Youth Sport Administrators’ Perceptions and Knowledge of Organizational Policies on Child Maltreatment

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**Abstract**

Youth Sports is one of the largest segments of the sport industry, generating over $5 billion annually (Wagner et al., 2010). Each year, 30 to 40 million children participate in a variety of programs in the United States that are offered by private, public, and non-profit organizations (Wagner et al., 2010). Of particular concern for youth sport administrators is the abuse and maltreatment of participants in their programs. High-profile cases, such as, the Jerry Sandusky/Penn State University scandal, has brought attention to this issue (Freeh, 2012). It is imperative that administrators of youth sport organizations implement measures to protect the children they serve (Kerr & Sterling, 2008). The purpose of this research was to determine the perception of youth sport administrators’ awareness of the organization’s policies relating to the signs and symptoms of child abuse, and reporting procedures concerning such abuse. A purposive sampling of 217 practitioners identified through Internet research from public recreation departments, non-profit organizations, and for-profit businesses for children were contacted; 108 of those selected participated. The limitations were that the participants were from one Midwestern state and second, rated their own assessment. As nearly a third of respondents were unsure or did not believe they should be mandated reporters, attitudes toward this topic warrants further investigation.

**Introduction**

Youth sports are one of the largest segments of the sport industry, generating over $5 billion annually (Wagner et al., 2010). Each year, 30 to 40 million children participate in a variety of programs throughout the United States offered by private, public, and non-profit organizations (Wagner et al., 2010). The benefits of participating in physical activity and sports continue to be emphasized at local and national levels, as they contribute to the overall development of physical, cognitive, social, and affective domains; and promote active, positive lifestyles for those who participate (Bailey, 2006). In the United States there has been particular emphasis on programs promoting wellness and fitness, due to the growing concern of childhood obesity (Hofferth et al., 2005). There is also a growing demand for youth sport programs that provide advanced instruction and training, particularly in team sports, in which nearly 70% of children between the ages of 6 and 17 participate (Sport & Fitness Industry
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. High profile cases have brought attention to this issue, particularly in youth sport and recreation settings. KGW News (Oregon City) reported in 2011 that a soccer coach, Parrish Leland Chang Sr., had been charged with multiple counts of child porn, encouraging child sex abuse after police seized his personal computer and found over 100 pornographic videos of children. Documents on his home computer contained pictures, including one titled, “11-year-old Girl Raped” (KGW, 2011). Closer to the Midwest, another crime against a child was reported in Garland, Texas. On September 24, 2012, a soccer coach was arrested for raping a 10-year-old soccer player. Three more possible victims talked to police, who believed that even more victims were avoiding coming forward due to their immigration status (WFAA 8, ABC, 2012).

The most notable of these cases involved Gerald Sandusky, a former assistant football coach at Penn State University, who was found guilty of 45 counts of child sex abuse, with a number of those incidents having occurred in facilities on the Penn State campus. One of the key issues of the case was the failure of university leaders – the president, a senior vice president, the athletic director, and head football coach – to take appropriate action when allegations of abuse were brought to their attention (Freeh, 2012; McGregor, 2012). When the allegations became public, the Penn State Board of Trustees responded by firing the four leaders associated with the incident and calling for an internal investigation of the issue, which was led by former FBI director and Federal Judge Louis Freeh. The results of the investigation concluded that the four university leaders “failed to protect against a child sexual predator for over a decade,” and that the former president “discouraged discussion and dissent” (Freeh, 2012, p. 14). The investigation also noted that the prominent leaders at Penn State demonstrated “total and consistent disregard…for the safety and welfare of Sandusky’s child victims,” and that those leaders were “unchecked by the Board of Trustees that did not perform its oversight duties” (Freeh, 2012, p. 15). In addition, the investigation noted that the Board “failed in its duties to oversee the president and senior university officials in 1998 and 2001 by not inquiring about important university matters and by not creating an environment where senior university officials felt accountable?” (Freeh, 2012, p. 15). The report also noted that the Board of Trustees failed to have “regular reporting procedures or committee structures in place to ensure disclosure to the Board of major risks to the university” (Freeh, 2012, p. 16; McGregor, 2012).

All youth sport programs should have zero tolerance for any form of child abuse, whether it is emotional, physical, or sexual (Wurtele, 2012). 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 among their highest priorities, and create a culture of zero tolerance for any form of abusive behavior (Brackenridge, 2002; Wurtele, 2012). Because of their regular interaction with children, administrators of youth sport programs have opportunities to observe children for signs of abuse or neglect, and can be involved in the detection, treatment and prevention of child abuse. Reporting suspicions of abuse allows child protective authorities to become involved before a child is seriously injured (Wilson & Gettigner, 1989; Zellman, 1990).

**Literature Review**

**Types of Child Abuse**

Child abuse and maltreatment, defined as “volitional acts that result in or have the potential to result in physical injury and/or psychological harm” (Crooks & Wolfe, 2007, p. 3), has become a growing area of concern throughout the United States. While physical abuse is the most visible, other types of abuse, particularly sexual abuse and neglect, are also damaging to those who are exposed to maltreatment.

**Physical abuse** is non-accidental physical injury (ranging from minor bruises to severe fractures or death) as a result of punching, beating, kicking, biting, shaking, throwing, stabbing, choking, hitting (with a hand, stick, strap, or other object), burning or otherwise harming a child, that is inflicted by a parent, caregiver or other person who has responsibility for the child. Such injury is considered abuse regardless of whether the caregiver intended to hurt the child” (U.S.
Child neglect—a very common type of child abuse—is a pattern of failing to provide for a child's basic needs, whether they be physical, medical, educational, or emotional in nature (Smith & Segal, 2012). Child neglect is not always easy to identify. At times, a parent might become physically or mentally unable to administer proper care to a child. This may occur, for example, when a parent suffers a serious injury, untreated depression, or anxiety. Additionally, alcohol or drug abuse may seriously impair a caretaker’s judgment and the ability to keep a child safe. Cultural values, the standards of care in the community, and poverty may also be contributing factors for neglect, indicating the family is in need of information or assistance. When a family fails to use information and resources, and the child's health or safety is at risk, then child welfare intervention may be required. Many states, however, provide an exception to the definition of neglect for parents who choose not to seek medical care for their children due to religious beliefs (What is child, 2008). Older children might not show outward signs of neglect, presenting a competent face to the outside world, and even taking on the role of the parent. Nonetheless, even under the surface, neglected children are lacking essential physical and emotional support (Kerr & Sterling, 2008; Smith & Segal, 2012).

Sexual abuse is defined as "the employment, use, persuasion, inducement, enticement, or coercion of any child to engage in, or assist any other person to engage in, any sexually explicit conduct or simulation of such conduct for the purpose of producing a visual depiction of such conduct; or the rape, and in cases of caretaker or inter-familial relationships, statutory rape, molestation, prostitution, or other form of sexual exploitation of children, or incest with children" (What is child, 2008). It's important to recognize that sexual abuse doesn't always involve body contact. Exposing a child to sexual situations or material is also considered to be sexually abusive, whether or not touching is involved (Kerr & Sterling, 2008; Smith & Segal, 2012).

Overview of Child Abuse Legislation
Federal Legislation on Child Abuse in the United States

Laws regarding the reporting of child abuse are intended to provide government agencies with the means to investigate allegations of child maltreatment. In the United States, responsibility for reporting suspected abuse initially fell on family members. It was the responsibility of parents to ensure their children were properly cared for (Persky, 2012). In the 1870s a case in New York City involving the abuse of a child by her stepmother brought attention to the plight of abused children and the need for outside intervention. In response to this case, the first organization in the world devoted to the protection of children from abuse, the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, was founded in 1875 (New York Society, 2012). The 1930s saw the establishment of a child welfare system by the federal government, reflecting a changing attitude toward the amount of acceptable government intervention for helping individuals in need. In one of the first scholarly articles to address the subject, Kempe et al., (1962) concluded that physicians were in a position to objectively identify and evaluate potential abuse in children, and that they have a duty and responsibility to ensure that such abuse is not permitted to happen again. In 1974, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) were enacted by Congress to provide federal funding to states that enacted mandatory reporting laws (About CAPTA, 2011). States that didn’t comply or report abuse lost funding for prevention and education. With these funds states have set up their own public child welfare systems to investigate and respond to reports of abuse and take action on behalf of the victims if allegations are substantiated. The Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act, signed into law in 2006, was aimed at protecting children from violent crime and sexual exploitation. This led to the formation of an online national sex offender registry and the enacting of harsher penalties for crimes against children (Wurtele, 2012). Internet crimes against children led to the passage of the Protect Our Children Act in 2008. The proposed “Protect our Kids Act of 2011,” aims to reduce fatalities among children as the result of abuse and neglect (Wurtele, 2012).
State Legislation on the Reporting of Child Abuse

When the results of the Kemp et al. research became public, states took action to pass laws making child abuse a criminal act (Persky, 2012). Most state statutes originally specified very few mandated reporters. Over time, many of those statues have been amended, broadening their definitions of mandated reporters to include teacher and childcare workers (McKinley, 2012; Persky, 2012). Each state determines what cases will be investigated and how authorities will respond based on the state’s statutes and regulations (Persky, 2012; Wolfe, 2012). Each state’s child abuse reporting law identifies individuals who are mandated by law to report suspected abuse. Along with doctors, teachers, and day care staff, many state statutes also identified counselors and law enforcement personnel as professionals who can provide insight into potential abuse (Persky, 2012). Some states mandate coaches to report suspected abuse, while others mandate parents to do so. In every state, anyone who is not mandated by law to report child abuse still has the option to report suspected maltreatment voluntarily. Additionally, each state permits voluntary reports to be made anonymously (Wolfe, 2012).

A number of states have addressed the reporting or communicating of suspected child abuse as a hierarchical responsibility. Pennsylvania, for example, amended its law to require the person with direct knowledge of the abuse to report “up” to their supervisor or director within his or her organization, rather than reporting the incident directly to the child welfare system. It is the organization administrator who then determines whether or not filing the report to the appropriate authorities is warranted (Wolfe, 2012). In Maryland, reports of potential abuse are screened before a formal investigation determines abuse has occurred, then the case is referred to a child advocacy center (Persky, 2012).

Recent Changes in Child Abuse Reporting

In response to incidents such as the one at Penn State, numerous sport organizations throughout the U.S. have enacted 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.

Each year an estimated 3.3 million reports of child abuse are made in the United States, involving over six million children (due to reports including multiple children), according to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2011). As of September 2012, 107 bills in 30 states and the District of Columbia have been introduced in the legislative session on the reporting of suspected child abuse and neglect, with 10 of these states enacting legislation (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2012). Those pushing to clarify and broaden current statues hope to prevent a recurrence of everything that went wrong at Penn State (McKinley, 2012; Persky, 2012; Wolfe, 2012). Some universities and colleges have initiated changes that focus on expanding who is mandated to report suspected child abuse and neglect. The University of Maryland established new procedures requiring any employee to provide both an oral and written report within 48 hours of witnessing possible child abuse or neglect to the local police department or to a local office of social services. It requires the university president or someone designated by the president to receive such reports. Failure to abide by the reporting policy could result in termination (Ujifusa, 2012). At Duke University, a new policy was established which requires everyone on campus to immediately report suspected abuse of minors to Duke police and the program director, and also requires background checks and special training for everyone working with minors, even those not employed by Duke (Moore, 2012).

Additional efforts are aimed at increasing public awareness of child abuse and the need to report abuse. Initiatives to expand and improve training for both mandated reporters and the general public on identifying and reporting potential child abuse was implemented through the state of Pennsylvania Task Force on Child Protection, which was recently commissioned by the state legislature to develop a report on ways to improve child abuse reporting, training, laws and policies and procedures (Wolfe, 2012). After Robert Dodd, former Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) President was accused of child molestation, the AAU examined the need for establishing two different task forces to review the organizations’ current policies related to the protection of their athletes, particularly children (Braconnier, 2011). The National Coalition to Prevent Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation (2012).
has published a national plan aimed at enhancing resources and increasing awareness of child sexual abuse, and offers suggestions as to how these goals may be accomplished.

**Child Abuse Policies in Youth Sport Organizations**

In order to ensure the safety of the children who participate in their programs, youth sport organizations need to implement policies that reflect the organization’s intolerance for any form of abuse. All adults who work with children at all levels in the workplace, whether paid or unpaid, must make the effort to create a culture of zero tolerance for any form of abuse (Wurtele, 2012). One of the most common strategies implemented by youth sport organizations involves conducting criminal background checks on all employees and volunteers. These are done to identify individuals who have a history of criminal misconduct, potentially decreasing the risk for child abuse (National Alliance for Youth Sports, 2012; Wurtele, 2012). Some agencies have created environments that make it difficult for abuse to occur, by minimizing opportunities for staff to be alone with youth, establishing separate accommodations for youth and adults, and limiting contact outside the organization, whether in person or through social networking sites (Wurtele, 2012; Wurtele & Kenny, 2012). Enhanced supervision and monitoring of employees during staff-youth interactions enables organizations to identify potential issues and possibly prevent the abuse of a minor (Preventing Child Abuse, 2012; Wurtele, 2012; Wurtele & Kenny, 2012).

Educating staff and volunteers is paramount in preventing and identifying abuse in children. In-service training enhances the awareness of an organization’s commitment to youth safety and intolerance of abusive conduct (Wurtele, 2012). All staff and volunteers who work with children need to understand their ethical and legal duty to report any reasonable suspicions of abuse to a designated state agency or law enforcement (Wurtele, 2012; Wurtele & Kenny, 2012). Some youth sport organizations have developed comprehensive strategies to educate their staff about ways to prevent and report child abuse. Online training programs such as Darkness to Light’s (2004) *Stewards of Children* and Positive Coaches Alliance and Kidpower’s (2012) two-part webinar series on child abuse prevention have served as effective, low-cost methods of teaching individuals on the importance of reporting and preventing abuse.

**Issues with the Implementation of Policies Addressing 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; Parent & Demers, 2011). Administrators of programs, though well-versed in 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). Some organizations fail to conduct proper screening of employees and volunteers because it simply costs too much, or because of the perception by administrators that screenings aren’t particularly useful (Wurtle, 2012). Other agencies fail to address allegations of abuse for fear of losing successful coaches and deny the existence of abuse in their organizations (Malkin et al., 2000). Similarly, agency administrators also express concerns that an increased emphasis on prevention programs will arouse suspicions that abuse is taking place within their organizations (Parent & Demers, 2011). These studies have mostly been conducted in a European context, and current knowledge on the subject, particularly in the United States, remains scant (Brackenridge, 2002; Parent & Demers, 2011; Wurtele, 2012). The literature reviewed supports our recommendation for more research of the policies of sport recreational facilities concerning all staff working with youth. Finding gaps in training and reporting child abuse are imperative for the protection of youth (Kerr & Sterling, 2008).

The purpose of this study was 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.
This study seeks to investigate youth sport administrators' self-reported knowledge of the signs and symptoms of child maltreatment, reporting procedures, legal issues surrounding child abuse, and their attitudes toward their organizations' policies pertaining to child abuse.

The following research questions will guide the study:

1. Are youth sport administrators aware of the signs of child abuse?
2. Are youth sport administrators aware of the reporting procedures for child abuse?
3. Are youth sport administrators aware of their organizations' policies and procedures regarding child abuse?
4. Do administrators of youth sport programs understand the legal issues surrounding child abuse as it pertains to their position?
5. Are youth sport administrators comfortable with the training they receive from their organization regarding the reporting of child abuse?

Method

Participants

Youth sport administrators from public recreation departments, non-profit organizations, and for-profit businesses in one Midwestern state that offer sport and recreation programs to children 17 years of age and younger were targeted by the researcher. For the purpose of this study, a youth sport administrator is defined as one who is responsible for programming, implementation, and administration of sport and recreation programs and activities for children 17 years of age and younger. A purposive sampling of 217 practitioners was identified as potential subjects through an Internet search of organizations with youth sport programs.

Instrument

The Administrators and Child Abuse Questionnaire (ACAQ) is an adaptation of the Educators and Child Abuse Questionnaire developed by Kenney (2001). The first portion contains 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. Each item is followed by five levels of agreement. Each subject was asked to select, for each descriptive scale, the rating that best described their feelings toward the item using the following scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = somewhat disagree; 3 = neither agree nor disagree; 4 = somewhat agree; 5 = strongly agree. Subjects were asked to read each statement and place a checkmark in the appropriate box on their response sheet.

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.

Procedure

To collect data, a link to the survey was e-mailed to all targeted youth sport administrators. The e-mail introduced the researcher and informed the reader of the researcher's intention to conduct a survey of their attitudes on child abuse training and policies within their organizations. The purpose of the study was explained as well. The e-mail requested their assistance by completing the survey. Youth sport administrators under the age of 18 were advised not to participate in order to avoid accessing a "vulnerable" population. Those who chose to participate were asked to click on a link that provided access to the survey instrument, which would take approximately two minutes to complete. The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at Wichita State University provided approval for the study. The survey served as the only method of collecting data. Two follow-up e-mails were distributed to remind youth sport administrators of the survey. Data from completed surveys were tabulated by the survey website, with results accessible only to the primary investigator.

After data collection, the final sample included over 100 usable responses (n=108).

Results

Of the 217 surveys sent, 108 were completed, for a response rate of 49%. From that sample of respondents, 55% were male, and 90% were
A study was conducted to determine the extent to which youth sport administrators are aware of the signs for different types of abuse and their abilities to detect it. The study also investigated their confidence in identifying the different types of abuse.

In the study conducted by the Administrators and Child Abuse Questionnaire (ACAQ), an overwhelming majority of respondents felt that child abuse is a serious problem in our society, but most (64%) believed that child abuse is not a problem in their youth programs. Univariate descriptive statistics show that 65 respondents indicated they had never made a report of suspected child abuse.

In the 12 statements from the Administrators and Child Abuse Questionnaire (ACAQ), an overwhelming majority of respondents felt that child abuse is a serious problem in our society, but most (64%) believed that child abuse is not a problem in their youth programs (see Table 1). Eighty-one percent indicated they were aware of the policies and procedures of their organization that pertain to the reporting of child abuse and the majority (83%) felt their administration would support them if they made a report of suspected child abuse. Most of the respondents (80%) agreed that as administrators of youth sport programs, they are obligated to report suspected child abuse. While 64% indicated disagreement with the statement that youth sport administrators should not be mandated to report abuse, 21% were unsure, and 15% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. The majority of administrators indicated confidence in identifying the different types of abuse:

- 71% indicated they were aware of the signs for neglect,
- 60% were aware of the signs for child sexual abuse, and
- 80% agreed or strongly agreed they could identify signs of physical abuse.

In terms of their training, 41% of respondents were unsure if their agency provided adequate training on identifying and reporting child abuse, while 24% felt their organizations didn’t provide enough training in this area. Along these lines, 34% indicated that most of their training in dealing with child abuse issues came from outside their current place of employment, while 31% stated their current agency provided them with the majority of their knowledge on the topic. Fifty-eight percent indicated their current organization had policies in place that address how to deal with child abuse, while 29% were unsure or unaware if their organization had such policies, and 13% disagreed that their agencies had these types of policies in place.

**Discussion**

Though the incident at Penn State has brought the issue of administrative preparation in the reporting of child abuse to the forefront of national consciousness, the results of this study indicate that administrators of youth sport programs in this region, while they believe child abuse is a serious problem, don’t feel it’s an issue in their respective organizations. This is reflected in their confidence with their knowledge of the signs of different types of abuse, particularly neglect and physical abuse. While nearly two-thirds of respondents indicated they were aware of the signs of sexual abuse, it’s important to note that the remaining third was not confident with their abilities to detect it. Though neglect is considered the most difficult form of abuse to identify (What is child, 2008), these results indicate youth sport organizations may need to provide their administrators with better training in regards to identifying potential victims of sexual abuse.

One of the main findings indicated in the Freeh Report on the Penn State scandal was that the administration failed to have appropriate policies and procedures in place for the reporting of suspected child abuse, and those in positions of leadership failed to create an environment that was supportive of such action (Freeh, 2012). The results of this study show this is not the case with these youth sport administrators, as over three-fourths of the respondents indicated that they are aware of their organization’s policies on reporting child abuse and believe they would receive support from their superiors if they followed through with a report of suspected abuse. This reflects positively on the preparation and awareness of child maltreatment in these organizations, but as the safety of children is the prime directive for every youth sport organization, it appears that more needs to be done to ensure all youth sport administrators are cognizant of their organizations’ policies on reporting suspected abuse and are confident in executing them.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse is a serious problem in our society</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>52.6</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child abuse is a serious problem in my youth programs</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of my organization's policies and procedures for child abuse reporting</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>52.0</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel the administration would support me if I made a child abuse report</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a youth sport administrator, I have an obligation to report suspected child abuse</td>
<td>45.3</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrators of youth sports programs should NOT be mandated to report child abuse</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>32.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of the signs of child neglect</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of the signs of child sexual abuse</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am aware of the signs of child physical abuse</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>57.9</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My organization provides adequate training to all employees who work with children on how to identify and report child abuse</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>41.3</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of what I know about dealing with child abuse came from training I received through my current organization</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our organization has policies in place that address how to deal with issues related to child abuse</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most respondents (two-thirds) to the survey indicated, though not specifically required by state law, youth sport administrators should be mandated to report incidents of suspected child abuse and maltreatment. As many as one-third of the respondents were unsure or did not believe they should be mandated reporters, attitudes toward this topic warrant further exploration.

While the state in which this study was conducted had over 64,000 reported incidents of child abuse and neglect in fiscal year 2012 (Kansas Children’s Service League, 2012), the overwhelming majority of youth sport administrators indicated they have never made a report of suspected maltreatment of a child. As most youth programs are located in highly populated urban areas, it is possible that some respondents may have encountered victims in their programs but were not able to identify them.

**Limitations**

The sample of participants for this study all work for organizations within one Mid-western state. While their attitudes may be similar to other youth sport administrators from the region, the findings from this study are limited to one geographic area. Second, the respondents rated their own assessment of their knowledge and abilities rather than being tested in these areas, so their actual knowledge regarding their ability to identify different types of abuse and awareness of their organizations’ policies on child maltreatment are unknown. Third, though the majority of respondents indicated they have never filed a report of suspected maltreatment, there is no confirmation of the validity of the youth sport administrators who indicated they have reported suspected abuse, as the method for reporting protects the confidentiality of the abuse reporter.

**Recommendations for further study**

It is recommended that sport agencies that provide programs to children have child abuse reporting policies in place that employees can access and implement with certainty. Youth sport organizations...
can enhance the awareness and knowledge of their employees by providing appropriate training and support (Kenny, 2004; Kerr & Sterling, 2008). Further research is needed to assess the readiness of youth sport administrators to address suspected abuse of program participants. Additional studies should further address potential differences based on ethnicity and geography, as well as policy differences and awareness between types of programs (public, private, non-profit). In addition, expanding the pool of research to include all employees and volunteers who have contact with children (instructors, coaches, bus drivers, etc.) in addition to those who administrate would provide greater insight into the issue of child abuse in the U.S. (Brackenridge, 2002; Wurtele, 2012).

**Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to identify the perceptions of youth sport administrators in a mid-western town in Kansas concerning child abuse and how organizations prepare them for reporting such incidences. It appears that many Kansas youth sport administrators believe child abuse is a critical issue in society, even if not identified explicitly as a problem in their programs. Recently, there have been numerous, high-profile scandals involving children and sport organizations that have helped to redirect the focus of child abuse not only in society, but also the role of sport administrators in this process, (Braconnier, 2011; Churchmach, 2012; McGregor, 2012). What is still unclear is how organizations are preparing youth sport administrators to deal with the possibility of child abuse or maltreatment of youth participants and how they should handle it. There is not a clear consensus or agreement on how policies and procedures or training should be handled. This could be due to the low report rates of child abuse by the sample.

In the state of Kansas, health-care professionals, educators, and emergency response personnel are mandated by law to report any incidents or suspicion of child abuse to the authorities (Kansas Children’s Service League, 2012). Since youth sport administrators’ frequently interact with children under the age of 17, and there are no state laws that mandate the reporting of such incidents, it is important to understand the perceptions and knowledge of child maltreatment of these professionals as it relates to the policies of the organizations of their employment.

It is recommended that youth sport organizations fully develop clearly articulated organizational policies regarding child abuse or maltreatment. In order to develop the policies, it is recommended that there be child abuse training sessions conducted in youth sport organizations by licensed personnel. Because of the cost associated with such training sessions, the recommendation is that youth sport organizations proactively contact the appropriate state or county agencies for these training sessions. As child abuse entails more than just physical abuse (Smith & Segal, 2012), training sessions can be scheduled on a regular basis, i.e. monthly, quarterly or annually and these trainings can cover a wide range of abuse-related topics.

State law does not currently mandate youth sport administrators to report suspicions of child abuse in Kansas. Therefore, the onus is now placed upon both youth sport organizations and the administrators operating these programs to proactively educate themselves regarding the issue. Youth sport organizations should also mandate either a code of conduct for administrators explicitly articulating a stance on child abuse reporting, and this should be incorporated into an employee manual. The large number of survey respondents selecting “neutral” on the items associated with organizational policies or training regarding child abuse could easily be interpreted as a need for organizations to clearly delineate not only a stance on reporting child abuse, but also increased training opportunities showing employees how to recognize and properly report child abuse or maltreatment.
References


