

CRIMINAL HISTORY AND SAFESPORT VIOLATIONS:
ASSESSING AND PREDICTING RISK

by

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This thesis explores the relationship between individuals' criminal histories and the likelihood of violating the U.S. Center for SafeSport policies. Focusing on Olympic and Paralympic sports, it conducts a comprehensive policy analysis using secondary sources, including policy documents, case studies, and criminological literature. The research critiques the existing SafeSport screening and training procedures, finding correlations between violent offenses and recidivism, and highlighting gaps in enforcement, transparency, and reporting. SafeSport plays a crucial role in protecting athletes, but current background checks and trainings are not comprehensive enough to reliably assess risk. Through the application of frameworks like the Risk-Need-Responsivity model and the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative's Pro-Data system, this research proposes improvements such as more rigorous background checks and better training. These recommendations aim to make athlete protection more data-informed and proactive. This thesis offers constructive reforms to help SafeSport better inform the mission of creating safe environments for athletes to participate in.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	5
Literature Review	9
Indicators and Prevention of Criminal Behavior in Sports	9
Recidivism Rates and Criminal Risk Assessment	11
SafeSport Policy Framework and Effectiveness	14
Case Studies: High-Profile SafeSport Violations	16
Gaps in Existing Literature	20
Current SafeSport Policy Analysis	22
SafeSport Code for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement	22
Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAP)	27
Background Checks	33
Methodology	36
Research Design	36
Data Collection	37
Limitations	38
Assessing Policy Effectiveness and Making Recommendations	40
Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) Pro-Data System	40
Risk-Need-Responsivity Model	42
Future Needs and Recommendations	43
Conclusion	45
Bibliography	47

Introduction

Bridging sports and criminal justice is an important way to help preserve athletes' safety at high-performance levels. Over the past decades, there has been an increasing need for organizations that provide athletes with a safe place to thrive and succeed. One that tackles this need is SafeSport, an essential institution in the United States. Its goal is to prevent and address sexual, physical, and emotional abuse allegations in Olympic sports while using a unique framework of training and enforcement.

Established in March of 2017, SafeSport was created as a reaction to the abuse in multiple youth sports associations, including misconduct within USA Gymnastics. This scandal occurred for over two decades, beginning in the 1990s. It is the largest sexual abuse scandal in sports history, with over 500 athletes being assaulted by athletic personnel. One of the central perpetrators in the case was Larry Nassar, a doctor for USA Gymnastics and an osteopathic physician at Michigan State. Over 265 women testified against him, stating that they had been sexually abused under the premise of medical treatment. This injustice led to the creation of the Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act of 2017. It required that sex abuse allegations be reported immediately to law enforcement, and it also established the United States Center for SafeSport. The agency is an independent investigation and resolution board that ensures all bodies follow strict child abuse prevention protocols. SafeSport reviews allegations of misconduct in the United States Olympic and Paralympic organizations. It does not have the governing power to arrest people, but it can create lifetime bans for people who are found to have violated policies. They maintain a database of people who might be a threat to the Olympic athletes, and names are removed after an investigation has occurred.

Many people are involved in working with SafeSport. The Chief Executive Officer is Ju'Riese Colón, followed by the Board of Directors and the Finance, Audit, and Nominating & Governance Board Committees. Regarding policymaking, SafeSport authority comes from the bylaws of the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC), and the National Governing Bodies that participate in the organization's jurisdiction. They receive funding from the USOPC, the Department of Justice, and other foundations and donors.

SafeSport emphasizes education and prevention, instead of primarily responding to issues as they arise, creating a culture within athletics based on respect and protection. Power dynamics can become a concern between minors and authority figures, and SafeSport safeguards this. People are urged to report misconduct without fear of judgment. Systems are put in place that work to analyze claims fairly and transparently. Many resources are provided to athletes who are survivors, and SafeSport empowers them through its work.

This research is significant to me because I have always been interested in the intersection of sports and criminal behavior. I have played sports for my entire life, and there were times in high school when ethical violations were committed. A coach during my freshman year of high school was removed for having allegations of making racist and misogynistic remarks. He made comments about girls being too sensitive and implied that we were inferior and weaker than the boys' team. This personal experience motivated my interest in exploring how policy reforms and improved screening processes can better protect athletes.

There is currently a gap in research that fails to link criminal histories to SafeSport violations. A SafeSport violation in the context of this study is defined as anything that breaches the code of conduct set by the organization. Although existing literature addresses recidivism rates and background checks, it often fails to identify specific types of criminal offenses that may

be correlated with an increased risk of violating SafeSport policies. Furthermore, despite efforts from SafeSport, background checks and training processes may still have gaps. The effectiveness of identifying high-risk individuals is unexamined in academia. This research seeks to fill these gaps by exploring potential correlations between criminal history and policy violations to inform more efficient abuse prevention strategies. Combining the two topics of athletics and crime will allow me to become well-versed in a niche area and will impact many people. It will be beneficial because it will reduce the exposure of sexual misconduct for Olympic athletes, especially those who are minors. It addresses athletes' safety in sports and underscores areas where risks can be mitigated before policies are violated in the first place.

It also applies on a broader scale by examining recidivism rates and utilizing predictive models to support at-risk populations. Improving screening systems will facilitate the identification of individuals at a higher risk of policy violations, reducing the potential for athlete abuse. This research could lead to additional preventative measures, and training could be more focused on different risk factors and populations that are more likely to perpetuate violations. Some crimes may not raise suspicion during the hiring process but may correspond with an increased risk of violations. Through this research, I could prompt changes to hiring strategies and close policy gaps.

Overall, this research is crucial. Organizations are obligated to protect their athletes and ensure that they are ready to compete to the best of their abilities. This especially pertains to minors, people with disabilities, and other vulnerable groups. Additionally, this research can apply not only to Olympic athletes, but other levels of sports, including high school and professional teams. Exploring the relationship between previous crimes and policy violations may help athletic organizations to prevent abuse and misconduct. This research is necessary to

produce a more accountable sports sector. It is important to investigate how previous criminal histories may be associated with increased risks of SafeSport policy violations, as it will lead to the safety of athletes.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to decipher how criminal behavior, recidivism rates, and SafeSport policies interact. There will be a focus on understanding how offenders past criminal histories may correlate with an increase in SafeSport policy violations in athletics. Criminal history in this context is defined as anyone with a prior record. However, it specifically identifies and categorizes violent versus nonviolent crimes. SafeSport, created to help athletes avoid abuse and misconduct, plays an instrumental role in creating a safe atmosphere in the Olympics. Throughout this review, research on criminal behavior in sports, recidivism rates connected to violent and nonviolent offenses, and the effectiveness of SafeSport policies will be explored. It will be split into five primary areas: Predictors and Prevention of Criminal Behavior in Sports, Recidivism Rates and Criminal Risk Assessment, SafeSport Policy Framework and Effectiveness, Case Studies: High-Profile SafeSport Violations, and Gaps in Existing Literature. The insights gained from the review will inform the methodology and data analysis.

Indicators and Prevention of Criminal Behavior in Sports

In the article "College Athletes and Crime: The Role of Race, Age, and Peers and the Implications for Social Work Practice in College Sports" by Emmett L. Gill Jr., he examines the prevalence and nature of criminal behavior among collegiate athletes. The study analyzes 371 media reports of arrests involving college athletes between 2010 and 2015. He looks at possible risk factors, including financial struggles that may lead to property crimes. Substance use is another risk and suggests that environmental and social factors shape behavior. The article recommends that disciplinary oversight from athletic departments should be removed and instead replaced with independent oversight that could help improve accountability. This connects to studies that advocate for more rigorous background checks to prevent misconduct. Furthermore,

it states that social workers should be hired specifically for athletic programs. This idea contributes to the concept that early intervention and structured support systems can help prevent criminal behavior.

Background checks can reduce crime in all sectors, including fraud in the workplace. “Background checks: the theories behind the process” by Chelsea Binns and Robin J. Kempf references John C. Nelson, who was hired as the director of finance at Philip Crosby Associates. He had a strong academic background and references but ended up stealing over \$900,000 from the consulting firm. He falsified contracts and fraudulently used the CEO’s signature. It was later found that his real name was Robert Liszewski. If a background check was conducted, it was not executed properly.

In the article “Criminal Background Checks for Youth Sport Coaches,” James C. Kozlowski explains the case of *Doe. v. United States Youth Soccer Association, Inc.* There is no legal duty to protect people from misconduct unless a “special relationship” occurs. This constitutes a vulnerable individual, over whom the defendant has control of their safety. In this case, the court looked at whether youth soccer organizations have a duty to conduct criminal background checks on adults in positions of power. The case details how Jane Doe was sexually abused by her soccer coach, Fabrizio, and the soccer league was sued for not protecting the child. The ruling was that the league did not have a duty to protect the child from this conduct. However, there was an appeal, and it was found that there was, in fact, a “special relationship” between the organization and Doe. It set the precedent that youth sports organizations are responsible for safety during games and practices. The soccer organization had policies requiring criminal screening, but did not conduct mandatory background checks. It was concluded that negligence occurred because they had a legal duty to conduct these checks.

It is also important to look at the accuracy of criminal background checks that are used by employers and institutions. "The Problem with Criminal Records: Discrepancies Between State Reports and Private-Sector Background Checks" by Sarah Lageson and Robert Stewart studied 101 records of individuals and compared official state reports with two private-sector background checks. One is regulated by federal law, and the other is not. The findings were that in the unregulated one, 60% of people had at least one false-positive mistake. In the regulated one, it was slightly less, with 50% of participants having this false-positive error. Furthermore, above 90% of each group had at least one false-negative error. This comes from mismatched data, missing case dispositions, and incorrect information.

Recidivism Rates and Criminal Risk Assessment

The article entitled "Associations between prisons and recidivism: A nationwide longitudinal study" by Rongqin Yu and colleagues addresses the differences in recidivism rates across different prisons using between-individual and within-individual designs. It aims to gain knowledge about how environments and policies may influence the likelihood of reoffending. It shows a pattern that violent offenders have higher rearrest rates than non-violent offenders.

Patterns of recidivism for federal offenders who have committed violent crimes can be telling information. The United States Sentencing Commission's 2019 report, "Recidivism Among Federal Violent Offenders," analyzed 25,421 federal offenders who were released in 2005 and categorized them into non-violent and violent offenders. 15,427 people had committed nonviolent crimes, with no history of violent offenses. 10,004 individuals were deemed violent offenders; they had either committed a violent act during their federal offense or had prior arrests for a violent crime. One of the key findings was that violent offenders had a rearrest rate of 63.8%, which was significantly higher than non-violent offenders, with a 39.8% recidivism rate.

Furthermore, the violent offenders reoffended more quickly than the non-violent individuals. 38.9% of violent offenders faced new charges of assault, while non-violent offenders had a new charge rate of 17.9%. Recidivism rates were higher for violent criminals across all categories of crime. Lastly, recidivism rates decreased with age for both nonviolent and violent offenders, but violent offenders invariably reoffended at higher rates across all age groups. This report marks the importance of interventions to address the reoffending patterns that violent federal offenders commit.

The article “Zeroing in on violent recidivism among released prisoners” by Matt DeLisi analyzes a study associating risk factors with violent reoffending among ex-prisoners in Sweden. The study looked at data from 47,326 individuals who were released between 2001 and 2009. It found that 24% of people committed new violent offenses within an average of 3.2 years. The likelihood of reoffending at one year was 11%, at two years was 18%, and at five years was 31%. Key risk factors for violent reoffending included being male, younger age, having a history of violent crimes, low education levels, unemployment, mental health issues, and problems with substance use. They also acknowledged that it is difficult to predict severe crimes like homicide and sexual assault. This is important because it provides a strong way for professionals to apply the framework and highlights that further research is needed to enhance the assessment of violent risks.

The Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative can be used as an example when replicating what SafeSport should be doing in its background checks. The article called “The JDAI Story: Building a Better Juvenile Detention System” by Rochelle Stanfield explains JDAI. Launched in the 1990s, this program sought to reform juvenile detention practices by limiting confinement, improving conditions for youth who were detained, and keeping the public safe.

The main strategy mentioned in the source was that JDAI wanted to reduce overcrowding. Furthermore, they wanted to provide alternative measures like house arrest, evening reporting centers, and supervised shelters.

Another applicable framework is the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model. The article “Risk-need-responsivity model for offender assessment and rehabilitation 2007-06” by James Bonta and D.A. Andrews explains that this model was developed in the 1980s and became formalized in 1990. It created a framework that assessed and rehabilitated offenders through three core principles. The Risk Principle emphasizes that the intensity should be matched to interventions that equate to risks of reoffending. It says that individuals might be harmed by programs that are too intense for their needs. The Need Principle focuses on criminogenic needs, factors linked to criminal behavior-like substance abuse, antisocial attitudes, and a lack of employment. The Responsivity principle highlights that interventions should be tailored to people’s learning styles, motivation, and intellectual abilities. Research supports this model’s effectiveness when it is followed efficiently.

The page entitled “Pro-Data” on The Annie E. Casey Foundation website explains how data-driven decision-making can be used in youth justice. This free and web-based tool was created to allow jurisdictions to collect, organize, and analyze juvenile justice data. There are over 100 measures, like court referrals, formal prosecutions, and new probation cases. There are also custom measures that can be used to address local priorities. This data collection site includes trends, comparison with anonymized data from other sites, and the disaggregation of data, including factors like offense type, risk level, and race. This source attempts to overcome challenges by having current insights that enhance accountability and advocate for reforms.

SafeSport Policy Framework and Effectiveness

SafeSport is the Olympic Governing body that helps to protect athletes from misconduct. The framework from SafeSport entitled “SafeSport Code For The U.S. Olympic And Paralympic Movement” outlines the rules and regulations administered to prevent abuse in sports. Its goal is to create a safe and supportive environment for everyone involved in Olympic and Paralympic sports, including athletes, coaches, and other personnel. The code outlines conduct that is prohibited, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, as well as harassment, bullying, and discrimination. It also establishes how to report violations and encourages individuals to disclose misconduct. They also state that reports should be handled confidentially. Procedures for investigating allegations and responding to claims of misconduct are stated in the codebook. SafeSport emphasizes the importance of education and training. All people within the Olympic community are mandated to undergo training to understand each type of misconduct, prevention strategies, and how to respond if it happens. The code also underlines the importance of creating environments where abuse and misconduct are less likely to occur. Maintaining clear boundaries, practicing respectful behavior, and supporting mental and physical health are all strategies that can help with this. The SafeSport code discusses the consequences when rules are broken, including suspension or permanent bans from participating in the sports.

SafeSport has another handbook called the “Emotional & Physical Abuse & Misconduct Toolkit.” It is a resource for people who work with young athletes to recognize, prevent, and respond to various forms of abuse and misconduct in sports. The “prevent” section discusses proactive ways to keep athletes safe from potential abuse. It analyzes how understanding power dynamics, implementing trauma-sensitive coaching practices, and fostering positive team environments are all important in preventing problematic behaviors before they escalate further.

The “recognize” step defines the five primary categories in the toolkit, which includes emotional misconduct, physical misconduct, bullying, harassment, and hazing. It covers specific definitions and scenarios that help people identify when behaviors may begin to fall into the realm of misconduct. This facilitates the implementation of time-sensitive interventions, ensuring that support and resources are provided when most needed. The last category is “respond,” which helps people know how to react when misconduct is shared. It reviews the best ways to support athletes who are going through an unbearable time and tackles the issue of retaliation in sports. The toolkit also explains mandatory reporting requirements to ensure everyone knows when a prevalent issue needs to be shared.

The article "Coaches' Perspectives influence of Safe Sport-Related Education" by Anthony Battaglia, Gretchen Kerr, and Stephanie Buono deciphers how SafeSport training can affect coaches' confidence and ability to support athletes. Surveying 1,365 coaches who had completed at least one of the twelve SafeSport training courses, findings found that any training correlates with better knowledge of how to help others. Furthermore, completing multiple courses is linked to having higher comprehension and confidence levels. This highlights the importance of education for coaches because it gives them improved capabilities in helping to reduce and recognize abuse.

However, even SafeSport themselves are not immune to misconduct within its organization. In the recently published article called “US sex-abuse watchdog fires investigator after learning of his arrest for stealing drug money” by Eddie Pells, it references that SafeSport fired one of their investigators named Jason Krasley. He was arrested for stealing \$5,500 in drug seizure funds when he was a police officer in Allentown, Pennsylvania. When he was investigated further, he had allegations of crimes like rape, sex trafficking, and kidnapping

between 2011 and 2015. The introduction of a morals clause in the center's code of conduct and personal interviews for job candidates is now mandated as a result. Senator Chuck Grassley expressed the necessity of qualified investigators, especially within this organization. It raises the question: If even SafeSport investigators are being arrested for misconduct, how can they be trusted to hire individuals who uphold the very standards they enforce?

The article "U.S. Center for SafeSport was created to protect athletes from abuse. But is it working?" by Nancy Armour also criticizes the effectiveness of SafeSport in safeguarding athletes. The organization has faced scrutiny for its handling of investigations and a perceived lack of transparency. SafeSport is also known for closing investigations without making their findings public. Notable attorneys like Nancy Hogshead-Makar and Jack Wiener deem that SafeSport is "defendant-friendly" and biased against victims. These critiques highlight concerns about the relationship between SafeSport and the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee, which they receive substantial funding from.

Case Studies: High-Profile SafeSport Violations

Case 1: Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics – Systemic failures in abuse prevention.

The article "Larry Nassar: A timeline of the sexual abuse allegations against the former USA Gymnastics team doctor" by Joe Sommerlad and Ariana Baio presents a timeline of Larry Nassar's abuse. He sexually assaulted children and young adults under the premise of medical care. In 2014, Amanda Thomashow of Michigan State University filed a Title IX complaint against Nassar, but the institution resulted in no charges and said that his behavior had been appropriate in the medical setting. In July of 2015, the FBI investigated Nassar after the USA Gymnastics president reported allegations made by a gymnast named Maggie Nichols. He got fired from Michigan State University and was charged with three counts of first-degree criminal

sexual conduct but pleaded not guilty. Approximately a month later, on January 10, 2017, eighteen victims filed a federal lawsuit against USA Gymnastics, Nassar, and Michigan State University, suing for sexual assault, battery, molestation, and harassment between 1996 and 2016. Nassar eventually pleaded guilty to seven counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct as part of a plea deal in exchange for prosecutors dropping other charges. On January 16, 2018, a seven-day hearing started in Ingham County, where 156 women gave victim-impact statements. Nassar abused hundreds of athletes throughout his time working with athletics, which highlights an immense failure in the prevention of abuse in the gymnastics community.

The article “Justice Dept. Reaches \$138.7 Million Settlement Over F.B.I’s Failures in Nassar Case” by Glenn Thrush and Juliet Macur, details significant failures in policy enforcement and accountability throughout the Nassar case. It discusses how the sexual assault perpetrated by Larry Nassar could have been prevented if the FBI had acted quickly when the allegations first occurred in 2015. They did not take immediate action, despite world-renowned Olympic medalists like Simone Biles providing evidence that it had occurred. Their delay allowed Nassar to continue to abuse gymnasts. It also underscored how the amount of money that the victims received did not undo the harm that occurred to them.

Case 2: U.S. Swimming and Sexual Misconduct Cases – Gaps in policy enforcement.

In the article, “Former Athletes File Sex Abuse Lawsuits Against U.S.A Swimming” by Juliet Macur, the author details how six women have sued the U.S.A Swimming, saying that the sport did not protect them from coaches who sexually assaulted them as teenagers. Andrew King was one of these former coaches and is currently serving a prison sentence of 40 years for child molestation. Federal prosecutors investigated U.S. Swimming, which tried to hide sexual abuse

claims. Rick Curl was another coach found guilty of abusing Kelly Curren when she was twelve years old. His abuse went mostly unchallenged until survivors began to come forward.

Systemic failures occur that prevent athletes from having safeguards against sexual abuse in sports. “My swim coach raped me when I was 17. USA Swimming made it disappear” by Sarah Ehekircher details how predatory behavior was considered normal within USA Swimming. There was a large substantial imbalance between coaches and athletes, and financial and career dependencies prevented victims from speaking out. USA Swimming also ignored allegations instead of taking action. Ehekircher mentions that there are lasting consequences of the abuse, like psychological trauma and thoughts of suicide.

In the article, “As USA Swimming Grapples With Sexual Abuse, Athletes Cite Lack Of Female Coaches,” Alexandra Starr details how Olympic athlete Ariana Kukors Smith sued her former coach Sean Hutchinson for sexually abusing her. There are more than 150 coaches on the USA Swimming’s permanently banned list, and almost all are men. Furthermore, there are very few female swim coaches at the elite level. One of the main issues throughout the U.S. Swimming scandal is a systemic failure of oversight. Athletes were too afraid to speak out, and the organization did not quickly respond to allegations. There was no effective system to report or track complaints of abuse. This scandal also played a large part in why SafeSport was formed. It is an example of a system that failed to protect athletes from abuse. Coaches were able to exploit swimmers due to power imbalances and people being scared to speak up.

Case 3: Coaching Scandals in Track and Field – How criminal history was overlooked.

“Disgraced Running Coach Was Barred for Life for Alleged Sexual Assault” by Kevin Draper and Matthew Futterman the authors details how Alberto Salazar, a former coach of the Nike Oregon Project, was banned from track and field by the United States Center for SafeSport

due to allegations of physical and sexual assault during athletic massages. He violated four violations of the SafeSport code, three of which were sustained by the arbitrator.

Another article entitled “Former UK Athletics coach Rana Reider alleged to have raped teenager in US” by Sean Ingle, mentions how Rana Reider, a sprint coach, faced allegations of sexual and emotional abuse. One case includes how he allegedly raped an athlete after her 18th birthday. The athlete said that Reider used his power and influence to coerce her to have sex. He has been placed on probation by SafeSport for having a relationship with an athlete. This highlights the abuse of power in athletics.

Case 4: U.S. Tennis and Youth Athlete Abuse – Institutional negligence in coach accountability.

An article entitled “A jury awards \$9 million to a player who sued the US Tennis Association over sexual abuse by a coach” by AP News, depicts how a tennis player named Kylie McKenzie filed a lawsuit in March 2022 against the U.S. Tennis Association (USTA) for failing to protect her from a coach that sexually abused her at one of its training centers. Anibal Aranda, the coach employed by the USTA, was able to use his position to gain access to vulnerable athletes and then assaulted them. McKenzie’s suit addressed that the USTA was negligent in continuing to keep him as a coach after he sexually assaulted one of their employees, and was also negligent in that they failed to protect her from the sexual assaults.

An additional abuse case within tennis is written about in an article called “NY Times investigative report on USTA. It follows a former collegiate tennis player named Stevie Gould, who had become an advocate for athlete safety after his former coach, Normandie Burgos, sexually abused him. The abuse began when Gould was 13 and occurred for two years. In 2017, Gould secretly recorded Burgos' confession to his crimes, which, in part, led to a sentence of 60 counts of child molestation. Gould also filed a civil lawsuit against the U.S. Tennis Association

(USTA), alleging that they were negligent because they failed to protect young athletes from Burgos, even though there have been accusations against him since 2001. The lawsuit was settled in 2021. In October of 2023, Gould also filed a complaint with SafeSport against the USTA's deputy chief legal officer, Staciellen Mischel. He alleged that her actions in handling abuse cases were dangerous to young athletes.

Gaps in Existing Literature

In the article, "U.S. Olympic Report: 93 Percent Of Athletes Surveyed Who Experienced Sexual Harassment Or Unwanted Contact Say They Didn't Report It" by Dan Boyce, he references a shocking statistic that SafeSport published- 93% of athletes who experienced unwanted contact said that they did not report it to the proper authorities. 18% of participants think that sexual, emotional, and physical misconduct are issues in their sports. This is a large gap, because it might be difficult to analyze data when many people did not report the assault.

The article "Awareness of the Misconduct in Sports Science Research," by Dário Gaspar and Dulce Esteves, identifies challenges in identifying misconduct. Pressure and systemic issues contribute to the underreporting of policy violations, which may create a barrier to finding risk factors. There is a gap in predicting effective methodologies for detecting misconduct.

Through the intersections of criminal behavior, recidivism rates, and SafeSport policies, this literature review attempts to understand how past criminal histories may correlate with SafeSport policy violations in athletics. Certain risk factors, like previous violent offenses, substance use, and systemic gaps, can increase the likelihood of misconduct in environments surrounding sports. The findings illustrated in this review highlight the importance of intense background checks in preventing criminal behavior against athletes. SafeSport policies give an essential framework for addressing misconduct in Olympic and Paralympic sports. However,

there is still work to be done. Literature suggests that there are gaps in enforcement implementation. Through case studies of violations, it is clear there is a need for a more consistent application of screening measures, and better education on how to recognize and report abuse. Recidivism research also suggests that violent offenders are much more likely to reoffend than non-violent offenders, which raises questions about whether current strategies are sufficiently addressing the long-term risks posed by individuals with prior violent offenses.

Current SafeSport Policy Analysis

This section outlines and analyzes the SafeSport Code for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement and the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAP). It explains the components of each framework and code, showing how their guidelines are used to protect athletes from misconduct.

SafeSport Code for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement

Authority

The United States Center for SafeSport is recognized by Congress, the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC), and the National Governing Bodies (NGBs) as the official organization to protect athletes of all Olympic, Paralympic, Pan American, and Para Pan American sports in the United States.

Administration and Compliance

The USOPC, NGBs, and Local Affiliated Organizations must comply with all relevant policies and procedures. They must not interfere with or influence the outcome of the Center's investigations. Participants are responsible for knowing the information outlined within the code, and the Center can change the code as necessary.

Jurisdiction of the Center

The Center has jurisdiction to investigate any allegation if a participant had engaged in any of the following: sexual misconduct, criminal charges or dispositions involving child abuse or sexual misconduct, misconduct related to not reporting when child abuse or sexual misconduct is involved, misconduct related to aiding and abetting, abuse of process, or retaliation against the processes that the Center upholds, and other inappropriate conduct.

Discretionary Jurisdiction

The Center has discretionary jurisdiction to investigate instances where a participant may have engaged in the following: non-sexual child abuse, emotional and physical misconduct such as stalking, bullying behaviors, hazing, and harassment, criminal charges or dispositions not involving child abuse or sexual misconduct, minor athlete abuse prevention policies, and misconduct related to aiding and abetting, abuse of process, or retaliation against the processes of the USOPC, an NGB, or a LAO.

Prohibited Conduct

It is a violation of the code for a participant to engage in any prohibited conduct. This includes criminal charges or dispositions, child abuse, sexual misconduct, emotional and physical misconduct, including stalking, bullying, hazing, and harassment, other inappropriate conduct, aiding and abetting, misconduct related to reporting, misconduct related to the Center's Process, retaliation, and violations of minor athletes abuse prevention and proactive policies.

With regards to criminal charges and dispositions, the Center may rely on allegations, original charges, amended charges, and pleas. Criminal charges include being arrested and subject to bond obligations and conditional releases, pending criminal charges, and active warrants for arrest. Anyone who is on a sex offender registry is ineligible to participate. If there are participants who wish to challenge the decisions related to criminal charges or dispositions, they may request a hearing.

Furthermore, it is a violation of the code for a participant to engage in child abuse or sexual misconduct. Examples of sexual misconduct offenses include sexual harassment, nonconsensual sexual contact, nonconsensual sexual intercourse, sexual exploitation, exposing a

minor to sexual content or imagery, sexual bullying behavior, sexual hazing, or other inappropriate sexual conduct.

Emotional and physical misconduct is also prohibited, which may include bullying behavior, hazing, and harassment. This may appear in repeatedly attacking people verbally in an unproductive or demotivational manner, being physically aggressive, like throwing sports equipment, punching walls, etc. Stalking is another example of this, occurring when people follow or monitor another person. Bullying behaviors like ridiculing and taunting, cyberbullying, hitting, and pushing are all prohibited. Hazing acts may include physical restraints, beating, forcing consumption of alcohol and drugs, ridiculing social actions, or other attempts to embarrass a participant.

Other inappropriate conduct includes intimate relationships where power imbalances exist, intentional exposure of private areas, or other inappropriate physical conduct like excessively touching, hugging, or kissing another person.

Aiding and abetting is defined as aiding and facilitating prohibited conduct by a participant, allowing anyone who has been suspended or ineligible by the Center to be associated with or coach a sport within the organization, or allowing anyone to violate temporary measures, sanctions, or conditional resolutions.

Reporting standards are also intensely upheld by the Center. Failure to report unauthorized behavior is against the code. Additionally, intentionally filing a false allegation will result in disciplinary action against the participant. The abuse of process occurs when someone directly or indirectly interferes with the Center's process. This includes giving false information, concealing information, attempting to discourage a person's participating in the Center's processes, harassing or intimidating anyone involved with the processes any time during the

proceedings, disclosing young victims identifying information, not complying with temporary measures, sanctions, or terms of conditional or alternative resolutions, distributing confidential materials, influencing others to abuse the process, recording the process, or any other conduct that interferes with the process.

Reporting

All adult participants must report suspected misconduct (sexual, child abuse, emotional and physical abuse, and violations of SafeSport Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies). These reports must be filed with SafeSport and law enforcement when minors are involved. Participants should not rely on supervisors to fulfill this. Reports must be filed as quickly as possible, should include all known identifying information, and should be updated if new information arises. Investigating or verifying claims before they are reported is not allowed. Furthermore, reports may be made anonymously, but this may limit the ability to investigate cases and confirm compliance with mandatory reporting laws. SafeSport protects third-party reporters' identities if possible and allows the reporter to proceed through different channels, such as law enforcement and governing bodies. Medical and mental health professionals are exempt from reporting adult sexual misconduct if it violates confidentiality laws but must report suspected child abuse.

Resolution Procedures

SafeSport resolution procedures outline how reports of misconduct are handled when received. The Center first conducts a preliminary inquiry and, if needed, an investigation to determine if a violation occurred. They coordinate with law enforcement but operate independently of civil or criminal proceedings, and there are no statutes of limitations. Cases can be resolved through conditional, alternative, informal, or formal resolutions, or can be closed if there is not enough evidence. Claimants can have advisors during the process, and witnesses are

expected to cooperate. Respondents are allowed procedural rights, including notices of allegations, the opportunity to be heard, and the right to arbitration. Investigations are put together into a confidential investigative report and notice of decision, which includes findings and sanctions when applicable. Cases may be reopened based on new evidence.

Temporary Measures

SafeSport may also impose temporary measures at any time to ensure that athletes are safe while there is an ongoing investigation. These measures may include suspension, contact limitations, or chaperone requirements, and are based on the seriousness of allegations and whether the respondent poses a risk to the sport community. The temporary measures remain until they are lifted. Respondents can request a temporary measures hearing, in which an independent arbitrator reviews whether the measures are appropriate, assuming that the allegations are true. Hearings are expedited, based on oral arguments, and may result in the approval, modification, or rejection of the measures. If the temporary measures were initially imposed by an NGB or the USOPC, they will be adopted and enforced by SafeSport.

Sanctions

If the Center finds there is sufficient evidence that a participant has violated the code, it can impose sanctions that influence how the individual can participate in sports. Sanctions can include written warnings, probation, suspension, temporary or permanent ineligibility, or other measures like no-contact orders or mandatory education. The severity of sanctions are determined based on factors like prior history, patterns of misconduct, ages of those involved, potential ongoing risk, voluntary cooperation, impact on the claimant and sporting community, and other circumstances. The Center is legally required to maintain a public database that lists adult participants who have eligibility restrictions.

Arbitration Rules

SafeSport Arbitration Rules outline the mandatory and confidential process for resolving challenges to disciplinary decisions. Arbitration is the process used to determine whether a participant has violated the SafeSport code. An independent arbitrator who is selected from a pool of trained attorneys and retired judges oversees the case. Proceedings are expedited and are usually done through a teleconference. There are strict timelines for filing briefs, submitting evidence, and completing hearings. The Center and the respondent both may have advisors. Evidence rules are flexible to allow relevant information, but attorney-client and doctor-patient privileges are respected, and minors' testimonies are handled with care. Arbitrators issue final, written decisions within fourteen days of closing the record, which are binding with no appeal rights. Fees are typically paid for by respondents unless there is demonstrated hardship, but costs can be reallocated based on the outcome of the case. It is imperative that throughout the case, arbitrators maintain control over the proceedings and rule interpretation to make sure it is fair and that participants' confidentiality is protected.

Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAP)

The current U.S. Center for SafeSport Minor Abuse Prevention Policies handbook was published on January 5, 2024. It has four main components: Organizational Requirements for Education & Training and Prevention Policies, an Education & Training Policy, Required Prevention Policies, and Recommended Prevention Policies. Each of these steps attempts to limit one-on-one interactions between adults and athletes who are minors.

A minor athlete is an athlete within the jurisdiction of the National Governing Body (NGB), United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC), and Local Affiliated Organizations (LAO). To be considered a minor athlete, they must be under the age of 18 years

old, and partakes in, or has participated in within the prior 12 months in any event, program, activity, or competition that is a part of the previously stated governing bodies, whether is be partially or full jurisdiction.

Part I: Organizational Requirements for Education & Training and Prevention Policies

This section of the MAAP handbook explains the organizational requirements that are implemented. NGBs and the USOPC must track whether adult participants complete trainings every twelve months. They also must give training to minor athletes on the prevention and reporting of child abuse. This is subject to parental consent, and the organization must track how the training was offered. Parents must also be given the opportunity of getting training again every twelve months. Organizations are required to develop minor athlete abuse prevention to limit one-on-one interactions between minors and adults. These model policies cover meetings, individual training sessions, therapeutic and recovery modalities and manual therapy, locker rooms and changing areas, electronic communications, transportation, and lodging and residential environments. Organizations also must have a reporting mechanism and should investigate and resolve any reports.

Part II: Education & Training Policy

There is a mandatory child abuse prevention training for adults who participate in sports. This constitutes those who have regular contact, authority, or are an employee or board member of an NGB, LAO, or the USOPC. Health professionals also must be trained but can take the Health Professionals Course instead of the SafeSport Trained Core Course. Adults must complete the course before there is regular contact with a minor, or within 45 days of initial membership or beginning a new role. They must also take a refresher course every twelve months. There are also optional training courses. Adults who are volunteers who do not have

regular contact with minor athletes are encouraged to take a volunteer course. Exemptions are possible for those who have survived abuse and those who have cognitive or physical disabilities, or language barriers, but these must be granted. There are options to help people complete the training courses, such as reader-compatible versions and language options.

Part III: Required Policies for One-On-One Interactions

Exceptions

All one-on-one contacts that occur within the program between an adult and a minor must be observable and interruptible. However, there are certain situations in which one-on-one interactions may be allowed. The first is a Close-in-Age Exception. This allows for a continued relationship among athletes on the same team. The criterion is that the adult has no authority over the minor athlete, and they are not more than four years older than the minor athlete. The second exception is personal care assistants who work with minor athletes. These are people who help the athlete with daily living and preparation for participating in their sport. The requirements that must be met include: the minor's guardian has given written consent to the organization for the adult personal care assistant to work with the athlete, the adult has complied with the education and training policy, and they have complied with the organization's screening policy. The third exception involves dual relationships, meaning that they already have a relationship with the minor athlete outside of the sport programs. The exception requires written consent from the guardian of the minor athlete. The last exception is in cases of an emergency, in which adults should document these situations.

Meetings

Adult participants must make sure that any in-program meetings with athletes who are minors are observable and interruptible. Meetings with licensed mental health care and health care professionals also must be observable unless the door remains unlocked and/or there is another adult present at the facility that knows a meeting is happening. The organization is also to be notified that the provider is meeting with them and there must always be consent.

Individual Training Sessions

Individual training sessions must be observable and interruptible. Written consent from the minor athlete's parent or guardian must be obtained in advance, at least once per year, and guardians must be able to observe the individual training session. It is recommended that there is another adult participant that monitors the session. It is also advised that parents receive the education and training from SafeSport as well.

Manual Therapy and Therapeutic and Recovery Modalities Policy

Therapies to prevent and treat injuries can put children in vulnerable positions. Adult participants must ensure that all contacts are observable and interruptible. An additional adult participant must also be present, and documented parental consent is required. The minor should always be fully or partially covered, making sure that the breasts, groin, and genitals are always covered. Parents and guardians must be allowed in the room, and the provider must narrate the steps before they take them during the session. It is suggested that parents receive the SafeSport child abuse prevention training. Techniques used should reduce the physical touch of minors, and only licensed providers should administer therapy. Coaches should not massage minor athletes, even if they are licensed massage therapists.

Locker Rooms and Changing Areas Policy

Athletes may be vulnerable to abuse in changing and showering areas. Adult participants must ensure that any in-program contact with minors is observable and interruptible. No adult or athlete may use photography or recording devices in locker rooms or changing areas. Adults may not remove their clothes or behave in a way that exposes their breasts, buttocks, groin, or genitals to a minor athlete. Adults may not shower with minors unless the adult meets the close-in-age exception or the shower is part of a pre- or post-activity rinse while wearing swimwear. Parents may request in writing that minors do not change or shower with adults. The Organization may permit recording or pictures in locker rooms when a sport or athletic accomplishment is being celebrated. However, guardian consent must be obtained, the organization must approve the specific instance of recording or photography, two or more adult participants must be present, and everyone must be fully clothed. Personal care assistants are permitted to be with and assist minor athletes if they meet the previous requirements listed on page 22. The Organization also must provide a private or semi-private place for minor athletes to change, and these spaces should be monitored to ensure compliance with these policies.

Electronic Communications Policy

Technology has made it easier for abusers to contact minors without supervision and share inappropriate images and videos. All one-on-one electronic communications between an adult and a minor must be open and transparent, meaning that the adult includes the parent or guardian, an adult family member or another adult participant in every communication. Only platforms that allow for open and transparent communication may be used. When an adult communicates to the entire team, they must also include the minor athletes' parents or guardians, another adult family member of the minor athletes, or another adult participant. All

communication must be professional in nature, and guardians may request that adults or the Organization do not contact the minor athlete whatsoever through electronic communication. It is advised that electronic communications be limited to hours between 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. Furthermore, adults, except those with a dual relationship or those who meet the close-in-age exception, are not allowed to have private social media connections with minor athletes.

Transportation Policy

Athletes frequently carpool or travel without direct guardian supervision, which can place them in potentially vulnerable situations. Transportation must remain observable and interruptible unless there is an exception, or the adult has written consent, is accompanied by another adult, or is transporting at least two minors aged eight or older. It is suggested that guardians pick up their minor athlete first and drop off their minor athlete last when carpooling.

Lodging and Residential Environments Policy

Athletes who travel overnight may face a greater risk of abuse when traveling without their parents or guardians. All in-program contact while lodging must be observable and interruptible. Lodging includes hotels, rentals, and long-term residential environments. Adult participants cannot share a hotel room or sleep in the same room as a minor athlete unless there is an exception and the minor's parent or guardian has given the Organization or adult advance, written consent. If there are room checks, the one-on-one interaction policy must be enforced, and there must be at least two adults present for room checks.

Part IV: Recommended Policies for Keeping Young Athletes Safe

Adult participants should not have out-of-program contact with minors without legal or parental guardian consent, even if the contact is not one-on-one. Adults who do not meet that

close-in-age exception or the dual relationship with a minor athlete should not give personal gifts to minors. Gifts that are equally given to all athletes and serve as a motivational or educational tool are permitted. Photographs or videos of athletes should only be taken in public view and should follow accepted standards of decency. Adults should not share or post photos or videos of the minor athlete without the athlete's and guardian's consent.

Background Checks

United States of America Track and Field

USA Track and Field (USATF) mandates background checks for individuals that interact with athletes. Background checks are carried out by the National Center for Safety Initiatives and apply to coaches, officials, volunteers, and athlete representatives. These background checks include identity verification, criminal database searches, national watch lists, sex offender registry searches, and at least one county-level search from the past seven years. The screen for criminal convictions, sex offender registrations, and pending criminal cases. Applicants are ineligible if they have convictions or pending charges for felonies involving violence against a person or violent crimes with weapons within the previous ten years, felonies involving animal abuse, cruelty, or neglect, felonies or misdemeanors involving sexual crimes, felonies or misdemeanors involving drug offenses within the previous seven years, felonies or misdemeanors involving harm to a minor, and disclosures of not being in good standing with the United States Anti-Doping Agency.

Individuals who have a flagged status may appeal to the USATF Background Screen Review Panel within 21 days of being notified of the flag. However, ineligible determinations that were previously stated are not appealable.

Applicants are required to provide their Social Security Number as part of the screening process. Background checks remain valid for two years, with an automatic recheck conducted approximately one year after the initial screening. Even if a person has done a background check through a different organization, USATF requires a separate screening through NCSI.

United States of America Gymnastics

The USA Gymnastics program requires criminal background screenings for individuals within the program. They must be completed for those over the age of 18 and are mandatory for people on the team, Board Members and staff, and other individuals instructed to do so. The National Center for Safety Initiatives (NCSI) is the organization that performs the background screenings for USA Gymnastics. People are screened when applying for membership, and every two years after. NCSI will conduct an automatic re-screen after one year from the initial background screening. Applicants complete online Consent and Authorization forms to register through NCSI.

The background screening includes two multi-jurisdictional criminal database searches, sex offender registry checks across all available states, social security number validation, name and address verification, federal terrorist database search, and a county criminal records and federal district court search for the past seven years.

Results are issues based on a cleared (green light) or flagged (red light) system. Red lights indicate that the individual did not meet the criteria screening due to criminal history findings. They are notified and given an opportunity to correct potential errors or provide additional information about the circumstances.

United States of America Soccer

Background checks within USA Soccer apply to staff, board members, contractors, and interns. It also applies to National Team players and associated personnel, National-level referees, and other individuals that have regular contact with minor athletes. Everyone over the age of 18 must have a background check, and they prioritize self-disclosure, in which applicants must state any prior disqualifications or ineligibilities from other sports organizations.

The background screening includes Social Security Number validation, name and address history verification, multi-jurisdictional criminal database searches covering all U.S. states and territories, federal and county criminal records searches for the past seven years, sex offender registry checks across all available states and territories, motor vehicle records checks (if driving is a job requirement), searches of multiple national watch lists, and international records checks for U.S. citizens who have lived abroad for six consecutive months in the past seven years.

An automatic limited recheck is done 12 months after the initial background screening for individuals who remain active in the organization.

Methodology

Research Design

This research involves a qualitative policy analysis approach to merge document analyses of SafeSport policies with a synthesis of secondary data from case studies, academic literature, media reports, and public disciplinary records. Rather than relying on primary data collection, this method draws on a comprehensive evaluation of secondary sources, looking at the effectiveness of policy and emerging risk patterns through existing materials. The main goal is to sufficiently address the risk of policy violations and explore strategies for prevention in relation to prior criminal histories.

The literature review attempts to find key themes in existing research related to criminal behavior, recidivism, and SafeSport current screening and misconduct policies. Furthermore, it serves to find gaps, such as the lack of observable connections between criminal history and SafeSport violations.

It also incorporates a case study analysis of high-profile violations to recognize patterns and gaps in enforcement. Both case studies and reports from the media demonstrate patterns of institutional failure and policy breakdowns that occur in the real world. These examples support the review of SafeSport current screening and policy frameworks, such as the SafeSport Code and the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policy's.

This methodology will be used to identify correlations and risk factors associated with past criminal behavior, while also focusing on policy improvements through comparative frameworks such as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative's "Pro-Data" or the Risk-Need-Responsivity model. Each source provides a descriptive foundation of what currently exists and a prescriptive rationale of what should be improved.

Data Collection

This research relies on the collection and analysis of secondary data. Every source used is available to the public and can be applied to instances involving SafeSport and its entities. The secondary source analysis is organized into four categories: policies, misconduct prevention strategies, and risk assessment frameworks.

This analysis includes a review of SafeSport policy documents, including the *SafeSport Code for the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement* and the *Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAPP)*. These documents provided insight into the structure, mechanisms of enforcement, and goals regarding education. They aim to create a prevention framework by issuing recommendations, definitions, and codes of conduct.

Second, screening policies and procedures from select National Governing Bodies, such as USA Track and Field, USA Gymnastics, and USA Soccer, were analyzed to assess how criminal background checks are implemented across Olympic-affiliated organizations. This review examined eligibility criteria, appeal processes, and disqualifying offenses.

Another aspect of data collection was academic literature and reports that were used to create knowledge in areas such as recidivism, risk assessment, and the limitations of background checks. These readings informed the evaluation of current screening criteria and what recommendations should be given more better evidence-based practices.

The U.S. Sentencing Commission's recidivism data, the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation's "Pro-Data" framework were also reviewed, providing comparative models for alternative approaches to risk assessment, data tracking, and policy reform. These can be used to strengthen practices of keeping athletes safer.

By synthesizing and evaluating existing sources, this research critically assesses current SafeSport procedures and proposes improvements that can be supported by information from other frameworks. Each of these materials were selected due to their relevance and credibility, collectively displaying how screening procedures intersect with cases of abuse or policy failure.

Limitations

Since SafeSport does not publish full criminal records from individuals, it is difficult to generalize findings to apply to all records. SafeSport is not a law enforcement agency, and many of their findings are protected for legal and privacy reasons, so they do not disclose detailed past criminal histories. As a result, the ability to directly compare past criminal behavior with policy violations is restricted. The research then has to rely on indirect sources like news articles, policy analysis, and existing academic literature and tools.

Another significant limitation is the issue of underreporting in cases of abuse and misconduct. As mentioned previously, 93% of athletes who experienced sexual harassment did not report it. This underreporting means that analyses might not be completely accurate, as they may only represent a small portion of actual violations. Consequently, this indicates that the findings might not identify the whole scope of misconduct within the Olympic and Paralympic organizations. Underreporting makes it challenging to make definitive conclusions about which criminal histories may correlate with policy violations because this population might not represent the correct risk pool.

Biases in reported cases are another limitation within this research. Cases that are reported can create biases due to external factors like media coverage, the gender or race of the accused and accuser, or the atmosphere of the sport it involves. Factors such as these can influence whether a case is taken to court. Allegations against high-profile cases or athletes

might receive more coverage, while misconduct between lesser-known people might be dismissed. These biases can lead to the overrepresentation or underrepresentation of certain groups, which can distort data that is presented. If data is skewed, it can suggest correlations between specific offenses and violations that are false, reflecting that it is occurring because of reporting trends rather than actual risk.

Furthermore, there are also challenges in generalizability when deciphering this data. SafeSport is limited to the Olympic and Paralympic community, which may not indicate applicable findings to the overall athletic landscape. Each level of sport has its own culture, power dynamics, and enforcement strategies. Professional leagues might have their own compliance frameworks, while youth sports might have a heavily volunteer-based community that has less oversight. This shows that the findings from this research might not be generalizable beyond Olympic and Paralympic sports. There are policies, training, and structures that might be unique to SafeSport, meaning that risk factors that have been identified may not apply to other contexts.

Another limitation is the misinterpretation of background check data. Criminal records do not always provide a comprehensive picture of a person's level of risk in committing a SafeSport violation. Some people may have committed acts that were never formally charged, especially in sexual assault cases where victims do not come forward. Other people may have past offenses that are irrelevant to SafeSport criteria. Background checks may contain errors such as false positives or false negatives, which can lead to important contextual details being overlooked. Without a comprehensive analysis of the circumstances surrounding an offense, there is a risk of making inaccurate judgments about an individual's potential threat to athlete safety. This can create ethical concerns about how fair and effective background checks are as a predictive tool.

Assessing Policy Effectiveness and Making Recommendations

SafeSport attempts to create safety within the Olympic and Paralympic organizations. However, as shown throughout the data and literature review, there changes must be made to make athletes safer so that they can perform their sport without any hindrance.

One significant improvement that could be made within SafeSport is better background checks. Using a more comprehensive range of records will allow for an improved assessment of personal history, including documents that typically may not be included, like reports from employers, mental health records, or military and government service records.

Another takeaway from this is the need to enhance existing training models. Current programs should be revised to include more in-depth modules on identifying early warning signs of potential policy violations. This may include actions like grooming behavior, patterns of aggression, and manipulative tactics. This will better equip trained people with tools on how to report concerns immediately. Also, there should be additional training sessions for people that have a criminal history.

Another recommendation is that SafeSport should publish its data publicly. This should include the outcomes of screenings, training programs, and policy violations. Even if presented anonymously, publishing information on the types of violations, background check effectiveness, and training outcomes would strengthen the system and promote accountability. This will also create a space to receive feedback on improvements that could be made.

Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) Pro-Data System

However, the most important recommendation that I have found is integrating SafeSport into a JDAI “Pro-Data” system. Pro-Data allows jurisdictions to gather and organize youth justice data through over 100 measures and lets the user to add custom metrics. SafeSport could

establish a similar system that would collect detailed data on reports of misconduct, resolutions of cases, and training compliance. By using the customizable metrics, specific concerns could be tracked within certain sports. The interactive dashboards offered by the JDAI system would allow SafeSport to track trends in misconduct reports, incident frequency, and the effectiveness of preventative measures over time. Pro-Data also allows for the disaggregation of data to find disparities within different demographic groups. Using this analysis through multiple demographics, SafeSport could address disparities in reporting, investigation outcomes, and access to resources. This would lead to a more equitable environment for all athletes. Another benefit of this resource is that it provides timely insights. This real-time data collection and analysis would allow SafeSport to respond quickly to emerging issues, so they could provide resources effectively and change policies before people get hurt. The program also encourages collaboration to drive decision-making. SafeSport should engage more coaches, athletes, and parents in these data-driven discussions so that there is a more transparent approach to misconduct prevention.

When connecting JDAI assessments to specific screening processes, SafeSport could track patterns in misconduct reports and identify which types of prior offenses (violent, non-violent, harassment, etc.) most often correlate with violations of SafeSport policies. This data could be used to improve background check protocols and flag individuals who may be high-risk based on evidence-based risk factors. The Risk Assessment Instruments provided by JDAI could be adapted to evaluate the risk levels of athletic personnel by integrating factors such as criminal history, employment gaps, and even unconfirmed prior allegations for further review. Using Pro-Data's tools would support a more precise and equitable approach for SafeSport.

Risk-Need-Responsivity Model

Another notable resource that could be used is the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model. This model provides a framework for offender assessment and rehabilitation within criminal justice systems. The three core principles, risk, need, and responsivity, give an evidence-based approach for reducing recidivism and managing risky behavior. These principles can also be applied to SafeSport to enhance identifiable and preventable misconduct within people in positions of authority in these athletic sectors.

The risk principle hypothesizes that intervention strategies should match a person's likelihood of reoffending. This principle could be used to design a tiered background and eligibility check within SafeSport. Instead of only relying on categories based on offense type, there could be a more fluid screening system to assess risk levels. For instance, a person with a violent or sexual offense history could be classified as permanently ineligible because they are high-risk. Those with less severe histories could receive additional training or be approved under certain conditions, like supervision. This would allow resources to go to those most likely to cause harm and reduce a potential overreach when screening lower-risk people.

The need principle primarily focuses on targeting criminogenic needs, such as substance abuse or antisocial attitudes, that can be empirically linked to future criminal conduct. SafeSport training and prevention programs could be strengthened by implementing strategies that specifically address these risk indicators. Educating individuals within the SafeSport system to recognize behavioral patterns linked to violations, such as grooming, boundary violations, and power imbalances, would align training efforts with known risk indicators. It would also allow the organization to be more proactive.

The responsiveness principle involves creating interventions that are accessible to each person's learning style and background to make them the most effective. People who might be more high-risk, such as those with past criminal records or previous complaints, could benefit from a more focused education and increased monitoring.

Adopting a model such as the Risk-Need-Responsivity Model would help SafeSport to incorporate a more individualized, risk-informed, and prevention-focused approach to dealing with violations and criminal history.

Overall, these strategies and policy reforms would shift the current reactive case handling to an evidence-based prevention, helping verify that only very qualified and low-risk people are allowed to be employed in these sports environments.

Future Needs and Recommendations

1. **Specific Offense Correlations:** Research must be conducted to decipher if certain types of criminal convictions correlate with specific SafeSport policy violations.
2. **Longitudinal Effectiveness of Screening:** There should be long-term studies conducted that evaluate whether people who pass background checks later receive SafeSport sanctions. This could help to measure the accuracy of predictions of current screening methods.
3. **Development of Sport-Specific Risk Assessment Tools:** Including criminogenic factors like prior allegations, employment gaps, or the abuse of power would help benefit SafeSport by giving them validated assessment tools.
4. **Evaluation of Training Program Effectiveness:** There should be follow-up studies that explore which designs are most effective in improving compliance. Especially for

people that are higher risk, it would be important to investigate if they respond best to trauma-informed, interactive, or mandatory follow-up programs.

5. Implementation of Centralized Systems: Using pilot programs and likelihood studies would assess whether SafeSport would be able to implement a centralized JDAI-inspired system to track misconduct reports, risk patterns, and policy outcomes.

Conclusion

This research examined the relationship between prior criminal histories and the likelihood of Olympic and Paralympic SafeSport policy violations. Through a comprehensive policy analysis, literature review, and case studies, this thesis dissected the limitations that remain in athlete safety frameworks. While SafeSport plays a large role in preventing misconduct and educating participants, its effectiveness is weakened when there are gaps in background screenings, widespread underreporting of abuse, and disciplinary measures that may be inconsistently enforced.

Findings from this research suggest that current background screening systems are not comprehensive or consistent enough to assess risk reliably. Violent offenders, who statistically have higher recidivism rates than non-violent offenders, can go undetected due to the limitations in current screening procedures. Furthermore, there is a high rate of underreporting, which highlights that studies cannot identify the true scale of abuse.

By using and incorporating criminological frameworks like the Risk-Need-Responsivity model and the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative's Pro-Data system, this research highlights specific strategies that SafeSport can adopt to enhance risk prevention approaches. These include establishing more complex and evidence-based background checks, reinforcing training programs to address behavioral warning signs, and using centralized data systems to track trends, outcomes, and disparities of policy violations across sports.

This thesis also highlights the need for policy transparency and accountability. Publishing anonymized, aggregate data about SafeSport investigations, outcomes, and training compliance could be used to increase public trust and allow for continuous improvements within the system.

Creating reforms would develop a more data-informed culture and would better identify high-risk individuals before violations of SafeSport policy potentially occur.

The main goal of the research is not to completely criticize SafeSport, but to outline areas where meaningful improvements can be made. Safety, especially regarding minor athletes and other vulnerable groups, must be a priority for everyone involved in the sport. This study affirms the need for a shift towards proactive, evidence-based risk prevention strategies. This thesis argues that SafeSport should continue to evolve its policies to better fulfill its purpose of protecting athletes.

By implementing these recommendations, SafeSport can further accomplish its goal of creating a culture that involves safety, respect, and accountability. The proposed changes offer ways to protect athletes before misconduct even occurs. While criminal history is only one of the several data-informed tools that can be considered when assessing potential risk, it is an important approach that can help ensure that athletic spaces are safe and inclusive to all who are passionate about sports.

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