

Project



Exploring childrens' experiences of sport in Australia. What are young people telling us?

Partner

VICSPORT

Year

2015

Purpose



In 2014 VicSport convened an expert working group including representatives from La Trobe University, the Equal Opportunities and Human Rights Commission, the Australian Institute of Sport, the Victorian Children's Commissioner, the Department of Human Services and the Australian Childhood Foundation to examine policies and procedures governing state sporting associations' institutional responses to safeguarding children in sport. It was in the context of that project that the need for a further study in relation to Australian children was identified. The expert group acted as an Advisory Committee to the study that was then designed and implemented. The aim was to explore children's experiences of organised sport, as recalled by young adults.

Method



The project first sought to examine the state of existing knowledge in the area of child abuse and harm in organised sport. A detailed breakdown of behaviours which may constitute abuse or harassment was developed and a systematic literature review was conducted. Four key areas of focus were identified: types of abuse experienced by children in sport and the impact of harm; the identification of people responsible for the abuse and harm; children and vulnerability; the cultural ethos in sport that may facilitate abuse and harm.

A mixed method design was employed. Data collection included an online survey (107 respondents) and an in-depth interview schedule (10 interviewees). Prospective participants were purposively selected according to set criteria: within the age range 18-25 years; participated in organised sport in Victoria as a child, and for the follow up interview, could identify a negative and/or harmful experience within this context. Data about the benefits of sport was gathered, as were the range of negative experiences, that children may have experienced when participating in junior sport settings.

Application



Overwhelmingly, young people reported the lasting developmental benefits of participation in organised sport as children. More than 50% also reported negative experiences, including emotional, physical and sexual harm. The reasons for these apparently contradictory findings were explored and reported. The roles of coaches, peers, parents and the wider sporting association ethos were investigated and recommendations were made for future research.

