

MEDIA RELEASE

Violence against children in Sport – a new UNICEF Report

UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre releases report on violence in children's sport, and recommends means of prevention

FLORENCE, Italy July 2010 - A study released today by UNICEF's Innocenti Research Centre states that child protection and violence prevention are not embedded in sport delivery systems, and finds worrying knowledge gaps among sports teachers and coaches. As a result, the report says that the same types of violence and abuse sometimes found in families and communities can also occur in sport and play programmes.

Protecting Children from Violence in Sport: A review with a focus on industrialized countries examines bullying, psychological abuse, child labour, trafficking and sexual violence.

"UNICEF has long recognized that there is great value in children's sport and play and has been a consistent proponent of these activities in its international development and child protection work," said UNICEF's global Chief of Child Protection, Susan Bissell. "Health, educational achievement and social benefits are just some of the many desirable outcomes associated with organized physical activity. However, in recent years it has become evident that sport is not always a safe space for children."

The UNICEF research provides examples of both good and poor practice, and makes recommendations for sport organizations that would assist in their violence prevention work. In particular, the study recommends:

- Development of structures and systems for eliminating and preventing violence;
- Education, awareness-raising and training on this subject;
- Promotion of ethical guidelines and codes of conduct as part of the prevention system.
- Improved data collection and knowledge generation;

Protecting Children from Violence in Sport states that education on child protection issues among sport teachers, coaches and other stakeholders is often lacking, and that child athletes are rarely consulted about their sporting experiences. Overall, the report notes that appropriate structures and policies need to be developed for preventing, reporting and responding appropriately to all forms of abuse in children's sport.

The report states that if the benefits of sport are to be fully realised, then collaboration between the agencies responsible for 'sport for development' and those responsible for child protection is needed. To this end, the Committee on the Rights of the Child should monitor the rights of the child in sport and ensure that States' ombudspersons incorporate sport in their work. The Innocenti Research Centre report also recommends that the Committee on the Rights of the Child become a de facto 'international observatory' for children in sport. In addition, every country should identify a designated authority with responsibility for child protection in sport – ranging from the school to the community and to elite athletes.

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Protecting Children from Violence in Sport notes that many of the industrialized countries covered in the report have yet to recognize the need to strengthen child safety and violence prevention measures within sport. Until and unless this is done, the many potential benefits of sport will never be fully realized by all children.

Note to Editors

Media materials are available from the Centre's newsroom:

<http://www.unicef-irc.org/presscentre/indexNewsroom.html>

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