

Child Safeguarding Policy

in New Zealand's sport sector

In this nationwide study, coaches (n=237) revealed how they are responding to child safeguarding policies (CSG) in their sports and clubs.

Awareness of policy

66% of people were aware of the CSG policy in their club/sport.



34% of people were unsure or certain of any CSG policy in their club/sport..

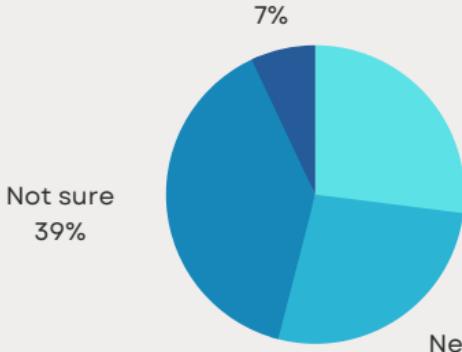
So what?

Encouraging progress has been made, but more needs to be done to reach coaches who require further direction with CSG policy.

No comment

7%

Need for more policy?



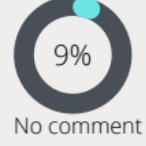
Many people said that they were 'unsure' whether more guidance was needed in their club/sport.

So what?

High levels of uncertainty around the need for more guiding CSG policy suggests that Sport NZ's aim to create 'cultures of safeguarding' is yet to be fully realised.

Helpfulness of policy

Many people said that CSG policy was helping them, yet one third believed current CSG policy was not helping at all.



So what?

It appears that more work needs to be done to clarify how current CSG policy can provide helpful guidelines for safe sport environments.

Changes in coaching

A majority of people said that CSG policy **has not changed** what they did as a coach

So what?

The uncertainty surrounding CSG policy in sport may explain the large number of coaches not making changes to their coaching practice.



Some thoughts about the findings...

While detailed findings (available on request) indicated that some sport organisations are reaching more coaches than others, overall results indicated that a number of people are uncertain about what child safeguarding (CSG) policy exists or what it requires. Indeed, coaches' perceptions of the CSG policy as being 'unhelpful' in their coaching requires consideration by policy writers and coach developers alike. This is especially true in the volunteer space - as only 33% of volunteer coaches considered current CSG policy helpful in their roles.

The majority of people (60%) indicated that they had not made any changes to their coaching practice in response to CSG policy. Given the commendable efforts made by Sport NZ (and others) to date, this is noteworthy. And, although it is encouraging that 40% of people have made changes, it is also important to be mindful of the types of changes that are being made. For instance, data from this (and other) research indicates that some coaches and organisations are misinterpreting CSG policy, and consequently making adjustments based on what they *think* is right (i.e. restricting males from coaching females; banning all physical contact, etc.). In other words, it would appear that the lack of clarity surrounding CSG 'best practice' is, in some cases, being supplemented with people's 'best guess'.

We suggest that this is primarily driven by wider, societal anxieties about abuse in sport; and has the effect of causing people involved in sport to make changes that are neither required nor necessary. As research in Aotearoa and abroad has shown, this has included 'no touch' and gender separation policies that lead to adult and child viewing each other as potentially dangerous. This quickly leads to 'cultures of suspicion' rather than positive and sustainable 'cultures of safeguarding'. Equally concerning is the danger of turning good people away from sport if (mis)interpretations are left to escalate.

Given the strong thread of uncertainty surrounding CSG policy in these data, any changes that coaches or organisations make should be noted carefully by sport sector leaders, policy writers, and coach developers. It is critical to provide opportunities for people to share and discuss 'best practice' with each other and with experts, while seeking a balance between sustainable, effective, and nuanced approaches that suit the needs of different sports, coaches, and athletes. As such, Sport NZ's efforts to disseminate CSG policy into the sport sector to date needs to be supported by ongoing research to ensure that the evolving interpretations and adjustments people make in their coaching can be scrutinized over time – with a goal to ensure that sport remains the vehicle for positive intergeneration interactions that we all want it to be!

For more information, questions, or comments about this research, please contact lead researcher Dr. Blake Bennett (University of Auckland) via email: blake.bennett@auckland.ac.nz