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Evaluation of Child Protection Practices of Sports Federations in Türkiye Within the Framework of International Practices*

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Abstract

This study examines child protection practices of national sports federations in Türkiye in comparison with the child safeguarding policies and institutional mechanisms identified in the countries included in the document analysis. A two-stage qualitative research design was adopted. In the first stage, official policy and institutional documents relating to child protection in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Germany, Australia, the Netherlands and Türkiye were examined using document analysis. In the second phase, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with six federation officials from the Turkish Football, Fencing, Curling, Skiing, Table Tennis, and Orienteering Federations who are responsible for or directly involved in practices related to the protection of children. The documents were analysed using document analysis, while the interview data were analysed using thematic content analysis. The findings indicate that the level of institutionalisation of child protection practices in sport in Türkiye remains limited compared with international examples. Awareness-raising initiatives within federations are primarily directed towards coaches, whereas measures targeting athletes and other stakeholders remain limited. Furthermore, key safeguarding mechanisms-including independent reporting systems, a safe sport helpline, child protection procedures, safer recruitment policies, and systematic monitoring processes have not yet been institutionalised at the national level. The interview findings highlight the need for a national child protection system supported by standardised policy documents, compulsory training programmes, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and effective monitoring mechanisms. The findings further suggest that establishing a centralised child protection in sport system, coordinated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and aligned with Türkiye's legal, institutional, and cultural context, could contribute to the institutionalisation of child protection practices, the implementation of common safeguarding standards across sports federations, and the development of safer sporting environments.

Keywords: Child protection in sport, child safeguarding, safeguarding policy, sport governance, sports federations

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INTRODUCTION

Child abuse is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as "behaviour by an adult, whether intentional or unintentional, that has a harmful effect on a child's health, physical development and psychosocial development" (WHO, 1999). This definition highlights that child abuse is not limited to physical violence alone, but is a multifaceted concept that also encompasses emotional, sexual and neglectful dimensions (Gilbert, 2009; Stoltenborgh et al., 2013). It is evident that efforts to prevent child abuse are becoming more widespread, both in the field of health and in disciplines such as psychology, law and education; international organisations, governments and non-governmental organisations are developing policies and strategies aimed at protecting children (UNICEF, 2010). Research indicates that child abuse leads to serious consequences at both the individual and societal levels, and therefore emphasises the need to strengthen preventive measures (Mathews et al., 2020).

Sport, the arts and cultural activities play a critical role in supporting the all-round development of children and young people. These activities enhance not only individuals' physical health but also their cognitive abilities, emotional intelligence, social skills and psychological resilience (Güler & Tatar, 2021). In particular, it is evident that sport makes a significant contribution to an individual's development and, by positively influencing the relationships they form within their social environment, helps to foster a range of personal skills such as self-confidence, leadership, discipline and responsibility (Yetim, 2000; Aydın & Gül, 2019).

Child abuse in sport refers to the physical, emotional or sexual abuse and neglect to which children are exposed during sporting activities (Kerr & Stirling, 2008). The physical contact inherent in sporting environments, combined with children's vulnerability, can increase the risk of abuse by coaches and other adults. For this reason, the types of abuse examined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) under four headings physical, emotional, sexual and neglect are also addressed in the context of sport; initiatives are being carried out to raise awareness amongst coaches, administrators and other stakeholders in sport (WHO, 1999). Today, one of the key social responsibilities of nations is to safeguard the safety and well-being of children who are particularly vulnerable to harm in all areas where they are actively involved. In line with this, child safeguarding policies and practices have increasingly been developed and implemented within organised sport systems.The primary aim of child protection programmes in sport is to safeguard the best interests of children, establish effective prevention and protection systems, ensure coordination between clubs, federations and public bodies, raise the level of knowledge and awareness amongst managers and sports staff, and ensure that children can participate in sport in safe environments (Parasız et al., 2015).

Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child, UNESCO documents on physical education and sport, and the fundamental principles of olympism collectively emphasise children's right to participate in sport in safe and appropriate environments and the responsibility of relevant organisations to protect this right. The responsibility of organisations governing sport has expanded in line with the growing importance of sport in modern life and in accordance with legal obligations (Kerr & Stirling, 2008). Within this

framework, the protection of children is treated as a priority right under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; UNICEF and other international organisations carry out policy and educational activities in this field (David, 2005; UNICEF, 2010). The IOC has carried out various initiatives aimed at athlete safety and the prevention of abuse and has developed guidance toolkits in this area (IOC, 2005; IOC, 2007; IOC, 2009; IOC, 2017).

National sports federations (NSFs) are key organisations responsible for governing and representing their respective sports at the national level. Although these organisations operate within their national sport governance structures, they also maintain relationships with relevant international sport federations and other governing bodies. Since the early 2000s, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) has increasingly focused on athlete safety and the prevention of harassment and abuse in sport. Within this framework, the safeguarding athletes from harassment and abuse in sport: IOC toolkit for International Federations and National Olympic Committees provides guidance for the development and implementation of safeguarding policies within sport organisations. The toolkit offers a structured framework for addressing athlete safety, preventing harassment and abuse, and establishing appropriate safeguarding mechanisms. In this regard, the IOC encourages International Federations and National Olympic Committees to develop and implement safeguarding policies by providing guidance and practical resources (Parasız, 2019).

Child safeguarding in sport has increasingly become an institutional and policy concern across different national sport systems, although the organisational structures, regulatory frameworks, and safeguarding mechanisms adopted vary across countries (Rulofs, 2015). In a global context, child protection systems and practices in sport are gaining strategic importance day by day at both national and international levels, in line with both on-the-ground requirements and legal regulations. Previous studies have pointed to limitations in the institutionalisation and standardisation of child safeguarding practices in sport in Türkiye (Aydın & Gül, 2019). Addressing this structural shortcoming requires proactive initiatives aimed at both enriching the academic literature and raising awareness at the practical level in the fields of child protection and child abuse in sport in Türkiye. Although child safeguarding practices in sport have received increasing international attention, a nationally standardised safeguarding framework applicable across sport federations has not yet been established in Türkiye. Therefore, this study examines child protection practices of national sports federations in Türkiye and compares them with the child safeguarding policies and institutional mechanisms identified in the countries included in the document analysis.

METHOD

Research Model

This study employed a two-stage qualitative research design to examine child protection practices in sports federations in Türkiye in comparison with child safeguarding systems and practices in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia. The two phases were designed as complementary components of the same qualitative inquiry. In the first phase, child safeguarding policies and practices in the selected countries were systematically examined through document analysis. In the second phase, a

qualitative descriptive approach was adopted, and semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with federation representatives in Türkiye who had direct involvement in or responsibilities related to child protection practices.

The two-stage design was considered appropriate because official policy and institutional documents provide information about the structural and regulatory dimensions of child safeguarding, whereas interviews enable the examination of how such practices are implemented and evaluated within federation contexts. Accordingly, the document and interview data were initially analysed separately and subsequently integrated to provide a comparative and holistic assessment of child protection in sport, incorporating both structural arrangements and practice-based perspectives.

Document Sources and Research Group

Document Sources: The dataset for this study consisted of official policy documents, international conventions, national legislation, federation regulations, institutional child safeguarding policies, implementation guidelines, standards, and official review and evaluation reports related to child safeguarding systems in sport in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, and Türkiye. The countries included in the study were selected based on the criteria that they had established institutional structures or policies related to child safeguarding in sport, had developed safeguarding initiatives at a relatively early stage, and had been identified in the relevant literature as examples of established child safeguarding practices (Brackenridge, 2001).

Documents were eligible for inclusion if they (a) were published or issued by an official governmental, intergovernmental, sport governing, or recognised child safeguarding organisation; (b) were directly relevant to child safeguarding or child protection in sport; (c) were publicly accessible in full text; and (d) represented an official policy, regulation, standard, guideline, procedure, or institutional practice relevant to the objectives of the study. Documents that were not directly related to child safeguarding in sport, were unavailable in full text, duplicated information contained in another version of the same document, or did not provide information relevant to the objectives of the study were excluded. Where multiple versions of the same document were available, the most recent publicly available version or the version officially in force during the data collection period was considered.

For analytical purposes, the documents were classified according to their institutional and regulatory status as international conventions, national legislation and regulations, policy and safeguarding standards issued by international sport organisations, federation-level policies and administrative guidelines, and official institutional review and evaluation reports. These categories were distinguished analytically and were not treated as having equivalent legal binding force. Academic journal articles, books, and theses were not included as primary data in the document analysis; instead, they were used to establish the conceptual framework, inform the analytical process, and support the interpretation of the findings.

Interview Participants: The study group for the second phase of the research consisted of six federation representatives working in sports federations operating in Türkiye. The participants were selected using criterion sampling, one of the purposeful sampling methods (Yıldırım &

Şimşek, 2016). Purposeful sampling involves the deliberate selection of participants who can provide relevant and in-depth information about the research topic, whereas criterion sampling involves selecting participants who meet predetermined criteria relevant to the research purpose. Accordingly, criterion sampling was considered appropriate because participants were required to meet specific criteria related to their roles and experience in child protection practices. The inclusion criteria were that participants held positions directly related to, or were directly involved in, child protection-related practices within their federations and had at least three years of managerial experience in the relevant federation. Within this scope, representatives from the Turkish Football Federation, the Turkish Fencing Federation, the Turkish Curling Federation, the Turkish Ski Federation, the Turkish Table Tennis Federation, and the Turkish Orienteering Federation were included in the study. Federation representatives who met these criteria and voluntarily agreed to participate formed the study group.

Procedures

Document Analysis: The literature and document search was conducted during the 2022-2023 data collection period. Relevant documents were identified through the official websites of governmental institutions, international and national sport governing bodies, sport federations, and child safeguarding organisations in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, and Türkiye. The official sources searched included, where relevant, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) (2017), the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) (2018), the U.S. Center for SafeSport (2022; 2023), and the official websites and policy documents of sport federations and governing bodies represented in the document dataset, including (The Football Association, 1997; Canada Soccer, 2020; USA Gymnastics Safe Sport Policy, 2019; Volleyball Canada, 2020; Deutscher Fußball-Bund 2023; Türkiye Football Federation, 2023).

Google Scholar was used solely to identify relevant academic literature for the conceptual framework and interpretation of the findings; it was not used as a primary source for the document analysis. Searches were conducted using the keywords “child protection,” “child protection in sport,” “child safeguarding in sport,” “safe sport,” and “prevention of abuse in sport.” These terms were searched individually and, where appropriate, in combination with the names of the countries, sport governing bodies, and federations included in the study.

Interviews: In the second phase of the study, semi-structured individual interviews were employed as the data collection method. This approach enabled an in-depth exploration of federation representatives’ experiences and evaluations regarding child safeguarding practices in sport. A semi-structured interview form consisting of seven open-ended questions developed by the researchers was used as the data collection instrument. The interview form was developed based on the relevant literature. Following revisions made in accordance with the expert opinions of three academics in the field of sport management and two academics from other disciplines, a pilot study was conducted with two participants who shared similar characteristics with the study group. The interview form was finalised based on the feedback obtained. Following the pilot interviews, minor wording revisions were made to improve the

clarity and comprehensibility of the questions; no substantive changes were made to the content or thematic scope of the interview form.

The interviews were conducted between March and June 2023. According to the participants' preferences, one interview was conducted face-to-face and five interviews were conducted online via Zoom. Each interview lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. With the participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and prepared for analysis. The interview form included the following questions:

1. Why is there a need for child safeguarding practices in sport?
2. Could you provide information about the child safeguarding practices implemented within your federation?
3. Have you received any recommendations, requirements, or guidance regarding child safeguarding in sport from international sport federations or the International Olympic Committee (IOC)? Are you familiar with these practices?
4. What are the stakeholders' views regarding the child safeguarding practices implemented within the child safeguarding programme?
5. How do you evaluate child safeguarding practices in sport?
6. In your opinion, what measures should be implemented to prevent child abuse in sport in Türkiye?
7. Finally, is there anything else you would like to add regarding child safeguarding or child abuse in sport?

Although the interview form consisted of seven questions, the four main themes were not predetermined according to the structure of the interview form. During the thematic analysis, the interview transcripts were first examined to identify meaningful units related to child safeguarding practices. Initial codes were generated from these meaningful units. Codes reflecting similar meanings, experiences, and practices were then compared and grouped into broader categories. The relationships among these categories were subsequently examined, and related categories were organised into four overarching themes. Accordingly, the analysis followed a predominantly inductive approach, as the themes were developed from recurring patterns identified in the participants' accounts rather than being predetermined according to the interview questions.

Data Analysis

Document Analysis: The documents were analysed following the document analysis procedures proposed by (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). After assessing their authenticity, relevance, and currency, the documents selected according to the criteria described in the Document Sources section were systematically examined and coded according to their content related to child safeguarding policies and practices in sport. Similar codes were grouped into broader categories, and related categories were organised into safeguarding domains. These domains included safeguarding policies, education and awareness, reporting mechanisms, safer recruitment and screening, procedures for responding to safeguarding concerns, disciplinary and sanction mechanisms, safe sport helplines, and compliance with safeguarding procedures. Preventive practices concerning interactions with child athletes,

including communication, travel, training, changing rooms, camps, personal support, and gift-giving, were also examined. These domains provided the analytical framework for comparing similarities, differences, and gaps in child safeguarding practices across the countries included in the study.

Interview Analysis: The interview data were analysed using thematic content analysis, following the content analysis stages proposed by (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). First, the interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, and the participants were coded as K01-K06 to ensure confidentiality, with "K" referring to Katılımcı (participant in Turkish). The transcripts were examined to identify meaningful units related to child safeguarding practices, from which initial codes were generated. Codes reflecting similar meanings, experiences, or practices were grouped into categories, and the relationships among these categories were examined to develop four overarching themes. The analysis followed a predominantly inductive approach, as the themes were developed from recurring patterns in the participants' accounts rather than being predetermined according to the interview questions.

The document and interview data were initially analysed separately and subsequently integrated through cross-source comparison. First, the document analysis generated the safeguarding domains described above. The interview data were then analysed independently, allowing codes, categories, and themes to emerge primarily from participants' accounts. Subsequently, the interview themes and categories were compared with the safeguarding domains identified through the document analysis. Findings that were consistent across the two data sources were identified as similarities, whereas differences between documented practices and participants' accounts were considered areas of divergence. Safeguarding mechanisms identified in the documents from the selected countries but reported as absent, limited, or inconsistently implemented within the federation contexts examined in Türkiye were considered potential gaps. Finally, the findings from both data sources were interpreted together to compare the structural characteristics identified in official documents with the practical experiences reported by federation representatives in Türkiye.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were taken into account. Credibility was supported through methodological triangulation by comparing findings obtained from document analysis and semi-structured interviews. To strengthen dependability and confirmability, the stages of coding, category formation, and theme development were carried out systematically and documented throughout the analysis process. The codes, categories, and themes were independently reviewed by two academics specialising in sport management. The reviewers examined the consistency between the codes and the underlying data, the appropriateness of grouping similar codes into categories, the conceptual coherence and distinctiveness of the categories and themes, and the extent to which they were supported by the data. Expert feedback was evaluated based on consistency with the original data, conceptual clarity, coherence among codes, categories, and themes, and preservation of participants' intended meanings. To enhance transferability, the research design, study group, data collection procedures, and stages of data analysis were reported in detail, and the findings were interpreted directly in relation to the data sources.

FINDINGS

In this section, the findings obtained from the two phases of the study are presented under two main headings: document analysis and qualitative interview findings. In the first phase, child protection policies and practices in sport across the selected countries were systematically analysed using the document analysis method. The findings from the document analysis are presented in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1. A comparative analysis of the fundamental preventive and protective components of child protection systems in sport

Countries	**Applications**										
	Sports Management Umbrella Organisation	**Child Protection Unit in Sport**	**Child Protection Policy Documents in Sport**	**Coaching Education**	**Parenting Education**	**Athlete Training**	**Notification/Reporting Systems**	**Guidance on How to Proceed in Suspicious Circumstances**	**Practices Relating to Special Disciplinary Measures in Sport**	**Helpline for Safe Sport**	**Obligation to Comply with Procedures**
United Kingdom	Sport England	CPSU	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
United States	U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee	U.S. Center for SafeSport	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Canada	Sport Canada	Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Germany	Olympic Sports Confederation	DSJ	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	XX*	X
Netherlands	National Sports Confederation	Centrum Veilige Sport Nederland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Australia	Sport Integrity Australia	Play by the Rules	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Türkiye	Ministry of Youth and Sports			X*					X**		

Note: CPSU=Child Protection in Sport Unit; DSJ=Deutsche Sportjugend (German Sports Youth). X* In Türkiye, the Ministry of Youth and Sports provides child protection training in sport for coaches. X** This is limited to the requirements set out for candidates wishing to join the coaching programme under the Coaching Training Regulations. XX* In Germany, a separate independent contact point has been established for national athletes and safeguarding officers in connection with the helpline.

Table 1 presents a comparative overview of the key components of child protection systems in sport across the selected countries. The findings indicate that the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia have established multiple institutional and procedural safeguarding mechanisms, including dedicated safeguarding structures, policy documents, education programmes, reporting mechanisms, disciplinary procedures, helplines, and compliance requirements. In contrast, the mechanisms identified in Türkiye were more limited, with the documented practices focusing primarily on coach education and specific procedural requirements.

Table 2. Findings from a document analysis of preventative and protective policies aimed at establishing a child protection system in sport

Countries	Applications										
	Child Protection Unit in Sport	Policies on Social Media and Communication Networks	Travel Policies	Policies on Alcohol and Tobacco Use	Policies on Athletic Training Methods	Policies Regarding Meetings and Training Sessions	Policies Regarding Changing Rooms	Policies on Personal Support and Care	Policies on Gift-Giving	Policies for Camps	Recruitment Policies
United Kingdom	CPSU	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
United States	U.S. Center for Safe Sport	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Canada	Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Germany	DSJ	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Netherlands	Centrum Veilige Sport Nederland	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Australia	Sport Integrity Australia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Türkiye		*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*

As no systematic child protection policy in sport applicable to all federations has been developed in Türkiye, and no common ethical standards of conduct have been established, only a few sports federations have implemented their own specific measures regarding these restrictions. As shown in Table 2, policies restricting one-to-one interactions are systematically established in most of the countries examined, whereas in Türkiye such measures are limited to specific federations and have not been established as a standardised, nationwide framework applicable to all sports federations. This section of the research presents data obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted with federation representatives from six different sports federations in Türkiye.

Table 3. Participants' views on the reasons for the need for child protection measures in sport

Theme	Category	Sport Discipline Variable					
		Curling	Fencing	Football	Skiing	Table Tennis	Orienteering
		K01	K02	K03	K04	K05	K06
Cases of Abuse and the Importance and Necessity of the Issue	Presence of child abuse cases		X	X	X		
	Presence of psychological violence cases			X	X	X	
	Presence of peer bullying cases		X		X		
	Events subject to judicial ınvestigation			X			
	Importance of the İssue at the ındividual level		X		X	X	
	Importance of the ıssue at the societal level	X		X		X	X
	Importance of the ıssue at the ınternational level	X	X	X	X	X	
Necessity from the Perspective of Sport Stakeholders	Enhancing coaches' knowledge of the subject	X	X	X	X		
	Enhancing administrators' knowledge of the subject	X	X				
	Enhancing parents' knowledge of the subject		X		X		
	Enhancing athletes' knowledge of the subject		X				

Note: K represents the participant, with each participant (K01-K06) representing the corresponding sport discipline. "X" indicates that the corresponding qualitative category was identified in that participant's response; it indicates the presence of the category in the participant's account, not its frequency.

The findings derived from participants' views on the need for child protection measures in sport in Türkiye are presented in Table 3. An examination of Table 3 reveals that participants' views centred predominantly on the existence of cases of abuse and the international significance of the issue, whilst comments regarding athletes' level of knowledge were limited. Illustrative participant quotations relating to the categories presented in Table 3 are provided below.

K01 stated: "Child safeguarding is an issue of significant societal importance that should not be overlooked. It is promoted by international organizations such as UNESCO and is also within the remit of government institutions, including the Ministries of Family and Social Services, Interior, Justice, and Youth and Sports."

K03 stated: "The existence of abuse cases has been a major factor driving the need for child safeguarding. However, child safeguarding extends beyond the prevention of abuse; incidents of peer bullying and cases involving criminal offences also highlight the necessity of implementing comprehensive child safeguarding practices."

K04 stated: "The occurrence of situations such as abuse, psychological violence and even peer bullying within practices involving children has highlighted the need for child protection."

K05 stated: "Not every individual may have sufficient knowledge of the concept of child safeguarding. However, increasing individual awareness strengthens its societal necessity, and this necessity is not limited to a national context but is also important at the international level."

K05 further stated: "Child safeguarding in sport should be communicated to all stakeholders, particularly athletes, coaches, parents, and administrators. Athletes should be aware of their rights, coaches should regulate their professional conduct, parents should critically monitor and question safeguarding processes, and administrators should ensure a safe sporting environment." All six participants were included in the thematic analysis. Quotations were selected based on their relevance and clarity in representing the identified categories while avoiding repetition. K02 and K06 were not quoted directly because their views were represented by similar statements from other participants.

Table 4. Participants' views on measures implemented as part of child protection in sport

		Sport Discipline Variable					
Theme	**Category**	**Curling**	**Fencing**	**Football**	**Skiing**	**Table Tennis**	**Orienteering**
		K01	K02	K03	K04	K05	K06
Awareness-Raising Events	Awareness-raising for coaches	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Awareness-raising for athletes	X					
	Awareness-raising for parents	X	X				
Academic Events	Situation assessment studies						X
	Opinion assessment studies				X		
Organisation Events	Committee establishment activities	X			X	X	X
	Program development activities			X		X	
	Directive/regulation development activities			X			

Note: K represents the participant, with each participant (K01-K06) corresponding to the sport discipline in which they serve. The themes and categories presented in the table were derived from the thematic analysis of the interview data by coding meaningful units in participants' responses and grouping similar codes into categories and broader themes. "X" indicates that the corresponding category was identified in that participant's account; it indicates the presence of the category in the participant's response, not the number or frequency of references to that category.

The findings derived from participants' views on the practices implemented in Türkiye as part of child protection in sport are presented in Table 4. An examination of Table 4 reveals that the child safeguarding measures reported by participants focused primarily on awareness-raising and training activities for coaches, whereas measures targeting athletes and parents were more limited. Illustrative participant quotations relating to the themes and categories presented in Table 4 are provided below.

K01 stated: "Our child protection committee organises seminars for coaches and athletes, particularly national athletes and those under the age of eighteen, to raise awareness on this issue. We have also prepared posters addressing children's rights, their own rights, and the responsibilities of coaches, which have been distributed to clubs and displayed in sports facilities. Furthermore, we provide training on this issue during coaching seminars and refresher courses almost every year."

K03 stated: "We developed a child protection programme in accordance with our cultural context and football environment. We prepared a guide, referred to as a toolkit, which includes criteria, guidelines, and regulations. These components were developed through extensive efforts, and similar approaches have subsequently been adopted by other national and international federations."

K04 stated: "Although I am not aware of any previous research on this subject, we conducted a consultation process with academics from different disciplines to gather their perspectives. Such a study could provide valuable contributions if published."

K05 stated: "We established a committee to organise seminars for coaches. Our aim was to implement practical activities within a structured programme. However, the pandemic created difficulties in this process. We aim to further develop this programme to strengthen child protection in sport."

K06 stated: "We conducted a needs assessment study to determine the extent of abuse. With the participation of a large number of athletes, we examined issues such as the prevalence of abuse and the extent to which relevant studies are conducted."

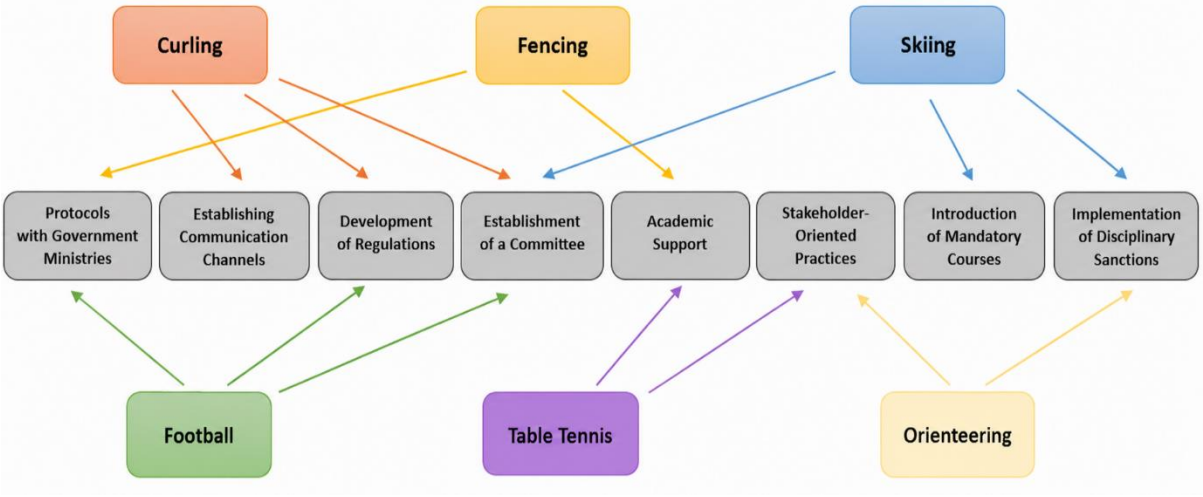

Figure 1. Recommendations for child protection practices in sport

Figure 1. presents the participants' recommendations for the development of child protection practices in sport under the following headings: the establishment of inter-ministerial protocols, the strengthening of communication mechanisms, the drafting of guidelines, the establishment of child protection committees, the provision of academic support, the development of initiatives for stakeholders, the provision of compulsory training, and the enforcement of criminal sanctions. Given the limited number of federations in Türkiye that have implemented child protection practices in sport, participants' recommendations for strengthening these practices were also examined.

K01 stated: "All communication channels, reporting pathways, and information resources related to issues such as physical contact with children, injury situations, and preliminary guidance should be established and made available."

K02 stated: "Education and certification in child safeguarding in sport are highly important. Since physical contact is common in sporting environments, it would not be appropriate for this process to be managed by a single institution. Collaboration protocols could be established with ministries such as the Ministry of Family and Social Services, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Justice."

K03 stated: "A structure should be established in which procedures are clearly and explicitly defined. It should specify what actions should be taken, who is responsible for implementation, and how potential challenges should be addressed."

K04 stated: "These processes should be managed through a committee consisting of academics, psychologists, sociologists, athletes, and experts. In the event of any problem, this committee should evaluate the situation and determine the actions to be taken. Only through such a structure can an effective child safeguarding programme in sport be implemented."

K04 further stated: "Courses addressing child safeguarding in sport should be provided across all departments within the field of Sport Sciences. These courses should be included as

compulsory components of the curricula of all departments within Faculties of Sport Sciences."

K05 stated: "Although we are competent individuals in this field, there is also an academic dimension to the issue. When we collaborate with academics, we obtain more meaningful results because they can provide different perspectives and alternative solutions. Processes supported by academic involvement and training contributions would strengthen child safeguarding practices."

K6 further stated: "Although we have child protection and criminal legislation, and important preventive measures have been established, sanctions should also be applied in cases related to child safeguarding in sport. Perhaps even more comprehensive measures are required." K06 stated: "A national child safeguarding system needs to be established."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this study, findings relating to child protection practices in sport were discussed through the joint analysis of data obtained from document analysis and qualitative interviews. The two-stage design of the study enabled a comparative assessment of the structural characteristics of child protection policies developed within international sport management systems and the practical findings based on the experiences of sport stakeholders in Türkiye. Consequently, the Discussion is organised around the safeguarding domains derived from the document analysis, within which the relevant interview findings are integrated and interpreted.

Conceptual Requirements for Child Protection Practices in Sport

The conceptual necessity for child protection practices in sport is based on the multidimensional risks that children may face in sporting environments, as indicated by both participants' views and findings from the literature. Participants stated that abuse, psychological violence, peer bullying, and criminal offence cases are among the factors that necessitate child protection practices. This finding indicates that child protection is not limited to specific forms of abuse but requires a holistic approach that considers different forms of harm that may arise in sporting environments.

The literature in this field also supports this finding. Alexander et al. (2011) revealed that a significant proportion of athletes have been subjected to emotional, physical and sexual abuse, whilst Taylor (2018) notes that abuse is not specific to certain sports; it can also be observed in various disciplines such as gymnastics, dance, figure skating, basketball, swimming, rowing and athletics.

The research findings also show that the need for child protection is not limited to physical and sexual abuse alone. Psychological abuse and peer bullying, as highlighted by the participants, have also been documented as forms of harm experienced by children and young people in sporting environments (Alexander et al., 2011; Vertommen et al., 2016). Whilst behaviours such as shouting, humiliation, exclusion and constant pressure can have long-term psychological effects on children (Kerr & Stirling, 2008; Hornor, 2011), competitive sporting environments may also contribute to or exacerbate bullying behaviours (Evans et al., 2016;

Dinçer, 2019). Furthermore, the lack of knowledge amongst sports stakeholders regarding the identification of and intervention in bullying (Shannon, 2013) demonstrates that child protection practices are closely linked not only to individual awareness but also to the development of organisational capacity.

High-profile cases of abuse at the international level also clearly highlight this necessity. The penn state, larry nassar, bob higgins, and barry bennell cases demonstrate that abuse does not stem solely from individual behaviour; rather, it can persist for many years due to institutional negligence, inadequate oversight, and ineffective reporting mechanisms (Kelly, 2013; Masters & Veselinovic, 2018; Morris, 2019; Smith & Pegoraro, 2020). These cases demonstrate that it is not merely the establishment of child protection mechanisms that is critical, but also their effective and timely implementation.

Safeguarding Domain 1

Discussion on Child Protection Policy Documents in Sport: The findings of the document analysis indicate that child safeguarding policies in sport are supported by institutional and governance structures in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and Australia. Organisations and institutional structures such as the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) in the United Kingdom, the U.S. Center for Safe Sport in the United States, and the Office of the Sport Integrity Commissioner (OSIC) in Canada contribute to the implementation and institutionalisation of safeguarding frameworks within their respective sport systems. The standards developed by the CPSU, the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAPP) implemented by the U.S. Center for SafeSport, and Sport Canada's mandatory policy requirements for national sport organisations illustrate that child safeguarding has been institutionalised through systematic governance structures (Parent & Demers, 2011; Parasız et al., 2015; U.S. Center for SafeSport, 2022). Likewise, policy developments examined in the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands demonstrate the increasing institutionalisation of child safeguarding within organised sport (Brackenridge et al., 2012; Rulofs, 2015; Schipper-van Veldhoven et al., 2015; Vertommen et al., 2016). In Australia, the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to child sexual abuse further highlighted the importance of effective institutional policies, reporting mechanisms, and organisational capacity in preventing and responding to child sexual abuse in sport (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). Taken together, these findings indicate that the effectiveness of child safeguarding policies depends not only on their development but also on their implementation, enforceability, and the institutional capacity available to support them.

In contrast, the interview findings indicate that child safeguarding policy documents in Türkiye have been developed to varying degrees across sport federations, with implementation relying largely on institutional initiatives. Although participants acknowledged that some federations had developed child safeguarding guidelines, they emphasised that these initiatives had not evolved into common standards applicable across the entire sport system. Participants also noted that limited inter-institutional coordination in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of child safeguarding practices has hindered the establishment of a comprehensive national child safeguarding system. Participants further

emphasised that addressing these shortcomings requires an interdisciplinary approach to policy development. In particular, participants K04 and K05 highlighted that involving academics, psychologists, sociologists, and professionals from different disciplines would improve the quality and effectiveness of child safeguarding policy documents. These views are consistent with findings from the Australian context, where the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017) highlighted the importance of multidisciplinary and institutional approaches to safeguarding and responding to child sexual abuse.

The findings are also consistent with previous studies concerning the institutionalisation of child safeguarding practices in Türkiye. Otyakmaz (2018) identified significant deficiencies in child safety practices within sports clubs, while Gündüz et al. (2007) highlighted structural challenges related to the protection of elite female athletes. Similarly, Aydın and Gül (2019) argued that child safeguarding policies should be developed under the coordination of the Ministry of Youth and Sports. While the present study supports these findings, it also suggests that the challenges identified in child safeguarding practices are associated not only with the limited development of comprehensive policies but also with issues related to policy standardisation, inter-institutional coordination, and institutional governance capacity.

The recommendations offered by participants reinforce these findings. Key recommendations included strengthening inter-ministerial cooperation, developing joint regulations, establishing institutional structures, improving communication mechanisms, and integrating academic expertise into policy development processes. Furthermore, as emphasised by participant K06, international models should not be adopted uncritically but should instead be adapted to Türkiye's legal, institutional, and cultural context. This perspective is consistent with Noble and Vermillion (2014), who emphasised the importance of zero-tolerance policies, and with (Mountjoy et al., 2015; Mountjoy et al., 2016), who argued that coordinated, multi-stakeholder governance systems, supported by clearly defined standards of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of child safeguarding practices. Overall, the findings from both the document analysis and the interviews indicate that within the countries and organisations included in the document analysis, child safeguarding policies are generally supported by more centralised and standardised governance structures, whereas the practices examined in Türkiye continue to vary across sport federations.

Safeguarding Domain 2

Discussion on Coach, Parent, and Athlete Education: The findings of the document analysis indicate that education programmes constitute a fundamental component of child safeguarding systems in sport. The practices examined in the selected countries demonstrate that child safeguarding policies extend beyond written policy documents and are supported by structured educational programmes designed for coaches, parents, athletes, and sport administrators. Canada's National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), including its Ethical Decision-Making module and the Respect in Sport programme, the SafeSport system in the United States, the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) framework in the United Kingdom, and the digital educational resources implemented in the Netherlands collectively

demonstrate that within the countries and organisations examined in the document analysis, child safeguarding education has become an institutionalised component of sport safeguarding systems (Kerr et al., 2014; Parasız et al., 2015; U.S. Center for SafeSport, 2022).

The literature further identifies coaches as central actors within child safeguarding systems and emphasises that child safeguarding competencies should be regarded as an integral component of professional coaching qualifications (Turner & McCrory, 2004; Bolter et al., 2018; Child Protection in Sport Unit, 2018). In contrast, the interview findings indicate that child safeguarding education in Türkiye is primarily implemented to raise awareness. Although several federations have introduced educational initiatives, participants reported that these efforts have not developed into a standardised, sustainable, and comprehensive system encompassing all sports and coaching levels. These findings indicate that child safeguarding education practices vary across the federations examined and that participants perceived a need for a more systematic and coordinated educational framework. Similar conclusions have been reported by (Parasız et al., 2015; Küçük et al., 2016; Otyakmaz, 2018), who emphasised the necessity of regular and systematic child safeguarding training for professionals working with children.

The findings further indicate that child safeguarding education should not be limited to coaches alone. While international child safeguarding systems actively engage parents and athletes as key stakeholders, the interview findings reveal that activities targeting parents in Türkiye remain largely confined to informational sessions, whereas educational initiatives for athletes, although implemented by some federations, have yet to become widespread or standardised. Children's ability to understand their rights, distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate behaviours, and utilise reporting mechanisms when necessary constitutes a fundamental element of an effective child safeguarding system. This interpretation is supported by (Güven & Öncü, 2006), who highlighted the influential role of parents in children's sporting experiences, and by (Küçük et al., 2016), who emphasised families' concerns regarding safe sporting environments.

Participants further emphasised that child safeguarding education should address not only sexual abuse but also other forms of harm, including psychological violence, peer bullying, and neglect. These findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that children may be exposed to multiple forms of harm within sporting environments (Alexander et al., 2011; Vertommen et al., 2016). Furthermore, participants stressed that educational activities should be implemented through collaboration among the sport, education, justice, and social service sectors. This perspective is consistent with the multi-stakeholder child safeguarding model proposed by (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017). Overall, the findings indicate that child safeguarding education should move beyond one-off awareness initiatives and be implemented as a standardised, sustainable national education system that actively engages all stakeholders.

Safeguarding Domain 3

Discussion on Notification and Reporting Systems: The findings of the study's document analysis indicate that institutional and systematic reporting mechanisms for cases of abuse in

sporting environments have been established in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. The SafeSport system in the United States, the CPSU in the United Kingdom, and the reporting mechanisms examined in Canada and Australia provide formal structures through which athletes, families, and other stakeholders can report cases of abuse. In particular, the fact that Sport Canada requires federations to have formal reporting procedures in place prior to receiving funding (Parent & Demers, 2011) demonstrates that reporting systems are regarded not merely as examples of good practice, but as a fundamental component of institutional child protection policies.

The practices examined in these countries further indicate that reporting mechanisms are supported by procedures defining how reports and subsequent interventions are to be managed. Whilst the process to be followed in cases of suspected abuse is defined in detail under the SafeSport Code in the US, in the UK the CPSU provides guidance to sports organisations on reporting and intervention processes (Parasız et al., 2015; U.S. Center for SafeSport, 2023).

In contrast, the findings of the interviews reveal that independent and systematic reporting mechanisms specific to sport have not yet been established in Türkiye. Participants stated that cases of abuse are mostly dealt with through general judicial mechanisms and that there is no safe and accessible reporting structure specific to the sport system. In particular, the recommendations made by the participant coded K01 regarding a reporting hotline, an investigation unit and accessible communication channels indicate that, within the current system, it is not only the reporting mechanisms themselves that need to be developed, but also their accessibility and functionality. These interview findings suggest limitations in the accessibility, functionality, and institutionalisation of sport-specific reporting processes within the federation contexts examined in Türkiye.

The research findings show that reporting systems are one of the key mechanisms that not only help to uncover cases of abuse but also support early intervention, the protection of victims and the assurance of institutional accountability. Therefore, from the perspective of the effectiveness of child protection practices in sport, the development of safe, accessible and standardised reporting mechanisms specific to the sports system is considered important.

Safeguarding Domain 4

Discussion on Safer Recruitment and Screening Practices: The findings of the document analysis indicate that recruitment processes are regarded as a key element within child protection policies in sport. The document analysis indicates that safety-focused recruitment and screening practices are incorporated into safeguarding frameworks in several of the countries examined. In the US, the requirement that all coaches who have regular contact with underage athletes (under 18) must satisfactorily complete a background check (U.S. Center for SafeSport, 2022) demonstrates that this approach has become an institutional requirement.

Similarly, in the United Kingdom, it is noted that some federations investigate whether new recruits have a criminal record relating to child abuse; however, criminal records alone are not considered sufficient, and candidates are subjected to various assessment processes, whilst references are also requested from individuals who have previously worked with children

(Parasız et al., 2015). In Germany, the long-standing use of records such as criminal history checks within the context of child protection requirements in the education sector (Rulofs, 2015) demonstrates that such practices are not specific to the sporting sector but form part of a broader institutional safety approach. In Australia, as part of a process conducted by a mandatory authority, all adults are expected to have completed statutory checks, depending on the location of the NSO (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). Taken together, the practices examined in the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia indicate that recruitment and screening can function as preventive components of child safeguarding frameworks rather than merely as administrative procedures. In contrast, the findings from the qualitative interviews indicate that practices such as criminal record checks and reference checks for coaches, staff and other personnel working with children in Türkiye are not carried out within a systematic and mandatory framework. The findings indicate a need to develop practices that address recruitment processes within an integrated framework that incorporates child protection policies.

Safeguarding Domain 5

Procedures for Responding to Safeguarding Concerns: The findings of the document analysis indicate that child safeguarding policies in sport extend beyond preventive measures and also encompass intervention procedures to be followed in cases of suspected child safeguarding violations. Within the systems examined, procedures for responding to suspected safeguarding violations include mechanisms for reporting concerns, notifying relevant authorities, protecting the child, and initiating appropriate follow-up processes. In particular, the SafeSport Code implemented in the United States clearly defines the responsibilities of sport stakeholders who encounter suspected cases of child abuse, neglect, or harassment (U.S. Center for SafeSport, 2023). Similarly, in the United Kingdom, the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) provides guidance and institutional support to sport organisations in implementing appropriate intervention procedures (Parasız et al., 2015). These practices demonstrate that clearly defined intervention procedures constitute a fundamental component of child safeguarding systems by promoting accountability and ensuring consistent responses to safeguarding concerns.

In contrast, the findings indicate that standardised intervention procedures for addressing child safeguarding violations in sporting environments remain limited in Türkiye. When considered together, the document and interview findings indicate limitations in the availability and consistency of sport-specific guidance mechanisms for responding to safeguarding concerns in the federation contexts examined in Türkiye. Participants emphasised that the absence of clearly defined procedures creates uncertainty for practitioners and highlighted the need to develop standardised intervention guidelines that can be implemented consistently across all sport federations.

Safeguarding Domain 6

Discussion on Investigation, Disciplinary, and Sanction Mechanisms: The findings of the document analysis indicate that child safeguarding policies in sport extend beyond preventive measures and may incorporate institutional mechanisms for investigating safeguarding

violations and imposing disciplinary sanctions. In the United States, the U.S. Center for SafeSport provides an institutional framework for investigating allegations of abuse and misconduct and, where appropriate, imposing disciplinary measures (U.S. Center for SafeSport, 2023). Similarly, the documents examined in the United Kingdom reflect institutional procedures for responding to safeguarding concerns and supporting appropriate referral and disciplinary processes. These practices indicate that accountability within the systems examined is supported not only through legal regulations but also through institutional oversight and enforcement mechanisms.

In contrast, child safeguarding sanctions in Türkiye remain largely embedded within the general legal framework. Although the Coaching Education Regulation requires coaching candidates to have no convictions for specified offences, these provisions primarily regulate entry requirements for the coaching profession and do not comprehensively address the investigation, disciplinary procedures, and management of safeguarding violations that may arise within sporting environment (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Gençlik ve Spor Bakanlığı, 2022). The interview findings reinforce this observation. Participants emphasised that the existing legal framework alone is insufficient and highlighted the need for clearer, more effective, and more deterrent disciplinary procedures. In particular, participant K06 stressed the importance of strengthening institutional responses to child safeguarding violations.

Safeguarding Domain 7

Safe Sport Helplines: The findings of the document analysis indicate that some countries have established safe sports helplines that athletes, families, and other sports stakeholders can contact directly. Such mechanisms may facilitate the reporting of abuse, harassment, bullying, or neglect and can provide athletes, families, and other stakeholders with an additional pathway for seeking support. Furthermore, helplines are considered important tools that allow victims or witnesses to report incidents confidentially and receive counseling support throughout the process. In this regard, helplines are seen as a factor that enhances the accessibility and intervention capacity of child protection systems.

Based on the findings of the document analysis, safe sport helplines represent one of the institutional mechanisms used to support the reporting of safeguarding concerns in the contexts examined. In the Netherlands, the NOC*NSF established a dedicated helpline through which athletes and their families could report concerns related to sexual abuse and harassment in sport and receive appropriate guidance. The system provided access to counsellors who could offer support and guidance to individuals seeking assistance (Schipper-van Veldhoven et al., 2015).

The interview findings, however, reveal that there is no safe sport helpline specific to the sports sector in Türkiye. Participants stated that cases of abuse occurring in sports settings are mostly handled through general law enforcement agencies or judicial mechanisms. The absence of a sport-specific helpline may represent a potential barrier to accessible reporting and early referral within the safeguarding system. Findings from the document analysis also indicate a need to develop referral and support mechanisms within the framework of child protection in Türkiye.

One of the participants' comments clearly highlights this need. Participant K01 noted that there is no hotline or investigation mechanism accessible to athletes and their families, and emphasized the need to establish such a communication infrastructure within the sports system. This finding demonstrates that child protection practices in sports settings must be supported not only by policies and educational programs but also by accessible reporting mechanisms. In this context, the establishment of a national "Safe Sports Helpline" in Türkiye where athletes, families, and other sports stakeholders can safely file reports can be considered an important step toward enhancing the effectiveness of child protection policies. Such a mechanism could contribute to more accessible reporting processes and facilitate access to appropriate support services.

Safeguarding Domain 8

Compliance with Safeguarding Procedures: The findings of the document analysis indicate that, within the countries and organisations examined, child safeguarding policies extend beyond advisory guidance and are supported by institutional procedures requiring compliance by sport organisations. In the United States, child safeguarding standards are established by the U.S. Center for SafeSport, and compliance with these standards is mandatory for the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC), National Governing Bodies (NGBs), and their affiliated organisations. More broadly, the document analysis indicated that safeguarding frameworks in the countries examined are supported by institutional oversight and compliance mechanisms (Parasız et al., 2015; Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017). These findings suggest that safeguarding practices are embedded within governance structures characterised by institutional responsibility, oversight, and accountability.

The literature further supports this approach. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) developed the IOC Toolkit for International Federations and National Olympic Committees, which provides sport organisations with a standardised framework for developing and implementing child safeguarding policies (Parasız, 2019). In addition, international organisations such as UNICEF and UNESCO, together with Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, emphasise that children's participation in safe sporting environments is a fundamental right (United Nations, 1989).

In contrast, the findings indicate that although Türkiye has introduced certain legal provisions relevant to child safeguarding, these provisions are primarily related to general eligibility requirements for coaching professionals. Under Article 7(1)(ç) of the Coaching Education Regulation, candidates for coaching education programmes must not have been convicted of specified offences, including offences against sexual inviolability (Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Gençlik ve Spor Bakanlığı, 2022). This provision represents an important safeguarding-related eligibility requirement; however, the Regulation does not itself establish a comprehensive framework governing the prevention, reporting, intervention, and monitoring of child safeguarding violations that may occur within sporting environments. The interview findings are consistent with this observation, as participants indicated that clear safeguarding directives, disciplinary mechanisms, and standard operating procedures remain limited across the sport federations examined.

Participants emphasised that these shortcomings could be addressed through the development of standardised child safeguarding procedures applicable across all sport federations and supported by robust institutional mechanisms. In particular, participants K02 and K04 stated that international sport federations are increasingly requiring national federations to establish comprehensive child safeguarding systems, indicating that such practices have become a fundamental requirement of international sport governance. These views suggest that child safeguarding is no longer solely a national concern but has become a strategic necessity for alignment with international sport governance standards.

Overall, the findings from the document analysis and the interviews indicate differences between the safeguarding structures examined in the selected countries and those identified in Türkiye. The document analysis showed that the regulatory framework examined in Türkiye did not provide a comprehensive and standardised framework covering key safeguarding areas such as reporting procedures, response and intervention processes, monitoring mechanisms, and compliance requirements across sport federations. In contrast, the interview findings indicated that participants perceived safeguarding directives, inter-institutional coordination, disciplinary mechanisms, and consistency of implementation across federations as limited. Taken together, these findings suggest a need for nationally standardised safeguarding procedures, greater consistency in implementation across sport federations, and stronger monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

According to the findings of the document analysis presented in Table 2, organizations operating within the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement are required to implement reasonable procedures that limit unobserved and uninterrupted one-on-one interactions between minor athletes and adults. To support this requirement, the U.S. Center for SafeSport developed the Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies (MAAPP) (U.S. Center for SafeSport, 2022). Similarly, the analysis revealed that policies regulating one-on-one interactions to safeguard child athletes have been established in Germany, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. These policies cover a broad range of settings and activities, including travel, accommodation, transportation, training practices, camps, locker rooms, personal care and support services, social media and digital communication, meetings, training environments, the use of photographs and videos, and gift-giving. Furthermore, in Germany, respecting the personal boundaries of children and adolescents under care is recognized as a fundamental safeguarding principle. In contrast, compared with the countries included in this study, the absence of a comprehensive child safeguarding policy encompassing all sports federations, together with the lack of established codes of ethical conduct in Türkiye, constitutes a significant gap in the protection of children in sport and the prevention of potential cases of abuse.

Conclusion

When the findings from the document analysis and interviews are considered together, child safeguarding practices in sport in Türkiye appear to be less institutionalised and standardised than the safeguarding structures identified in the countries examined in the document analysis. The findings indicate several areas in which further institutional development may

be needed, particularly in relation to safeguarding policy documents, education and awareness, reporting mechanisms, safer recruitment and screening, disciplinary procedures, and monitoring processes.

According to the research findings, one of the significant contributions of child protection practices in sport is the raising of awareness. The findings indicate that child protection training is primarily targeted at coaches, whilst initiatives aimed at athletes remain more limited. The interview findings further indicate that participants identified the occurrence of child abuse, psychological violence, peer bullying, and other safeguarding concerns as factors underlying the perceived need for child protection practices in sport. In contrast, initiatives aimed at developing athletes' knowledge and awareness of child protection were reported to be more limited than those targeting coaches.

Based on the cross-country comparison, practices such as safe sport helplines, safer recruitment and screening procedures, monitoring of compliance with safeguarding procedures, and disciplinary and sanction mechanisms were found to be less institutionalised in Türkiye than in the countries examined. In this context, the findings suggest the potential value of developing a nationally coordinated child safeguarding framework in sport, aligned with Türkiye's legal, institutional, and cultural context. Greater consistency in the implementation of such a framework across sport federations and clubs could contribute to the development of safer sporting environments.

Limitation

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. As the study employed a qualitative research design based on document analysis and semi-structured interviews, its purpose was not to generate statistically generalisable findings. The interviews were conducted with six federation representatives who were responsible for or directly involved in child safeguarding practices within the federations examined in Türkiye; therefore, the perspectives of athletes, coaches, parents, and other stakeholders were not directly represented. In addition, the document analysis was limited to the countries and organisations selected according to the criteria described in the Methods section. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted within the scope of the documents and federation contexts examined. Future research could extend these findings by including different stakeholder groups, a broader range of sport organisations and countries, and mixed-methods research designs.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following practice-oriented recommendations may be considered:

The findings suggest the potential value of developing a nationally coordinated and standardised child protection system in sport that is aligned with Türkiye's legal framework, institutional functioning, and cultural context. Consideration could also be given to appropriate regulatory and institutional measures that support the implementation and sustainability of such a framework.

Within such a framework, multidisciplinary child safeguarding committees involving relevant professionals, including psychologists, sociologists, legal experts, sport scientists, child development specialists, and academics, could contribute to policy development, implementation, and monitoring processes.

The findings also suggest the potential value of independent monitoring, evaluation, and audit mechanisms. Consideration could be given to developing centralised systems for recording, early warning, referral, and reporting of alleged safeguarding violations.

A confidential Safe Sport helpline could be considered as an additional reporting and support mechanism for athletes, families, and other sport stakeholders. Such a mechanism could be linked to clearly defined procedures for receiving reports, assessment, referral, and appropriate intervention.

Consideration could also be given to strengthening safer recruitment and screening practices for coaches, administrators, volunteers, and other personnel working directly with children, including criminal record and reference checks where appropriate and legally applicable.

Regular and continuing child safeguarding education could be expanded for coaches, administrators, athletes, parents, and other relevant stakeholders. Collaboration among sport organisations, universities, educational institutions, and relevant public authorities may contribute to the sustainability and quality of such educational initiatives.

The findings further suggest the potential value of developing national safe sport standards that prioritise the physical and psychological safety of children. Practical guidelines defining appropriate responses to harassment, abuse, violence, bullying, and degrading behaviour could also support greater consistency in safeguarding practice.

Finally, incorporating children's views, needs, and experiences into the development and evaluation of safeguarding policies could strengthen athlete-centred approaches. Greater cooperation among public institutions, sport federations, civil society organisations, universities, and other relevant stakeholders may also contribute to more coordinated safeguarding practices.

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Statement of Ethics Committee	
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