

ALLOWED TO CARE, ALLOWED TO INTERVENE GUIDE

Finnish Olympic Committee

This description comes from the study commissioned by the European Commission on gender-based violence in sport ([Mergaert L., & al., Study on gender-based violence in sport – final report, European Commission, 2016](#)). It was updated within the framework of the European Union-Council of Europe joint projects Pro Safe Sport +and Child Safeguarding in Sport (www.coe.int/CSiS), by collecting more recent information from the organisation responsible for the project.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Background

In 2001, the Council of Europe Committee for the Development of Sport asked the Finnish Sports Federation (SLU) to organise an international seminar on the prevention of sexual harassment and the abuse of women and children in sport. The seminar highlighted the lack of action to address these problems. The SLU agreed to lead on policy development and formed a working group of secretary-generals of SLU member organisations, which proposed a guide for adults in sport on the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse. Representatives of the Finnish sports community and experts on sexual violence, gender equality, and child protection helped develop this guide. 'Allowed to Care, Allowed to Intervene' is the first guide on sexual harassment and abuse in Finnish sport. It is still used today and is disseminated online to Finnish Olympic Committee member organisations.

The guide has undergone several revisions and the most recent version (2019), will serve a quick guide for preventing and managing harassment and inappropriate behaviour. In addition, it will serve one-stop shop for sport stakeholders wanting guidance on preventing and managing sexual harassment and abuse. It includes information on sexual harassment in adult-adult, in child-child, as well as in adult-child athlete relationships. It also contains training materials to help users implement the 'Allowed to Care, Allowed to Intervene' guidelines.

Developing best practice guidelines

The guide provides information on preventing and managing sexual harassment and abuse in sport.¹ Sexual harassment and abuse are defined as abuses of power, and the coach-child athlete relationship is identified as a relationship in which the child occupies a position of relative powerlessness. As a result of this understanding, the establishment of an open, safe and equitable sports culture in which respect for others is prioritised and difficult issues are discussed openly are identified as key to prevention. The guide encourages adults to intervene if they witness improper behaviour in recognition that silence can be interpreted as acceptance. It also outlines the principles that should underpin adult-child athlete interactions,² and provides guidelines for managing sexual harassment and abuse.

In 2004, an annex on coach-youth athlete relationships was added.³ This annex notes that such relationships fall into a grey zone and advises that the power imbalance between coach and athlete be considered when assessing the appropriateness of these relationships. In 2005, another annex was added that expanded advice on the

¹ See:

New link: <https://www.olympiakomitea.fi/uploads/2019/10/64dcb932-lupa-valittaa-lupa-puuttua.pdf>

² These include a series of recommendations relating to fostering an environment where athletes are safeguarded and are always treated with respect and dignity.

³ 'Youth' athlete is not defined in the guidebook but is understood to mean young people under age 16, which is the age of sexual consent in Finland, and more widely under age 18 years old.

procedures for sports clubs when sexual harassment or abuse is suspected. Clubs are advised, among other things, to nominate a person for managing cases and to ask the accused to step down during any investigation. The document also recommends sports clubs and their national federation work together on cases.

Developing training resources

In 2006, the SLU developed a resource to train sport stakeholders on identifying and managing sexual harassment and child abuse in sport. The 'Case Cards' resource comprises vignettes of sexual harassment and child abuse cases and includes guidelines on key points for discussion. The resource is available in an annex of the guide.

OUTCOMES AND STRENGTHS

In total, 20,000 printed copies of the guide have been distributed to SLU/Valo/Finnish Olympic Committee member organisations and, in turn, passed on to affiliated bodies. As such, the guide has been widely distributed within the Finnish sport community and has become relatively well known among these organisations. A survey by a Finnish television channel in 2005 found that 40% of grassroots sports clubs were aware of the guide. According to those involved in developing the guide, it has been positively received by the Finnish sports community. It is believed to have helped raise awareness of sexual harassment and abuse in sport and has kick started discussions on the topic at national and grassroots level. The Finnish Olympic Committee notes that it has received more inquiries from individuals, sports clubs and the media about sexual harassment and abuse in sport since the guide was published, and that some federations have requested training on the prevention of sexual harassment and abuse in sport for their members. The longevity of the guide and the fact that it has been updated over time and is still used by Finnish sports organisations today are evidence of the value attributed to the guide by sport stakeholders. Particularly, regular updates to the guide and the fact that feedback from the Finnish sports community has been sought when revisions are being made ensures that 'Allowed to Care, Allowed to Intervene' remains current and relevant to a wide variety of sport stakeholders. A good example of this was the decision in 2005 to expand the target audience for the guide to sport clubs when the SLU recognised these were in need of advice as well as individuals. In addition, the guide has purposefully been written in accessible language and in a way that makes it relevant to the entire Finnish sports community regardless of sports discipline. Thus, 'Allowed to Care, Allowed to Intervene' serves as a useful one-stop shop for everyone in sport for advice and guidance on sexual harassment and abuse in sport in Finland. This uncomplicated approach also means that advice and guidelines for sport stakeholders and clubs on the prevention and management of sexual harassment and abuse in sport are standardised among those that follow the 'Allowed to Care, Allowed to Intervene' guide.

LIMITATIONS

While those involved in developing the guide suggest that it has been well received among sport stakeholders, there has been no independent, peer-reviewed evaluation of its effectiveness in preventing or managing sexual harassment and abuse in Finnish sport. As such, the efficacy of the 'Allowed to Care, Allowed to Intervene' guide in general, and its various guidelines more specifically, is unknown, as is an understanding of which of the specific guidelines have had the most substantial impact on preventing sexual harassment and abuse, or why. In addition, to date there has also been no monitoring of the extent to which sports organisations or individual stakeholders are implementing the guide, and no audit of sports organisations' current provision for the prevention or management of sexual harassment and abuse in their ranks. Coupled with the fact that the guidelines contained within 'Allowed to Care, Allowed to Intervene' are voluntary rather than mandatory, sport stakeholders that are reluctant to address the issue of sexual harassment and abuse may choose to ignore the guidelines and fail to address the issue at all. In this sense, the guide does little to encourage cultural change in the way sport in Finland deals with sexual harassment and abuse.

A further limitation of the guide is that it is only useful to organisations and individuals that know about it. While the SLU/Valo/Finnish Olympic Committee has made substantial efforts to disseminate the guide, the results of the 2005 Finnish television channel survey mentioned above suggested that most grassroots sports clubs (60%) did not know of its existence. While this survey is now some 15 years out of date, the figures are nonetheless concerning and suggest more work needs to be done to raise awareness of the guide.

While efforts have been made to ensure the guide is useful to all sports and there are numerous advantages to this, the guide's lack of specificity to a particular sport discipline may also represent a potential limitation. Given that the socio-cultural context varies across sports, it is possible that some stakeholder groups would benefit from a more tailored approach that can account for cultural differences. Finally, the guide requires sports organisations to invest human and financial resources into implementing its advice and guidance. No specific additional funding has been made available for this, which may deter sports organisations from following the guide. However, organisations can apply for additional funding for implementing the guide's recommendations and other projects to the relevant government department.

LESSONS LEARNT

The 'Allowed to Care, Allowed to Intervene' guide has been widely disseminated in print and online among Finnish Olympic Committee affiliated sports organisations, and has generally been positively received by sport stakeholders. These successes are, in part, due to the involvement of individuals with a high level of social capital and influence (such as the secretary-generals of some Finnish Olympic Committee member organisations) in the development and dissemination of the guide. The involvement of individuals high up within Finnish sport also added credibility to the guide and to the notion that sport has an obligation to address sexual harassment and abuse in its ranks. This, in turn, may have helped reduce resistance among sport stakeholders to addressing the issue.

The way in which sexual harassment and abuse in sport were framed and the language used within the guide likely also played an important part in gaining 'buy in' from sport stakeholders and minimising resistance to the guide's implementation. Getting the language and the tone wrong when writing about such sensitive topics, especially when the issue is new to a community and may require changes to established practice, can make stakeholders feel as though their integrity and professionalism are being questioned. This can result in feelings of resentment and defensiveness, making it more difficult to gain acceptance for the initiative.

Finally, the fact that the guide has been regularly updated and that feedback from the sports community has been sought when these revisions are being made has played a key role in ensuring the guide remains valued by sport stakeholders as it ensures the information provided is current, relevant and responds to their needs.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Link to the tool in Finnish:

<https://www.olympiakomitea.fi/uploads/2019/10/64dcb932-lupa-valittaa-lupa-puuttua.pdf>

Media and scholarly articles on Allowed to Care, Allowed to Intervene:

<http://www.kaleva.fi/urheilu/urheilussakin-heratty-hairintaan/109243/>

<http://www.mtv.fi/uutiset/kotimaa/artikkeli/urheiluseuroissakin-ongelmia-seksuaalisesta-hairinnasta/1982598>