British gymnastics 'must do more' to keep children safe

17 Jun 2022 Last updated at 11:22



GETTY IMAGES

A big review into British Gymnastics and its coaches has found that lots of children taking part weren't kept safe or looked after properly.

The review found cases of children being treated very badly and that gymnast welfare has "not been at the centre of British Gymnastics' culture".

Around 75% of British Gymnastics' members are children under the age of 12.

Among the problems were young people being made to train when they were injured, punished for needing the toilet, sat on by coaches, and being shouted and sworn at.

British Gymnastics said it wanted to "wholeheartedly apologise" for what has happened but some charities want more to be done, including limits on the number of hours child athletes can

train.

Children's charity NSPCC has also set up a special helpline for children involved with gymnastics who have worries.

Find out more

Children should 'speak out' about their right to be safe from abuse

What is the report?



GETTY IMAGES

Following a series accusations of abuse and mistreatment of athletes within gymnastics in Britain, lawyer Anne Whyte QC was asked to look into the way the sport was being run.

The review, which focused on August 2008 to August 2020, received more than 400 comments, including 133 from current and former gymnasts, and conducted 190 interviews.

It calls for a new focus on four key areas: safeguarding and welfare, how complaints are handled, standards and education, and more supervision of what the organisation is doing..

“

I hope that the findings in this report will allow the gymnast community to feel that the failures of the past have been publicly recognised and enable the sport to move forward and make positive changes.

Anne Whyte QC

What did it find out?



GETTY IMAGES

The report found lots of cases of children not being properly looked after, being treated inappropriately and not being kept safe.

There were lots of examples of cruel treatment if young athletes weren't able to do certain moves or tasks.

These included being made to sit in store cupboards if they cried or refused to perform a skill in training, being shouted at and called names, being forced to stand on the beam for an hour, and being sat on if they were not fully on the ground while performing the splits.

There were also reports of gymnasts being put under a huge amount of pressure over what they ate and not being allowed to go the loo.

More sport stories

Five things you need to know about Euro 2022

Racism in football: 'FA not doing enough to support victims of racism'

Minimum age raised for figure skaters

Lost of people explained that this treatment had affected their mental health in a bad way and one former Team GB athlete, Nicola Paver, said she thought the way she and other people were treated was "child abuse".

The boss of British Gymnastics, Sarah Powell, who has been in the job since October 2021, said what gymnasts experienced was not acceptable: "British Gymnastics accepts all of the recommendations and key findings. We will not shy away from doing what is needed.

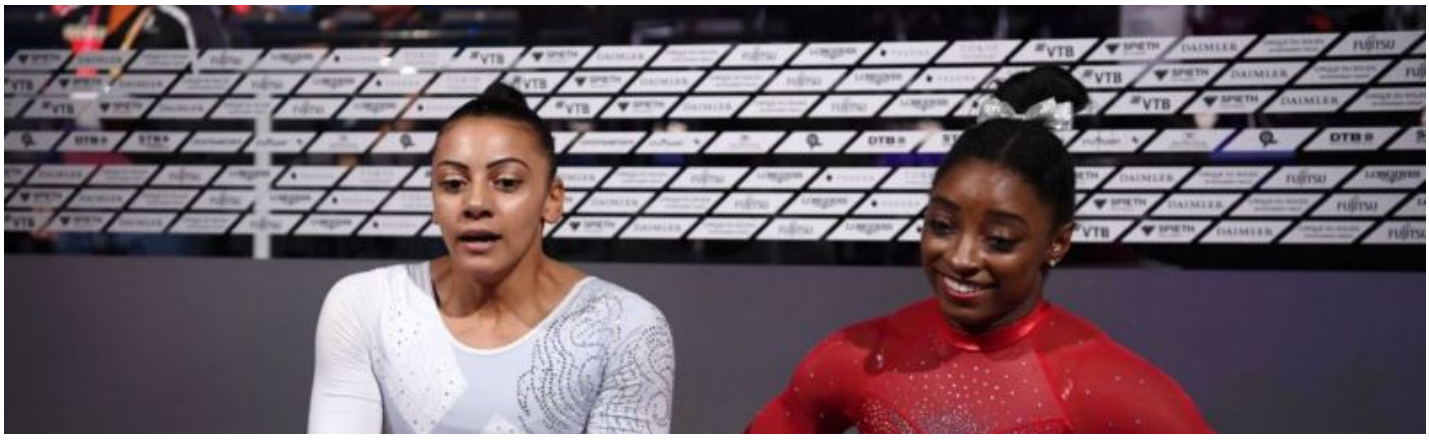
"I want to wholeheartedly apologise to the gymnasts who have suffered as a result of us not working to the standards we set ourselves. We are sorry... We will change gymnastics for the better.""

> **Gymnastics will be different because of the bravery of the gymnasts who stood up.**
>
> Sarah Powell, CEO of British Gymnastics

What have people said?

Team GB gymnast Becky Downie, who also spoke about the negative way she and her sister were treated, said the review marked "an important day" for the future of the sport but said: "A lot still needs to be worked on."

Gymnastics' international federation, the FIG, also said it was satisfied by what it has seen so far in British Gymnastics' efforts to change the sport.





GETTY IMAGES

Becky Downie of Great Britain (left) and Simone Biles of United States (right) during the FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Championships in 2019

However the campaign group, Gymnasts For Change, felt the report was "shocking" and said the recommendations "fall far short of what is needed".

They want to see "maximum limits on child athlete training hours" and new government laws on child safeguarding.

The former boss of British Gymnastics, Jane Allen, who retired in December 2020, was criticised in the report for a "lack of leadership" and for her "failure" to look after athlete welfare enough.

In a statement, she said she was "deeply sorry I didn't do more for everyone - especially the athletes - to feel supported, able to speak up and heard".

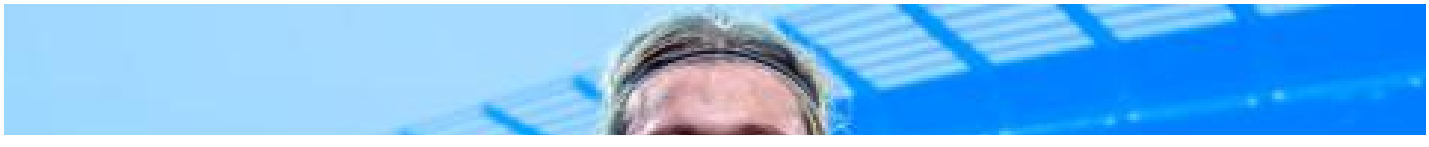
UK Sport and Sport England said they "welcomed" the report and accepted its recommendations - adding that to keep getting funding, British Gymnastics will have to show changes being made.

Need help?

You can contact Childline - a counselling charity for people aged 18 and under - on 0800 1111 for free at any time.

Or visit the Childline Kids website

MORE LIKE THIS





TOP STORIES



Explore the BBC

CBBC

Newsround

Own It

CBBC on TV

CBBC iPlayer

Bitesize

CBeebies

CBBC Help

Terms of Use

Privacy Policy

Accessibility Help

Contact the BBC

Advertise with us

About the BBC

Cookies

Parental Guidance

Get Personalised Newsletters

AdChoices / Do Not Sell My Info

Copyright © 2022 BBC. The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites. **Read about our approach to external linking.**