ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH **IN-DEPTH FINDINGS**

Safe Sport
Addressing Abuse and Harassment

AUGUST 2019

viaSPORT
BRITISH COLUMBIA

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In this Report

Commitment to Safe Sport

viaSport, in partnership with the Ministry of Tourism Arts and Culture believes that all British Columbians deserve equitable opportunities to develop and realize their potential through sport. Ensuring sport experiences are positive requires participants are safe in sport. Sport experiences must be free from physical, emotional, and mental harm. Abuse in sport includes, but is not limited to bullying, physical abuse, sexual abuse, harassment, discrimination, verbal abuse and neglect.

The initial phase of work is addressing (general and sexual) abuse and harassment as well as the development of a strategic framework to help guide the Safe Sport program in B.C. on a long-term, sustained basis. Collective action from all levels of government and stakeholders is required to address the issue.

Guiding Principles

We are committed to leading the program through research, consultation and education that put participants first and support people to effectively respond by:

- Prioritizing the building and implementation of evidence-based solutions.
- Bringing together people across sectors, especially those most affected to expand impact
- Listening, establishing continuous dialogue, responding, and amplifying findings every step of the way

Safe Sport in British Columbia

The purpose of this program in B.C. is to eradicate abuse and harassment in sport, and to promote a positive, inclusive and respectful environment for all sport participants, at every level of participation.

In order to advance this topic in B.C. and implement necessary changes, the sport system must be aligned, integrated and coordinated from the national to the local level. viaSport is currently partnering with provincial and national organizations and champions to advance actions at all levels of the sport system to ensure that all British Columbians will experience the true benefits of safe, meaningful and inclusive support. viaSport has completed development of a strategic framework to help guide the Safe Sport program in B.C. on a long-term, sustained basis.

There are four key strategies within the framework that will support stakeholders along the lines of:

- Reporting
- Investigation
- Prevention
- Compliance

This comprehensive approach is among the first of its kind in Canada, and will focus on providing education and policy resources, building accountability frameworks, providing victim-centred support and leading a culture change process to establish healthy relationships while minimizing risk in sport.

Where We've Been

Work and key accomplishments to date

Through the dedicated efforts of viaSport and the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, British Columbia has been one of the first provinces in Canada to mobilize around safe sport, in accordance with three main guiding objectives:

OBJECTIVE # 1 To increase awareness of the conditions that make sport safe and to deepen the understanding of the challenges faced by provincial sport organizations (PSOs) to successfully implement Safe Sport policy and program recommendations

OBJECTIVE #2 To identify potential solutions and support capacity building for collaborative, evidence based, aligned Safe Sport solutions with PSO's and relevant partners

OBJECTIVE #3 To co-develop with government and other stakeholders system level recommendations that are expert-informed in harmony with the Red Deer Declaration and F/PT Working Group on Safety Integrity, and Ethics in Sport.

Flowing directly from these three objectives and with the direct support by the Province of British Columbia, viaSport's key activities and initiatives to date include:

- Using an evidence-based and collaborative approach to engage over 100 organizations at all levels of sport in B.C. to understand what will make sport safer for everyone
- Listening to parents, athletes, coaches and administrators to identify what has been done, what is working and how viaSport can further implement solutions that are tailored to organizational and provincial needs
- Building capacity to respond to harassment and abuse through training, education, and the development of safe sport tools
- Ongoing and extensive consultation with experts, including the Canadian Centre for Child Protection, Coaching Association of Canada, Canadian Olympic Committee and others, to better uncover the complexities of the problem and build alignment
- Establishing a PSO working group on policy and program development
- Developing Principles to Guide Effective Safe Sport Solutions for sport leaders to put into practice and actively sharing these with PSOs as they implement changes
- Extensive research and development as the foundation for viaSport's recommendations and actions, including Safe Sport Theory of Change outlining the necessary conditions for progress toward safer sport organizations

Every PSO in B.C. that is affiliated with viaSport has now signed the *Erase Bullying Declaration of Commitment.* In addition to this action, many B.C. based organizations have taken the *Responsible Coaching Movement Pledge* to prevent unethical behaviour in sport.

Report Overview

WHY WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

In order to develop and implement system wide sustainable solutions, viaSport sought to first learn more about the culture that has hindered movement around safe sport, the ways in which Provincial Sport Organizations (PSOs) are responding, and other contextual considerations that impact an organization's ability and willingness to move toward safer sport environments.

This report contains the findings from a 17-interview series of ethnographic research conducted between January and April 2019.

Ethnography informs solutions-building

The interviews presented in this report are designed as part of a months-long, multi-step research process aiming to instigate change around sexual harassment and abuse in sport. Ethnography is the first step in the process.

Step 1:
Qualitative research using ethnographic approach

17 ethnographic interviews were conducted with members of the sport system, all but one participant representing Provincial Sport Organizations. The research looked to learn more about the entrenched culture that has hindered movement around safe sport in past years, the ways in which PSOs are attempting to respond, and other contextual considerations. The body of knowledge resulting from the ethnographic interviews will help inform the direction and framing for Step 2, a five-day design sprint.

Step 2:
Five-day design sprint and solution building

viaSport will use information collected during ethnographic interviews to design a **five-day process of collaborative problem solving**. Over the course of one week, 18 individuals will wrestle with the problem of abuse and harassment and work together in teams to formulate out-of-the box solutions. Each team will develop rapid prototypes - quick versions of their ideas - and present them to an additional group of experts who offer their time and expertise to critically analyze the solutions and provide feedback.

Step 3:
Testing and iterating solutions

With four ideas in hand, viaSport will spend the following months helping sport organizations try their ideas in real life situations and learn through **developmental evaluation**. The findings of the ethnographic research and design sprint idea synthesis will inform how viaSport will set about putting it into practice. This will result in continued learning about the problem and how to solve it - teasing out learnings and further building on understanding of the problem.

HOW WAS THE RESEARCH CONDUCTED?

Between February and April 2019, 17 interviews were conducted. viaSport chose to invite PSOs to participate as these organizations are the primary bodies with which viaSport liaises and supports in their work. Additionally, PSOs hold a unique role in sport systems: they balance a higher-level policy and planning lens while being attuned to the day-today experience of sport as it plays out at the local level.

Topics discussed in these interviews can be political and uncomfortable; for this reason, viaSport contracted a third-party researcher to host conversations with the participants. Although viaSport organizers were aware of the individuals who agreed to participate, the researcher removed all identifying information that could tie comments to a specific respondent or sport (such as a reference to a specific training location) before sharing information back.

Interviews were semi-structured, meaning they were guided by a set of core questions but in ethnographic research style, conversation largely followed the content that participants wanted to discuss. This approach allows for new, unanticipated themes to emerge and generates a much stronger understanding of context than structured interviews.

Guiding questions were:

What characterizes the formal and informal cultures of PSOs, particularly with respect to safe sport?

What is the broader context in which PSOs are operating?

What kinds of practices are they doing now and hoping to do in future with respect to safe sport?

Following the 17 interviews, the researcher used qualitative research software to identify patterns in participants' comments and select demonstrative quotes. Any identifying information has been removed.

Who was involved?

Care was taken to speak with people who have a range of experience in the sport system and who hold an array of different roles within PSOs: from Executive Directors and Board members, to staff and safety coordinators. Some participants' roles are paid positions, some volunteer. Those interviewed formally represent 11 different sports, as well as one multi-sport organization, and participants were able to speak to their personal experience as athletes or supporters in a number of additional activities.

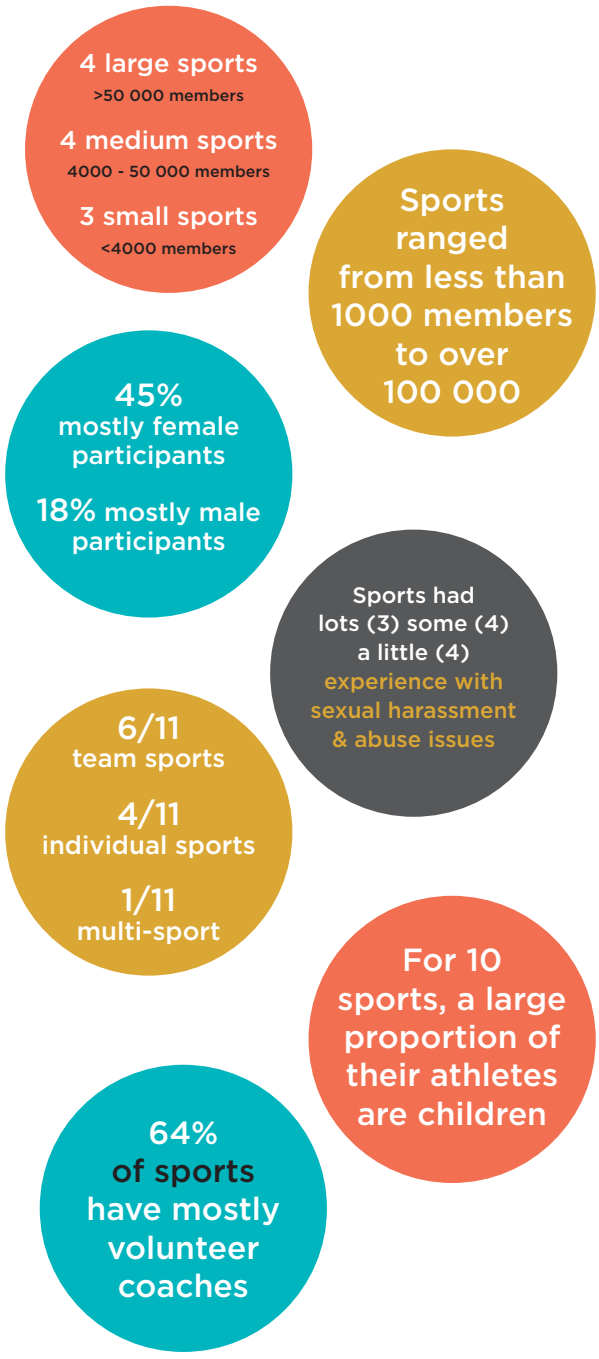
Of the 11 sports represented, they exhibit a mix of the following characteristics:

- Paid vs. volunteer coaches and staff
- Size and geographic spread of membership
- Prime training and competition season (winter vs. summer)
- Individuals vs. team sports
- Low barrier to entry vs. entry through formalized clubs only
- Age and gender composition
- Experience with past safe sport issues

The themes shared in the following sections of this report are the compilation of participants' experiences and perspectives.

A sincere thank you to all participants, who willingly offered their time and candid reflections on a difficult topic.

Participant Characteristics



1. Attitudes towards safe sport

How people perceive an issue is critically important to the formation and maintenance of culture. This section of the report explores participants' perception of sport generally and of safe sport as a specific issue.

1.1
"It's never us, it always someone else that it happens to"

"I was surprised how fast safer sport became an issue," opened one participant. The issue seemed to have gained momentum quickly, prompting an on-going series of revelations and newly-shared stories: *"Every day something new comes out. As a parent of kids in sport, I'm starting to say, 'Am I going to keep my kids in sport?'"* The sense that safe sport is "coming out everywhere" generated a real sense of urgency and anxiety for many participants. Participants often made reference to recent media coverage of the issue, particularly noting reporting by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation[1]. These *"heart-breaking"* accounts of abuse – particularly the ubiquity across sports – contrasted strongly with the reasons participants continue to be involved in the sport system. They believed in sport's ability to enable personal growth and build community,

> When incidents like this happen, it's no longer a quiet conversation. It's a conversation we put on the table.

but emerging allegations cast doubt over these motivations: *"I do what I do because sport had a positive impact on my life. To be working in an environment where I'm not sure that's the case..."*

Despite this emerging information, however, people reported that the dominant perception within the sport system continues to be that *"It's never us, it's always someone else that it happens to."* This pattern of dissonant thinking occurred even as respondents acknowledged cases of abuse or harassment within their sport; they sometimes qualified their statements by minimizing their sport's experience in comparison to another sport that has faced more issues. They created distance, mentioning things like, *"We've had our share.... nothing like [another sport], but we've had our share."* By introducing other, worse examples, this approach (consciously or otherwise) diminishes the degree of severity with which the participant communicates about issues facing their own sport.

1.2
Personal experience breeds action

However, direct experience with a high-profile case of abuse or harassment drastically reduced the degree to which participants expressed that the issue primarily occurs in *"other sports"*. For those individuals who had witnessed harassment or abuse, or been directly involved in managing the subsequent fallout, the issue of sexual abuse and harassment is *"very personal every day"*. Some individuals harboured deep regret over cases that they felt they handled poorly:

"I have incredible guilt and remorse over what the athlete went through. If I'd known then what I know now - which is still just a fraction - how we could have handled that, how we could have made that an experience where the athlete felt they were being heard, that they would be safe. I don't know that we ever really accomplished that."

[1] See, for example, "Sex offences against minors: Investigation reveals more than 200 Canadian coaches convicted in last 20 years" (Feb. 10, 2019) by Lori Ward and Jamie Strashin. Available May 16 from https://www.cbc.ca/sports/amateur-sports-coaches-sexual-offences-minors-1.5006609

Others were impacted by the stories of friends and colleagues who had been victimized: *"I've been close to the athletes, I knew all of them....I realize how much it has affected them for the rest of their lives. Maybe that's why I'm so black and white"* about making changes toward safer sport.

Nearly all participants felt that a key driving force for change was having to deal with cases of sexual harassment and abuse. Speaking about one sport, a participant explained, *"The numerous incidents that they have experienced has forced them to reckon with it all."* This was reinforced by individuals in sports that had been confronted with problems: *"It was a real learning experience....It also made us a lot more aware that this was going on. Again, you look at it and go, 'It's over there in other sports,' but the vast majority of our players are female, kids...You just know it's got to be happening here."*

One interview respondent suggested that a high-profile incident was, in fact, necessary before their PSO would become actively involved: "*Luckily we haven't had a big sexual issue where we've identified key things we haven't done. It's just not something on forefront...It's bad to say we have to wait for something bad to happen, but... it's because safe sport goes through the NSO."* More often than not, however, PSOs welcomed the chance to organize their response in advance of an issue arising: *"No one's disclosing; we don't have a lot of pressure so we can be really thoughtful rather than stomping out fires."* In the words of another participant, *"Let's not wait for something really nasty to happen and the fall out is so substantial that it forces us to act right away."*

1.3
What is safe sport, exactly?

In general, the overall tone of conversations was determined and dedicated – both in participants' commitment to their sports and to improving athletes' experiences within them. One participant expressed their passion: *"I love this sport, and I want to keep it as untarnished as it can be. Moving forward, I don't want any more tarnishing of it - whether it's physical or mental abuse. I want my sport to be the best it can be."*

> We're all responsible for it [safe sport]. If we're not interested in making headway on it, we'd best step out of the way and let others step into it.

Participants believed that sport free of sexual harassment and abuse was a key element of the kinds of positive sport experiences they wanted to provide - but this belief often contrasted with the lack of action they were taking. This gap between perceived importance and inaction often appeared linked to uncertainty. *"There are lots of unknowns out there...and you don't want to be responsible for anything that could happen."* Participants reported being *"terrified of getting involved with [safer sport issues]....If you don't do it right, the retaliation, the fall-out can be horrible."* The consequences can include negative press storms, subsequent unearthing of other events, and erosion of trust in the PSO and/or sport. Many participants were also keenly aware of the potential for further harm to a victim if a situation was handled improperly. A sizeable incident is *"every sport's worst fear....It would send ripples through the community because the community isn't that big."*

Part of this uncertainty results from the wide spectrum of definitions of safe sport. Some core commonalities existed across conversations: participants typically thought of children and female athletes as being at risk, and perceived sports where athletes typically wear less clothing to be more hazardous. However, the scope and complexity of the concept of 'safe sport' differed wildly between participants: Some individuals articulated that a specific and limited focus on sexual harassment and abuse is necessary: *"'Safe sport' gets a bit confusing.... but we're talking about abuse. Physical, mental and social abuse and harassment - that's where safe sport needs to dwell."* For other participants, 'safe sport' inherently encompassed a wide range of considerations: *"Things have changed. The focus shouldn't be just on harassment, it should be more of a broader safe sport scale and the lessons to be learned about resourcing it."* The lamer approach mirrored many sport's current strategic focus areas, on issues like inclusion and the safety of trans athletes.

Irrespective of the participants' view of the correct scope of 'safe sport', the majority of participants' comments reflected an inextricable link between sexual harassment and abuse and other safe sport considerations. Without prompting, nearly all participants instinctively offered comments about diversity or inclusion, implying overlap between the sport culture that makes people feel welcome and included, and culture that reduces the risk of sexual abuse. The words of one participant provide an example of this interconnection: *"Once we can get out of a focus on abuse and have a more general focus on making the sport facilities and culture more safe and open to differences, then we'll see a lot more diversity in the sport."* Interviews suggested that making an impact on other elements of safe sport - such as inclusion and diversity - would inevitably have positive impacts on abuse and harassment.

1.4 "Old school" methods

In the majority of conversations, coaches were the focus of discussion around sexual harassment and abuse. Participants frequently criticized "old school" coaching styles as part of the problem, a concept that was defined in different ways depending on the context of a specific sport. For some, "old school" coaching involves greater comfort with casual touch than contemporary approaches: *"I saw a coach talking and they give a little tap on the bum to the young athlete to say, 'Ok, go back to work.'"* In other sports, "old school" methods are about the "old boys" club in which pride in playing a "tough sport" manifests in physically grueling drills to the point of exhaustion: *"You still have that culture of 'Well, I was doing this'.... 'I survived that and look what a good person I am, so I'll use that [coaching style].'"*

Often, participants indicated that individuals using "old school" methods were not willing to alter their approaches despite participants' assertion that "*times have changed."* *"Many of the officiates are obstinate. It's like 'I didn't have to do this before, why now?'"* Their views sometimes clashed with newly introduced safe sport initiatives like Rule of Two; opponents of the changes argue with participants, accusing that *"'You're keeping me from doing my job.'"* In other instances, the lack of coordinated response across sports or within a sport was highlighted by individuals not willing to change: *"They say, 'Well, other sports aren't doing this....'It's not coming out at the national level, so why are we doing this at the provincial level?'"*

Interviewees pointed out that their concern about "old school" culture was heightened by the disproportionate number of individuals in high-level sport positions who perpetuate a more traditional sport mentality. *"The makeup of boards is still older, white men....We've noticed that clubs with populations of people of colour are not in leadership. People don't always know what it takes to sit on a board, or don't want to make an unpopular decision. Or maybe someone has a bad experience on a board and they say, 'Do I want to take that on?'"* The demographic makeup of leadership was important primarily because individuals who experienced a particular culture and approach to sport were seen to propagate similar styles in their own coaching and administration. In the words of another participant, *"I think the culture is trying to change. There are more women getting involved - in positions as Presidents of associations, and I think that women go at it a little different"* because they lack the same historical involvement in the sport.

However, "old school" isn't always negative. Participants' views starkly highlighted the subjective nature of "good" coaching; "What I like in a coach doesn't necessarily mean it's a coach that someone else likes." For example, some participants felt that close personal relationships between coaches and athletes are to be applauded: *"I like one [a coach] who takes interest in their athletes' skill development, who knows what's going on at home - having a personal relationship."* Others disparaged the same approach: *"Some coaches seem to have some sort of spell over some kids, not because they're good, but because they've become their friends rather than having a business relationship."* The wide range in personal definitions of 'good' and 'safe' coaching outlines one of the core complexities of creating 'safe sport': it doesn't look the same for each individual.

One participant's account further demonstrates this complexity. They shared about their family's experience with a particular coach known for their "hard-core" coaching:

> *"He's loud, he's tough. He's the guy you either love or you hate. Outwardly everybody hates him, but if you're on the team he's just super invested in those players, he really does want them to succeed....It ended up he got suspended for being unprofessional toward an official. [The participant's colleagues] could not believe I'd let my kid play for him...He's known as not the most approachable or friendly individual, but you ask [the participant's child] today who their favourite coach is, it's him."*

The duality of this account - of recognizing that a style of coaching is simultaneously positive for a particular player and problematic for others - underscores the deep complexity of "good" coaching.

1.5
Sport for fun vs. sport for performance

"We all come from different perspectives of what our games look like." Indeed, much of the tension between 'old school' and 'new' styles of coaching can be framed as distinct perspectives on the aim of sport, whether outwardly recognized or tacitly understood. Two distinct perspectives exist: sport in pursuit of performance and excellence, and sport for growth and enjoyment. Both perspectives emerged when participants were asked to share the aim of their sport organization. Some articulated it was *"to develop our competition athletes to do well in the country,"* while others expressed that *"in the first instance, you should have fun."* Other participants pointed out that a focus on performance is sometimes at odds with safe sport: *"If you're trying to do something to win, you're usually wondering what boundaries can you push."*

In the eyes of many participants, the majority of athletes participate in sport for the enjoyment of it. This was especially the case for young athletes, but was not always reflected in parents' approach: *"The adult wants to win and the kid wants to win, too, at certain levels, but they really want to have fun."* One participant shared an anecdote that highlights the *"competitive nature between parents"*:

> *"Kids have turned into commodities....I saw a parent screaming at the kid and I asked him what he was doing. He said 'I'm coaching my kid.' I asked, 'Why? There are five coaches out there,' and he said, 'I need to coach him because he needs to be the best. He's my RRSP.[2]"*

> One of our biggest problems is adults, not kids....The parents always focus on, 'You did this wrong.'...Parents are circling whirlwinds out there.

The way in which sport is structured and conducted stem directly from the aim. Participants' comment surfaced a strong dissonance between organization's stated objectives - such as creating safe, welcoming environments for fun and holistic personal growth - and the structures within which they operate. A focus on performance begins from an individual's initiation into a sport organization: when selecting coaches, organizations may be *"screening out bad coaches [i.e., non-performers], not predators....Rather than reference checks, we should be asking why people got laid off"* in their previous job. It's also reinforced by competition selection criteria geared primarily toward that prioritize athlete development and performance, and in funding structures that originate at the highest levels of sport: *"One of the national Achilles heels is that all funding is directed at athletic performance. There's very little funding directed at coaching."*

Despite the pressures to prioritize performance, however, PSOs are increasingly repositioning their focus from high performance to local level clubs. *"There's a kind of shift happening right now...We're giving more back to them because they're keeping the doors open.... We need clubs more than the clubs need us.'"* For many sports, this adjustment requires addressing historical dynamics through conscious re-building of relationships and trust between LSOs and the PSO.

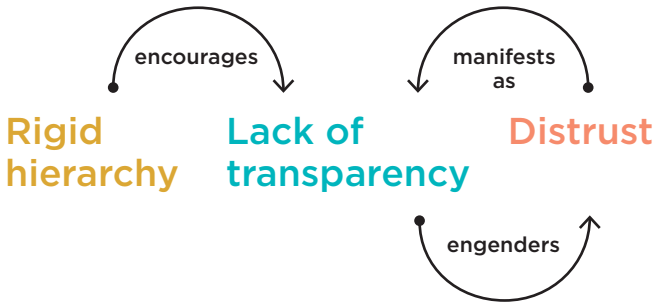
[2] For international readers of this report, an RRSP is a Canadian savings plan for retirement.

2. Characterizing the sport system

Ethnographic interviews reveal a great deal about the context of a problem. The following section explores some of the factors that characterize sport systems and, in turn, impact on their ability to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and abuse.

2.1
A siloed sport system

Throughout interviews, one of the characteristics of the sport system that emerged most strongly was an intricate and self reinforcing relationship between organizational hierarchy within sports, a high degree of distrust, and lack of transparency and communication.



Certainly, sport systems are vertically complex: they involve many levels of organizations that must work in tandem to build and deliver everything from high-level policy to front line services. Each actor within this system holds a specific set of information, decision-making power and implementation. Participants reported that NSOs are most often responsible for hiring coaches, coach development and training, holding a specific safe sport portfolio, and policy development. Local sport organizations are, by definition, on the ground with athletes, coaches, parents and officials; for this reason, the implementation of most programs falls to clubs.

In turn, PSOs sit in the intervening space where, in addition to managing provincial-level activities, they play an important middle-man role, directing and disseminating information up and down the chain. For example, when issues are received at the PSO, one participant explained, *"I triage it. I look at who's involved...If it's a club issue, I send it back to them or I get the manager of a team ...I could potentially send it to a board member responsible for something....Our policy outlines who I go back to." "Typically, the approach is to start at local level and work your way up"* with a concern, said another. As such, PSOs had limited to no direct interaction with athletes, their families, and coaches.

This division of labour often left PSOs reliant upon other levels of the organization to put changes into action. For example, one participant shared: *"We can't adopt something; We can strongly suggest, but that policy has to come from the governing body [i.e., NSO]."* Many participants articulated that they were in a holding pattern for a policy or program to be moved along by another level of the organization, leaving them with options to wait or navigate the creation of a temporary fix.

Another person spoke about policy development at the NSO level: *"They're working on it but we don't want to sit behind and wait for it to come out."* This participant and their PSO were left scrambling to fill the gap: *"How do we do this, how long will it take, and what are the band-aid solutions while we wait?"* In many cases, the waiting game could extend for a lengthy period of time as resource-limited organizations, particularly local clubs, struggled to find the capacity to implement a change: *"One of the challenges I see as a PSO, regardless as what we put in place, it's how to deliver that to the club. They're volunteers, they have a fuller desk than me."*

The siloed approach seen between levels of sport organizations was also mirrored in the internal workings of organizations: Within PSOs, information is often held by one individual at a time, and managing safe sport concerns is the purview of one person. Limited capacity at the organizational level likely plays a role as organizations often struggle to cover necessary functions, notwithstanding additional time and effort spent involving multiple team members. For example, one participant explained how a member of the PSO's staff spends approximately 70 per cent of their time facilitating judicial processes and complaints. Other members of the staff team were not privy to the details of these cases.

Interestingly, participant accounts indicated that it's often discouraged to overstep the chain of command and interact with different levels of the hierarchy. This norm was suggested in people's response to front line individuals - parents or athletes - who tried to engage directly with the PSO. Speaking about complaints they had received, a participant discussed how they re-directed a parent's concerns back down the chain of command to their coach: *"I get emails saying, 'Maybe you should talk to the coach', but I'm like, 'No, that's not our place. You're a parent, you're an adult, speak to your coach about your kid.'....It's a problem we run into, that people jump to the PSO to fix things."* Similarly, instances where PSO representatives tried to interact directly with athletes - rather than through LSOs - were met with suspicion. One PSO developed a formal program that would involve drop-in's to local clubs because *"before, we weren't able to get into those environments. They'd want to know, 'Why are you coming? Are you coming to look in and check on us?'"*

2.2 Distrust brewed over time

A "combative relationship" between clubs and PSOs was reported by a number of participants. In many cases, participants articulated that distrust between LSOs and PSOs has been built over years, and were only beginning to be repaired in recent years: *"There's a perception that we don't know, a perception of armchair professionals who've made mistakes and who didn't acknowledge what went wrong."* PSOs have also blamed the perception that they introduce arbitrary policies and practices that drain the resource of local clubs: *"People are starting to gain trust with [the PSO]. Used to be, 'Those bastards at [the PSO], look what they're doing now.'"*

The nature of LSOs' relationships with PSOs appeared to be influenced by clubs anticipating a punitive response, rather than support, from their PSOs in the face of difficulties. In the words of one participant, *"Clubs fear that if they're in trouble, we're going to swoop in and shut them down. But a number of us in the [PSO] office are agreed that we need a big culture change [in their relationships with LSOs]."* As a result, "*clubs are reticent to ask for resources,"* including assistance with safe sport issues. People expressed their fear that a lack of trust and transparency impedes the organizations' ability to collaboratively build solutions for issues like sexual harassment and abuse in a timely manner. As one participant said, *"You need to tell me before the roof is falling in so we can find a solution. I can't do anything once it's fallen in."*

> Other people say, 'Really? You talk to your NSO?'

Relationships between LSOs and PSOs were further complicated by misunderstanding. Many participants felt that LSOs were unclear about PSOs' role in the sport system, and the value it presents to them: *"Our LSOs don't understand why they give [the PSO] money...If you were to ask the average athlete or coach, the benefits of being part of [the PSO] are insurance, and the ability to attend provincial or national events."* Unsurprisingly, LSOs' lack of clarity also impacts their understanding of the role of PSOs in responding to safe sport issues; according to participants, individuals at the local level frequently overestimate the recourse available to PSOs: *"As much as people think the PSO is a court system, it's not the court system - we're peers judging peers."* Another participant shared that *"what we keep impressing on people is that we're not the RCMP, or the legal system....What we can do is we can stop you playing [our sport] within our organization."*

Notably, approximately half of participants who commented on their relationship with their NSO revealed that they similarly distrust their NSO. Speaking about their national organization, one participant said:

> *"Typically, my impression is that they have no idea what they're doing. I don't think that's that uncommon across sport; it's really normal for someone to say, 'If you want something done, you've got to do it yourself because the NSO's not there.' They tend to run within an ivory tower. They typically feel that they know best for everyone, but the little person's voice [on the front line] isn't heard."*

As with LSOs, some participants articulated that they did not actively share information with their NSO, felt they received little support from the national level, and/or perceived the NSO to be *"putting their head in the sand"* when it came to safe sport issues. The other half of respondents indicated that they had good relationships with their NSOs - often with one or two trusted individuals.

2.3 Lack of communication & transparency

Distrust and the rigid hierarchy within the sport system combined to have powerful effects on the degree to which information is communicated between stakeholders. Whether intentional or not, this pattern left sports without the information necessary to effectively collaborate with other levels of the organization. *"Getting people [at LSOs] to communicate with us is sometimes hard....We're getting radio silence."* In this context, individuals at one level of the sport organization held important information that did not get passed along to relevant personnel in a timely manner. This dynamic persisted even in severe cases such as a known safe sport incident: *"Most people knew something was going on....I knew the athlete was living at the coach's house"* but, to the participant's knowledge, no information was passed up the chain of command.

Lack of communication around safe sport issues was also affected by the siloed division of responsibilities internally at the PSO level. Notable impacts include the loss of organizational knowledge - particularly about initiatives tried in the past and subsequent lessons learned. It was a regular occurrence during interviews for participants to mention a program or initiative, but when asked for further information, apologize that they didn't know anything more as it was held by a colleague. This left the organizations highly vulnerable to loss of organizational knowledge: *"It was led by a key staff member who's no longer with us."* A strong division of labour without cross-communication also undermined a PSO's ability to respond in a flexible, timely way: *"If it's Friday afternoon and I'm on holiday, what happens? I don't like to be that sole point of contact...I don't want to have that responsibility hanging over my head like that."*

At times, secrecy and lack of communication were unintentional outcomes that resulted from other constructs in the sport system. For example, one participant spoke about the aftermath of the dismissal of two coaches for unsafe coaching: *"We're bound by confidentiality, so the only perspective in the rumour mill is the coaches who are blaming athletes....How do you have trust [at the local level] that you're doing the right thing because we don't want to tarnish their reputation?"* In the attempt to act respectfully, the organization felt cornered into silence. Individuals at the local level were unaware of the context behind the scenes and would have had limited information about the situation.

A shift from face-to-face contact to digital tools - a trend which characterized all PSOs - also had significant impacts on the means by which members received information from other levels of sport organizations. This may affect transparency: *"Everything we do is online, our office is [geographically far], which is even more*

isolated....I still try and get out and visit communities; I think we've lost that conduit to the office, getting out and talking to people." Certainly, when asked about their lines of communication to athletes and parents, most PSOs pointed to their website, emails, or social media channels. Few organizations reported being out at community events or interacting in person with athletes, parents, or coaches. Even within organizations that primarily relied on these means, however, participants expressed the limitations: *"We can believe in this [safe sport] with all our heart, but if we can only do it through email blasts, we're not reaching people on those teams."*

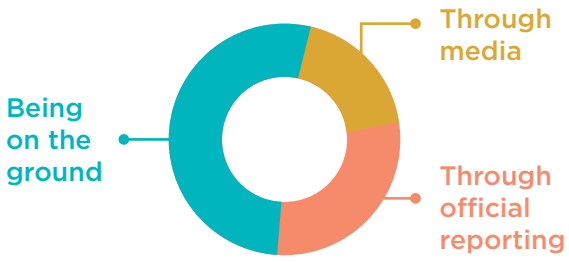
> I think we've lost that conduit to the office, getting out and talking to people.

In addition to multiple factors unintentionally affecting communication, participants also shared multiple accounts in which limiting the spread and uptake of information was an express aim. For example: *"They [the NSO] did a really good job keeping a lid on it. No one knew why the coach got suspended, who they were. Since then, some people have speculated but no one really knows."* Similarly, it was notable that PSOs who were not hearing of safe sport issues from their front line often considered the silence to be "lucky": *"That these issues haven't come forward is pure luck."* It is understandable that Individuals who feel under prepared to respond to safe sport issues may frame open communication as a negative. For some stakeholders, this outcome may influence their behaviours and decision-making around the issue.

2.4 Finding out about sexual harassment & abuse

Trust, communication and transparency shape all elements of an organization's culture, and safe sport initiatives are no exception. Weak lines of communication meant that athletes and other front line individuals were not aware of resources accessible to them: *"When I was at a club [as an athlete] I didn't even know what was available...And a kid isn't going to know who to talk to, or that they could go above a coach"* to talk directly with the PSO. In turn, the organizational flow of information up to the PSO from club level was severely limited, leaving interpersonal means of information transfer to fill the gap: *"We probably wouldn't know about a safer sport issue until it hits the news unless people are talking to us on a personal level...If something did happen, who's going to tell us?"*

Participants' fears were often supported by experience. Of the specific cases participants shared in interviews, the majority of incidents (more than half) came to light because a PSO staff person was on the ground. Typically, individuals were either spending time in sports venues because they or a family member was playing or they were assisting in high performance training or competition. In many cases, they observed an unsafe situation firsthand: *"I have a grandchild in the sport so I'm on the ground, and the stuff I notice is appalling... They [coaches] know the rules - they know, but they go, 'Who'll know?'"*



In other cases, being in clubs creates opportunities for secondhand information to be casually transferred through word of mouth: "*Complaints come from rumours - people said something to someone, who said something to you. Sometimes it might have happened a long time ago."* Participants cited specific examples that involved hearing word of mouth from friends and family members in the sport, from colleagues while judging or coaching. Notably, no participants mentioned finding out about rumours through digital media. Without first-hand knowledge of the situation, participants found it challenging to decide how to respond: *"That's the hard part. Someone said something happened but there's nothing's coming from the athlete, from the parent. Do I report him?"*

Roughly a quarter of the time, participants reported that they found out at the same time as the general public when stories broke in the media. They were left wondering *"Were any of my athletes involved?"* and scrambling to begin the process of information collecting while simultaneously attempting to manage sometimes fierce public scrutiny. At times, local clubs heard of media reports and passed along the information to their PSO: *"It broke on the news, and right away the club where they were a coach emailed us."* In other remaining quarter of cases, clubs received information from parents or athletes and passed it along to their PSO through official channels.

A number of participants' accounts of safe sport issues revealed that trusting personal relationships appear to have helped bring issues to light. A few participants highlighted that people talk to them because they're *"known"* in their communities - in their roles with the PSO, as a coach or ex-athlete, or their other roles in the community. For example: one major incident was brought to a participant's attention when *"The club president contacted me - he and I know each other."* Indeed, participants' accounts suggest there is truth to the idea that *"It's hard to know because we don't have clubs telling us unless one of us has [personal] connections to the LSO directly."* Within a context in which organizations are seen as distrustful and secretive, these accounts suggests that individuals may negotiate risk by opting to share information through trusted personal contacts, where possible.

2.5 Necessity breads creativity

It was evident that some organizations were expressly attempting to share information widely and increase transparency, in spite of on-going uncertainty about the best manner for implementation. Speaking about sharing sanctions with their sport community, one participant said, *"That's one of the things too - Who do we tell? How broadly do we paint that brush? We've taken the approach that we'd rather be criticized for telling too many people."* Some had gone so far as to develop events where the PSO actively sought information directly from athletes and coaches, opening up new lines of communication; *"We know we need to find out what's going on".* For example, one participant shared that their PSO devoted time at an annual sport-wide event to gathering feedback. They asked coaches, athletes, and executives of all ages to anonymously submit the "good, bad and ugly" about their sport, including incidents that had happened to them or that they'd heard of, and asked them to share why they didn't report. Other PSOs were publicly sharing information about individuals who have been sanctioned for breaking Codes of Conduct.

Participants also side-stepped the rigid vertical hierarchies within their organizations by jumping horizontally, creating connections with other sports. The majority of

interview participants indicated that they had collaborated with or built upon resources from another sport. They had communicated with members of other PSOs and NSOs and *"shared lots of material"* or *"put them in touch with the CCCP [Canadian Centre for Child Protection]".* They had developed messaging campaigns and materials for athletes and offered them to other sports, *"stolen"* strong appeals policies, adapted parent handbooks they admired, amended workshops and called multi-sport organizations in their network for help when lost. Participants expressed that they were *"willing to work with other PSOs; They can always reach out to us"* to learn about the changes they've made, and successes and failures they encountered. As such, interviews revealed that participants were able and motivated to continue to strengthen ties supporting each other across sports.

2.6 "We're a people organization"

"We're close-knit; we all know each other," was a common refrain amongst participants. Their comments highlighted the interpersonal nature of sport systems. Connections are arguably closer than many other interest communities; individuals see each other on a regular basis and work to create a sense of camaraderie, they develop and move through levels of an organization together over years, experience emotional highs and lows with their colleagues, and forge intimate friendships. These realities can make it more difficult to distinguish between normal behaviour and something that is "too" personal, and respond to it appropriately.

At its best, the interpersonal element of sport offers members a rich community. For many participants, this kind of personal connection is what fueled their long-term engagement with sport organizations: *"It sounded kind of goofy when I started but it's true that you become a family. Honestly, I have some of the best friends in [this sport] that I never see except when I go to competition, so many people who've become a big part of my life."* Despite friendly rivalries, communities encourage growth and a sense of place: *"They're all in competition with each other but there's still that camaraderie and support. Everybody gets along."* And when issues arise, interpersonal relationships helped sports find pragmatic solutions, filling the gaps that exist in formal procedures or policies. Participants relied on community to help resolve conflicts, build social norms in the absence of set rules, and help enforce practices that keep athletes safer without the need for bureaucracy or slow-moving policies. *"This is where being a small sport is kind of helpful,"* affirmed one participant.

However, on the other side of the same coin, the highly interpersonal nature of sport leaves the system vulnerable to nepotism. Participants talked about instances of favouritism, such as high level officials choosing to assign friends to officiate games rather than using locally available individuals. In another example, a participant told of a club President who actively undermined the PSO's attempts to respond to inappropriate conduct. The PSO had banned a coach from the playing area, however:

> *"The club President was actually one of the few people who refused to believe that the volunteer had done wrong....I said, 'We have enough evidence,' and provided the club President with that evidence and he just kept saying, 'No, no, it's not the way it appears.' Finally we said 'We're doing this, you need to respect this decision', and it turned out that he didn't. The coach would show up [at the playing area], and these guys had volunteered together and had developed a friendship so the President was over there yakking away with this guy. Finally we had to discipline him, too."*

The personal nature of sport systems may also have influenced peoples' response to inappropriate conduct. Frequently, participants indicated their wish to give offenders a chance to change their behaviour. The feeling that poor behaviour was a manner of *"misinterpreting"* was common; *"Maybe this guy he does not even comprehend or notice his behaviour."*

As a result, the stance taken was often that *"most of the time it's an overall education piece"* that was required to resolve well intentioned ignorance. Similarly, participants expressed that they would consider the perpetrator's motivations when responding. One individual explained their organization's approach:

> *"The advisor always meets with the complainant, then they always have to meet with the respondent. Then the advisor would look at that and go, 'The respondent seems reasonable' or 'They're sorry'... 'Ok, they were sorry, they didn't intend to, maybe there's a chance...'" Then, the advisor would ask the respondent, "'What would you be willing to do?' So they'd see if they can resolve it."*

Part of PSOs' roles generally is to support not only athletes but all other stakeholders, and participants were considering safe sport from this angle, too. *"We also have to keep in mind protecting coaches. For example, what do we do if we know mum is a nut job and we know, and we know it's [i.e., an allegation] probably not true? How do we protect the children, but also the coaches who could also be falsely accused?"* People also feared instigating anything without knowing the full context for fear that it might result in harmful outcomes: *"You don't know how big it's going to spiral out."* Balancing risk to all parties was particularly challenging when it when was one person's word against another's without *"concrete evidence"* such as multiple accounts, witnesses, or video footage. Participants expressed reticence to move on word of mouth alone because of the sometimes political nature of sport: *"We try not to participate in whisperings; it's often someone trying to undermine someone else's position."*

However, other participants warned expressly against this view. In the words of one person, their greatest take-away from child safety training ran contrary to assuming ignorance: *"You don't know the people that you think you know. Never think that the individual that you think you saw do something, that it's accidental. It could be, but not because you know the person."* Certainly, some participants shared stories about the harmful ways in which assuming ignorance had affected their response to inappropriate conduct in the past. One individual reflected on their PSO's response to emerging allegations:

> *"A couple years ago we had an über volunteer - it didn't matter what committee they needed, [this person] was doing everything that the club ever wanted. They thought [this person] was the best thing since sliced bread. They received a complaint from another club that the person had approached a minor and set up a relationship through social media with them; it was [the athlete's] parent that reported the person. We screwed up the investigation so badly. It was the first one I'd been involved with, I had no clue what to do with that. I still feel horrible....We kept on deferring to this [person] - 'You're innocent until proven guilty,' 'till finally we started to gain more information, we found out different places where they'd been playing the same MO [modus operandi]."*

Importantly, however, the same participants acknowledged the deep discomfort sometimes inherent in this stance: *"[The sport]'s a very close-knit group of people, we all know each other across the world. It's like reporting your uncle."*

> If you penalize a not-for-profit community club you're seen as a pretty big bully.

2.7 People scarcity and power imbalances

"We take whoever will volunteer because there's not lots of people in the basket." Perhaps the most consistently repeated assertion amongst participants was that sports are facing shortages of coaches and other volunteers, meaning that they're forced to accept assistance from less-than-ideal candidates. This real or perceived lack of coaches and volunteers created a significant power imbalance, in which participants felt that they *"don't have the luxury"* of asking coaches and volunteers to leave: *"If they're not running the program, there is no program."* In the words of another participant, *"It's either 50 people who practice with a bad coach or 50 people who don't get the opportunity to practice."* Is it more athlete-centred, then, wondered one person, to allow players to practice their sport with a poor coach or reduce coach availability? In this context of scarcity, participants were struggling to answer, *"How do we allow them [athletes] to continue the sport but also create a better situation?"*

These pressures were ever more pronounced outside of urban centres. *"If you're in a smaller club or community you don't necessarily have the option [to find a different coach]...In a city like Vancouver if you don't like that club there's many other clubs in the area, but in rural areas they may only have one or two coaches."* Participants had indeed witnessed the dissolution of their sport in small communities when a coach retired or was sanctioned, leaving no one left to train athletes. Further, scarcity was perceived to be an issue not only for sports with volunteer coaches. In areas with paid coaching staff, participants shared that lifestyle is the limiting factor: *"Not very many new people are coming into high performance because there are very few young people interested in that type of life - really intense, with little time off."*

In addition to lacking the *quantity* of people to fill necessary roles, a number of participants felt that their organization's capacity to tackle issues - particularly safe sport - was undermined by not having people with the right skill sets in the right roles. Often, participants expressed that their organization lacked a trained 'people person' able to navigate the kinds of tricky interpersonal situations that arise with sexual harassment and abuse. Interviews suggested that these situations were instead managed by individuals hired for different aptitudes. As one participant said, *"Who they appoint is important. You can't appoint an administrator to do a human interaction."* Strains on organizational resources are likely to affect their ability to access the right talents, but participants also highlighted that elected boards can contribute: *"I also believe that not all positions should be elected. The board should be able to appoint members to the board to have more robust members with skill sets,"* allowing PSOs to amass a team of individuals with the necessary skills to tackle contemporary challenges.

2.8 Hesitance to discipline

Organizations' fear of losing key members translated into a hesitance to discipline individuals for poor or unsafe behaviour. In many situations, they felt that they were incapable of enforcing existing safe sport policies when individuals didn't comply. Speaking about incomplete criminal record checks, one individual asked: *"Where's our jurisdiction? What do we do if someone says no because clubs are struggling to get volunteers?....The clubs say, 'We're not going to do this [enforce check] because we need this person.... They ask us, 'Are you going to run our teams for us?' Obviously we can't."* Moreover, in organizations with already limited capacity, choices that further impede activities are not perceived kindly: *"If you penalize a non-profit community club you're seen as a pretty big bully."* Participants reported that such significant power imbalances between coaches and volunteers on the one hand, and clubs and PSOs on the other were noticeably impacting their ability to implement safe sport policies and practices; *"Our hands are tied because they keep threatening to walk away."*

Additionally, clubs' unwillingness to sanction or dismiss coaches and volunteers risks perpetuating negative behaviours as people self-select into communities that feel aligned with their values. As one participant explained, some coaches are *"not teaching the things that we want, and we continue to keep them because we can't get other people. Then it's catch-22; I look at him and go, 'That's not me (reflected in others' coaching style), so I'm not going to coach.'"* Conversely, another participant expressed their support for more hard line approaches to coaches. In order to enact safe sport at the local level, *"It's finding a few of these champions [of safe sport]...That might weed out some of the more stubborn coaches. But it's fine, we don't want them being representatives of the sport anyway....You can't keep everybody happy."*

Beyond a reluctance to penalize, a number of differences between paid and volunteer personnel arose during conversations. Participants shared that the perception of volunteers is noticeably different; philanthropy is considered morally superior. In the words of one individual, *"The clubs never believe that any volunteer they have will ever do anything bad."* Coupled with lower screening, reference checking, and less training for volunteers than paid staff, participants expressed that volunteers are generally less *"aware of their responsibilities"* and less well-prepared to take on safe sport than paid staff, leaving both them and their athletes more vulnerable; *"That's the difference. [Paid] coaches understand the risks they have if they're not following safer sport practices."* This is especially the case at lower levels of coaching, as certain policies and practices are applied for high performance coaches but it *"doesn't extend past them into recreational level."*

2.9
Fear of reprisal

Fear is a strong driver of behaviour. In the context of safe sport, losing coaches is not the only outcome about which people are concerned; as one person said, *"The fear is always retribution."* Multiple participants asserted that people reporting a safe sport concern are apprehensive that their actions will result in reduced opportunities for themselves or for their athletes. This is especially pronounced when "the person can make decisions on your athletes," like influencing their selection or success at competition. The situation for high performance athletes may be more difficult than at the recreational level; *"Historically, the info I've received tells me that most of this is going to happen at the competitive level because of the power the coach holds over kids and parents."*

Certainly, participants were able to provide multiple instances they perceived to be cases of reprisal. For example, one participant shared that a player in their sport had accused a coach of sexual harassment but had not followed through submitting a formal complaint or pressing charges. The participant asserted that this was because of the victim's fear of retaliation: *"[The perpetrator] has a lot of clout, money, power. They're an influential person, not just in our sport....[The victim] knows if they come forward it will be hard for them because they don't want it to ruin their [own] career."* In another incident, a participant recounted that a junior coach spoke up to a senior coach about their unsafe coaching style with young athletes. It was not received well by the senior coach and *"the [junior] coach is now facing retribution because he mentioned something."*

3. Responding to sexual harassment & abuse

Interviews delved into the ways that organizations are attempting to respond to sexual harassment and abuse. This section identifies some of the core opportunities and on-going vulnerabilities facing sport organizations.

3.1
Experience with sexual harassment & abuse

In interviews, nearly all participants reported having some level of experience with incidents of sexual harassment and abuse. Circumstances ranged in intensity from firsthand experience, to in-depth involvement responding to incidents, to hearing of unconfirmed incidents within their sport. Incidents involved all categories of stakeholders: athletes of all genders and ages, coaches, parent, officials. Significantly, participants expressed that the majority of safe sport issues with which they struggled were not those clearly criminal in nature. For those issues, both the inappropriate behaviour and the subsequent course of action were clear-cut. Instead, they were smaller, day-to-day incidents: an action or choice that feels off or *"icky"*, or *"a bad comment."* Rather than speak up, *"we turn a cheek"* for fear of the potential repercussions.

Another noteworthy trend emerged amongst participants' accounts of safe sport complaints involving athletes: In multiple instances, athletes expressed an issue to a coach or other authority figure. Sometimes, that issue was brought forward to the PSO immediately, while other times it was first dismissed. Frequently, PSOs sanctioned the offending party once they had received reports of similar behaviour from multiple athletes and often, it was only when PSOs began actively seeking information that they uncovered a series of events. This was the case for one PSO: *"The people that looked into the appeal said, 'You need to go out and get more information.' That's when we started to find more about the pattern of this behaviour."*

One participant shared an incident illustrative of these trends. At a sporting celebration, *"girls would come out [of the venue] and tell coaches what was going on, and coaches would just say, 'Well, don't go back there.' I had coaches telling me, 'I didn't think it was that big of a deal.' They had a break in the [event], and there were a bunch of girls in the washroom, different girls telling the same story. We started to realize it was whole bunch of girls, about 20 girls who witnessed it or were [harassed]. We didn't find out about it till it got to that stage."*

> The people that looked into the appeal said, 'You need to go out and get more information.' That's when we started to find more about the pattern of this behaviour.

Patterns of dismissal or inaction may also be affected by peoples' reluctance to become fully involved in formally reporting safe sport concerns. Interestingly, a number of participants shared that they will receive emails about issues *"that could be a breach of the Code of Conduct but no one wants to complain."* Some emails were even sent anonymously. The participants typically emailed backing, asking *"'Can you provide me with more details?', but people don't write back. I need details - I have nothing to move forward on."* Without additional information, participants felt they were left with few recourses to action and typically did not take the issue any further. However, for other participants, this approach was not acceptable; the costs of failing to report - and *stop* - an issue have the potential to inflict great harm. As one individual expressed, *"At one point you have to say if you're totally on board with this [safe sport], then you have to do it and you take whatever repercussions."*

3.2 Wrestling with implementation

One of the most ubiquitous patterns in interviews was the degree to which participants reported feeling uncertain. This was demonstrated at everything from the most foundational level up; in many participants' views, not all members of organizations shared the same understanding of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. For example, one individual recounted their negative experience addressing their colleague about inappropriate conduct. The colleague responded poorly, expressing that they disagreed that their behaviour was wrong, prompting the participant to assert that further education was needed to clarify the boundaries: *"Once everybody's on the same page understanding the box, we all know what's outside of the box."*

Uncertainty further permeated the process of building capacity to deal with sexual harassment and abuse in sport. Most people expressed doubts about how to integrate safe sport principles into their organizations, from training to emergency response: *"We have an onus to train [volunteers] but how do I train them?,"* asked one participant. *"Are people going to know where to call? What to do with the info?" "In my head I don't know how it [handling an issue] would work..."* Participants were often convinced they had to change something but were struggling to answer the practical application; 'But how?'

Participants' lack of clarity was further compounded by mixed messages from different sources. At times, given levels of the same organization responded in distinct ways. For example, one participant observed inappropriate behaviour from a coach. The participant had received training about sexual harassment and abuse which stressed the importance of reporting, so the individual decided to record the event: *"I reported and that was to our NSO, and the NSO - their response was,'Well, why did you write it down? You could have just said something [to us]."* The participant felt that a historical lack of clarity around safe sport continues to prevail: *"It used to be this way and I feel the same thing is still not clearly understood, not clearly felt from every individual that this is what needs to be done."*

> Once everybody's on the same page understanding the box, we all know what's outside of the box.

3.3 Policy has an important place

The overarching opinion amongst interviewees appeared to be that policy is a good starting place, particularly for developing clear, shared understandings of norms. Whilst it cannot provide all the answers, it does constitute something upon which to fall back when needed. As one person said, "It's a lot of stuff to know, but luckily I don't have to know it off top of my head...I know we have a code. If I had a situation, I would just go refer to it and find it. There have been situations in which I go, 'Wait, we have a policy for that....Having the ability to go to a policy is beneficial."

Certainly, participants indicated their interest in developing new policy — particularly, pragmatic policies that outline procedures for responding to challenging situations. For example, one participant articulated their view that *"If there were provincial guidelines that say clearly, 'This is what needs to happen,' it would put a lot less pressure on us, to know that you're going about it the right way."* This was complimented by a handful of other participants, who commented that certain elements of the system - such as reporting mechanisms - must be independent and external to the PSOs.

Similarly, participants also expressed noticeable support for policies aligned across sports and levels of organizations. They felt that aligned policies would put *"everyone on the same page. It'd be nice to see consistency."* This way, *"when you walk into a club you know what's available....I know I can report or say something on inappropriate behaviour and know that someone will respond."* Similarly, participants pointed to the reduction in labour that might compliment aligned policies and procedures, avoiding the need to repeat screening or develop policies from scratch. Importantly, any new policies must apply across contexts, participants felt: *"We need to make policy transferable, whether you have paid staff or volunteer."*

> I knew that people would ask, 'Great policy but how does it apply?' so I made up examples to present.

Despite the wide variety of sports involved in this series of interviews, participants articulated the view that policy alignment was feasible and had advantages to offer them. *"Policies don't need to change that much sport to sport....There's no point reinventing the wheel."* In fact, in addition to saved resources, participants articulated a number of benefits to aligned policies, including higher impact messaging: *"For the most part kids play multiple sports so if they're seeing that message in multiple environments, all the better."* Further, another participant shared that messaging perceived as cutting across sports would be more powerful: *"LSOs and individuals would listen more if it was our message but supported by viaSport...Sportwide initiatives have more impact."*

3.4 Bridging policy and practice

Participants saw policy as a necessary tool for tackling sexual harassment and abuse. However, participants were wrestling most with the implementation of existing policies in real-life situations. Policies are, by nature, based on an ideal situation, but their application in real life is often more complicated; *"It's fairly easy to write a policy but how does it apply to everyday things and how do you manage it?"* They pointed to the reality that, despite best intentions, *"there are going to be times it's not 100% by the book."* In general, *"it's really hard for us to enforce policies unless [local clubs] help enforce."* Further, participants answers reflected the need for policy to have enough flexibility to account for the human element of sport. For example, one participant articulated, *"There are situations where we have little kids - I have 11-year-old kids. They may need a hug or an extra bit of time alone with me"* which might overstep policy.

While some individuals and PSOs struggled to apply policies, others were forging their own ways ahead. One person shared their approach for bridging policy and practice: *"I was responsible for selling safe sport to our board. They were white paper-type ideas....I knew that people would ask, 'Great policy but how does it apply?'* so I made up examples to present." The individual created a rubric to help stakeholders self-evaluate their actions. They felt that their approach *"set an example and let people know it's not that complicated... Just do something and let people know you've done something and are thinking about it because it's then a conversation, it's not hidden."*

Other participants echoed the importance of communication as the means to bridging policy and practice.

Discussing the Rule of Two at events, one participant said, "*We do try our best, and we also try to be open and transparent when we don't have Rule of Two going. For example, I had a coach…her [athlete] came and fell asleep in her room. She texted to say, 'I don't want to get into trouble, my door is open.'…I feel like any rule we put in place, someone's going to find way to break it if they want to, but it's being open and transparent that we're trying to make headway.*"

3.5 Bringing in reinforcements

Interviews revealed that many organizations were tapping into external resources to help them navigate complex safe sport situations. This pattern is likely influenced by organizations' lack of ability to meet their needs internally through the skill sets of their employees and volunteers;[3] *"We need a body that would be able 3 to take it off our plate come back with strategy."* In two interviews, PSOs reported hiring third parties to investigate and provide support around complaints. Two additional PSOs had contracted assistant to review and strengthen their by-laws and policies, and to gather feedback from local-level participants to feed back into their programming.

Bringing in external organizations allowed PSOs to very intentionally select for the expertise lacking within their organization. Further, they perceived that it increased the legitimacy of the findings: *"Having that third party, it helps us for our messaging, that we did research behind it….My view was that if we do an internal review, regardless of what we come up with, people would criticize the process because it's not a third party, so it's not objective."* However, this approach does come with costs in a resource-limited sphere. In the words of one participant, *"It's a strain on the resources. I don't think that [the ED] complained once that we had to pay it but I know that it's a strain."*

> Having that third party, it helps us for our messaging, that we did research behind it….My view was that if we do an internal review, regardless of what we come up with, people would criticize the process because it's not a third party, so it's not objective.

3.6 Athlete and parent empowerment

As organizations seek to build solutions to combat sexual harassment and abuse, athletes and parents represent a critical piece - but are, as of yet, an untapped resource. Few PSOs reported engaging directly with parents and athletes around the topic; the exception was a small handful of sports in which parents have historically perpetuated cultures of aggression and unsafe conduct. In these PSOs, education campaigns and accountability measures seek to bring parents and athletes into the fold.

Participants pointed to the need for a greater focus on involving athletes in discussions around harassment and abuse, often pushing back against the pronounced hierarchy common in sport. One participant discussed an educational measure used by their PSO: *"It gives them [athletes] the permission to say, 'No, it's not ok, why are you doing this?' Adults tend to impose their power. From where I sit, giving athletes the power is critically important."* Participants expressed that athlete

[3] See 'People scarcity and power imbalances' for more information

empowerment was a crucial component of the solution that cannot be omitted in order to achieve widespread systemic change. *"Until they [athletes] can stand up and say, 'No, this isn't acceptable'....Until parents are demanding this, we're not changing the culture. We have to change the mindset of the organization."*

> If a picture ends up on my desk, how many people have seen it before I've seen it?...It can come back and haunt them down the road.

3.7 On-going areas of vulnerability

In addition to opportunities, interviews surfaced a handful of common safe sport vulnerabilities across PSOs. Travel continues to present a challenge, as most organizations have *"outdated"* policies in that respect. Due to the often prohibitive costs of travel, policies like Rule of Two are more difficult to enact when on the road for training and competition. As one participant explained, *"[Our sport] is an expensive sport. If we have one male and one female [traveling to competition] there's no way we or the individuals can pay for two coaches to go."* Further, travel to and from daily training facilities was often unaddressed: *"Coaches picking up kids and driving them to [practice] - we have no policy that they can't do that. They're one-on-one... It's up to the parent whether a kid travels to [practice] with their coach."* Decisions about this travel was left up to the discretion of individual athletes or their parents, rather than with formal guidance from the sport organization.

Practice and competition facilities were identified as another area of vulnerability due to the lack of influence PSOs have over these public or semi-public areas: *"We don't control the schedule in the venue,"* and therefore have little control of other teams and members of the public legitimately entering or leaving the space before or after play. Similarly, the physical spaces were often unfavourable to safer sport. One participant cited that 95% of the venues they use include one room in which officiates can change, which they described as a *"big open space, maybe it has a bathroom, maybe a shower,"* meaning that female and male officiates - often of very different ages - are forced to change together. If people elect to change in the washroom, in some cases *"to get to the bathroom you have to walk through the public hallway,"* exposing individuals to a long walk in undergarments. Short of developing their own facilities, these PSOs felt limited by the infrastructure necessary for their sport.

Another contextual vulnerability increasingly faced by PSOs is the problematic use of digital media. Participants spoke about how athletes - particularly young ones - are *"adding coaches on social media, direct messaging with them....The parents may not know they're messaging."* While some participants felt this was acceptable behaviour, others felt it introduced too much vulnerability and were working to apply the Rule of Two to digital interactions as with offline relationships. Transmission of video and photos by social media was of particular concern to a few participants: *"Another situation we get is pictures. If a picture ends up on my desk, how many people have seen it before I've seen it? Where is it now? Does that kid know that that photo's out there? Do parents have any idea? It can come back and haunt them down the road."* Photos were frequently taken in change rooms, creating the opportunity for rapid, uncontrolled spread of potentially compromising photos with little time to react.

The content of this report shared the perspectives of 17 individuals on safe sport, their sport contexts, and the opportunities and challenges inherent within them. This ethnographic data, in combination with existing research, and consultation with government, experts, and stakeholders is informing the safe sport strategic framework to put participants and victims first while supporting people to effectively respond through: reporting, investigation, prevention, and compliance.

QUESTIONS?
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