

# Child protection and sports volunteers

Research conducted for sportscotland by

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# The brief

- The effect of child protection legislation on the numbers of volunteers in sport in Scotland and the impact on the volunteers' work
- The context – achieving a balance between trusting and helping volunteers; and protecting children from risk of abuse

# **An emotive subject – media sensitive**

**Time for sanity in the vetting of volunteers**

Daily Telegraph, 26/6/08

**Child safety laws mean adults 'scared to approach children'**

Guardian 26/6/08

**If we can't learn to trust each other, we will lose ourselves and our children**

Independent on Sunday 29/6/08

**Now you need a licence to interact with children**

Spiked 26/6/08

**A quarter of adults to face 'anti-paedophile' tests**

Daily Telegraph 2/7/08

**Parents banned from ferrying children to sports matches**

Daily Telegraph, 2/7/08

**Volunteering tsar points to hindrance from red tape**

Guardian 10/3/08

# Child Protection legislation in Scotland

- Police Act 1997
- Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003
- Disclosure checks for new volunteers working with young people <18 years

# The process in Scotland at present

- Club identifies volunteer and asks volunteer to complete a disclosure check.
- In practice an enhanced disclosure will always be required for prospective volunteers working with children - standard disclosures are not relevant.
- Disclosure administration in sport is conducted by one of three organisations - first, an umbrella organisation (normally the SGB); second, the club; or third, another body, such as a local sports council.
- The SGB/club/other sends the volunteer a form to complete which asks for personal details to verify their identity..

# The process 2

- The volunteer takes or sends these documents to a person from the SGB/club/other who checks that they confirm identity.
- The SGB/club/other sends the forms to the Disclosure Agency
- Both the volunteer and the SGB/club/other are sent a record of offences.
- The only information which automatically excludes the volunteer from working with children is if the person is formally disqualified from working with children.

# The process 3

- Most offences do not invoke automatic exclusion - decision to use the volunteer made at SGB or club level. Procedures vary by sport - in some the SGB makes the decision, in others the SGB makes a recommendation but the club decides. When the club handles the administration, it then makes the decision.
- Decisions made by a variety of means - some SGBs have an expert panel; some SGBs consult CHILDREN 1ST; in other organisations it may be one person, the nominated child protection official, who makes the decision.

# The process 4

- In some cases SGB/club/other receives 'soft' information about applicants, such as arrests and charges, as well as 'hard' information on offences.
- Ideally decisions should not be based on disclosure information alone, but also on normal recruitment documentation, e.g. references, qualifications. It is likely that practices vary across organisations.
- CHILDREN 1ST recommend a right of appeal against decisions, but it is not known how many organisations have a right of appeal.

# Previous research: on the one hand ...

- A third of English organisations surveyed believed that CRB checks have deterred potential new volunteers
- Complying with child protection legislation was the second most commonly expressed concern in a survey of Scottish sports clubs
- For certain types of people, CRB checks are a barrier to volunteering

# Previous research: on the other hand ...

- Volunteer Development Scotland survey, 2006:
  - for 85% of respondents, disclosure checks would not affect willingness to help with children
  - 71% agreed that we are achieving a balance between safety and risk

# The research

- funded by **sportscotland**
- aimed to examine the impact of child protection legislation on volunteers in sports clubs in Scotland
- New information because :
  - it focussed on child protection legislation
  - it compared this with other barriers to volunteering
  - it sought the views of individual volunteers as well as organisations
  - it considered benefits as well as problems

# Research methods

- telephone interviews with
  - key agencies (14)
  - Active Schools Coordinators (19)
- E mail surveys via SGB distribution lists to
  - current volunteers (744)
  - disengaged volunteers (69)
  - potential volunteers (169)
  - club representatives (52)
  - child protection officers (15)

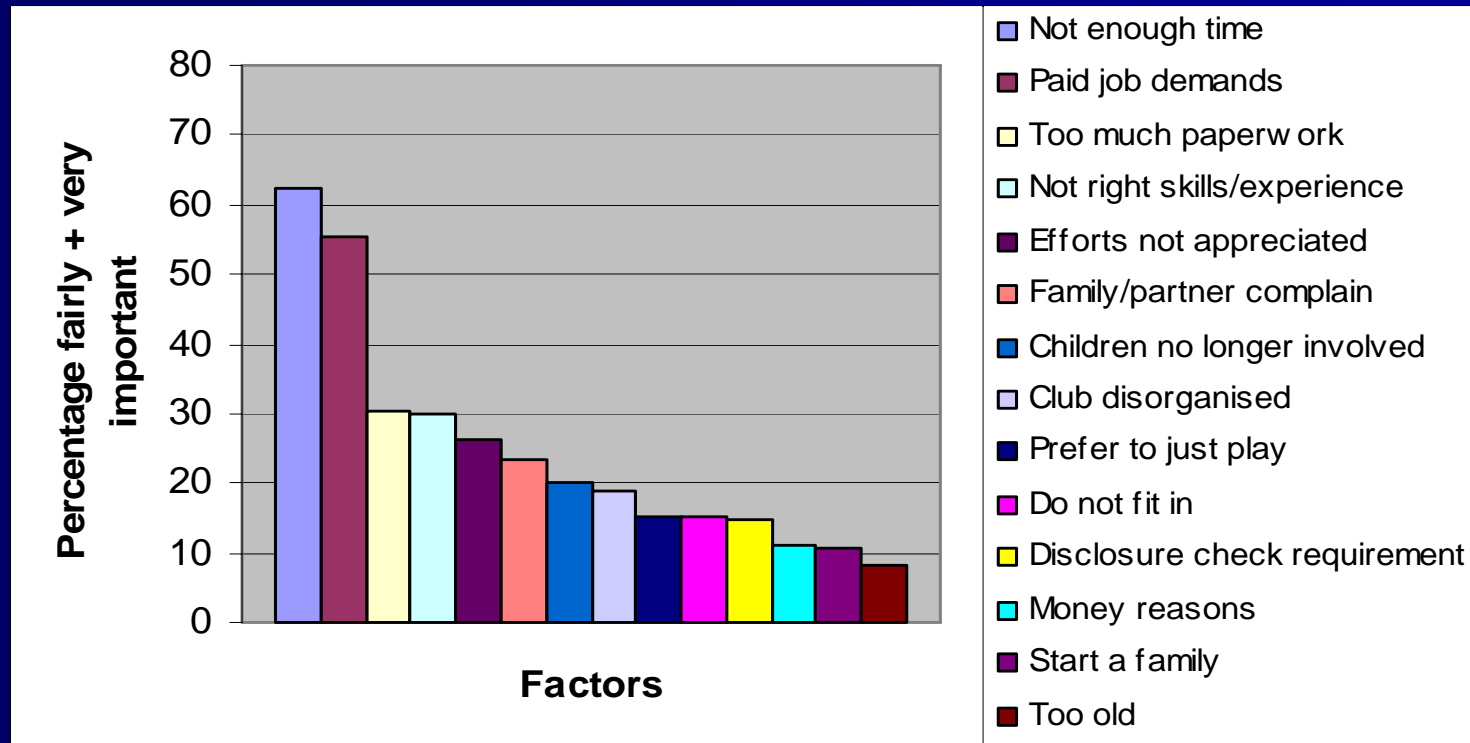
# Results: impacts on preventing unsuitable people and on volunteer numbers

- 71% of club representatives disagreed that disclosure checks had prevented volunteers coming forward
- 69% of clubs had administered disclosure checks in the previous 2 years (median of 2 per club); 31% of clubs had administered no disclosure checks in the previous 2 years
- In the 52 clubs surveyed, no unsuitable volunteers had been removed by the disclosure process in the previous 2 years

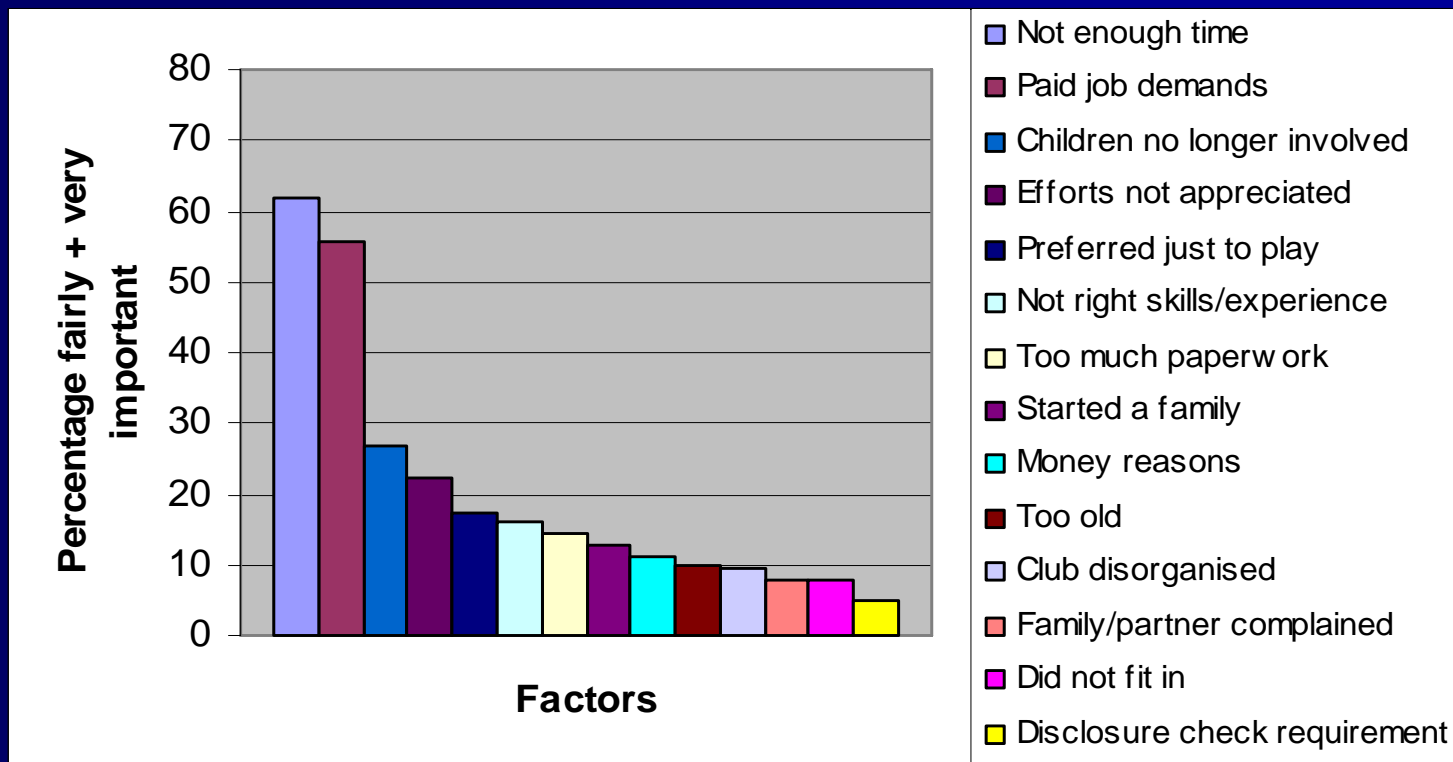
# Low disclosure outcomes

- This could mean any or all of the following:
  - unsuitable people are deterred from volunteering (intended result)
  - people with offences irrelevant to volunteering are deterred (unintended result)
  - people with convictions have a low propensity to volunteer

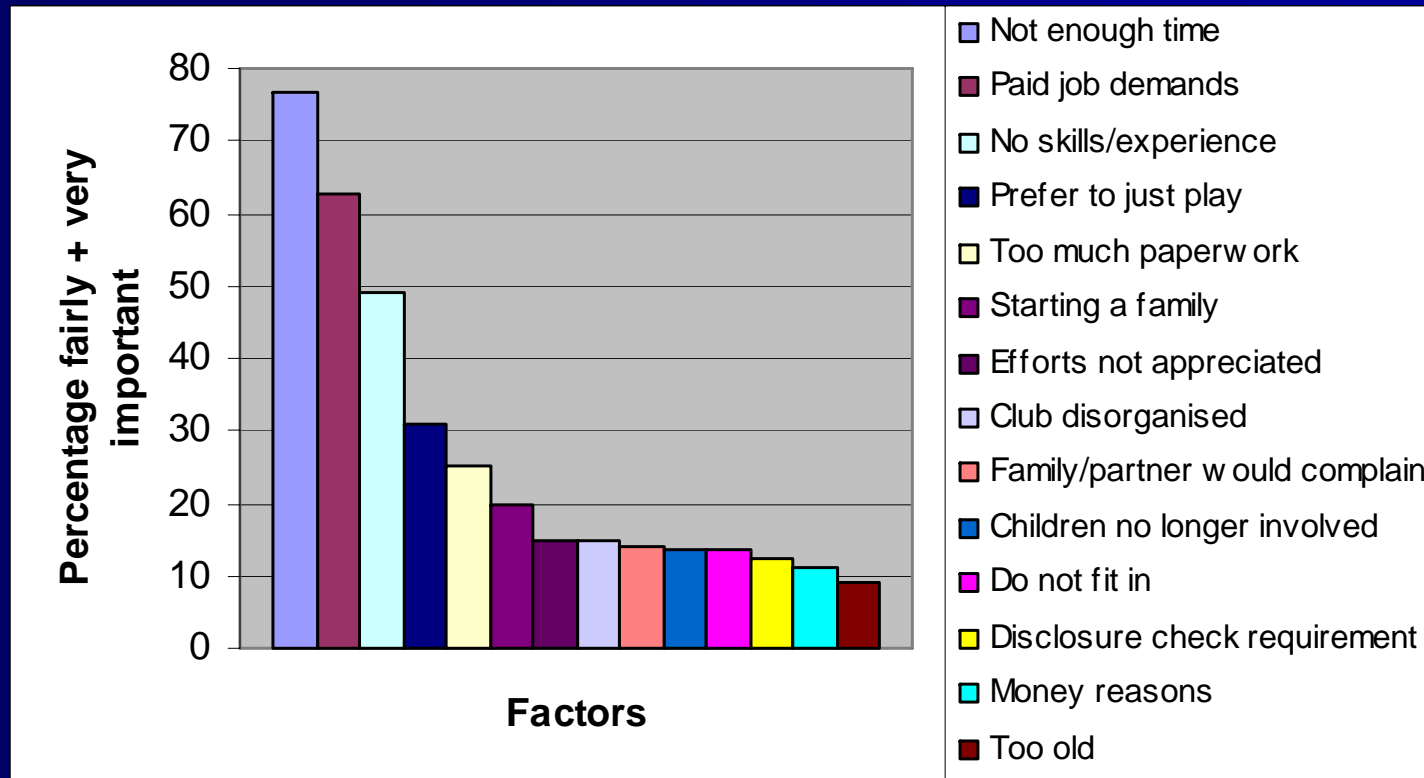
# Is Child Protection Legislation a threat to current sports volunteers?



# Was Child Protection Legislation an important reason for sports volunteers stopping?



# Are disclosure checks a barrier to potential sports volunteers?



# So how important are disclosure checks to volunteers?

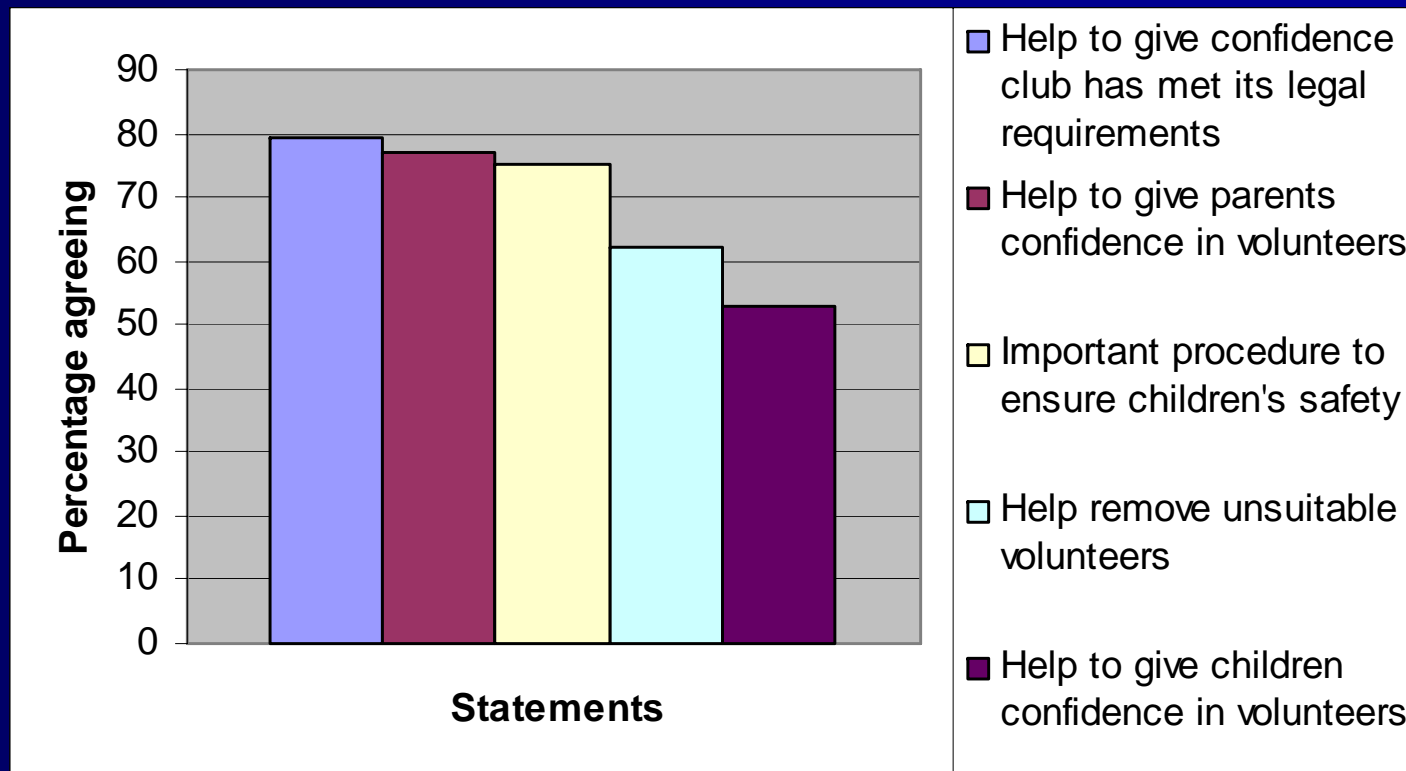
- For all three groups the need to take a disclosure check is low down the list of barriers to volunteering
- Much more important are time pressures, pressures from paid work, family commitments, etc.

# Nevertheless ...

- 66% of volunteers and members felt that disclosure checks were discouraging, because of the need to take a new one for every organisation
- And a minority have strong opinions:

"Nothing threatens my volunteering more than the feeling I have that I can no longer be trusted to do what I've done for many years without being checked up on, lectured to, and generally being treated with suspicion by people who do no volunteering work. If only the same effort could be put into helping volunteers"

# Positive impacts on work of sports volunteers in clubs



# Negative impacts on work of sports volunteers

"I am currently the child protection officer for the club. I find the procedures very onerous, time consuming and in some cases the child protection advice is contrary to common sense and is all about 'covering your back'. It sometimes makes you 'frightened' to work with children and, as a result of other commitments, makes you less likely to fulfil the role. I will be giving this role up in March and it is unlikely anyone else from the club will volunteer."

# Conclusions

On the one hand:

- Positive responses by majority of volunteers to the effects of the legislation
- Disclosure checks are not important threats/barriers to sports volunteering for the majority of people in relation to other problems

# Conclusions

On the other hand:

- A minority of volunteers are very unhappy with disclosure checks
- Multiple disclosures are unpopular (but will not be necessary under new legislation coming into force)
- Low disclosure volumes in sports clubs suggest little or no effect
- Adds to the work of volunteers at club and SGB levels.

# Conclusions

Furthermore:

- Still no reliable evidence on deterrent effects on both unsuitable and suitable volunteers with criminal records
- there is a need to "reconcile the drive to reduce risk in many areas of our collective life with the promotion of spontaneous and informal voluntary action"

# Recommendations

- clear guidance provided at all levels of sports administration and for volunteers.
- lead bodies to promote the purpose and the benefits of legislation for the protection of children and position it positively as part of more comprehensive procedures for the development of volunteers. Provide models of good practice for clubs and SGBs.

# Recommendations 2

- Professional support, provided through the umbrella organisations for disclosure checks - e.g. SGBs and local sports councils - with an additional role of promoting good practice in volunteer development.

# New legislation

- creation of a central barring unit, with disclosures being transferable between organisations thus removing the need for multiple checks for an individual.
- extension to cover vulnerable adults as well as children
- retrospective checking for existing volunteers

# Further research...

- Case studies of clubs to examine the practical difficulties faced by clubs in implementing disclosure checks and the work of Child Protection Officers
- The work of SGB officers who give support to Child Protection Officers -many of these are volunteers themselves.
- Monitoring of the number of disclosure checks undertaken for sports clubs by umbrella organisations and outcomes

Full report and summary at:

<http://www.sportscotland.org.uk/cpvols>