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**Submission**

**to the Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children**

**in reference to 2021 Annual Thematic Report: *Gender dimension of the sale and sexual exploitation of children and the importance of integrating a human rights-based and non-binary approach to combating and eradicating sale and sexual exploitation of children***

The Centre for Sport and Human Rights (CSHR) welcomes the Call for Input by the Special Rapporteur on the Sale and Sexual Exploitation of Children for her 2021 Thematic Report on the “*Gender dimension of the sale and sexual exploitation of children and the importance of integrating a human rights-based and a non-binary approach to combating and eradicating sale and sexual exploitation of children*.” In continuing its collaboration with the Special Rapporteur, CSHR provides the input below with **a specific focus on the sexual abuse of boys in sport.**

In addition to the inputs provided, the CSHR promoted the submissions from a number of its partners on the issue of sexual abuse in the **sport** environment of children who identify outside the gender binary. The CSHR also calls attention to the independent submission to the Report made by Mission 89 on the sale and trafficking of children in s**port** and the independent submission of the Caribbean Sport and Development Agency on the sale and sexual exploitation of boys in **sport** in the Caribbean.

CSHR acknowledges the contribution to the paper provided by Safe Sport International whose research group includes some of the world’s foremost experts on the abuse of boys in sport.

After an overview of about the sexual abuse and exploitation of boys in sport, this paper responds to Questions 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 of the key questions in the Call for Input. It ends with a list of references on the topic.

**Sexual Abuse and Exploitation of Boys in Sport – Largely hidden with non-recent cases giving a glimpse into its extent**

Worldwide millions of boys are engaged in sport, from elite athletes to those in organised school or community teams. For the majority, sport brings a range of positive benefits. However, for some sport can bring experiences of sexual abuse and exploitation which up until recently has been largely hidden or ignored.

In the past two decades, a growing number of men began to break their silence and disclose their boyhood experiences of abuse in sport. In reaction, investigations into non-recent cases have been undertaken. A few examples include:

* In 2021, an [Independent Review of Child Abuse in Football](https://www.thefa.com/news/2021/mar/17/clive-sheldon-qc-independent-commission-report-released-20210317) in the United Kingdom 1970-2005 documented 893 survivors, mostly boys.
* In 2020, an accusation by a single victim inspired 800 others, mostly men,to come forward and unleash[disclosures of their abuse](https://www.mlive.com/news/ann-arbor/2020/04/former-university-of-michigan-football-players-reported-sexual-abuse-by-doctor-to-three-trainers-lawsuits-say.html) when they were students, perpetrated over a period of almost four decades by a physician in the University of Michigan’s Athletic Department.
* In 2019, a [report](https://presspage-production-content.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2170/finalredactedstraussinvestigationreport-471531.pdf?10000) was released that documented the abuse of 177 male students by a physician of Ohio State University Athletic Department. The students were members of sport teams in wrestling, gymnastics, swimming, soccer, lacrosse, hockey baseball, track and field, tennis, volleyball, and fencing.
* **In 2019,** [a joint investigation](https://www.cbc.ca/sports/amateur-sports-coaches-sexual-offences-minors-1.5006609) **by CBC News and CBC Sports revealed** found that at least 222 coaches who were involved in amateur sports in Canada have been convicted of sexual offences in the past 20 years. Those convictions involve more than 600 victims under the age of 18.

Such reports of cases that occurred in the past, and are only now brought forward, signal the need for greater attention to the sexual abuse and exploitation of boys in sport, including disclosure and reporting in more timely manner.

Overall there is little data available on the sexual abuse and exploitation of boys in sport. Prevalence rates at regional and global levels are unknown. In the paper ‘[Sexual abuse in Sport: What about boys?’,](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/254408234_Sexual_abuse_in_sport_What_about_boys) Parent and Bannon referenced prevalence rates found in studies from Canada, Australia, and the UK. Given differences in methodologies, terminology, contexts and the limited number and size of studies, the paper did not present a common prevalence rate. However the authors did conclude that sexual abuse of boys ‘does indeed exist in the context of sport.’ Vertommen et al (2016) reported that 17.2 percent of girls and 10.2 percent of boys experienced sexual violence in organised sport.

While most studies on child abuse in sport report a greater percentage of victimisation of girls exchanged in sport, scholars suggest that this may be due to the significant underreporting of cases involving boys. It has also been found that boys tend to experience more forceful and severe abuse.

1. What forms of existing societal norms, practices/behaviours (cultural, social, traditional or other) may explicitly or implicitly involve and/or manifest sale and sexual exploitation of children?

Sport is dominated by hierarchical and hypermasculine cultures. Boys participating in organised sports are often socialised in these cultures from a young age. This can influence the sexual exploitation of boys in sport in myriad ways. As is observed by Hartill: “Boyhood-sport extorts the submission, complicity and silence of young males to their own exploitation.” The rigid, asymmetric, and often unsupervised relationship between a coach and an athlete is ripe for abuses of power. Moreover coaches, frequently held in high regard parents and communities, and who project the stereotypical image of strong masculinity may be perceived as unlikely perpetrators of abuse of boys.

1. Please provide contextual information on any existing good practices, policies or legislation tackling sale and sexual exploitation of children that include a gender dimension that takes into account different gender identities.

Examples of good practice:

* Rowing Canada Aviron’s 2021 [Safe Sport Policy Manual](https://rowingcanada.org/uploads/2021/04/RCA-Safe-Sport-Policy-Manual_FINAL.pdf) makes significant provision for gender and takes into account different gender identities.
* MomsTeam.com® is an online practical information and guidance service for parents of children engaged in sport. Its mission is to make sure that youth sports is safe for all children. It has a number of resource materials on boys and sport. An example of one of guides on the sexual abuse of boys can be found [here.](https://www.momsteam.com/health-safety/sexual-abuse-of-boys-in-sports-does-the-sports-culture-itself-play-a-role?page=0%2C1)
* In collaboration with Football Beyond Borders, the Gillette company is sponsoring the ‘Made of What Matters’ campaign that promotes positive versions of masculinity in sport.

1. What forms and manifestations do gender dimensions take in the context of the eradication and prevention of the sale and sexual exploitation of children, boys in particular, including online, and which ones are the most prevalent. Please provide information about the causes and manifestations of gender dimension, and how it affects the eradication and prevention of sale and sexual exploitation of children.

To end the sexual exploitation and abuse of boys in sport requires a major breakthrough in the disclosure and reporting of such experiences. The silence that protects perpetrators must be broken. Timely disclosure and response needs to become the norm.

A number of studies have documented that boys are less likely than girls to disclose abuse and have identified gender specific barriers to disclosure including sociocultural taboos related to homosexuality and norms pertaining to masculinity. (see UNICEF: [Research on the Sexual Exploitation of Boys](https://data.unicef.org/resources/sexual-exploitation-boys-findings-ethical-considerations-methodological-challenges/), page 14)

In the sport environment, there are additional barriers. Toxic masculine ideals such as extreme self-reliance and the avoidance of appearing weak, coupled with a normalized nature of abusive behaviour in sport, can make disclosure and reporting less likely. This is particularly the case when combined with a team-first ethos that subordinates the best interests of the child for that of the group. Additionally, the high social capital assigned to sports leaders and sporting accomplishment can lead to abuse being overlooked by guardians, tolerated or even hidden as a cost of achieving sporting success.

Studies and investigations (like those mentioned earlier) indicate that the majority of boys do not disclosure their sexual abuse, and when they do it is many years (often more than 25 years) after it occurred.

1. Please indicate any specific measures aimed at reducing vulnerability of children to sale and sexual exploitation in a gender-and disability-responsive, as well as age-and child-sensitive manner.

Some of the good measures that can be undertaken are:

**Preventative work:**

* Ensure boys and their parents/caregivers understand early on issues related to protection and wellbeing in sport
* Ensure boys know how, and feel safe, to disclose and understand the importance of disclosing in a time in close proximity to when grooming or abuse occurred
* Empower coaches to teach boys healthy masculinity

**Athlete Voices:**

* Include boys and male adult athletes in discussions about abuse issues, taking into account their voice in how to proceed

**Leadership:**

* Develop young leaders to work with boys
* Feature famous male athletes who publicly speak out about abuse and talk with young male athletes about rights, grooming, empowerment, personal safety, etc.
* Applaud sports bodies and governments that adopt good policy and practice and continually improve their implementation
* Develop international standards for training (safeguarding officers; case management officers; child’s rights in sport advisors, etc.)
* Develop global leadership to address the situation that includes sport and non-sport child protection stakeholders and personalities

**Organizational accountability:**

* Ensure safeguarding policies and procedures are in place, understood by all stakeholders, strongly and visibly supported by top leadership, and regularly monitored.
* Hold sport organisations accountable for their actions or absence of actions
* Hold accountable enablers and by-standers of sexual abuse
* Place great emphasis on the importance of children’s rights at the earliest levels of boys’ involvement with sport

**Case Management Measures:**

* Ensure third-party independent mechanisms for disclosure and reporting
* Ensure bespoke support for boys who have experienced abuse

1. What measures and safeguards can be put in place to identify the protection needs of vulnerable children in order to prevent, prohibit and protect them from all forms of sale and sexual exploitation, including examples of child-friendly, independent, timely and effective reporting and complaints mechanisms made available without discrimination in child-friendly spaces at community, national, and regional level.

As awareness has grown about the abuse of children in sport, international sports bodies and federations, national governments and civil society groups are increasingly taking steps to address the situation.

International Sports Bodies and Federations

In 2019 FIFA launched its [Guardians Programme](https://www.fifa.com/what-we-do/fifa-guardians/#web-07) and toolkit for its 211 member associations. Subsequently it established a Safeguarding in Sport Diploma. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) provides sporting organisations with a [toolkit](https://www.iwf.net/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2018/10/IOC_Safeguarding_Toolkit_ENG.pdf) on safeguarding athletes from abuse in sport that takes into account power differentials related to sex, gender, disability and age. In September 2021, the IOC will commence an International Safeguarding Officer training certification programme.

National Governments

A few countries have organised systems and mechanisms to reduce the sexual abuse and exploitation of children in sport. In 2020 the [McLaren Report](https://sirc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/MGSS-Report-on-Independent-Approaches-December-2020.pdf) was published which reviewed existing international and national mechanisms related to preventing and addressing maltreatment, abuse and discrimination in sport. It also undertook a comprehensive analyses of the Canadian safe sport landscape, and set out a national framework for Canada for protecting athletes through a national safe-sport body. The Report provides a review of the safe sport structures and mechanisms in the USA, UK, Australia and Norway. Unfortunately, such systems are not established in most countries, especially those of the Global South.

**Civil Society**

Civil society organisations have developed and made available a wide range of tools to guide sports bodies in the design, adoption and implementation of safeguarding policies and procedures that can reduce the vulnerability of children to sexual abuse and exploitation in sport. Among the principles of the International Safeguards for Children in Sports, which influence the content and approach of many of the tools developed by others, is the right to be treated with dignity without discrimination for gender or sexual orientation. The Safeguards also recognise the need for the training of staff and volunteers about the additional risks children are exposed to because of their gender or sexual orientation.

While the actions taken by international sports bodies and federations, national governments and civil society groups that are outlined above are commendable and indicate a positive trend, uptake is relatively slow. Implementation at scale remains a challenge. An opportunity to accelerate implementation relates to the Kazan Action Plan. adopted during **UNESCO’s Sixth International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport (MINEPS VI).** The Plan recognises the contribution that sport can make towards achieving the SDGs. Recently a set of 27 Sport and SDG indicators were presented to measure this contribution. Three of these sport indicators specifically relate to SDG targets 5.2 and 16.2 which call for an end to violence against children, girls and women, i.e.

Sport Indicator 14:  % funded national sport bodies / member organisations that have adopted formal policies (with procedures) to i) safeguard children and ii) prevent violence against women

Sport Indicator 19:  number of i) athletes i) coaches/officials and iii) management/board members in funded national sport bodies /member organisations who were trained in the last year in a) governance and sport integrity b) safeguarding children, youth and vulnerable groups and c) prevention of violence against women and girls and d] promoting sustainable development

Sport Indicator 20:   % funded national sport bodies /member organisations with a nominated focal point to i) co- ordinate child safeguarding and protection and ii) prevention of violence against women and girls

Promotion and support by Member States for the implementation and monitoring of the actions presented in these indicators could make children across the globe better protected from sexual abuse and exploitation in sport.

1. Please indicate any other areas of concern and provide any additional information which is relevant in the context of gender dimension and eradication of sale and sexual exploitation of children.

* Additional research on the nature and scope sexual abuse and exploitation of boys in sport is required to provide a stronger evidence base to guide policy, legislation, programming and resource allocations.
* The voice and perspectives of boys and men should be included to a greater extent in research and case studies on sexual abuse and exploitation in sport.
* Although cases of the sexual abuse and exploitation of boys in Europe, North America and some countries of the Pacific and Caribbean are increasingly exposed and documented there is a paucity of information on the situation in Africa, Latin America and Asia.
* Recent commissions, investigations and studies have focused on non-recent cases of sexual abuse of boys in sport in highly industralised countries. More attention needs to be given to assessing current situations, particularly in the Global South.
* Programmes, initiatives, and studies related to Violence Against Children, including boys, tend not to include safeguarding and protection issues related to sport. This is also the case with State Party Reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as well as in the Committee’s Concluding Observations.

1. In what context do external environment factors exacerbate the prevalence and/or magnitude of sale and sexual exploitation of children. Do the vulnerabilities of the surrounding environment play a significant role in terms of rural/urban; war/conflict zones, different forms of migration, emergency contexts (e.g. natural & manmade disaster, climate change, COVID-19) and religious context.

Reference is made to the report the [“An Overview of the Sport-related Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Children”.](https://www.sporthumanrights.org/library/an-overview-of-the-sport-related-impacts-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-children-english-francaise-espanol/) The report brings together the observations of more than 30 organisations and individual experts on how the pandemic affected children’s engagement in sport and consequences including those related to their mental and physical health and access to the safe haven that sports often provides to children in living in difficult situations, including those experiencing and/or witnessing domestic violence.

**For reference and further reading:**

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