

Reports of child protection and safeguarding concerns in sport and leisure settings: an analysis of English Local Authority data between 2010 and 2015

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Data availability statement: All data provided for this study is taken from a Freedom of Information Request made in 2015/16 to all English Local Authorities. Each authority must publish all data provided under the Freedom of Information Act (2000), therefore, this data can be located through the website of each LA. In addition, the full data set is available from the corresponding author.

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The abuse of children in sport has received considerable attention in recent years not least in the UK, where high-profile disclosures of abuse by former sports professionals has led to several independent inquiries and reviews. Subsequent public and media interest has focused on the potential scale of child abuse in sport. This scrutiny has highlighted how little data there are in this area, in a sector that thrives on statistics. This paper analyses official reports of child abuse in sport and leisure settings received by local authorities (LAs) in England during a five-year period (2010-15) across a range of factors. Findings show that English LAs have varying capacity to provide data on sport/leisure contexts; receive substantively different volumes of reports of child abuse in sport/leisure; and record reports of *sexual* abuse in sport at higher levels than other forms of abuse. These data suggest that abuse in English sport is significantly underreported but that reports per annum increased over the period.

Keywords: child abuse; maltreatment; safeguarding; sport; Local Authority; reporting

Introduction

Evidence of child sexual abuse in sport emerged in the mid-1980s (Brackenridge & Lyons, 1986). In the UK, a co-ordinated response began in 2001, with the creation of

the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU¹). While there have been significant developments in sport since this time (see, Lang & Hartill, 2015), there remain extensive gaps in our knowledge, not least the absence of robust data on reports of child protection and safeguarding concerns in sport.

Most attempts to quantify child abuse rely on retrospective surveys of (young) adults' experiences as children (e.g., Radford et al., 2011). Alexander, Stafford and Lewis (2011) explored students' (aged 18-22) retrospective views of sport participation (up to age 16). 75% of the 6,124 respondents said they had experienced 'emotional harm', 24% said they had experienced 'physical harm', 29% reported experiencing 'sexual harassment' and 3% said they had experienced 'sexual harm' (defined narrowly as being 'forced' to engage in sexual activities as well as someone exposing themselves).

Studies measuring the prevalence of child abuse in sport have been conducted outside the UK. Vertommen et al. (2016) surveyed 4000 adults about their childhood experiences in sport; applying a broad definition of violence, they found 38% of all respondents reported experiences with psychological violence, 11% with physical violence, and 14% with sexual violence. In a study of *sexual violence* and *elite* athletes, Ohlert, Seidler, Rau, Rulofs and Allroggen (2017) found, from 1,529 respondents (16 years and above), 38% had experienced at least one sexual violence situation (contact and non-contact behaviours) in sport and 11% reported a severe form. Parent et al. (2015) conducted a prevalence study with a representative sample of 6,450 14-17-year-olds in Quebec. For those in the sample considered to be 'athletes' (i.e., affiliated to a

1. The CPSU is a capacity-building organisation that works to support sports organisations to keep children safe from harm.

sports club), the prevalence rate of sexual abuse was 8.8%, somewhat lower than the rate of 10.2% for the general population (Parent et al., 2015).

As important as such data are, they tell us little about the extent to which the abuse of children in sport is being reported, the nature of such reports or official responses to them. As Jud, Fegert and Finkelhor (2016, p. 17) note, ‘far less attention has been paid to analysing reported incidents of alleged child maltreatment’. Official statistics on child abuse have long been understood to be unreliable indicators of the prevalence of abuse due to low reporting rates. However, analyses of reports made to authorities provide important insights into reporting behaviour – patterns and variations within and between communities or sectors – and the cultural context within which reporting structures exist. Such data can complement prevalence studies and inform strategic approaches to policy-making and prevention efforts.

Safeguarding ‘standards’ have applied to sports organisations funded by Sport England since 2003². Sports organisations are required to adopt procedures for managing referrals of abuse, including recording all incidents and allegations. There is currently no uniform approach to the collection of such data. Some researchers have, however, drawn on statistics gathered by National Governing Bodies of sport (NGBs). Brackenridge, Bringer and Bishopp (2005) analysed 132 of the 152 cases opened and closed by the Football Association (FA) between April 1999 and August 2002. These referred to both current and non-recent allegations between 1967 and 2002, including allegations relating to incidents outside football. The study found that 14 of the

2. Only sports and NGBs funded by Sport England are required to implement the CPSU Standards as a condition of funding.

allegations related to sexual abuse (10.6%), 30 to physical abuse (22.7%), 20 to emotional abuse (15.2%), and five related to neglect (3.8%).

More recently, Rhind, McDermott, Lambert and Koleva (2014) used a 15-item questionnaire with 41 NGBs in 2011. These NGBs recorded 134 reports (20.6%) relating to physical abuse, 124 (19%) relating to sexual abuse, 68 (10.4%) relating to concerns around criminal convictions, 66 (10.1%) relating to emotional abuse, and 66 (10.1%) relating to bullying. The study also provided data on gender, finding that 91% of the alleged perpetrators were male and in 65% of reports the 'victim' was also male.

Reporting child abuse

The Children Act 2004 imposed a duty on all agencies involved with children to safeguard and protect them, prevent impairment of their health or development and promote their welfare. The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 notes that its provisions, '...apply to all persons working regularly or frequently with children or vulnerable adults, including those working within voluntary and community organisations' (Welsh Assembly Government, 2007, p. 6). Nevertheless, there is currently no *legal* obligation for individuals to report child protection concerns in England. Statutory 'guidance' is issued by the government in the form of *Working Together to Safeguard Children*. This guidance, first issued in 1988 (Department of Health and Social Security [DHSS], 1988), provides definitions of abuse and neglect with related processes to guide organisations' safeguarding and child protection responsibilities. The latest version was published in 2015 (Department for Education [DfE], 2015), however, earlier versions are most relevant in the context of this study (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF], 2010; DfE, 2013).

Working Together 2010 states, ‘if somebody believes or suspects that a child may be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm³ then s/he should always refer his or her concerns to the local authority children’s social care services’⁴ (DCSF, 2010, p. 139). Following a referral, ‘the decision should be recorded by local authority children’s social care’ (DCSF, 2010, p. 144). Also relevant is the role of the LADO – Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). The LADO is a statutory position within each authority for ‘the management and oversight of individual cases’⁵.

Data reported to LAs form the basis of the DfE’s annual ‘Children in Need’ census, established in 2013 (DfE, 2016). This provides data on the volume and nature of safeguarding concerns referred to children’s social services. Amongst the aggregated data published by the DfE is the *primary* need of referred children. These range from abuse and neglect, to safeguarding concerns related to the family’s low income. Anonymised data on the number of children identified as ‘in need’, the number of referrals and assessments, and the source of the referral are also published.

While these data are informative, information on the setting to which the referral relates is not required. Consequently, the number of referrals made to LAs in relation to any specific setting, including sport and leisure, is not collated centrally. Nevertheless, specific details of referrals are recorded by LAs and these records do contain useful

³ According to the Children Act 1989 (s.31): “‘harm’ means ill-treatment or the impairment of health or development including, for example, impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another; “development” means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development; “health” means physical or mental health; and “ill-treatment” includes sexual abuse and forms of ill-treatment which are not physical. Where the question of whether harm suffered by a child is significant turns on the child’s health or development ... [which] shall be compared with that which could reasonably be expected of a similar child.’

4. Or to the police if a child is at immediate risk.

5. Revised government guidance (DfE, 2015) no longer refers to LADOs but makes clear that LAs should have a designated officer or team of officers.

contextual data. Arguably, this point of capture offers a more independent, robust and sustainable source for the comparison of reporting data (including outcomes) than that found within specific sectors. It also offers geographically sensitive data. Furthermore, as sport agencies do not currently publish data on safeguarding reports as a matter of course, LA data offer an important source for researchers to draw upon to establish longitudinal patterns and trends – a feature sorely missing from the past 15 years of child protection in sport.

The study

To establish how data could be retrieved, the first author consulted with an experienced LADO. This resulted in the development and dissemination of a Freedom of Information Request (FOIR) in 2015 to all 151 LAs in England. It asked the following question:

During the period April 1st 2010 – March 31st 2015, how many child protection referrals/allegations relating to a sport/leisure setting did you receive in each financial year?

Definitions of *sport* and *leisure* were not provided. Instead, a list of general categories was provided – for example, ‘athletic sports’, ‘net/wall/racket sports’, ‘health/fitness sports’ and ‘outdoor pursuits’ – each accompanied by illustrative examples. This was intended to encourage a broad definition of ‘sport’ or ‘leisure’ activities whilst providing sufficient clarity about the contexts we were interested in. We referred to ‘sport/leisure’ as some activities, such as swimming, are clearly understood to be a ‘sport’ whilst also being an activity that most ‘swimmers’ engage in as a leisure activity.

Other activities are generally not understood as ‘sport’ in any strict definition, yet they represent ‘sporting’ or ‘athletic’ activities within organised contexts that children may participate in. UK sport council’s do not apply a definition of sport and recognise a wide range of activities that may not be considered ‘sport’, such as life-saving, yoga, caving and rambling. The intention, then, given LAs are not required to report the setting in which abuse is reported (only the source of the referral), was to capture the widest range of ‘sporting activities’ in which children participate. This means the data certainly includes reports emanating from ‘recognised’ NGBs and activities that clearly fall within the ‘sport’ category, but also reports that fall beyond this, such as reports relating to leisure centres or outdoor pursuits centres.

Authorities were asked to organise their response according to categories of abuse given within a reporting table. The definitions for these categories (e.g., sexual abuse) are provided within the relevant statutory guidance ‘Working Together’ (DCSF, 2010; DfE, 2013⁶) and the definitions within both are the same. As all LAs are required to respond to FOIRs within 20 working days, the response rate was 100%. However, some authorities refused to supply the information requested. Therefore, ‘response rate’ here is operationalised as those instances where a LA returned data either in whole or in part. We refer to these returns as ‘positive returns’⁷. Within these positive returns, there were significant differences in the fullness or quality of the data provided. For example,

6. *Working Together to Safeguard Children* 2010:

<http://www.lcitylscb.org/media/1151/working-together-2010.pdf>

7. These include null responses (i.e., the LA reported that they had received no referrals relating to sport/leisure).

within the East region, Essex returned data for 39 reports, but excluded several categories from their return, reducing the extent to which it is possible to establish patterns and develop comparative analyses. Cambridgeshire, whilst returning 51 reports, did not utilise the table provided at all. Therefore, associations between variables could not be made and much of these data have had to be input under ‘Not Known’⁸. It is not possible to present all the findings here. Below, we present our analysis of LA responses to the FOIR.

Results

LAs in England are organised by 10 regions. Table 1 shows the total responses received (N=151), by region, including *refusals* (N=81) and *positive returns* (N=70). It also shows the 5-17 population within each region, as well as within the responding authorities. Figure 1 illustrates the discrepancy in the extent to which regions are able to provide such data.

Table 1

Figure 1

A further significant factor is the relative size of each region, which may be determined by the child population. Such data are provided by the Office for National Statistics and

8. ‘Not Known’ refers here to either the absence of data under a specific category (e.g., sex of child) provided by the LA within the FOIR (in some cases redacted data), or to instances where the LA explicitly stated they do not hold this information.

presented in the annual ‘Children in Need’ survey. 5-17 years-old was considered the most relevant age range in relation to youth sport participation⁹.

Therefore, Table 1 also shows the 5-17-year-old population within each region, as well as the corresponding figure for the authorities that responded to the FOIR. The regions are ranked according to volume of positive responses. As Table 1 shows, the four regions (South East, North West, East, West Midlands) with the highest volume of 5-17-year-olds all had a *positive return rate* of less than 50%. Nevertheless, the total sample of responding authorities (N=70) accounts for 51% (N=4,221,946) of the 5-17 population in England (N=8,243,176).

Thus, positive returns were supplied (in whole or in part) by 70 LAs (‘responding authorities’) – a positive return rate of 46%. However, a ‘Refusal Notice’ was returned by 81 LAs (‘non-responding authorities’). The refusal rate and the reason given for refusal is worth considering.

Refusals

Three main categories of refusal were: 1) *information not held*: 13 LAs (9%) stated they did not hold the data requested; 2) *data protection*: 9 LAs (6%) refused to provide data as they believed to do so would breach the Data Protection Act 1998 and thus claimed exemption under section 40 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000; and 3) *provision of the information would exceed statutory cost limits*. Where such information is recorded, it is often located in a ‘free-text field’. These data are often only retrievable through a manual search of records. The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) 2000

9. National data on children’s participation in sport is not available until 2019 (via Sport England’s new ‘Active Lives’ survey).

allows LAs to refuse a request for information if it estimates the cost of complying would exceed the ‘appropriate limit’. The Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 set this limit at £450 (based on a calculation of 18 hours’ work at £25 per hour of staff time). Many authorities refused on this basis. For example, Bedford Borough Council stated:

... the only way to ascertain referrals relating to the Sport/leisure settings would require a manual check of every referral. We have 1,000+ referrals every year, so this would take us over the 18-hour threshold to complete.

Other authorities offered a more detailed breakdown. For example, Greenwich Council stated:

To locate, retrieve and extract the information, one officer will have to read through [19,435] records to extract where the allegation took place. This would take approximately 4.5 minutes ... to locate file and 3 minutes to retrieve and extract the information. $4.5 \times 19,435 \text{ files} / 60 \text{ minutes} = 1,457 \text{ hours}$.

Therefore, the cost to Greenwich to complete this request – assuming the rate of £25 per hour of staff time – would be £36,425. Other authorities stated the cost explicitly:

There are a total of 13,599 records relating to the periods you have requested ... We have estimated it would take at least 20 minutes per case to locate, extract and retrieve the information and answers to the various questions you have posed in your request. This would equate to approximately 4,533 hours or a cost

of £113,325 based on an hourly rate of £25 per hour. (Royal Borough of Greenwich)

It is noteworthy that while 70 authorities were able to conduct a review of their records, retrieve relevant data and complete the request, within FOI legislation, 58 (38%) authorities refused on the basis that fulfilling the request would exceed time/cost limits. Half of the regions had refusal rates over 50%, the most common reason for exemption being cost, accounting for 72% of all (N=81) refusal notices.

Key findings

Positive returns: reports recorded by LAs

The FOIR asked for specific data on each report received by an authority. The request yielded data from 46% of 151 English LAs¹⁰ (N=70). In some returns it was not possible to verify that multiple reports with identical details did not refer to the *same* incident or individual. In such cases just one report was recorded in our data. The 70 responding authorities returned useable data on 1,013 distinct safeguarding reports related to sport/leisure settings, received and recorded by them between 1st April 2010 and 31st March 2015. Below we present descriptive statistics followed by discussion of these data.

LAs are individually responsible for child protection, therefore, the most significant level of analysis and comparison is at the level of individual authorities.

10. The Isles of Scilly were excluded (under 18 population = 385)

However, as English LAs are also grouped according to 10 geographical regions, analysis was also conducted at this level.

Regional reporting

Given the regional differences in response rates, it is unsurprising there are also regional differences in the *number* of reports recorded (see Table 2). Nevertheless, some analysis of the regional data is warranted.

Table 2

Figure 2 illustrates the regional differences, including the number of LAs returning data within each region.

Figure 2

The South West sample recorded 210 reports – 21% of all reports returned (Table 2) – yet these authorities (N=10) constitute only 14% of the responding authorities. This equates to an average of 42 reports per year across 10 LAs that have a combined responsibility for approximately 602,000 5-17-year-olds (DfE, 2016). At the other end of the table, the 10 authorities from Outer London recorded just 54 reports – just over 5% of all reports recorded. This amounts to an average of five reports per year across 10 LAs with a combined responsibility for approximately 471,000 5-17-year-olds. Also noteworthy is the East region: just two (from 11) authorities (3% of the sample, albeit with combined responsibility for approximately 311,000 (33%) 5-17-year-olds in the

East region) returned 90 reports, constituting nearly 9% of all reports recorded in this study.

Figure 3

Figure 3 illustrates the regional data by year. It shows there is, generally, a gradual *upward* trend in reporting in all regions. In some regions this is particularly pronounced in 2014-15. Combining returns for all reports across all authorities, there is a 146% increase in the reports received across the five-year period (2010: N=130; 2015: N=320).

Reporting within Local Authorities

Figures 4 and 5 illustrate the returns submitted, across all categories of concern, for each LA: Figure 4 groups LAs by region; Figure 5 presents the sample in ascending order according to the volume of reports returned by each LA.

Figure 4

Figure 4 illustrates the substantial differences in reporting between authorities in the *same* region (without accounting for relative size). It also shows that reporting in the London authorities appears to be lower, overall, than in other regions.

Figure 5

As Figure 5 illustrates, there is considerable difference in the volume of reports received by LAs during this five-year period. The 10 authorities that disclosed the *most* reports,

constituting 14% of the sample, account for 41% (N=421) of the total reports returned. Yet the 10 authorities with the *fewest* reports accounted for less than 1% (N=9) of the total. Significantly, the lower 50% of the responding LAs (by volume of reports) recorded only 15% (N=157) of all reports. Moreover, 30% of responding LAs (N=21) recorded only five or fewer reports across the full five-year period; 16% (N=11) recorded two or fewer. Therefore, on average, in nearly 50% of responding authorities (N=32) only one report or less per year is received in relation to a sport/leisure setting.

Again, in appraising these figures, it seems relevant to take account of the size of the authority in terms of the number of children within its boundary. In relation to the 20 authorities that returned *most* reports (within which only the two London regions do *not* feature), there appears to be little or no correlation between an authority's size (measured by the 5-17 population) and the volume of reports it receives related to sport/leisure settings. To illustrate, Wiltshire, with a 5-17 population of less than 76,000, returned data on 40 reports, whereas Surrey, with a 5-17 population of over 183,000, returned data on just 16 reports. Similarly, Swindon, with a 5-17 population of less than 35,000, returned 32 reports whereas Coventry, with a child population over 51,000, returned just a single report.

Reports by category of abuse and year

These data also allow analysis of the nature of the alleged (*primary*) harm referred to in each report. As Figure 6 shows, of the 1,013 reports received, 47.4% (N=480) related to *sexual abuse*, 19.7% (N=200) to *physical abuse*, 3.5% (N=35) to *emotional abuse*, 2.6%

(N=26) to *neglect*, 10.7% (N=108) to *other* (such as ‘conduct’ or ‘suitability’), and 16.7% (N=169) were not classified (*not known*)¹¹.

Figure 6

Reports referring to *sexual abuse* are by far the most common in relation to sports/leisure settings, constituting nearly 50% of the total reports recorded for the period. As Figure 7 shows, this pattern applies to each region also.

Figure 7

Reports categorised as relating to *physical abuse* constitute 20% of all reports, however, *emotional abuse* and *neglect* combined constitute just 6% of all reports received. 10% (N=106) relate to reports categorised as *other*.

As Figure 8 illustrates, for both *sexual* and *physical* abuse, the volume of reports received increased each year in the five-year period. The increase in reports of *sexual abuse* is particularly marked in 2014-15.

Figure 8

11. Based on respondent concerns about cost, the following caveats apply: one LA (South West region) searched *only* for data on sexual abuse referrals; one LA (Yorkshire & Humberside) searched *only* for referrals from leisure centres for the year 2014-15.

Adult-child relationship and characteristics

LAs identified the sex of the individual (adult) reported – the ‘alleged perpetrator’ – in 635 (63%) reports; in 378 (37%) reports, the sex of the individual was not given. In total, 91% (N=575) of the reports providing relevant data referred to a *male* (‘male reports’) and 9% (N=60) to a *female* (‘female reports’). In total, 73% of *female reports* and 70% of *male reports* related to adults in the role of *coach/instructor*.

The role (or title) of the individual against whom the report/allegation was made was given in 64% (N=650) of returns. As Figure 9 illustrates, of these, the overwhelming majority, 80% (N=517), referred to a *coach* or *instructor* and a further 13% (N=84) referred to *volunteers* or *sport officials*; 3% (N=18) referred to *leisure centre workers*, 2% (N=14) referred to *teachers*, 1.4% (N=9) referred to *referees*, and 0.5% (N=3) referred to a *parent*. In total, 0.8% (N=5) of returns referred to another *child*. However, in 36% (N=363) of returns the *role* of the individual reported was withheld or *not known*. Of the returns identifying a *coach* or *instructor* (N=517), 9% were female, 78% were male and 14% did not state or else withheld this information.

Figure 9

As Figure 10 illustrates, of the 60 *female reports*, 45% (N=27) related to reports of *physical abuse*, 22% (N=13) to *sexual abuse*, 12% (N=7) to *emotional abuse*, 3% to *neglect*, 8% to *other* concerns; for 10% the category of concern was withheld or *not known*. The *male reports* present a different picture, at least in relation to *sexual* and *physical* abuse. Of the 575 reports identifying a *male* individual, 58% (N=331) refer to *sexual abuse* and 20% (N=115) refer to *physical abuse*; 4% (N=21) refer to *emotional abuse*, 1% to *neglect*, 11% to *other* and 7% *not known*.

Figure 10

As Figure 11 illustrates, the sex of the child – the ‘alleged victim’ – was withheld or *not known* in 54% (N=551) of reports (all categories) and stated in 46% (N=462) of reports. Of these 462 *known* reports, the child was identified as *male* in 40% (N=185), *female* in 57% (N=263), and *male and female* in 3% (N=14) of reports.

Figure 11

Where a female adult was identified (N=60) (Figure 12), the child was *male* in 33% (N=20) of reports, *female* in 40% (N=24) of reports and both *male and female* in 1.7% (N=1) of reports. For 25% (N=15) of these reports the sex of the child was not known.

Figure 12

Figure 13

Where a male adult was identified (N=575) (Figure 13), the child was *male* in 27% (N=154) of reports and *female* in 40% (N=228) of reports. For 31% of these reports (N=180) the sex of the child was not known. Figure 14 illustrates these data comparatively.

Figure 14

Where the child was identified as male (N=185), the adult was *male* in 83% (N=154) of reports, *female* in 11% (N=20) of reports and *not known* in 6% (N=11) of reports (Figure 15). Where the child was identified as female (N=263), the adult was a *male* in

87% (N=228) of reports, *female* in 9% (N=24) of reports and *not known* in 4% of reports (Figure 16).

Figure 15

Figure 16

In reports where the child was identified as *male* (N=185), the age of the child is recorded as 0-10 years in 24% (N=44) of cases and between 11-17 years old in 50% (N=93) of cases; in 26% (N=48) the age of the male child was not given (Figure 17). In reports where the child was identified as *female* (N=263) the age of the child is recorded as 0-10 years in 16% (N=42) of cases and between 11-17 years of age in 57% (N=150) of cases; in 27% (N=71) the age of the female child was not given (Figure 18).

Figure 17

Figure 18

In reports where the child was identified as *male* (N=185) the type of abuse was categorised as follows: *physical*: 46% (N=85), *sexual*: 35% (N=65), *other*: 8% (N=14), *emotional*: 6% (N=11), *neglect*: 4% (N=7), *not known*: 2% (N=3) (Figure 19). In reports where the child was identified as *female* (N=263) the type of abuse was categorised as follows: *sexual*: 70% (N=183), *physical*: 14% (N=36), *other*: 10% (N=27), *emotional*: 4% (N=11), *neglect*: 0.4% (N=1), *not known*: 2% (N=5) (Figure 20).

Figure 19

Figure 20

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse was reported far more than other forms of abuse. In these reports (N=480) the adult was identified as *female* in 13 reports (2.7%), *male* in 331 reports (69%) and *not known* in 136 reports (28%) (Figure 21). In these reports the child was identified as *female* in 183 cases (38%), *male* in 65 cases (13.5%), *male and female* in 6 cases (1%) and *Not Known* in 226 cases (47%). From the 344 reports of *sexual abuse* where the sex of the *adult* was stated, 96% identified a male, 4% a female.

Figure 21

The sex of both adult *and* child, within each report of *sexual abuse* (N=480), was identified for 245 reports (51%). Where the adult was identified as *male* (N=331), the child was *male* in 18% (N=58) of reports, *female* in 52% (N=172), *male and female* in 2% (N=6) of reports, and in 29% of these reports the sex of the child was not identified. Where the adult was identified as *female* (N=13) the child was identified as *male* in 15% (N=2) of reports, *female* in 54% (N=7), and in 31% of these reports the sex of the child was not identified (Figure 22).

Figure 22

Outcomes

LAs were offered a small range of descriptors to categorise the outcome of a report in addition to the level of the investigation that was conducted – either *internal*, i.e. the sport setting, or *external* i.e. LA or police. In 40% (N=406) of the reports recorded, LAs either withheld data on outcome or were unable to provide it. However, an outcome was

documented and returned in 60% (N=607) of reports. In many instances more than one category might apply, however, only one category – the most significant provided – was applied. Thus, whilst an individual who is *convicted* would likely also have been *suspended*, *resigned* and/or *dismissed*, this report would be recorded under ‘conviction’.

In a few instances, cases were labelled as *current* or *ongoing*, therefore, no final outcome had been reached. In 16.5% (N=100) of returns only the level of investigation was provided: 8% of returns reported an *internal* investigation, 7% reported a *police* investigation, and 1.5% a *social services* investigation. Specific data on outcome was provided for 507 reports.

Figure 23

In total, 16.6% of these reports were designated *substantiated* and 2.2% as *founded*. We take these to mean the same thing. Beyond these cases, 2.1% were categorised by an individual being *suspended* from their role, 1.3% were categorised as *cease to use* (where an organisation stops using an individual’s services), and just under 5% of cases were categorised as *dismissal*. Three reports were recorded as a *police caution*, and in 8.7% of reports the LA identified a *conviction* (N=53); two cases resulted in an *acquittal* following trial.

Further data on convictions were extracted. In total, 48 of the 53 convictions (91%) related to a report of *sexual abuse*. Two of the 53 convicted were reported as female; of these, one conviction related to a report of *sexual abuse*, the other to a report of *physical abuse*. 51 of the 53 convictions (96%) related to male perpetrators; of these, all but four (92%) related to reports of *sexual abuse* – two related to *physical abuse* and two were listed as *other*.

Overall, 13.3% of reports were designated *unsubstantiated*, 11.8% as *unfounded*. These should not be confused. An *unsubstantiated* allegation refers to a report where there is insufficient evidence to support the allegation, whereas an *unfounded* allegation is one determined to be untrue/erroneous (Lang & Pinder, 2016). Within the *unfounded* reports, 1.3% (N=8) were categorised as *malicious*. In 16.6% of reports (N=101) the outcome was designated as *no further action* and in a small number of cases the report was *passed on* to another organisation.

Discussion

Availability of data

Our first observation relates to the difference in how LAs interpreted the FOIR. For some, sharing such data was perceived as a potential risk to the anonymity of those connected to the report and, therefore, a breach of The Data Protection Act (1998). Yet for many, this was either not considered a risk or considered a risk that could be managed by excluding/redacting elements of the data requested. While the collated data, as presented here, pose no threat to an individual's privacy or confidentiality, LAs must publish their responses to FOIRs, so clearly data protection is a crucial consideration and must be done on a case-by-case basis. The solution would seem to lie in the systematic collection and collation of these data at a regional and national level, and we recommend that the various stakeholders in UK sport lobby for such a system.

Differential regional responses

Nearly 50% of all LAs provided the requested data in whole or in part. Therefore, whilst not representing a full data set, these data offer a strong indication of the overall

national picture. Nevertheless, the lack of data from so many authorities is disappointing. The ‘refusal rate’ varied from 33% (South West) to 72% (East) (Figure 1), therefore, we do not emphasise differential volumes of reports at the regional level. However, the regional data is noteworthy and should be of interest to regional and national safeguarding leads and committees. For example, the finding that LAs within *Inner* and *Outer* London, with a combined responsibility for over 1.8 million children, receive, on average, a little over one report relating to a sport/leisure setting per authority per year is cause for concern and should be considered further. The vast difference between LAs estimates of cost to fulfil this information request also needs further investigation and explanation.

Differential reporting between LAs

These data show significant differences in the volume of reports received and recorded by LAs. Many LAs received one report or less per year on average, yet others received 10 or more. Whilst it may be reasonable to expect the child population within an authority’s jurisdiction to correlate with the number of reports received (i.e. more children, more reports), no such correlation is evident from these data, suggesting other factors are at play. It may be that influences on levels of reporting are geographically sensitive and influenced by local systems, policies, procedures and initiatives.

Therefore, further longitudinal and qualitative investigation is required to confirm if, and why, LAs have such different volumes of reports relating to sport/leisure settings.

Moreover, because *setting* is not a reporting category required by government, as it stands the ‘Children in Need’ census is of very limited relevance to sport agencies. To manage safeguarding and child protection in sport (in its broadest sense)

strategically, such data seems an essential basis from which to plan future interventions and strategies.

Underreporting

The NSPCC's survey of childhood experiences in sport found emotional harm was reported by 75% of student respondents compared to 29% for sexual harassment and 3% for sexual harm (Alexander et al., 2011). These figures and other more robust studies of prevalence (e.g. Ohlert, et al., 2017; Parent et al., 2015; Vertommen et al., 2016) suggest that 1,013 reports over a five-year period, between LAs with responsibility for over 4 million children represent significant underreporting of abuse in sport/leisure settings rather than low levels of actual abuse. Given that sexual abuse, within these data, is by far the most reported category, it also appears that underreporting of physical abuse, emotional abuse and neglect in sport/leisure settings is even more extreme.

Underreporting is a persistent problem in the child protection field and many national campaigns have been targeted at encouraging individuals to report their concerns. Despite reference to 'mandatory reporting' (see Mathews, 2015) and a call for the government to 'consider extending a Duty to Report to all sports organisations' within a recent government-sponsored review of sport (Grey-Thompson, 2017), there seems to be little appetite to consider the introduction of mandatory reporting responsibilities within British sport (or other contexts) – a view apparently not shared by the US Congress (see, 'Protecting Young Victims from Sexual Abuse and Safe Sport Authorization Act 2017'). Nevertheless, despite over 15 years of safeguarding and child protection in sport policy and training, these data suggest there is much more work to be done.

In particular, sport agencies might focus greater attention on education around emotional abuse and emphasise the importance of reporting behaviour or incidents that constitute such abuse but are too often considered a necessary part of the game, as ‘character building’, or non-harmful. Currently, it would appear that emotional abuse in English sport is rarely reported, therefore, such behaviour cannot be robustly challenged through appropriate investigation. Given the findings from the NSPCC’s study of university students (Alexander et al., 2011), it is impossible to believe, from the data presented here, that emotional abuse, in particular, is being appropriately identified and/or reported. Furthermore, emotional abuse is often a precursor to (child) sexual exploitation. The formal reporting of and subsequent investigation into such behaviour, which should already occur under the provisions of current safeguarding policy, is likely to offer a far more robust challenge to the frequently noted normalisation of abusive behaviour within sport settings.

Types of report and increases in reporting

More positively, and keeping in mind these data represent only 46% of English LAs, there appears to have been a slow but gradual increase in reporting of child abuse in sport/leisure settings. This applies to each region also. As already noted, a crucial caveat is that this relates to sexual abuse (and to some degree physical abuse). There are many unknowns here that can really only be answered through further systematic and more comprehensive data collection. This increase could represent a real increase in the incidence of (sexual) abuse, but equally – and we suggest more likely – it may represent a growing sensitivity to sexual abuse in British society, greater awareness of abuse in non-familial contexts such as sport, coupled with an increased willingness to report it.

Potentially this could be associated with the development of safeguarding in English sport since 2001, however, the increases since 2014 are perhaps better explained by reference to the extensive media coverage of sexual abuse within institutional settings in the UK, especially around Sir Jimmy Savile¹² and other high-profile figures from 2012 onwards. Our survey stopped 20 months or so short of the unprecedented attention on sexual abuse in sport initiated by the public disclosures of ex-professional footballers beginning in November 2016 (see, Taylor, 2016). Further analysis of post-2015 data would enable an assessment of the impact of this on reporting levels and characteristics.

Characteristics of individuals reported

The individual reported (the alleged perpetrator) in these data was overwhelmingly *male* and most often occupied the role of *coach* or *instructor*. Where a female was the subject of a report, she was also most often a *coach*.

Across all categories, from 462 reports containing the relevant detail, the child was most often *female* (57%) but was identified as *male* in 40% of these reports. In relation to sexual abuse, the data suggest that reports are over twice as likely to refer to a female child and that the adult is overwhelmingly likely (96%) to be male. Our analysis also shows that reports identifying a child under the age of 11 are more likely to refer to a *male* child, whereas reports identifying a child over the age of 10 are more

12. A celebrated national figure famous for children's entertainment and charitable work who was found to be a prolific sex offender (for more than five decades) shortly after his death in 2011, prompting several national inquiries into institutional failings in organisations such as the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation), the NHS (National Health Service) and the Department of Health.

likely to refer to a *female* child (replicating findings by Vertommen et al., 2016). These findings may represent real differences in victimisation, but they might also indicate that as male children in sport mature, their experiences of abuse become less visible (and/or reportable) to the adults around them. However, the volume of returns where the sex of the child was *not known* (54%) means these figures must be treated with caution.

Further, in contrast to Alexander et al. (2011) reports of sexual abuse received by LAs relating to peer abuse are negligible. This issue clearly requires far more investigation within sport contexts.

Outcomes

Understanding what happens following a report seems crucial for strategic approaches to child welfare in sport. Our sample of LAs returned specific *outcome* data for 50% (N=507) of all reports received. Just under 20% of these reports were recorded as *substantiated* or *founded* with specific action to remove the individual from the setting in a further 8% of reports; nearly 9% resulted in a *conviction* (nearly all of which related to a male perpetrator of child sexual abuse) whilst 13% were recorded as *unsubstantiated* and 17% were recorded as *no further action*. 12% of reports were deemed *unfounded* and future studies might usefully attempt to understand the experiences behind this figure. Systematic tracking of cases, from initial report to completion, must be a fundamental feature of efforts to improve the welfare of children in sport and offer a means of evaluating the efficacy of reporting cultures, policies and processes over time.

Conclusion

Child abuse prevention within sports settings has not, to date, been informed by robust data that can reveal patterns and trends. Such data can and should inform strategic policy-making. Strategic approaches should not be confined only to places and settings that fall within a narrow definition of ‘sport’ but should account for the broad array of ‘sporting’ activities that children and young people engage in. Most of the data presented here are not, as far as we are aware, systematically collected, collated or analysed by sports agencies or government. Clearly, more comprehensive data are required and we suggest this would require collaborative, cross-sector work. However, this data set provides a useful starting point from which to begin longitudinal, geographically sensitive data collection that can reveal patterns in reporting behaviour in sport and leisure settings. Such analysis can provide an essential evidence base for the evaluation of safeguarding measures and inform strategic responses to child abuse in sport at national, regional and local levels. Finally, there is a need not just to collect more reliable data on reporting, but also to understand why abuse in sport is, at least in our view, significantly underreported. Therefore, qualitative research into reporting practices, or cultures, is required across sporting contexts if we are to better understand and address this problem. Furthermore, comparisons with jurisdictions where mandatory reporting laws do and do not include sport-specific roles would be very valuable.

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TABLES

Table 1: LA responses by region of England, ranked according to the volume of positive returns received, with child population data

10 Regions of England	Total LAs	Refusals	Positive Returns (Sample)		5-17 years population			
	N	N	N	%	Region		Sample	
					000s	rank	000s	rank
South West	15	5	10	67%	775	7	602	2
North East	12	5	7	58%	374	10	209	9
East Midlands	9	4	5	56%	693	8	314	7
York. & Humber	15	7	8	53%	813	6	530	3
Outer London	19	9	10	53%	844	5	471	4
South East	19	10	9	47%	1,372	1	844	1
West Midlands	14	8	6	43%	897	4	432	5
North West	23	14	9	39%	1,078	2	333	6
Inner London	14	10	4	29%	475	9	178	10
East	11	9	2	18%	922	3	311	8
Total	151	81	70	46%	8,243		4,224	

Table 2: Safeguarding reports recorded by LAs 2010-2015 by type of abuse and region

REGION	Sexual Abuse		Physical Abuse		Emotional Abuse		Neglect		Other		Not Known		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
S West	127	26.5	53	26.5	6	17.1	6	23.1	3	2.8	15	9.0	210	20.7
S East	71	14.8	29	14.5	3	8.6	4	15.4	32	30.2	6	3.6	145	14.3
Y&H	48	10.0	11	5.5	5	14.3	3	11.5	6	5.7	50	30.1	123	12.1
E Mids.	52	10.8	24	12.0	11	31.4	9	34.6	5	4.7	3	1.8	104	10.3
East	27	5.6	11	5.5	0	0	1	3.8	3	2.8	48	28.9	90	8.9
W Mids.	58	12.1	19	9.5	3	8.6	1	3.8	6	5.7	2	1.2	89	8.8
N East	31	6.5	18	9.0	2	5.7	0	0	20	18.9	16	9.6	87	8.6
N West	30	6.3	12	6.0	0	0	0	0	20	18.9	23	13.9	85	8.4
O London	26	5.4	18	9.0	4	11.4	1	3.8	2	1.9	3	1.8	54	5.3
I London	10	2.1	5	2.5	1	2.9	1	3.8	9	8.5	0	0	26	2.6
TOTAL	480	100	200	100	35	100	26	100	106	100	166	100	1013	100
% of all reports	47.4		19.7		3.5		2.6		10.5		16.4		100	

FIGURES

Figure 1: LA responses (N=151) showing *refusals* (N=81) and *positive returns* (N=70)
– by region

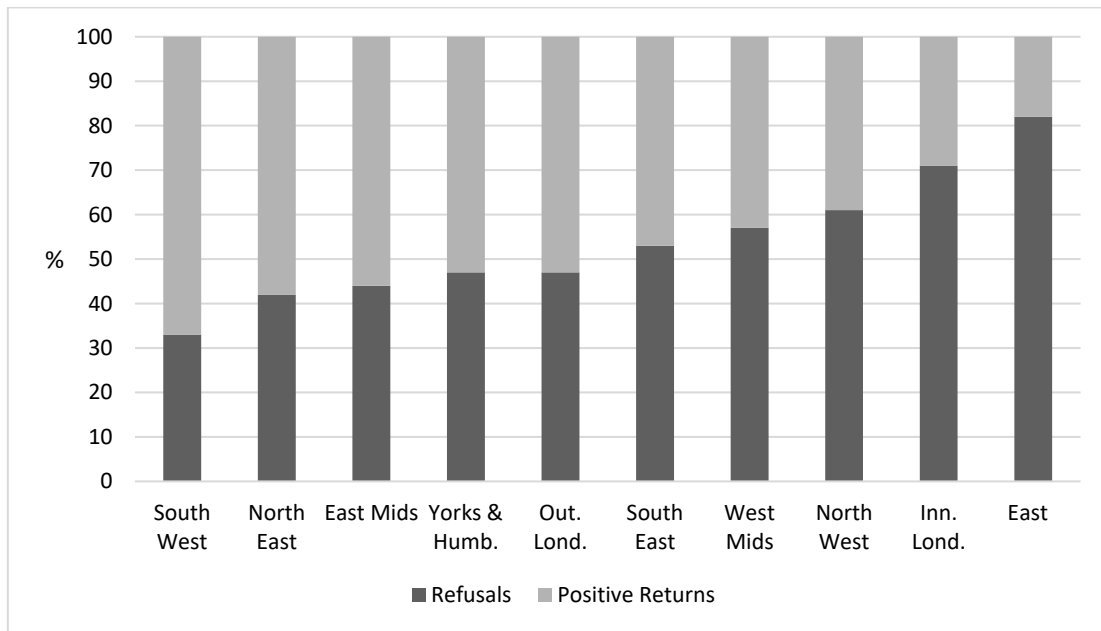


Figure 2: Reports (N) received by 70 English LAs of child abuse in sport/leisure 2010-15, by region

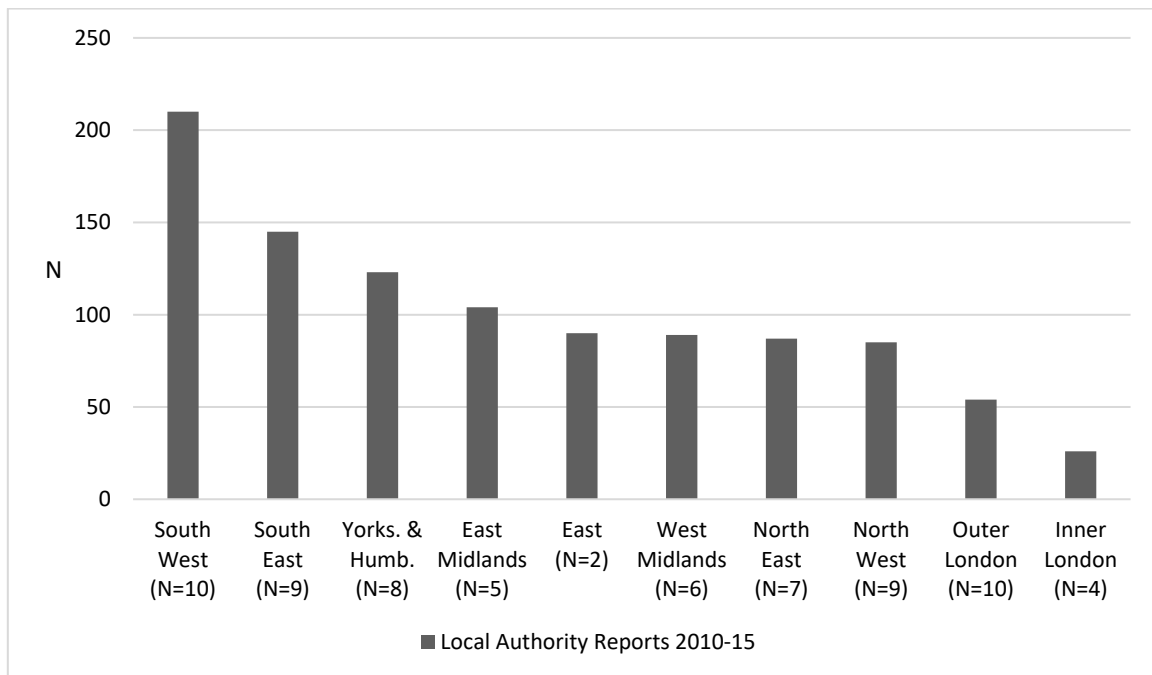


Figure 3: LA returns by region and year

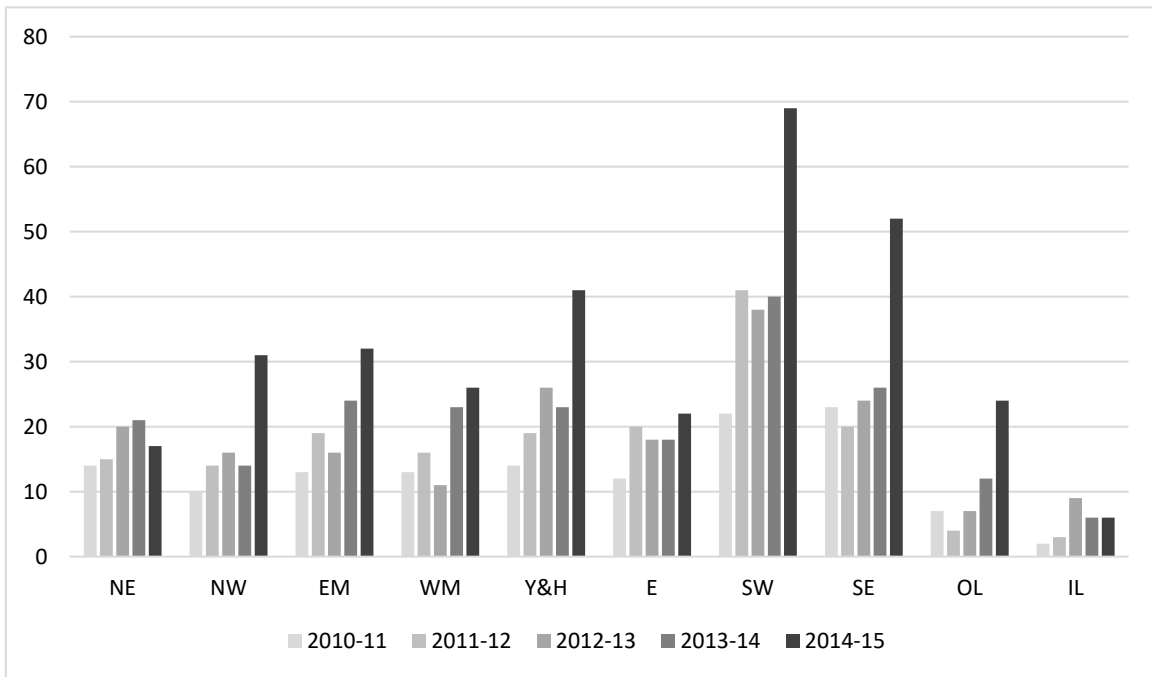


Figure 4: Individual returns (N) (all categories) from 70 English LAs, by region (incl. 3 null reports, not visible)

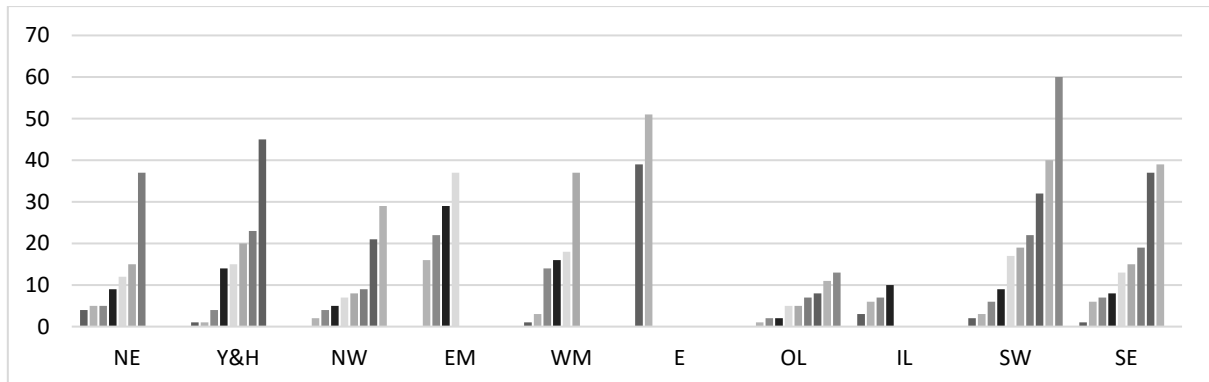


Figure 5: Individual reports (N), all categories, from 70 English LAs (incl. 3 null responses)

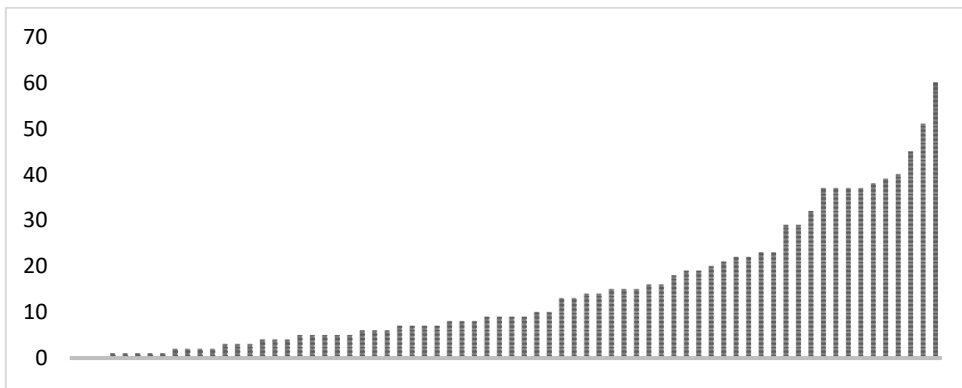


Figure 6: Reports to LAs (2010-15) by (primary) type of abuse recorded

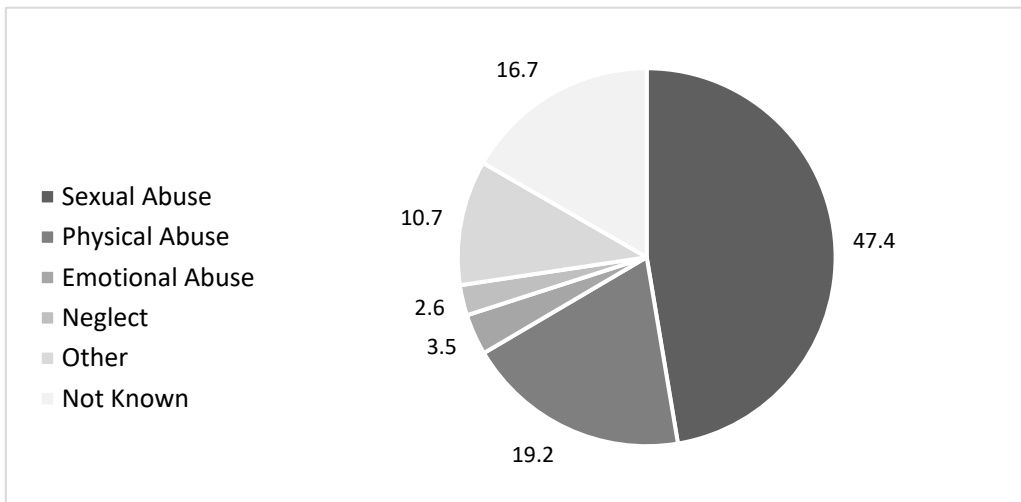


Figure 7: Reports to LAs (2010-2015), by region and type of abuse

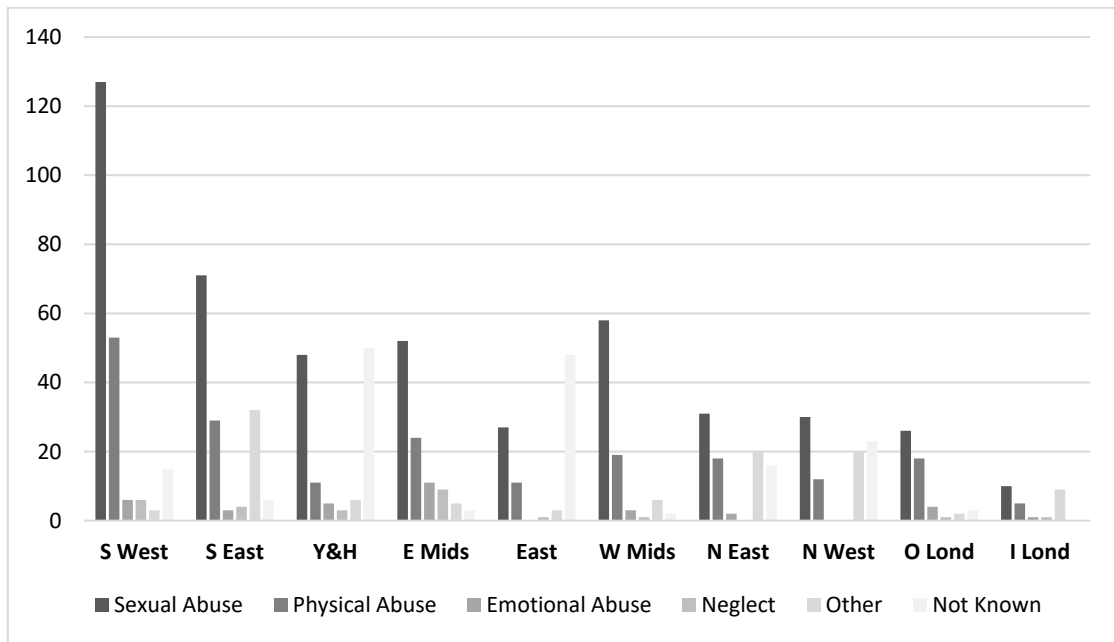


Figure 8: Reports to LAs by year and category

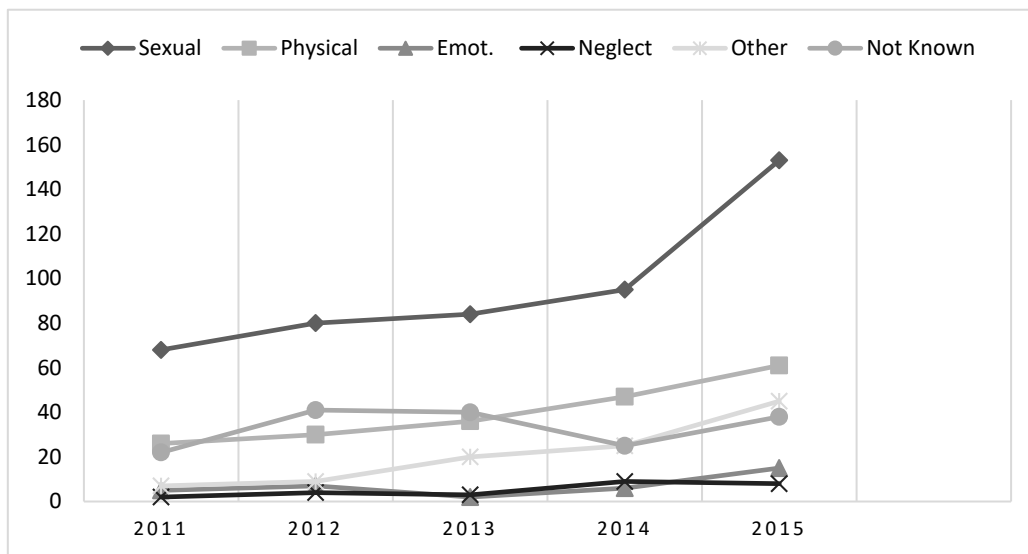


Figure 9: Role of individual identified in report (N=1,013)

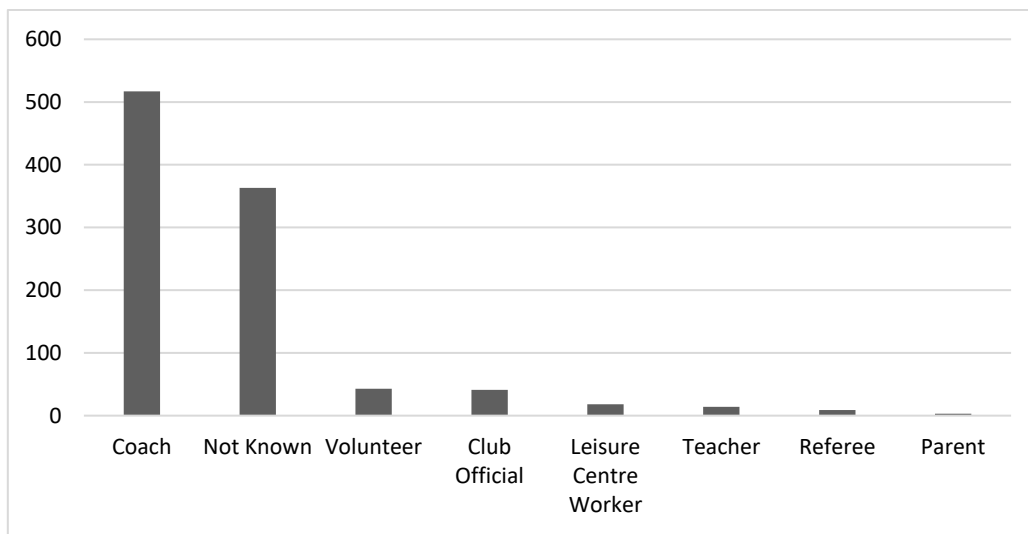


Figure 10: Sex of individual reported (N), by category of abuse

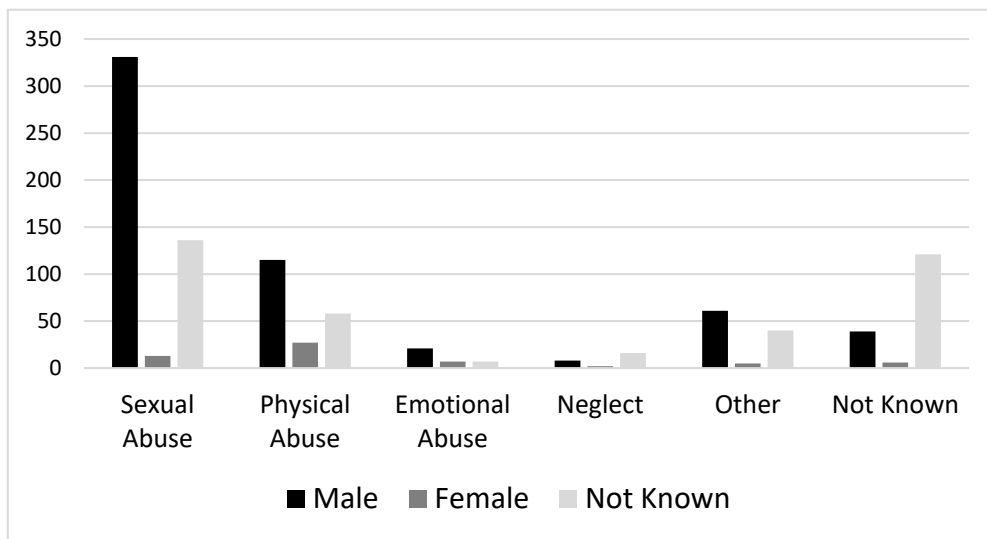


Figure 11: Sex of child (all categories of abuse)

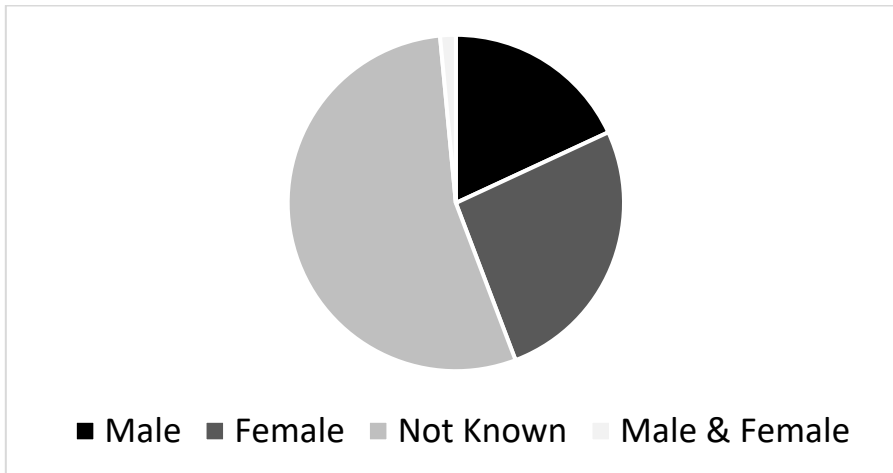


Figure 12: Sex of child when adult identified as *female*

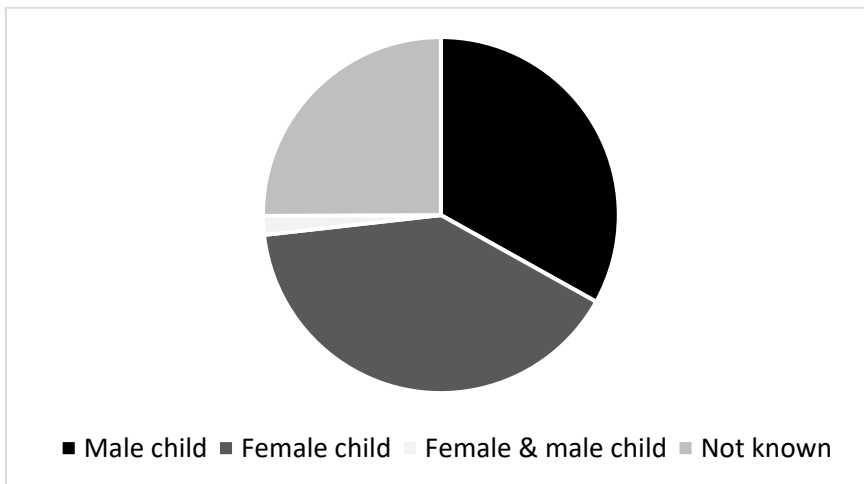


Figure 13: Sex of child when adult identified as *male*

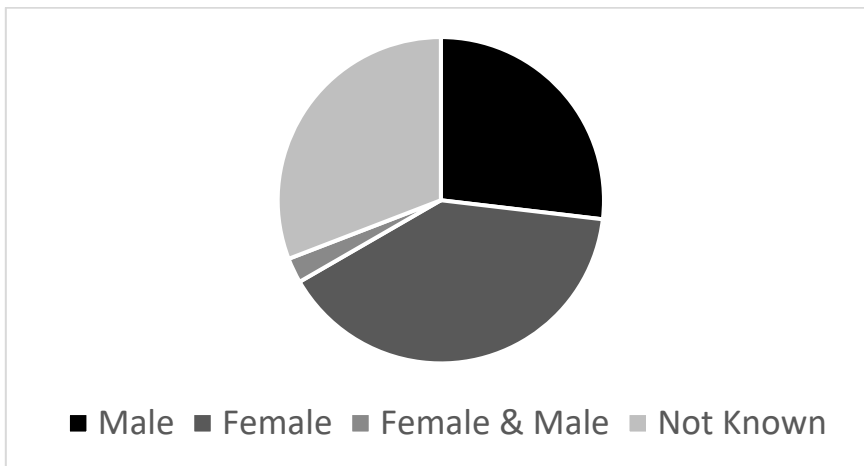


Figure 14: Sex of adult reported by sex of child (all categories of abuse)

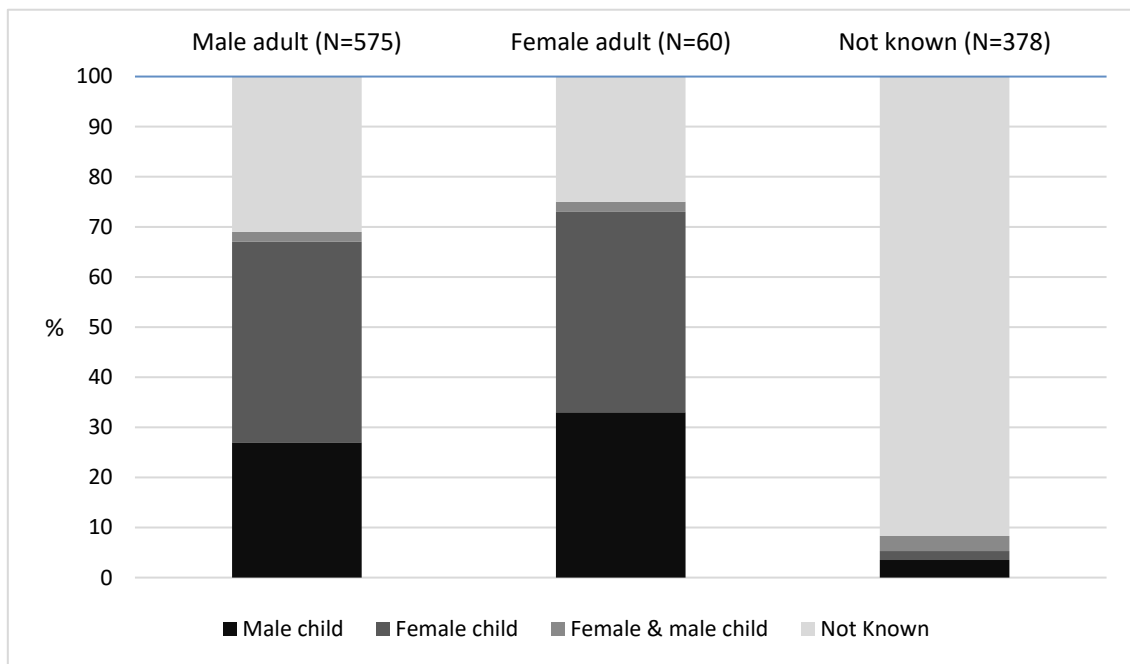


Figure 15: Sex of adult when *child* identified as *male* (N=185)

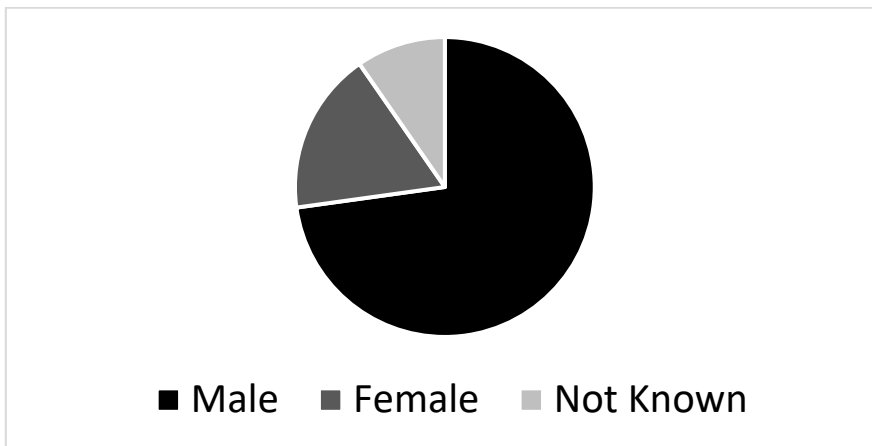


Figure 16: Sex of adult when *child* identified as *female* (N=263)

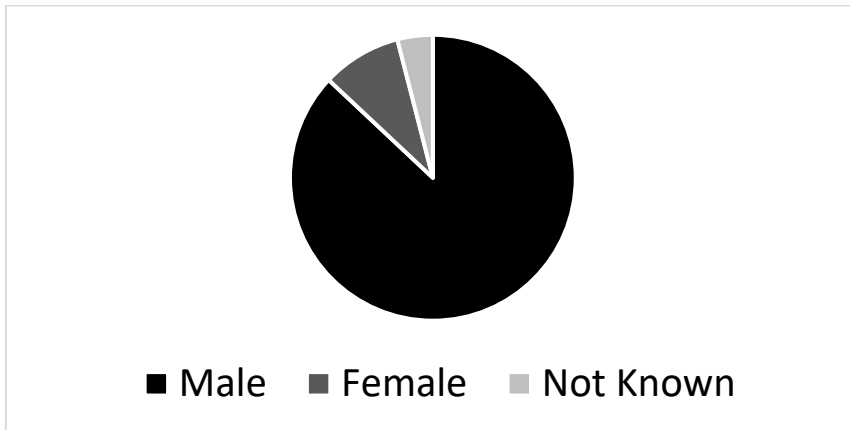


Figure 17: Age of *male* child (N=185)

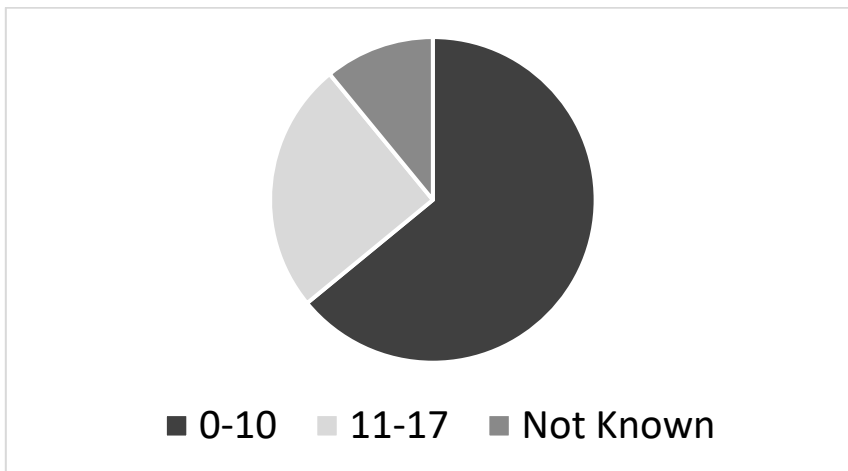


Figure 18: Age of *female* child (N=263)

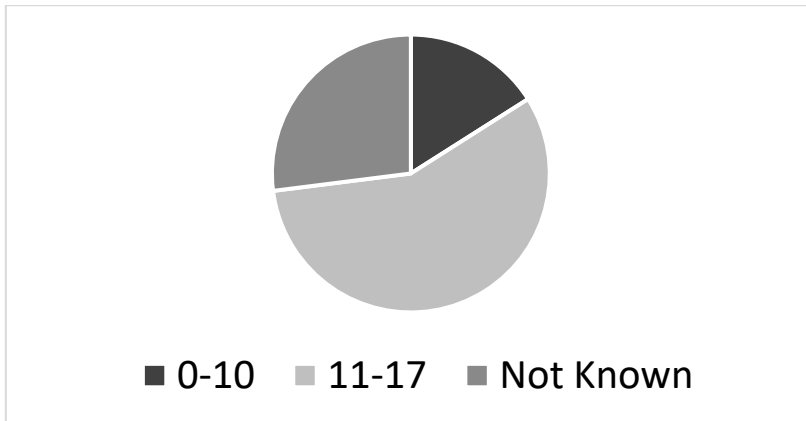


Figure 19: Type of abuse when child identified as *male* (N=185)

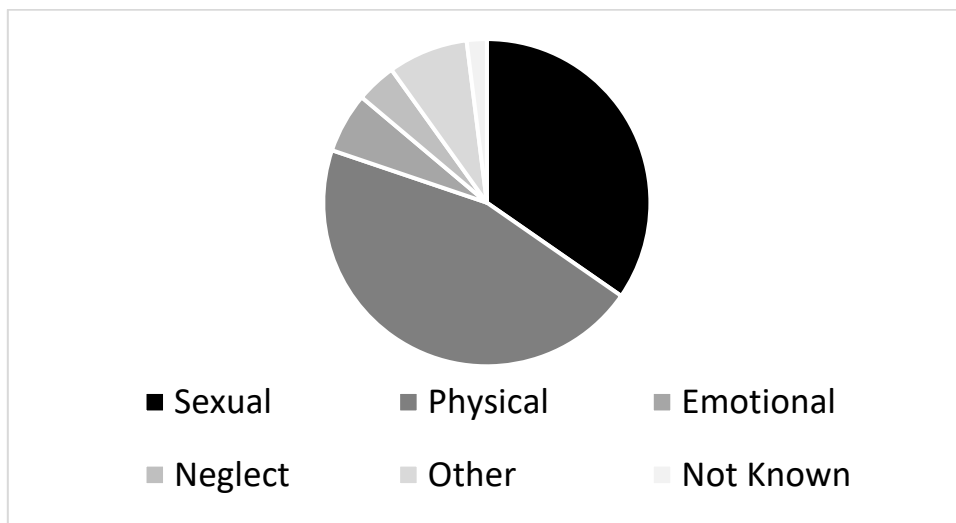


Figure 20: Type of abuse when child identified as *female* (N=263)

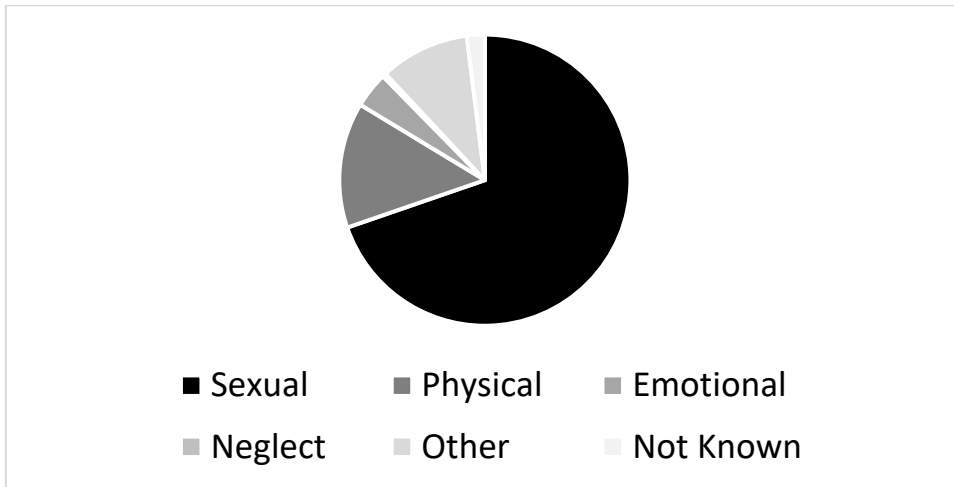


Figure 21: Sex of adult when report referred to *sexual abuse* (N=480)

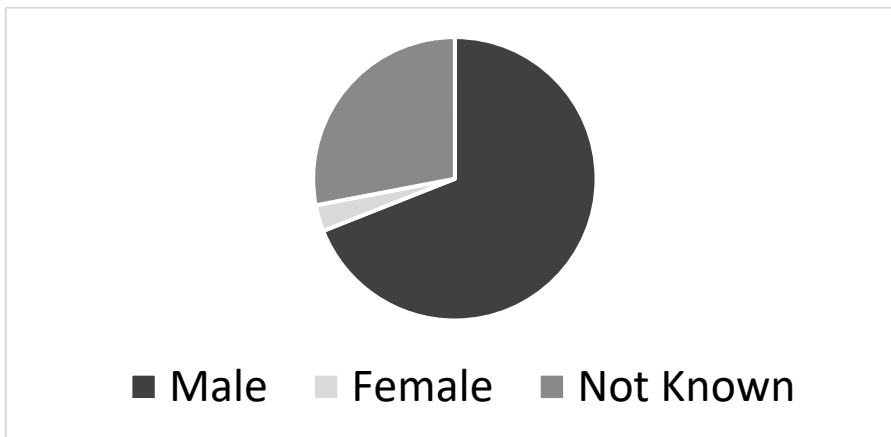


Figure 22: Sex of adult and child identified in reports referring to *sexual abuse* (N=480)

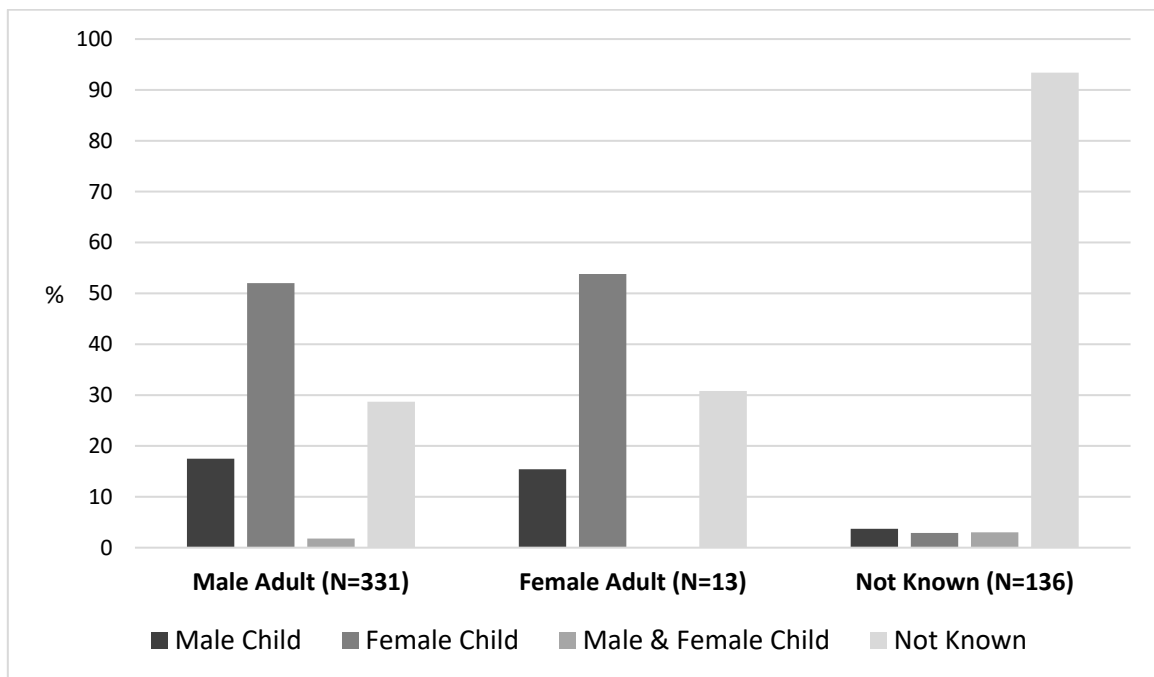


Figure 23: Outcomes where LA stated a specific outcome (N=507)

