

The International Judo Federation safe sport (safeguarding) policies and  
procedures: meeting the responsibilities of an international federation

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# Abstract

This research critically examines the safeguarding policies and practices of the International Judo Federation (IJF). It evaluates the adequacy of these policies in addressing abusive and harassing behaviours, applying the Five 'R' framework: Readiness, Recognition, Reporting and Disclosure, Response, and Remedy. The analysis highlights significant strengths, including the IJF's proactive stance in establishing a safeguarding policy and appointing Safeguarding Officers. However, it identifies areas for improvement, such as enhancing independent reporting mechanisms and extending the statute of limitations for reporting safeguarding violations. The study underscores the importance of clear language and comprehensive application across all IJF documents to ensure consistency. It also introduces the concept of 'Reach' to address the scope and applicability of safeguarding policies. The findings suggest the need for continued vigilance to maintain a safe and supportive environment for all judo participants. This research contributes to the broader discourse on safeguarding in sports, offering recommendations for policy enhancements that align with international standards and best practices.

**Keywords:** Five 'R' framework, judo, safeguarding, safe sport, governance.

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I dedicate this work to my young granddaughter, hoping to ensure her generation is protected from interpersonal violence in any sport or activity they choose.

# Table of Contents

<i>Abstract.....</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Acknowledgements.....</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Table of Contents.....</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>List of Figures.....</i>	<i>vii</i>
<i>List of Tables.....</i>	<i>viii</i>
<i>Glossary of Terms .....</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Publications and Presentations.....</i>	<i>x</i>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background and Rationale.....	2
Federations and International Federations .....	4
Shift in emphasis from understanding to prevention .....	5
Governance Reviews.....	8
Conclusion .....	10
<b>Chapter 2: Literature Review .....</b>	<b>11</b>
Introduction .....	12
The need to promote safe sport and safeguarding .....	12
The complex issue of Reporting Abuse.....	13
Vocabulary, Safe Sport, Safeguarding and other key terminology .....	15
Policy.....	20

Safety management systems and safety culture.....	23
Organisational issues .....	24
Describing types of abuse and harm .....	26
The role of International Federations .....	32
Ethical Foundations in Sports Management .....	32
Governance .....	36
Deficiencies, Imperfections or Limitations .....	41
How sport intersects with international legislation and human rights.....	42
Training .....	44
Culture .....	45
Forward look .....	51
Key Theorists .....	53
Research Question .....	54
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>55</b>
Introduction .....	56
Research design .....	56
Research Methods .....	57
Judging qualitative and quantitative data .....	63
Ethical Considerations.....	65
Conclusion .....	65
<b>Chapter 4: Results .....</b>	<b>67</b>

Result of examination of International Judo Federation Policies .....	68
Results of the examination of the terms Safe sport and Safeguarding.....	72
Results of the Coding .....	73
Reach .....	76
Conclusion .....	77
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion .....</b>	<b>78</b>
Discussion Introduction.....	79
Distinction between the terms safeguarding and safe sport .....	79
Expectations of an International Federation and the 5R Framework.....	80
A Potential Sixth "R": Reach .....	92
Different phraseology used to describe to whom policies apply .....	95
Psychological abuse though not emotional abuse .....	96
Statute of Limitations.....	97
Children.....	101
Potential Gap in IJF Disciplinary Procedures.....	101
Presentation of Priorities within IJF Safeguarding Policy.....	102
Review of the ASOIF Top 7 Sports.....	103
Conclusion .....	104
<b>Chapter 6: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>106</b>
Introduction .....	107
Hierarchical Nature of Judo .....	108

<b>Summary of Findings.....</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>The Distinction between Safeguarding and Safe Sport.....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>The Role of Independent Reporting Mechanisms .....</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>The Concept of Reach.....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Statute of Limitations.....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Recommendations for Policy and Practice .....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>Key Limitations of the research .....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b><i>Chapter 7: References .....</i></b>	<b><i>115</i></b>

# List of Figures

Figure 1 - International Olympic Committee (IOC) safe sport and safeguarding definitions.....	20
Figure 2 - The safeguarding culture in sport model. ....	49
Figure 3 - NVivo tree map: frequency of inclusion of 5R's in IJF safeguarding documents. ....	74
Figure 4 - Distribution of inclusion of 5R's in IJF safeguarding documents.....	75
Figure 5 - IJF abuse and harassment reporting screen. ....	86



# List of Tables

Table 1 - Eight United Nations Children Pillars underpinning the safeguards .....	7
Table 2 – IOC consensus statement suggested terms and definitions.....	31
Table 3 - Safeguarding documents identified per International Federation.....	62
Table 4 – IOC safe sport and safeguarding definitions .....	72
Table 5 - Evidence of compliance with the 5R framework within IJF policies.....	73
Table 6 - IJF definitions or descriptions or types of abuse .....	97

# Glossary of Terms

ASOIF	The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations
GAISF	Global Association of International Sports Federations.
GTF	Governance Task Force. The ASOIF reviews are prepared by the Governance Task Force (GTF) of The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF). The GTF aims to assist the summer IFs with promotion of improved governance ensuring they are fit for purpose.
IF	International Sports Federations responsible for governing global sport.
IJF	International Judo Federation.
IOC	International Olympic Committee.
Safeguarding	All proactive measures to both prevent and appropriately respond to concerns related to harassment and abuse in sport as well as the promotion of holistic approaches to athlete welfare (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).
Safe Sport	A physically psychologically safe and supportive athletic environment where participants can thrive and experience the full benefits of sport participation (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).
SSI	Safe Sport International.

# Publications and Presentations

Fletcher, N. (2024). To what extent are the International Judo Federation Safeguarding or Safe Sport policies and procedures able to meet the responsibilities of an International Federation. In: H. Sertic, S. Corak, & I. Segedi (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 7th European Science of Judo Research Symposium & 7th Scientific and Professional Conference on Judo: Applicable Research in Judo*. (pp. 151). Poreč, Croatia: Faculty of Kinesiology, University of Zagreb.

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# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

## Background and Rationale

It is suggested that various high profile athlete abuse cases revealed in sport internationally, such as Larry Nassar in the US, and Barry Bennell in the UK has resulted in efforts to make advances in what is termed “safe sport” (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021). International media reports contain cases of abuse within the Olympic sport of judo. Examples include: a judo coach who slapped, kicked and beat female athletes in the run-up to London 2012 (McNeill, 2013), a German female athlete who publicly defended her coach for violently shaking and slapping her face when he performed a pre-fight ritual during the 2021 Tokyo Olympics insisting it had been at her request (Zoellner, 2021), as well as sexual assaults of two underage girls by a high-profile judo coach, for which he was imprisoned for five years (Reuters, 2019b). These examples above pose a question as what extent are the International Judo Federation (IJF) Safe Sport or Safeguarding policies and procedures able to meet the responsibilities of an International Federation (IF)?

While sport offers many benefits, it is important to acknowledge that it can also enable harmful behaviours, including physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (Baker, 2013; Brackenridge et al., 2004; Everley, 2022; O’Gorman & Greenough, 2018; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022).

Despite efforts to address issues within sports organisations, the cultural environments that exist within these institutions continue to attract criticism, particularly for their potential to create contexts where children may be exploited (Everley, 2022; McMahon et al., 2018). The USA Larry Nassar, Gymnastics case, a high-profile and devastating scandal starkly illustrates the profound impact that failures in protecting athletes can have. This underscores the need for systemic change across the global sporting community (Everley, 2020; McMahon et al., 2018).

The issue of governance within sport has come under increasing scrutiny, especially considering the accumulation of scandals over the past few decades. The frequency and severity of these scandals have reached a level that poses a significant threat to the credibility of sport and the trust that the public places in sporting organisations. This situation not only undermines the integrity

of sport but also jeopardizes the perception of sport as a provider of positive cultural values in society (Alm, 2013; Sisofo, 2019).

The fact that child maltreatment exists within sport cannot be denied. Child maltreatment is a widespread term used to designate abuse in sport (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). Evidence from research includes: sexual abuse (Bjørnseth & Szabo, 2018; Fasting et al., 2004; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022), emotional abuse (Gervis et al., 2016; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Rhind et al., 2015) physical abuse (Alexander et al., 2011; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Vertommen, 2017) neglect (McPherson et al., 2017; Rhind et al., 2015), and bullying (Evans et al., 2016; Mishna et al., 2019; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). So, we can see from the literature that child maltreatment can encompass sexual abuse, emotional abuse, physical abuse, neglect and bullying.

The evidence indicates that child maltreatment in sports is a widespread issue, occurring across various countries, sports, and levels of competition. This suggests that such maltreatment is not confined to any specific context or level of competitiveness, but is a problem throughout sport, whether in amateur or professional settings, and regardless of geographic location (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017).

The exploitation of power in sports, whether real or perceived, can be a significant factor leading to interpersonal violence (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). A culture of secrecy, silence, and shame can thrive in the world of sports due to entrenched power differentials in various interpersonal relationships and across different characteristics, such as gender, race, class, ability, age (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2020; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023)

Judo is a high intensity contact sport and injuries may occur during competitions (Blach et al., 2022). Research with a focus on the diagnosis of tissue injury occurrence of top-level judo athletes during competition indicated that the most prevalent type of tissue injury was ligaments (48%) trailed by skin (12%) and muscles (11%). The most frequent injury was the sprain (43%), muscles (11%) and dislocation (9%), (Blach et al., 2022). A study into injury rates in adult elite judoka participating in a national tournament identified the most common injury type for men was a strain

and the most common type of injury for women was the elbow (James & Pieter, 2003). Some judo injuries are extremely serious and research into fatal accidents that occurred from 1983 to 2009 during judo classes and associated activities conducted under the supervision of schools in Japan, showed that 76 deaths were caused by actions specific to Judo (Uchida, 2011). Uchida's research indicates that many of these serious injuries concern non-accidental violence. Focussing on cases within Japan the first conviction for a judo fatality was in 2011 and in 2021 a school teacher was sentenced to a term of imprisonment for inflicting bodily injury (Nimura et al., 2022).

### **Federations and International Federations**

IFs govern global sport. There are more than 100 IFs who are members of the Global Association of International Sports Federations (GAISF). IFs act as umbrella organisations for the national federations of their sport; in turn, national federations and state federations oversee clubs. IFs establish and control global rules, award championships to cities and countries and fight the excesses of sport such as doping and corruption (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013).

The responsibility of governing bodies in sports to protect participants and maintain the integrity of the sport is fundamental. This responsibility includes addressing issues of abusive and harassing coaching conduct and fostering an environment of ethical behaviour (Sisofo, 2019). This responsibility is known as safeguarding, which has been defined as; "all proactive measures to both prevent and appropriately respond to concerns related to harassment and abuse in sport as well as the promotion of holistic approaches to athlete welfare" (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024)

The IF responsible for organising Judo at the Olympic Games and World Championships alongside a World Judo Tour is the IJF. IJF Safeguarding arrangements are at a relatively early stage of introduction or implementation. Within an IJF media style article on their website (Messner, 2022) an announcement was made that the IJF is ready for Safe Sport. Within the same article an explanation was also provided that two named IJF Safeguarding Officers had been appointed and that they had attended the first IOC Safeguarding Course. The first publicly available safeguarding

policy titled Safeguarding from harassment and violence (International-Judo-Federation, 2021c) and was dated 15/7/2021.

An issue that will be discussed later are the responsibilities of the IJF and how far they reach. Do they relate just to field of play at major events, slapping an athletes face as part of match preparation (Zoellner, 2021), do they include training environment scenarios, beating female athletes with a stick (McNeill, 2013) as well as fatal injuries that occurred in school (Uchida, 2011), which could be considered the responsibility of a national federation, and how should the IJF address criminal acts (sexual assault) committed by high profile personalities within the sport (Reuters, 2019a).

### **Shift in emphasis from understanding to prevention**

Research indicates a shift of emphasis in the sport safeguarding arena from understanding instances of abuse to understanding the management of safeguarding. This moves the field from analyses of what has occurred towards frameworks that look to prevent abuse in all its configurations from taking place (Kavanagh et al., 2020; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020). Early attempts to rid sport of child maltreatment have concentrated on individuals and adult to child interaction, implementing codes of conduct or policies and procedures that contribute to organisational systems (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014; Mountjoy et al., 2015; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). Conversely, more recent research has expanded understanding of safeguarding intricacy, the range of potential perpetrators, and the range of contexts that maltreatment may take place (Mountjoy et al., 2015; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Rhind et al., 2015; Stirling, 2009). It is therefore necessary to have a cohesive approach that considers institutional, cultural and social factors that contribute to the continuance and cover-ups of child maltreatment (Kavanagh et al., 2021; Nite & Nauright, 2020; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017; Roberts et al., 2020; Sanderson & Weathers, 2020).

An implementation guide has been produced to assist organisations and It is suggested that to develop policy, a global framework is necessary to guide such development (Chroni et al., 2012).



The International Safeguards for Children in Sport (Rhind et al., 2015) are intended to mirror international declarations, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, relevant legislation, government guidance, existing child protection and safeguarding standards as well as good practice (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017).

The International Safeguards for Children in Sport (Rhind et al., 2015) are described below:

- Developing Your Policy
- Procedures for Responding to Safeguarding Concerns
- Advice and Support
- Minimizing Risks to Children
- Guidelines for Behaviour
- Recruiting, Training and Communicating
- Working with partners
- Monitoring and evaluating
- Abuse in sport recent research

The International Safeguards for Children in Sport (Rhind et al., 2015) are an example of preventative measures in contrast to research seeking to understand and are an example of the shift of understanding instances of abuse to understanding the management of safeguarding.

Table 1 below presents the United Nations eight children pillars which are designed to play a crucial role in safeguarding of children. The framework is considered to be a mechanism that will help people to reflect on the approach taken to safeguarding children, inform development of strategies and embedding an organisational culture that helps to safeguard children (Rhind et al., 2017).

**Table 1***Eight United Nations Children Pillars Underpinning the Safeguards*

<b>Pillar</b>	<b>Description</b>
Cultural sensitivity	There was a clear need for flexibility within the Safeguards such that they can be tailored to the cultural and social norms of the context.
Holistic	Safeguarding should be viewed as integrated into all aspects of an organization as opposed to being an additional element.
Incentives	There needs to be a clear reason for individuals and an organization to work toward the Safeguards.
Leadership	The Safeguards need to have strong support from those working in key leadership roles.
Dynamic	The safeguarding systems within an organization need to continually be reviewed and adapted to maintain their relevance and effectiveness.
Resources	The implementation of the Safeguards needs to be supported by appropriate resources (e.g., human, time, and financial).
Engaging stakeholders	A democratic approach should be adopted which invites and listens to the voices of those in and around the sport (e.g., parents, coaches, community leaders).
Networks	An organization's progress toward the Safeguards will be strengthened by developing networks with other related organizations.

*Note.* (Rhind et al., 2017).

A study to explore sport administrators' perspectives of how to advance safe sport was conducted (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021). Considering the leadership positions sport administrators hold, understanding their perspectives was deemed beneficial in informing a framework to guide the development and implementation of safe sport schemes. The findings indicated that a multi-faceted approach embracing multiple advancement strategies was essential. Specifically, the sport administrators recommended that sport organisations establish a universal framework of safe sport, design and implement education, implement and enforce policies, establish independent monitoring

and complaint mechanisms and conduct research to ensure that advancement strategies are current and applicable (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021).

## **Governance Reviews**

An assessment of good governance of five international sports federations (Geeraert, 2018) included various principles. Principle 45 recommended that organisations implement a policy to mitigate the health risks of sporting activities and principle 46 recommended that organisations implement a policy to combat sexual harassment in sport. The IJF has such a policy (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d) and the extent of their effect or adequacy is examined and discussed as an integral part of this research.

The result of a benchmarking process by the National Sports Governance observer (Geeraert, 2015), identified the IJF main weaknesses as: weak main event allocation, lack of decent code of conflict of interest rules and lack of ethics and audit committees. Strengths were solid election procedures and a social responsibility programme. A governance benchmarking exercise (Geeraert, 2018) assessed the governance of five international federations, although judo was not included.

Governance benchmarking did not include safeguarding which was assessed by the authors as understandable as the broad nature of sport integrity requires a multi-lens systems approach to promoting integrity and limiting risks as well as violations (Geeraert & van Eekeren, 2022; Molina, 2018). The fifth review of International Federation governance (ASOIF, 2024) is titled “Progressing Towards Better International Federation Governance.” The ASOIF reviews are prepared by the Governance Task Force (GTF) of The Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF). The GTF aims to assist the summer IFs with promotion of improved governance ensuring they are fit for purpose. The 2024 document is the fifth review with the first commencing in 2017. The 2022 review did not include a section specific to safeguarding although safeguarding was included within the 2022 self-assessment process. The 2022 conclusion confirmed that there was an increase from 15 to 20 in the number of IFs who evidenced implementation of safeguarding

programmes (ASOIF, 2022). The 2024 review included a new section of the report that addressed introduction of a Safeguarding Policy by IFs. In 2024, 27 out of 32 IFs had a safeguarding policy in place or were working towards introduction (ASOIF, 2024).

It is argued that although many interventions have been created to prevent athlete harassment and abuse, a significant level of success has not been accomplished. Despite existing athlete welfare policies, education and efforts to achieve compliance, numerous athletes have been abused, over an extended period of time whilst adults who were aware of the abuse did not intervene (Kerr & Kerr, 2020). It is further argued that whilst dissemination and advocacy of best practice has occurred, at the international level as of 2020 there had been no evaluation of data in respect of those interventions. It was accepted that the proposed model (an international governance system) would require significant resources to set up, operate and maintain. However, Kerr and Kerr argue that it is imperative that significant action is taken in this area (Kerr & Kerr, 2020), thus supporting the position of ASOIF in encouraging IFs to review the application of their policies.

The 2024 Paris Olympics saw multiple examples of individuals with histories of abuse-related convictions or safeguarding investigations afforded the privilege of participating in those Games according to Safe Sport International (SSI). These circumstances do not provide an environment where athletes can participate in sport without fear of inter-personal violence, abuse or harassment. SSI argue that the impact a perpetrator's presence has on survivors of abuse should be acknowledged for the harm it causes to those both inside and outside of sport, for life. Abuse must not be normalised, or the impact minimised in society. SSI believe that the situation needs to change (Safe-Sport-International, 2024).

The assessment of governance reviews, particularly within international sports federations, reveals a complex and evolving landscape concerning the adequacy of safeguarding requirements. While governance benchmarking exercises such as those conducted by the National Sports Governance Observer and ASOIF have provided valuable insights into the strengths and weaknesses

of various federations, it appears that safeguarding has not always been at the forefront of these evaluations. In recent years, however, there has been a shift towards incorporating safeguarding policies into governance reviews.

## **Conclusion**

This introduction highlights the critical importance of safeguarding and safe sport in the realm of sports participation. It underscores the need for robust policies and procedures, considers the widespread issue of harassment and abuse in sports, and emphasises the necessity for effective governance and prevention strategies to address and mitigate these challenges. It is evident that the efforts to create a safe and secure environment for all athletes is complex.

As awareness of the issue has grown, the need for effective policies and research to address and prevent abuse within sports environments has become increasingly urgent. This heightened focus reflects a broader commitment to safeguarding athletes and ensuring that sports are safe and supportive spaces for all participants (Boocock, 2002; C. Brackenridge et al., 2005).

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

## **Introduction**

The chapter aims to introduce, identify, and review the literature related to safeguarding in so far as it relates to the responsibilities of an IF for sport. Additionally, the definitions or meaning of the terms safeguarding and safe sport or safesport are examined.

Saturation is defined as data adequacy and is reached when reviewing data until no new information emerges, during the preliminary mapping of the field (Morse, 1995; Sisofo, 2019). The saturation stage occurred when no new information emerged, leading the researcher to stop further searches as all key material relevant to the issue had been identified.

Research traditionally starts with a literature review, where experts assess existing knowledge to identify gaps, trends, and areas for further exploration. This helps formulate a research objective that contributes to the ongoing academic discourse (Sisofo, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). Literature reviews provide an overview of research findings, summarizing knowledge to inform further research. Historically, they were less structured, with reviewers selecting studies based on relevance or prominence rather than a comprehensive approach (Brunton et al., 2012; Gough et al., 2012, 2017; Sisofo, 2019).

## **The need to promote safe sport and safeguarding**

Promotion of safe sport is a pressing task that is an element of good governance in sport at an international level. “The successful prevention and eradication of abuse and harassment against athletes rests on the effectiveness of leadership by the major international and national sport organisations” (Mountjoy et al., 2016).

It is suggested that various high profile athlete abuse cases revealed in sport internationally, such as Nassar in the US, and Bennell in the UK has resulted in efforts to make advances in what is known as safe sport (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021). Gurgis and Kerr (2021) also suggest that research, like that of Nite and Nauright (2020), has pushed for the development and enforcement of safeguards within sports leadership. Consequently national and international sport and coaching bodies have cultivated educational programmes and policies to improve the philosophy of safe sport (Gurgis &

Kerr, 2021). Examples provided by (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021) are SSI, the Coaching Association of Canada, the US Centre for SafeSport, the Child Protection in Sport Unit in the United Kingdom, Play by the Rules in Australia and International Olympic Committee (IOC). Major sporting events have the power to unite people, foster and encourage healthy competition, they also carry a darker side, often linked to facilitating human rights abuses (Chatziefstathiou & Simon Rofe, 2024). Abuse takes many forms although those that are the most noted in sport are: emotional, physical, sexual, neglect and poor practice (Raakman et al., 2010). Non-accidental harm can take place at any stage of activity from beginner to elite (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014).

A review of 30 years of child protection in sport shows initial focus on sexual abuse, later expanding to include physical, psychological abuse, neglect, and harmful hazing rituals (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014). The IOC Consensus Statement on Interpersonal Violence and Safeguarding in Sport describes interpersonal violence as a broad term that encompasses various harmful behaviours: physical, psychological, sexual violence, and deprivation, neglect (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). This is consistent with the Krug et al. (2002) definition of interpersonal violence.

In the 1990s, few sports organisations addressed child abuse, but since then, international interest has grown, especially in the UK, Canada, and Australia, with agencies actively involved in prevention (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014). It is suggested that in the UK safeguarding and child protection in sport emerged at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century amid media headlines about coaches abusing, sexually assaulting and raping children (Hartill & Lang, 2014).

In summary the promotion of safe sport and safeguarding is vital to protect athletes from abuse and harassment, to ensure their well-being, and establish effective governance within sports organisations.

## **The complex issue of Reporting Abuse**

Early research in non-sport contexts found that long-term, early, and violent abuse is difficult to report, often not remembered or disclosed until adulthood. Adults may feel guilt, shame, or responsibility for past abuse, complicating reporting. Similar dynamics occur in sports, where



power, trust, and manipulation can cause self-blame and hesitation in reporting. Emotional manipulation, like in coach-athlete abuse, can intensify the traumatic impact (Briere & Conte, 1993; Leahy et al., 2004; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

It is critically important that there is an understanding of the reporting methods, specifically: how, when, where, and why personal violence against children in sport is able to be reported. To understand the relationship between child rights, sport, and violence, it is necessary to examine the barriers and facilitators in reporting child protection violations in sport (Burrows et al., 2020; Tuakli-Wosornu. et al., 2023).

Many survivors keep their abuse hidden for years, while others encounter distress well after their football careers concluded (Sheldon, 2021). In football, feeder programs lacked oversight, and clubs discouraged younger players from voicing concerns. Even when inappropriate behaviour was recognised, players remained silent, making silence a key part of the culture surrounding professional football careers (Sheldon, 2021). An unspoken code of silence, fuelled by fear of ruining careers, allows abuse to persist as athletes prioritise their success over confronting or acknowledging witnessed or experienced misconduct (Sheldon, 2021; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

The 2002 UK Standards for Safeguarding Children in Sport aimed to create safer environments with clear reporting systems and rights information. The 2014 International Safeguards for Children in Sport advanced global child protection, linking abuse prevention with children's rights and guiding best practices for safeguarding in sports and sport-for-development communities (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020).

Sport lacks a global child protection framework like the World Anti-Doping Agency's system for doping. While there is no evidence confirming its effectiveness, such a framework could help raise global awareness and coordinate safeguarding efforts in sports (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2021).

This section of the literature review examines the challenges of reporting abuse in sports, highlighting the long-term effects of emotional manipulation and guilt on survivors. It notes the

cultural silence in sports, where career success often supersedes addressing misconduct. Efforts like the UK Standards for Safeguarding Children in Sport and the International Safeguards for Children in Sport have aimed to create safer environments. However, the lack of a global child protection framework in sports remains a significant gap in ensuring consistent safeguarding practices.

### **Vocabulary, Safe Sport, Safeguarding and other key terminology**

The United States Olympic Committee trademarked the term SafeSport in 2012 (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021; Koller, 2017). There is no consensus or accepted definition of the term Safe Sport and it is considered an umbrella term with confusion existing about what it does and does not include (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021). This lack of clarity is caused by the terminology used (Gurgis et al., 2023; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017).

Various descriptions or definitions have been articulated although they consist of a broad range of factors concerning protection from harm and protection of rights. Safe sport is described by various academics and organisations as

- An athletic environment that is respectful, equitable and free from all forms of non-accidental violence to athletes (Mountjoy et al., 2016).
- Physical and environmental safety (e.g., injury free), fair play and drug-free sport (Mountjoy et al., 2020).
- Sport that not only includes environmental and relational safety elements but also the optimisation of sport experiences (Gurgis et al., 2023).
- Creation and maintenance of a sport community where all persons who participate can do so in an environment free of emotional, physical and sexual misconduct (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021; Koller, 2017).
- A firm belief that harassment and abuse have no place in sport or in society, whilst advocating for safe sport, as the safety and wellbeing of athletes are paramount is the description of Safeguarding offered by the IOC (Gurgis et al., 2023; International-Olympic-Committee, 2017).

- Improving safeguarding and child protection practice within sport organisations, ensuring safety of children and young people participating in sport (Boocock, 2002; Gurgis et al., 2023; Lang & Hartill, 2014a).
- A term conceptualized through the expression maltreatment (Canada-Sport-for-Life, 2019; Gurgis et al., 2023; Sport-Dispute-Resolution-Centre-of-Canada, 2022).
- Welfare, safety and rights of athletes is an implied definition of safe sport contained within the SSI Principals (Safe-Sport-International, 2022).
- The US Centre for SafeSport website lacks a clear definition of Safe Sport but provides detailed descriptions of inappropriate behaviours, reporting procedures, and disciplinary actions in its SafeSport Code. (US-Centre-for-Safe-Sport, 2022).

Gurgis et al (2023) commented that despite the frequent use of the term safe sport, there is no consensus on the definition or conceptualization of safe sport.

The above definitions of safe sport reflect a broad range of perspectives on athlete protection. Despite frequent use, there is no consensus on its precise meaning. Definitions range from physical and emotional safety to fair play and drug-free environments, emphasizing the need for clear terminology to avoid confusion.

The term "Safeguarding" is a proactive approach to protecting children and vulnerable adults from harm, emerging from child protection legislation in the UK. High-profile cases have raised awareness of the need for safeguarding, reporting concerns, and promoting equality. Incidents of racism in sports highlight the need to prevent discrimination. Sports can drive societal change, with leaders influencing behaviour. Therefore, all sports require strong safeguarding, recruitment policies, and criminal record checks. Governing bodies emphasize the role models' influence, using sport to promote diversity and appropriate behaviour (Hedges, 2015).

Safeguarding is a comparatively new term developed from child protection issues that brought about the implementation of legislation in the UK. Safeguarding refers to a comprehensive approach to keeping children and vulnerable adults safe from harm or abuse.

Safeguarding is a multi-faceted theory that reaches further than basic child protection (Hedges, 2017; Reeves et al., 2017).

Safeguarding in sport focuses on protecting athletes during training and competition, while safeguarding around sport addresses issues like child labour and exploitation. It involves reasonable actions to ensure all children and young people are safe from harm (Rhind & Blair, 2018).

Safeguarding in sports has evolved from an early focus on sexual abuse and harassment to addressing a broader range of harmful behaviours, including disordered eating, self-harm, psychological and physical abuse, harassment, and medical mismanagement, all contributing to unsafe environments (Bekker & Posbergh, 2022).

In the UK and Ireland, Safeguarding is preferred to the term safe sport. The term safeguarding is based on child protection legislation defined by four principles (Gurgis et al., 2023). The principles mentioned by (Gurgis et al., 2023) were updated by the Department for Education in 2022. Despite some minor rewording, the core essence of the 2018 principles remains unchanged in the 2022 update. The 2022 principles are: “protecting children from maltreatment; preventing the impairment of children’s mental and physical health or development, ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care, and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes (Department-for-Education, 2022).

Safeguarding in sport extends beyond just children. As defined by the British Judo Association, safeguarding ensures that all children and vulnerable adults have a positive experience while being protected from harm, abuse, violence, exploitation, and neglect. It extends beyond just children (British-Judo-Association, 2023).

Safeguarding in the sporting context appears to have a similar meaning to safe sport. The IOC Toolkit for IFs and National Olympic Committees (International-Olympic-Committee, 2017) discusses safeguarding athletes from harassment and abuse yet in the same document it also used the term safe sport without clear distinction in meaning. It has been proposed that whilst a variety

of different definitions are used in respect of safe sport and safeguarding, they all focus on sport and sporting environments that are free from harm (Gurgis et al., 2023).

In summary safeguarding in sport encompasses a proactive approach to protecting children and vulnerable adults, extending beyond basic child protection. Originating from UK legislation, it addresses the need for comprehensive measures against harm and abuse, including discrimination and inappropriate behaviour.

Another term identified is non-accidental violence which is used to describe non accidental harm inflicted on athletes by coaches, athlete entourage support staff or other athletes. Non accidental violence is an umbrella term that groups together a wide range of harmful interpersonal experiences (Roberts et al., 2020).

Whilst defining maltreatment and safeguarding in respect of harm to children Owusu-Sekyere et al. (2022) proposed the use of the term “maltreatment”. It was argued that several terms summarise harm that may be experienced by children such as exploitation, violence and abuse, which are sometimes used interchangeably by researchers (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017). It was also argued that this interchangeable use hindered understanding as the use of terms varied globally (Hayhurst et al., 2015; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). Prevention of maltreatment in sport should be recognised as safeguarding (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017). This is far broader than child protection which are characterised activities undertaken to protect specific children that are at risk of suffering or are suffering significant harm (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Parton, 2016; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020).

Use of the term interpersonal violence for both child and adult athletes is suggested due to its global recognition as a public health issue. It covers physical, psychological, sexual abuse, deprivation, neglect, hazing, bullying, grooming, and online or cyber-enabled violence (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

Within a social work review rather than in relation to sport, attention is drawn to the need for reliability of vocabulary when making safeguarding assessments. It is asserted that the use,

meanings and consistency or validity and reliability of vocabulary for safeguarding practice is under researched (Fanner, 2021). Terms used to describe harm experienced by children such as exploitation violence and abuse are used by some researchers with a lack of consistency (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017; Stirling, 2009).

This attempt to clarify the meaning and potential distinction between the terms safe sport and safeguarding was settled by production of the IOC consensus statement: interpersonal violence and safeguarding in sport (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

The 2016 IOC definition of safe sport is “an athletic environment that is respectful, equitable and free from all forms of non-accidental violence to athletes.” Safe Sport in accordance with the IOC 2024 definition is “a physically psychologically safe and supportive athletic environment where participants can thrive and experience the full benefits of sport participation.” The IOC 2024 definition of Safeguarding is “all proactive measures to both prevent and appropriately respond to concerns related to harassment and abuse in sport as well as the promotion of holistic approaches to athlete welfare (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). A plain and simple interpretation is that the purpose of safeguarding is to ensure or provide safe sport.

**Figure 1**

*International Olympic Committee (IOC) safe sport and safeguarding definitions.*



*Note* (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

## Policy

Organisational policies define the principles that guide the social morality of organisations and individuals (McFall, 1987; Sisofo, 2019). The role of policy in an organisation is to provide:

- General guidance about the mission of the organisation (for example, affiliations with governing bodies, profit, not for profit)
- Specific guidance regarding the strategies to achieve the mission of the organisation (for example, employment policy or business operating systems)
- A mechanism of behaviour control within the organisation in pursuit of the mission, (for Example), election of office bearers and complaint resolution (Arthur, 2019).

In 2017, the IOC introduced a Safeguarding Toolkit to protect athletes from abuse, but its adoption varies across National Olympic Committees and IFs. Many IFs, like FIFA, lack alignment with a rights-based approach to children's safety. As a result, safeguarding policies often fail to integrate children's rights fully, neglecting broader issues like education and healthcare. This gap reduces the effectiveness of safeguarding measures and limits the overall impact of child protection in sports, compromising the culture of safety within sports organisations (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

A 2018 review examined the use of global safeguarding policies by sporting organisations. Due to an increase in usage, the research was updated in 2022 (Wilson & Rhind, 2022). The research indicated improved safeguarding engagement in organisations but also highlighted incidents of insufficient safeguards. Further research was recommended to explore why some countries are slower to adopt and fully implement safeguarding practices (Wilson & Rhind, 2022).

A study by Shiakou (2022) offered a uniform method of implementation of policies, that recommend remedial steps to overcome obstacles detected in earlier research that act as barriers to introduction and operation of common policies on harassment and abuse in sport (Shiakou et al., 2022). A problem solution approach can be effective for specific issues but may be unsuitable or harmful when applied to different objectives or circumstances, as meanings constructed around one issue can influence others (Everley, 2020; Fahlén & Stenling, 2019).

The evaluation of an organisation's commitment to implementing safeguarding policies, as opposed to potential resistance within the organisation, is facilitated by tracking progress through the use of a self-audit tool (C. H. Brackenridge et al., 2005). The importance of policy is sometimes exaggerated, causing the mistaken belief that an organisation is protected just by having a policy (Jacobs et al., 2017; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). Additionally, the existence of policy is a weak indicator of safety culture (Fernández-Muñiz et al., 2007; Frazier et al., 2013).

Creating and applying effective policies is an important early preventative step for sport organisations (Young & Wendit, 2017). When addressing the scope and complexity of sexual violence in sport, it is crucial for sport organisations to adopt evidence-based policies and practices that are subject to continuous evaluation (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014) for effectiveness (Boocock, 2002; Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014; Johnson et al., 2020).

A multifaceted approach, incorporating various policies and protective measures, is necessary to effectively address the complex issue of sexual abuse in sports, as a single policy alone cannot suffice (Parent & Demers, 2011). A dual approach is recommended, focusing on abuse prevention through education and awareness, alongside effective resolution mechanisms, with well-



communicated policies, procedures, and codes of conduct (Cense & Brackenridge, 2001; Johnson et al., 2020; Parent & Demers, 2011).

Sports organisations face unethical behaviour, integrity issues, and declining public trust. To maintain legitimacy, IFs must adhere to good governance principles, increasingly emphasised by the public and within the organisations (Mrkonjic, 2016; Sisofo, 2019). Good governance principles like transparency, integrity, accountability, and democracy are widely accepted, but the lack of a globally recognized standard has led to multiple governance guidelines developed by sport organisations, academics, and NGOs (Mrkonjic, 2016; Sisofo, 2019).

Research titled “The Journey to reporting child protection violations in sport: Stakeholder perspectives” (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023), suggest a pathway to incident reporting in sport known as the 5 R framework. The components of this framework are Readiness, Recognition, disclosure and Reporting, Response, and Remedy. It is noted that while the 5Rs resemble trauma frameworks, they are not identical.

The International Safeguarding Children in Sport Working Group developed a comprehensive framework that includes eight key safeguards to guide the creation of policies aimed at protecting children in sport environments (Johnson et al., 2020; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017). It is noteworthy that developing policy is the first item listed. The 8 (eight) key safeguards are:

- 1) Developing your policy
- 2) Procedures for responding to safeguarding concerns
- 3) Advice and support
- 4) Minimizing risks to children
- 5) Guidelines for behaviour
- 6) Recruiting, training, and communicating
- 7) Working with partners
- 8) Monitoring and evaluating.

The eight safeguards closely align with other established child protection frameworks in sports and mirror the primary focus areas utilised by organizations such as the U.S. Center for SafeSport (Johnson et al., 2020; Parent, 2011; Parent & Demers, 2011).

This section emphasises that effective safeguarding in sports requires continuous evaluation, of standards, and adherence to governance principles. By focusing on participant welfare and combating abuse, sports organisations can uphold ethical practices, adapt to evolving sports landscapes, and maintain public trust.

### **Safety management systems and safety culture**

Effective Safety Management Systems are crucial for enhancing and guiding an organisation's safety culture (Bottani et al., 2009; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). There is no universally accepted model of safety culture. Researchers have developed various models, each providing unique perspectives on its elements and dynamics (Cooper, 2000; Frazier et al., 2013; Goncalves Filho & Waterson, 2018; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Parker et al., 2006). The absence of a universally accepted safety culture model challenges the predictive and analytical capabilities of these models and limits their applicability in various contexts (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022).

Using Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) to ground safety culture offers a strong, theory-based framework that overcomes previous model limitations. SCT proposes that behaviour, personal factors, and environmental influences interact dynamically and reciprocally, continuously affecting each other. By applying this framework to safety culture, models such as Cooper (2000) and Fernández-Muñiz et al (2007) use this framework to illustrate the complex, interdependent relationships that define safety culture in organisations (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022).

Research identifies three key factors for safety culture: safety management systems, managerial commitment, and employee engagement (Fernández-Muñiz et al., 2007; Mearns et al., 2003; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). A positive safety culture enhances safety performance, morale, productivity, and adherence to safety protocols (Fernández-Muñiz et al., 2007; Goncalves Filho & Waterson, 2018; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Podgórski, 2006). Positive effects are evident (Cull et

al., 2013; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022) and developing a strong safety culture has shown to be effective in various high-risk industries including construction (Ismail et al., 2012), aviation (Hsin Lin, 2012), and healthcare (Halligan & Zecevic, 2011).

Sports administrators and other professionals can analyse risks and implement measures to improve protective strategies (Brackenridge, 2003). Effective risk management in the sports industry is essential for ensuring a safe environment for all sports programs. The objective of sports risk management is to control, prevent, and minimise the risk of accidents and injuries (bin Esa et al., 2017; Mustaffa et al., 2017).

This section recognises effective Safety Management Systems as essential components for fostering a positive safety culture within organisations. Various models exist, each offering unique insights, but their varied perspectives can limit their practical application.

## **Organisational issues**

Institutional structures may be influencing factors that support and reinforce organisational wrongdoing. Research in sport management has encountered challenges in determining how sports organizations contribute to abuse and corruption, partly due to the limited extent of investigation (Nite & Nauright, 2020). Agencies vary their focus based on their mission and can be broadly characterised. Sport-specific agencies concentrate on abuse prevention in sports, children's rights organisations emphasise child protection around sport events, and humanitarian organisations promote child development and protection through sports (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014).

Organisational factors related to non-accidental violence are organisational tolerance or permissiveness, conformity to dominant values or an ignorance to abuse. When such structural and social factors enable and motivate behaviour, the likelihood of abuse increases (Fasting & Sand, 2015; Kavanagh et al., 2020; Nite & Nauright, 2020; Roberts et al., 2020; Salin, 2003).

Organisational tolerance for non-accidental violence involves four key beliefs: not punishing instigators, backlash against those who report abuse, passive bystanders, and uncertainty about what constitutes non-accidental violence (Roberts et al., 2020). Failing to set standards of conduct

and enforce compliance within sports organisations promotes abusive behaviour and bystander inactivity (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004; Bandura, 1976; Roberts et al., 2020).

The United Nations, much like the Olympic and sports movements (including the IOC, IFs, National Olympic Committees, and National Governing Bodies), are organisations that wield significant influence and should lead by example in matters of governance (Mark & Lacy, 2018; Sisofo, 2019).

Several studies highlight a lack of organisational action, along with the absence of formal procedures for addressing coach-perpetrated sexual harassment and abuse (Brackenridge & Kirby, 1997; Dzikus, 2012; Fasting & Sand, 2015; Krauchek & Ranson, 1999; Sisofo, 2019; Volkwein et al., 1997). Sexual harassment in organisations is influenced by factors beyond power, including organisational climate, gendered occupations, ethics, and existing norms and policies (Dzikus, 2012; Fasting & Sand, 2015; Sisofo, 2019). Passive behaviours, non-intervention, and silence from influential figures in sports organisations worsens psychological harm from harassment and abuse, creating an environment where harmful behaviours seem acceptable or unchangeable. Governing bodies' inaction fosters athlete silence, perpetuating sexual harassment and abuse, and may lead to athletes dropping out entirely (Sisofo, 2019).

In smaller or resource-limited sports organisations, leadership structures are often minimal or absent. Effective leadership goes beyond policies and must be demonstrated through the actions and behaviours of leaders at all levels (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Palmer & Feldman, 2017; Parker et al., 2006).

In sports organisations, roles like employers, middle management, and safety professionals often overlap due to the diversity in size, type, mission, and leadership, leading individuals to take on multiple responsibilities (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Wu et al., 2010). Managerial commitment is an essential element of safety culture (Fernández-Muñiz et al., 2007; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Wamuziri, 2013) as well as operational safeguarding (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Palmer & Feldman, 2017).

Sports organisations must prioritise the welfare of participants by implementing robust safeguarding policies and fostering a positive safety culture. Effective risk management and strong leadership are essential to protect against abuse and ensure a safe environment for all involved in sports.

This section shows that organisational structures and passive behaviours foster non-accidental violence in sports. Effective safeguarding demands unified safety standards, proactive intervention, strong leadership, and prioritisation of participant welfare to counter abuse and implement comprehensive risk management within sports organisations.

### **Describing types of abuse and harm**

This section serves to introduce and briefly discuss the issues of sexual harassment and abuse as well as emotional abuse as they pertain to the sporting environment.

Both sexual harassment and abuse as well as emotional abuse are critically important issues to address within the sporting environment to protect the rights of all sport participants to take part in a safe and enjoyable setting. When considering sexual harassment and abuse in sport, central to many definitions of sexual harassment (Brackenridge, 1998, 2000; Brackenridge et al., 2008; Fasting et al., 2003; Fejgin & Hanegby, 2001; Sisofo, 2019; Van Niekerk & Rzygula, 2010; Volkwein et al., 1997; Willis, 1993) is the notion of “invasion without consent” (Brackenridge, 1997; Sisofo, 2019) and “unwanted sexual attention” (Fasting & Brackenridge, 2009; Sisofo, 2019).

In 1997, Brackenridge proposed a continuum model linking sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse. It suggests a progression from mild behaviours like unwanted attention and sexual jokes to severe acts like coerced sexual participation. In sports, interpretations of these terms vary, reflecting complexities in defining and understanding these behaviours across contexts. (Brackenridge, 1997; Fasting et al., 2003; Sisofo, 2019).

Sexual harassment and abuse in sport pose physical and emotional risks, highlighting the need to define 'good practice' and improve policies to better safeguard athletes and ensure their well-being. (Brunton et al., 2012; Gough et al., 2012, 2017; Sisofo, 2019). Despite the benefits of

sport, negative impacts on athlete integrity, well-being, and health can arise from non-accidental violence, such as harassment and abuse. (Chroni et al., 2012; Mountjoy et al., 2016; Parent & Hlimi, 2012).

Sexual harassment is difficult to define due to its subjective nature, depending on individual perception. It refers to unwelcome sexual behaviour that creates a hostile or offensive environment, though what is offensive varies between people (Krauchek & Ranson, 1999; Sand et al., 2011; Sisofo, 2019). The definitions of sexual harassment and sexual abuse can be shaped by cultural norms and the legal frameworks of various countries (Fasting et al., 2014; Pépin-Gagné & Parent, 2016; Sisofo, 2019). Viewing sexual exploitation as a continuum helps understand the range of misconduct behaviours, varying in severity, impact, and intent, but all rooted in power exploitation and disregard for consent (Brackenridge, 1997, 1998; Fasting et al., 2003; Fejgin & Hanegby, 2001; Hartill, 2009; Johansson & Larsson, 2017; Parent & Demers, 2011; Sisofo, 2019; Van Niekerk & Rzygula, 2010).

Athletes may sometimes be unaware of the behaviours that constitute sexual harassment or abuse, which can complicate the processes of identification, reporting, and measurement of such incidents (Sisofo, 2019). While sexual harassment generally involves unwanted sexual attention, some differentiate it from sexual abuse, viewing abuse as a more severe form of harassment (Fasting et al., 2003; Sisofo, 2019). Sexual harassment, abuse, and emotional abuse harms wellbeing (Sisofo, 2019). Unwanted sexual behaviours have significant consequences for those impacted (Sisofo, 2019; Vijayasiri, 2008).

The IJF interpretation is that harassment and abuse can be expressed in five forms which may occur in a group or towards a single person. The five forms are: psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and neglect. Sexual harassment is any unwanted and unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal, non-verbal or physical. Sexual harassment can take the form of sexual abuse. Sexual abuse is any conduct of a sexual nature, whether non-contact, contact or penetrative, where consent is coerced, manipulated absent. The IJF definitions of

harassment and abuse are consistent with an IOC Consensus Statement (International-Judo-Federation, 2021c) emphasising a broad understanding of these behaviours.

A key definition of emotional abuse provided by Stirling & Kerr (2008) states emotional abuse is “a pattern of deliberate non-contact behaviours by a person within a critical relationship role that has the potential to be harmful.” Emotionally abusive behaviours include spurning, terrorising, isolating, exploiting, or denying emotional responsiveness, all of which can harm an individual's emotional, behavioural, cognitive, or physical well-being (Gervis et al., 2016; Kerr & Stirling, 2012, 2015; Sisofo, 2019; Smits et al., 2018; Stirling, 2013; Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Emotional abuse in athletic settings involves harmful non-contact behaviours by coaches or officials, exploiting authority. It affects athletes' mental health, with lasting negative psychological impacts, especially in structured sports environments where athletes are particularly vulnerable (Sisofo, 2019).

Emotional abuse frequently occurs in elite sports due to the emphasis on achieving positive performances and outcomes. However, these behaviours can also be observed at all levels of sport, including recreational activities, where there is an attempt to replicate the culture and objectives of high-level sports or adhere to a culture that prioritises success and performance over the well-being of athletes (Everley, 2020; Sisofo, 2019; Stafford et al., 2015). Existing research demonstrates emotional abuse often develops out of accepted coaching methodologies such as a ‘win-at-all-costs’ approach (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Sisofo, 2019). This mindset prioritises sporting achievements over athletes' health and development, promoting emotionally abusive practices for desired outcomes. Studies highlight the need to address such coaching methods and advocate for an athlete-centred approach (Sisofo, 2019; Stirling & Kerr, 2008, 2014). There is a growing and widespread call for a holistic, athlete-centred approach to coaching in response to the recognition of the harmful effects of emotionally abusive practices in sports (Gervis & Dunn, 2004; Kavanagh et al., 2017; Sisofo, 2019; Stafford et al., 2015; Stirling & Kerr, 2008). Reducing the authority of the coach and empowering the athlete may be an important factor in achieving this aim (Sisofo, 2019; Stirling & Kerr, 2014).

This discussion on emotional abuse in sports, highlights detrimental effects and emphasizing the need for an athlete-centred approach. The win at all costs mentality prevalent in coaching can lead to harmful practices. Research underscores the importance of addressing these methodologies to safeguard athletes' well-being, advocating for reducing coach authority and empowering athletes to create a healthier sporting environment.

Interpersonal violence (IV) in sports is a critical issue that cuts across all age groups, competitive levels, and forms of participation, from recreational to elite-level athletics (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). In 2007, the initial consensus statement on sexual harassment and abuse in sport was issued (Ljungqvist et al., 2007). Since that time, research has broadened to encompass a wider range of abuses, as outlined in the IOC 2016 consensus statement (Mountjoy et al., 2016) on harassment and abuse in sport, and then the most recent IOC statement that contained physical abuse, psychological abuse, neglect, bullying, and hazing (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

The IOC Consensus Statement on Interpersonal Violence and Safeguarding in Sport characterises interpersonal violence as a broad term that includes various harmful behaviours, such as physical, psychological, and sexual violence, as well as deprivation and neglect (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). This is consistent with the Krug et al. (2002) definition of interpersonal violence.

Maltreatment involves harmful inaction, harmful action, and exploitation. It may be direct, indirect, intentional, or unintentional (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Parton et al., 1997; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017). Harm can result from omission (failing to act), commission (taking action that causes harm), or exploitation (using someone for personal gain). Factors include the nature of the act, method of administration, and intent behind the action (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Parton et al., 1997; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017).

Harm can be direct, inflicted by one person onto another, or indirect, caused through intermediaries or other means. Indirect harm includes spreading rumours, encouraging others to cause harm, or creating situations where harm is likely. Intent may be malicious or not.



Understanding these types of harm aids in better prevention and response strategies (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Parton et al., 1997; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2017).

The terminology in interpersonal violence in sport is complex and not standardised, causing confusion. Standardised definitions are crucial for research, safeguarding measures, and a global understanding among stakeholders (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

This section has highlighted the persistent nature of interpersonal violence (IV) in sports, which affects participants of all ages and competitive levels. It underscores the evolving nature of research on abuse in sports, with an initial focus on sexual harassment and expanding to include various forms of abuse such as physical, psychological, and neglect.

**Table 2**

*IOC consensus statement suggested terms and definitions.*

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Interpersonal violence	'The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.' Interpersonal violence involves the intentional use of physical force or power against other persons by an individual or small group of individuals. It can occur online, be perpetrated by different actors and take different forms.
Child abuse/maltreatment	'Child abuse or maltreatment constitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power.'
Sexual violence (includes sexual harassment)	'Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting including but not limited to home and work.' The different forms of sexual violence can occur both online and in person.
Physical violence	'Physical violence is an act attempting to cause, or resulting in, pain and/or physical injury' and 'Physical violence includes beating, burning, kicking, punching, biting, maiming or killing, or the use of objects or weapons.'
Psychological violence	'Psychological violence (abuse) involves the regular and deliberate use of a range of words and non-physical actions used with the purpose to manipulate, hurt, weaken or frighten a person mentally and emotionally; and/or distort, confuse or influence a person's thoughts and actions within their everyday lives, changing their sense of self and harming their wellbeing.' In sport, it could also take the form of non-physical actions that could cause physical or psychological harm to the athlete. Psychological violence could occur online and offline in different forms.
Neglect	Neglect includes a failure to provide a vulnerable athlete with an adequate standard of nutrition, medical care, clothing, shelter or supervision to the extent that the health or development of the athlete is significantly impaired or placed at serious risk. A vulnerable athlete is neglected if they are left uncared for over long periods of time or abandoned.

*Note.* The above list is not exhaustive and other forms of sport related aggression have been identified: including hazing, bullying and grooming (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

## **The role of International Federations**

IFs, National Olympic Committees, and National Governing Bodies each play vital roles in the Olympic Movement. IFs govern their sports worldwide, promoting development at all levels, maintaining consistent rules and standards. During the Olympic Games, IFs handle the practical and technical aspects of their sports, ensuring competitions meet Olympic Charter guidelines (Sisofo, 2019).

IFs operate independently from the IOC and governmental bodies. The IOC recognises IFs as organisations responsible for managing one or more sports globally. Although they are autonomous, IFs are required to adhere to the Olympic Charter in all areas of their management (Porreca, 2021).

National Olympic Committees foster sport development, while National Governing Bodies regulate specific sports and prepare athletes for Olympic qualification. Along with IFs, they ensure effective governance and promotion of sports in line with the Olympic Charter (Sisofo, 2019).

## **Ethical Foundations in Sports Management**

Sport integrity covers a wide range of issues, such as doping, match-fixing, harassment, bullying, exploitation, and abuse. Globally, integrity is deemed crucial in sport, with scholars and policymakers increasingly focusing on these issues (Sam et al., 2022). A fundamental point is that sport integrity issues are not confined to the field of play (Cleret et al., 2015). Integrity in sports isn't just about participants or institutions, but about the sport itself. Sporting integrity means maintaining a consistent framework where inefficiencies are accepted to preserve the spirit of competition (Archer, 2016; Sisofo, 2019). Sport organizations need to broaden their focus to address various integrity issues that impact the fairness, safety, and governance of sport (Sisofo, 2019).

The term "integrity in sport" is commonly used without a full understanding of its scope or clear definition. Traditionally, discussions have focused on match manipulation, doping, and financial corruption. However, limiting the conversation to these issues ignores other important factors that

also affect sports integrity (Sisofo, 2019). Integrity refers to a state of completeness, defined by adherence to moral principles (Maak, 2008; Sisofo, 2019). Integrity requires consistent values, principles, behaviour, and outcomes. It means aligning words with actions, making integrated judgments, and controlling character, conduct, and consequences (Kaptein & Wempe, 2011; Sisofo, 2019). Organisational integrity is founded on self-governance guided by the establishment's principles. It fosters an environment that promotes ethical conduct and instils a sense of mutual accountability (Paine, 1994; Sisofo, 2019).

Sports organisations globally are facing ongoing integrity issues, and there is evidence to suggest that current methods such as good governance, piecemeal legislation, and policy have not been effective in addressing these problems (Kihl, 2019). Scholars advocate for the implementation of coherent integrity systems, as well as contemporary integrity management systems and policies, to ensure effective oversight from a sports governance perspective (Cleret et al., 2015; Kihl, 2019; Sam et al., 2022; Vanden Auweele, 2016). In the context of developing frameworks for sporting integrity, themes such as transparency, accountability, effectiveness, trustworthiness, anti-harassment, anti-abuse and anti-discrimination are essential components (Archer, 2016; Gardiner et al., 2017; McNamee & Fleming, 2007; Sisofo, 2019). Examining issues like harassment, abuse, doping, and match manipulation reveals how factors such as transparency and accountability affect sports integrity. Sport organizations must expand their notion of integrity to cover all essential areas (Cleret et al., 2015; Sisofo, 2019).

Literature broadly assesses integrity by linking it to governance structures. Frameworks suggest components such as transparency, accountability, effectiveness, trustworthiness, anti-harassment, anti-abuse and anti-discrimination (Archer, 2016; Gardiner et al., 2017; McNamee & Fleming, 2007; Sisofo, 2019).

Morality focuses on appropriate conduct, while ethics pertains to actions informed by one's understanding of right and wrong (Ianinska & Garcia-Zamor, 2006; Sisofo, 2019). Integrity is the combination of morality and ethics (McFall, 1987; Sisofo, 2019). Sexual harassment and abuse as

well as emotional abuse present a risk to integrity of individuals and organisations as well as sport culture (Sisofo, 2019). Integrity involves identifying right from wrong, acting accordingly, and clearly stating those actions. It requires intentional decisions guided by ethical reflection and moral reasoning (Carter, 1998; Sisofo, 2019). Individuals and organisations involved in sports must consistently uphold their principles and ensure that their actions align with these principles, irrespective of the results (Sisofo, 2019). Morality is considered a result of human culture and history, meaning it changes over time. Various societies, groups, or individuals can create their own moral systems, influenced by their specific environments, cultural norms, and historical contexts. This perspective recognises that several moral systems can exist simultaneously, even if they differ or conflict with one another (Sisofo, 2019; Walther, 2004). Morality, in the normative sense, is viewed as a guide for behaviour that is meant to apply to all rational individuals (Gert & Gert, 2002; Sisofo, 2019). Studies show that people worldwide share core values guiding moral conduct. These include respect, non-malevolence, benevolence, integrity, justice, utility, double effect, responsibility, caring, courage, wisdom, hospitality, and peace (Kidder, 1994; Sisofo, 2019).

Adopting a normative perspective on morality necessitates the recognition of certain behaviours as immoral, regardless of one's personal inclinations to engage in such behaviours (Gert & Gert, 2002; Sisofo, 2019). People do not always follow universal moral principles strictly. However, these guidelines are vital for creating order, fairness, and stability (Covey, 1998; Sisofo, 2019). Morality is influenced by culture and history yet guided by universal principles. It aims to create order and fairness, despite varying personal adherence. Core values such as respect, justice, and integrity are essential for maintaining societal stability and ethical conduct.

Codes of good governance help organisations to meet ethical standards, legal requirements, and societal expectations. These codes can be effective if there is a genuine commitment to ethical behaviour, avoiding any false sense of security (Kayes et al., 2007; Sisofo, 2019). To foster ethical behaviour, organisations should not only ensure compliance with ethical codes but also promote a culture of integrity (Kayes et al., 2007; Sisofo, 2019). Integrity is a concept widely referenced in

ethical discourse, encompassing multiple interpretations based on context. Although it has various meanings, integrity is consistently regarded as one of the most essential qualities an organisation can exhibit (Sisofo, 2019).

Legitimacy is a construct that represents perceptions of appropriateness in a social setting (Nite & Nauright, 2020). Legitimacy can be moral, pragmatic, or cognitive. Moral legitimacy means following accepted norms. Pragmatic legitimacy involves actions that benefit the organization. Cognitive legitimacy is about adhering to widely accepted practices and structures (Bitektine, 2011; Nite & Nauright, 2020; Suchman, 1995). Sexual abuse cannot be legitimised, yet corruption might become normalised when corrupt actions are rationalised within organisations. This legitimisation can happen through deliberate action or passive acceptance of such behaviour, which then gets rationalised as necessary (Anand et al., 2005; Haack & Sieweke, 2018; Nite & Nauright, 2020; Papaefstathiou et al., 2013). Sometimes, discussions among stakeholders are used to explain certain elements and integrate them into sports culture, suggesting that they are essential for successful performance and standard practice (McMahon et al., 2018). In the decade before their research, reports of abuse in sports gained attention from media and academics (Nite & Nauright, 2020). Numerous cases of sexual abuse were reported globally, showing that this issue is not limited to any one country. Sexual abuse remains a global concern (Nite & Nauright, 2020).

Research indicates that stigma encompasses public stigma, self-stigma, stigma by association, structural stigma, and remains a significant area of study (Bos et al., 2013). Stigmatisation can serve to exploit and dominate others, reinforcing power inequalities. It also enforces social norms by pressuring deviants to conform to group standards (Phelan et al., 2008). Athletes with impairments are more vulnerable to non-accidental harms like abuse, neglect, and exploitation. These risks can affect their physical, psychological, and emotional well-being, potentially hindering their performance and careers (Farstad, 2007; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2020).

This section proposes that integrity in sports governance encompasses moral principles, ethical conduct, fairness, and safety. It requires adherence to standards, legal compliance, and

fostering a culture of trust. Legitimacy ensures conformity to norms, while stigma highlights inequalities, enforcing social discipline and pressuring individuals to align with societal expectations.

## **Governance**

Governance is a key part of the administrative operations in a sports organisation (Sisofo, 2019; Yeh & Taylor, 2008). The term "governance" has several definitions, with its meaning depending on the context in which it is considered and the research objectives of scholars studying it (Alm, 2013; Sisofo, 2019). In the context of sports, governance is crucial for the practical and ethical self-regulation of organisations, teams, and athletes. It ensures that sports entities operate with integrity and fairness, striving to meet various objectives that enhance the overall quality and sustainability of the sport (Healey, 2012; Sisofo, 2019). Sport governance is complex due to the variety of organisations involved, each with its own structures, legal frameworks, and goals. These organisations interact at international, national, and local levels, regulating and developing sport in various ways. Key types include IFs, event associations, national governing bodies, and professional sport leagues (Forster, 2006; Sisofo, 2019).

Governance in the sport sector is significantly shaped by the external environment, particularly the legal and political contexts in which sporting organizations operate. These organisations must pay increasing attention to both national and international laws (Pendlebury & Semens, 2011; Sisofo, 2019).

The commercialisation of sport has complicated the role of governing bodies. They must now balance their internal duties with managing sponsors, broadcasters, and corporate partners. This often leads to conflicts between preserving the sport's integrity and meeting stakeholders' demands for financial gain or brand exposure (Pendlebury & Semens, 2011; Sisofo, 2019). Alongside commercialisation, the dissemination of scandals has exerted pressure on governing bodies (Sisofo, 2019). IFs typically serve three main governance functions: overseeing sports, managing events, and regulating specialist functions. The most common function is the governance of a sport, which includes regulation, development, and promotion globally. IFs also organise and manage

international or regional sporting events, and handle specific regulatory aspects like anti-doping measures, arbitration, or ethics (Forster, 2006; Sisofo, 2019).

The IOC's "Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic and Sports Movement" is a widely respected framework for good practices in sports governance (International-Olympic-Committee, 2008). This document guides Olympic sports organisations on governance standards for ethical, transparent, and accountable management (Sisofo, 2019). The seven principles that define effective governance in sports organisations are as follows:

1. Vision, mission and strategy
2. Structures, regulations and democratic process
3. Highest level of competence, integrity and ethical standards
4. Accountability, transparency and control
5. Solidarity and development
6. Athletes' involvement, participation and care
7. Harmonious relations with governments while preserving autonomy

Transparency in administrative proceedings is essential for good governance and long-term economic stability in sport organizations (De Zwart & Gilligan, 2009; Sisofo, 2019). Corruption can affect the governance of sporting organisations that provide sociocultural value to the broader community (Schenk, 2011; Sisofo, 2019).

IFs are crucial in global sports governance (Crocì & Forster, 2004; Sisofo, 2019). Their decisions affect all structures within their as well as IOC jurisdiction (Hums & MacLean, 2004; Sisofo, 2019). Critics argue that IFs are undemocratic due to their hierarchical structure. Athletes, teams, and national federations often have little influence over the decision-making processes that affect them (Geeraert et al., 2013; Sisofo, 2019). IFs operate autonomously, managing their affairs, setting global sports standards, and regulating competitions without legal or political oversight (Alm, 2013; Sisofo, 2019).



In any organisation, the allocation of time and material resources often involves competing priorities. This challenge can complicate the implementation of policies such as child protection, which necessitate significant investments in both areas (Brackenridge et al., 2004; Everley, 2020). Organisations of all sizes face challenges in implementing child protection policies. Larger organisations often encounter more complex barriers compared to smaller ones when working with children or youth (Everley, 2020). It is evident that regulatory practices associated to the professionalisation of coaching contribute to positive child protection developments (Everley, 2020; Kerr & Stirling, 2015).

The Fourth Review of International Federation Governance (ASOIF, 2022) and the updated Fifth Review (ASOIF, 2024) are governance reports published biennially. The fifth review, titled "Progressing Towards Better International Federation Governance" (ASOIF, 2024), aims to help summer IFs improve their governance to ensure they are fit for purpose (ASOIF, 2024). Another key document relevant to governance is The Journey to Reporting Child Protection Violations in Sport: Stakeholder Perspectives (Y. A. Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

The 2022 ASOIF (Association of Summer Olympic International Federations) review evaluated the performance of 33 international federations (IFs) and categorized them into five different groups: A1, A2, B, AT (Achieved Target), and C (ASOIF, 2022).

Group A1 (Top group): This group included the seven IFs that achieved the highest scores. These were:

- BWF (Badminton World Federation)
- FEI (Fédération Équestre Internationale)
- FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association)
- ITF (International Tennis Federation)
- UCI (Union Cycliste Internationale)
- World Athletics
- World Rugby

Group A2: Comprising 10 IFs, this group was below A1 in terms of performance but still notable. Group B: This group contained 12 IFs that were ranked lower in terms of performance compared to A1 and A2. Group B included the International Judo Federation. Group AT (Achieved Target): This group had 3 IFs that had met their performance indicators set by the ASOIF. Group C: Only one IF was placed in this group (ASOIF, 2022).

The ASOIF 2024 report highlighted notable differences between the highest and lowest-scoring IFs on several critical issues, one of which was safeguarding (ASOIF, 2024). Indicator 3.12 within section 11 Integrity assesses programmes or policies for safeguarding against harassment and abuse. There has been some improvement, as 27 out of 32 IFs now show evidence of implementing a safeguarding policy and appointing safeguarding officers at events. Several IFs included human rights references in their safeguarding policies or codes of ethics (ASOIF, 2024).

Section eight of the ASOIF report 2024 focuses on the implementation of safeguarding policies, rather than their content or adequacy. The report includes case studies of rugby, rowing, and the world dance sport federation, all noted for their positive comments on safeguarding. Rugby has improved since 2022 with a formal safeguarding policy and enhanced integrity code. Rowing performs strongly in many areas, including safeguarding, while the world dance sport federation has made significant advances in this field (ASOIF, 2024).

The Sport Integrity Global Alliance (SIGA) addresses issues such as corruption, criminal infiltration, and abuse in sports by promoting ethical sports governance. SIGA's Independent Rating and Verification System (SIRVS) is an independent rating and certification system that evaluates sports organisations' compliance with SIGA's Universal Standards on four core principles: good governance, financial integrity, sports betting integrity, and youth protection (SIGA-sport.com, 2024). SIRVS is a comprehensive two-part audit conducted by SIGA over four months to assess a sports organisations' compliance with international standards. Organisations must submit a corrective plan for unmet criteria, which is re-evaluated (SIGA-sport.com, 2024). Article 5 of the SIGA terms of reference for permanent committees establishes the Permanent Committee on the

Protection of Children and Young People in Sport. This committee advises and supports the SIGA council and CEO on matters concerning the development and protection of children and young people in youth sports. Most SIGA activities fall under the broader category of governance in sport rather than focusing specifically on safeguarding or safe sport. The IJF is not listed by SIGA as an organisation that has undergone a SIRVS audit (SIGA-sport.com, 2024).

Good governance varies across sport organisations due to context. Governance needs differ significantly between local, national, and international levels. For example, community sports clubs have different governance compared to large organisations like the IOC (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013; Sisofo, 2019). The need for a practical and flexible method to evaluate governance within sports organisations, enabling continuous improvement, is recognised (Chappelet, 2011; Sisofo, 2019). Basic Indicators for Better Governance in International Sport are sometimes referred to as BIGBIS (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013; Sisofo, 2019). Chappelet and Mrkonjic (2013) focus on seven essential aspects of governance that are consistently highlighted in various principles of good governance. These seven fundamental aspects are:

- Organisational transparency
- Reporting transparency
- Stakeholders' representation
- Democratic process
- Control mechanisms
- Sport integrity
- Solidarity.

This section highlights the importance of ethical governance in sports organizations to uphold integrity, fairness, and trust. Effective governance demands transparency, accountability, and ethical behaviour.

## Deficiencies, Imperfections or Limitations

The theme of this section is to highlight aspects or factors that have been identified as absent, missing or lacking within safeguarding related research.

A study involving an international group of elite youth athletes found a general lack of awareness regarding harassment and abuse in sport. This was despite participants acknowledging that harassment and abuse do exist within their sports (Mountjoy et al., 2020). Project CARE found that 69% of adult athletes surveyed were not consistently aware of their 'rights' during their childhood in sports. In 2022, athletes' confidence in their rights, related agency and autonomy was reported to be low in sport settings and was strongly influenced by gender (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2022; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

Interviews with children and coaches in floorball and equestrian sports (2011-2012) show that awareness and application of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) are lacking in Swedish sport. Although the UNCRC is included in Swedish sport policy, both child athletes and adult coaches were unaware of this incorporation and lacked knowledge of the convention's specific content (Eliasson, 2017).

An equity-deserving group is one which has traditionally faced barriers to participation in aspects of society. Research suggests that achieving a safe sport environment presents challenges for equity-deserving groups, emphasising the need for principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion to support them (Gurgis et al., 2022). This research highlights the challenges faced by equity-deserving groups in achieving safe sport environments and underscores the barriers within sports governance and practices. Overall, this serves as a critical reminder that safeguarding in sports must be designed with sensitivity to the unique needs of all participants, particularly those from equity-deserving groups.

Giving children a voice and consulting with them may be absent and presenting child protection policy as a process that actively engages children and gives them a voice is crucial to its effectiveness (Brackenridge, 2003; Everley, 2020; Hartill & Prescott, 2007). Within human rights

legislation, children are to be consulted on policy issues that affect them (Everley, 2020; Hartill & Prescott, 2007). Regarding child rights principles at Olympic games, Japan included child participation strategies in Tokyo 2020 activities but lacked comprehensive child rights policies, including listening to the voice of the child, due to the IOC not integrating human rights into its host city contract. Researchers recommended that the IOC should embed child rights principles in bidding and planning processes, treating human rights with equal importance to other requirements. These findings offer guidance for future host city bidders to integrate child rights into policies for major sporting events (Aina et al., 2021).

A lack of confidence may be derived from exploitive behaviours within high-performance sports systems and potentially violate the individual human rights of athletes (Adams & Kavanagh, 2020). Ongoing reports of human rights abuses in sports indicate a lack of trust in IFs. It is argued that IFs have failed to uphold the basic human rights of athletes, whose careers rely on the legal frameworks and justice procedures established by sports organisations (Schwab, 2018). It is argued that the development of international sports law by sport's governing bodies worsens the situation for athletes, as it does not incorporate their fundamental human rights. In contrast, the United Nations' guiding principles on business and human rights do address these rights (Schwab, 2018).

In conclusion for this section, it is evident that good governance, safeguarding, and human rights in sports are areas that require significant attention and improvement. There remains a lack of awareness and understanding about harassment, abuse, and the rights of young athletes. The absence of comprehensive child rights policies and integration of human rights principles in major sporting events further exacerbates these issues.

### **How sport intersects with international legislation and human rights**

Sport, practiced since ancient times, is now a global business with significant stakes. Beyond the 'Laws of the Game', sport requires external legal regulations known as *Lex Sportiva*, which are laws specific to the sporting context (Blackshaw, 2018). Judicial activity is significant in sports, as shown by the establishment and duties of the Court of Arbitration for Sport, which handles disputes

and settlements (Casini, 2011). Sports law is becoming a crucial part of the sports industry. It includes provisions from the state or sports authorities that regulate sporting activities and govern relationships within this sphere. Unlike other laws, these rules are often set by legal entities rather than state executive power (Singh, 2017).

The Lex Sportiva was identified in 2012 as an area needing further research. Three critical questions that were raised included: what constitutes transnational law? is it legitimate? should the matter of transnational legal diversity be addressed (how different legal orders interact and coexist beyond the borders of nation-states)? (Siekmann & Soek, 2012). A study examined the potential of Lex Sportiva as the governing law in contracts, developed through decisions of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). Challenges included defining Lex Sportiva, ensuring its legitimacy, and identifying its content. More time and clarity are needed before Lex Sportiva can be widely adopted in contractual law, with CAS continuing to refine it (De Oliveira, 2017).

It is suggested that sports and competition laws should take precedence over general laws, as the former are specifically enacted for sporting events. It is recognised that conflicts between sports laws and general laws may occur (Panagiotopoulos, 2023). The 1992 European Sport Charter, adopted by the Council of Europe, reaffirmed the principle of autonomy from the 1975 Sport for All Charter. It states that voluntary sports organisations have the right to make decisions independently within the law and require mutual respect between governments and sports organisations. These organisations are responsible for promoting their sport in line with national and European legislation, using democratic and transparent methods (Chappelet, 2016).

Sport, when done well, can powerfully promote global human rights (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). The Olympic Charter (2024) affirms that "the practice of sport is a human right." This indicates that every individual has the right to participate in sports, without facing any form of discrimination (International-Olympic-Committee, 2024; Mountjoy et al., 2016). All individuals who participate in sports have the fundamental right to feel safe and be treated with dignity and respect. This right includes not only physical safety but also issues of equitable access and full integration into

sport environments (Tuakli-Wosornu & Kirby, 2022). All forms of interpersonal violence and abuse, including physical and sexual abuse as well as harassment, bullying, hazing, disability stigma, physical, psychological, neglect, gender and race-based discrimination, constitute human rights violations. These acts compromise dignity, safety, and equality outlined in international human rights frameworks (Tuakli-Wosornu & Kirby, 2022).

In summary, sports law intersects with human rights frameworks to uphold dignity, equality, and safety. Lex Sportiva, developed by CAS, requires further clarity to address legal complexities in sports governance. The Olympic Charter affirms sports as a human right, promoting inclusivity and safety for all. Addressing interpersonal violence and abuse is essential for equitable access. Harmonising sports law with broader legislation can foster secure, transparent, and inclusive environments while safeguarding athletes' rights.

## **Training**

All stakeholders need training, especially those with specific safeguarding roles, as it is essential for effective safety management systems (Fernández-Muñiz et al., 2007; Frazier et al., 2013; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). In statistical terms, training has a significant impact on safety performance (Bottani et al., 2009; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). Researchers are supportive of more role-specific training (Hartill & Lang, 2014; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022) as findings indicate that volunteers as well as those who have less of a delivery-based responsibility within sport tend to be under scrutinised and undertrained (Kerr et al., 2014; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Piper et al., 2017).

Coaches should meet higher child protection standards through certification-based training, which enhances their understanding of abuse, complaints, and ethics. This ensures a safer, ethically responsible sports culture that prioritises child welfare (Sisofo, 2019). Superior knowledge can lead to environments where abuse may occur and be ignored. The idea that coaches always know what's best can pressure athletes to follow harmful or unethical instructions (Everley, 2022; Mills et al., 2020). In sports, a culture of conformity pressures athletes to follow unspoken rules, limiting their

ability to express individual perspectives and potentially reinforcing harmful environments (Everley, 2022; Mills et al., 2020).

This section indicates that a safe culture in sports requires tailored training, ethical responsibility, addressing undertraining, safeguarding roles, and preventing abuse. It promotes equity through informed practices and critical engagement with norms and authority.

## **Culture**

Examining sport culture is key to understanding its potential safety risks and identifying vulnerable individuals (Roberts et al., 2020; Tuakli-Wosornu & Kirby, 2022). Culture should include these key recommendations (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024)

- Make safe sport everyone's responsibility.
- Ensure safe sport is inclusive for all in the sports ecosystem.
- Promote the use of current scientific knowledge on safeguarding in sport.
- Focus on athlete-centred sport with mutual care and respect.
- Listen to unheard voices and incorporate global perspectives.

Safety culture is a specific sub-component of an organisation's overall culture (Fernández-Muñiz et al., 2007; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022). Understanding culture in its broader sense is essential to effectively grasp both organisational culture and safety culture (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022).

Culture is characterised as a pattern of basic assumptions developed by a group to handle external and internal challenges, deemed effective and taught to new members as the right way to perceive, think, and feel about these issues (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Schein, 1990). The following definition of culture was selected by Owusu-Sekyere et al. (2022) because it encapsulates extensive research on organisational and safety culture, providing conceptual clarity (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022).

“The assembly of underlying assumptions, belief's, values and attitudes shared by members of an organisation, which interact with an organisation's structures and systems



and the broader contextual setting to result in those external readily visible, practices that influence safety” (Edwards et al., 2013).

An organisation's unique culture is formed by its history, values, beliefs, and behaviours. Over time, employees, leaders, and stakeholders develop common practices and understandings, creating a shared cultural framework (Schein, 1990). Owusu-Sekyere (2022) noted that Guldenmund (2000) highlighted seven key elements of organisational culture that are frequently cited:

- an abstraction rather than a concrete phenomenon,
- relatively stable over time,
- comprised of multiple dimensions,
- shared by groups of people,
- containing several aspects which co-exist within an organisation,
- something that leads to but is not solely defined by overt practices and
- serving a functional purpose as expressed with the saying that it is ‘the way we do things around here’.

A positive and robust safeguarding culture can yield substantial benefits, potentially fostering a holistic approach to safeguarding that permeates every aspect of an organisation. This culture is shaped by three fundamental themes: effective safety management systems, committed leadership, and active stakeholder engagement (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022).

Research shows that organisational factors alone may not cause bullying, but they can enable it. Tolerance within sport organisations is seen as essential for bullying to occur. While individuals perpetrate abuse, it is perpetuated by organisations that allow a tolerant environment or overlook abuse in sports (Kavanagh et al., 2020; Salin, 2003). Separate research aimed to understand how institutional structures are created and legitimised, allowing abuse to perpetuate within sport organisations (Nite & Nauright, 2020). Organisational permissiveness can enable harassment and abuse (Fasting & Sand, 2015).

Many athletes have experienced harmful, emotionally abusive, coaching practices across different sports and levels of competition. Coaches, athletes and parents may justify or normalise these practices (Kerr & Stirling, 2012; Stirling, 2013). For juniors in sport, the need for approval from authority figures like coaches, as well as peers and parents, can heavily influence their behaviours and attitudes (Everley, 2022). Everley (2020) citing Foucault (1980) argued that modern power is more subtle than traditional coercive power (Everley, 2022; Mills et al., 2020). The proximity and depth of the relationships between a coach or other responsible adult and athlete potentially render children in sport especially vulnerable to exploitation (Everley, 2022; Parent & Demers, 2011). The Whyte Review of British gymnastics (Whyte, 2022), addressed widespread abuse allegations, revealing issues such as bullying, training through pain, and physical assault. A major concern was that gymnasts, especially children and young athletes, felt unheard, enabling harmful practices to continue (Everley, 2022; Whyte, 2022). A culture of expression may help mitigate certain abuses in sport (Everley, 2020).

The perceived moral benefits of sport, including fostering discipline, teamwork, fairness, and character-building, have often been idealised. However, these assertions are critiqued for being based on political and ideological assumptions that could oversimplify or overlook the complex cultural contexts of sport (Brackenridge, 2003; Everley, 2020).

Sports organisations may struggle to address abuse and violence due to a belief in the inherent goodness of sports. This idealised view can blind them to internal issues like harassment and exploitation, making it hard for Federations to acknowledge and tackle these problems (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024; Tuakli-Wosornu & Kirby, 2022). Justifying inappropriate coach behaviour as passion can lead to physical and psychological abuse of children. Some coaches with such behaviour are even celebrated in sports halls of fame. Parents often overlook unsafe practices, thinking tough coaches ensure their child's success (Willson et al., 2022). Many sports organisations also face challenges related to anxiety of reputational risk, lack of awareness, silence or collaboration, which contribute to vulnerabilities in their systems (Mountjoy et al., 2016).

Studies show that elite athletes face a higher risk of interpersonal violence, including abuse, harassment, and bullying, than non-elite athletes (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Tuakli-Wosornu & Kirby, 2022). In sports environments focused on winning at any cost, athletes are more likely to face harm due to risk-taking and boundary-pushing. This can create a culture that tolerates harmful behaviours, especially when they fall into "grey zones" being actions that don't explicitly break rules but can still be damaging or abusive (Roberts et al., 2020; Tuakli-Wosornu & Kirby, 2022; Vertommen, 2017). In environments where athletes are expected to meet demands unquestioningly, there might be a higher risk of exploitation or violence (Tuakli-Wosornu & Kirby, 2022). Certain sports and aspects of training can potentially objectify children and even rationalise abusive practices (Everley, 2022; Papaefstathiou et al., 2013). An excessively intensive training regime is often framed as a "necessary sacrifice" for success in sports, which can lead to it being deemed acceptable despite the potential risks it poses to young athletes (Everley, 2022; McMahon et al., 2018).

Clear language in Codes of Conduct and policies is crucial to ensure everyone's right to a non-violent, safe, and respectful environment in sports organizations. It also establishes the organisation's duty to protect and support all athletes and staff. Beyond individual abusers, all actors within sports organisations bear responsibility for fostering and maintaining safe environments (Mountjoy et al., 2016; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). The responsibility for athlete safety is collective, implicating administrators, coaches, support staff, and any organisational entity that interacts with athletes (Kerr et al., 2019). When organisations fail to address unsafe conditions, they implicitly prioritize their reputation over athlete well-being, fostering a culture where abuse can continue unchecked (Guiora, 2020; Kerr et al., 2019; Tuakli-Wosornu & Kirby, 2022).

Organisations aiming to meet international child safeguarding standards saw improvements due to positive changes at personal, social, and organisational levels, which helped develop and maintain strong safeguarding cultures (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020).

However, when safeguarding is undervalued, this can develop into a compromise of safeguarding behaviour (Hartill & Lang, 2014; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022).

Managerial commitment to safety is recognised as a critical component of safety culture and necessary protections (Fernández-Muñiz et al., 2007; Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022; Palmer & Feldman, 2017; Wamuziri, 2013). Safeguarding culture is influenced by leadership commitment, safety management systems, and stakeholder engagement and the relationships are set out in the safeguarding culture in sport model below (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022).

**Figure 2**

*The safeguarding culture in sport model*



*Note.* (Owusu-Sekyere et al., 2022).

The maintenance and reinforcement of dominant values are motivating factors of non-accidental violence. Two such dominant values are high performance and traditional male values, which have at their core aggression and dominance. A further dominant value of, expertise values, includes deference to those who are successful as an integral feature. It is suggested that in combination these values depict or legitimise non-accidental violence within sport (Roberts et al., 2020).

Sport organisations should review safeguarding policies to prevent organisational tolerance (Roberts et al., 2020). They should:

- define respectful behaviour for athletes, coaches, managers, entourages, and spectators both on and off the field,
- support expected behaviour, promote athlete autonomy, and prevent isolation,
- establish reporting mechanisms and procedures, and
- outline sanctions for non-compliance and enforcement methods.

Inequalities in sport can be addressed by acknowledging that power dynamics are not always one-directional, and through the implementation of cultural practices, it is possible to transform relationships (Apple, 2013; Everley, 2020). Institutional betrayal occurs when an institution does not adequately address a victim's concerns. One instance of such betrayal is when an organisation fails to take sufficient action after someone reports sexual harassment, resulting in the persistence of the harassment (Gómez et al., 2023; Smith & Freyd, 2014). An institution's commitment to truth and protection of dependents counteracts institutional betrayal (Freyd, 2018; Gómez et al., 2023). The Small Wins Model Correll (2017), promotes focusing on specific change areas through initial actions, building momentum for broader organizational transformation (Gómez et al., 2023).

The belief in a “right” way offers structure but may lead to a culture of compliance (Everley, 2022; Mills & Denison, 2018). Conformity can deeply influence the culture, leading athletes to adopt unwritten expectations that shape their behaviour and attitudes. This environment prioritises norms over individual expression in conduct, training, and views on hardship (Everley, 2022; Mills & Denison, 2018). The focus on conformity and the desire for approval significantly influence young athletes. Juniors, being highly impressionable, often view coaches, senior athletes, and teammates as role models for appropriate behaviours and attitudes (Everley, 2022; Mills & Denison, 2018). Athletes often follow norms and values through training, rules, and coaching that subtly enforce conformity (Everley, 2022; Mills et al., 2020). Coaches and team staff observe and evaluate this type

of conformity (Downham & Cushion, 2020; Everley, 2022; Foucault, 1977). The emphasis on conformity in sports often puts discipline, resilience, and sacrifice above personal well-being, which doesn't always lead to better performance (Everley, 2022; Mills et al., 2020). Children are potentially more vulnerable to abuse in sports due to the formalized power dynamics in the environment (Everley, 2022).

Power is not simply something held by those at the top of a hierarchy but is rather fluid, circulating through various relationships and interactions (Everley, 2022). Normative power, often seen in sports, refers to the subtle regulation of behaviours and standards by widely accepted norms rather than explicit rules. This power is evident not only in the hierarchical control exerted by coaches and institutions but also in the unspoken "rules" and standards. (Everley, 2022; Mills et al., 2020).

This section on culture examines how sports culture and safeguarding are interconnected, highlighting how conformity and power dynamics impact individual behaviours. Addressing structural issues requires athlete-centred practices, inclusive policies, and accountability, combined with effective leadership and stakeholder engagement to create transparent systems and counteract institutional tolerance and power imbalances.

## **Forward look**

Research is urgently needed to develop and evaluate prevention and policy approaches for sexual violence in sports to improve athlete safety (Kaufman, Lee, Milroy, Yore, et al., 2022).

It is argued that we should prioritise upstream prevention measures over downstream efforts like investigation and victim treatment (Bethea, 1999; Kaufman, Lee, Milroy, & Raj, 2022).

An international governance system has been proposed to improve athlete protection. The proposal is likely to require considerable resources to establish, operate, and maintain as it concerns a multi-sports operation or collaboration rather than each individual International Federation operating their own individualised systems (Kerr & Kerr, 2020).

In February 2025 the IJF announced that their safeguarding officers aim to enhance collaboration with IJF continental unions and member federations by appointing a Safeguarding and Wellbeing Coordinator for each union. This role seeks to ensure alignment with global efforts to protect athletes and harmonize safeguarding policies, processes, as well as programs across all levels (International-Judo-Federation., 2025).

Progress in safe sport can be achieved by enhancing accountability measures, introducing third-party disclosure and reporting, promoting equity, diversity, inclusion, educating stakeholders, prohibiting sexual relations between athletes and authority figures, and adopting a broader view of harms and perpetrators (Willson et al., 2022). The IOC's updated statement enforces a zero-tolerance policy for safeguarding breaches in sports, stressing proactive measures to protect athletes from harassment, exploitation, and abuse (International-Olympic-Committee, 2022).

A common practice among many sport organisations to enhance their safeguarding efforts is to involve survivors of abuse in sport, often as guest speakers at conferences or educational events. This approach necessitates careful consideration of safe survivor engagement to avoid unintentional re-traumatisation, which could exacerbate the original harm and create vulnerabilities for both the survivor and the organisation (Mountjoy, Vertommen, Denhollander, et al., 2022). Safeguarding and educational material as well as mechanisms for reporting should cater for specific readership or age groups i.e. youth athletes (Mountjoy, Vertommen, Tercier, et al., 2022).

A systematic review of enabling and motivating factors that contribute towards athlete non-accidental violence concluded that a whole system approach is required towards prevention (Roberts et al., 2020). Restorative justice places a victim at the centre of the resolution model. Restorative justice, has been utilised in the criminal justice system and the principles have been applied in various situations, including organisations. Restorative justice is frequently used to address the aftermath of a conflict or a crime and it is suggested that it should be incorporated into safe sport (Abdul Rahim, 2022).

The Olympic Charter urges the IOC and IFs to protect athlete health, mainly focusing on elite athletes. However, IFs often neglect recreational athletes, missing an opportunity to improve public health. By broadening their efforts to include recreational athletes, IFs could promote physical activity, reduce sedentary lifestyles, and align with the IOC's vision of sports having a positive societal impact (Mountjoy & Junge, 2013).

This section indicates that enhancing athlete safety requires comprehensive strategies that go beyond compliance. Effective governance systems, accountability measures, survivor engagement, and restorative justice are essential components. By prioritising prevention, and broadening efforts to include all athletes, institutions can foster a safe and supportive environment, ultimately improving the wellbeing of participants.

## **Key Theorists**

A central influence of this research is the work of Yetsa Tuakli-Wosornu particularly the development of the 5R framework (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023), which is frequently referenced throughout the thesis as both a guiding structure for policy analysis and as a benchmark for best practice in safeguarding. The 5R framework was created to describe how child protection violations are reported in sports, and this thesis uses it to evaluate whether the IJF's safeguarding policies are sufficient. The framework's approach enables the research to move beyond policy existence towards evaluating the clarity, accessibility, and effectiveness of safeguarding measures in real-world contexts. The thesis codes IJF documents against the 5Rs, highlighting strengths and potential gaps in each domain, and proposes an additional sixth R (Reach) to reflect on the scope and jurisdiction of safeguarding responsibilities. The 5R paradigm is used as a framework for policy analysis, guiding the findings and recommendations.

Professor Celia Brackenridge is an influential theorist whose extensive research on child protection, safeguarding, and abuse in sport provides much of the academic foundation for the thesis. Brackenridge's work is used to contextualise the evolution of safeguarding concepts, the challenges of reporting abuse, the importance of robust organisational responses, and the critical



need for independent reporting mechanisms. Brackenridge's emphasis on the gap between policy and practice, and her advocacy for continuous evaluation as well as improvement of safeguarding systems, are echoed in the thesis's analysis and recommendations.

## **Research Question**

This study is guided by the following primary research question:

- To what extent are the policies for managing the integrity issues of abusive and harassing behaviours fit for purpose within the remit of the International Judo Federation?

Despite ongoing development in safeguarding policies and procedures, abuse incidents persist. For instance, a 1999 position statement on child protection in sport (Brackenridge, 1999) referenced research from 1989 about abusive coaches (Crosset, 1989). Despite over thirty years of research, media reports show that abuse continues. One case of abuse is too many. Continued research is essential to prevent abuse in judo.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

## Introduction

A good research project commences with selection of the topic or issue of interest (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Groenewald, 2004; Mason, 1996). In alignment with the research question, the objective is to evaluate the adequacy of policies and procedures that address integrity issues related to abusive and harassing behaviours within the remit of the international Judo Federation. This research focuses on a comprehensive review of documented policies and related materials that include definitions or explanations of abuse, reporting mechanisms, case management arrangements concerning regulatory breaches, whistleblowing (reporting), sanctions, and corrective actions.

The ontological and epistemological assumptions are detailed. Research methods and systematic review processes are discussed.

## Research design

Based on Mackenzie & Knipe's principles (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006), following a literature review, the research began by examining which policies and procedures addressed abusive and harassing behaviours, focusing on safeguarding within the IJF. Data was collected via internet searches, filtered to include relevant documents and documented in an Excel spreadsheet.

Document analysis was chosen as the analytical method, whereby the published policies and procedures were analysed using NVivo software. Data was read and re-read in advance of coding which is sometimes described as immersion in data (Rivas, 2012).

Ethics approval was not required according to the guidance by the University of Hertfordshire Health, Science, Engineering and Technology Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority, as the data utilised was already within the public domain.

Qualitative research must be open to scrutiny, with findings based on more than the researcher's authority (Madill et al., 2000). Ensuring trustworthiness and quality is a key challenge (Finlay, 2006). This research involves subjective interpretation by the researcher. Although it's important to apply criteria for evaluating research, opinions vary on which criteria to use (Finlay,

2006; Willig, 2001). The quality and trustworthiness of qualitative research can be ensured by referring to studies on the characteristics of well-conducted qualitative research. Seven attributes that define good qualitative research have been identified by researchers (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). These are: the importance of fit, integration of theory, reflexivity, documentation, theoretical sampling and negative case analysis, sensitivity to negotiated realities and finally transferability (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992).

A five dimensional approach known as the 5 Cs provides fundamental principles to evaluate the outcome of pieces of qualitative research (Finlay, 2006). The 5 Cs are:

- Clarity: does the research make sense, is it systematic and clearly described.
- Credibility: Do the findings match the evidence.
- Contribution: Does the research influence the debate and knowledge of an issue.
- Communicative resonance: Are findings consistent with current understanding or do they challenge existing perceptions and are they well-articulated.
- Caring: Has proper consideration and respect been afforded those who may be affected.

Have any safety needs been sensitively considered (Finlay, 2006).

The research plan was to adhere to the principles of the research journey, ensuring quality and trustworthiness by checking for clarity, credibility, contribution to the debate, and consistency with current understanding, while maintaining proper consideration and respect (Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

## **Research Methods**

### Philosophical Stance

The philosophical stance of this document integrates constructivist and pragmatic perspectives. Constructivism emphasizes developing patterns of meanings during the research process without starting from a predefined theory (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). It focuses on subjective interpretation and the role of qualitative methods in constructing knowledge.

Constructivists do not typically start with a theory; instead, they develop a theory or pattern of meanings during the research process. Constructivist researchers often use qualitative data collection methods. Their analysis may include a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). This aligns with their personal perspective. While this research is qualitative, it would be appropriate to employ a quantitative methodology if required.

Pragmatism allows for flexible methodologies aimed at solving research problems effectively, without strict adherence to specific philosophical preferences (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). These perspectives shape the approach to examining safeguarding policies and procedures within the International Judo Federation, emphasizing the complexities of reality (ontology) and the process of knowledge acquisition (epistemology).

Pragmatism in research prioritizes solving problems using flexible methodologies suitable for the issue at hand rather than adhering strictly to philosophical preferences (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). A pragmatist approach allows researchers to mix methods for better exploration and explanation, while realism suggests discovering truth with limitations by combining positivist and interpretive elements (Gratton & Jones, 2014; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006).

The constructivist paradigm does not start with a predefined theory but develops patterns of meanings throughout the research process. Pragmatism allows for flexibility in methodology, focusing on solving research problems using the most suitable approaches without strict adherence to specific philosophical preferences (Gratton & Jones, 2010; Gratton & Jones, 2014).

The components of a paradigm are, ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods (Scotland, 2012). Ontology is the study of the philosophy of knowledge (Gratton & Jones, 2014). Ontological assumptions are what constitutes reality and researchers need to take a stance on how things really are and how things really work (Crotty, 1998; Scotland, 2012). Broadly speaking, ontology addresses the nature of reality and being (Fife & Gossner, 2024). Epistemology is the philosophical study of how knowledge is acquired (Gratton & Jones, 2014) or valid ways of knowing

(Fife & Gossner, 2024). Another explanation is that epistemology concerns the nature and forms of knowledge. Epistemological assumptions concern the way in which knowledge is created, acquired and communicated (Cohen et al., 2007).

### Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in the philosophical perspectives of ontology and epistemology, which shape the approach to examining safeguarding policies and procedures addressing abusive and harassing behaviours within the IJF. This research adopts a qualitative methodology, rooted in subjective interpretation and document analysis, to understand the adequacy of existing policies.

Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality and what exists, raising questions about what is real and what entities or structures constitute reality (Crotty, 2003; Sisofo, 2019). Epistemology explores the basis for identifying types of knowledge and evaluating their validity (Maynard, 1994; Sisofo, 2019) and focuses on questions such as how can we know about reality and what is the basis of our knowledge (Blaikie, 1993; Ormston et al., 2014; Sisofo, 2019). The ontological stance taken in this study recognizes the complexity of safeguarding and the varied experiences of individuals affected by abusive behaviours.

Identifying the paradigm during preparation is crucial to align the research's intent, motivation, and expectations (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). A paradigm is a set of related assumptions, concepts, or propositions that guide thinking and research, or the philosophical motivation for a study (Cohen & Manion, 1994). Paradigm beliefs are fundamental and accepted on faith without proof of their truthfulness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The research paradigm utilised for this study integrates constructivist and pragmatic perspectives, aligning with the idea that research systematically studies problems and adds to human knowledge (Gratton & Jones, 2014; Reber, 1995).

Interpretive methodology allows researchers to explore and uncover explanations through non-numerical measures such as words and statements. This approach aims to gain understanding

rather than establishing absolute truths. However, it may be critiqued in terms of reliability and validity by those with a positivist perspective (Gratton & Jones, 2014). Interpretivism recognises that people construct meaning differently and accept ideologies. Interpretive methodology seeks to understand phenomena from individual perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2005; Scotland, 2012). Researcher beliefs are asserted by their research choices, methods, and data interpretation (Edge & Richards, 1998; Scotland, 2012).

The theoretical framework for the study integrates constructivist and pragmatic perspectives to examine safeguarding policies within the International Judo Federation. It emphasizes the complexities of reality (ontology) and the process of knowledge acquisition (epistemology). Overall, the theoretical framework supports an interpretive approach to understanding safeguarding policies, recognising the subjective construction of meaning and the need for flexible methodologies to address complex research problems.

#### Participants and Sample

The sample documents were sourced from public websites of various sports International Federations, with a focus on judo from the IJF site. For comparison, governance documents for ASOIF assessed highly ranked sports like swimming and tennis were also accessed from their websites.

The literature review was conducted utilising academic data bases Scopus and Google Scholar, with additional searches performed as required to identify secondary and tertiary sources. Key documents identified in that literature review, included the Fourth Review of International Federation Governance (ASOIF, 2022). The fifth review of International Federation governance (ASOIF, 2024), titled "Progressing Towards Better International Federation Governance," was published during the research period and has been utilised as the most recent ASOIF publication. The GTF of ASOIF helps summer IFs improve governance to ensure they are effective. The 2022 and 2024 reports identified the top seven IFs for good governance.

#### Data Collection

The safeguarding policies of the top seven international sport governing bodies, identified in the ASOIF reports (2022, 2024), were accessed from their respective websites:

- BWF (Badminton World Federation)
- (FEI) Federation Equestre Internationale
- FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association)
- ITF (International Tennis Federation)
- UCI (Union Cycliste Internationale)
- World Athletics
- World Rugby.

### Data Analysis

The International Judo Federation publishes documents on their website in three official languages, Spanish, French and English. By removing duplicate Spanish and French versions, 449 documents were reduced to 177, which were then reviewed for relevance to safe sport and safeguarding, identifying 11 pertinent documents.

NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software widely used in academic research to organise, code, and analyse unstructured data which in this case was textual documents consisting of the IJF safeguarding policy and associated documents. The data was imported into NVivo and codes were applied that are referred to as nodes. Nodes were applied manually to explore themes, patterns, and concepts. The software streamlines the process from coding to interpretation, ensuring a transparent and systematic approach to qualitative analysis. Such thematic analysis (TA) is a qualitative method for identifying, organising, and interpreting patterns or themes in large datasets. It helps explore common topics and experiences within a group in a detailed manner (Braun & Clarke, 2012).



The method included qualitative documentary research (Tight, 2019) as well as critical policy analysis and content analysis (Baehler & Fiorino). Scrutiny of IJF published policies and other associated material, was undertaken.

The researcher conducted a comprehensive literature review and an extensive search of international sport federation websites to identify safeguarding policies and associated documents. Subsequently, a detailed analysis was carried out on the identified materials. Compared to the IJF, the seven IFs in ASOIF's top tier have a different style of website with clear safeguarding or governance sections. The IJF website provides a list of governance documents by title. As there was scope for a wide distribution or placement of potentially relevant safeguarding documents on the IJF website a broader search was conducted, rather than focussing on a governance, safeguarding or legal section. In relation to the ASOIF top seven (governance) ranked sports, documents were opened, tiles were accessed and secondary links were reviewed as appropriate. Searches in text were made using the term "safe" as that captured safeguarding safe sport and safesport. Additional search terms were the words "harassment" and "abuse." All positive results were read to assess their relevance to safeguarding and safe sport.

**Table 3**

*Safeguarding documents identified per International Federation*

<b>International Federation</b>	<b>Number of Safeguarding documents identified</b>
IJF (International Judo Federation)	11
BWF (Badminton World Federation)	12
(FEI) Federation <u>Equestre Internationale</u>	16
FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association)	22
ITF (International Tennis Federation)	7
UCI (Union <u>Cycliste Internationale</u> )	15
World Athletics	23
World Rugby	17

This research seeks to consider the adequacy of the policies and procedures for managing the integrity issues of abusive and harassing behaviours in IJF related judo. It is therefore necessary to understand that which should be in place. A review of the safeguarding policies and procedures belonging to the top seven international sport federations (governance), as ranked by the ASOIF report of 2024 (ASOIF, 2024) was carried out. The seven sports listed in the 2024 report (ASOIF, 2024) were also identified as the top tier of good governance in the 2022 report (ASOIF, 2022). Despite the work of the GTF who produce the governance reviews some academics take the view that there is a lack of agreement on a standardised way to assess the good governance of sports entities (Cabello Manrique & Puga González, 2023). It is further suggested that this lack of agreement in assessment must be addressed and improved urgently (Cabello Manrique & Puga González, 2023).

It was important to understand the 5R framework as this point as it is critical to understand what should be in place particularly when coding and gathering data. The 5R framework of Readiness, Recognition, disclosure and Reporting, Response and Remedy, outlines critical points on the reporting journey relating to Safeguarding within sport (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

### **Judging qualitative and quantitative data**

In qualitative research, data collection is conducted in non-numerical forms. The process of qualitative analysis involves identifying codes while analysing the material (Bryman, 2004). The literature review, guided by the research question, did not indicate the need for a quantitative approach.

Qualitative researchers acknowledge their connection to the phenomena under investigation, recognising that the research is influenced by their own values (Finlay & Ballinger, 2006; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Soiferman, 2010). The researcher has substantial involvement with the British Judo Association (BJA) Safeguarding case management group and Conduct and Complaints Commission, handling serious complaints including sexual assault allegations. They bring extensive experience from investigating organised crime and working with international partners,

currently employed by a regulatory body overseeing investigative techniques. This aligns their expertise with safeguarding in judo, though not at the IF level, contributing to decision-making processes in safeguarding cases. The founder of judo, Kano Jigoro explained that the purpose of judo training is to train and strengthen the body through offensive and defensive exercises, to perfect one's character by cultivating one's mind, and to contribute to society (Hoare, 2009; ; Messner, 2021; Watson, 2008). Service on the British Judo Association safeguarding case management group and research to improve IJF safeguarding arrangements both contribute positively to society.

Policy analysis is an established discipline (Walt & Gilson, 1994) and supportive arguments to justify policy analysis have been made by scholars (Walt & Gilson, 1994; Walt et al., 2008). The analysis of organisational policy offers a straightforward method for collecting and examining data in qualitative research. This approach is valuable in practical applications and is particularly beneficial in formal research settings, enabling the establishment of evidence and providing context for studies related to specific categories of documentation (Cardno, 2018; Walt et al., 2008).

Qualitative research can involve both inductive and deductive analysis, depending on the research purposes and questions being addressed (Rivas, 2012). Deductive qualitative research uses established theory to examine processes, narratives, and meanings (Fife & Gossner, 2024). A further feature of qualitative analysis of textual contents is that rich and valuable information is identified by allocating labels to the data (Xiao et al., 2023). Deductive and inductive practices in qualitative analysis involve priori coding, where codes are created before analysing the data (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021). In this research the 5R framework (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023) was identified and coding was adapted accordingly.

A deductive approach is positivist and quantitative, focusing on questions like what, where, and how many. It follows a pre-determined design to establish causality and confirm theory (Gratton & Jones, 2014). Inductive research often involves qualitative, interpretive studies that ask why and how. It typically follows a flexible design and aims to explain causality and develop theory (Gratton & Jones, 2014).

Qualitative data analysis involves both inductive and deductive thinking and interpretation to generate meaning, as opposed to the examples mentioned above which steer the argument away from a purely deductive approach (Swanson & Holton, 2005). Arguments based on laws, rules, or accepted principles are best expressed deductively (Soiferman, 2010).

Research uses two main types of analysis: quantitative (deductive) and qualitative (inductive). Researchers often debate which method is best, as both can address the same question differently. Despite their differences, both methods utilise research questions and rely on observation (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Soiferman, 2010). Qualitative and quantitative research arguably address the same elements, but differ in implementation (Creswell & Clark, 2017; Soiferman, 2010).

The context, objectives, and nature of the research questions should dictate the methodological approach employed in a study (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Soiferman, 2010; Trochim, 2006). Qualitative research is a rigorous method for uncovering answers to complex questions. It includes the extensive process of data analysis, which requires significant time and effort (Soiferman, 2010).

## **Ethical Considerations**

No interviews, direct or indirect contact is planned with subjects of abuse. The level that the research is aimed at, could be described as strategic or policy, procedure and practice, which is a conscious decision to guard against any inadvertent drift into case specific abuse particulars. The Ethics Review Board, University of Hertfordshire, Health, Science, Engineering and Technology (HSET), Ethics Committee with Delegated Authority (ECDA), deemed that as the research is limited to documents within the public domain that Ethics Approval was not required.

## **Conclusion**

The research evaluates safeguarding policies in judo using qualitative methods and the 5R model. It analyses IJF-level frameworks, comparing them to other federations to highlight gaps and the need for standardisation. Ethical considerations restrict focus to public-domain documents. This

rigorous approach, supported by the researcher's expertise, aims to enhance safeguarding practices within national and international sports communities.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

## Result of examination of International Judo Federation Policies

The IJF has a safeguarding policy (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d) although other policies exist and contain relevant information that supports the overall safeguarding regime, for example the Code of Ethics (International-Judo-Federation, 2023a). A further example is the Disciplinary Code (International-Judo-Federation, 2023b) upon which the safeguarding policy is reliant in the form of remedy or punishment. Another example are the Sport and Organisation Rules (International-Judo-Federation, 2025e) that signposts readers to the Safeguarding Policy and summarises key safeguarding information.

The IJF Safeguarding Policy is titled 'Safeguarding participants in judo from harassment and abuse' (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d), is freely accessible in the IJF website ([ijf.org](http://ijf.org)) and is dated 28/1/2025. The introduction to the policy affirms that the welfare of all individuals involved with the IJF is paramount and that behaviour and actions that constitute harassment and abuse will not be tolerated (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). The different categories of harassment and abuse are explained and include psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and neglect. The IJF assert their commitment to training and as from February 2022, it requires member countries to include safeguarding guidelines in their training programs. These must address protection against violence towards vulnerable individuals or those in hierarchical dependence. Offenders face disciplinary sanctions or may be reported to judicial authorities. The Safeguarding Policy confirms that if disciplinary action is initiated it will be in compliance with the IJF disciplinary code (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d).

The purpose of the IJF Safeguarding Policy is to demonstrate the commitment of the IJF to safeguarding. The goals of the IJF in the field of violence, harassment and abuse are to raise awareness and provide education to prevent harassment, abuse, and violence among IJF bodies and populations, Additionally, to provide information on the alert process and case management and establish a safe environment for everyone involved in judo (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). The policy applies to everyone involved with the IJF and its affiliates, including athletes, coaches,

medical staff, entourages, technical staff (referees, organisers, technicians), managers at all levels, accredited persons, and stakeholders in IJF-related events (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d).

Member Federations must implement safeguarding policies, establish reporting systems for incidents of harassment, abuse, and violence, and report disciplinary actions to the IJF (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). A glossary of terms is provided which defines safeguarding as actions taken to promote the welfare of vulnerable adults or children and protect them from harm, including harassment and abuse. The safeguarding officer is identified as the primary individual within the organisation responsible for receiving reports regarding the welfare of participants. Additionally, the safeguarding officer is tasked with coordinating the management of these reports and addressing any queries related to the safeguarding policy (International-Judo-Federation, 2021c).

In addition to the IJF Safeguarding Policy several IJF documents are also relevant to this subject because they include references to safeguarding or provide a supporting function to the safeguarding policy. Such supporting documents are identified below.

- The IJF Sport and Organisation Rules include a section titled "Policy for Safeguarding Athletes and Other Participants from Harassment and Abuse," which covers safeguarding measures. This document includes a confidential and anonymous reporting link and a code of conduct for coaches (International-Judo-Federation, 2025e).
- The IJF Judo Integrity document mirrors the Sport and organisation rules, emphasizing integrity as a core value. It underscores respect for rules, oneself, and others, with a focus on three key areas, including safeguarding against harassment and violence (International-Judo-Federation, 2021a).
- The IJF Code of Ethics underscores the safeguarding of individual dignity, prohibiting discrimination based on various factors including race, gender, ethnicity, religion, and political opinion. It bans all forms of harassment and injury to participants. The principles align closely with those of the IOC. Violations can result in verbal warnings,



written reports, or referrals to the Ethics Committee, Disciplinary Commission, or external authorities like the police (International-Judo-Federation, 2023a).

- Purpose C of the IJF Disciplinary Code (2023) aims to promote compliance with IJF rules and regulations. While the Safeguarding policy is not explicitly mentioned, it is included within the broader scope of the "IJF Rules and Regulations," thereby covering IJF safeguarding rules (International-Judo-Federation, 2023c). Paragraph 1.4 of the IJF Disciplinary Code explains that the Code covers acts against the moral, ethical, or sporting spirit of judo, particularly those that harm the image and reputation of the sport (International-Judo-Federation, 2023c).
- A document named "IJF Safeguarding Flyer" bears the title "Safeguarding from Harassment and Abuse" and lists types of harassment and abuse. It proceeds in a succinct style to describe a duty to report incidents and how to report incidents. A reporting link and an email address for additional information is provided (International-Judo-Federation, 2022).
- The Athletes Rights and Responsibilities Declaration aims to enhance athletes' ability to protect their mental and physical health, ensure a safe training and competition environment, and prevent abuse and harassment (Messner, 2023a).
- The International Judo Federation Governance Policies outline athletes' rights to mental and physical safety, protection from abuse, and the right to report unethical behaviour, aligning with IOC principles (International-Judo-Federation, 2025c).
- The IJF Risk Management Module addresses potential risks to judoka, such as crime, harassment, and inadequate supervision. It includes child protection measures, requiring criminal record checks for coaches and incorporating children in risk assessments (International-Judo-Federation, 2023d).
- The IJF Vision Mission and Goals emphasise protecting the integrity of judo, promoting inclusion, gender equality, and athlete safety, while incorporating safeguarding

principles into rule changes and broader organisational activities (International-Judo-Federation, 2024b).

- A website news article titled “The IJF is ready for Safe Sport” (Messner, 2022), reported the appointment of two IJF Safeguarding Officers, emphasising safeguarding as a preventative measure to protect individuals, especially vulnerable groups, from harm, abuse, and neglect.

The range of policies and procedures will vary based on the nature of the sport and the type of activities performed. For example, membership criteria, documents and forms may vary (King, 2016). Policies and attendant procedures facilitate the efficient and effective operation of an organisation, supporting the achievement of its objectives. They should be regarded as frameworks for legitimate operations rather than restrictions (Arthur, 2019). The author of this document proposes that the entirety of IJF Safeguarding written policies and procedures collectively amount to the IJF safeguarding policy framework.

## Results of the examination of the terms Safe sport and Safeguarding

As previously mentioned an attempt to clarify the potential distinction between the terms safe sport and safeguarding was settled by production of the IOC consensus statement: interpersonal violence and safeguarding in sport (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

**Table 4**

*International Olympic Committee (IOC) safe sport and safeguarding definitions.*

The 2016 IOC definition of safe sport.	An athletic environment that is respectful, equitable and free from all forms of non-accidental violence to athletes.
The 2024 IOC definition of safe sport.	A physically and psychologically safe and supportive athletic environment where participants can thrive and experience the full benefits of sport participation.
The 2024 IOC definition of safeguarding.	All proactive measures to both prevent and appropriately respond to concerns related to harassment and abuse in sport as well as the promotion of holistic approaches to athlete welfare.

*Note* (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

The IJF define safeguarding within their 2025 safeguarding policy as “Safeguarding is the action that is taken to promote the welfare of vulnerable adults or children and protect them from harm, including protecting them from harassment and abuse” (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d).

## Results of the Coding

The results of coding using the NVivo software shows that the IJF Safeguarding Policy and the ten further documents that provide the entirety of IJF Safeguarding written policies and procedures demonstrate that the IJF has evidence of compliance with the 5R framework.

**Table 5**

*Evidence of compliance with the 5R framework within IJF policies.*

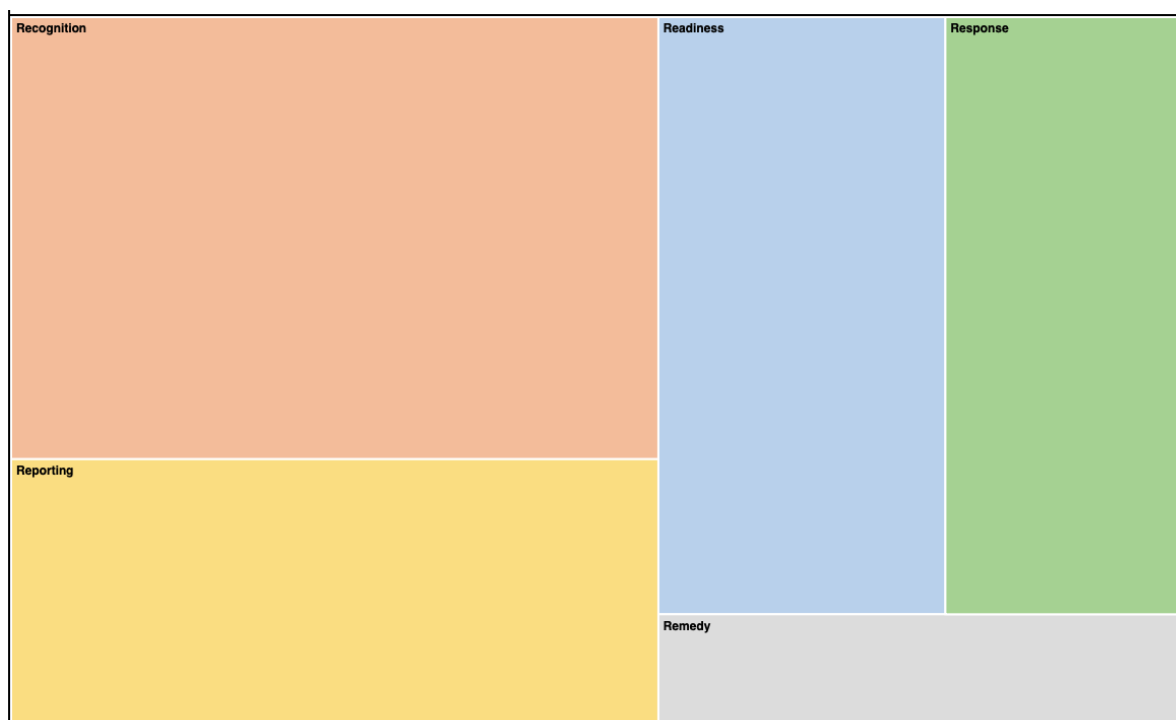
IJF Document	Readiness	Recognition	Remedy	Reporting	Response
Safeguarding Policy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Disciplinary Code	N	N	Y	N	Y
Code of Ethics	Y	Y	N	Y	N
Integrity (Code)	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Governance Policies	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Vision Mission and Goals	N	N	N	Y	N
Risk Management Module	Y	Y	N	N	Y
Sport & Organisation Rules	Y	Y	N	N	N
Safeguarding from Harassment & Abuse (Flyer)	Y	N	N	Y	N
Athletes Rights & Responsibilities declaration	N	Y	N	N	N
The IJF is ready for safe sport for all	Y	Y	N	N	N

*Note.* Y = yes and N = no (Fletcher 2025)

The NVivo screenshot below indicates that the topic of recognition is referenced multiple times within IJF policies. In contrast, the issue of remedy is mentioned once in the disciplinary code and once in the Integrity Code.

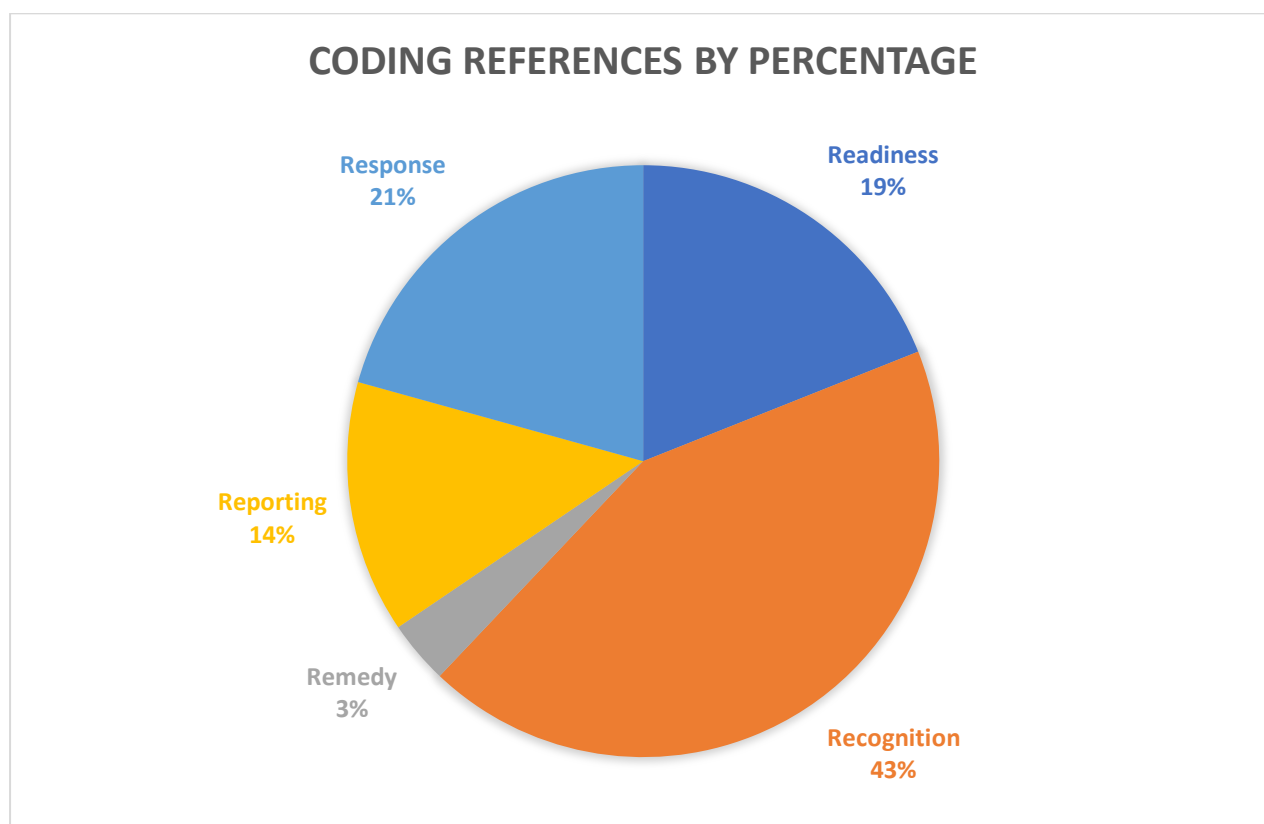
**Figure 3**

*NVivo tree map. Frequency of inclusion of 5R s in IJF safeguarding documents.*



**Figure 4**

*Distribution of inclusion of 5Rs in IJF safeguarding documents.*



Utilisation of the NVivo software was important in ensuring that a full analysis of material was carried out. In total 177 IJF documents were loaded onto the system and key word searches assisted in identifying which documents were relevant to safeguarding. From those 177 documents, 11 documents relevant to safeguarding were identified. Coding of those 11 documents to assess compliance with the 5R Framework was carried out and the results are shown in Table 4 above. The IJF is compliant with the 5R Framework. The fifth R of recognition was the most frequently documented characteristic. In terms of frequency of inclusion by percentage the 5R of recognition scored 43% followed by response 21%, readiness 19% reporting 14% and remedy 3%.

Whilst trying to understand the distinction between safeguarding and safe sport, NVivo was explored to assess whether it could assist. Word searches and frequency of use of the terms safeguarding and safe sport could be counted in terms of level of inclusion within relevant academic

papers or international federation policies. Results could be manipulated by inclusion or exclusion of documents although a conclusion was reached that the term which was in most frequent use (safeguarding or safe sport) was not a significant factor when seeking to establish a true meaning or definition.

## Reach

An issue that came to the fore during coding is a potential sixth R, 'reach'. Reach in the context of safeguarding within IFs refers to the scope, range, jurisdiction, and limitations of IF policies and responsibilities. Put very simply; to what extent do the IJF Safeguarding Policy and rules apply. Within the main safeguarding policy, the issue of reach is explained very well, but in the IJF disciplinary code different language and phraseology is used. As the Safeguarding Policy is reliant upon the disciplinary code to impose sanctions for acts contrary to provisions of the safeguarding policy, the use of differing phraseology could create a vulnerability, if on imposition of a sanction an argument is made that as a result of different terminology a loophole is identified. Within six documents relevant to safeguarding, the IJF attempt to describe the issue of reach through the use of six different forms of words. The terms used are detailed below:

- Safeguarding policy section 3 Scope applies to all those involved in the IJF and its affiliated structures, namely: athletes, coaches, medicals, staff and entourage of judoka, technical staff, such as referees, organisers and technicians, the managers from world level to local level (clubs, associations or individual structures of judoka), all accredited persons or stakeholders in the events of all structures in connection with the IJF (training, organisation, etc.). (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d)
- Disciplinary Code 1.2 applies to: IJF, the Continental Unions, Members, to sports organisations participating in a competition system organised by the IJF, the Continental Union or Members, athletes registered (certified) by the IJF, the Continental Union or Members, sports professionals involved in the judo sport. in accordance with the Statutes, regulations and decisions of the IJF (International-Judo-Federation, 2023b).

- Flyer (Safeguarding from Harassment and abuse) applies to all populations of the judo family, coaches managers, athletes, staff or voluntary members (International-Judo-Federation, 2022).
- The Integrity Policy applies to, IJF judo actors, managers, athletes, staff employees, voluntary members, from international, continental, national regional and club levels (International-Judo-Federation, 2021b).
- Risk management module applies to the organisation (IJF), national governing bodies, international federations, clubs and registered participants (International-Judo-Federation, 2023d).
- Code of ethics applies in all fields, in all places, in all circumstances, competition venues, training venues and media platforms (International-Judo-Federation, 2023a).

## Conclusion

The IJF is compliant with the 5R framework. Strong evidence of **Recognition** of abuse, **Readiness** to deal with abuse and provision of an organisational **Response** to abuse exists. Mention of the issues of **Reporting** and **Remedy** are less frequently included within IJF policy. Whilst evidence of inclusion within IJF policy clearly exists for each of the 5Rs, consideration regarding prioritisation of each of the 5Rs or level of importance of any of the 5Rs, based upon frequency or level of inclusion in policy, has not been attempted in this research.

A sixth R of **Reach** has been identified and that is fully explored in the discussion chapter. NVivo has been of significant assistance to the researcher for providing an assurance that a full examination has been made. The positive result arising from the analysis of the 5R framework is to highlight the issue of Reach.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

## **Discussion Introduction**

The safeguarding of athletes, children, and other stakeholders within sports organisations and specifically the IJF has emerged as a critical issue, necessitating the establishment of comprehensive policies and frameworks to protect against harassment, abuse, and violence. The literature is extensive and that which is relevant to this research is set out in the literature review. This chapter summarises the distinctions between the terms safeguarding and safe sport, explores the 5R framework (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023), and underscores the importance of a sixth R, the concept of Reach, within IJF policies.

This analysis seeks to interpret the effectiveness of safeguarding measures within the IJF, highlighting positive attributes and gaps. Through a rigorous review of current policies, the chapter intends to identify the essential components that constitute a robust safeguarding system, ensuring that the protections offered are thorough and are capable of being effectively applied. Furthermore, this chapter emphasises the necessity for consistent terminology and comprehensive though not excessive reach within safeguarding policies, particularly concerning their application to vulnerable groups such as children. By examining the approach taken by the IJF we endeavour to provide a clear pathway for enhancing safeguarding measures within the IJF, ultimately fostering a safer and more supportive environment for all.

### **Distinction between the terms safeguarding and safe sport**

There has been a lack of clarity or distinction between terms safeguarding and safe sport. As an example two documents that utilise both terms in which the lack of distinction was not clear to the author of this research are the IOC Toolkit for International Federations and National Olympic Committees (International-Olympic-Committee, 2017) and an academic paper by a respected academic (Mountjoy et al., 2020). Separate research proposed that whilst a variety of different definitions are used in respect of safe sport and safeguarding, they all focus on sport and sporting environments that are free from harm (Gurgis et al., 2023).

Within the IJF Sport and Organisation rules dated 24 March 2023 section 1.2.3 is titled Policy for Safeguarding Athletes and Other Participants from Harassment and Abuse. The term safe sport is not included (International-Judo-Federation, 2020). The IJF Safeguarding Policy dated 28 January 2025 does not include the term safe sport other than to refer to Safe Sport International (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). A document named IJF Safeguarding Flyer is titled Safeguarding from Harassment and Abuse does not include the term safe sport (International-Judo-Federation, 2022). Within an IJF media style article on their website (Messner, 2022) an announcement is made that the IJF is ready for safe sport for all. Within the heading and body of the article the term safe sport is used six times and the term safeguarding is used thirteen times. The IJF clearly use the term safeguarding more frequently than the terms safe sport or safesport. Clarity regarding the definition of both terms is provided by the IOC. As discussed in the results section the IOC Definition of safes port 2024 is “a physically psychologically safe and supportive athletic environment where participants can thrive and experience the full benefits of sport participation (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). The IOC Definition of safeguarding 2024 is: all proactive measures to both prevent and appropriately respond to concerns related to harassment and abuse in sport as well as the promotion of holistic approaches to athlete welfare (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

### **Expectations of an International Federation and the 5R Framework**

The study “The journey to reporting child protection violations in sport: Stakeholder perspectives (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023) aimed to describe global systems and identify key concerns regarding case resolution, healing, and children's experiences in reporting abuse within sport. The study utilised: a literature review, a survey of 112 stakeholders, as well as interviews with nine athletes who experienced abuse and 13 human rights experts. The research developed a five-step reporting pathway summarized as the 5 'Rs': **Readiness**, **Recognition**, disclosure and **Reporting**, **Response**, and **Remedy** (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). The expectation of this research is that the IJF should meet the 5R Framework.

#### Readiness

Readiness can be thought of as cultural preparedness and precedes recognition. The initial point of reporting is the willingness shown by a sport's organisation to engage with the existence or reality of neglect as well as sexual, physical, and psychological harassment and abuse of participants in sport. Should adults and officials lack the will to engage with the concept of abuse a barrier could be formed that results in those individuals being less inclined to commence the reporting process (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). This point in the reporting process is consistent with literature on trauma informed approaches and practice in healthcare scenarios (Menschner & Maul, 2016; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). Unless organisations have a readiness to engage, rights are not protected and violations continue (Sheldon, 2021).

Several themes to indicate a lack of readiness regarding safeguarding violations were identified. They consist of: fear and discomfort related avoidance or aversion, reputational risk, inability of some children to interpret abuse based on their developmental stage (adolescent), education, training and life experience. Additionally, respondents from the non-sporting sector struggled to believe that child protection violations do indeed occur in youth sport (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). A lack of individual and organisational readiness contributes to repeated safeguarding violations, giving perpetrators a sense of immunity (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). A separate study found that university administrators used tactics like obscuring reporting processes, silencing victims, and colluding with stakeholders to protect the institution's reputation, effectively shielding perpetrators and downplaying abuse (Nite & Nauright, 2020). This is in direct conflict with readiness to report.

The IJF demonstrates its readiness to engage with the issue of safeguarding by its implementation of a principal safeguarding policy titled "Safeguarding participants in judo from harassment and abuse" (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). This policy is supported by ten further policies, codes or other documents that amplify the safeguarding message and are listed in detail in the results section of this document focussing on the examination of IJF safeguarding policies. Key readiness facets are an IJF news article bearing the title "The IJF is Ready for Safe Sport

for all” announced publicly in September 2022 that the International Judo Federation had appointed two experts as Safeguarding Officers who were certified by the International Olympic Committee in safeguarding (Messner, 2022). The IJF General Secretary, in agreement with the IJF President is empowered to take the necessary measures to bring safeguarding matters to the IJF Ethics Committee, the IJF Disciplinary Commission or to external authorities such as the Police (International-Judo-Federation, 2023a). Additionally, the IJF Code of Ethics (International-Judo-Federation, 2023a), indicates and states that the IJF is culturally prepared in readiness for safeguarding. The IJF risk management module (International-Judo-Federation, 2023d) for event planning, the safeguarding flyer (International-Judo-Federation, 2022) the main Sport and Organisation Rules (International-Judo-Federation, 2025e) and the IJF Integrity policy (International-Judo-Federation, 2021b) all reinforce the safeguarding message.

### Recognition

Recognition is the next stage in the reporting process, involving a clear understanding of what constitutes a safeguarding violation. One barrier to recognition is the normalization of violations, especially non-sexual ones, within the sporting context. This normalisation can be sport-specific, context-specific, or cultural. Abusive behaviours may become part of the sport's culture. Other barriers include dissociating abuse as an outside problem and denial, where sport is portrayed as entirely positive. Educating and informing personnel can address the lack of recognition (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

The risk that sexual abuse in sport will be ignored or denied is mitigated by the fact that several studies have now documented such abuse (Brackenridge & Kirby, 1997). Research indicates that while there is support for formalised safeguarding, some uncertainty exists about the extent of abuse in sport, which it is suggested reflect a lack of recognition (Solstad, 2019; Solstad & Strandbu, 2019).

Evidence of IJF Recognition is seen by the clear and unambiguous description of that which constitutes a safeguarding violation within their Safeguarding Policy (International-Judo-Federation,

2025d). The IJF Safeguarding policy defines harassment and abuse. The following extract explains that the IJF has adopted the definitions of harassment and abuse as set out in the IOC Consensus Statement 2016 and that harassment and abuse can be expressed in five forms which may occur in combination or in isolation. These include, psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, neglect. The forms of abuse are all defined with the same level of detail, although this representative example includes only the description of psychological abuse which is: a pattern of deliberate, prolonged, repeated non-contact behaviours that target a person's inner life in all its profound scope, including confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, infantilisation, or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth of a participant.

In addition to the IJF safeguarding policy (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d) and as previously mentioned, that policy is supported by ten further policies, codes or other documents that make comment on what constitutes a safeguarding violation. The IJF Code of Ethics (International-Judo-Federation, 2023a) for example provides a succinct and clear explanation and states that: All forms of harassment of participants be it physical, professional, religious, political, hierarchical or sexual, and any physical or mental injury to participants are prohibited.

### Reporting

It is suggested that many safeguarding violations in sport go unreported (Kerr et al., 2019; Sheldon, 2021). Several factors prevent or discourage people from reporting. A lack of trust may lead to hesitation in coming forward. Complainants need to know the reporting process and whom they should report to. Children may test a reporting system before making a formal report. Concerns exist regarding mandatory reporting, as the formality of an investigation can be intimidating (Kerr et al., 2019; Sheldon, 2021; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). Parents may hesitate to report abuse due to stigma, leading them to transfer their child to another club instead. They might unintentionally enable the situation if the child is reluctant to report because of the parents' sacrifices. Coaches may

groom parents, increasing the risk of harm to the athlete (Sheldon, 2021; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

Advancing safe sport demands a comprehensive, interconnected approach. Isolated solutions, while valuable, often lack the sustainability and wide-reaching impact needed to make real change (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014; MacPherson et al., 2022). Creating independent, safe reporting structures and providing comprehensive, evidence-based education are two critical strategies widely recommended to address safe sport challenges effectively (Brackenridge & Rhind, 2014; Kerr et al., 2014; MacPherson et al., 2022; Willson et al., 2022).

Advocates and researchers worldwide are urging countries to establish independent reporting mechanisms specifically for handling cases of maltreatment in sports. These mechanisms would provide athletes with a safe, confidential, and trauma-informed way to report concerns without having to go through the sport organisations themselves, which often have conflicts of interest or may lack the capacity to handle such issues impartially. The aim is to make these reporting systems accessible to all athletes and capable of addressing the wide range of abuse and maltreatment that can happen within sport settings, from physical abuse to emotional and psychological harm (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002; Donnelly & Kerr, 2018; Kerr & Kerr, 2020; MacPherson et al., 2022; Willson et al., 2022).

Independent reporting mechanisms could serve as crucial support systems for sport administrators and stakeholders, especially in cases where they may be conflicted, unprepared, or otherwise unable to handle maltreatment issues effectively. By outsourcing the handling of abuse and maltreatment reports to an impartial body, sports organizations can reduce the conflicts of interest that may hinder effective action and allow their administrators to focus on proactive measures, like fostering a positive, safe, and respectful organisation (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021; MacPherson et al., 2022). An accessible and public reporting mechanism can be instrumental in bridging the gap in awareness among athletes and their families regarding where to seek help or report maltreatment. Many athletes, particularly younger ones and their parents, may be unaware

of existing reporting channels or unsure of whom to trust within sports organisations. An independent, well-publicized mechanism would make it clear where to go for support, fostering transparency and trust in the reporting process (Brackenridge et al., 2010; MacPherson et al., 2022). In response to growing calls for independent and accessible reporting structures, several countries have taken concrete steps to protect athletes from abuse and maltreatment by establishing dedicated organisations and mechanisms (MacPherson et al., 2022).

The IJF has a reporting and disclosure facility. Help with how to report is contained within the Safeguarding Flyer (International-Judo-Federation, 2022) which is the type of document suitable for public display to raise awareness. Three key aspects of the IJF Athletes Rights and Responsibilities Declaration (Messner, 2023b) which help to explain matters are: Right number seven: the protection of mental and physical health, including a safe competition and training environment and protection from harassment and abuse, Right number nine: report unethical behaviour without fear of retaliation and Right number ten: privacy including protection of personal information. The IJF Anti-Corruption Policy contained within the IJF Governance Policies (International-Judo-Federation, 2025b) explains the IJF reporting mechanisms. The policy asserts that the IJF ensures optimal protection and guidance in respect of its obligations. Under this policy readers are signposted to three reporting mechanisms. Firstly, directly to the designated authorities, secondly, on the IJF's online reporting platforms (the first of which relates to safeguarding <https://reportabuse.judobase.org/form>) and finally, to contact the IJF General Secretariat by either email or phone. The specific email address and phone number is provided. The reporting mechanism is also advertised on the IJF Safeguarding Flyer (International-Judo-Federation, 2022), and which is accessed from one of the "Quick Links" titled Safe Judo that is displayed on the front page, top left hand corner of the IJF website IJF.org. Once the link is clicked access to a reporting form is given.

In summary this section shows that the IJF has implemented robust reporting mechanisms, including online forms, direct communication channels, and public awareness initiatives like the Safeguarding Flyer and Safe Judo link. These efforts enhance transparency and encourage reporting.



**Figure 5**

*IJF abuse and harassment reporting screen.*

reportabuse.judobase.org

IJF.org - International Judo Federation

IJF Abuse and harassment report

## INTERNATIONAL JUDO FEDERATION

Abuse and Harassment report


Form Log-in

Having the moral and statutory duty to take all measures to protect the health and well-being of all participants in judo, the IJF guarantees that all information will be treated seriously with the utmost discretion by the IJF Safeguarding officers.

Integrity and compliance reports on match fixing and competition manipulation can be reported here: <https://reportintegrity.judobase.org/form>

Select type of report \*

- ✓ Select type
- Sexual Harassment and Mistreatment
- Bullying or Emotional Abuse
- Physical abuse and forced physical exertion
- Neglect or Negligence
- Another situation not listed above



*Note.* (International-Judo-Federation, 2025a)

### Response

Issues may arise depending on how athletes or judoka are treated during the process of reporting. One significant theme is the burden of proof. Victims might feel unsupported by federations, especially if they perceive that their claims are not believed or are considered false until proven otherwise. Athletes may feel unprotected and disbelieved due to the passage of time, which raises concerns about the accuracy of recollections (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

An integral part of any safeguarding system, including within the IJF, is the effective management of safeguarding allegations and cases (Mountjoy et al., 2015; Rhind et al., 2015). Concerns raised regarding the capability of key individuals within sports organisations to adequately respond, included the themes of second chance, capacity and willingness (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). The concept of a second chance refers to instances where leaders may have exercised

excessive leniency. When subsequent allegations arise, this prior negligence can lead to ethical conflicts. Such situations create vulnerabilities, particularly if the abusive individual is afforded protection instead of the victim (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). In line with good practice, the IJF documentation reviewed in this research does not indicate an opportunity for second-chance in judo. Capacity concerns involve overwhelmed safeguarding services and individuals lacking necessary skills. Research highlighted statutory bodies' (Police and Local Government) limited understanding of elite sport and related safeguarding issues (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). The 2025 initiative to encourage a unified approach to safeguarding across the judo community, with the introduction of Safeguarding Officers for Continental Unions in judo may go some way to addressing the capacity concerns (International-Judo-Federation., 2025).

The systematic identification and recording of abuse allegations in sport serve three main functions, each aimed at enhancing the safety and integrity of sports environments. So called Case Progress-Chasing ensures that each case of alleged abuse is managed efficiently, fairly, and with a clear investigative process. Where necessary, proportionate sanctions are given to subjects against whom allegations are made and victims can be given proper care and treatment (C. Brackenridge et al., 2005). The second and third functions of recording abuse allegations in sports involve research analyses that provide long-term benefits. Case Study analysis examines individual cases to understand abuse incidents and uncover patterns, aiding in prevention strategies (Cense & Brackenridge, 2001; Nielsen, 2001). Cross-Case Analysis examines trends and patterns across multiple cases to assess risk factors within and across sports (Fasting et al., 2004). Together, these analyses contribute to a proactive, data-informed approach to safeguarding, enabling sports organisations to shift from reactive responses to abuse toward predictive and preventive strategies (C. Brackenridge et al., 2005; Cense & Brackenridge, 2001; Nielsen, 2001).

Creating an effective response to athlete abuse and misconduct involves fostering a culture that values openness and trust. This ensures that athletes, parents, and bystanders feel safe and supported in reporting issues promptly, which is crucial for preventing abuse and maintaining a

respectful environment within sports organisations (Johnson et al., 2020). Historically, many sports organisations have handled cases of misconduct and disciplinary issues that fall below the level of criminality internally and often without transparency. (Cense & Brackenridge, 2001; Johnson et al., 2020). Sports organisations often struggle with abuse cases because their staff and leaders lack training in child welfare and safeguarding. This absence of knowledge can lead to mishandled cases, increasing risks for young athletes and leaving issues unresolved (Johnson et al., 2020; Parent, 2011; Rhind et al., 2015). Establishing an independent organisation to handle cases of misconduct offers significant advantages, particularly for victims who might feel uncomfortable reporting incidents to their governing bodies. An independent body can deliver a more objective and impartial assessment of the evidence, promoting trust and transparency in the process (Johnson et al., 2020; Parent, 2011; Stirling & Kerr, 2009)

Willingness pertains to the victim's perception that they or their parents are discouraged from pursuing allegations because of potential re-traumatisation of others involved, dismissals by perpetrators, or lack of sufficient funds to continue (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). How an organisation or individual responds to abuse disclosure greatly affects the victim's healing and their willingness to seek further support or justice. Empathetic responses can reduce psychological trauma, whereas negative reactions can worsen feelings of shame and isolation (Johnson et al., 2020; Jonzon & Lindbland, 2004; Parent, 2011; Rhind et al., 2015). When victims encounter negative reactions, such as disbelief, blame, minimisation, or outright dismissal, they are often at greater risk of experiencing intensified emotional distress and prolonged negative symptoms (Johnson et al., 2020; Parent, 2011). This highlights the need to provide education to personnel handling disclosures as well as personnel involved in athlete protection (Johnson et al., 2020).

Independent organisations play a key role in enhancing athlete protection by providing education and training that may have been historically overlooked or insufficient within national governing bodies or local affiliate programs (Brackenridge et al., 2010; Bringer et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2020; United Nations Children's, 2008). The U.S. Center for SafeSport is dedicated to

protecting young athletes from abuse. This national organization creates policies to prevent emotional, physical, and sexual abuse in sports, and provides accessible reporting channels for cases, especially involving children (Johnson et al., 2020).

The IJF demonstrates its response to safeguarding allegations within their safeguarding policy (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). The appointment of Safeguarding Officers is a practical step to resource that response (Messner, 2022). The introduction of the IJF safeguarding policy announces the IJF safeguarding intentions which in summary are to ensure a safe and respectful environment for all (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). The IJF confirms that their role is to raise awareness about harassment and abuse reporting procedures across all IJF activities. The organisation has committed to timely, fair, and responsible management of reported incidents, providing appropriate support to concerned participants. Personal information remains confidential unless consent is given. Disciplinary measures are imposed for policy violations (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d).

IJF disciplinary sanctions are published for cases between 2017 to 2024 of which there are 29 in total (International-Judo-Federation, 2024a). In all instances offence or mischief details are provided such as breach of Covid regulations, refusal to compete with an athlete from a particular nation based on religious grounds or poor etiquette. There is nothing publicly available to indicate if the IJF have issued any punishments for a safeguarding matter or whether a disciplinary panel has considered a safeguarding case. This is not intended to be a critical comment as it is acknowledged that organisations maintain confidentiality around safeguarding cases. What is clear is that the IJF does have a disciplinary process, that complaints are considered, and punishments are imposed. Punishments range from warnings, severe reprimands, financial fines and suspension from the sport and in one case this was for ten years. It is also noteworthy that an appeal option is open to subjects of the complaint or disciplinary process with the Court of Arbitration for Sport (International-Judo-Federation, 2024a).

The IJF Safeguarding Policy refers readers to the IOC "Safeguarding Toolkit," designed to help the Olympic Movement implement athlete-safeguarding policies and procedures.

Complementary tools include IOC athlete safeguarding e-learning courses, available at an IOC athlete learning gateway. Additional resources cited by the IJF include the IJF Code of Ethics, IOC Consensus Statement 2016: Harassment and Abuse in Sport (IJF Safeguarding Policy), United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and International Safeguarding Children in Sport guidelines (International-Judo-Federation, 2022).

The concept of a second chance which refers to instances where leaders may have exercised excessive leniency is discussed above. Second chance is recognised by the IJF who within their risk management module assess the risk of leniency and the application of a second chance as a medium level risk. The possibility of inappropriately applied disciplinary action as well as disciplining people or entities unjustly or even not taking disciplinary action at all, is considered (International-Judo-Federation, 2023d) The associated management measures in place are to develop, publish and apply a non-rules related disciplinary policy with linkage to appeals & reviews of policy. Rule-free regulation aims to influence behaviour without new specific rules or altering existing norms. It focuses on guiding actions indirectly, rather than changing the normative environment. This approach involves ruling without introducing new rules that target the desired behaviour rather than operating without any rules (Lorini & Moroni, 2022).

### Remedy

The outcome represents the final phase of the reporting process, which is healing, and is a necessary step to occur. Justice in the form of an effective remedy is required and organisations should be willing to learn constructively from cases (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

Tuakli-Wosornu et al. (2023) highlighted negative outcomes, in that whistleblowers (those speaking out) may be excluded from the sport if insufficient protections exist. Survivors of abuse may drop out of sport due to re-traumatisation. Concerns raised in relation to appropriate outcomes, adequacy of sanction and future access to sport, particularly migration to another sport

(Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). A requirement exists for psychological support for survivors of abuse and the level of support is dependent upon where they are on their journey. Survivors may also need support when speaking out and it is acknowledged that additional difficulty or complexity may be created if a survivor is in the public arena (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). Prevention and early intervention strategies will be assisted by making meaningful enquiries about well-being of sport participants. Regular monitoring by way of regular check-ins build trust over time, show empathy and provide athletes with opportunities to raise concerns including low level concerns (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

IJF remedy provisions and the implementation of policies, procedures and safeguarding officers are at a relatively early stage. The IJF message that they are ready for safe sport was delivered in 2022 (Messner, 2022). Preventative measures or early intervention strategies are set out in the safeguarding policy (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). The matters that specifically relate to remedy within IJF policies focus on provision of support as well as sanction and punishment. Psychological support for athletes was specifically included within the 2022 IJF safeguarding policy (International-Judo-Federation, 2022) although within the updated 2025 policy (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d) a broader phrase explains that appropriate support to concerned participants of an alleged incident of harassment or abuse is articulated.

As mentioned above IJF disciplinary sanctions are published for cases between 2017 to 2024 of which there are 29 in total (International-Judo-Federation, 2024a). In respect of each disciplinary case a summary document is also published. As a sample the case number DIS2024-06 has been selected. Details provided are: the decision, summary of the charge or offence, the IJF rule extract alleged to have been breached, evidence, the defence and considerations on the appropriate sanction. This demonstrates that there is an investigatory and punishment process in place within the IJF. As no details of any safeguarding offences or sanctions were found within the IJF published material, it is beyond the scope of this research to comment upon the adequacy of any safeguarding investigations and punishments.

### 5R conclusion

The 5Rs are a framework that sets out broad parameters as to what should be in place without specifying precisely how an IF should seek to comply. This provides sufficient flexibility for an IF to apply systems and processes that meet the needs of an organisation than is responsible for activity across different continents and countries with differing legal systems. As non-accidental violence can involve criminal behaviour, it is essential to follow jurisdictional laws to ensure cases are managed according to justice principles (Roberts et al., 2020; Weitekamp & Parmentier, 2016).

### **A Potential Sixth "R": Reach**

In the context of safeguarding within International Federations, the concept of Reach refers to the scope, range, jurisdiction, and limitations of an IF policies and responsibilities. This encompasses several key dimensions:

- **Geographical Reach:** Ensuring that safeguarding policies are applicable across all regions under the federation's influence while respecting local legal and cultural contexts.
- **Personnel Reach:** Extending to athletes, coaches, officials, volunteers, and other stakeholders involved in the sport.
- **Organisational Reach:** Covering relationships with continental and national federations, recognising their autonomy while ensuring alignment with overarching safeguarding standards.
- **Timeframe:** Addressing any time-related factors to be considered such as a statute of limitations.

### Geographical

Addressing reach is important for developing safeguarding policies that are both comprehensive and balanced. Policies need to be extensive enough to protect all parties without being excessive or infringing on the responsibilities of National Federations or Home Countries. Achieving this balance can prevent overextending the reach of an IF while promoting collaboration and mutual accountability.

The International Tennis Federation (ITF) provides detailed guidelines on the scope of application for its policies, the applicability of legislation, and the determination of which nation's legislation should be applied. The ITF Safeguarding Children Policy explains that the ITF is an international organisation based in the UK and accordingly the legal framework in the ITF policy is in harmony with UK legislation. Although many events activities and contact with children are international, the host countries have their own domestic legislation relating to the protection of children. Persons covered by the ITF policy should comply with all relevant criminal laws in the host country when working at ITF sanctioned tennis activities, events and tournaments. Host country relevant criminal laws take primacy over provisions laid out in ITF policy (International-Tennis-Federation, 2023b).

### Personnel

IJF rules on disciplinary offences and safeguarding do not specifically mention children. The language and policies are neutral regarding age groups or demographics. Such neutrality is consistent with the acknowledgement that in sport, and with regards to human rights, strict distinctions between children and adults is somewhat artificial, since human rights apply to all, and age boundaries are irrelevant in a field of activity like sport where elite performers might be in their low teens and beginners several years older (Lang & Hartill, 2014b; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). The IJF Safeguarding and associated policies are drafted in a manner which is silent on inclusion or exclusion of such age groups.

The IJF disciplinary Code makes provision for imposition of a disciplinary sanction for an IJF Safeguarding Policy violation. The disciplinary code applies to: the IJF, Continental Unions, Members, sports organisations participating in a competition system organised by the IJF, the athletes registered (certified) by the IJF and sports professionals involved in the sport of judo (International-Judo-Federation, 2023c). IJF disciplinary sanctions may be imposed at Continental level, National Federation level and sport organisation level. Fourteen potential sanctions are listed and they range from a written warning, monetary fine, suspension or expulsion.



### Organisational Reach

Top coaches transfer from country-to-country coaching sport. Mischief in one country should not be overlooked upon transfer to another (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). The IJF has set a requirement (paragraph 9.4 of the IJF Disciplinary Code) that National Federation Disciplinary Committees shall notify the IJF General Secretary in writing within eight days if the conduct giving rise to the initiation of those disciplinary proceeding contains an international element (International-Judo-Federation, 2023b).

Cultural issues also require consideration, and every society has differences and cultural variances. Nation specific context approaches utilising tailored responses around the world may be appropriate. It is acknowledged that one size does not fit all in diverse global sports settings (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

### How far should IJF responsibilities reach

Reach could also apply to IF responsibilities and whether those responsibilities reach too far. There is an argument that greater independence may be necessary, as governing bodies could, at times, be complicit in cases of abuse. In such situations, an IF may face a conflict of interest in its governance or oversight role, particularly if it is the sole organisation with the jurisdiction to impose sanctions (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). In terms of Reach the code of Ethics (International-Judo-Federation, 2019) extends to all IJF Managers and Officials, its continental, national and other member bodies who are required to respect it. In respect of safeguarding the IJF Safeguarding Policy (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d), clearly sets out responsibilities. Member Federations must implement safeguarding policies, establish reporting systems for incidents of harassment, abuse, and violence, and report disciplinary actions to the IJF (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d).

In summary the concept of "Reach" within IF safeguarding policies addresses scope, applicability, and jurisdiction, ensuring comprehensive protection while respecting local autonomy. It spans geographical, personnel, and organisational dimensions, accommodating diverse legal and cultural contexts. The IJF's policies emphasise global collaboration, tailored cultural responses, and

transparency in disciplinary actions. However, questions arise regarding IF accountability and potential conflicts of interest in abuse cases. While safeguarding responsibilities extend to member federations, critics highlight the need for independence in governance to prevent complicity in misconduct. Overall, "Reach" serves as a nuanced framework balancing inclusivity and practical application across global sport networks.

### **Different phraseology used to describe to whom policies apply**

As mentioned earlier in the results section, in addition to the IJF Safeguarding Policy there are several IJF documents that are also relevant because they include references to safeguarding or provide a supporting function to the safeguarding policy. Such supporting documents are listed below.

- The IJF Sport and Organisation Rules include a section titled "Policy for Safeguarding Athletes and Other Participants from Harassment and Abuse," (International-Judo-Federation, 2020).
- The IJF Judo Integrity document (International-Judo-Federation, 2021a).
- The IJF Code of Ethics (International-Judo-Federation, 2023a).
- Extract identified as Purpose C of the IJF Disciplinary Code 2023 (International-Judo-Federation, 2023c).
- IJF Safeguarding Flyer” bearing the title “Safeguarding from Harassment and Abuse” (International-Judo-Federation, 2022).
- Athletes Rights and Responsibilities Declaration (Messner, 2023a).
- The International Judo Federation Governance Policies (International-Judo-Federation, 2025c).
- The IJF Risk Management Module(International-Judo-Federation, 2023d).
- The IJF Vision Mission and Goals (International-Judo-Federation, 2024b).
- A website news article titled “The IJF is ready for Safe Sport” (Messner, 2022).

Each IJF policy has its own unique phrase that tries to define and encapsulate who and what is included. The disciplinary code applies to “disciplinary and ethical offences committed by a person subject to the Code at a sporting event, function, training camp or in preparation for and/or travel to or from such events”.

In contrast other policies or codes contain different phraseology to describe who and what is subject to the conditions of each policy or code. As an example the IJF Safeguarding policy, with the title Safeguarding participants in judo from harassment and abuse, under the sub heading of scope (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d) states “ This policy applies to all those involved in the IJF and its affiliated structures, namely: Athletes, Coaches, medicals, staff and entourage of judoka, Technical staff, such as referees, organisers and technicians, The managers from world level to local level (clubs, associations or individual structures of judoka), All accredited persons or stakeholders in the events of all structures in connection with the IJF (training, organisation, etc.).” The safeguarding policy further states that: If a disciplinary action is initiated based on investigations, it will be led in compliance with the “IJF Disciplinary Code”.

As the Safeguarding policy relies on the disciplinary code to implement some form of disciplinary action it is argued by the author that consistent phraseology should be used. It should be noted that inconsistent or ambiguous language in policy documents can lead to uncertainties that affect enforceability (Allen & Saxon, 1994; Nowak, 2016)

### **Psychological abuse though not emotional abuse**

The International Judo Federation Policies include psychological abuse though not emotional abuse. Emotional and psychological abuse are closely linked, often happening together. Emotional abuse harms a person’s emotions, while psychological abuse affects their mental development. For example, physical or sexual abuse usually also causes emotional and psychological harm. Both types of abuse are repetitive and damaging, and they impact a person’s emotional and mental well-being, often worsening over time (O'Hagan, 1995).

The IJF interpret harassment and abuse in five forms which may occur in a group or towards a single person. These are: psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and neglect (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d).

**Table 6**

*IJF definitions or descriptions of types of abuse*

Type of Abuse	Definition
Psychological abuse	Any unwelcome act including confinement, isolation, verbal assault, humiliation, intimidation, infantilization, or any other treatment which may diminish the sense of identity, dignity, and self-worth.
Physical abuse	Any deliberate and unwelcome act of corporal punishment or mistreatment such as exaggerated judo technique, supported techniques of strangulation/dislocation, punching, beating, kicking, biting, burning, pushing around, inappropriate physical activity, forced alcohol consumption, or forced doping practices.
Sexual harassment	Any unwanted and unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal, non-verbal or physical. Can take the form of sexual abuse.
Sexual abuse	Any conduct of a sexual nature, whether non-contact, contact or penetrative, where consent is coerced/manipulated or is not or cannot be given.
Neglect	Failure of a coach or another person with a duty of care towards an athlete or staff to provide a minimum level of care, causing harm, allowing harm to be caused, or creating an imminent danger of harm.

*Note.* (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d)

The forms of abuse described by the IJF in the table above are consistent with the general definition and meaning of that described by the IOC framework for safeguarding athletes and other participants from harassment and abuse in sport (International Olympic, 2021; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024) and the IOC consensus statement: interpersonal violence and safeguarding in sport (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024).

## **Statute of Limitations**

One element of the IJF Disciplinary Code is a statute of limitations (International-Judo-Federation, 2023c). Paragraphs 4.1 to 4.3 detail the limitation periods. A general limitation period is

set and the imposition of a disciplinary sanction is not permitted once five years has elapsed since commission of the disciplinary offence (paragraph 4.1).

The International Judo Federation (IJF) Disciplinary Code (International-Judo-Federation, 2023b) does not specify a fixed statute of limitations for initiating disciplinary proceedings. However, paragraph 4.1 establishes that individuals can only be held accountable for actions that were considered disciplinary offences under the IJF Statutes or Code at the time the act was committed for a period of five years. The benefits though of initiating an investigation are questionable, if it is not possible to hold a perpetrator to account. The limitation period may be extended to ten years if the victim at the time the disciplinary offence took place was a minor (paragraph 4.2 refers). The same ten year limitation period applies to members (officials and professionals) of Continental Unions (4.3). Where in law, the period of punishment exceeds the limitation period set forth in Clauses 4.1 - 4.3, that limitation period shall be extended in accordance with the law.

Paragraph 4.5 of the IJF disciplinary code states that “the right to initiate disciplinary proceedings in the case of unlawful influence on the result of a Sport Event or competition system (championship) is not time-barred.” It could therefore be argued that as the punishment for influencing a sport event has no limitation period, it demonstrates that the IJF prioritises influencing an event higher than safeguarding offences.

Reporting abuse is a complex area and barriers that adversely impact upon the prompt or timely reporting of abuse is well documented. In non-sport contexts, early research indicated that long-term abuse, abuse occurring at an early age, and especially violent abuse were not only more challenging to report but also might not be remembered or disclosed until adulthood (Briere & Conte, 1993). Some survivors of sexual harassment and abuse choose not to report their experiences formally for fear of retaliation or lack of belief (Bergman et al., 2002; Gutek & Koss, 1993; Ragins & Scandura, 1995; Sisofo, 2019) or the worry that their experiences will be invalidated or they will face blame (Baugh, 1997; Sisofo, 2019). The most commonly employed strategies for dealing with sexual harassment have not been effective in addressing or reducing harassment (Herrera Enríquez et al.,

2018; Sisofo, 2019). Victim-blaming in cases of sexual harassment often arises from differences in perception and imbalances of power (Baugh, 1997; Sisofo, 2019) because the power imbalance, that traditionally favours men, enables them to institutionalise and legitimise male-centric definitions of sexual harassment (Sisofo, 2019; Vaux, 1993). As a result, a woman seeking to make a sexual harassment complaint must navigate the challenge of proving the validity of her complaint within a power structure that is often male-dominated or influenced by male bias (Baugh, 1997; Sisofo, 2019). When a woman formally reports sexually harassing behaviour, she may be perceived as the problem rather than the behaviour that led to her complaint (Baugh, 1997; Sisofo, 2019). Numerous accounts from individuals who experienced exploitation as child athletes reveal that it was the imposed silence that enabled the perpetrator to continue their abuse (Everley, 2020).

Fostering a culture that encourages listening to children and normalises the expression of their perspectives could help address issues related to children feeling they lack the right to share their experiences. This is especially evident in research on historic sexual abuse in UK sport, where adults reflecting on their childhood or youth experiences highlight a significant barrier: the inability to speak out without fear of reprisal (Everley, 2022). As discussed in the literature review research indicates that long-term, early, and violent abuse is challenging to report and often not disclosed until adulthood. In sports, similar dynamics like power imbalances and emotional manipulation complicate reporting (Briere & Conte, 1993; Leahy et al., 2004; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

The impact of the IJF limitation period could result in safeguarding complaints not being investigated and or safeguarding punishments not being imposed. This is because the IJF limitation period is rather short or limited in contrast to the long periods of time that is often taken by subjects of abuse to report the issue.

Serious cases are typically addressed under criminal law, while those that do not meet the criminal threshold may fall under the jurisdiction of the sport's governing body. The effectiveness of IJF investigations and sanctions could be limited by the IJF statute of limitations. The IJF Safeguarding Policy is dated 28/1/2025 and the Disciplinary Code is dated 4/5/23 indicating that any impact of the

limitation period within the Disciplinary Code should have been considered in respect of the Safeguarding Policy at the time it was produced. Both documents work together, and the Safeguarding Policy sets the standards and guidelines related to the protection of individuals. The Disciplinary Code takes on an enforcement role, providing the tools to impose penalties or corrective measures when safeguarding breaches or other violations occur. A restriction exists as a result of the IJF statute of limitations. The IJF could consider applying an extension to the limitation period analogous to that applied in respect of unlawful influence on the result of a Sport Event or competition.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse report (Jay et al., 2022) highlighted the balance the law of limitation seeks between claimants' rights and defendants' interests. Limitation periods set statutory time limits for claims, which must be raised by defendants as a procedural defence. This presents significant challenges for victims of non-recent child sexual abuse due to difficulties in establishing facts over time. Few victims of child sexual abuse bring their claims before the English and Welsh three-year limitation period expires. If a limitation defence is raised, victims must request the court's discretion to proceed. The court considers factors such as the delay's length and reasons, strength of evidence, defendant's conduct, claimant's disability duration, promptness in filing the claim, and steps taken to get expert advice (Jay et al., 2022).

Although this particular case is England and Wales focussed, the inquiry report also explained that the European Court of Human Rights has considered and upheld the principle of a fixed limitation period, emphasising its importance in civil claims. However, it acknowledged that the evolving understanding of child abuse's psychological impact could warrant special provisions for such claims (Jay et al., 2022). Whilst recognising the balance between the claimants rights and the defendants interests recommendations 15, from the inquiry, recommended the removal of the three-year limitation period for personal injury claims brought by victims and survivors of child sexual abuse (Jay et al., 2022).

## Children

The researcher's interpretation of IJF descriptors of disciplinary offenses, as well as the inclusion of individuals subject to the enforcement of IJF safeguarding rules, is that they do not explicitly address children. The language and associated policies are written in a way that does not specify or imply any age group or demographic. The wording is neutral and non-specific with respect to age. The IJF Safeguarding policies therefore apply to both adults and children without explicitly mentioning their inclusion or exclusion.

Such neutrality is consistent with the acknowledgement that in sport, and with regards to human rights, strict distinctions between children and adults is somewhat artificial, since human rights apply to all, and age boundaries are irrelevant in sport (Lang & Hartill, 2014b; Y. A. Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). IF focus on elite athletes, often neglects child athletes. National policies require everyone in sports to safeguard children, emphasizing vigilance and reporting concerns. While legally necessary, this approach can reflect detachment rather than genuine commitment to children's welfare (Everley, 2025).

## Potential Gap in IJF Disciplinary Procedures

The IJF interpret harassment and abuse in five forms which may occur in a group or towards a single person. These are: psychological abuse, physical abuse, sexual harassment, sexual abuse and neglect (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d).

The IJF define sexual harassment as any unwanted and unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, whether verbal, non-verbal or physical. Additionally the IJF explain that sexual harassment can take the form of sexual abuse (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). Sexual abuse is any conduct of a sexual nature, whether non-contact, contact or penetrative, where consent is coerced/manipulated or is not or cannot be given (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). The definitions of sexual abuse and sexual harassment relied upon by the IJF are as set out in the IOC Consensus statement: harassment and abuse non-accidental violence in sport (Mountjoy et al., 2016). The author of this research argues that the IJF do consider sexual abuse and sexual



harassment to be different otherwise why would two different definitions exist within their policy. The importance of this very fine distinction is discussed in relation to the IJF Code of Ethics below.

Focussing on the IJF Code of Ethics (International-Judo-Federation, 2023a). This code explains that all forms of harassment of participants be it physical, professional, religious, political, hierarchical or sexual, and any physical or mental injury to participants are prohibited. It is noteworthy that issues of harassment are prohibited and not issues of abuse. The word abuse only appears once within the IJF Code of Ethics and that is in terms of do not abuse any equipment and ensure all facilities, hotels and other places put at your disposition are respected.

Paragraph 1.6 IJF Disciplinary Code states that “the IJF code of ethics sets out the standards of conduct that may entail the initiation of disciplinary action in the event of a culpable breach thereof” (International-Judo-Federation, 2023b). As the IJF code of ethics has not set out the standard for sexual abuse as conduct that may entail the initiation of disciplinary action, it can be argued that the IJF is not able to discipline anyone for psychological abuse, physical abuse and sexual abuse.

### **Presentation of Priorities within IJF Safeguarding Policy**

The stated purpose of the IJF Safeguarding Policy is to demonstrate the commitment of the IJF to safeguarding (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d). The goals of the IJF in the field of violence, harassment and abuse are:

- Raise awareness on prevention of harassment, abuse and violence among all IJF bodies and populations
- Raise awareness, clarify, educate all populations on what is considered to be harassment, abuse and violence
- Provide information on the alert process and the management of cases of harassment, abuse and violence
- Establish a safe environment for all those involved in the field of judo (International-Judo-Federation, 2025d).

It is argued that if the purpose and goals of the policy are articulated in order of priority, that the IJF is trying to demonstrate IJF commitment to safeguarding first and that establishing a safe environment for all those involved in the field of judo is of least importance. In contrast it could be argued that the first three bullet points lead to the establishment of a safe environment.

## **Review of the ASOIF Top 7 Sports**

Safeguarding policies for the following international federations were found on their publicly accessible websites. BWF (Badminton World Federation), (FEI) Federation Equestre Internationale, FIFA (Federation Internationale de Football Association), ITF (International Tennis Federation), UCI (Union Cycliste Internationale), World Athletics and World Rugby.

Single Safeguarding policy documents existed for: Badminton (Badminton-World-Federation, 2022), Equestrian, (Federation-Equestre-Internationale, 2023), Cycling (Union-Cycliste-Internationale, 2023) and World Rugby (World-Rugby, 2022). Tennis has a Safeguarding Adults policy (International-Tennis-Federation, 2023a) as well as a Safeguarding Children policy (International-Tennis-Federation, 2023b). Both policies have many similarities in structure and content. Key differences are that the adult policy contains a section for wheelchair athletes and a section for under 18s competing in adult events. The children's policy has a section for engaging with children as well as a section titled additional risks to children. The Safeguarding Policy for World Athletics (World-Athletics, 2021) upon examination did not include all required information although the details sought (specific mention of Reporting) was included within the World Athletics Integrity Code of Conduct (World-Athletics, 2023). In respect of Football (FIFA - Federation Internationale de Football Association), a singular Safeguarding policy document could not be located. All information was though available from the following documents. Code of Conduct (Federation-Internationale-de-Football-Association, 2012), Code of Ethics (Federation-Internationale-de-Football-Association, 2020a), Competition Safeguarding (Federation-Internationale-de-Football-Association, 2022), What is Safeguarding and Child Protection (Federation-Internationale-de-Football-Association), Making Football Truly Global, The Vision (Federation-Internationale-de-Football-Association, 2020b).

A search was conducted to determine if any of the ASOIF Top 7 sports had a specific committee or commission primarily responsible for safeguarding or safe sport. Generally, the organisations had an audit and compliance committee or an ethics committee that handled safeguarding responsibilities among other duties. Equestrian (FEI), Football (FIFA), and World Athletics are examples of such organisations. The responsible World Rugby committee for Safeguarding could not be identified. The Badminton World Federation (BWF) has a Governance & Ethics Technical Commission responsible for the ongoing review of BWF governance and ethics regulations. The International Tennis Federation (ITF) has an Advantage All Committee that raises awareness of harassment and abuse in sport and contributes to the ITF's safeguarding policies and practices. Cycling has an ethics committee whose duties include ensuring safety and fairness in the areas of anti-doping, competition manipulation, and safeguarding.

An analysis of safeguarding policies among seven leading sports organisations highlights compliance with the 5R Framework, showcasing examples of robust practices without identifying major vulnerabilities. Variations in policy style were observed, yet the substantive quality remained consistent. Specific safeguarding committees were generally absent, with responsibilities embedded in broader governance structures, such as ethics or compliance committees. While IJF's policies align with best practices, the review offers no significant additional measures for adoption, indicating a solid foundation yet room for refinement.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter underscores the IJF's commitment to safeguarding through policies aligned with the 5R Framework. It identifies strengths in recognition, readiness, and response, yet highlights a lesser degree of strength in reporting and remedy mechanisms. Additionally, it introduces the notion of a sixth 'R,' reach, explaining complexities tied to policy scope, jurisdiction, and consistency in language. The chapter underscores the necessity of clear terminology across safeguarding documents to mitigate vulnerabilities, such as differing language in disciplinary codes potentially undermining sanctions. Furthermore, the use of NVivo software is noted as a methodological asset

for comprehensive document analysis, offering insights that might have otherwise been overlooked.

Overall, the chapter demonstrates the IJF's progress while emphasising the importance of continual refinement in safeguarding measures, particularly regarding reach and consistency of policies to ensure robust athlete protection and alignment with international governance standards.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

## Introduction

In the world of sport and with a particular focus on judo and the IJF the safeguarding of participants and anyone associated with the sport such as athlete entourage, employees and volunteers has emerged as a compelling imperative. This research has examined the IJF safeguarding policies and supporting material, offering a critical examination of their adequacy, implementation, and alignment with international standards. The aim was to unearth the robustness of IJF's safeguarding mechanisms and to propose recommendations that could elevate their efficacy and adherence to global best practices.

The research was cognisant of principles recognised as best practice in facilitating impact and identification of three key strategies that are associated with achieving research impact on policy and practice. Firstly, there is collaboration with the end user to inform the planning of the study. This was an integral part of the research or project proposal, which was discussed with an IJF Safeguarding representative, and member of the Supervision Team. Secondly, the project should be needs-led and the research emanated from a consensus of key stakeholders that there was a clear need for safeguarding research specific to IJF activities. Finally, there should be mechanisms in place for people to use the findings, which has been achieved through submission of the research to the IJF Safeguarding Officer. The strategies were pre planned in concept and were refined as the research developed. (Hanney et al., 2017; Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020).

The IJF, as the global governing body for the sport of judo, holds a responsibility to ensure the safety, dignity, and well-being of all athletes under its jurisdiction. As an IF, its obligations include establishing safeguarding policies that prevent abuse. While the IJF has made significant strides toward fulfilling these duties through its Safeguarding framework, its real world or day to day ability to meet its ethical and practical responsibilities remains beyond the scope of this study. The IJF's safeguarding structure demonstrates alignment with international standards. It has developed a publicly accessible Safeguarding Policy and Code of Ethics, articulating a zero-tolerance stance on abuse, harassment, and discrimination (International-Judo-Federation, 2023a, 2025d). The

appointment of dedicated Safeguarding Officers at international events and the provision of an online reporting system marks important procedural developments. These mechanisms reflect the federation's stated commitment to athlete protection and to upholding the values of respect and integrity principles foundational to both judo and international sport governance.

The core issue at the heart of this research is the adequacy of the policies for managing integrity issues related to abusive and harassing behaviours within IJF related judo. Despite ongoing developments in safeguarding over several decades, incidents of abuse continue to surface in sport in general and in judo. The IJF, as the IF governing judo, bears a responsibility to uphold the safety, dignity, and well-being of all judo practitioners and those associated with the sport in other capacities.

### **Hierarchical Nature of Judo**

Hoare (2009) explains how the culture of judo developed, particularly in relation to its rank system. A distinctive feature of *judo* is the coloured belt worn around the waist to indicate rank and ability. The terms *kyu* (beginner grades) and *dan* (advanced grades) are used, with *dan* grades traditionally signified by the colour black (Hoare, 2009). The rank system functions as a structured way for practitioners to be situated within dojo culture. Belt colour, grade, and seniority all serve as visible markers of standing, progress, and responsibility. Advancement in rank signifies not only increasing technical competence but also growing teaching capacity and greater responsibility within the training environment and, potentially, the wider judo community. Watson's Judo Memoirs of Jigoro Kano (Watson, 2008) helps illuminate this culture of rank. Judo grades confer status, yet culture emphasises modesty, lifelong learning, and service to others. Consequently, the rank system is not purely competitive but oriented toward community responsibility and personal development. Higher grades bring expectations of mentorship and the upholding of *judo* moral and cultural values. A potential vulnerability of such a hierarchical structure is highlighted by Everley (2022), who observes that children are potentially more vulnerable to abuse in sports due to the power dynamics of the environment (Everley, 2022).

## Summary of Findings

The examination of IJF's safeguarding framework through the lens of the Five 'R's, Readiness, Recognition, Reporting and Disclosure, Response, and Remedy, has revealed several strengths and some areas for potential improvement. The 5R framework (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023) was instrumental within this research in assessing the IJF's preparedness and response to safeguarding issues.

**Readiness:** The IJF has demonstrated a commendable readiness to engage with safeguarding issues, as evidenced by the establishment of a principal safeguarding policy and the appointment of certified Safeguarding Officers. The IJF's proactive stance in publicising its commitment to safeguarding through various channels, including its website and policy documents, underscores its cultural preparedness.

**Recognition:** The IJF's policies clearly delineate what constitutes a safeguarding violation, adopting definitions that are consistent with the IOC Consensus Statement 2016 (Mountjoy et al., 2016). The clarity and comprehensiveness of these definitions ensure that all stakeholders have a common understanding of abusive behaviours, thereby facilitating recognition of violations.

**Reporting and Disclosure:** While the IJF has established a reporting mechanism, including an online reporting platform, there are other issues or barriers that can and do discourage victims of abuse from reporting. The research highlights the need for greater awareness among athletes and their families about the existence and accessibility of these reporting channels. There is a global call for independent reporting mechanisms to address abuse in sports. These mechanisms should offer athletes a safe and confidential way to report issues, ensuring impartial handling and addressing a wide range of abuse types (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002; Donnelly & Kerr, 2018; Kerr & Kerr, 2020; MacPherson et al., 2022; Willson et al., 2022). It is noted by the author that the global call for independent reporting mechanisms to address abuse in sports, due to its independence, should be outside of IJF control.



Response: The IJF's response to safeguarding allegations includes timely, fair, and responsible management of reported incidents. However, the absence of published disciplinary sanctions in relation to safeguarding transgressions, which may be for confidentiality reasons means that this aspect of the IJF response has not been tested within this research. The federation's commitment to providing appropriate support to affected participants is notable, yet the efficacy of these measures remains to be fully evaluated.

Remedy: The concept of remedy within the IJF's framework focuses on providing psychological support and appropriate sanctions for policy violations. However, in relation to other aspects the IJF policies are silent. The approach to remedy could benefit from a more comprehensive strategy, including regular monitoring and check-ins to build trust and ensure ongoing support for survivors (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023).

Several key themes emerged from this research, each of which is critical to understanding the broader implications of safeguarding within the IJF.

### **The Distinction between Safeguarding and Safe Sport**

The terms 'safeguarding' and safe sport have often been used interchangeably within sports governance, leading to confusion. This research underscores the importance of distinguishing between the two. The IOC's 2024 definitions provide clarity: Safe Sport refers to an environment where participants can thrive without fear of non-accidental violence, while safeguarding encompasses proactive measures to prevent and respond to concerns related to harassment and abuse (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). The IJF's policies predominantly use the term 'safeguarding,' aligning with international standards.

### **The Role of Independent Reporting Mechanisms**

A recurring theme in the literature is the necessity of independent reporting mechanisms. The IJF's current reporting system, while accessible, could be enhanced by the establishment of an independent body to handle safeguarding complaints. Such a body would ensure impartiality and

build greater trust among athletes and other stakeholders, thereby encouraging more timely and accurate reporting of abuse.

### **The Concept of Reach**

The concept of 'Reach' emerged as a potential sixth 'R' in the safeguarding framework. Reach pertains to the scope and application of safeguarding policies across geographical regions, personnel, and organisational structures. The IJF's safeguarding policies are characterised by their broad applicability, yet the consistency of language and enforcement across various documents remains an area for improvement. Ensuring that all stakeholders, regardless of their location or role, are equally protected under the federation's policies is paramount.

### **Statute of Limitations**

The IJF's statute of limitations on disciplinary proceedings poses a significant challenge to effective safeguarding. Given the long periods between commission of a safeguarding transgression and victims reporting that transgression, which is a characteristic associated with reporting abuse, the current five-year limitation period (extendable to ten years for minors) may be insufficient. This research recommends a review and potential extension of the limitation period to ensure that survivors have adequate time to come forward and seek justice or remedy.

### **Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

The findings of this research have several implications for policy and practice within the IJF. The following recommendations are made:

- **Enhance Independent Reporting Mechanisms:** Support or contribute to the establishment of an independent body to handle safeguarding complaints, ensuring impartiality and building trust among stakeholders.
- **Extend the Statute of Limitations:** Review the need to maintain a statute of limitations and if retained consider extending the limitation period for reporting safeguarding violations. This

is to accommodate the long time periods between incidents of abuse and then reporting of that abuse, which is so often associated with cases of abuse.

- **Standardise Language Across Policies:** Ensure consistency in the language used to describe the scope and reach of policies, avoiding ambiguity and enhancing clarity.
- **Maintain the current collaboration project with Continental Unions and National Federations:** Promote cooperation to ensure uniform application of safeguarding policies and address cultural and contextual variations (International-Judo-Federation., 2025).
- **Examine the wording in the code of ethics** to confirm that instances of abuse are subject to the same level of prohibition as those of harassment.

### **Key Limitations of the research**

The extent to which the IJF policies are effective in practice is beyond the scope of this research. While the IJF sets safeguarding standards, enforcement may be delegated to National Federations, which differ widely in their capacity, cultural norms, and political autonomy. Without robust international monitoring, accountability mechanisms, or capacity-building support, implementation becomes inconsistent (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021). Philosophically, this raises the question of whether moral responsibility lies solely in the creation of rules or also in ensuring their real-world efficacy, a distinction highlighted in the ethics of care and deontological traditions alike (Held, 2006).

The IJF's safeguarding model appears procedural rather than survivor centred. While reporting mechanisms exist, limited information is available on how survivors are supported after reporting abuse, whether through trauma-informed care, psychosocial services, or restorative justice processes. Understanding the experiences of survivors who have navigated the IJF's safeguarding processes is crucial. Future studies should seek to capture these experiences, providing a more nuanced understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of current policies.

A potential gap is the lack of independent investigative oversight. The IJF processes most complaints internally, raising potential conflicts of interest, particularly if allegations involve high-profile athletes or officials. Best practice in safeguarding emphasises the importance of external

adjudication to uphold fairness and procedural neutrality (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2020). Without independent review, both actual justice and the perception of justice may be compromised, which could undermine trust in the institution.

A major limitation of this research is that much of the data came from academic studies and policies that did not directly address organisational factors (Roberts et al., 2020). Several Swedish Sport Federations in the early stages of safe sport processes experienced a disconnect between policy and implementation against sexual abuse, with few or no measures taken (Johansson, 2022). This research has not examined whether any such disconnect does exist but highlights the risk that there is potential for detachment between policy and real-world implementation. IJF policies are informed by resources from reputable organisations which is positive. However, the presence of numerous resources from reputable organisations does not provide an absolute guarantee that they are evidence-based, current, or effective in supporting sport safety behavioural change (Bekker & Finch, 2016).

## **Conclusion**

The safeguarding of participants within the IJF is a multifaceted issue that requires ongoing commitment, vigilance, and enhancement. The federation has made significant strides in establishing a robust safeguarding framework that aligns closely with international standards and suggests a serious effort to meet its duties as an IF, yet there remain areas for enhancement. By addressing the identified gaps and implementing the recommended practices, the IJF can further solidify its commitment to the safety and well-being of all its participants. This research not only contributes to the existing body of knowledge on safeguarding in judo but also provides a roadmap for future efforts to create a safer, more inclusive sporting environment.

A copy of the research thesis has been sent to both the IJF Safeguarding Officer (also part of the University Supervisory Team) and the IJF Academy Director. The IJF Academy oversees international level coach education. After completing examination requirements, a meeting with IJF Safeguarding Officer is planned to discuss implementation of the research recommendations. The

research will be presented at an international symposium in Kanoya, Japan, hosted by the National Institute of Fitness and Sports, offering a valuable platform to disseminate the findings.

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