

Youth Sport Administrators' Perceptions of Child Abuse Policies and Training

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(including questions)**

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Youth sports is one of the largest segments of the sport industry, generating over \$5 billion annually. Each year, 30 to 40 million children participate in a variety of programs throughout the United States that are offered by private, public, and non-profit organizations (Wagner, Jones & Riepenhoff, 2010). Because of the significant child population, it is paramount for sport organizations to implement measures for child protection (Kerr & Sterling, 2008). Of particular concern for youth sport administrators is the abuse and maltreatment of participants in their sport programs. If youth sport programs are to be successful, administrators and leaders must develop and implement policies and procedures that place the safety of their youth participants as their main priority (Brackenridge, 2002). High profile cases have brought attention to this issue, particularly in youth sport and recreation settings. In response to these incidents, numerous sport organizations throughout the U.S. have engaged in measures to train the administrators of their youth programs to identify and address issues related to child abuse, with the most notable issue involving the reporting of suspected child abuse.

Studies conducted on child protection in sport have indicated a number of issues appear to hamper the implementation of policies and other measures geared toward protecting children from abusive behaviors, such as a lack of resources, fear, and administrative difficulties (Parent & Demers, 2011). Research has also shown a policy void relating to child protection between sport federations and affiliated local clubs, indicating measures implemented by higher-level organizations rarely reach their lower-level counterparts (Brackenridge 2002, Brackenridge et al., 2004). Administrators of programs, though versed about their child protection policies, often encounter numerous administrative problems in carrying out said policies, such as long delays in criminal background checks or problems with regard to the sharing of information about offending coaches among sport organizations (Brackenridge et al., 2004). Other agencies fail to address allegations of abuse for fear of losing successful coaches and denying the existence of abuse in their organizations (Malkin, Johnson & Brackenridge, 2000). These studies have mostly been conducted in a European context, and current knowledge on the subject, particularly in the United States, remains scant (Parent & Demers, 2011).

The purpose of this study is to determine the perceptions of youth sport administrators' awareness of their organizations' policies relating to signs and symptoms of child abuse, and reporting procedures concerning such abuse. It seeks to investigate youth sport administrators' self-reported knowledge related to the following: 1) signs and symptoms of child maltreatment, 2) reporting procedures for child abuse, 3) legal issues surrounding child abuse, 4) their awareness of their organizations' policies pertaining to child abuse, and 5) the level of training provided by their organization regarding the reporting of child abuse.

Youth sport administrators from public recreation departments, non-profit organizations, and for-profit businesses that offer youth sport and recreation programs will be targeted by the researcher. For the purpose of this study, a youth sport administrator is defined as one who is responsible for the programming, implementation, and administration of sport and recreation programs and activities for children 17 years of age and younger. A purposive sampling of administrators of youth sports programs throughout a Midwestern state were identified as potential subjects through an Internet search of organizations with youth sport programs. The survey instrument used is an adaptation of the Educators and Child Abuse Questionnaire developed by Kenney (2001) in order to relate to perspectives of youth sport administrators. The first portion of the survey uses a 5-point Likert scale assessing their level of agreement with 12 statements related to (a) competence in identifying and assessing various types of child abuse, (b) knowledge of reporting procedures, and (c) attitudes toward their organization's policies and procedures regarding child abuse. The second portion of the survey requests specific demographic information, such as age, gender, ethnic background, experience in youth sport administration, years in their current position, and educational background. Face validity of the instrument was established through an extensive review of pertinent literature, and evaluated by experts in the field of sport management and survey research. Results from the survey will be

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compared with the demographic data using measures of central tendencies and correlations.

The study will have been completed by the date of the presentation. Discussion will include the practical implications of the results for administrators of youth sport programs, as well as limitations and suggestions for future research.