferred way of caring, and appears when the carer, the coach here, fails or lacks resources to care for the athlete. So, ethical caring and athlete's perceptions of deal breakers in the coach-athlete relationship might in some cases challenge or even break the relationship as the athlete does not feel cared for based on the elements of a caring relationship, like communication, feeling seen, trusted and understood.

Coach-care and athlete-needs: A meeting point

Whether and how the coach's care meets the needs of athlete's needs for care is an important question to answer. To answer this question the data collected from athletes and coaches and the analyses performed to answer how coaches care and how athletes perceive

coach care, were revisited with a secondary analysis (Tate & Happ, 2017) described in the methodology section. According to Cronin and Armour (2019), the way of giving care and perceiving care can be very individual, as every person has different criteria for what they perceive as care. Within the sport context and the coach-athlete relationship there are several factors that can influence performance and athlete well-being as well as the coach-athlete relationship in both positive and negative way. Jones (2017) stated that key in coaching is how coaches develop the disposition to care and how coaches can care at any given moment, while coaching is an interpersonal act between the coach and the athlete (Cronin & Armour, 2017). Additionally, care is complex and difficult to acquire, it is acknowledged as a fundamental factor and quality in good coaching (Cronin & Armour, 2019; Jones, 2017). Also, Noddings' (2012) stated that a caring climate is fundamental in a relation that consists of the one person caring and the cared-for person. Noddings' (1984) defined care as "to be in a burden mental state, one of anxiety, fear, or solicitude about something or someone" (p. 9), whereas a caring person is one who regularly and dependably establishes or maintains the caring relation (Noddings, 2007).

Looking at how the athletes in this study perceive being cared for, their needs are met via support and individualized attention from the coach to develop, a coach who understands them as a whole, and as persons and performers in good and bad days. Ine shared what she sees as important and caring, "It is like the small things. If you have performed a good match and the coach comes to you after the match and tells you in personal that it was good, that's a good way of giving and expressing care". Thomas in talking about getting the coach's vote of confidence and support, said, "the coach action of choosing to let me play and I get another chance to 'fix' my mistakes, that is a huge confirmation for me of that he believes in me". Hanna said on the holistic approach, "it is important that the coach gets to know the athletes in a way that he/she knows how to talk with them, and in best possible way communicate with the athletes". The athletes see immense value in communication and role clarity as aspects that meet their need for care and a caring coach-athlete relationship. Elias shared that "it is important for me that I can talk to my coach when I need and wants to. We must have mutual communication". While gender variations in perceiving care was not the scope of this study to explore, it is worth noting here that a variation became apparent in that the three women and three men of the study shared on coach-care. For the women athletes, seeing the totality of the athletic and personal level was stressed as important, while the men athletes drew a clear

line between private and professional life. This observation signposts some variation in care needs of men and women that necessitates further exploration.

From the coaches' side, in giving care, is important to balance individual and team needs, seeing and responding to, based on knowing the athlete as persons and performers, good communication, clear athlete roles and expectations. In Hans words, "if we [coaches] focus on the individual and its needs, then we will get closer with the athletes in a different way and the coach-athlete relationship will be better". For Kari dialogical approach shows her care:

"The dialogue, to listen and take care of every individual in the team. I need to show that I care and that we work in the same direction. And in some cases, are the athletes even included, so we get different points of view".

Bringing together how coaches give care and what athletes need, the two parties of coach-athlete dyad appear to meet rather seemly, words and actions not matching or when the coach showing favoritism in these occasions coach-care is not the case. Both the coaches and the athletes recognized factors like communication, clear roles and getting to know the person/athlete (a whole person approach) as significant for them and the caring coach-athlete relationship. When the coaches talked about balancing individual and team needs and the ability to see and respond to individual needs, they emphasized how they aim to help everyone in the best possible way. Nonetheless, handball is a team sport and there are team needs that also need to be considered, and in some circumstances the team needs may overrun the individual needs. Team needs are understood by the athletes, once their roles are clear and the coaches help them (within timely individual feedback and adjustments) to see themselves within the team's bigger picture. These findings show that a caring climate is present beneath what the interviewed coaches do. A climate that is similar to what Noddings' (2012) suggested where the carer is the one to regularly and dependably establish the caring relation, as they coaches drove the responsibility to see, understand and support the athlete/person. As Ine said, "the coach should notice if I am having a tough period, because it is not always easy for me to tell. And in team sport, and handball, it is the coach job to take care of the people/athletes under him". The elite handball coaches and the athletes mentioned the caring coach-athlete relationship factors that Noddings (2007; 2012) has recognized and that caregiving is a way of life enriching both the carer and the cared-for. Moen et al. (2018) and Dohsten et al. (2020) found that coaches who manage to meet their athletes' needs by understanding them, balancing

the development and performance focus, keeping the athletes satisfied and confident, and provide closeness and commitment to them, have happier athletes who understand the mutual relation and feel cared for.

Positioning these findings within the Norwegian context, the whole person approach was reported as a factor for care (Frøye et al., 2020a; 2020b; Skille et al., 2020). While this whole person approach is a good and recommended way of approaching athletes with care, for Cronin and Armour (2019) the approach is dependent on other factors as well (ever-changing personalities, motives and skills), making care complex and context specific. In the Norwegian sport-context, Skille and Chroni (2018) found that a development-oriented culture is endorsed over a result oriented one by Norway's successful national teams and wrote that "the team is built on community of individuals with complementary roles; the competence of this community exceeds the sum of the parts" (p. 328). The athletes and coaches in the present study also touched on role clarity that caring for everyone to grow and for the team to develop. One could also interpret this as a common bond over taking care of each other that characterizes elite sport. Norway as a society cares about the people, functions under humanistic and social-democratic values; even elite level sport where chasing results is a job for many athletes and coaches a value-based approach to performing allows the athletes, teams and coaches to achieve success while caring for the whole person (Skille et al., 2020). There appears to be understanding about results and performances being more than making money, Jonas talking about the Scandinavian (and Norwegian) culture, he said:

In Scandinavia we have a whole person approach. If you go to the Balkan and the handball culture in the east of Europe, there is no coach-care, it is just a job you go to, you finish practice and then you go home.

NIF's values of honesty and inclusion (NIF, 2019) and NHF's values of commitment and empowerment (NHF, 2019) are central in the context of care, and the develop-oriented view also shows that these values stand strong when approaching athletes, team and the club. To follow up on these values lies in every action of coaching and athlete-performance, which can be reflected in the whole person approach. NIF's priority area on 'better elite sport' also contains developing Norway's performance-focused culture (NIF, 2019), and the Norwegian handball federation have central role within this, as they have responsibility of developing coaches and contribute to athlete development (NHF, n.d.). This means that the concept of care also in the values of NIF and NHF, are touched on but with no wider understanding. A better understanding of coaches and athlete perception of coach-care in Norwegian elite

handball do therefore seems necessary so knowledge and understanding can be provided in maintaining the development-oriented approach and Norwegian sport can keep growing.

Last but not least, both the coaches and athletes mentioned trust as important for coach-care, and how trust makes a strong contribution to the coach-athlete relationship. However, athletes and coaches did not agree on how trust should be ‘carried out’. The coaches thought it is up to the athletes to decide whether the coach-athlete relation is a trusting one, while the athletes thought that it is the coach who needs to initiate trust, show trust on them, and practice trust consistently. This finding gives a signal that there is a possible communication gap in the coach-athlete relationship, related to what trust is and what ‘doing’ trust entails. Even though previous literature has mentioned trust in some sorts as an element in the coach-athlete relationship (Dohsten et al., 2020; Annersted & Lindgren, 2014), this new controversial finding of carrying out trust between coaches and athletes reveals the need for further research and on a practical level that trust requires more clarity than it often receives.

Overall, in looking at how the coaches give care and the athletes need for care, they identified the same elements actions, sometimes with different word. To give care and to meet someone’s need for care, it takes a reciprocal relational dyad of ‘the carer’ and ‘the cared-for’ (Noddings, 1984; 1988), meaning that for the coach (carer) to give care in a way that meets the athlete’s (cared-for) needs for care, both must contribute (share something) to justify the label of caring. This sharing between the elite handball coach and athlete in Norway appears to happen through communication that made of active listening and dialogue; these findings according to Noddings’ (2007; 2012) are fundamental for building a caring relationship.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to answer the research questions “How do coaches give care and how do athletes perceive care?” and “Does the care coaches give meet the athletes need for care?”. The aim was to better understand how elite handball coaches enact care in their coaching and how elite handball athletes feel cared for in the context of chasing results and development. I learned from the coaches that they give care by being actively present in the athlete and the person’s life, by interacting with every individual and by showing understanding for each athlete’s situation and needs. The athlete perceives care when being understood both as an athlete and a person, getting individual feedback and can communicate openly and at any time with the coach.

Majority of the coach-care factors, identified in this study, support previous findings (Fisher et al., 2017; 2018; Dohsten et al., 2020; Morris et al., 2020; Schools et al., 2020). However, the case of trust was unique; while reported by both the coaches and the athletes as vital for coach-care, they have different views of how trust should be carried out, expecting one another to act on it first. The coaches expressed seeing that the athletes will eventually decide whether a coach-athlete relationship is a trusting one or not, while for the athletes the coach should a-priori give trust to the athlete in practice and games. Another key finding is how a mismatch between the coach’s words and actions can damage the caring coach-athlete relationship, while the athletes can accept a mismatch occasion, a mismatch occurring several times over a longer period can ruin the coach-athlete relationship.

In conclusion, the factors mentioned by the coaches and the athletes show that the care the coaches give meets rather well the athletes need of care. It is vital for the coaches to continue being involved and showing support and adapting individual plan and development for the best of the person and the team. Via this individual approach, the athletes will feel seen in a way which they perceive as caring. This way is consistent with Noddings’ ethics of care and caring relation (1984; 1988; 2012), where the coach, the carer, must involve and show interest in the athletes, the cared-for, which enriches both the carer and the cared-for.

Contribution and implications

When starting this study, the aim was to gain better understanding and knowledge on coaches and athletes' experiences, perceptions, and views on coach-care and how coach-care is manifested in Norwegian sport. The findings of this study, have given me a better understanding of how coach-care is practiced and received in Norwegian elite handball as well as how it can contribute to the coach-athlete relationship. The athletes', in this study, expression of needs for coach-care can contribute to better understanding the athlete's well-being at the elite level which can help us to further develop the sport. The athlete's view that being an elite athlete means more than performing a job signals that care must be explored as a fundamental factor and quality in coaching (Cronin & Armour, 2019). With this new knowledge, coaches can better understand how athletes experience and perceive their role in elite sport, which also contributes to coaches' understanding the importance of the coaching role and the power they hold. Regarding care being a fundamental factor of good coaching, and that a caring climate should lay underneath all that coaches do (Noddings, 2012), more research-based knowledge on how athletes experience coach-care is necessary. In addition, the element of trust needs to be studied and clarified. Based on the finding that coaches and athletes mention trust as a crucial element for coach-care but with different outlook was interpreted here as a communication gap between coaches and athletes on what trust means and entails. What trust is within the coach-athlete relationship is should be further researched considering that to my knowledge there is limited literature on the concept of trust in sport (e.g., Jones, 2001; Moore & Stevenson, 1991; 1994).

In closing, the results show that coaches and athletes share an understanding for what coach-care is, and that caring coaches meet the athletes needs for care. This study provided us with knowledge about coach-care in the Norwegian sport-context, which did not exist to this day. While two Norwegian studies touched on the theme of coach-care (e.g., Skille et al., 2020; Frøyen, 2020), they did not approach it through a care theoretical framework or the research knowledge on the concept of care.

Limitations and future research

Several limitations can be addressed relation to the current study. First, in terms of the method, looking back at the interview process I see that there should have been asked more follow-up questions in order to better understand the participants history and experiences. I think this would have given more explanatory answers to the phenomenon of coach-care. These limitations related my own limited experience with the interviewer role, which in the beginning made it a bit difficult to know what and/or how to make next interview even better. Second, the translation-part of the interviews and the analysis may have influenced the results reported here, even though I believe that no unique description provided in Norwegian by the interviewees lost its meaning when translated. Third, the population of coaches interviewed was rather small. Interviewing more coaches would help me enrich my understanding of coach-care by coaches and would enhance saturation of information on the coaches' side of care.

In future studies, the athletes' perspective should be further investigated, to give us more knowledge about how athletes perceive care and how they think they receive it from the coach, and maybe in which context coaches are caring or not. The concept and perspective of care should also be investigated within several sports, for it hopefully to become more talked-about in sport. The idea of investigating athletes' perspective more was also suggested by several researchers (Fisher et al., 2017; 2018; Morris et al., 2020). Even though there are a few studies today that have looked at the athlete's perspective of care, there are no studies that looked at care with both coaches and athletes from the same sport and culture context within the same study, like it was done here. The coaches interview here were not coaching the athletes interviewed to increase the sense of comfort for all interviewees to share their experiences on coach care. Last but not least, future research should scrutinize the factor of trust within care and caring relationships.

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Appendix A

Report from The Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD)



NSD sin vurdering

Prosjekttittel

Care in Norwegian Elite Handball

Referansenummer

320716

Registrert

14.09.2020 av Ingrid Rørlien - 204473@stud.inn.no

Behandlingsansvarlig institusjon

Høgskolen i Innlandet / Fakultet for helse- og sosialvitenskap / Institutt for folkehelse og idrettsvitenskap

Prosjektansvarlig (vitenskapelig ansatt/veileder eller stipendiat)

Stiliani Chroni , stiliani.chroni@inn.no, tlf: 97631001

Type prosjekt

Studentprosjekt, masterstudium

Kontaktinformasjon, student

Ingrid Rørlien, ingridror.96@gmail.com, tlf: 90246618

Prosjektperiode

01.10.2020 - 30.06.2021

Status

17.09.2020 - Vurdert

17.09.2020 - Vurdert

Det er vår vurdering at behandlingen av personopplysninger i prosjektet vil være i samsvar med personvernlovgivningen så fremt den gjennomføres i tråd med det som er dokumentert i meldeskjemaet 17.09.2020 med vedlegg, samt i meldingsdialogen mellom innmelder og NSD. Behandlingen kan starte.

MELD VESENTLIGE ENDRINGER Dersom det skjer vesentlige endringer i behandlingen av personopplysninger, kan det være nødvendig å melde dette til NSD ved å oppdatere meldeskjemaet. Før du melder inn en endring, oppfordrer vi deg til å lese om hvilken type endringer det er nødvendig å melde:

https://nsd.no/personvernombud/meld_prosjekt/meld_endringer.html Du må vente på svar fra NSD før endringen gjennomføres.

TYPE OPPLYSNINGER OG VARIGHET Prosjektet vil behandle alminnelige kategorier av personopplysninger frem til 30.06.2020.

LOVLIG GRUNNLAG Prosjektet vil innhente samtykke fra de registrerte til behandlingen av personopplysninger. Vår vurdering er at prosjektet legger opp til et samtykke i samsvar med kravene i art. 4 og 7, ved at det er en frivillig, spesifikk, informert og utvetydig bekreftelse som kan dokumenteres, og som den registrerte kan trekke tilbake. Lovlig grunnlag for behandlingen vil dermed være den registrertes samtykke, jf. personvernforordningen art. 6 nr. 1 bokstav a.

PERSONVERNPRINSIPPER NSD vurderer at den planlagte behandlingen av personopplysninger vil følge prinsippene i personvernforordningen om:

- lovlighet, rettferdighet og åpenhet (art. 5.1 a), ved at de registrerte får tilfredsstillende informasjon om og samtykker til behandlingen
- formålsbegrensning (art. 5.1 b), ved at personopplysninger samles inn for spesifikke, uttrykkelig angitte og berettigede formål, og ikke ~~viderebehandles~~ til nye uforenlige formål
- dataminimering (art. 5.1 c), ved at det kun behandles opplysninger som er adekvate, relevante og nødvendige for formålet med prosjektet
- lagringsbegrensning (art. 5.1 e), ved at personopplysningene ikke lagres lenger enn nødvendig for å oppfylle formålet

DE REGISTRERTES RETTIGHETER Så lenge de registrerte kan identifiseres i datamaterialet vil de ha følgende rettigheter: åpenhet (art. 12), informasjon (art. 13), innsyn (art. 15), retting (art. 16), sletting (art. 17), begrensning (art. 18), underretning (art. 19), dataportabilitet (art. 20). NSD vurderer at informasjonen som de registrerte vil motta oppfyller lovens krav til form og innhold, jf. art. 12.1 og art. 13. Vi minner om at hvis en registrert tar kontakt om sine rettigheter, har behandlingsansvarlig institusjon plikt til å svare innen en måned.

FØLG DIN INSTITUSJONS RETNINGSLINJER NSD legger til grunn at behandlingen oppfyller kravene i personvernforordningen om riktighet (art. 5.1 d), integritet og konfidensialitet (art. 5.1. f) og sikkerhet (art. 32). For å forsikre dere om at kravene oppfylles, må dere følge interne retningslinjer og eventuelt rådføre dere med behandlingsansvarlig institusjon.

OPPFØLGING AV PROSJEKTET NSD vil følge opp ved planlagt avslutning for å avklare om behandlingen av personopplysningene er avsluttet. Lykke til med prosjektet!

Tlf. Personverntjenester: 55 58 21 17 (tast 1)

Appendix B

Research log

Database	Search nr	Keyword	Hits	Limitations / Comments
SPORT DISCUS 27.01.21	1	Ethics of care AND coach AND sport	10	“Full text” and “English language” 3 already picked for review
	2	Ethics of care AND athlete AND sport	33	“Full text” and “English language” Same as search number 1.
	3	Ethics of care AND coach-athlete relationship	3	“Full text” and “English language” Same as search number 1.
SPORT DISCUSS 15.03.21	1	Care in sports AND coaching Care in sports AND coaching AND athlete	66 39	“Full text” and “English language” 2 already picked for review
	2	Caring climate AND coaching	8	“Full text” and “English language” Same as search number 1
	3	Caring climate AND athletes	18	“Full text” and “English language” 2 already picked for review
GOOGLE SCHOLAR 07.04.21	1	Care in sport AND caring	17 200	Limited to year 2018-2020 Non interesting
	2	Care in sport AND coaching	16 800	Limited to year 2018-2020 Non interesting
	3	Care in “sport coaching”	748	Limited to after year 2020, and sorted by relevance

	4	Ethic of care in “sport coaching”	535	Limited to after year 2020, and sorted by relevance 2 picked for further inspection
SPORT DISCUSS 19.04.21	1	Ethics of care AND coach AND sport	1	“Full text” and “English language” Year 2020-2021.
	2	Ethics of care AND athlete AND sport	3	“Full text” and “English language” Year 2020-2021.
	3	Ethics of care AND coach-athlete relationship	1	“Full text” and “English language” Year 2020-2021.
	4	Care in sports AND coaching Care in sports AND coaching AND athlete	13 9	“Full text” and “English language” Year 2020-2021.
	5	Caring climate AND coaching	3	“Full text” and “English language” Year 2020-2021.
	6	Caring climate AND athletes	3	“Full text” and “English language” Year 2020-2021.
GOOGLE SCHOLAR 19.04.21	1	Ethics of care AND sport	57 000	Limited to year 2020-2021 Sorted by relevance
	2	Coach-care	27	Limited to year 2020-2021 Sorted by relevance
		Coach-care AND sport	6	1 picked for further inspection

Appendix C

Consent form

“Care in Norwegian Elite Handball”

This is an agreement about participation in a research project where the main purpose is to enhance our understanding on how coaches give, and athletes receive and perceive care. This form gives you information about the purpose of the project and what your participation will involve.

Purpose of the project

In recent years, researchers started paying more attention to the concept of coach-care. Norwegian Sport (NIF) considers care as an important element and wishes for it to be provided to athletes of all ages, abilities and levels. To better understand coach-care in sport it is therefore imperative to also hear athletes’ experiences and perception of care. Without the athletes’ understanding of coach-care we will remain unsure whether care is received and perceived in the way it is intended to be, and whether coaches act with care. Evidence-based knowledge and understanding of athletes’ and coaches’ perceptions of care, can provide us with valuable information on how care is manifested in Norwegian sport.

The aim of this project is to learn about how coaches give care and how athletes perceive the care they receive – does coach-care meet athletes need for care.

This is a master’s thesis.

Who is responsible for the research project?

Inland University of Applied Sciences is the institution responsible for the project.

Why are you being asked to participate?

You are invited to participate in this study, because you are either an elite athlete or an elite coach with ample experience on coach-care in sport. Both men and women are invited to partake in order to learn a variety of experiences and collect rich experiences, perceptions and meanings about coach-care, that will help us improve our understanding.

A total of 6-8 participants will be invited, with 3-4 athletes and 3-4 coaches.

What does participation involve for you?

If you agree to participate, you will join the researcher in a conversation-like interview, where you will be asked many open-ended questions that will help us gain in depth understanding and knowledge over coach/athlete experiences, perceptions and meaning of care and coach-care and athlete-need-for-care. The focus of the interviews will be on the totality of your athletic/coaching career experiences with coach-care. I will not ask you about coach-care at present time.

The interviews will be audio recorded and will last between 1 to 2 hours. If any question makes you feel uncomfortable during the interview and you do not wish to respond, please let me know and I will withdraw the question.

After the interview, you will be sent a copy of the transcribed interview which I will ask you to read through it and inform me whether the transcription of the interview reflects accurately your views and experiences.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can still withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose to participate and later decide to withdraw. Please contact my supervisor or me via email and inform us of your decision to withdraw from the study – we will instantly delete all information and data related to you and will not use it in the project.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this consent form. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

To protect your anonymity, your name will be replaced with a pseudonym right after the transcription of your interview's audio recording is completed. Your name and contact details will be stored at an external drive to protect your privacy and safeguard you from unwanted access, and separately from the rest of your data (audio and text of interview).

To protect personal privacy, only the average age of all athletes and of all coaches, the average number of years they have been in the sport as athletes/coaches, and a collective description of their experience at the elite level as athletes/coaches will be made public -- this information is crucial for the study's trustworthiness. Participants' names, clubs, hometowns, player position or any other detail/data that can make the person recognizable will not be shared with anyone or publicized. Your data (audio and text of interview) will be stored in a separate folder from other participants. Both the audio recording and transcribed text files will be saved with your pseudonym and date the interview was conducted and stored at an external drive to protect your privacy and safeguard you from unwanted access to data.

Only my supervisor and me will have access to the full data (i.e., contact information, audio and text of interview) which will be treated with full confidentiality.

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

The project is scheduled to end June 30, 2021. Once the study is completed, all names, contact details and data (audio and text of interviews) of all participants will be deleted.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Based on an agreement with Inland University of Applied Sciences, NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS has assessed that the processing of personal data in this project is in accordance with data protection legislation.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- Dr. Stilian “Ani” Chroni, professor in sport psychology, pedagogy and sports coaching at Inland University of Applied Sciences by email at stiliani.chroni@inn.no or by telephone at +47 97631001.
- NSD – The Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS, by email: (personverntjenester@nsd.no) or by telephone: +47 55 58 21 17.

Yours sincerely,

Project Supervisor

Student

Consent form

I have received and understood information about the project Care in Norwegian Elite Handball and have been given the opportunity to ask questions. I give consent:

- ☐ to participate in interview
- ☐ to be a part of the process of reading the transcribed interview and give approval to use it
- ☐ for my experiences with coach-care to be published in a way that I cannot be recognised, instead a pseudonym will be used and no individual information (age, hometown, club) will ever be published

I give consent for my personal data to be processed until the end date of the project, approx. *June 30, 2021.*

(Signed by participant, date)

Appendix D

Interview guide for coaches

Introducing the participant about the theme and that I want to hear more about their experiences and thoughts about care and coach-care and understand their side of it.

The participants decide what they are comfortable to answer and wants to talk about.

Opening questions

1. Will you start sharing your coaching story with me? How, why, when did you start as a coach?
 - Experience of coaching in other sports?
 - For how long you have been working as a coach?
 - What about as a head-coach and assistant-coach?
 - i. How long on elite level?
2. What is your reason for coaching and why do you coach today?
 - What's your motivation for being a coach?
 - i. Has your motivation changed since you started coaching?
3. How will you describe your role as a coach with your players?
 - What do you want to achieve for your player and for yourself as a coach?
4. Can you talk to me about your coaching philosophy?
 - What is it value to you, what are the values and principles you go by in your coaching and maybe in your life?

Care – description, experience and praxis

1. As a coach, what does the concept care and coach-care mean to you? What do you care about?
 - What does care for the athlete, team, club, sport mean to you?
 - What are your experiences, thoughts, views about what athletes-need-to-be-cared-for about?
2. What you describe – how, where and when did you learn about care?

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- Was it through role models, coaching education, own coaching practice, own athlete experiences?
 - Do you care about your athletes in the same way now as when you started coaching? Has your coach-care developed and shaped during your coaching career?
3. Can you share an example of good coach-care – your own or from other coaches that you noticed at work?
- What exactly do you see as good in this example, why - please elaborate as much as you can to help me see it your way?
4. When coaching, do you care and how?
- When you care, what do you do, say, what is your body language?
 - i. Is feeling cared something that you want to present as part of the training environment, and how do you do it?
 - ii. How do you show it? Values, culture, clear roles in the team?
 - In your care, how do you meet individual athlete-needs, and how do you meet team-needs? How do you handle it?
 - i. What do you consider about the individual and the team when you care, do these overlaps or are different?
 - How do you take care of different personalities in a team? Does your care change at different occasions? When, why, how?
 - Do you care for the athletes as more than just athletes? Physical, mental and social sides of your athletes as well?
5. When planning your work on athlete/team training/competition and development, what is important for you which shows that you care?
- Do you involve significant others to help you care for the athletes/team?
6. Do you think your athletes see you as a caring person?
- Yes – how do you know they see it?
 - No – why – how do you explain this?
7. What do you think is most important element in a robust coach-athlete relationship?
- Is care a part of the relation?
 - i. Yes – how is it a part of the coach-athlete relationship?
 - ii. No – why isn't care a part of the coach-athlete relationship?
 - Can you tell me how care can impact the coach-athlete relationships?

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- i. Have you ever experienced this impact? Do you want to share with me about it?
 8. Has there been time in your career when you failed to care for an athlete? Would you like to share it, without names and club details?
 9. What do you think is the most challenging thing about coach-care?
 - What challenges have you met as a coach when caring for your athlete/team?
 - Do you feel coach-care is a central theme in the sport? Is it something you talk about?

Closing question

10. Is there anything else that comes to your mind about coach-care that we haven't talked about and you think it's important for us in learning about coach-care?

Interview guide for athletes

Introducing the participant about the theme and that I want to hear more about their experiences and thoughts about care and coach-care and understand their side of it.

The participants decide what they are comfortable to answer and want to talk about.

Opening question

1. Will you start sharing your athletic-career and experience with me? Why did you start participating in sport and when?
 - Have you played many different sports?
 - i. When did you start concentrating on handball as your sport?
 - ii. For how long have you played handball at elite level?
 - Have you had many different coaches? Are there some of them who stand out, why do they stand out for you, what was special with them?
2. What is your motivation for playing handball today?
 - Are there any specific criteria/element that are important for you when choosing clubs to play for in your career?

Care – description and experience

1. As an athlete, what does care and coach-care mean to you?
 - What you describe is it something you have learned? How?
 - Can you describe what's important for you to feel cared for?
 - Have you had any coaches who meet this demands you describe?
 - i. Do good coach-care consider the physical, mental and social factors for an athlete?
 - How do you describe good coach-care, what does it entail to count as coach-care?
2. When and how did you come to understand the value of receiving coach-care?
3. Can you please tell me about an experience when you received good coach-care that stands out for you, without mentioning any name or club?
 - What was it that made you feel cared for? How did it meet your needs?
 - i. Coach's body language, something the coach says or do?
 - ii. Was it a one-time situation, or for a longer periode?
 - Have you experienced different coaches giving you care but in different ways, and still meeting your needs? Can you please tell me more about these experiences?
 - Have you had any injuries periods where you felt cared for?
4. Could you share an experience that stands out for you where you received coach-care so you could develop as an athlete, in training and competition?
 - What did the coach do or say, so you felt cared for to develop?
 - i. Were all factors that can impact an athlete and/or performance been taking care of?
 - Have your needs or demands for coach-care changed as you have developed during your career?
 - How would you separate good and bad coach-care? And can you describe your perception of the distinctions?
 - i. Do you have any experiences of coaches who have "failed" to take care of athletes? You or a whole group?
5. Is a good coach-athlete relationship important for you to feel cared for, as an athlete? In what way?

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- Have you had any coach-athlete relationships where you can express your needs, and this has been taking care of?
 - i. Did you feel cared-for as both an athlete and human?
 - 6. What do you see as important to building a good and caring coach-athlete relationship?
 - How do you think care can impact the coach-athlete relationship?
 - What has been decisive for the good relationships you have built with coaches through your career?
 - 7. Do you think the coach-athlete relationship is decisive for how coaches give care, and how you receive care?
 - Yes - Can you tell how and why?
 - No – why don't you think that?
 - Do you show any confirmation when you feel cared-for, or receive care?
 - 8. Is there anything you experience as challenging with coach-care, as an athlete?
 - Is coach-care something you talk about in the wardrobe?
 - Do you feel the theme is central in the sport? Something that's being talked about?

Closing question

- 9. Is there anything else about coach-care that you can think about as important and that we haven't talked about and want to share with me?