

Institution: Edge Hill University		
Unit of Assessment: C24 Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism		
Title of case study: Prevention of child sexual abuse in sport		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Mike Hartill	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Professor	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2000-date
Period when the claimed impact occurred: August 2013 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Research into child sexual abuse (CSA) in sport has had impact at national and international levels through promoting the voices and concerns of victims of CSA in sport, raising awareness of the problem of CSA in sport, and providing an evidence base to advise and guide national level organisations and inquiries. Through long-standing research and projects working directly with victims, support organisations and the sport sector, Hartill's research has resulted in a substantial change in how the problem of CSA is viewed and acted upon by sporting administrations and governing bodies in the UK and across Europe. The work has led to the establishment of victim-led advisory panels, new safeguarding strategies and policies, and, most fundamentally, a deep, meaningful and unique engagement between victims of abuse and the sports sector itself. As a result of his established research expertise, Hartill acted as the only academic advisor to the recent FA inquiry into CSA across football. His research has significantly shaped the forthcoming recommendations and outcomes from the inquiry.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>The research focused on child sexual abuse (CSA) in sport, specifically the impact of abuse on victims, and the responses of the sport sector to this problem. The research combines critical theoretical arguments with sensitive empirical research. Hartill (<i>output 1</i>) highlighted that research and policy had ignored the situation of male victims, arguing that 'sport ... provides a context conducive to sexual abuse and it is only through radical cultural change that this problem can be addressed.' This research drew particular attention to the sexual abuse of boys and argued that 'without greater knowledge of the lived experiences of boys sexually abused in sports', theoretical accounts and wider understanding would be partial and limited. Hartill (<i>output 2</i>) argued that the abuse of children in sport constituted a 'hidden history' and that the concealment and 'cover-up' of abuse was widespread rather than limited to a few 'bad apples', whilst access to the 'corridors of power' by those seeking to address the problem was extremely limited. Hartill (<i>output 3</i>) argued that 'masculinist forces that continue to dominate youth-sport have served to completely silence the voices of victims (boys and girls, women and men) of sexual violence in sport,' but observed that disclosures from male survivors in sport were 'set to proliferate'. Hartill (<i>output 4</i>) presented a number of 'survivor' narratives based on original qualitative research with male and female victims of CSA in sport. This work offered a substantive, original, theoretical exploration of CSA in sport, combining feminist and sociological approaches to child abuse with a critical analysis of sport. This emphasised the importance of situated knowledge ('lived experience') for both understanding and preventing abuse in sport, whilst rejecting medicalised, pathological approaches and emphasising the importance of a critical interrogation of the social spaces and cultural contexts created, and persistently reproduced, by a hyper-masculinist field. Qualitative interviews with survivors of CSA in sport (<i>outputs 3,4,5</i>) explored their experiences, life histories and trajectories. The research enabled individual lives to be recounted, in detail, well beyond the features or characteristics of the abuse experience, so that the social, cultural and historical dimensions were brought into focus alongside, and through, the biographical. The initial research provided space for survivors to tell their story in their own terms.</p> <p>The research explored and highlighted the extreme psychological strain placed on young athletes who are subjected to sexual abuse (including the 'grooming' process), as well as the long-term emotional and social impacts. The analysis located gendered antecedents of their abuse experiences within the cultural, historical and institutional features of their sports environment. Therefore, it situated the abuse within institutional and cultural domains, whilst highlighting the</p>		

significant personal challenges faced by victims of CSA, as children *and* adults, who continued to 'live the abuse'. Participants often commented that their involvement in the research was a positive experience for them and that they would find it empowering to contribute to prevention work and be more involved in research. Hartill (*output 5*) also devised an innovative Freedom of Information request in order to generate sorely needed quantitative data on reporting of abuse in sport. This highlighted both the scarcity of such publicly available data on this problem, as well as the difficulty in accessing it and illustrated significant underreporting of abuse in sport in the UK. This work led to the initiation of two (ongoing) major studies, led by Hartill, on the scale of abuse and neglect in [European](#) (2018-2021) and UK sport (2020-21). Therefore, the research provides both qualitative and quantitative evidence bases relating to abuse in sport that are being utilised and endorsed by the sport sector. Harris and Hartill (*output 6*) move the agenda forward, highlighting the empowering potential of initiatives that conceptualise victims and survivors as co-constructors of knowledge, including the potential for and value of research collaborations with and between survivors. The research has consistently argued for and demonstrated a new approach to the prevention of abuse in sport, and safeguarding, that creates safe and authentic spaces for survivors to participate and contribute in a meaningful way.

This research led to the initiation of a European project ([VOICE](#)) based on the same principles and methodology of Hartill's earlier research. However, rather than the voices of survivors always being mediated by the researcher/author, the option for survivors to engage more directly with key stakeholder organisations was built in. As a result, VOICE began to generate direct engagement between researchers, victims, charities, and sport sector policymakers/stakeholders in eight national European contexts.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

1. Hartill, M. (2009) [The sexual abuse of boys in organized male sports](#). *Men and Masculinities*, 12(2): 225-249. (single-authored journal article) [10.1177/1097184X07313361](#)
2. Hartill, M. (2013) [Concealment of child sexual abuse in sports](#). *Quest*, 65: 241-254. (single-authored journal article) [10.1080/00336297.2013.773532](#)
3. Hartill, M. (2014) [Exploring narratives of boyhood sexual subjection in sport](#). *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 31: 23-43. (single-authored journal article) [10.1123/ssj.2012-0216](#)
4. Hartill, M. (2017) [Sexual abuse in youth sport: a sociocultural analysis](#). London: Routledge. (single-authored monograph) [10.4324/9781315726113](#)
5. Hartill, M. & Lang, M. (2018) Reports of child protection and safeguarding concerns in sport and leisure settings: an analysis of English Local Authority data between 2010 and 2015. *Leisure Studies*, 37(5): 479-499. (co-authored journal article) [10.1080/02614367.2018.1497076](#)
6. Harris, C. & Hartill, M. (2020) 'Survivor' research in sport. In M. Lang (ed.) *Routledge Handbook of Athlete Welfare*. London: Routledge. (co-authored book chapter)

Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 5 are published in peer reviewed journals of international standing; output 4 is a research monograph published by Routledge; output 6 is a co-authored book chapter, based on original research, published in a Routledge international handbook.

4. Details of the impact

Based on research begun in 2001, the relevance and significance of this work became even more evident in late 2016, when hundreds of reports were received by the police and NSPCC following a report in *The Guardian* of the disclosure of an ex-professional male footballer regarding the sexual abuse he had experienced as a child at the hands of his football coach. In a sector (and sport) that had previously denied and minimised the existence of CSA within its ranks, but which also had well-established safeguarding procedures and practices, the research provided crucial historical context for the national debate that followed as well as providing guidance for how the sector might improve its response.

This research and related advocacy, based on established relationships with survivors and victim-focused charities, encouraged and helped to bring forth national and international cultural change where sexual abuse in sport is no longer a 'hidden history'. The research led to and enabled a significant change in the national approach of the sport sector in relation to victims of sexual abuse in sport and supported and enhanced the work of national charities operating in

this area. As a result of this research, the British sport sector is the first to formally include survivors within its child protection and safeguarding landscape. The research also guided the internationally significant independent national inquiry into CSA in football, led by Clive Sheldon QC.

Working directly with victims, victim-support organisations, and sport sector organisations to develop engagement, enhance awareness and build capacity and expertise on CSA in the sport sector

Hartill's research with survivors of CSA in sport revealed the need to provide safe and authentic spaces, within the sport sector, for those with 'lived experience' of CSA to engage with the prevention and safeguarding process. In order to communicate these research findings and develop tangible events, products, and activities that the sport sector could engage with, Hartill conceived the Voice Project as a first step towards sustainable participation of survivors within the sector. Hartill established a consortium of European academics and professional bodies, including the UK charity *NWG Network* focussed on child sexual exploitation, that successfully bid for an EU grant. VOICE collaborated with 72 individuals personally affected by CSA in sport and staged 8 national seminars ('Acknowledgement Forums') at which individuals with 'lived experience' spoke directly to policy makers and others in positions of influence within the European sport sector and beyond. As an example, the invitation-only seminar Hartill organised and chaired in Nottingham on 15th June 2017 was attended by 40 delegates, including *Sport England*, the *NSPCC*, *Operation Hydrant*, and many sport organisations such as *Boxing Scotland*, *Swim England*, *Arsenal FC* and *Liverpool FC*. According to the Director of the NWG Network, the Voice Project '*generated crucial evidence on child sexual abuse in European sport whilst enabling victims to engage with, and become part of, the policy-making landscape*' (source 4). In addition, the English Football Association [supported and promoted the project](#), stating '*The FA has backed a Europe-wide safeguarding project which is closely linked with our own work in the UK*' (The FA website, 2018).

The Voice Project conference, led by Hartill and Rulofs, was attended by 144 delegates from 16 countries and included representatives from major sport organisations such as the *International Olympic Committee* (IOC), the *German Ministry of Education, Youth & Sport*, the *European Commission Sport Unit*, the *English Football Association* (FA), the *Premier League*, the *Child Protection in Sport Unit* (NSPCC), and *Chelsea FC*. In his closing speech, Hartill enjoined the sport sector to recognise the 'acknowledgement' of sexual violence in sport as:

1. a vital aspect of 'voicing' lives and experiences that have been denied, invalidated and concealed;
2. a continuing *process* – not a one-off event – based on partnership, truth, and dignity;
3. a necessary element of: (a) an ethical organisation; and (b) genuine prevention efforts.

These recommendations from the research were presented to *Sport England* (the national umbrella body for sport in England) leading directly to the decision to establish a new safeguarding advisory panel constituted by individuals with a lived experience of abuse in sport. A unique development, the *Sport England Advisory Panel* (SEAP) was established in December 2017. According to Sport England, '*the learning and educational resources emanating from [the] research ... resulted in the establishment of Sport England's Advisory Panel*' (source 2). SEAP comprises 5 adults who were abused as children in a sport setting and represents an innovative and first-of-its-kind relationship between victims of abuse and sports administration. According to one SEAP member '*During my time with the SEAP it is apparent that it has helped to foster an acceptance in the sports community that those with 'lived experience' of sexual abuse have a unique contribution to make in the development of safe sport policies. It has also created a genuine collaboration with survivors of sexual violence and the broader sports community*' (source 6).

Following its inception, SEAP has provided a vehicle for outreach, advocacy, and knowledge exchange within the sport sector. In partnership with Hartill, SEAP subsequently staged two national events in 2019 ([EHU](#) and the [Lee Valley Stadium](#), London) attracting over 80 high-level stakeholders from across the sport sector and beyond, including 13 national governing bodies, 5 national sport agencies, 8 county football associations, 5 professional (*Premier League*) football

clubs, 13 local authorities, 6 police forces and 9 charities (e.g. *Sport Ireland, Rugby Football Union, Premiership Rugby, English Cricket Board, the Football Association (England and Scotland), Internet Watch Foundation, Surrey Police, Kent County Council, UNICEF UK, Nagoya University*). These events were designed and delivered by SEAP members with support from Hartill, again providing a national platform for meaningful engagement between victim-advocates and key stakeholders. According to Sport England: *'This work has been hugely beneficial and has been embraced by several National Governing Bodies of Sport including the Lawn Tennis Association who have used this information when developing their new [safeguarding] strategy'* (source 2).

The VOICE *Good Practice Guide* (source 8) subsequently set down eleven 'Key Issues and Principles of Good Practice in the Prevention of Sexual Violence in Sport' for the sport sector, emphasising *'the importance of listening to, engaging with, and supporting those who have been subjected to and affected by sexual abuse.'* This work has impacted on the work of national child protection charities. According to the director of the NSPCC's specialist unit, the *Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU)*, *'The VOICE project has had a huge impact on the work of the CPSU and how people with lived experience are seen and heard in the sector. The CPSU has promoted this work throughout all its networks and have used the good practice guidance to support the work we are doing around the voices of people with lived experience. The consultants within the team refer to this when delivering safeguarding training and they use the work to encourage sports across the UK to engage with people who have been abused within a sport setting to learn from it and to create a safe place where it is unlikely to happen again. The VOICE project has been key to this'* (source 5). Similarly, the director of the NWG Network states: *'The research has had an enormous impact on our service, having understood the issues more fully, it allowed us to grow our relationship with Sport England and a cohort of individuals with lived experience'* (source 4). NWG were invited to sit on the VOICE Project steering group and as a result of their inclusion have subsequently become a central pillar in the UK 'safeguarding in sport' landscape, establishing a full-time sport officer in 2018 and assisting with the coordination of SEAP. This activity is extended through NWG's first accredited [training](#) programme on sexual exploitation in sport which has been designed in collaboration with Hartill based on his research. Therefore, the research has resulted in an expansion of capacity within the sports sector to address the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation through the sharing and development of expertise.

SEAP members, in conjunction with Hartill and *Sport England*, also engaged across other sports and governing bodies. For example, in July 2018, the *Lawn Tennis Association* requested to attend SEAP to seek advice on its new safeguarding strategy and in July 2019 sought further advice for the development of a new educational resource ([Safe to Play](#), launched in 2020). Similarly, in May 2019 *British Cycling* requested to attend SEAP for advice on their safeguarding strategy. In addition, shortly after SEAP had been established, and based on advice from Hartill, the chair of the English FA also agreed to establish a 'survivor group' that has met regularly since 2018. According to a survivor-campaigner (source 6): *'As might be imagined, at a personal level the impact of these developments has been profound. More importantly, the forming of the group has resulted in a more widespread acceptance in Football that those with 'lived experience' of sexual abuse have a unique contribution to make. For example, earlier this year I was approached by FIFA (the international governing body in football) about developing terms of reference for a 'survivor' panel based on the Sport England model.'*

The research, and subsequent VOICE project, has also had international impact in bringing together sports administration and victims. As in the UK, it was often the first time that a platform had been provided for victims of abuse in sport to speak out and to engage with key stakeholders in the sport sector. This has provided the foundation for significant developments across a number of countries. For example, in Belgium, a 'Voices in Sport' campaign group was founded by participants from the Voice Project, from which [one member](#) (source 7) was invited to address a Council of Europe [Parliamentary Hearing on sexual violence against children](#). According to one survivor-campaigner (source 7) *'It was the first time, at least in Belgium, that attention was given to survivors' stories. The project ... empowered victims to reach out, speak up and call all actors involved upon their responsibilities to act ... public testimonies in line of the VOICE-project got the subject high on the political agenda. The Minister of Sport issued 6*

binding measures that sport federations have to take into account going from the establishment of integrity contact points to the development of codes of conduct and setting up a disciplinary system.' This group continues to expand and campaign in Belgium. In Germany, the decision by the ongoing German national inquiry into CSA (2016-2023) to issue a [public request for victims of abuse in sport](#) to come forward and disclose to them, was significantly influenced by the results of the Voice Project which were presented at a special public hearing held by the Inquiry (20th Oct., 2020). In Spain, following [presentations](#) and [advocacy](#) over a number of years, the research has been pivotal in supporting the work of campaigners and survivors. For one survivor-campaigner, recruited to a key safeguarding post with FIFA in 2020, this *'work literally changed my life and helped to turn the devastating experience of abuse that I suffered as a child, with all its consequences during my whole life, into something that allows me to help other children and change the culture of abuse in sport'* (source 3). Hartill continues to shape the international agenda, for example, assisting *Safe Sport International* (SSI) to create an [online event focused on the athlete voice](#) (12th March, 2021) and ensuring inclusion of those with lived experience of CSA is prioritised by leading a workshop with survivors of abuse from the UK, Ireland and Belgium.

Support and guidance provided to the FA independent review into CSA in English football, directly influencing the conclusions and recommendations of the final report

In January 2017, based on his acknowledged research expertise within the sport sector, Clive Sheldon QC appointed Hartill to serve as the ['child protection in sport expert'](#) to the [Football Association's independent inquiry](#) into allegations of child sexual abuse in football. A number of preliminary conversations took place about the field. Hartill directed and facilitated access to key stakeholders, supported the preparation of a questionnaire for victims, and prepared a comprehensive working paper (circa 100 pages) summarising his research and incorporating additional research to build an historical record of the emergence of child protection in sport. According to Sheldon, this *'paper greatly assisted me in reaching my conclusions as to the appropriateness of the approach of the FA and some football clubs to child protection issues during the period from 1970-2005' and 'guided me to reaching my particular conclusions.'* Subsequently, Hartill drafted recommendations for Sheldon to consider for inclusion in the final report and offered comment on several drafts of the review's recommendations (embargoed at time of writing). The independent review report which was completed in November 2020 and released publicly on 17th March 2021 acknowledges the expert assistance provided by Hartill *'I have relied on Mike Hartill's research'* (source 9 p.44). In a separate statement Sheldon explains in more detail Hartill's contribution to the review and recommendations *'I should also note that Professor Hartill provided me with considerable assistance in a number of other aspects of the FA Review process (including the structuring of correspondence to, and interviews with, survivors of child sexual abuse), and in producing recommendations for the FA to improve the safeguarding of children playing football in the future'* (source 1).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. Factual statement - Clive Sheldon QC, 11 King's Bench Walk, Temple, London.
2. Factual statement - Director of Children & Young People, Sport England, London.
3. Factual statement - FIFA Event Safeguarding Coordinator, Spain.
4. Factual statement - Director, NWG Network (Exploitation Response Unit), Derby, England.
5. Factual statement - Director, Child Protection in Sport Unit, Leicester, England.
6. Factual statement - Campaigner and advisor to Sport England and English FA, England.
7. Factual statement - Campaigner, Voices in Sport, Belgium.
8. Hartill, M., Murphy, K., Taylor, S., Schroer, M., Axmann, G., Viseras, G., Leach, K., Harris, C., Rulofs (2020) [Good Practice Guide: Supporting individuals affected by sexual violence in sport – a guide for sport organizations based on the results and experiences of the project VOICE](#). Voices for truth and dignity: Combatting sexual violence in European Sport through the voices of those affected. Cologne: German Sport University.
9. Independent Review into Child Sexual Abuse in Football 1970-2005 - Report