

**Safeguarding children &  
young people in sport –  
“The State of Play”**

**Hockey Australia & the Institute of  
Child Protection Studies (ICPS)**

Funded by the National Centre for Action on Child  
Sexual Abuse (NCACSA)

# Acknowledgement of country

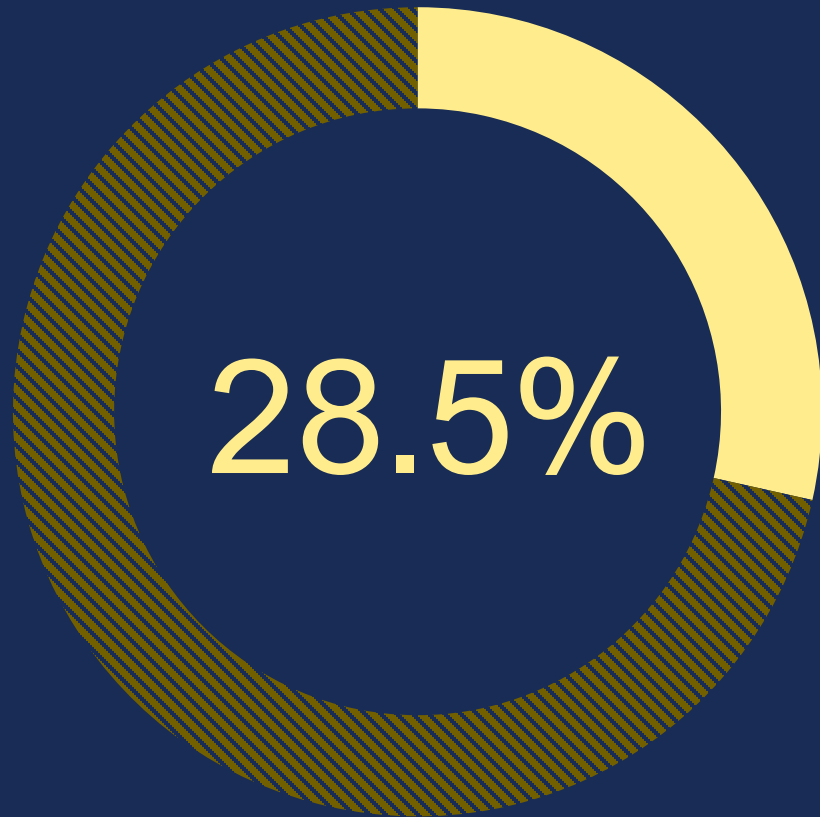


## Meet the team

- **Jarrold Dowdy**  
*Hockey Australia*  
*Integrity & Governance Manager*
- **Samantha Dellamarta**  
*Dellamarta Consulting*  
*Primary Consultant*
- **Douglas Russell**  
*Institute of Child Protection Studies*  
*Senior Research Officer*

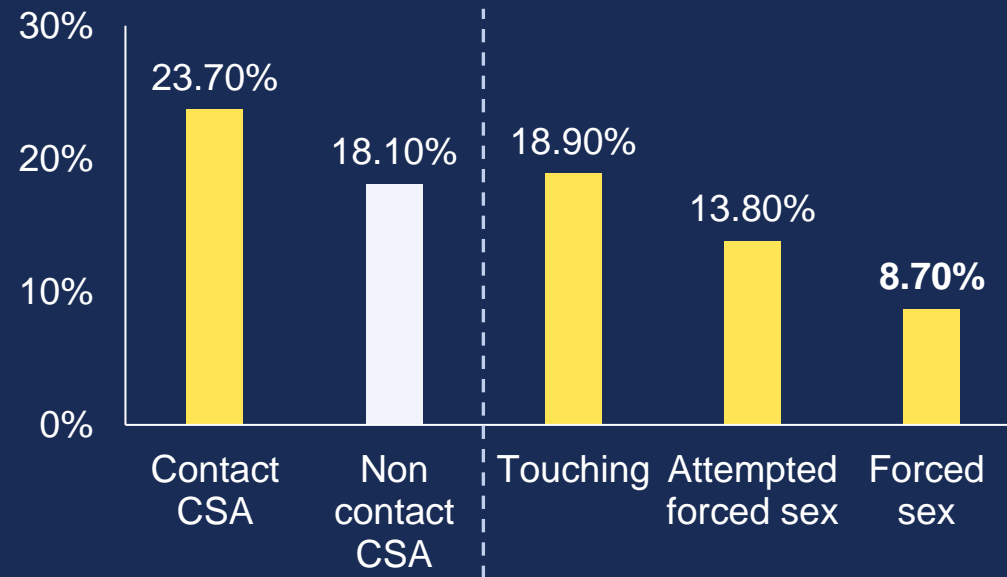


# Child sexual abuse - Whole sample



1 in 4

More than 1 in 4 Australians have experienced child sexual abuse



# Girls experience substantially more child sexual abuse in almost all settings

Compared with boys, girls experience:

**2x**

**Double** the rate of contact sexual abuse by any offender

**3x**

**Triple** the rate of any sexual abuse by familial offenders

**4x**

**Quadruple** the rate of contact sexual abuse by familial offenders

**5x**

**Five times** the rate of sexual abuse by current/former romantic partners



Institutions were the **only setting** where girls experience less CSA than boys.

**This disparity is a massive, enduring and intolerable injustice.**

It is within our power to change this.

It is imperative that we do so.

# Child sexual abuse – classes of offender (whole sample: 28.5%)

7.8%

Parents/adult caregivers in the home

7.5%

Other known adults

12.9%\*

Known adolescents (aged <18)

2.0%

Institutional adult caregivers

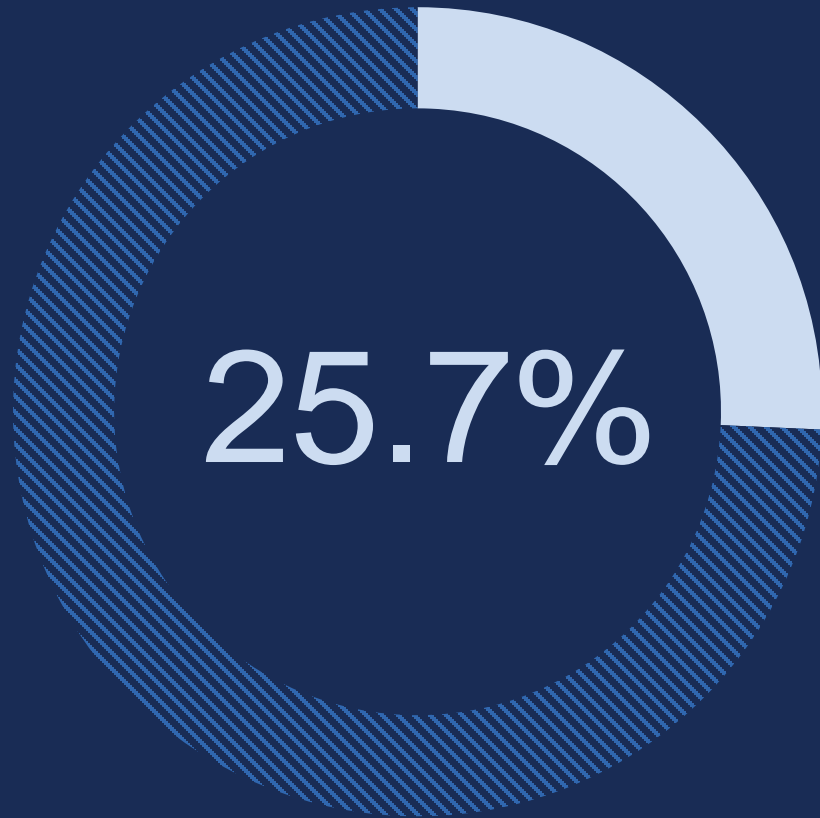
4.9%

Unknown adults

1.4%

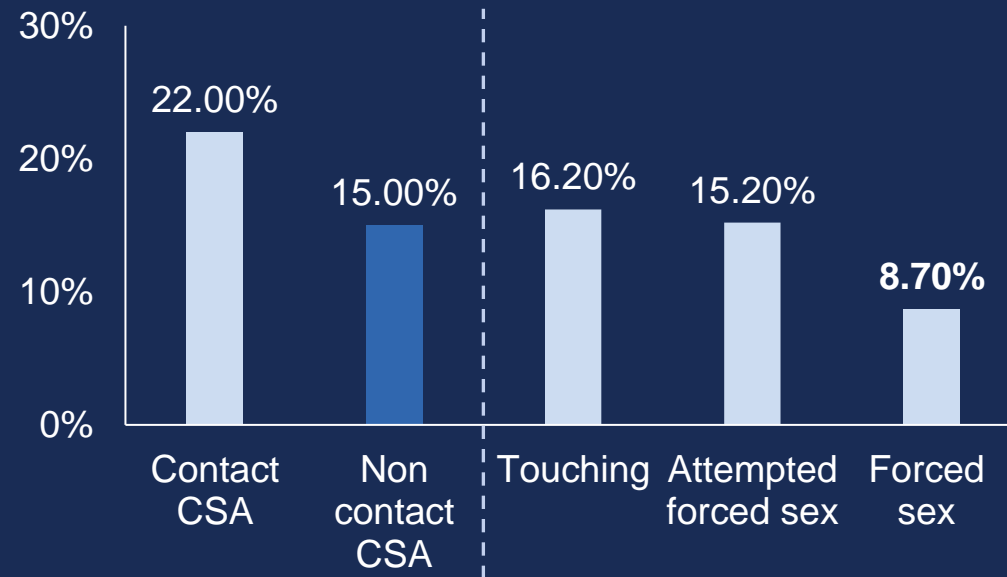
Unknown adolescents (aged <18)

# Child Sexual Abuse – Youth Sample (16-24 yrs)



1 in 4

One in four of our youth sample (aged 16-24) had experienced CSA before age 18.



# Interpersonal Violence in Sport

## Introduction:

- Interpersonal violence (IV) in sport includes psychological, physical, and sexual abuse.
- Focus on sexual violence, abuse, and harassment due to its severe impact on athletes.

## Prevalence:

- High prevalence of IV in sport:
  - 82% experienced some form of IV (Pankowiak et al., 2022).
  - Psychological violence: 76%
  - Physical violence: 66%
  - Sexual violence: 38%
- All participants experienced coach violence at least once (Zach et al., 2024).



# Sexual Violence, Abuse, and Harassment in Sport

## Types of Sexual Violence:

- Inappropriate touching, sexual comments, coercion, exploitation.
- Severe harassment, exploitation, and abuse (Zach et al., 2024).

## Impact:

- Emotional distress, trust issues, difficulties in relationships.
- Long-term psychological issues (Zach et al., 2024).

## Disclosure Challenges:

- Low disclosure rates due to fear of not being believed, damaging reputations, and losing sport participation.
- Normalisation of violent behaviours in sport (Woessner et al., 2024).



# Psychological Safety and Recommendations

## Psychological Safety:

- Defined as protection from psychological harm in sport (Vella et al., 2024).
- Includes absence of fear, threat, anxiety, and presence of positive relationships.



## Recommendations (Roberts and Quigley, 2024)

**Education and awareness for all stakeholders.**

**Supportive policies and procedures, including transparent investigations.**

**Independent oversight to ensure accountability.**

**Cultural change within sports organisations.**

**Access to psychological support and safe disclosure spaces**

# The Project

The aim of the project was to evaluate change in athletes' perceptions of safety and adults' capabilities to prevent and respond to abuse after implementing the Safe Hockey Framework

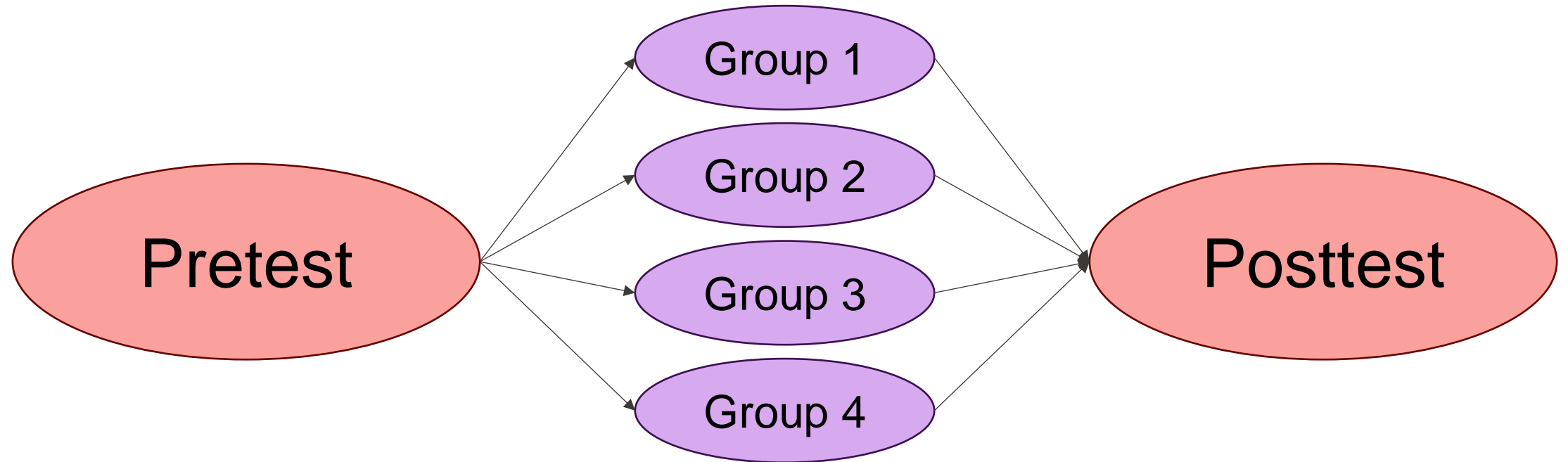
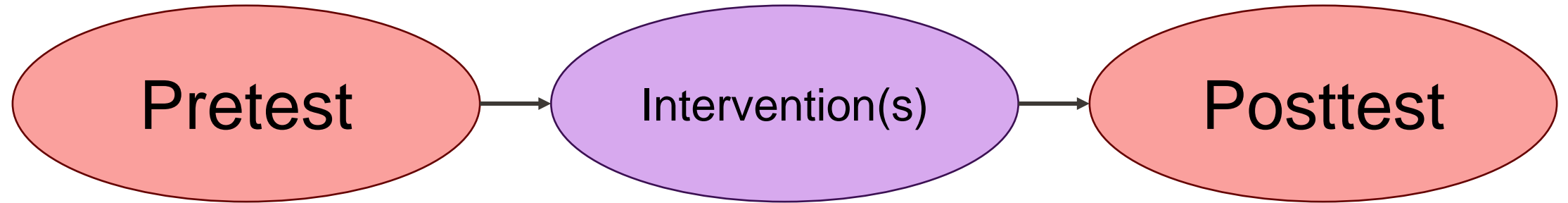
- Use the ICPS safeguarding surveys to measure the effectiveness of the safeguarding strategies that were rolled out in 2024
- Target state level representative teams – athletes and staff

The surveys would capture both children and young people's perception of safety in hockey, and the capabilities of adults responsible for the safety of children and young people in hockey prior to implementation of the safeguarding strategies or 'interventions', and after.

Pre intervention results were used to inform content delivered through the interventions

Post intervention results aimed to capture the effectiveness of the interventions.

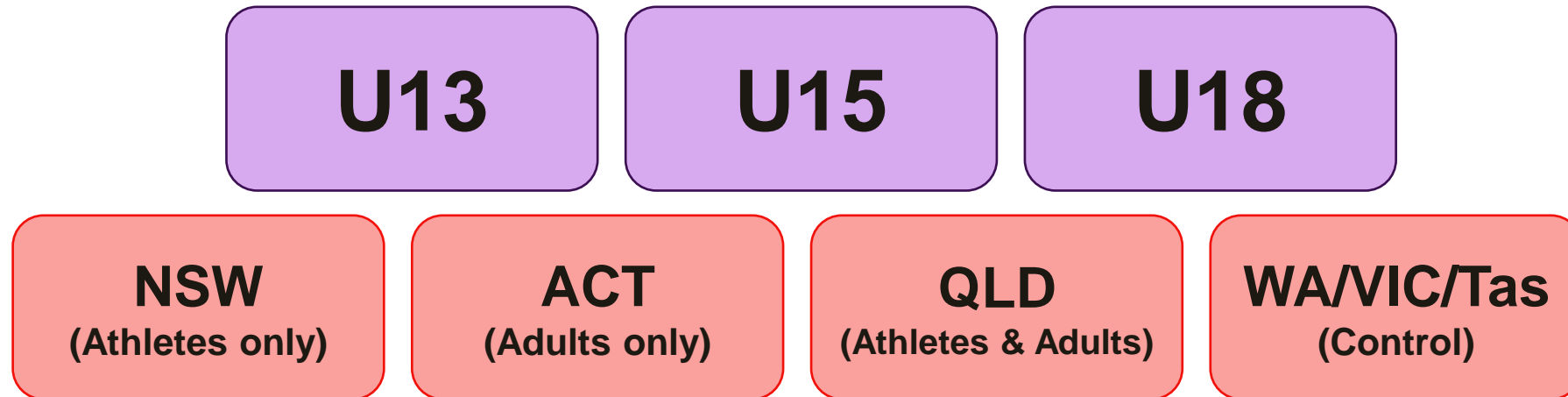
## Study design



# Selecting Participants

## 2024 National Indoor Hockey Tournament

- We planned to compare the four groups as shown in the red boxes which included athletes across all three age groups (purple boxes)



\*SA were omitted due to not sending a team to the tournament.

## Measures

### Safeguarding Capabilities Survey

73 items

4 domains

- Awareness of policies and procedures and organisational culture
- Confidence to act
- Attitude to prevention and agency of children and young people
- Knowledge of situational prevention

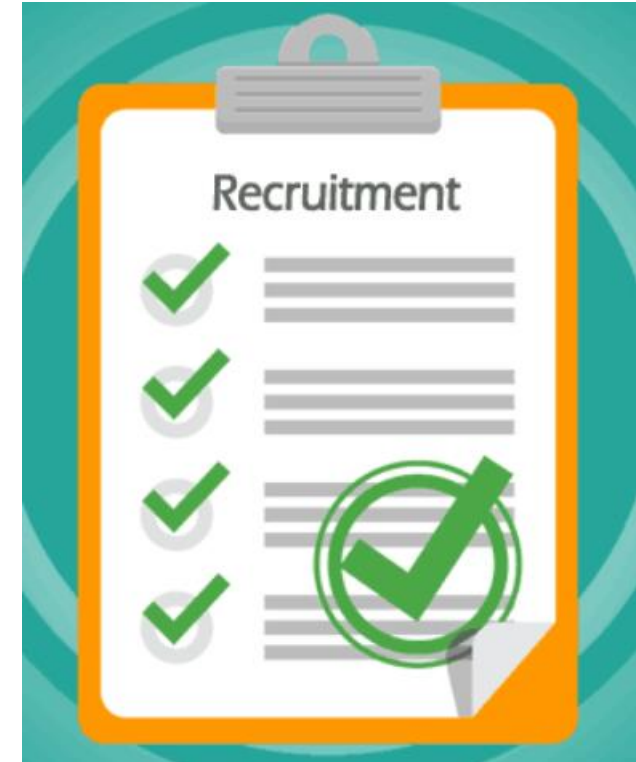
### Children's Safety Survey

3 main scales

- Child informed indicators of safety climate
- Confidence in adults (x2)
- Barriers to help seeking (x2)

## Recruiting Participants

- Safe Hockey Leads
- Emails – sent via SHL and CEOs
- Videos – for parents, athletes and adult participants
- Prizes – incentives for completing both pre and post surveys for athletes
- Follow Up – reminder emails were sent to boost participation numbers in the pre-survey



# Interventions

- Standard Intervention – The Safe Hockey Online Course
- This online, self-directed course is tailored to different audiences (coaching teams, umpires & officials, staff, young athletes and adult athletes) and had recently been updated to focus further on excepted behaviours and the Code of Conduct.
- **This standard intervention was deployed to both young athletes and coaching teams across both the study cohorts and the control cohort.**
- The project team recognised the risk of sending coaching teams away with young athletes with little to no education or information regarding safeguarding, beyond the online course.
- For this reason, the young athletes in the control cohort were provided *brief* information by their coaching teams relating to what to expect and how to raise concerns. This was designed to clearly differentiate from the information interventions received by the study cohort but to also reduce any risk of harm to those young athletes.

# Intervention for coaching teams (adults)

## **Completion of the *Safeguarding Children & Young People in Sport eLearning Course (Sport Integrity Australia)***

- This course has become the standard, minimum expectation of all adults working in sport and is accessible via the Aus Sport / SIA eLearning platform.

## **Access to, and familiarisation with the *Safe Hockey Overnight Travel Guide***

- This guide provides practical advice and steps for ensuring any overnight travel with young athletes is safe and inclusive and that safeguarding risks are identified and mitigated as best as possible.

## **Guidance in the expectations of coaching teams to deliver key safeguarding messages to the young athletes in their teams.**

- This guidance was provided to each MA coaching team based on their involvement in the research project as either the control group or the study group

## Interventions for athletes

### Information for raising concerns

This was provided by the project team in a screenshot that coaching teams could send to athletes via text or email. It included QR codes to give direct access to HA and SIA reporting lines.

**IMAGE REMOVED**

# Interventions for athletes

## Safe Hockey Key Messages

The project team developed and distributed a script for key messages that the coaching teams were asked to deliver to their young athletes in a face-to-face pre-tournament briefing

**IMAGE REMOVED**

# Interventions

## Safe Hockey Check ins

Additional check in messages were developed and distributed to coaching team to share with young athletes via text or email. These were scheduled for mid-tournament and 2 days post tournament.



IMAGE REMOVED

## Second deployment

- Due to numbers not reaching what was required for statistical power we deployed the measures and interventions again at a second tournament.
- Post intervention participation was much lower than pre-intervention participation. Possible reasons:
  - A lack of interest after tournament has occurred
  - Fatigue from competing
  - Email method not as suitable as in-person method



# Findings - responses

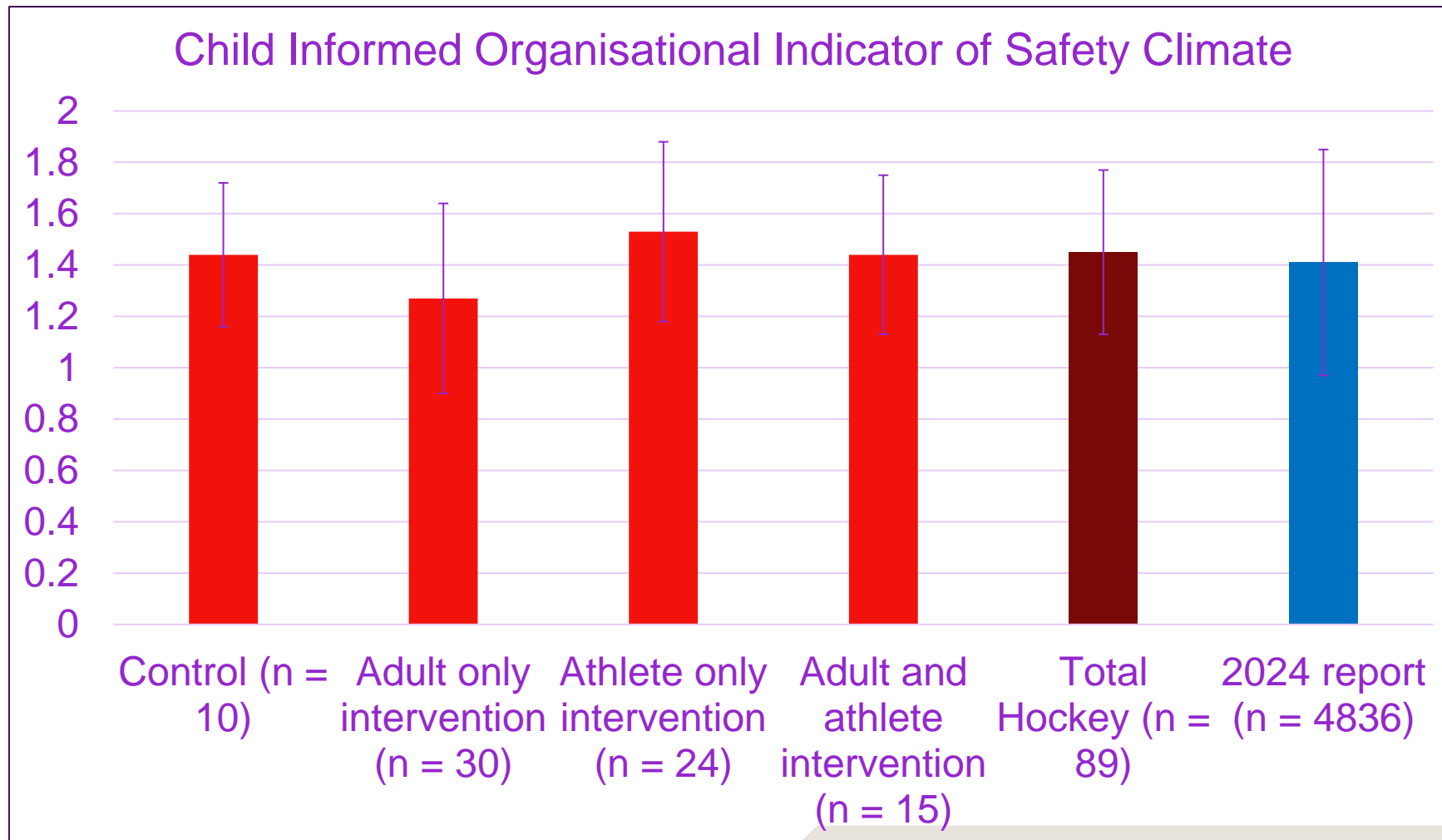
## Athletes' response rates

	Pre intervention	Post intervention
<b>ACT</b>	10	4
<b>NSW</b>	24	3
<b>QLD</b>	15	0
<b>Control</b>	30	3

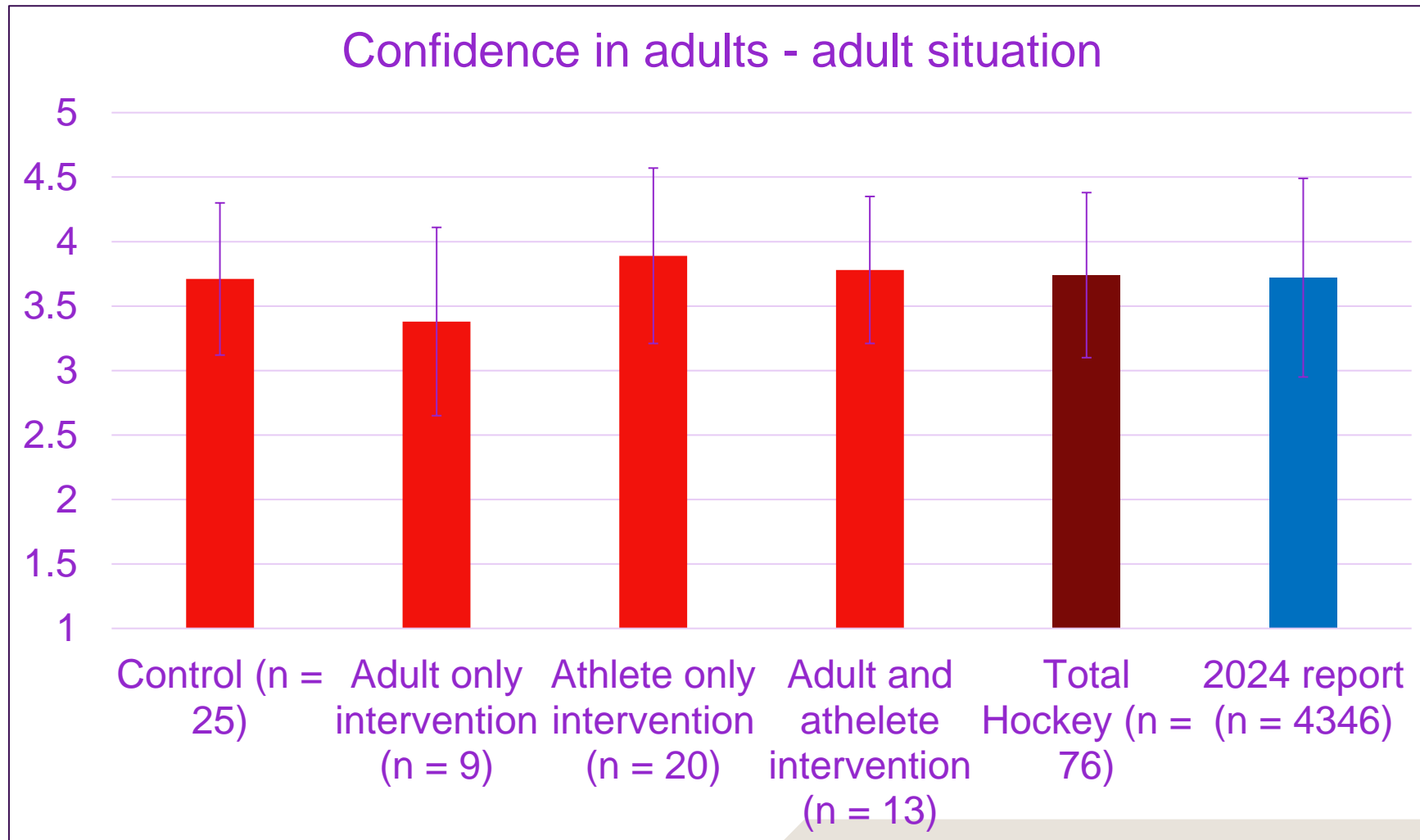
## Coaches/adults' response rates

	Pre intervention	Post intervention
<b>Coach intervention (ACT)</b>	3	1
<b>Athlete intervention (NSW)</b>	4	4
<b>Both interventions (QLD)</b>	7	3
<b>Control – No intervention</b>	11	2

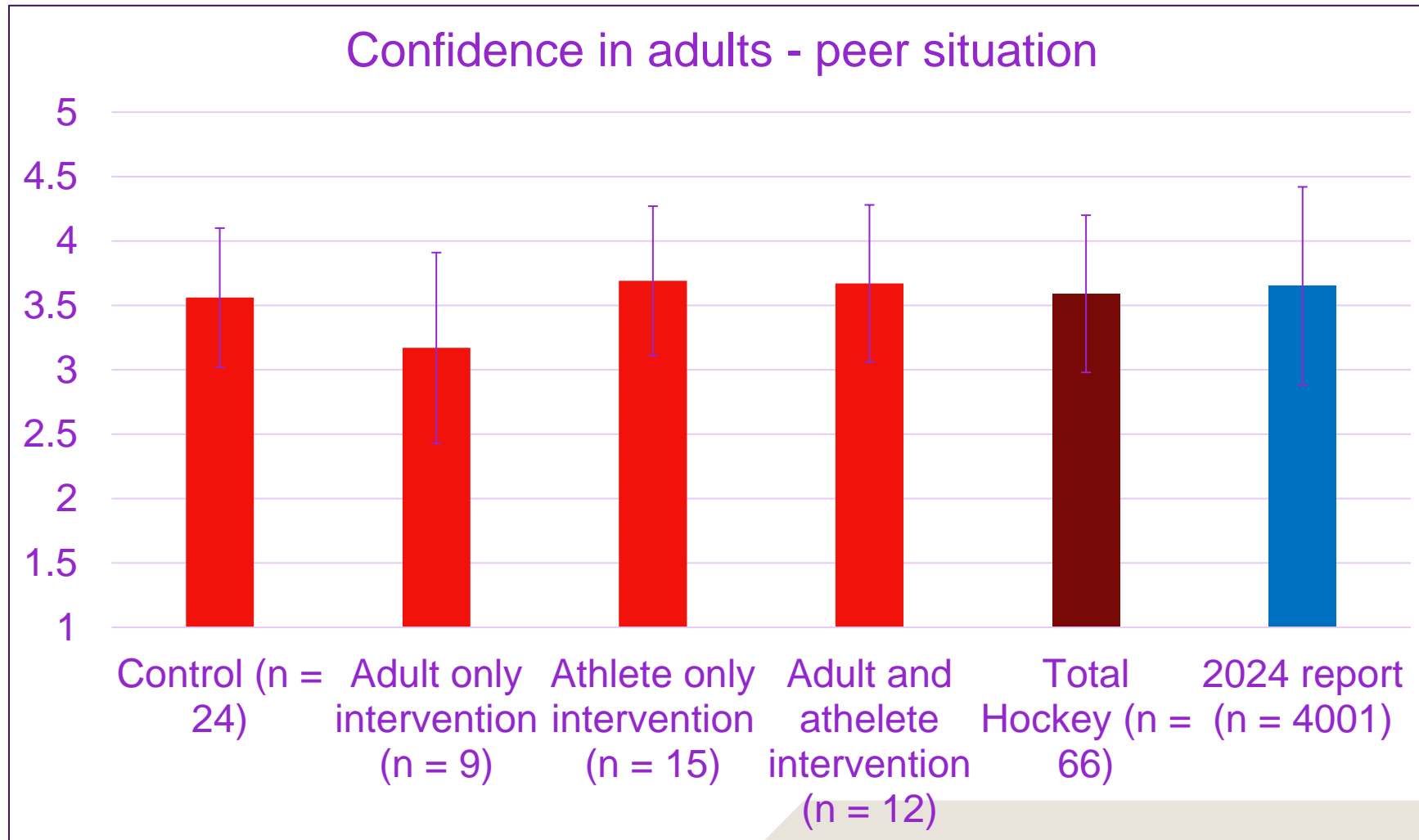
# Athletes' findings



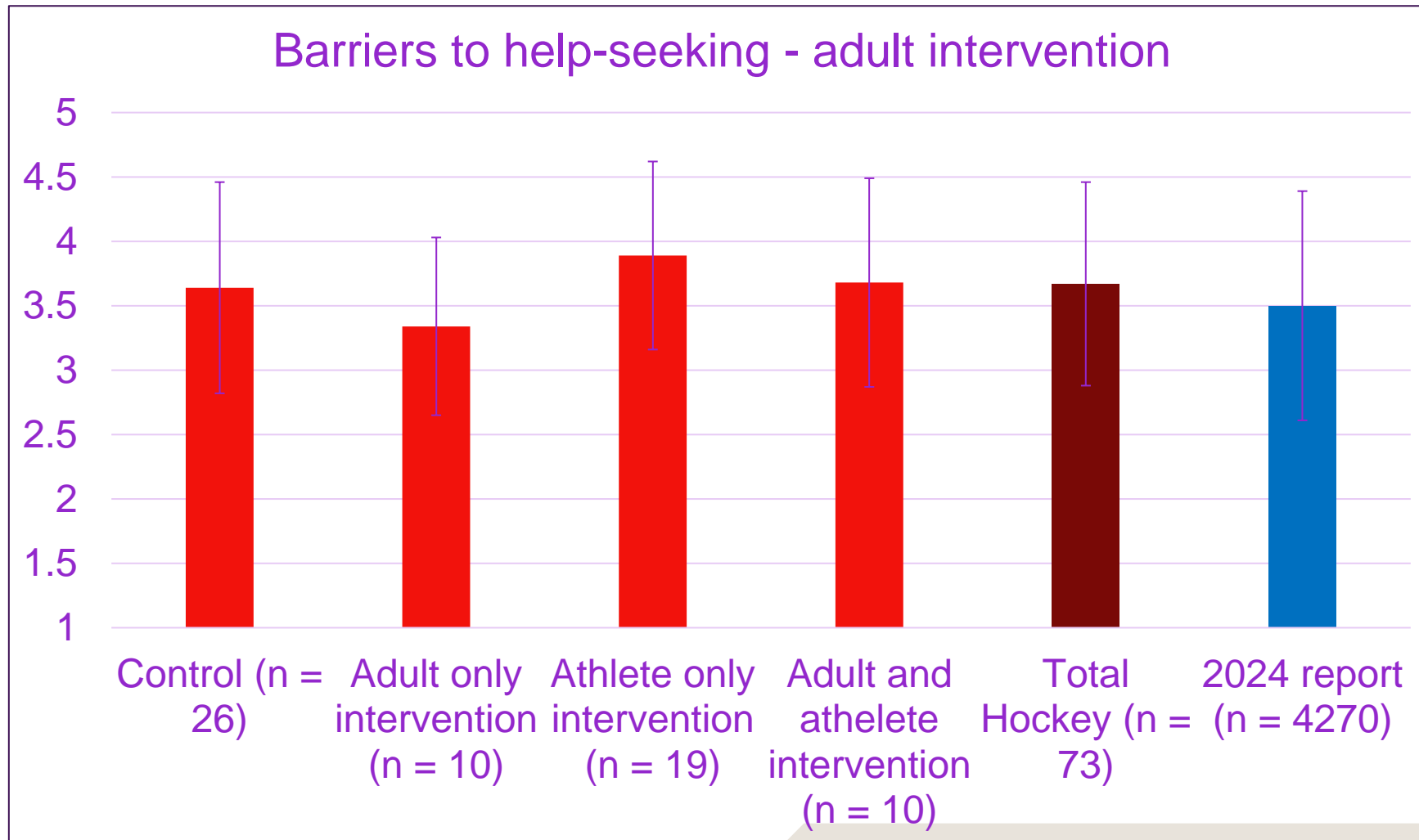
# Athletes' findings



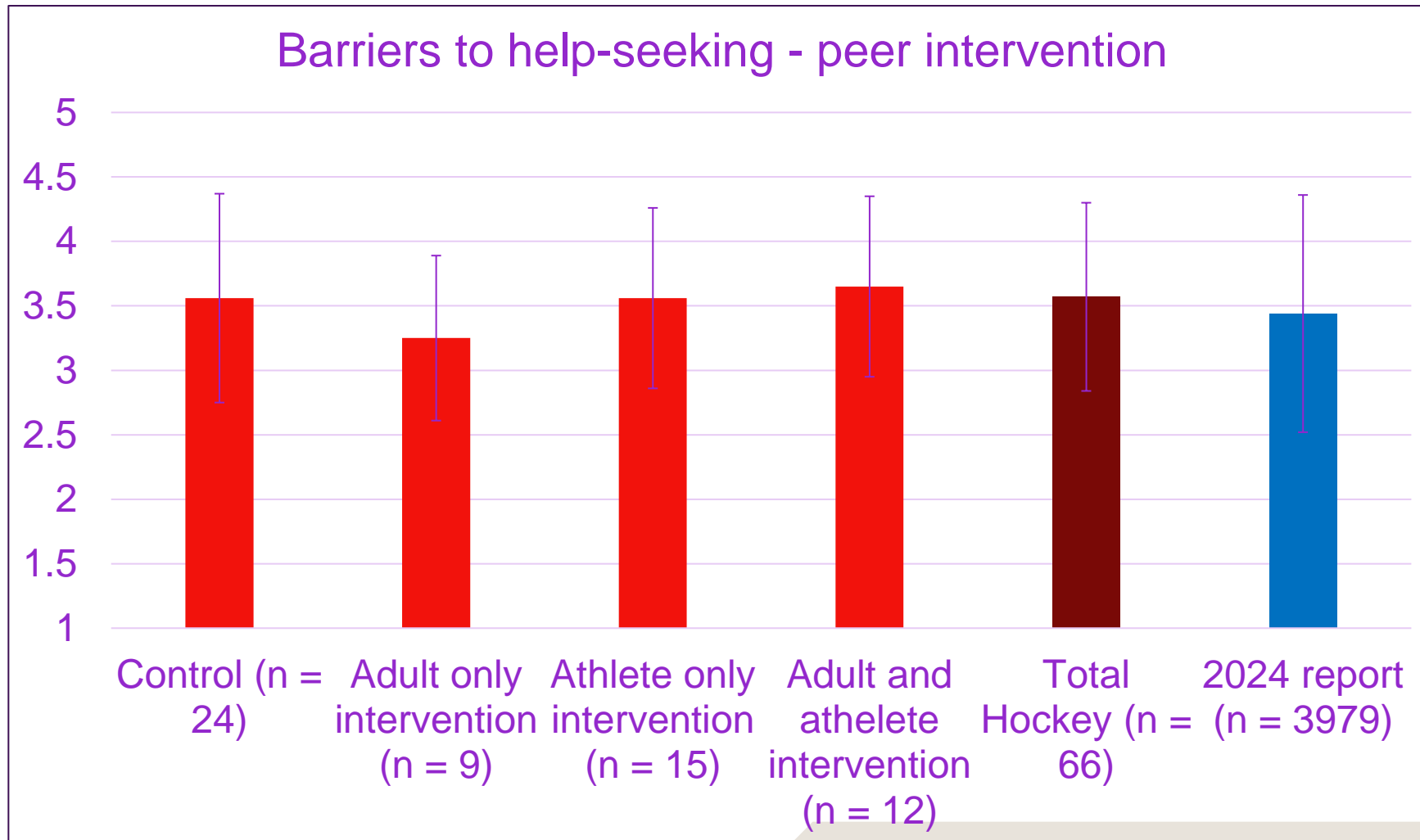
# Athletes' findings



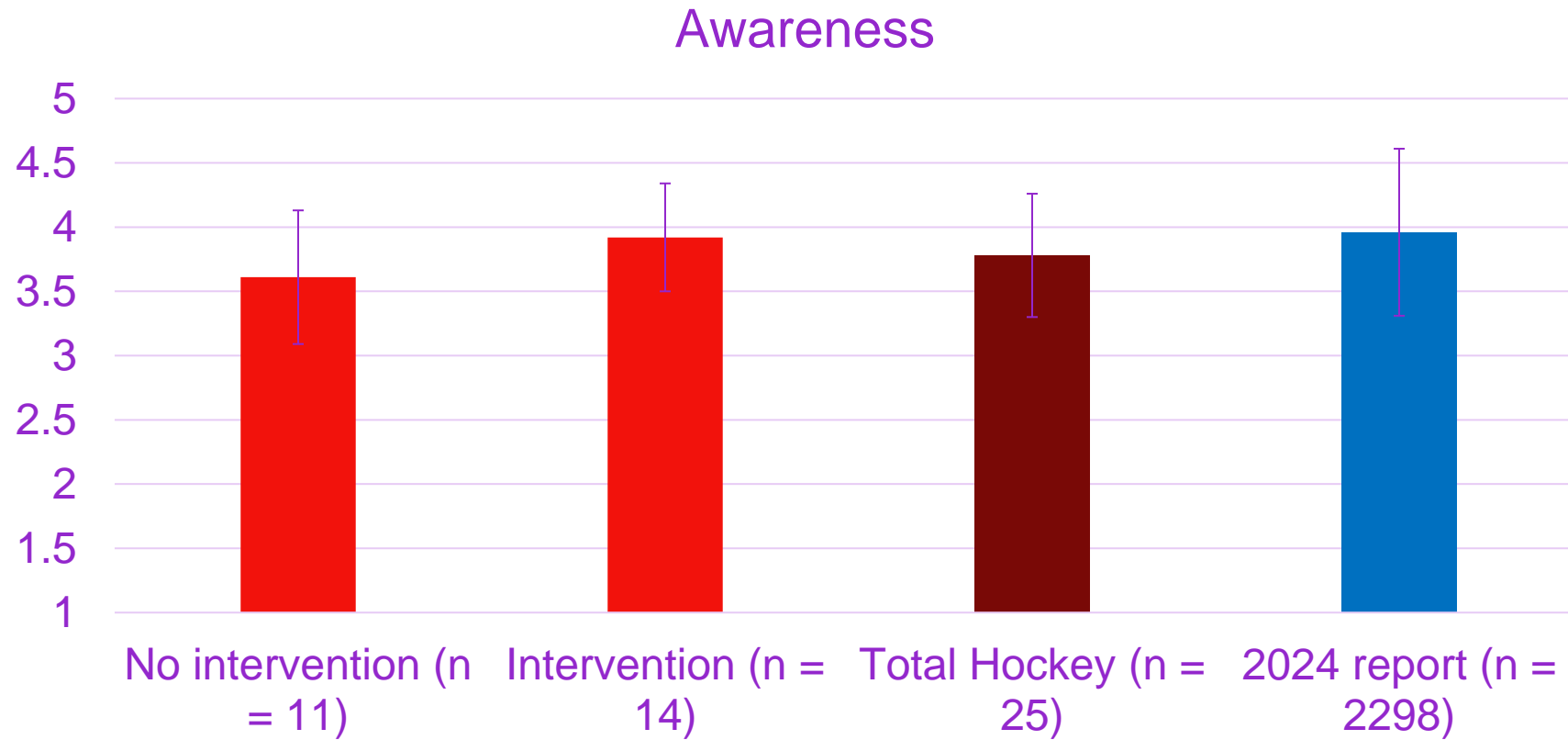
# Athletes' findings



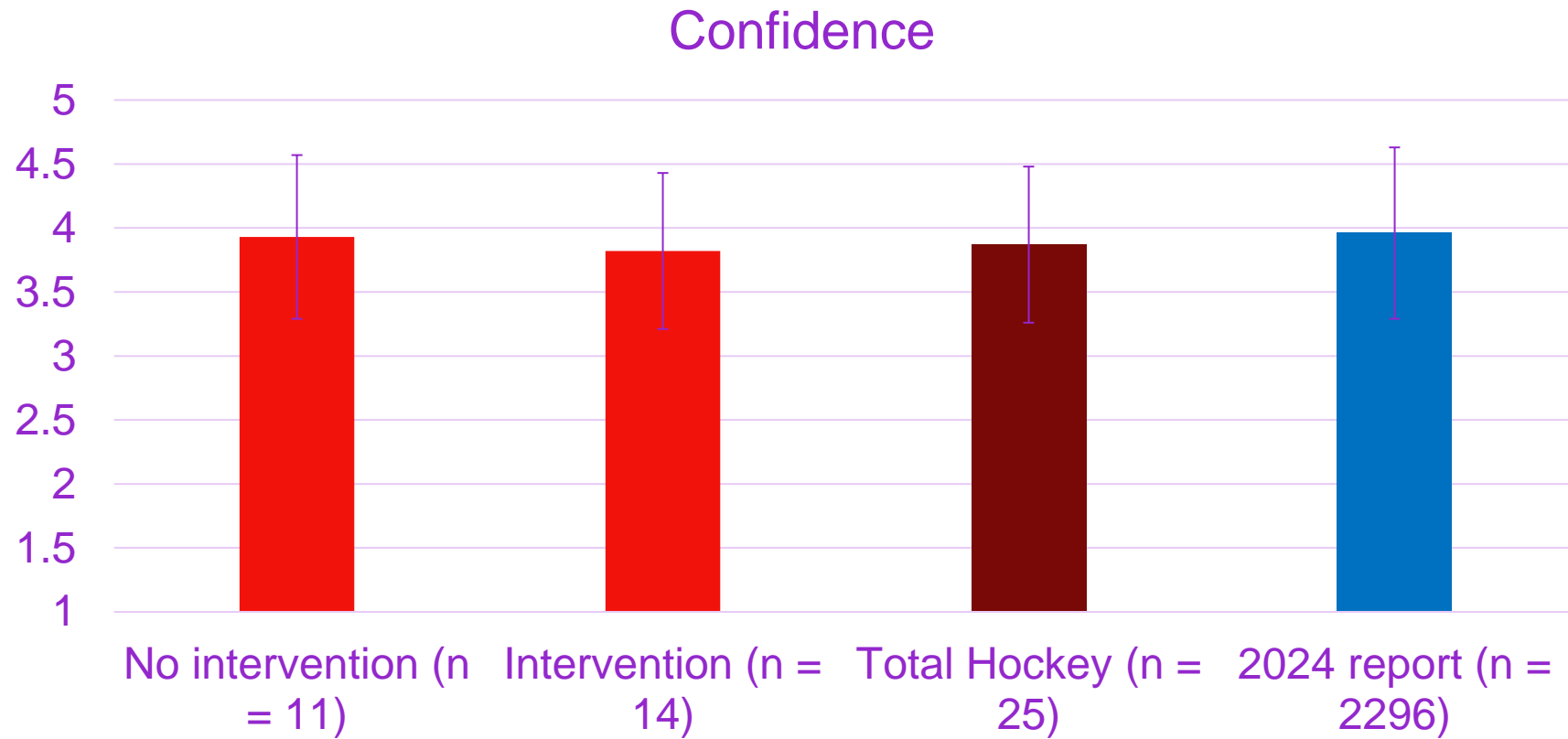
# Athletes' findings



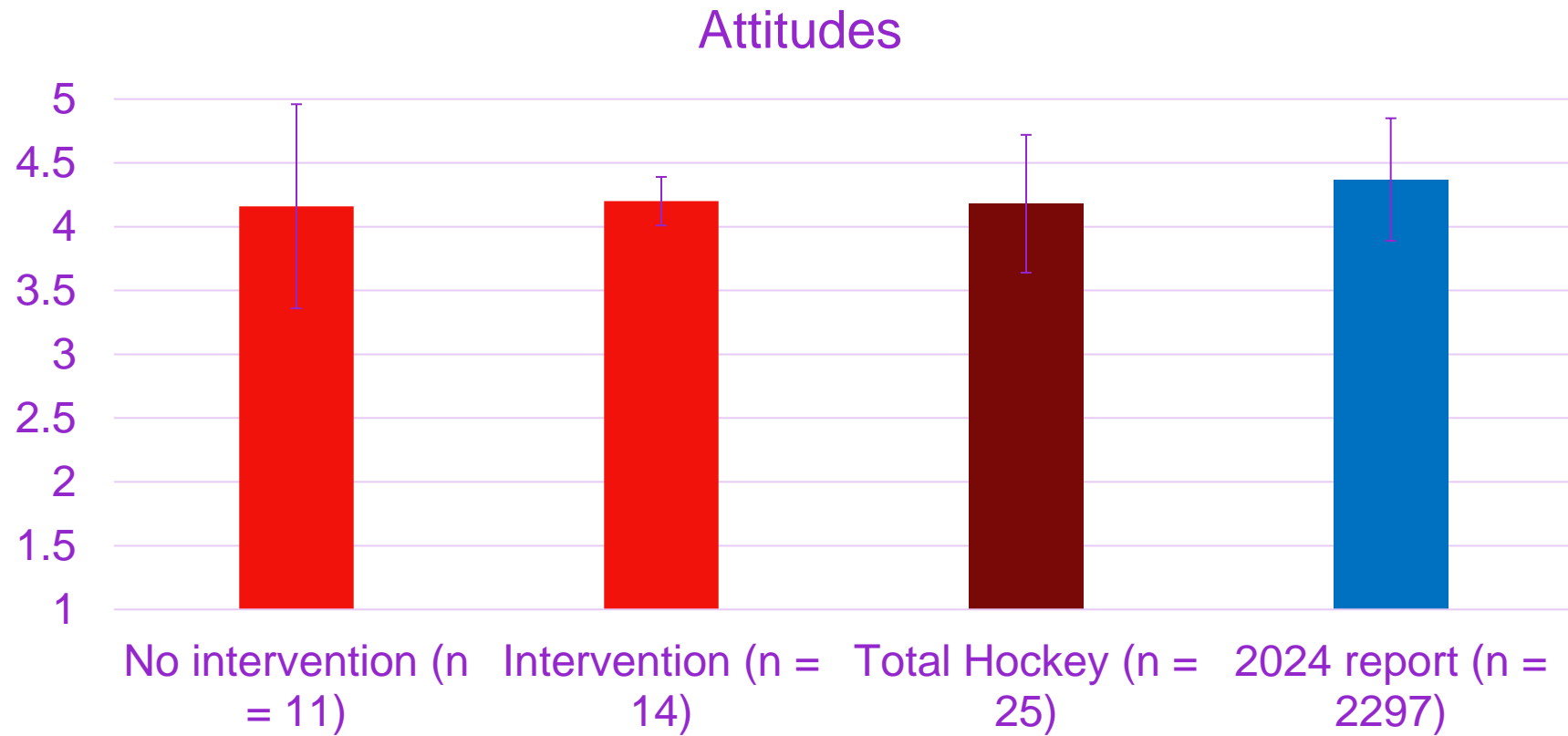
# Coaches/Adults' findings



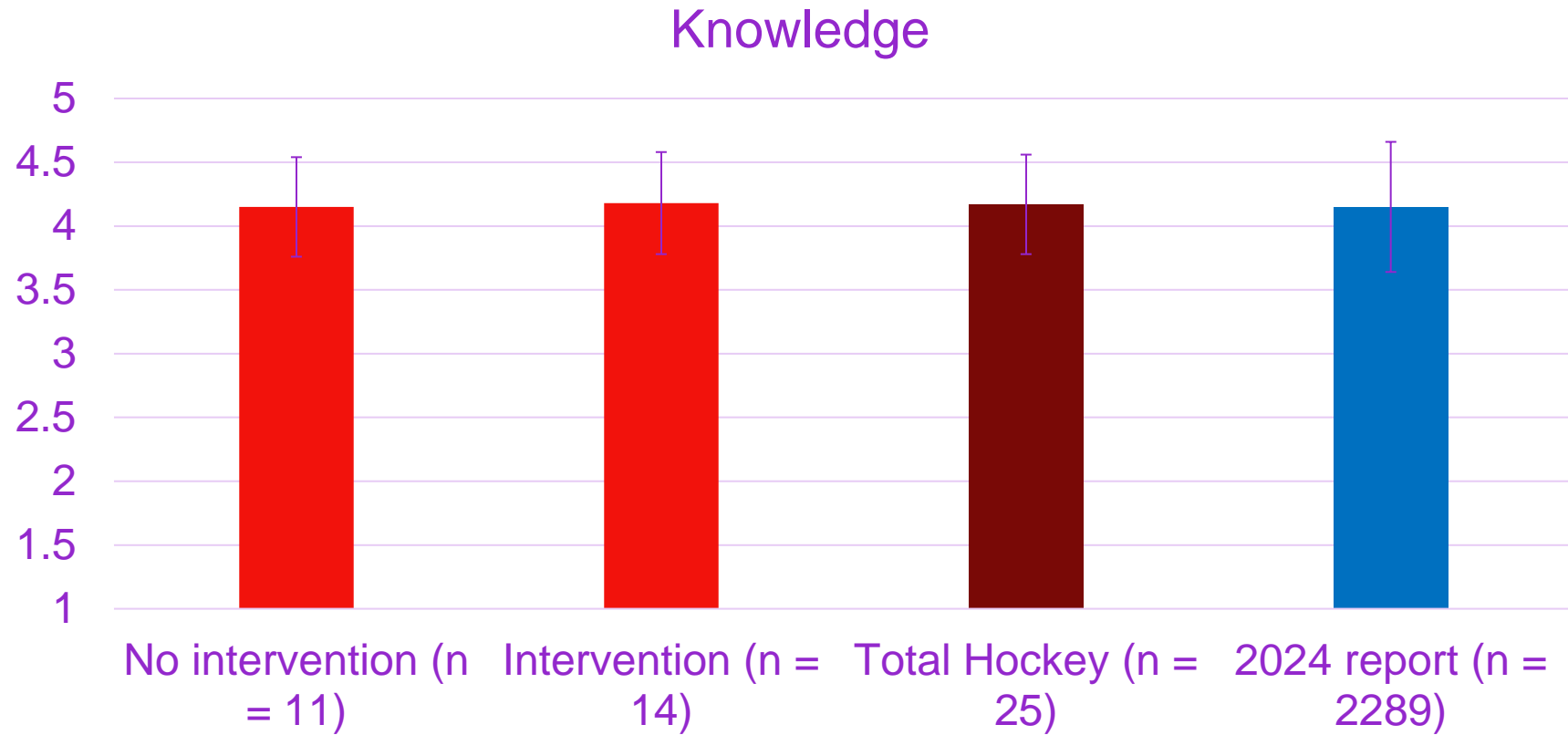
# Coaches/Adults' findings



# Coaches/Adults' findings



# Coaches/Adults' findings



# Conclusions

- Hockey, as an example of a sport, is doing as well if not better than organisations in other sectors in relation to young people’s perceptions of safety.
- There is more work to do in ensuring adults are aware of policies and procedures and the importance of a culture of safeguarding, feel confident to act and consider safeguarding a part of their role.
- There are barriers (as there always are) to conducting safeguarding research—particularly using experimental designs—in sport.

	National Principles									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Survey question: Organisational culture and awareness of policy and procedures</b>										
My organisation makes sure I am aware of things that our organisation can do to protect children and young people from sexual abuse.										
My organisation provides sufficient training about sexual abuse that can be experienced by children and young people.										
My organisation regularly reviews child-safe policies, procedures, and practices to manage risks of abuse.										
Our organisation's child safe policies and procedures are readily/always available to clients, staff and volunteers.										
My organisation keeps issues of child safety high on the agenda (e.g., in supervision, team meetings).										

## Learnings – Barriers

Systemic barriers	Logistical barriers	Cultural barriers
<p><b>Focus on frameworks and action – not research</b></p> <p><b>Multiple levels of involvement</b></p> <p><b>Insufficient awareness of the role of research</b></p> <p><b>Fear of repercussions</b></p> <p><b>Power dynamics</b></p>	<p><b>Volunteer status</b></p> <p><b>Incentives</b></p> <p><b>Time constraints</b></p> <p><b>Accessibility of research</b></p>	<p><b>Stigma around safeguarding</b></p> <p><b>Lack of awareness</b></p> <p><b>Resistance to change</b></p> <p><b>Distrust of researchers</b></p> <p><b>Fear of negative outcomes</b></p> <p><b>Cultural variability</b></p>

## Athlete's story

One young athlete wasn't worried about their coach's behaviour until they completed the survey as part of the project.



## Thank you, contact details, and Q&A

*Douglas*

**Institute of Child Protection Studies**

Research & evaluation questions

[douglas.russell@acu.edu.au](mailto:douglas.russell@acu.edu.au)



*Sam*

**Dellamarta Consulting**

Strategies and policy question

[sam@dellamartaconsulting.com](mailto:sam@dellamartaconsulting.com)





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