

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN IN SPORT

SIGURANȚA COPIILOR ÎN SPORT

Svetlana PATRAS, ORCID: 0000-0001-6335-0743
State University of Physical Education and Sport,
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova

CZU: 364.442.6:796-053.2

e-mail: svetlana.ceban85@gmail.com

Cuvinte-cheie: protecția copilului, sport, cercetare, politică de protecție, cod de etică, părinți, antrenori, copil.

ACTUALITY

Football is one of the most popular sports worldwide and millions of children around the world are involved in it. Many of them play, whether in organised matches or tournaments. At the same time, almost all children follow a favorite team, learning valuable life lessons such as loyalty and team work. In this context, involving children in playing football requires ensuring and respecting their right to a safe environment, a culture of respect and understanding within the football team. Every child has the right to enjoy football in a safe and inclusive environment, free from any form of abuse, harassment or exploitation, and the failure to ensure all the aforementioned conditions is a violation of children's rights.

Over the last few years, orientations aimed at ensuring the safety of children involved in football were internationally established (FIFA) by promoting the child protection policy covering the pro-active actions taken by football clubs to promote and ensure the well-being of children and protect them from certain risks when playing football. At the same time, UEFA through its Strategy 2019-2024 “Together for the future of football” established the need to promote the child protection policy in order to make both coaches and managers accountable for high values and standards. UEFA defines the child's safeguarding as “the organization's responsibility to ensure that football is a safe, positive and enjoyable experience for all children and that all children are kept safe from harm (including abuse) when involved in football, in all capacities and at all levels”.

At national level, the Moldovan Football Federation (MFF) takes an interest in the development of a safe environment for children playing football, observing the principles laid down by UEFA and FIFA. In this context, FAM in partnership with Terre des hommes Moldova (Tdh), have started the implementation of the project named “Safe football for children in Moldova”, aimed at ensuring a safe and protective environment for all children practicing football in the Republic of Moldova.

Safeguarding children in Sport/football is a priority both at the national and international level and for this reason the need to implement a child protection policy in sport.

Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.

An important outcome of the UEFA project has been that Football Association of Moldova, under the lead of the UEFA FSR project “Safe football for children In Moldova”, are developed attached child protection policy (manual), which was approved by FAM senior management on 15 April 2021. This safeguarding policy has since formed a basic book regarding child safeguarding in Moldova.

METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of research: The sociological study named “**Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices for Safeguarding Children in Football**” was designed to assess the knowledge, attitudes and practices (KAP) aimed at protecting children involved in football. The research objectives have centered on:

- determining the degree of satisfaction of the target groups (coaches, children, parents and football experts having direct or indirect contact with children involved in football) with the football club and its work;
- identifying children’s perceptions of the degree of safety within the club/football team;
- determining perceptions of the risks to which children are/may be subjected while playing football;
- identifying the views and attitudes of target groups on safeguarding children in football and the need for the safeguarding measures thereof;
- establishing practices for the information of the target group on measures for safeguarding children in football;
- identifying the level of knowledge about the rights of the child and protective measures in respect thereof;
- establishing the forms of violence and the frequency of their application to children during training sessions;
- revealing the knowledge of the target group on reporting the infringements of the rights of the child to enjoy football, including the cases of violence against children.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

Following the state of emergency declared in the Republic of Moldova in March 2020, due to COVID-19 pandemic, all football clubs shut down for about 5 months. In this context, the research design has been adjusted to the new existing conditions, being determined the need for collecting all the necessary data in online form. Thus, the research has been conducted on the basis of a structured, self-managed online questionnaire via the <https://docs.google.com> platform, the research tool being adapted for each category of respondents (child, parent, coach).

The research community/target groups included respondents from both banks of the Dniester/Nistru River, the total number of participants in the study being of 391 individuals, of whom 204 children (girls and boys attending local football clubs), 75 parents of children attending local football clubs, accompanying their children most frequently (women and men), 57 coaches and 55 managers of football clubs and sports schools.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Structure of the sample designed for parents

The absence of statistical data on the demographic features of parents whose children play football has created difficulties in calculating a representative sample of parents. Thus, of the total of 75 parents surveyed, 42.7% (32) are male, and 57.3% (43) are female, about half (53.3%) of them are 30-39 years old, whilst 46.7% are more than 40 years old. Over 60% of the parents participating in the study, have a university degree plus as many parents are residing in urban areas. Over 80% of parents have only one child playing football, and over 90% of parents mentioned that the child playing football in their family is male. Most parents have children playing football who are 5-6 years old (33.7%).

Table

Structure of the sample designed for parents

		Number	%
Total		75	100.0%
Parents' Gender	Male	32	42.7%
	Female	43	57.3%
Parents' Age	30-39 years old	40	53.3%
	More than 40 years old	35	46.7%
Parents' Education	Secondary Education/ Professional & Technical Studies	27	37.0%
	University Degree	46	63.0%
Number of children in the family playing football	1 child	62	82.7%
	2 children	13	17.3%
Place of residence	Urban Area	50	66.7%
	Rural Area	25	33.3%

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Safeguarding children playing football is a topical subject for the world of football at global and national levels and that is why the toolkit for implementing the child protection policy has been developed so far. The best practices of FIFA and UEFA are to be adapted and implemented at national level as well. The efforts to establish a child protection policy in football need to be combined, ultimately creating a child-friendly and safe environment.

The sociological study named “**Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices for Safeguarding Children in Football**” have pointed out several shortcomings in understanding and taking action in the event of failure to comply with the rights of the child in football, but also on ensuring his/her protection. The main conclusions of the study revealed the following:

- a pleasure to play football among children, not being an activity imposed by parents or adults. Approximately the third part of the children want to become great footballers, the vast majority having expanded their circle of friends;

- the low participation of parents, children and coaches in information activities is reflected in the level of knowledge about the protection of children in football: the vast majority having a low and medium level of knowledge of the rights of the child;

- child protection policy even if it is approved at institutional level, it is not made known to all parents;

- the lack of knowledge about child protection policy is reflected in the ways of intervention of managers, coaches, parents and children in relation to the violation of the rights of the child. Most often children and parents turn to managers and coaches and less often to the competent bodies and the child protection officer, in case of insecurity or certain incidents within the club;

- the main way of intervention in most cases of violence is communication with the coach, child-victim, child-abuser and their parents;

- the referral of cases of violations of children’s rights to competent institutions in the field is poorly achieved; only 0.5% of children and one in ten parents would call the Childline. Calling the police is also a rare practice among parents or coaches.

Following the study conducted therein, it is recommended:

- to appoint a child protection officer at the level of each institution, given that about a third of the coaches know about his/her existence in the football club where he/she works and most parents consider his/her presence very important;

- to implement the child protection policy by applying the UEFA tools at the level of all football clubs and sports schools;

- to carry out a broad information and awareness-raising campaign to inform children and parents about the rights and means of safeguarding children involved in football, given that there is a low level of information and knowledge about the rights of the child;

- to make improvements to the training system of coaches and managers of clubs on safeguarding children involved in football, determined by the situation in which knowledge is found to be misapplied in sports activity;

- to establish collaboration relationships with Child Protection Authorities, being observed a low number of parents and coaches appealing to them;

- to improve the sports infrastructure from the perspective of providing optimal and healthy conditions for the conduct of training sessions and sports activities, determined by the poor equipping of football clubs with changing rooms, showers and separate

toilets for girls and boys inside the clubs, with hot water and sewerage facilities, sports equipment, etc.;

– to create a non-discriminatory football environment adapted to the needs of all children, including children with disabilities.

Bibliography:

1. Convenția cu privire la drepturile copilului adoptată de Adunarea Generală a Organizației Națiunilor Unite la 22 noiembrie 1989, Republica Moldova a aderat prin Hotărârea Parlamentului nr.408-XII din 12 decembrie 1990; <https://www.unicef.org/moldova/media/1401/file/Conventia-cu-privire-la-drepturile-copilului.pdf>
2. Codul Educației nr. 152 din 17.07.2014; https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=110112&lang=ro
3. Hotărârea Guvernului nr. 270 din 08.04.2014 cu privire la aprobarea Instrucțiunilor privind mecanismul intersectorial de cooperare pentru identificarea, evaluarea, referirea, asistența și monitorizarea copiilor victime și potențiale victime ale violenței, neglijării, exploatării și traficului; https://www.legis.md/cautare/getResults?doc_id=18619&lang=ro
4. Child safeguarding toolkit for UEFA member associations; <https://uefa-safeguarding.eu/child-safeguarding-toolkit-uefa-member-associations-english>
5. GAGEA, A. *Metodologia cercetării științifice în educație fizică și sport*. București: Editura Fundației „Romania de Maine”, 1999.
6. Declarația Brunel, 2014 Declarația și Principiile Internaționale pentru un Sport Sigur; Măsurile internaționale de protecție pentru copii în sport; <https://www.end-violence.org/sites/default/files/paragraphs/download/Implementation-Guide-for-organisations-who-work-with-children-A5-version-re.pdf>
7. Strategiei de dezvoltare a educației pentru anii 2014-2020 „Educația-2020” aprobată prin Hotărârea Guvernului nr. 944 din 14.11.2014; https://mecc.gov.md/sites/default/files/1_strategia_educatia-2020_3.pdf
8. CULIC, I. *Metode avansate în cercetarea socială*. Iași: Polirom, 2004.
9. RATEAU, P. *Metodele și statisticile experimentale*. Iași: Polirom, 2004.
10. PATRAȘ, S. *Politica de Protecție a copilului*, Chișinău, 2021. ISBN 978-9975-57-301-6
11. Child Safeguarding Toolkit for Member Associations, FIFA.
12. Safeguarding children in Sport: A mapping study, European Commission, 2019.

La Studiul național de evaluare a cunoștințelor, atitudinilor și practicilor privind protecția copiilor în fotbal în Republica Moldova.au luat parte: dna Anastasia OCRETNÎI și dl Veaceslav BĂTRĂNESCU.