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## PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH ATHLETE SAFETY PARENTS VS DIRECTORS

Nicole Anais Rodriguez  
*California State University - San Bernardino*

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PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH ATHLETE SAFETY  
PARENTS VS DIRECTORS

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by  
Nicole Rodriguez

May 2024

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Approved by:

Erik Schott, Faculty Supervisor, Social Work

Yawen Li, M.S.W. Research Coordinator

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores sexual abuse in youth sports by studying the perceived effectiveness of established trainings mandated for youth sport coaches. It discerns how the perceived effectiveness varies between youth sport organization directors, and the parents of the athletes. The aim was to discover if the required trainings are successfully being utilized by coaches and effectively contributing to a safe sport culture, or if more needs to be established to keep athletes safe. Finally, the parent's knowledge of what defines sexual abuse, potential risks, and what to look out for in the realm of youth athletics was assessed to further decide if this gap in awareness and education could be a potential contributing factor. This qualitative study utilizes individual interviews with youth sport organization directors, and the parents of the athletes they train. Data was interpreted to discover overlapping trends, recurring themes and highlight contributing factors of the issue. The findings from this study highlight the significant gap in awareness, understanding and education of sexual abuse in youth sports between parents and directors. Parents and players need to be offered educational opportunities on this topic so they can have more active roles in youth athlete safety. Implications for social work include involvement and engagement of social workers in the various fields and levels of athletics so that they can advocate for, and protect children from, abuse within the sport setting.

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## DEDICATION

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### Problem Formulation

Youth sports provide many positive opportunities for children and can provide them with strong characteristics and traits that will help them well beyond sport. There are both psychological and social benefits connected to the participation of organized sports in youth athletes (Moore et al., 2021). The best outcomes for children involved in youth sports are brought out when they have positive, engaged and dedicated coaches; their unique role allows them to help children find personal meaning and improve proficiency in their skills and abilities inside and out of sport (Cutton & Hochstetler, 2021). The role of a coach can serve children in numerous ways, many of which are positive and can have lasting positive outcomes. Within this role and title, however, also provides a coach with great power over their players.

When considering the amount of power a coach has, it is important to recognize how the amount of power and type of power might change depending on the athletes they are working with. Within sport involvement, females and minority athletes are at higher risk for sexual abuse. Further, athletes that compete at higher levels of sport appear to be at higher risk for grooming. In addition to these risk factors, one must also consider the amount of time a coach and player spend together. A coach and young athlete often spend more time

together than the athlete does with their own parents; thus, making children in sports specifically susceptible to sexual abuse (Bjørnseth, & Szabo, 2018).

Due to the unique role, requirements and expectations of a coach, individuals in that position are often granted different opportunities than those in other professions. Amongst these additional liberties presents greater risks for children to be abused by their coaches. A risk that is intensified by the nature of the coaching position is the use of grooming. Grooming is a subtle approach used by an offender in an attempt to gain physical access to and time alone with a child with the intention of engaging in sexual behaviors by building trust with the individual and their caregivers (Pollack & MacIver, 2015). Within the realm of athletics grooming may occur physically through inappropriate touching of an athlete that is accredited to supportive coaching; psychologically by convincing an athlete and their family that the player and coach require additional time together for instruction; or through coercive societal and environmental factors such as a successful reputation which may deter individuals from wanting to challenge or question a coach's actions (Leberg, 1997). Further, while grooming, a coach can offer athletes rewards such as play time, positive recognition and other benefits that positively contribute to a player's confidence, security and overall self-esteem which will aid in trust building. Once the relationship is established and the athlete is conditioned to the coach's grooming, the player may become completely confined to the relationship as compliance is continuously secured with the manipulative use of threats, the withholding of

privileges or the offering of rewards (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2005). Resulting from the slow, subtle and gradual process of grooming, it can be difficult to realize when an individual is using their position as an opportunity partake in dangerous behaviors aimed at exploiting or abusing children.

At the macro level, policy change and the creation of the U.S. Center for SafeSport were enacted following major news stories related to the concerns of sexual abuse within athletics at all levels. There was the creation of the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017, which codified SafeSport as a nonprofit organization for the United States. SafeSport has been tasked with resolving abuse and misconduct reports, as well as creating and enforcing policies, procedures and trainings which will further aid in the prevention of abuse (SafeSport, 2017). Even with the development and implementation of SafeSport and its offered resources such as trainings and educational opportunities, there is still more work to be done. Though SafeSport is a beneficial asset at the macro level, it may not be reaching the micro levels as significantly. Organization directors may not be thoroughly involved, coaches may not be intentional when going through mandated trainings and parents and players may not even be aware of what to look out for, avoid or report. In conclusion, these educational resources and opportunities at the legislative level may be serving little to no true benefit for those it is meant to be protecting.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the issue of sexual abuse in youth sports by evaluating the perceived effectiveness of modern educational and awareness trainings required of youth coaches and how aware and knowledgeable other members of the organization are, specifically parents, on the matter. By identifying differences in the attested culture of youth athlete safety as recognized by organization directors and the parents of youth athletes, it is expected that there will be an increased awareness of this understudied problem, and further drive effective change that will decrease the risk of sexual abuse against youth athletes. Through this research children are the ones that can benefit from the findings most directly, however, one could recognize that all members in athletic communities will benefit from improving the safety of sport culture.

A broad overview of the research method to be employed in this proposed study consists of a qualitative research design. Data will be collected through interviews conducted by the researcher with the use of an interview guide. The researcher will interview youth club directors as well as parents of the athletes, to compare the results and further determine if the practices currently in place are benefitting the participants. Once data has been collected it will be depicted through content analysis in hopes of discovering overlapping trends, recurring themes, highlighting contributing factors and revealing gaps that further allow or even promote the problem of sexual abuse in youth sports. By utilizing this form

of data collection and interpretation the researcher hopes to discover what else needs to be done within youth sport organizations, sport culture or even policy change to effectively intervene and further prevent the evident problem.

### Significance of Project for Social Work Practice

As a social worker, one must study, agree to and practice within the NASW Code of Ethics. Within the Code, one learns that it is ethical to fight for the safety, rights, and equality for all. In doing so, social workers must be increasingly aware of, and involved in, the protecting and serving of clients and populations who are unable to do so for themselves. By exposing young athletes, their parents and society to the unfortunate possibilities that youth may be exposed to, it is helping the profession of social work protect vulnerable populations in a community that has not been significantly considered prior.

While viewing this study within the scope of the generalist intervention model, this research project most closely utilizes the assessment and evaluation processes. The researcher will assess the current perspective of youth club directors regarding the quality of trainings they require of their coaches and how they believe their coaches are implementing safe practices to foster a healthy environment for their athletes. In addition to the youth sport organization directors, the parents of the athletes they train will also be assessed. The researcher will evaluate the parents' perspective of the effectiveness of the trainings mandated for coaches, their own awareness of and education on the

topic, and if they believe their children are in a safe space free from risk of sexual abuse. Following these assessments, the researcher will evaluate the responses provided to determine what more may be necessary to assist in the creation of a safe sport environment and how to implement tools that are reaching the coaches, players and parents. In short, the researcher will draw conclusions on the key contributing factors to the problem, devise how to reach all affiliates within organizations and what future research needs to be done to further understand and mitigate sexual abuse in youth sports.

This study will aim to address the specific research question: Do youth sport organization directors and the parents of the athletes they serve share the same perspectives, understanding and awareness of athlete safety regarding sexual abuse in youth sports? What else can be done to promote a safe, welcoming, and encouraging environment for all members?

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

Current research on sexual abuse in youth sports is scarce, and amongst the work that has been done, previous researchers mention that more research in this area needs to be prioritized as it is a significant, yet understudied problem. Briere and Elliot (2003) have identified that amongst the general public, childhood sexual abuse is unfortunately common. Tschan (2014) provides insight on professional sexual misconduct (PSM) and describes how institutions, such as youth sport organizations, can provide an ideal environment for abuse to occur. Nielsen (2001) conducted a study which found coaches had a widespread ignorance of legal regulations governing sexual abuse with athletes and revealed the relaxed attitudes of coaches being intimate with athletes. Addressing these concerns and determining what needs to be done to mitigate the problem is crucial, and further proves why more research needs to be conducted on this topic.

#### Risk Factors and Potential Causes

There are different ways to examine the possible causes of sexual abuse in youth sports; though, it is important to recognize that there is no singular cause, nor is it possible to understand every reason one might have considered



when participating in SAYS or any other abuse against children. Though the exact purpose of abuse against any individual may have no certain identifiable basis, it is valuable to explore considerable potential causes to allow for greater understanding of the phenomena. Some of the contributing factors to the problem that will be discussed include the coach- athlete relationship and the influence of power dynamics within sport culture. Understanding how these components may contribute to sexual abuse in youth sports provides insight for organization directors, parents of athletes and the athletes themselves. The increased comprehension of risks may aid in both gaining awareness and the deterring of this problem.

The coach- athlete relationship is a crucial component of sport. Various studies have explored contributing factors of a beneficial coach-athlete relationship, the impact a positive coach- athlete relationship can have on the athlete and why the relationship is significant. Best practices by coaches in relationship building with athletes come from building an autonomy-supportive environment, keeping knowledge and expertise at a high standard, and embracing the player as a person rather than just the athlete (Carson et al., 2022). Additionally, it is found that honoring an athlete's voice is an important aspect to creating a psychologically safe environment which further develops and maintains positive coach-athlete relationships in which every athlete feels heard, valued, and connected (Jowett et al., 2023). Coaches that utilize these types of practices advance the amount of trust an athlete has in them, fundamentally

forming a natural alliance between the coach and player. Understanding how the execution of these relationship building techniques can establish a strong bond between the athlete and the coach is pivotal in comprehending why boundaries are often blurred, and youth athletes are at high-risk of being sexually abused by their coaches.

Similar to most organized groups, youth sport clubs consist of various positions members may fulfill; in each role members are subscribed to the social and institutional expectations of their placement. Throughout the course of sport participation, children realize that conforming to informal rules and expectations related to behavior equates to an increase in the amount of fun they experience (Claringbould et al., 2015). From the lens of the coach, it has been found that coaches prioritize children that they perceive as highly committed, well- behaved and respectful (Kirk & Macphail, 2003). This recognition and idealization of athlete conformity accepted by both players and coaches, creates a power dynamic that promotes an intense obedience by the athlete to their coach. These role expectations allow those in the coaching position to develop a sufficient source of power. As a result of one's title and the power that accompanies it, it is assumed a coach would willingly use that power responsibly; however, it is clear how the role expectations can contribute to a destructive use of power and become a detrimental factor when examining sexual abuse in youth sports (Kottter, 1985).

## Gaps in Literature

Of the research completed within the related areas of sexual abuse in youth sports, there appears to be minimal focus on the exposure, awareness and education on the topic provided to athletes and their parents. This is also evident through policy implementation at the macro level which mandates many professionals working with youth athletes to complete trainings and educational opportunities related to abuse and misconduct with the anticipation of fostering safe sport environments (Safesport, 2017). Though the focus on coaches and related professionals in sport settings is understandable and significant to increasing athlete safety, it is imperative to explore the education and awareness garnered by, and provided to, the youth athletes and their parents regarding safe and healthy coach- athlete relationships. By highlighting what knowledge is possessed by youth athletes and their parents in this realm, one can deduce if providing education to these members of youth sport organizations could further help deter the problem of sexual abuse in youth sports thus, creating a safer and more positive experience for youth athletes.

## Theories Guiding Conceptualization

To understand more about the impact sport involvement can have on a child it is necessary to consider youth involvement in sports in the lens of the ecological perspective theory. According to the American Psychology Association, the ecological perspective works to view the subject and the

transactions it has with the various systems it interacts with. Further, interventions utilized at any transaction should contribute to the progress of the entire system (2015). This is evident in this study by viewing children as the main subject, and their involvement in youth sports as just one system they are interacting with. Within this system of youth athletics there are more transactions taking place with each relationship that is developed, some of which being a child's teammates, coaches, trainers, etc. If one assumes that the interactions a child is having with each of these relationships is positive, one could deduce that the child's involvement is a beneficial transaction according to the ecological perspective theory. This may be the case in such positive experiences; however, for children that fall victim to sexual abuse in youth sports, unfortunately, it is not.

Taking the issue at hand, sexual abuse in youth sports, and considering the ecological perspective theory; it is important to recognize not only the presenting problem but how this interacts with the main subject and their other interactions. Take a child as the main subject focus, and one of their interactions is involvement in youth sports. Athletics is now a system that this child interacts with, and it is an interaction that has transactions both ways. This means that both the child influences the system (athletics), and the system has an influence on the child, any of which could be positive, negative or neutral. To ensure relevance of the ecological perspective theory in this study it is important to stress the negative impact a harmful interaction could have on a subject.

Viewing the issue of sexual abuse in youth sports through the lens of the ecological perspective theory, it is clear how just one harmful experience with an individual within a system can have massive effects on the transaction between the subject and the larger system. Further, this obstructive interaction between the subject and this one system can go on to have negative impacts amongst the subject's other systems. A child that has been sexually abused by a coach in their athletic community will have a poor relationship with their coach and this system of youth sports but, may also cause the child to have negative transactions amongst their other systems. Any trauma from the abuse within this one system the child may suffer from, they may carry it into their various interactions, transactions and interrelationships amongst all other systems they connect with. Though the harmful interaction was between just one member of one system that the subject interacts with, it is clear that it can have lengthy and ongoing impacts amongst multiple systems that the subject associates with. As a result of the negative impact sexual abuse in youth sports could have on an individual, even far beyond the scopes of athletics, it is crucial that effective interventions and preventions are utilized to minimize this issue.

### Summary

Though research related to sexual abuse in youth sports has been conducted, the need for more is evident and previous researchers have called for this as well. Previously explored concerns related to the problem such as

environmental and institutional factors, the extent of the coach- athlete relationship and the power dynamics within sport culture have assisted in highlighting potential risk factors and identifying new strategies that may aid in the mitigating of sexual abuse against youth athletes; however, there are still many areas of opportunity to be considered and further studied. A gap in the literature reveals a lack of focus on the role parents and athletes currently fulfill regarding athlete safety from sexual abuse. Understanding the differences in awareness and education on safe and beneficial coach- athlete relationships between youth organization directors and the parents of the athletes they train will provide valuable insight on potential risk factors and may lead to a safer sport experience for children.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

#### Introduction

The aim of this research is to identify possible differences in the attested culture of youth athlete safety as recognized by organization directors and the parents of youth athletes, determine if these differences are contributing risk factors of sexual abuse in youth sports, and propose new strategies that may assist in creating a safe sport experience. Through this study it is expected that there will be an increased awareness of this understudied problem, and further drive effective change that will decrease the risk of sexual abuse against youth athletes. This chapter will consist of the following sections: the study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis. Lastly, there will be a summary at the end that will reflect the entirety of the information provided in this chapter.

#### Study Design

This study focused on the varying perceptions of youth athlete safety regarding sexual abuse by a coach in a sport setting between the directors of youth sport organizations and the parents of the youth athletes they work with. This allowed for an understanding of the awareness and education on the topic between each group and may reveal the need to promote educational resources

for athletes and their parents to further create safe sport experiences. Comparing how the directors of the organizations expect the mandated trainings for their coaches to be reflected in promoting a safe and healthy environment, and how the parents of the athletes view the safety and well-being of their children are being practiced by the coaches aided in determining the subjective effectiveness in coaches keeping children free from abuse. Research was gathered through one-on-one, in person or online via zoom, interviews. There were two categories of interviewees: youth sport organization directors and, parents of the youth athletes participating within the same organizations. Participants were invited to share their perceptions of mandated trainings required of youth coaches, the effectiveness of the trainings, the implementation of safe practices by coaches, the overall culture of their organization and the youth sports community, their own knowledge and awareness of sexual abuse in youth sports and what else they feel could be done to further promote a safe sport experience for children. A qualitative research approach was selected due to the nature of the topic and in pursuit of gathering a well-rounded understanding of all related factors that may impact or contribute to sexual abuse in youth sports. This type of analysis was additionally beneficial as it allowed participants to utilize their own experiences, perceptions and formal or informal education to speak authentically about the reality of youth sports culture and to aid in the understanding and development of effective prevention and intervention aids to assist in the creation of a safe sport environment.



This study design consisted of exploratory, descriptive and predictive research purposes. By exploring the various perceptions, describing the current understanding and identifying areas of variability between the participant groups, the researcher was able to deduce current risk factors contributing to the problem and predict potential strategies that upon utilization may aid in fulfilling the goal of establishing a safe sport experience for youth athletes. Strengths of this design included significant opportunities for flexibility, in-depth understanding and the unveiling of any recurring themes and patterns that were discovered through the detailed responses provided by the selected participants. In addition to gaining full and in-depth comprehension of the participants' responses, this design was beneficial in that the one-on-one interview approach provided a confidential setting which may have encouraged participants to speak extensively and with authenticity. Limitations to this study's design may consist of a small sample size, potentially triggering question topics that could result in participant discomfort; and a lack of follow-up which may aid in determining if the identifying and addressing of differences in understanding between the participant groups was successful in improving youth athlete safety.

### Sampling

The participants for this study were gathered using purposive sampling strategies. Due to the nature of this form of sampling, the participants were selected based upon their ascribed roles within their organization. There were

two groups of participants: (1) youth sport organization directors and, (2) parents of youth athletes within the same organization. The sampling frame for group one consisted of four youth sport organization directors; group two consisted of a combined total of 12 parent representatives. Three parent participants were selected from each organization and the selected parents had to represent different athletes within the club. The criteria each participant had to meet included that they were over the age of eighteen and were currently members of the groups to which they were representing (director or parent).

### Data Collection and Instruments

The study was conducted utilizing qualitative research and the data collection technique that was used was one-on-one, in person or online via zoom interviews. The researcher obtained permission from each applicant to have a voice-to-type tool present during the interview, as well as a recording device to ensure the interview could be reviewed, referenced, and used to verify information that was disclosed. If the interview took place via zoom, Zoom's built in talk-to-text system was utilized during the meeting. An instrument that was used was an interview guide that the researcher created and tailored to the research topic and participants. There were two interview guides created, one for each group of participants: youth sport organization directors and, the parents of the athletes that play there, respectively. The guides consisted of a set of open-ended questions related to the topic of sexual abuse in youth sports and allowed

participants to share any suggestions or ideas that they believed would further promote a safe sport environment for all youth athletes.

There was not a maximum time cutoff for the interviews to encourage the participants to speak on the matter to the best and clearest of their abilities. The data collected was the verbal responses to the interview guide questions provided by each participant. To guarantee reliability, this study utilized face validity to determine if the collected data findings were true, accurate and representative of the responses provided by the participants. To further certify precision within this study, it is relevant to note that the sample frames and the questions developed for the interview guides were determined and formed through the information found and unfounded within existing research and was reviewed under the guidance and supervision of California State University, San Bernardino Research Supervisor, Erik Schott.

### Procedures

The researcher requested eligible participants to partake in this research study by reaching out to various youth sport organizations, inviting them to aid in the understanding and improvement of youth sport safety and improve the well-being of their participants. The requisition for participants included a brief overview of what this study aimed to address, the role the participant would assume if selected, and participant eligibility criteria. Once the sample frames were established, eligible participants were identified, and individuals were

selected for participation then the protection of the participants and their information were enacted on. To assure identity protection the researcher assigned each participant with corresponding numbers, once this had been completed the participants numbers were used in place of their names for the remainder of the study. The researcher once again sought approval from the participant to utilize recording devices during the interview prior to the interview beginning, assured the participant that they have the right to deny such resources or to revoke their participation entirely. Interviews were conducted in a private, one-on- one setting, which further served as a protective factor for client confidentiality.

There were no plans to obtain personal identifying information throughout this study thus, the identities of the participants remained confidential. Each participant was reminded of their rights which included their participation in this study was voluntary, and they could have chosen to skip any questions or end the interview at any time without consequence. This led into the providing and reviewing of an informed consent document with each participant, which was signed prior to research participation. For interviews that were conducted virtually, the informed consent form was read to participants and consent was obtained orally. Upon receiving participant informed consent, the researcher thoroughly described the goals of the study and further reassured the participant that their responses would be kept confidential and free from judgment,

negativity, or shame. Following the completed interviews, there is no additional participant contact required.

### Protection of Human Subjects

The researcher was mindful of the risks in leaking participant personal identifying information which may have included but not limited to: participants email addresses, phone numbers, names, and workplace. Participants were assigned numbers once interest and eligibility were determined, and personal identifying information was secured on the researcher's personal laptop which is password protected. Once participant contact and interviews were completed, all participants' personal identifying information was deleted. Data that was obtained through this study was also secured on the researcher's personal laptop that is password protected. All data and information related to the study will be deleted from the researcher's personal laptop three years after the research has been completed and only the finalized research project will be available to the public.

### Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the gathered data by utilizing content analysis. Studying this research through content analysis allowed the researcher to discover discrepancies, overlapping trends, recurring themes, and highlight key contributing factors to the presented issue between each group of participants. Being able to categorize and clearly identify both risks and strengths related to

the prevention and intervention of sexual abuse in youth sports was the ideal outcome that resulted from depicting this study's data in this fashion.

### Summary

This study explored the differences in perspectives, opinions, and education related to sexual abuse in youth sports as compared between directors of youth sport organizations and the parents of the athletes that play there. By comparing the data derived from each group, the researcher identified areas of opportunity to improve upon and further promoted awareness of sexual abuse in youth sports. The research depicted utilized qualitative research methods which was supported with the use of interview guides. There were two groups of participants which required a total of 16 participants involved in the study. Group one was comprised of four youth sport organization directors and group two consisted of 12 parents; all participants were selected utilizing a purposive sampling strategy. Once data was collected the researcher analyzed the findings through content analysis. Through the results of the study, the aim is to assist in the creation of safe sport experiences for children.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of this study which examined both parents of youth athletes and youth sport organization directors' perceptions of awareness, understanding and education related to sexual abuse in youth sports; and compared those perceptions to uncover gaps, discover areas of opportunity and highlight areas of concern that may be contributing to, or further perpetuating sexual abuse in youth sports. This chapter will detail the participant groups utilized in this study, explain the data collection process and results, and expand on the responses provided by the participants. In doing so, this section highlights common themes that emerged through the interview responses, and reveal gaps in knowledge, awareness, and education on this topic between the participant groups.

This study was conducted utilizing qualitative research methods including one-on-one interviews with the assistance of interview guides which were tailored to each participant group. There were two participant groups for this study: parents of youth athletes and directors of the same organizations that the youth athletes play at. There was a total of 16 participants, consisting of 12 parents and

4 directors. Purposive sampling strategies were utilized to recruit participants within the youth athletics community.

Recruitment consisted of emailing local youth sport organizations and the directors of the organizations the IRB approved recruitment flyer for this study. In addition to this, the researcher made phone calls and went in person to local organizations to gauge participant interest and attempt to recruit willing and eligible participants. Once the director of a youth sport organization expressed interest in participating, the researcher gained the director's approval to attempt to recruit parent participants within their same organization. Once participants were recruited, each participant agreed and consented to participate utilizing the IRB approved consent form for this study. Participation was voluntarily, anonymous, and participants were aware they could skip questions or stop participation in the study at any time without consequence.

The researcher created and utilized two interview guides, one for the parents and one for the directors. Both guides were similar to one another, to assist with the data analysis process of comparing responses by question. The interview guides consisted of nine open ended questions, with the ninth question being an opportunity for the participant to reflect on the previous discussions and provide suggestions, if they had any. Interviews for this study were conducted in January and February 2024. Interviews with parent participants were from 20 to 40 minutes long, whereas interviews with directors ranged from 40 to 90 minutes long. All Interviews were recorded for content and then transcribed. The



transcriptions were analyzed for reoccurring words and themes which were grouped together, when possible, with unique answers and outlier responses also included.

### Presentation of the Findings

The following will be a discussion of the result of each question. Results will be presented by sample frame, first the parents and then the directors. Within the sample frame, the question number that is being discussed will be listed in numerical order according to how they are listed on the interview guides and how they were presented in the interviews. Following each question number will be the summation of the answers received for that question. Trends and themes will be presented which may represent homogeneity, or a lack thereof. Quotes supporting or explaining the summation of responses or specific themes will be included for additional illumination, as will outlier responses. The interview guide utilized with the directors can be found at Appendix A and the interview guide for the parents can be found at Appendix B.

#### Parents

Question 1: Majority of parents perceived themselves as having low rates of knowledge related to sexual abuse in youth sports, and most were unsure of the level of knowledge or expertise the director, coaches, trainers and other staff within their organizations had on this topic. One participant said, “For myself I’d say a little bit. For the director and coaches and stuff, I’m going to assume

they've been trained, but I don't really know" (C4P2). Another participant explained, "I wouldn't say I have a whole lot. I would hope that they're knowledgeable. But, honestly, it's something that I kind of just assumed that they would be knowledgeable in, so I don't have any idea whether or not they actually are..." (C3P3).

In general, most parents were not confident in their own or the director, coaches, trainers, and other staff knowledge related to sexual abuse in youth sports. Many parents referred to their perception of the director's, coaches and staff's knowledge on this topic as an assumption or hope, rather than fact.

Question 2: Half of the parents reported believing that the coaches and other staff members at their organizations have a strong awareness of what is considered sexual abuse with youth athletes, and most parents believed that the coaches and other staff knew how to report it. One participant said, "Yes, I do believe that the coaches and other staff members have a strong awareness of what is considered sexual abuse with youth athletes and how to report it" (C1P1). Another participant described, "I don't, I honestly don't know how much awareness the coaches have about what is considered sexual abuse with youth athletes or if they know how to report it" (C1P3).

In general, most parents believed or were hopeful that the coaches and other staff members at their organizations have a strong awareness of what is considered sexual abuse with youth athletes and how to report it. Like question

number one, most parents described their belief in the coaches and staff awareness as being hopeful or an assumption, rather than fact.

Question 3: All parents described the culture of their respective organizations positively, and all parents reported believing that the youth members of their organizations feel safe and encouraged when they come to practice. Some common descriptions of the organization's cultures are good/ welcoming, competitive/ good sportsmanship, diverse/ inclusive, educational/ instructional, nurturing/ supportive and open/ available. One participant said, "At certain levels it's, I believe, extremely competitive and on other levels it's more instructional. I believe that the majority of the athletes feel safe and encouraged coming here" (C3P1). Another participant described, "I'd say it's nurturing and family oriented. I do believe the children feel safe and encouraged coming here, yes" (C2P2).

All parents described the culture of their organizations positively and reported believing that the youth members feel safe and encouraged when they come to practice. Some of the reasons why parents reported believing the youth members feel safe and encouraged coming to practice included the children appearing happy at practice and being excited to go to practice, never hearing or seeing youth members feeling unsafe or uncomfortable, and the organization's creating an environment that promotes communication and comfortability.

Question 4: Most parents reported that their organizations did not provide the parents or the players with any form of education related to safe and healthy

relationships between players and coaches, though nearly all parents believe that doing so would benefit the athletes. One participant said, "... there probably was some paperwork that I pencil whipped through in the application process but did I like read it, study it, analyze it, think about it? No. Yes, I do think providing this stuff could benefit the athletes but I think that it needs to be more user friendly than just signing a form of acknowledgement. I think some kind of video training would be super helpful for everybody, you know and include the athletes too. Yeah, I think that would be very helpful" (C4P1). Another participant stated, "No, they don't provide anything about relationships to the parents or the players, but absolutely I think providing information on this could be beneficial to the athletes. Just especially because of the age of these athletes. They're young... with young athletes, they may not be so aware of the boundaries that should exist. So I think it would be very beneficial to have something like that" (C3P2).

There was one outlier from the parents that did not believe providing education related to safe and healthy relationships between players and coaches to the athletes or parents would be beneficial to the athletes. This participant explained, "I don't know that it would necessarily be beneficial to do so; I think it's a slippery slope or a double- edged sword because I think if you promote it, it can become a bigger issue. Versus, not saying it at all and then an issue occurs, it can also be a big issue. So I think there's probably a fine line in there somewhere" (C1P3).

In general, most parents reported their organizations did not provide them or the athletes any form of education related to safe and healthy relationships between players and coaches but believe that doing so would benefit the athletes. One parent discussed why they did not believe that providing this would be beneficial. Some parents shared that safety related to sexual abuse and harassment is something they talk about with their children and family in their homes, and explained that children whose family's do not discuss such topics would benefit from education being provided more so than their own. Overall, most parents believe providing education on this would increase awareness and safety for the athletes.

Question 5: Most parents reported their organization did not have rules or guidelines in place to deter unsafe communication or relationships between coaches and players; or stated if there were any, they were unaware of them. Additionally, many parents disclosed not knowing if there was any implementation, verification, or enforcement of rules related to this, and suggested that parental oversight and reporting to the director are the primary gatekeepers of safe communications and relationships between players and coaches. One participant said, "No, nothing to deter unsafe communication or relationships between coaches and players. And if there are, they're not, they are not made explicit to the adults. There isn't anything that says do this, don't do this. More like kind of use your own judgement thing" (C1P3). Another participant described, "I would think there are [rules], but I'm not positive if there's something

like, written. I think they try to avoid direct communication to the players, but I'm not sure if that's a rule or if that's just what my coach tries to do. For enforcement or whatever of this I'm not too sure, I guess if a problem ever occurred, I don't think there's any way of a coach or the director verifying it beyond what may be said" (C3P3).

In general, most parents reported their organization as not having any rules in place to deter unsafe communication or relationships between players and coaches; or at least not being made aware of any. Some parents described the use of group chats and 3<sup>rd</sup> party communication applications to prevent sharing of personal phone numbers and to avoid direct communication between players and coaches; but most were unaware if this was a rule of their organization, or just a safe practice being utilized by their coach.

Question 6: Nearly all parents reported believing members would feel comfortable reporting to the director or other staff if sexual abuse was taking place. Some of the reasons the parents believed members would feel comfortable reporting to the director or other staff was because of familiarity and relationships with coaches, staff and the director(s), director and staff openness and welcoming of communication / addressing concerns and some have experience in reporting coaches previously (not for sexual abuse or harassment reasons). Some parents discussed possible limitations to the youth members reporting and suggested that the youth members may be less likely to report than compared to adult members. Additionally, some parents specified that male

youth may be less likely to report than female youth, and some parents believed that youth members may report to friends, family, or other trusted adults rather than the director or other staff at their organization. One participant said, “I would hope members of this organization would feel comfortable reporting to the director or other staff if sexual abuse was taking place. Because I mean, they’ve been with, you know, coach for I think this is like their third maybe fourth season with her. So I would like to think they would be able to feel comfortable with her, but again, you know, it’s boys. I think with girls, they probably feel comfortable telling someone. I have a feeling they’d [male youth athletes] probably talk to their family or, you know, siblings or friends first” (C1P2). Another participant stated, “As a parent, I think so [would report]. Yeah. With kids, you never know. So, I don’t know if the kids would report it. So, I’m going to say more than likely the child will report it, but you never know” (C4P2).

Lastly, some parents shared that they do not believe reporting to the director or other staff within the same organization that perpetrated the abuse is the best strategy and explain that reports should go to the police directly. One participant mentioned “I don’t know, but my personal opinion is that the organization is generally never, the first place that you should go. I think you should probably call the police. I understand why your first impulse would be to go to somebody else within the organization, but time after time, organizations protect their, the people in their hierarchy. So, I think unfortunately, you just have to bypass it, you know, go to the police” (C2P1).

In general, a majority of the parents believe members of their organization would feel comfortable reporting to the director or other staff if sexual abuse was taking place. Some parents discussed possible limitations to members reporting, primarily explaining why youth members may be less likely to report. Factors such as lacking education and awareness, stigma, shame, and fear were all mentioned. Some parents discussed preferences in reporting directly to law enforcement. Finally, some parents explained they believe that youth members would report to family, friends or other trusted adults but were unsure of the youth reporting to the director or other staff.

Question 7: Nearly all parents reported believing that more should be done to promote awareness, education and safety related to sexual abuse in youth sports. There were variances in responses about who should be responsible for the promotion of awareness, education, and safety, but most parents ascribe the organizations / clubs as the responsible party. Some parents believed that higher entities of youth volleyball organizations such as USA Volleyball (USAV) and the Southern California Volleyball Association (SCVA) should be responsible, and some described that there should be some form of collaborative effort or mandate from the higher entities and the actual implementation is through the clubs and organizations. One participant said, "Yes, I do [believe more should be done]. I think that every level... that training and education would be great. I think it should be something that the coaches have to do, the parents and the students [youth athletes]. Some kind of



interactive training would be great” (C4P1). A participant also stated, “Yeah, [more should be done to promote] absolutely. I think it could come from anyone, USAV, SCVA or just the club or even a combination of all those different agencies... I think it coming from someone higher up, but then maybe putting that responsibility, mandating that of the actual clubs themselves, I think that would be a good way to go about it. That way there’s an expectation of all the coaches, all of the directors, all of the parents are getting the same education and are being held to the same standards” (C4P3).

In general, almost all of the parents believe more should be done to promote awareness, education and safety related to sexual abuse in youth sports, but there were variances in responses about who should be responsible for doing so. In addition to the clubs and organizations, USAV, and SCVA, some parents shared that they believe schools should be responsible for promoting awareness, education, and safety on this topic. Additionally, some parents described that parent’s should be the responsible party for promoting awareness, education, and safety on this topic.

There was one outlier in responses, and they did not believe that more should be done to promote awareness, education and safety related to sexual abuse in youth sports. They shared, “I don’t know if more should be done... I’m old school on that. I kind of feel like if you put too much out there, you’re putting the idea in the children’s minds” (C1P1). Whether the promotion of this topic is done through the schools, clubs, organizations, SCVA, USAV or some other

avenue; a majority of the parents described wanting additional awareness, education and safety related to sexual abuse in youth sports and believe that youth athlete safety would benefit from doing so.

Question 8: No parents were able to identify any training tools used to educate the coaches and staff about sexual abuse within their organizations, and most were unaware of mandated trainings for coaches. One participant said, “No, I’m not aware of any trainings that they do, and I have no idea if they are mandated to do anything” (C3P2).

In general, parents were unable to identify training tools used to educate the coaches and staff at their organizations about sexual abuse, and most were unaware of any mandated trainings for coaches. Some parents did mention having assumptions that there were mandated trainings, as well as some noted background checks as a mandatory item for coaches and staff. Overall, parents do not know of trainings for coaches or what is mandated.

### Directors

Question 1: All directors rated themselves as having increased/considerable levels of knowledge or expertise related to sexual abuse in youth sports but rated their coaches and staff as having lower amounts of knowledge than themselves. One participant described, “I would say [I am] above average... regarding my coaches and other staff, I would say they know enough so they can’t plead like, ‘I didn’t know’” (C2D). Another participant stated, “I would consider myself, yes, pretty, pretty well versed in sexual abuse training for youth.

Regarding the other coaches and staff within this organization I'm in right now; well, it's very basic and to be quite frank, it doesn't really cover all the bases" (C4D).

In general, the director's viewed themselves as being sufficiently knowledgeable related to sexual abuse in youth sports but describe their coaches and other staff as having less knowledge than themselves. Additionally, some director's explained that their perceptions of the coaches and staff knowledge on this topic was due to the trainings that are used to educate the coaches and staff; some describing the trainings as easy to work through without having to pay attention and for legal/ liability purposes rather than educational.

Question 2: All directors were confident that their coaches and other staff members at their organizations have a strong awareness of what is considered sexual abuse with youth athletes. There was a variance in responses related to whether the director's believed that the coaches and other staff members at their organization's know how to report sexual abuse with youth athletes. One participant said, "Yeah, they do. I'm confident that the commonsense part of this part of the business is now understood. They know what it is, what can be considered as it, and how to report it" (C2D). Another participant described, "I would say yes, my coaches and other staff members have a strong awareness of what is considered sexual abuse with youth athletes. Reporting, I would say it's a question mark. I would say 75% of my coaching staff knows how to do it" (C1D).

Some directors reported providing their coaches and staff with additional resources outside of the mandated trainings for coaches and contributed the additional resources as beneficial for increasing their awareness of the topic. There were two directors that provided additional resources, and both believe their coaches and staff may not know how to report abuse, officially. One participant that did this stated, “Yes, [coaches and staff have strong awareness] and the reason why I believe that it because I took initiative this year to require coaches to take an extra step of training...Regarding my coaches and other staff’s ability to report this stuff, they’re good at reporting to a higher authority. They probably wouldn’t know beyond that” (C4D).

In general, the directors believed that their coaches and other staff members at their respective organizations have a strong awareness of what is or could be considered sexual abuse with youth athletes. Two of the four directors reported utilizing additional training/ educational resources in addition to what is mandated for the coaches related to this topic. With regard for the coaches and other staff member’s knowledge of and abilities to report abuse there was a variance in responses. One director was confident that their coaches and staff could report properly, one said about 75% could report properly, and two directors suggested that their coaches and staff knew to report to a higher power but did not specify that they could report directly to the proper channels which is in line with legal mandates.

Question 3: All directors described the culture of their respective organizations positively, and in various manners, all directors reported that the youth members of their organizations feel safe and encouraged coming to practice. Some common descriptions of the organization's cultures as described by the directors are diverse, growing/ evolving, and having an open door or promoting communication. One participant stated, "Our core beliefs are communication... hard work... and an attitude of positivity. Exemplifying what we want in our athletes. So our culture, and in those beliefs that defines our culture, we're very diverse... completely different... definitely open. I do believe the youth members feel safe and encouraged coming to practice. Yes, I definitely, they definitely do" (C4D). Another participant described, "I would say it's positive. There's always room for improvement. Here we have to continue to evolve. I feel like [we have] a very open door thing, you know, we're very diverse in many ways. I would hope the youth members feel safe and encouraged coming to practice, right? That's one of our foundational goals" (C2D).

Some of the directors described the use of coaches' clinics, meetings or check-ins as beneficial in creating and fostering a positive culture, as well as highlighted the significance of relationship building as an additional contributor to a positive culture and promotes youth members feeling safe and encouraged within their organizations. One participant shared, "It's a good one. We are always trying to set the trend or find new tactics... make it more fun for the athletes coming in. I hope the kids feel safe and encouraged coming here, I hope

so... just building that relationship, that athletic relationship, you know, we find that it's a great relationship to have" (C3D). Another participant described, "Our culture is constantly growing. I think the culture amongst our coaches is the best it's ever been through the coaches' clinics that we've been offering... The culture in the entire building with the players and parents involved, we are known for having a very good vibe with our club. We have a very welcoming feel... people don't feel judged. I do believe the youth members of my organization feel safe and encouraged when they come to practice... athletes always feel like they have some outlet for someone to speak with. Our coaches do an extremely great job of building relationships with the players... I think it's pretty cool that we've been able to help a lot of athletes get through some challenging things that aren't volleyball related" (C1D).

All directors described the culture of their organization's positively and either believed /hoped that the youth members of their organizations felt safe and encouraged coming to practice. Two of the directors included their use of coaches' clinics, coaches' meetings or coach check-in's as contributing to the positive culture dynamics. Additionally, two of the directors described the importance of relationship building for enhancing culture and for promoting the youth members to feel safe and encouraged when coming to practice. One director mentioned COVID 19 and the impact it has had within their organization related to the overall culture and the relationships with players. They said, "... especially after COVID behaviors have changed, sensitivities have changed. Not

in a bad way. I think we've always should have been aware of how people perceive things. It's not just one way of what. You know, there's so many different ways of what's right is right and what's wrong is wrong" (C2D). Overall, the director's reported believing that their organization's culture was positive and that the youth members feel safe and encouraged coming to practice.

Question 4: All directors reported that their organization's do not provide players or parents with any form of education related to safe and healthy relationships between players and coaches; but nearly all the director's believed doing so would be beneficial for the athletes. Some coaches shared that outside of their immediate organization there are resources or education provided to the athletes and/ or their families related to this topic. One participant stated, "No but...We provide a basic guideline, like no bullying... generic stuff; but that's it. 18 and above athletes now have to take SafeSport too. But providing information on this topic would absolutely be beneficial. Some of these kids, and coaches too, it's all about levels of tolerance. It's important that there is a baseline. So having that baseline of expectation at the beginning of the year, including the sexual harassment part and the abuse part is critical" (C2D).

Another participant described, "No, we don't. We don't. We are a part of an organization that does offer those resources. So USA Volleyball and SCVA, they link our organization, our parents and our families to SafeSport so they have direct access to that... like there's a fully array of training that parents and the players have direct access too and that's through USAV. Yeah, I think providing

information on this could be beneficial. I think having the information available for them will give them a way to feel more empowered, right? I think they'll feel more confident for sure in getting that education" (C4D).

There was one outlier amongst the directors that also did not provide any form of education to the parents or players related to safe and healthy relationships between players and coaches, but unlike their colleague's they did not believe that providing this would be beneficial to the athletes. This participant said, "Actually, there's not [anything provided]. I guess... I kind of have a theory a little bit, which I don't know if it's right or not... if we don't bring it up to the parents and we haven't planted that seed in the parents that our coaches could potentially be, I don't want to say predators but predators and so, yeah, we've never had the conversation with the parents, we've more just put it, or never even the players we put it on the coaches to be the ones kind of controlling that situation and to not put themselves in that situation. I would say providing information on this topic would not benefit the athletes, but there's always this gray area in everything" (C1D).

All directors reported that their organizations do not provide players or parents with any form of education related to safe and healthy relationships between players and coaches. One of the directors shared that resources and education are available to the parents and players and another disclosed that SafeSport is mandated for 18-year-old and above athletes as well. Almost all the directors reported believing that providing education on this topic to players or



parents would be beneficial for the athletes, with the exception of one director who shared they did not think it would be beneficial. Of the directors who believed it would be beneficial, they reported believing the athletes would be empowered, less afraid and more confident and willing to report. They also shared that additional eyes and protection for the youth would be a possible outcome of providing education. Lastly, of the directors who believed it would benefit the athletes, they said providing education would encourage transparent conversations and minimize the 'gray area' of appropriateness.

Question 5: All directors reported their organizations as having rules or guidelines in place to deter unsafe communication or relationships between coaches and players. There was some variance amongst the director's responses related to how rules are being implemented, verified and enforced; and only two of the four director's reported informing parents of the rules related to coach – player communications and the rules coaches are expected to follow with youth athletes. One participant said, "So, on our girl's side of the club, I do my best to have one male and one female, on every single team and the male coaches are made aware that they should never have a conversation one on one with an athlete, ever, and that the female coach always needs to be present. We also ensure that no coach ever enters a hotel room of any of the players, regardless if they have the parents' permission or not. Not communicating after 9 o'clock [pm]... being in the GroupMe conversations. Just kind of being mindful of your communication, your surroundings, the player, where we're at, and we go

through this whole walkthrough of everything in between. I think the implementation process is first with the coaches' education at the beginning of the season of actually having it in writing. I make binders for the coaches that they have to keep with them year round and these rules and regulations are in that binder. The GroupMe kind of the second phase of it, me [director] being involved in the majority of the GroupMe's that we have. The third implementation of it is I've got four directors, outside of myself, that I've hired... and directors and I meet every Wednesday at noon and we definitely talk about potential issues trying to be proactive at resolving situations" (C1D).

Another participant described, "Yes, you know, social media, not 'friending' there or whatnot, you know. Keeping the communications professional. Coaches and players are permitted to have each other's cell phone numbers, but there are restrictions as far as when they contact you, like after a certain point don't, like just ignore the text and just text them back the next day or whatever. For verification or enforcement it's almost, it's just based on trust" (C2D).

All directors reported their organizations as having rules or guidelines in place to deter unsafe communication or relationships between coaches and players. Common rules described by the directors were the use of third-party communication apps, time frames of when it is appropriate to communicate with a player, not following or interacting with player profiles/ posts on social media, and finally, not being alone with an athlete or being somewhere in private. With regard to the implementation, verification and enforcement of these rules, the

common strategies provided by the directors were admin overseeing communications within the third-party communication apps, informing parents of the rules so they can monitor and communicate if concerns arise, and one director simply stated, “trust” as the primary verification and enforcement of rules.

Question 6: Only one of the four directors felt confident that the youth members of their organization would feel comfortable reporting to them if sexual abuse was taking place. Some directors included the significance of stigma, fear and lacking education or understanding of this topic to youth not wanting to report to them. One participant said, “... it’s always these athletes are afraid or scared or fearful. You know they don’t want anybody to know...” (C3D).

Another participant described, “I hope they feel comfortable reporting to me any issues. If not, maybe it is because of just the topic, right? They might feel embarrassed and whatnot and that’s where it goes back to the education of it. So the more educated they are, the more they’re able to understand and hopefully, you know, be open to talking to me about it” (C2D). Additionally, a participant shared, “You know, that’s tough. I think it’s situational. I can think of numerous athletes that would feel 100% comfortable coming to me as poppa bear. But I also know over the years of doing this, that sometimes the athletes feel that they are the ones that did something wrong and because of that they don’t want to tell anyone. Because who wants to admit that they’ve done something wrong? So, that’s a hard question” (C1D).

Overall, the directors report that they hope the youth members feel comfortable reporting to them if sexual abuse was taking place, but most directors mentioned various possible limitations that would affect the youth athletes reporting. The director who was confident in their youth members feeling comfortable reporting to them said, “The rapport that I tried to build with them on a consistent basis. I feel like the athletes feel confident, to at least bring up bring to my attention if there’s any real dangers right, or any big issues because of that consistency and me being on the court present like all the time, right? So, I would feel, I feel confident that they definitely would, they would definitely come to me if they, if they are having any issues or any real dangers” (C4D). In addition to the limitations of reporting such as stigma, fear and lacking education, most directors identified the significance of building rapport and relationships with the athletes and how doing so contributes to athlete’s feeling comfortable to report to them.

Question 7: All directors reported believing that more should be done to promote awareness, education and safety related to sexual abuse in youth sports. There was a variance, however, amongst the director’s responses regarding from where or whom the additional awareness, education and safety on this topic should come from, how it might be done, and what it may look like or possibly entail. One participant said, “Absolutely I believe more should be done to promote the awareness, education and safety related to this topic; yes. You know it should be like a, like a combined effort from the national body, right? That requires clubs because if you keep it optional, I feel like it’s not gonna happen,

right? So, those two have to go hand in hand, and require kids to be able to be more educated on that. This needs to come from probably higher than SCVA. That's not their specialty, right? So whoever's running SafeSport that's their livelihood. That's their bread and butter. So it has to come from the top like that" (C2D).

Another participant described, "Yes, more should be done. I think it's gotta be a collective group. It's really gotta be that way, from the parents to the directors, coaches, assistant coaches, staff. Even, even other teammates. I think it's better for that athlete if there's a lot of people helping. I think independently, the clubs or whatever, the organizations should be where additional awareness and education on this stuff comes from. Taking steps forward, you know, I would say try to make it as formal as possible" (C3D).

All directors believe that more that more should be done to promote awareness, education and safety related to sexual abuse in youth sports. There were variances in the director's responses around where the additional awareness, education and safety should come from, how it should be enacted, and what it may consist of. Two directors suggested the immediate organizations and clubs should be responsible, one director suggested it should come from USAV due to financial capabilities, and one director shared it should be a combined effort from USAV and SafeSport to create and enforce a required training on this topic for all youth.

Question 8: All directors identified SafeSport as a training tool that they use to educate themselves and their staff about sexual abuse within their organizations. Three of the four directors reported SafeSport as being a mandated training for coaches in club volleyball, and one director reported it is only mandated for high school. In addition to SafeSport, three of the four directors identified Impact as a training tool and reported that it is a mandated training for coaches. Of the three that identified Impact, two of the directors mentioned it being a lifetime certification and since it has no refresher courses, they admitted to having forgotten the contents of the training. All the directors describe the trainings similarly, such as having videos followed with questions, describing various scenarios, and modules with situational or interactive prompts.

One participant said, "Obviously, SafeSport... a lifetime certification course called Impact certification that we also have to do... The problem with that is I did it 18 years ago and I couldn't tell you one thing that was on it. I feel like SafeSport exists because it has to, not because it's educational. Not even as a proactive measure. It's more along the lines of like we're gonna cover our basis by saying that we have some form of education for sexual harassment. SafeSport is not a mandated training for club volleyball. For high school, yes" (C1D). Another participant described, "It would just be our basic meeting literature that we have. And SafeSport. SafeSport is like the biggest one, that covers almost every base. And it has continued to evolve, you know, the like the education itself is, all that has evolved. So in order to get like your membership

for USAV you've gotta take the course and there's refreshers ... There's also a training called Impact but I don't even know; it was one and done. But there should be a refresher course, I think it's necessary. SafeSport has changed to be more fitting to this. It's like if you don't know what they're trying to tell you, then you really shouldn't be in our business. It's very straightforward" (C2D).

The director's described variances in how they perceive the depth and effectiveness of the mandated trainings such as SafeSport and Impact, and some directors reported utilizing additional tools or resources with their coaches and staff in addition to what was mandated. Additionally, there were variances amongst the director's related to what trainings are mandated for coaches at the club level. The directors all described the content and format of the trainings in similar matters, stating they consisted of modules in the way of videos followed by questions and the user is prompted to navigate various situations and scenarios related to the athletic realm.

## Summary

Overall, findings demonstrated a significant gap of awareness, understanding, and education related to sexual abuse in youth sports amongst the participant groups. Additionally, the findings highlight significant areas of opportunity that will increase youth athlete safety and help mitigate the problem of sexual abuse in youth sports. The identified areas of opportunity include: providing education on this topic to players and or parents, having rules in place

to deter unsafe communication and relationships between players and coaches and ensuring parents and players are made aware of these rules, ensuring parents are aware of the mandated trainings and certificates all coaches must complete and have prior to working with youth athletes, and youth sport organizations promoting additional awareness, education and safety related to sexual abuse in youth sports to their staff and members. Even though all participants described the culture of their organizations positively, and believed that the youth members felt safe and encouraged coming to practice; it is crucial that the identified gap is minimized between participant groups and that parents and players are provided with additional awareness, training, and education so that all members of a youth sport organization can contribute to youth athlete safety and help create a safer sport experience.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

#### Introduction

The following chapter will expand on the results provided in the previous chapter and will specifically discuss the identified current risk factors contributing to the problem of sexual abuse in youth sports. Risk factors will be described through the gaps identified between both participant groups as well as each area of opportunity that was uncovered through the gathered responses. Following the discussion of the analyzed data, this chapter will entail limitations and strengths of the study, potential interventions, implications for social work practice, and recommendations for future research. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a summary specific both to this chapter and the overall study that is being discussed.

#### Discussion

There are many potential contributing risk factors of the issue of sexual abuse in youth sports. In this discussion, the risk factors will be described by gaps between participant groups and the areas of opportunity that were uncovered; all of which were drawn from the transcriptions of the participants' interviews. Participants were encouraged to speak from their personal perspectives and experiences when answering the interview questions, and

interviews were conducted in a conversational format which allowed responses to be natural for the participants as well as promoted rapport building as interviews felt comfortable and informal.

### Gaps

The first identified gap between the parents and the directors will be each participant groups perception of their own knowledge or expertise that they themselves obtain related to sexual abuse in youth sports. The parent participant group overwhelmingly reported themselves as having significant low rates, if any, of knowledge on this topic. On the contrary, the director participant group rated themselves as having above average and other increased amounts of knowledge or expertise on this topic. Additionally, most parents reported that any knowledge, or even awareness, they did have on this topic they obtained through media, news coverage, and other informal sources; whereas most directors reported their knowledge came from more formal settings such as work experience in the related field, previous experience dealing with the topic, and mandatory trainings and educational programs.

Another identified gap worth noting is that half of the parent participants were not confident that the coaches and other staff members within their organizations had a strong awareness of what is or could be considered sexual abuse with youth athletes, though the directors all reported believing that their coaches and other staff do have a strong awareness of what is or what could be considered sexual abuse with youth athletes. Ironically, when asked about

coaches and other staff members ability or know-how of how to report sexual abuse, parents had more belief in the coaches and other staff ability to report than the directors did. Overall, parents were less confident that coaches and other staff knew what is, or could be, considered sexual abuse with youth athletes than the directors, yet parents thought coaches and staff could report sexual abuse more so than the directors.

A significant gap that was identified between the parents and the directors was related to rules within the youth sport organizations. Most parents reported their organizations did not have any rules or guidelines in place to deter unsafe communication or relationships between players and coaches; yet all directors reported their organizations did have rules in place to do so. Additionally, half of the directors specifically stated that part of the implementation, verification and enforcement of these rules was notifying parents of the rules and expectations so that parents could serve as an additional oversight that rules are being followed by both players and coaches.

The last gap identified between the participant groups is the parents lack of knowledge on what trainings coaches and staff must go through, and not knowing if there are mandated trainings or certifications coaches must have to interact with youth athletes. No parents were able to name the two mandated certifications for coaches, SafeSport and Impact, though many parents “assumed” or “hoped” that coaches were undergoing some form of training prior to working with youth athletes. Directors, on the other hand, all reported that

coaches and staff do have to complete trainings and certifications for them to be eligible to coach. Though all directors were able to accurately report that coaches and staff are required to obtain certifications to coach, some directors were incorrect in what they reported to be mandated for their coaches. One director falsely stated that SafeSport was only mandated for high school athletics, and another director failed to identify Impact as one of the mandated certifications for coaches to be eligible to work with youth athletes.

Amongst the gaps that were uncovered by coding the transcriptions of the interview responses, the most significant were the differences in self- perception of knowledge related to sexual abuse in youth sports, differences in perception of coaches and other staff members awareness of what is considered sexual abuse with youth athletes and their ability to report it, participant's knowledge of organization's having rules in place to deter unsafe communication and relationships between players and coaches, and participant's knowledge of mandated trainings and certifications that coaches must have prior to interacting with youth athletes. By highlighting these gaps, it is clear that intervention must be done to minimize these gaps between the participant groups, as well as organizations must focus on communication and engagement and ensuring that parents are made aware and knowledgeable of rules and coaching standards.

#### Areas of Opportunity

The first identified area of opportunity that will be discussed is providing education on the topic of sexual abuse in youth sports to players and or parents

within youth sport organizations. Many participants shared various ways in which this could be provided to members within an organization. Some suggestions consisted of trainings that could be completed together by each team to ensure age-appropriateness, online- modules followed with review questions, a simple educational pamphlet that players and parents could take home and review at their convenience, and even just requiring a signature of understanding inside of the annual consent forms. At this time, formal education on this topic is only required of, and often only provided to, directors, coaches, and other staff within youth sport organizations, while parents and players remain in the dark of what to be aware of, warning signs, what crosses the line of appropriateness, what to report as abuse, and where to report if abuse is taking place. All members within a youth sport organization and within the youth athletics community should be knowledgeable on this topic so that they can better protect themselves, their children, and others from abuse.

Another area of opportunity is though youth sport organizations may have rules in place to deter unsafe communication and relationships between players and coaches, it is crucial that parents and players are made aware of these rules. Having these rules may be beneficial towards fostering a safe sport culture, however, if only some members are aware of them it is likely that these rules are not being followed by all members and it is almost definite that members are not reporting when rules are broken due to them not knowing that a rule may have been broken. Due to this breakdown with the rules organizations may already

have in place, it is clear they may not be serving their intended purpose and youth athlete safety may be at the cost of it.

An additional area of opportunity consists of ensuring parents are aware of the mandated trainings and certificates all coaches must complete and have prior to working with youth athletes. In this study, parents were remarkably unsure of trainings or education that coaches must go through to be eligible to work with youth athletes. If parents are not aware if coaches have requirements to legally coach their children, it is impossible for parents to verify that the coaches working with their children are properly certified. Additionally, if parents are not aware of coaching requirements and legal mandates, parents may not know what standard coaches are able to be held too, and unsafe practices may be getting dismissed due to a lack of knowledge on both the coaches and parents sides.

The final area of opportunity that was discovered is youth sport organizations promoting additional awareness, education and safety related to sexual abuse in youth sports to their staff and paying members such as players and parents. Most participants, amongst both parents and directors, shared a belief that more should be done on this matter and many felt the push should be fronted by the youth sport organizations directly. Some suggestions consisted of seminar style educational opportunities, informational reading materials, and in-person meetings and trainings. It is clear through the findings of this study that various members within youth sport organization's desire to increase their awareness, education and safety on this topic and if the organizations can

promote this and provide additional members with this information and education then surely, youth athlete safety will benefit and a safer sport culture may be a potential outcome.

By highlighting and expanding on the areas of opportunity it is clear how parents and players have not been prioritized when it comes to receiving awareness, understanding or education on the topic of sexual abuse in youth sports. It is even more clear how this separation, and almost isolation, of information that is provided to only the working members within these organizations may be a perpetuating factor of sexual abuse in youth sports and may be hindering the athletes' or their parents' ability to prevent it from happening or stop it if has already occurred.

### Limitations and Strengths

There are a few limitations within this study that are worth noting. One of the limitations for this study was the sample size. The originally desired sample size for this study was five different youth sport organizations, meaning five director participants and 15 parent participants, for a total of 20 participants. Instead of the five youth sport organizations with 20 participants, the researcher was only able to recruit four youth sport organizations, for a total of 16 participants, four directors and 12 parents. The time frame in which research had to be conducted in is another limitation within this study, and because of minimal time to recruit participants and conduct interviews, the sample frame was

negatively impacted. An additional limitation is that only youth volleyball organizations/ clubs were utilized within this study, rather than the intended variance in participants that would have included organizations that offered different sports. It is possible that the findings from this study may be true specific to youth volleyball programs, rather than youth sports overall. Further, another limitation is that the researcher did not obtain general demographic information of the participants, thus, there is no way of knowing if there was variance amongst the participants, as well as if certain demographics impacted the results or findings. The final limitation that was identified within this study is the use of purposive sampling strategies and as a result all the organizations that participated are in Southern California. It is possible that the findings of this study may be true for this region but not representative of all regions.

A significant strength of this study was the use of a qualitative research approach. The use of one- on- one, private interviews with no time limit potentially promoted participants to express themselves with no limitation and encouraged extensive and authentic conversation and responses. Participants were allowed to share their personal experiences and views regarding their involvement and perspectives of their organizations, which may have provided in-depth data that is difficult to capture in surveys.



## Potential Interventions

By conducting this study, the researcher was able to deduce potential risk factors that are contributing to the issue of sexual abuse in youth sports, as well as determine potential interventions that may be beneficial in not only mitigating this problem overall but assist with minimizing the identified gaps between participant groups and contribute to a safer sport culture in youth athletics as well. First, and as previously discussed, it is critical that parents and players receive awareness and education related to sexual abuse in youth sports. Parents and players must take an active role in protecting youth athletes from abuse at the hand of their coaches or other related staff within their organizations, but to do so they need the opportunity of receiving education on this topic, similar to what is offered to and mandated of the coaches.

Similarly, organizations must be more intentional with making rules known to their members, especially rules that are established to deter unsafe communication and relationships between players and coaches. Organizations can do this in a multitude of ways, some options being sending out monthly reminders of the rules to all members of the organizations, having rules posted visibly in training facilities, hosting mandatory orientations or seminars in which rules are discussed, or including it in member contracts and requiring both youth and parent signature of understanding. Without all members being made aware of these rules, it is probable that the rules currently in place are not being followed and members may have no idea that rules and boundaries are being

crossed. Ensuring all members are aware of, and upkeeping, these rules allows players and parents to take a more active role in youth athlete safety and will contribute to an overall safer sport culture.

Lastly, organizations should be more intentional with highlighting the trainings, education, and certifications that their coaches and staff obtain. Most parents were unaware of trainings that coaches must undergo or certifications they must earn, but a vast majority of parents “assumed” or “hoped” coaches had received proper training. Organizations should not only inform parents that their coaches have undergone, at a minimum, the required trainings mandated of them to work with youth athletes; but they should proudly report to their members that all coaches are working at the highest standard and have received the most up to date training and education that will contribute to not only better sport, but safer sport as well. Additionally, organizations may want to consider having their coaches’ certifications posted somewhere visibly, or at least easily accessible, within their organizations so that members can verify coaches and staff are current and eligible to work.

### Implications for Social Work Practice

It is known that the field of Social Work is rapidly expanding, and many fields are adopting social work values and practices, with some even integrating social workers into their staff and their places of work. Just like the realms of law enforcement, schools, medical and hospitals, and many more that have initiated

or followed the movement of including social work values and social workers into their careers and communities; the realms of sport, especially youth athletics, should do the same. At the professional levels of athletics, some teams are beginning to have therapists or other mental health professionals on staff, recognizing the need and positive contribution that social workers offer to athletes. At the lower and younger levels of sport, not only would social workers be able to support youth athletes through the mental challenges that participation in sport creates, but a social worker can also offer these youth an outlet to report abuse too that is not directly related to their team such as a coach or athletic trainer.

Having social workers within youth sport organizations could positively impact youth athlete mental health, may promote members to report abuse or concerns, and can overall contribute to a safer sport culture. Youth athletics, and athletics as a whole, has historically valued the physical health and ability of athletes but it is crucial that the mental health and overall well-being of the athlete be valued as well. Just like the roles of positional coaches, athletic trainers, and strength and conditioning coaches are significant to athlete performance, it is imperative that the roles of therapists, social workers, and other mental health professionals be recognized and become more prominent within youth athletics and sport at large.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Further research on this topic is not only encouraged, but necessary if real change is to be established and the issue of sexual abuse in youth sports is to be diminished. One recommendation for future research consists of researchers replicating this study with participants from varying regions and comprised of different types of youth sport organizations. Doing so will allow future researchers to discover if the results garnered through this study remain true with varying sample frames and participants across different regions and sports; or reveal discrepancies in the findings and they can share these variances within their work. An additional recommendation for future research consists of future researchers utilizing interventions that provide awareness, education and support related to sexual abuse in youth sports to parents and or players in youth sport organizations and studying the impact of the intervention between the participant group that was offered the intervention and a control group that was not offered services. Conducting future research in this matter will allow the researcher to understand the depth and impact of the intervention and deduce whether or not intervention is beneficial towards increasing awareness, understanding and education on this topic and in turn minimizing sexual abuse in youth sports and creating a safer sport culture.

## Summary

This qualitative study utilized individual interviews with youth sport organization directors, and the parents of the athletes they train. The data was transcribed and interpreted, and the findings were discussed in depth with valuable input related to the study such as limitations and strengths, potential interventions, implications for social work practice, and recommendations for future research. This research explored the prominent issue of sexual abuse in youth sports by studying the perceived effectiveness of established trainings mandated for youth sport coaches. It discerned how the perceptions varied between youth sport organization directors, and the parents of the athletes. The study discovered that more needs to be established to keep athletes safe from the potential for sexual abuse perpetrated by their coaches or other athletic staff. Parent's lack of knowledge related to this topic, disconnect from their organization's rules, and ignorance of mandated trainings and certifications that coaches must have all contribute to the significant gap between parents and coaches which could be a potential contributing factor of this problem. Exploring this problem further is crucial for protecting youth athletes, and the field of social work should do more to become more prominent within athletics at every level to protect this population of people and truly create a safer sport experience for all.

APPENDIX A  
INTERVIEW GUIDE (DIRECTORS)

1. What level of knowledge/ expertise would you consider yourself to have related to sexual abuse in youth sports? How about your coaches, coworkers and other staff within this organization?
2. Do you believe that your coaches and other staff members have a strong awareness of what is considered sexual abuse with youth athletes, and how to report it?
3. How would you describe the culture of your organization? Do you believe youth members of your organization feel safe and encouraged when they come to practice?
4. Does your organization provide any form of education related to safe and healthy relationships between players and coaches to the athletes or their parents? Do you think providing information on this topic will benefit the athletes? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. Does your organization have any rules or guidelines in place to deter unsafe communication or relationships between coaches and players? What are they? How are they implemented, verified and enforced?
6. Do you believe members of your organization would feel comfortable reporting to you if sexual abuse was taking place? Why or why not?
7. Do you believe more should be done to promote awareness, education and safety related to sexual abuse in youth sports? If yes, who do you think should be the one to do it? What might that look like?

8. What training tools do you use to educate yourself and your staff about sexual abuse within this organization? Are they mandated? Can you describe the type of training(s) that are being utilized?
9. Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to anything we have previously mentioned, any suggestions on what might promote safe sport culture, or anything you already do or use that works well when educating youth, parents or staff?

Developed by Nicole Rodriguez



APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDE (PARENTS)

1. What level of knowledge/ expertise would you consider yourself to have related to sexual abuse in youth sports? How about the director, coaches, trainers and other staff within this organization?
2. Do you believe that the coaches and other staff members have a strong awareness of what is considered sexual abuse with youth athletes, and how to report it?
3. How would you describe the culture of this organization? Do you believe youth members of the organization feel safe and encouraged when they come to practice?
4. Does this organization provide any form of education related to safe and healthy relationships between players and coaches to the athletes or you as the parents? Do you think providing information on this topic will benefit the athletes? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. Does this organization have any rules or guidelines in place to deter unsafe communication or relationships between coaches and players? What are they? How are they implemented, verified and enforced?
6. Do you believe members of this organization would feel comfortable reporting to the director or other staff if sexual abuse was taking place? Why or why not?
7. Do you believe more should be done to promote awareness, education and safety related to sexual abuse in youth sports? If yes, who do you think should be the one to do it? What might that look like?

8. Do you know of any training tools that are used to educate the coaches and staff about sexual abuse within this organization? Do you know if they are mandated for the coaches? Do you know what they might consist of?
9. Is there anything else you would like to discuss related to anything we have previously mentioned, any suggestions on what might promote safe sport culture, or anything you would like to address speaking from the perspective of a parent?

Developed by Nicole Rodriguez

APPENDIX C  
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

## INFORMED CONSENT

If the interview is being conducted via zoom this informed consent form will be read to participants and consent will be obtained orally.

The study in which you are asked to participate is designed to explore the issue of sexual abuse in youth sports (SAYS) by evaluating the differences in perceived effectiveness of modern education and trainings required of youth coaches between youth sport organization directors and the parents of the athletes that train there, and how aware and knowledgeable other members of the organization are, specifically parents, on the matter. This study is being conducted by Nicole Rodriguez, a graduate student, under the supervision of Erik Schott, Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at California State University, San Bernardino (CSUSB). The study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at CSUSB.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to identify contributing factors to sexual abuse in youth sports.

**DESCRIPTION:** Participants will be asked open- ended questions in an interview format on their current awareness and education on sexual abuse in youth sport settings, how they perceive safe practices are being utilized by coaches and if they have any suggestions that will further promote or foster a safe sport culture.

**PARTICIPATION:** Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary. You can refuse to participate in the study or discontinue your participation at any time without consequences.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** Your responses will remain confidential, and data will be reported in group form only.

**DURATION:** Interviews are expected to last 30 to 60 minutes, though there is no time requirement established by the researcher.

**RISKS:** Although not anticipated, there may be potential discomfort in answering some of the questions due to the nature of the research topic. You are not required to answer and can skip questions or end your participation.

**BENEFITS:** There will not be any direct benefits to the participants. However, findings from the study will contribute to our knowledge in this area of research.

**CONTACT:** If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Erik Schott at (909) 537-7480.

**RESULTS:** Results of the study can be obtained from the Pfau Library ScholarWorks database (<http://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/>) at California State University, San Bernardino after July 2024.

I agree to have this interview be audio recorded: \_\_\_\_\_ YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO

I understand that I must be 18 years of age or older to participate in your study, have read and understand the consent document and agree to participate in your study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Place an X mark here

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

APPENDIX D  
DEBRIEFING STATEMENT

This study you have just completed was designed to investigate the perceived effectiveness of modern educational and awareness trainings required of youth coaches and how it contributes to the culture of youth sports. In this study two perspectives were assessed: directors of youth sport organizations and, parents of youth athletes within the same organization. These two perspectives are significant when determining the expectations and the reality of the effectiveness and implementation of safe practices used by coaches with their players. We are particularly interested in the discrepancies between these two perspectives and hope to identify strategies that will effectively assist in the creation of safe sport experiences for all youth athletes.

Thank you for your participation and for not discussing the contents of the interview with members of your organization or other organizations. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Nicole Rodriguez or Erik Schott at (909)537-7480. If you would like to obtain a copy of the completed research, please contact Erik Schott at (909)537-7480 at the end of Spring Quarter of 2024.



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