ICVAC

Measuring Violence against Children in Organized Sport in Line with the International Classification of Violence against Children

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Introduction to the International Classification of Violence against Children

A significant challenge in the global effort to protect children from violence is the lack of reliable and standardized data. Data on violence against children are often fragmented across sectors, such as health, justice, education and social services, and institutional contexts, including organized sport. Combined with inconsistent definitions and underreporting, this fragmentation makes it difficult to fully understand the scope of the problem. To address this challenge, UNICEF developed the International Classification of Violence against Children (ICVAC), which was endorsed by the United Nations Statistical Commission in March 2023.[1] The ICVAC is a critical tool to enhance the quality and comparability of data on violence against children worldwide. It serves as a:

Global statistical standard to measure violence against children

The ICVAC establishes internationally agreed operational concepts, definitions and principles to ensure a standardized and consistent approach to producing statistical data on violence against children, regardless of national legal variations.

Comprehensive tool applicable to all types of data

The ICVAC is designed to apply to diverse data types, including administrative records, dedicated surveys on violence against children or generic surveys that incorporate questions on such violence.

Catalyst for enhanced understanding and action

The ICVAC incorporates a set of policy-relevant disaggregating variables based on victim, perpetrator and circumstances of the act, which greatly assist cross-national analysis of patterns and trends in violence against children and its enabling and mitigating factors.

The ICVAC's standardized approach addresses long-standing gaps and inconsistencies in statistical standards. Violence against children can be seen, and classified, from a multitude of angles: the nature of the violent act, the impact on the victim,[2] the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, and the place where the violent act occurred, to name just a few. In building the classification, priority has been given to criteria that are particularly relevant from a policy perspective.

The ICVAC is applicable to all types of data on violence against children, including administrative records and data collected in dedicated surveys on violence against children or generic surveys that include questions on such violence. The unit of classification of the ICVAC is a violent act committed against a child or multiple children.[3] Violent acts are therefore classified into different, mutually exclusive and exhaustive sets of categories, using as criteria the nature of the act as well as its severity and frequency/recurrence. Based on these criteria, violent acts are grouped into homogeneous categories, which are aggregated at two different hierarchical levels: Levels 1 and 2. Level 1 includes categories that reflect the different nature of the violent acts or of the harm such acts cause. There are six Level 1 categories designed to cover all acts that constitute violence against children within the scope of the ICVAC. Violent acts at Level 2 represent sub-categories of Level 1 acts of the same nature but categorized by additional elements, such as severity and frequency/recurrence (*see Annex 1*).

The ICVAC also includes policy-relevant disaggregating variables (called 'tags'), such as victim descriptions (age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, previous victimization history, concurrent victimization, background characteristics such as migration status, ethnicity and disability), perpetrator descriptions (age, sex, individual perpetrator, group perpetrator, previous history of violence/recidivism, institutional linkages) and circumstances of the act (settings, geographic location, date and time, armed-conflict context). The categories of the ICVAC capture and describe different types of violent acts against children, while the disaggregating variables enable the coding of additional information about a violent act, thus allowing the full identification of policy-relevant patterns. For example, when producing statistics on sexual violence against children, additional value is provided if data can be disaggregated by the characteristics of the victims

1 United Nations Children's Fund, *International Classification of Violence against Children*, UNICEF, New York, 2023.

2 In the ICVAC, the term 'victim' is used systematically throughout to refer to children who have experienced violence. While acknowledging that different terminology has been used to refer to children who have been subjected to violence, it is important not to assign a label to children that they themselves may not identify with. Within legal and medical contexts, the term 'victim' is typically applied, while the term 'survivor', borrowed from the field of violence against women and gender-based violence, has increasingly been used in the child protection sector either interchangeably or in combination with 'victim'.

3 The ICVAC covers violent acts that are carried out by individuals or groups against a child or multiple children. It therefore excludes self-directed violence, in which the perpetrator and the victim are the same individual.

(e.g., age) and perpetrators (e.g., an intimate partner or stranger) and by the setting where the violence occurred (at home, at school or within community settings, for instance).

Using the ICVAC to measure violence against children in organized sport strengthens the production of statistics that are consistent and comparable across contexts. This will in turn make it easier to understand risks and take targeted action to keep children safe in sport. This publication illustrates how the ICVAC can serve as an important tool for measuring violence against children in organized sport in a standardized and comparable manner, thus promoting monitoring and helping to improve sport safeguarding systems. It is part of a series of briefs meant to complement the ICVAC by offering a deep dive into some specific forms of violence against children, differentiated by categories and complemented by disaggregating variables.

While children's engagement in sporting activities can take different forms, both formal and informal, this brief focuses on the occurrence of violence within the context of organized sport. This focus does not deny that violence may occur in informal contexts connected to sport activities. Rather, it establishes a boundary for statistical classification aligned with prevention responsibilities within specific entities to foster accountability and advance safeguarding efforts.

This brief is primarily intended for national statistical offices and other data producers, including relevant line ministries, child protection authorities and researchers. It is also meant to provide guidance to sports governing bodies and federations for the purpose of recording cases.

In a sport safeguarding context, such statistical classification can help produce critical data to:

- strengthen risk assessment by enabling better identification of high-risk activities, settings, behaviours and groups of children who may be at heightened risk.
- support early intervention and prevention, including for travel, residential training, selection processes and digital interactions. By spotting patterns early, sports organizations can act before harm escalates – shifting from reactive responses to proactive safeguarding.
- support safer, more consistent and child-centred safeguarding responses by strengthening case recording, reporting and referral pathways; improving coordination with child protection, health, education and justice systems; and helping ensure children affected by violence are connected to appropriate support services.
- improve resource allocation by helping direct funding, training and safeguarding measures to the areas where they are most needed.
- support learning, continuous improvement and institutional accountability by enabling sports organizations and oversight bodies to monitor patterns over time, assess implementation gaps and systemic failures and evaluate whether safeguarding measures are implemented effectively.

In short, when used effectively, data collection on violence against children in sport can strengthen safeguarding systems by supporting prevention, early identification of risks, safer responses and referral pathways, institutional accountability and access to appropriate support for victims.

Violence against children in organized sport and measurement challenges

Sport is widely recognized as a powerful platform for children's development.[4] Across regions and income levels, millions of children participate in organized sport activities, making it one of the most significant settings in their lives beyond the home and school. International safeguarding frameworks emphasize children's right to participate in sport in environments that are respectful, equitable and free from violence.[5]

While sport can promote health and development, evidence from multiple countries shows that children experience a spectrum of interpersonal violence within sport, including physical violence, sexual violence, psychological violence and neglect. Perpetrators include adults in positions of authority, peers and parents, among others.[6]

Sport environments have distinctive characteristics that shape risk. Participation typically involves structured hierarchies in which adults often control selection, progression and access to training opportunities and resources. Children may become highly dependent on these decisions, particularly within competitive performance pathways. Close physical proximity during training and competition is common. Travel and residential arrangements may reduce external oversight. Organizational cultures may also frame harsh treatment as necessary for discipline or success, including controlling coaching behaviours.[7] Additionally, sport environments can normalize behaviours that would not be acceptable in other settings, thereby allowing violence against children to occur. International safeguarding frameworks increasingly describe these risks as emerging from multiple levels, including from individual and interpersonal relationships, organizational practices, sectoral structures and broader societal norms.[8] Manifestations of these risks may include, for example, peer-led hazing or initiation rituals, verbal humiliation or intimidation framed as motivation, pressure to train or compete through injury, excessive or age-inappropriate training demands, harmful weight-control


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4 United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace, *Sport and the Sustainable Development Goals: An overview outlining the contribution of sport to the SDGs*, UNOSDP, Geneva, 2014.

5 Mountjoy, Margo, et al., 'International Olympic Committee Consensus Statement: Harassment and abuse (non-accidental violence) in sport', *British Journal of Sports Medicine,* vol. 50, no. 17, September 2016, pp. 1019–1029; updated by Tuakli-Wosornu, Yetsa A., et al., 'IOC Consensus Statement: Interpersonal violence and safeguarding in sport', *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, vol. 58, no. 22, 25 November 2024, pp. 1322–1344.

6 Parent, Sylvie, and Kristine Fortier, 'Comprehensive Overview of the Problem of Violence against Athletes in Sport', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 42, no. 4, 5 March 2018, pp. 227–246.

7 Schyvinck, Cleo, et al., 'Ethical Club Climate and Coaching Style: Unveiling their role in coach-perpetrated psychological abuse of gymnasts', *Journal of Sport Management*, vol. 39, no. 2, 17 December 2024, pp. 114–127.

8 Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 'IOC Consensus Statement'; Rhind, Daniel, and Frank Owusu-Sekyere, *International Safeguards for Children in Sport: Developing and embedding a safeguarding culture*, Routledge, London, 2017.

practices, cyber-bullying, image-based child sexual abuse and the normalization of adult performance expectations for child athletes.[9]

Research conducted across different sport contexts and competition levels documents varying forms and levels of violence against children in organized sport. In the absence of standardized monitoring systems across contexts, methodologies vary and definitions are not uniform, limiting direct comparability across studies. Nevertheless, several consistent findings emerge:

- Violence in sport affects both boys and girls across community and elite pathways.[10]
- Psychological violence is often the most frequently reported form of harm and is at the core of all other manifestations.[11]
- Sexual violence occurs in both contact and non-contact forms.[12]
- Physical violence is often most frequent among children engaged in team sports.[13]
- Neglect is also documented in sport contexts; however, its measurement is less consistent and may be underreported.[14]
- Perpetrators include authority figures (e.g., agents, coaches, trainers, medical staff and other sport personnel), parents, peers, spectators and audiences; peer athletes (sometimes acting in groups) feature prominently, challenging coach-only assumptions.[15]
- Severity patterns may differ by perpetrator role, with sexual violence perpetrated by coaches associated with higher reported severity compared to other perpetrators.[16]
- Certain groups, including children with disabilities, children from different ethnic backgrounds and those identifying as LGBTIQ+, face heightened risks.[17]
- Elite and high-performance pathways, including sports academies, are identified as environments of increased vulnerability, with elite athletes and those training for more than 16 hours weekly reporting more psychological violence.[18]
- Violence in sport increasingly occurs in digital environments, with online and offline manifestations often interconnected.[19]
- Organizational factors, including tolerance of abuse and conformity to dominant sport values, have been associated with higher levels of reported violence.[20]
- Exposure to violence in sport has been associated with adverse long-term mental health and well-being outcomes.[21]

Despite this emerging evidence, measuring violence against children in sport presents significant challenges.

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9 For an overview of these manifestations, see Mountjoy, Margo, et al., 'Safeguarding the Child Athlete in Sport: A review, a framework and recommendations for the IOC youth athlete development model', *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, vol. 49, no. 13, July 2015, pp. 883–886; Mountjoy et al., 'International Olympic Committee Consensus Statement'; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 'IOC Consensus Statement'.

10 Parent and Fortier, 'Comprehensive Overview of the Problem of Violence against Athletes in Sport'.

11 Vertommen, Tine, et al., 'Interpersonal Violence against Children in Sport in the Netherlands and Belgium', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 51, January 2016, pp. 223–236.

12 Hartill, Mike, et al., 'Prevalence of Interpersonal Violence against Children in Sport in Six European Countries', Child Abuse & Neglect, vol. 146, December 2023, Article 106513; Brackenridge, Celia, *Spoilsports: Understanding and preventing sexual exploitation in sport*, Routledge, London, 2001.

13 Maranhão, Joanna, et al., 'Self-Reported Experiences of Interpersonal Violence among High-Performance Athletes in Brazil', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 23 September 2025, Article 8862605251368852.

14 Pankowiak, Aurélie, et al., 'Psychological, Physical, and Sexual Violence against Children in Australian Community Sport: Frequency, perpetrator, and victim characteristics', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 38, nos. 3–4, February 2023, pp. 4338–4365; Spaaij, Ramón, 'Sports Crowd Violence: An interdisciplinary synthesis', *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, vol. 19, no. 2, March–April 2014, pp. 146–155.

15 Bjørnseth, Ingunn, and Attila Szabo, 'Sexual Violence against Children in Sports and Exercise: A systematic literature review', *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, vol. 27, no. 4, May–June 2018, pp. 365–385; Vertommen, Tine, et al., 'Profiling Perpetrators of Interpersonal Violence against Children in Sport Based on a Victim Survey', *Child Abuse & Neglect*, vol. 63, January 2017, pp. 172–182.

16 Vertommen et al., 'Profiling Perpetrators of Interpersonal Violence against Children in Sport Based on a Victim Survey'.

17 Pankowiak et al., 'Psychological, Physical, and Sexual Violence against Children in Australian Community Sport'; Parent, Sylvie, and Marie-Pier Vaillancourt-Morel, 'Magnitude and Risk Factors for Interpersonal Violence Experienced by Canadian Teenagers in the Sport Context', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, vol. 45, no. 6, 19 November 2020, pp. 528–544; Vertommen et al., 'Interpersonal Violence against Children'.

18 Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 'IOC Consensus Statement'; Pennock, Adam, et al., *Safeguarding in Sport: Online abuse of athletes, Safe Sport International*, Berkshire, 2026; Mountjoy et al., 'International Olympic Committee Consensus Statement'; Willson, Erin, et al., 'Prevalence of Maltreatment among Canadian National Team Athletes', *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 37, nos. 21–22, November 2022, pp. NP19857–NP19879; United Kingdom Committee for UNICEF, Children before Players: Protecting and realising children's rights – A guide for ensuring children's rights in sport, UNICEF UK, London, 2020; Sothern, Nicola A., and Jimmy O'Gorman, 'Exploring the Mental Health and Wellbeing of Professional Academy Footballers in England', *Soccer & Society,* vol. 22, no. 6, 26 July 2021, pp. 641–654.

19 Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 'IOC Consensus Statement'; Pennock et al., *Safeguarding in Sport.*

20 Roberts, Victoria, Victor Sojo and Felix Grant, 'Organisational Factors and Non-accidental Violence in Sport: A systematic review', *Sport Management Review*, vol. 23, no. 1, 4 April 2020, pp. 8–27.

21 Timon, Carter E., et al., 'Child Sexual Abuse of Elite Athletes: Prevalence, perceptions, and mental health', *Journal of Child Sexual Abuse*, vol. 31, no. 6, August–September 2022, pp. 672–691; Vertommen, Tine, et al., 'Severe Interpersonal Violence against Children in Sport: Associated mental health problems and quality of life in adulthood', *Child Abuse & Neglect,* vol. 76, February 2018, pp. 459–468.

First, for a long time, multiple definitions have been applied specifically to violence in sport. While the International Olympic Committee's 2024 Consensus Statement[22] adopts 'interpersonal violence' as an umbrella term, terms such as 'violence', 'maltreatment', 'abuse', 'harassment', 'bullying', 'safe sport' and 'safeguarding' continue to be used interchangeably across sectors and countries. Legal definitions may not align with safeguarding policies, and survey instruments vary in how behaviour is operationalized. This variation limits the ability to compare findings across studies or integrate them into national statistical systems.

Second, distinguishing legitimate sport practices from violence is inherently complex. Determining when discipline or training demands cross the threshold from performance enhancement to harmful acts requires clear, act-based criteria anchored in the child's experience. In the absence of such criteria, the measurement risks either normalizing harmful conduct or misclassifying acceptable practice.

Third, underreporting remains a persistent barrier.[23] Children may fear retaliation from peers or parents, or the loss of opportunity within the team and wider sport system, if they disclose harm. These concerns are often compounded by power imbalances inherent in, for example, coach-athlete and agent-athlete relationships, as well as a lack of trust in reporting mechanisms and limited access to appropriate support systems. Loyalty to teams, the normalization of harsh behaviour within competitive cultures, and social and cultural norms that stigmatize those who report harm as 'weak' or not suited for high performance can further inhibit disclosure. At the institutional level, reputational concerns and resistance within sports organizations may discourage reporting. Together, these dynamics affect both survey responses and administrative complaint data, leading to an underestimation of violence against children in organized sport.

Fourth, the fragmentation of data across sectors and institutions limits the visibility and use of information on violence in sport. Violence in sport may be recorded across multiple sectors (e.g., justice, health, education and child protection) without consistent identification of the sport context, and differences in reporting thresholds, documentation practices and governance structures further limit data comparability and integration. Many cases do not meet criminal thresholds and are instead handled internally by sport-specific disciplinary systems[24] – often not designed to deal with safeguarding cases but rather other integrity and conduct breaches[25] – placing them outside formal administrative data systems. Within sports organizations themselves, data collected through complaints or safeguarding mechanisms are rarely systematically analysed, shared or used to assess the effectiveness of safeguarding programmes and responses. As a result, violence against children in organized sport remains largely invisible in official statistics.

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22 Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 'IOC Consensus Statement'.
23 Woessner, Mary N., et al., 'Telling Adults about It: Children's experience of disclosing interpersonal violence in community sport', *Sport in Society*, vol. 27, no. 5, 18 October 2023, pp. 661–680.
24 In some contexts, sport-specific disciplinary systems operate with limited external oversight and may be shaped by performance-oriented cultures. This can affect how concerns are documented and addressed, with reports at times interpreted as low-level matters rather than recognized as safeguarding issues. See Roberts, Sojo and Grant, 'Organisational Factors and Non-accidental Violence in Sport'.
25 Interim Steering Group on the Establishment of an Independent Global Safe Sport Entity, 'Consultation on the Establishment of an Independent Global Safe Sport Entity: Final report', FIFA, 1 June 2023.

How to measure violence against children in organized sport in line with the ICVAC

The ICVAC offers a framework for standardizing the measurement of all forms of violence, including those that occur in sport. A standardized measurement enables governments and safeguarding bodies to quantify the scale and forms of violence, identify populations at increased risk, monitor trends over time, evaluate prevention and safeguarding interventions, and fulfil international commitments, including Sustainable Development Goal target 16.2 to end all forms of violence against children.

Measuring violence against children in organized sport requires situating sport within the statistical architecture of the ICVAC. The ICVAC does not create sector-specific categories of violence; rather, it provides a standardized framework for classifying violent acts based on their nature, while capturing contextual information (such as the setting and perpetrator role) through policy-relevant disaggregating variables.

Accordingly, measuring violence in organized sport does not involve introducing a new definition of violence. Instead, it entails applying the ICVAC's established definitions, categories and tagging structure to violent acts that occur within organized sport settings. This involves the following components:

- an understanding of what constitutes organized sport for measurement purposes
- the application of the ICVAC definition of violence against children to identify violent acts occurring in organized sport
- the application of the ICVAC standardized categories to classify violent acts occurring in organized sport
- the application of the ICVAC disaggregating variables to analyse violent acts occurring in organized sport

It is the combined application of these components that ensures a standardized, comprehensive and actionable approach to measuring violence against children in line with the ICVAC.

What is meant by 'organized sport'

There is, at present, no internationally agreed definition of organized sport. For measurement purposes in this brief, organized sport is defined as any recreational or competitive (including professional) sporting activity that takes place within the context of a sports organization.[26] This definition requires the cumulative presence of a sporting activity, an identifiable organizational structure and personnel that operate in the field of sport.

This includes, for example:

- club- or federation-based sport
- organized extracurricular sport (outside physical education or activities run by a school)
- private sports academies and structured training centres
- community or faith-based sport programmes with formal sports coaching
- elite, high-performance and talent pathways under recognized sports bodies

This excludes, for example:

- informal or spontaneous play (e.g., street soccer games, walking the dog)
- physical education (curriculum-based)
- independent individual physical activity or training
- private family-based recreation not linked to a sports body
- general recreational facility use without structured supervision

26 What constitutes a sports organization may differ across countries. In some cases, it requires formal registration with a recognized sports association; in others, it may mean registration with another regulatory body.

Application of the ICVAC definition of violence against children

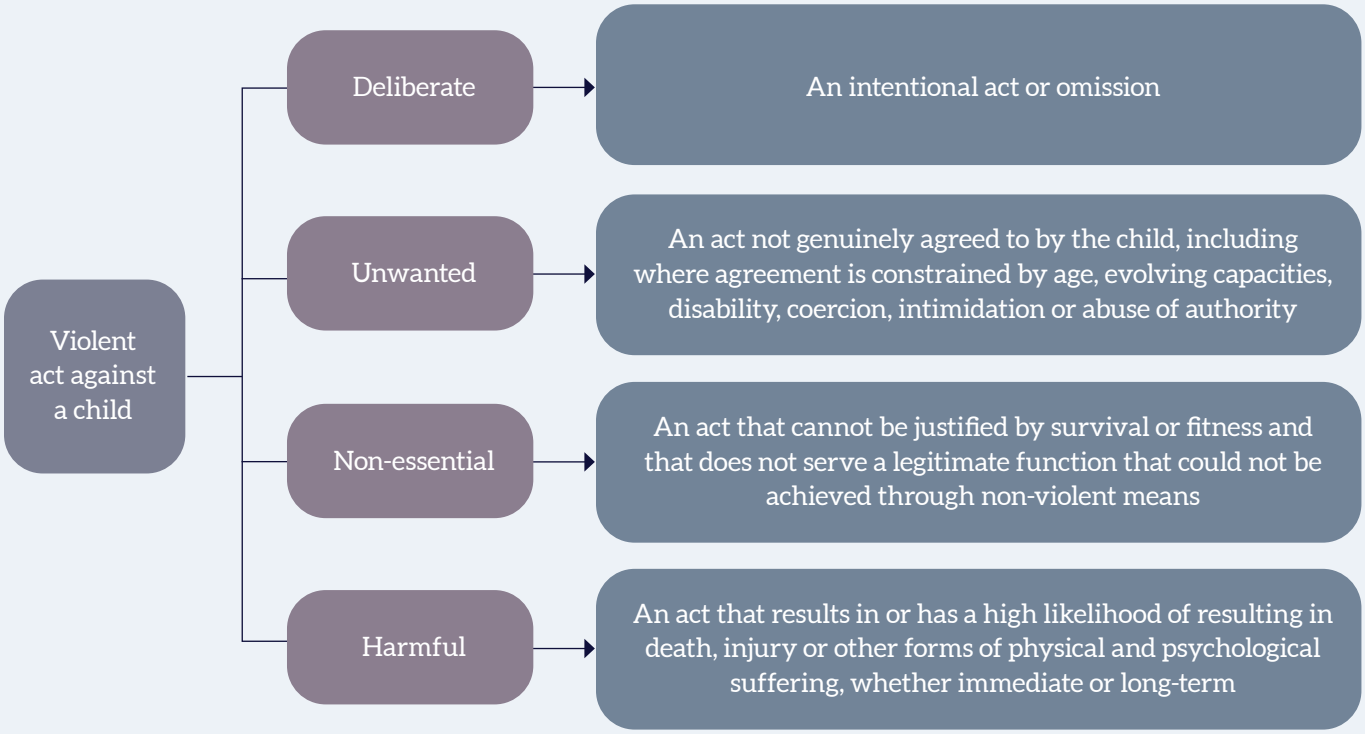
The ICVAC defines violence against children as any deliberate, unwanted and non-essential act, threatened or actual, against a child or multiple children that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in death, injury or other forms of physical and psychological suffering. An act refers to the process of doing or performing something. This includes acts of omission, which refer to the failure to perform an act when those responsible for the child's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so.

Violent acts are therefore based on four critical elements – i.e., deliberate, unwanted, non-essential and harmful[27] – all of which must be present simultaneously. If one of these is absent, the act does not constitute violence against children under the ICVAC (*see Figure 1*).

Measuring violence in organized sport therefore requires distinguishing legitimate sport participation from deliberate, unwanted and non-essential acts that result in harm (*see Figure 2*). Applying these criteria is particularly relevant in organized sport, where differentiating sport practice from violence requires careful assessment of the nature and purpose of an act. In sport contexts, the boundaries between deliberate intention to act and accidental injuries, wanted and pressured agreement, and essential and non-essential demands can be blurred, particularly when a child, a coach, a manager, an agent and parents all share an interest in the child's performance and competitive success. These dynamics can make the criteria more difficult to apply, as practices may be accepted, encouraged or justified even when they expose children to risk.

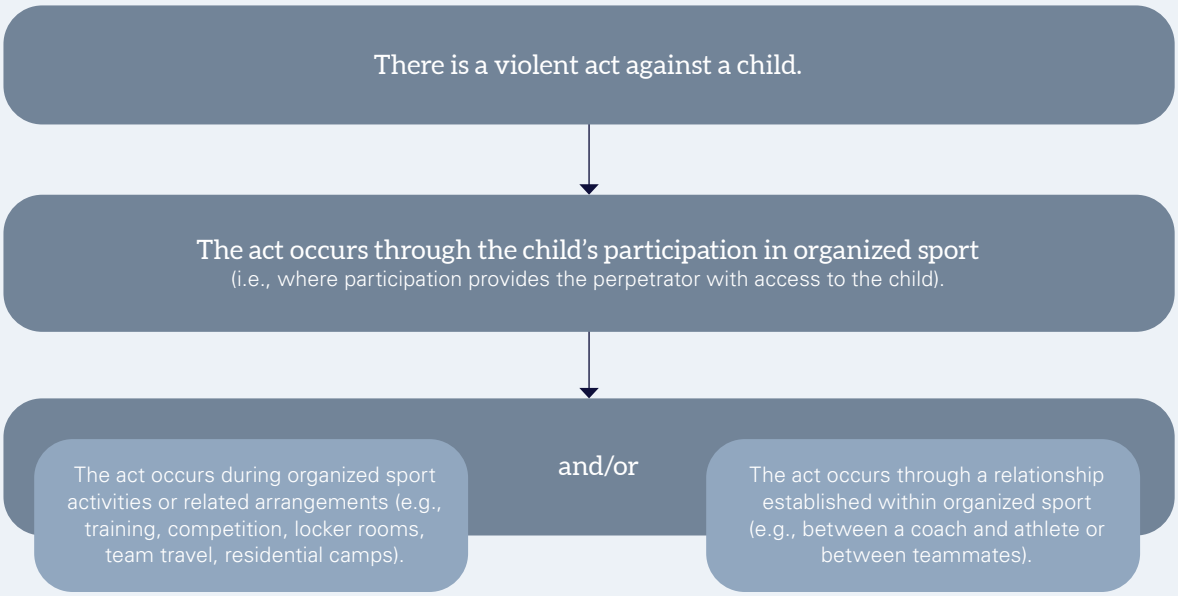
The ICVAC criteria are therefore intended to be assessed together and in context. The fact that a practice is common or framed as necessary for performance does not, in itself, make it essential or acceptable. Similarly, apparent agreement by a child does not determine whether an act falls outside the definition of violence. Where an individual persists in conduct, or fails to act, despite having the authority and capacity to intervene, responsibility may arise if the risk of harm is known or reasonably foreseeable. The normalization of pain and performance pressure does not remove this responsibility. The following presents each criterion individually and outlines its application to organized sport.

Figure 1. Characteristics of a violent act



27 Based on the framework developed in Hamby, Sherry, 'On Defining Violence, and Why It Matters', *Psychology of Violence*, vol. 7, no. 2, April 2017, pp. 167–180.

Figure 2. Conditions for classifying a violent act in the context of organized sport



Deliberate

Deliberate acts refer to actions or omissions that are carried out intentionally. An act can be deliberate whether or not there is an intention to cause harm. In organized sport, the concept of deliberateness distinguishes violence from accidental or unintended events.

Acts that derive from reckless or dangerous behaviour, where outcomes could have been foreseen even if not explicitly intended, are considered violence. The fact that such practices are common or culturally accepted within a sport does not remove responsibility. For example, if a coach continues to require a child to train in excessive heat in order to obtain or maintain competitive performance, the conduct meets the deliberate criterion. Similarly, where ongoing peer abuse is observed and no action is taken despite a duty of care,[28] the omission itself meets this criterion.

Unwanted

Unwanted acts are those not agreed to by the child or committed against someone unable to refuse or agree. For children, the capacity to agree depends on age[29] and evolving capacities,[30] as well as individual characteristics, such as disability[31] or other vulnerabilities.

In organized sport, assessment of whether conduct is unwanted must take account of power dynamics and dependency structures. Decisions relating to selection, progression or access to opportunities may limit a child's practical ability and agency to refuse or meaningfully agree. Apparent agreement may therefore not constitute genuine agreement where it is obtained through intimidation, coercion or manipulation.[32] Agreement may also be shaped by normalizing rhetoric (e.g., "this is part of sport" or "everyone goes through this"), which can obscure a child's ability to exercise meaningful refusal. Consequently, an act may still be considered unwanted even when a child

28 Mountjoy et al., 'International Olympic Committee Consensus Statement'.

29 As stated by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, individual children reach maturity at different ages. "Puberty occurs at different ages for boys and girls, and different brain functions mature at different times. The process of transitioning from childhood to adulthood is influenced by context and environment, as reflected in the wide variation in cultural expectations of adolescents in national legislations, which afford different thresholds for entry into adult activities." See United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 20 (2016) on the Implementation of the Rights of the Child during Adolescence, CRC/C/GC/20, United Nations, New York, 6 December 2016, para. 5.

30 The Committee on the Rights of the Child defines "evolving capacities as an enabling principle that addresses the process of maturation and learning through which children progressively acquire competencies, understanding and increasing levels of agency to take responsibility and exercise their rights". See General Comment No. 20, para. 18.

31 Article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities defines persons with disabilities as "those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others". See United Nations, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UN, New York, 30 March 2007, article 1.

32 Breiding, Matthew, et al., *Intimate Partner Violence Surveillance: Uniform definitions and recommended data elements, version 2.0*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Atlanta, Ga., 2015, pp. 11–13.

accepts, tolerates, seeks or normalizes the conduct within a broader system of dependency, pressure or performance expectations.

In the specific case of contact sport, participation implies agreement to rule-based contact, but it does not extend to conduct that exceeds those rules or exploits unequal power relationships. In non-contact sports, similar pressures may arise during selection trials, performance assessments or training demands. For example, a child who submits to repeated performance assessments out of fear of losing her/his place on a team may not be exercising meaningful choice. Similarly, peer-based initiation rituals framed as voluntary may be unwanted where refusal would result in exclusion from the group.

Non-essential

Non-essential acts are those that cannot be justified by reason of survival or fitness (not to be interpreted in sport terms but more broadly as well-being and development) and that do not serve a legitimate function that could not also be obtained by non-violent means. Essential acts include those necessary for safety, medical care or self-defence.

In organized sport, there are certain practices that may serve a legitimate function as they are integral to the nature of the sporting activity and therefore fall outside the definition of violence. Competitive sport typically involves a degree of physical and psychological discomfort; however, such demands must be appropriate and proportionate and should not justify harmful or degrading treatment. By contrast, practices justified solely on the basis of discipline, performance enhancement, resilience-building, tradition or team culture do not automatically qualify as essential.[33] For example, compelling continued participation despite injury, or using degrading treatment as a motivational technique, meets the non-essential criterion, particularly where non-violent alternatives are available.

Harmful

Harmful acts include those that result in or have a high likelihood of resulting in death, injury or other forms of physical and psychological suffering.[34] Harm may be immediate or long-term.[35]

In organized sport, harm may arise not only from a single incident but also from repeated conduct over time. Psychological suffering may occur, for example, through persistent humiliation, exclusion or neglect of health needs, even in the absence of visible physical injury. The likelihood of harm is sufficient for classification, regardless of whether the full consequences materialize.

Application of the ICVAC standardized categories and operational definitions

The ICVAC categorizes violent acts into different, mutually exclusive and exhaustive sets of categories using a two-level hierarchical structure: Level 1 provides six broad categories of violence, while Level 2 offers detailed descriptions of specific acts. Each category includes a numerical code and operational definition, accompanied by clearly defined illustrative examples, inclusions and exclusions to ensure consistent categorization across contexts.

The unit of classification under the ICVAC is the violent act. Where multiple acts occur within a single incident (e.g., sexual assault accompanied by threats), each act should be coded separately under the appropriate Level 2 category.

Table 1 provides an overview of selected ICVAC categories with examples of violence against children relevant to the context of organized sport. The ICVAC categories allow for the classification of emerging or context-specific forms of violence in organized sport, provided they meet the definitional criteria.[36] The list of examples is illustrative and not exhaustive.

33 On the use of justifications such as performance, discipline or tradition to legitimize violent practices in sport, see Parent, Sylvie, et al., 'Development and Initial Validation of the Perceived Instrumental Effects of Violence in Sport Scale', *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, vol. 6, 27 February 2024, Article 1355958; on the parsing of harmful conduct from acceptable practice in sport more broadly, see also Stirling, Ashley E., and Gretchen A. Kerr, 'Defining and Categorizing Emotional Abuse in Sport', *European Journal of Sport Science*, vol. 8, no. 4, 5 June 2008, pp. 173–181.

34 Adapted from World Health Organization, *World Report on Violence and Health*, WHO, Geneva, 2002, p. 5.

35 Violence can result in physical injury, sexually transmitted infections, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts, unplanned pregnancy and even death. See United Nations Children's Fund, 'Violence against Children', <www.unicef.org/protection/violence-against-children>, accessed 17 June 2026.

36 The ICVAC also provides operational definitions for various acts specifically relevant to the context of organized sport.

Table 1. ICVAC definitions and categories, and selected examples of violence against children in organized sport

ICVAC Level 1	ICVAC Level 2	Illustrative examples relevant to the context of organized sport
1 Violent killing of a child *Any deliberate, unwanted and non-essential act that leads to the death or intends to cause the death of a child*	103 Non-intentional homicide of a child	Death resulting from unsafe training practices (e.g., extreme conditioning drills in heat without hydration); failure to respond to medical distress (e.g., ignoring signs of concussion, cardiac arrest or heat stroke) resulting in death; unsafe facilities or equipment leading to fatal injury; excessive punitive exercise used as discipline resulting in death; inadequate residential conditions in training academies resulting in fatal harm
2 Physical violence against a child *Any deliberate, unwanted and non-essential act that uses physical force against the body of a child and that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, pain or psychological suffering*	201 Severe assault against a child	Coach or training staff striking, punching, kicking or choking a child; severe group hazing resulting in serious injury
	202 Minor assault against a child	Slapping, pushing, grabbing, pulling the hair of or throwing objects at a child during training, in camp or during competitions; physical bullying by peers in locker rooms; forcing a child to perform painful physical tasks as punishment; initiation practices involving minor but deliberate physical force
	203 Isolating a child	Locking a child in a room or equipment space as punishment; forced isolation from teammates during camps for disciplinary purposes
3 Sexual violence against a child *Any deliberate, unwanted and non-essential act of a sexual nature, either completed or attempted, that is perpetrated against a child, including for exploitative purposes, and that results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, pain or psychological suffering*	301 Rape of a child	Any act of sexual penetration perpetrated by a coach, trainer, official, peer athlete or other person in the context of organized sport; penetration facilitated through abuse of authority or manipulation
	302 Sexual assault of a child	Sexual touching during physiotherapy; touching breasts, buttocks or genitals under the guise of coaching instruction; coercive sexualized 'initiation' practices involving contact
	303 Non-contact sexual violence against a child	Sexual harassment (comments about a child's body, sexuality or appearance); spreading sexual rumours within a team; exposing a child to sexual images in locker rooms; requesting or sending sexual images; sexual extortion linked to performance opportunities; pressuring a child to undress unnecessarily
4 Psychological violence against a child *Any deliberate, unwanted and non-essential act, verbal and non-verbal, that harms or has a high likelihood of harming the development of a child, including long-term physiological harm and mental health consequences*	401 Terrorizing a child	Coach or staff threatening to hurt the child; threat of abandonment in a sport context (e.g., threatening to leave the child behind while travelling to a sports camp); threats against the child's loved ones/valued objects
	402 Harassing, spurning and humiliating a child	Repeated public humiliation (derogatory terms such as 'useless', 'fat', 'weak'); degrading rituals; persistent ridicule; scapegoating; verbal abuse during training; psychological bullying by peers or authority figures; exclusion intended to degrade; discriminatory insults targeting gender, sexual orientation, disability or ethnicity; cyber-bullying through team messaging groups and social media; circulation of degrading images or videos within or beyond the team
5 Neglect of a child *The deliberate, unwanted and non-essential failure to meet a child's physical or psychological needs, protect a child from danger, or obtain medical, educational or other services when those responsible for the child's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so*	501 Physical neglect of a child	Ongoing lack of supervision in sport facilities/camps (e.g., repeatedly leaving children unsupervised in unsafe environments); ongoing failure to provide basic necessities (food, shelter, adequate residential conditions in training academies that uphold players' dignity and ensure a standard of living that meets their physical and social needs) where responsible adults have means, knowledge and access to do so
	502 Psychological neglect of a child	Failing to create opportunities for children to maintain regular contact with their families, both virtually and in person, when they are away from home for extended periods, such as in academies
	503 Neglect of a child's physical or mental health	Ongoing failure to obtain medical care for injuries; ongoing pressure on a child to train through injury; persistent disregard of mental health crises; repeatedly withholding access to qualified health professionals when available
	504 Educational neglect of a child	Systematically prioritizing sport obligations in ways that obstruct access to schooling, where adults have the means, knowledge and access to ensure educational continuity and repeatedly fail to do so
	509 Other acts of neglect of a child not elsewhere classified	Failure to respond to safeguarding concerns when the sports organization fails to act/ignores a disclosure/leaves the child in the harmful environment, etc.
9 Other violent acts against a child	909 Other acts of violence against a child not elsewhere classified	

Application of the ICVAC disaggregating variables

Disaggregating variables, or 'tags', add critical policy-relevant details about the victim, perpetrator and circumstances of a violent act, providing insights into the underlying dynamics of violence against children. The ICVAC clearly defines disaggregating variables and their subtypes, with acronyms preceding each category title for efficient coding in data collection records.

Disaggregating variables are divided into three tiers: Tier I includes only one variable that is indispensable to classifying an act of violence as violence against children; Tier II includes the minimum set of disaggregating variables that capture the fundamental characteristics of the violent acts; Tier III includes additional variables that are not strictly necessary for the identification of violence against children but are important for conducting comprehensive and detailed analyses of violent acts.[37] These variables are expected to be gradually implemented at the national level, considering existing constraints and capacities.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The disaggregating variables included in the ICVAC are not exhaustive and may be expanded over time, as needed. Accordingly, an additional tag has been created to specifically capture violent acts against children in the context of organized sport (*see Annex 2*). The following outlines the ICVAC disaggregating variables needed to specifically classify and analyse violent acts occurring in organized sport.

Tier I: Indispensable variable

- The indispensable variable is the age of the victim (AV), as this determines whether the victim is under the age of 18 and qualifies as a child as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Tier II: Minimum disaggregating variables[38]

- The organized sport context (OS) variable captures whether the act of violence was perpetrated through participation in organized sport,[39] where such participation provides the perpetrator with access to the child. Access may arise during organized sport activities or related arrangements (e.g., during training or competition, in locker rooms, during team travel or at residential training camps) or through relationships established within organized sport (e.g., between a coach and athlete or between teammates, including where interactions occur outside of organized sport activities). This excludes acts that involve persons connected to organized sport or that occur in sport-related settings but are not linked to the child's participation in organized sport – for example, the sexual assault of a child perpetrated by a stranger on a sport field, or a coach hitting her/his own child in the context of parental discipline.

- The perpetrator variable identifies who committed the violent act, whether it is an individual (IP) or a member of a group (GPer). For individual perpetrators, policy-relevant categories measuring violence against children in organized sport include sports coach

37 The priority, relevance and categorization of the disaggregating variables into tiers are determined by the specific type of violence being measured. Different forms of violence against children require distinct sets of disaggregating variables to accurately capture the nature and context of the violent act for analytical and policy purposes.

38 In the ICVAC, setting and institutional linkages are included under 'additional disaggregating variables' (Tier III), but they should be included under 'minimum disaggregating variables' (Tier II) for the purpose of specifically classifying and analysing violent acts occurring in organized sport.

39 For measurement purposes in this brief, organized sport is defined as any recreational or competitive (including professional) sporting activity that takes place within the context of a sports organization.

or training staff (IP8),[40] peer (IP4), doctor or other medical personnel (IP5a) and other perpetrator (IP11) for other figures, including agents, scouts, volunteers or spectators (or IP12 if the perpetrator is a stranger). The group perpetrator variable (GPer), particularly other group (GPer5), can be used to capture collective peer violence.[41]

- The settings (Set) variable identifies where the violent act occurred. For the purpose of measuring violence against children in organized sport, there are several relevant settings. This includes community settings – closed spaces for leisure, sports, art, music and other recreational activities (Set3b). By anchoring measurement to sport-designated community settings, data can more directly inform safeguarding standards and institutional accountability within organized sport systems. Relevant settings also include open spaces such as sport fields and medical, rehabilitation and care facilities, such as residential training venues and digital spaces and platforms. Violence that occurs in other settings (e.g., in private homes) may involve individuals connected to sport but does not necessarily reflect failures within sport governance structures.
- The institutional linkages (IL) variable identifies whether the act was mandated, supported, incited, covered up or justified by a public or private institution. In organized sport, this includes the role of sports organizations (whether at the local, national or international level) in shaping or maintaining the conditions in which the act occurs, including where rules enable harm or where reported concerns are not acted upon. This variable distinguishes isolated individual misconduct from systemic or governance-related failures.
- Other minimum disaggregating variables include the sex of the victim (SV) and the age (AP) and sex (SP) of the perpetrator, relevant for identifying gendered patterns of violence and age-based power differentials.

Tier III: Additional disaggregating variables

- Other additional disaggregating variables in the ICVAC, including gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, migration status and previous victimization, allow for the analysis of differential vulnerability and intersecting inequalities within sport contexts. Circumstantial variables, such as geographic location and date and time, support the identification of clusters of risk.

Examples of applying the ICVAC standardized categories and disaggregating variables to record and classify a violent act against a child in organized sport are available in Annex 3.

Beyond the ICVAC standardized disaggregating variables, additional contextual variables may be relevant for sport policy analysis, including the type of sport (e.g., team versus individual, contact versus non-contact), the geographic level of competition (e.g., local, regional, national, international) and the training environment (day programme versus residential academy or camp). While these variables fall outside the standardized ICVAC structure, they may support sector-specific prevention strategies and risk assessment within sport governance systems.

40 Codes refer to the ICVAC disaggregating variable categories. See *International Classification of Violence against Children*.

41 This refers to the instrumental use of violence by people who identify themselves as members of a group – whether this group is transitory or has a more permanent identity – against another group or set of individuals to achieve social objectives. See *World Report on Violence and Health*, p. 215.

Application of the ICVAC in practice – Coding and analysing case studies on violence against children in organized sport

The following fictional case studies illustrate how the ICVAC framework can be applied to measure different forms of violence against children in organized sport. Each example highlights practical applications in coding and analysis[42] and offers insights into how ICVAC-informed data can support policies, prevention and responses.

Case study 1: Team initiation – Peer hazing in a youth rugby programme

Scenario: A 15-year-old boy joins a competitive youth rugby club competing at the regional level. At the start of the season, senior teammates (aged 17 years) organize an unofficial 'initiation' for new players following an evening training session at the club facility. Coaches and staff have already left the premises.

The new players are physically forced to perform demanding exercises beyond the scheduled training session, including repeated tackles against equipment while teammates shout insults and record the activity on their phones, with the recordings later circulated within team messaging groups on social media. Because the boy struggles with balance during drills, his teammates mock his performance and single him out for additional repetitions. When the boy hesitates, he is told that refusal would demonstrate weakness and could affect his acceptance within the team. The ritual escalates as senior players order the boy to complete a series of initiation dares involving physically forcing him to consume alcohol, the removal of clothing items and non-consensual image-taking of his sexual organs. The boy is then pushed into an equipment storage area and held inside while teammates strike the door and film his attempts to get out.

In the following weeks, videos and pictures of the incident circulate within team messaging groups. Although coaching staff later become aware of the event, no formal safeguarding report is filed, as the behaviour is described by players as a long-standing team tradition.

Insights for ICVAC measurement

This case illustrates peer violence occurring within an organized sport environment and demonstrates how practices framed as team bonding or tradition may constitute violence against children when assessed using act-based criteria.

The acts are deliberate, as senior players intentionally organize and impose the initiation; unwanted, as participation is physically forced and coerced through threats of exclusion; non-essential, as the activities serve no legitimate sporting or safety function; and harmful, evidenced by subsequent psychological distress.

Multiple violent acts are identifiable, including:

- **202 Minor assault against a child:** forced physical exertion and physical coercion during hazing activities
- **203 Isolating a child:** isolation created by holding the door shut and striking it while the child attempts to leave
- **303 Non-contact sexual violence against a child:** non-consensual image-taking of the sexual organs
- **402 Harassing, spurning and humiliating a child:** insults, degradation and filming of the incident
- **402 Harassing, spurning and humiliating a child:** humiliation amplified through subsequent circulation of recordings via social media

In line with the ICVAC unit of classification, each act of violence against each victim would be recorded separately.

The indispensable variable records the victim as a child based on her/his age at the time of the incident, which is 15 (AV4). Minimum disaggregating variables identify the acts of violence in the context of organized sport (OS1), the setting as a sports and recreational environment (Set3b) and the perpetrators as peers acting collectively, captured through both individual perpetrator (IP4) and group perpetrator classifications (GPer5). Recording the sex and age of victims and perpetrators enables the analysis of peer dynamics within youth sport. Additional disaggregating variables capture the child's experience of multiple acts of violence (CV1). The recording and subsequent circulation of videos on the violence would be coded as a separate act (i.e., as 402, with the technology-facilitation tag TF1

42 Annex 2 presents the disaggregating variables specific to the measurement of violence against children in organized sport. For the full list of ICVAC disaggregating variable codes and operational definitions, please see the *International Classification of Violence against Children.*

and digital setting Set7a) in line with the ICVAC's act-based approach.[43] Where available, systematically capturing the date and time of each violent act (DaT) supports the identification of recurring risk periods, including incidents occurring outside supervised training hours, and enables the monitoring of patterns over time within sport environments.

Potential insights for policy, prevention and response

- **Recognizing hazing as collective violence within team culture:** ICVAC-aligned classification enables initiation rituals to be recorded as peer-perpetrated group violence rather than informal team behaviour. Capturing group perpetration highlights how harmful practices may be sustained through collective norms, supporting policies that explicitly prohibit hazing and that clarify organizational responsibility beyond formal training activities.
- **Strengthening supervision during unsupervised transition periods:** Recording the setting and timing characteristics exposes incidents occurring once coaching supervision has ended. Such data can inform safeguarding measures extending oversight to locker rooms, post-training periods and other transitional moments where peer violence may occur outside structured activities.
- **Addressing technology-facilitated amplification of harm:** Capturing technology facilitation where incidents are recorded or shared enables sports organizations to recognize how humiliation extends beyond the immediate event. This supports prevention strategies addressing digital team communication spaces and reinforces responsibilities related to image-sharing and online conduct within youth sport environments.

Table 2. Example of recording and coding acts of physical, sexual and psychological violence, in line with the ICVAC

ICVAC	Code	202-203-303-402-AV4-OS1-TF1-Set3b-Set7a-SV1-SP1-AP2-IP4-GPer5-CV1	
Category	202	Minor assault against a child	Intentional or reckless application of minor physical force inflicted upon the body of a child resulting in no immediate physical injury or in minor injury
	203	Isolating a child	Separating a child from other children or adults to whom he/she is connected, including while in residential care, police custody or detention
	303	Non-contact sexual violence against a child	Any form of verbal or non-verbal non-physical conduct, whether isolated or persistent, that involves unwanted references to any part of the body used for sexual activity or to the sexuality of the child, including conduct facilitated via technology
	402	Harassing, spurning and humiliating a child	Repeated interactions with a child that convey that he/she is worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered or only of value in meeting others' needs
Indispensable variable	AV4	Age of the victim	15–17 years
Minimum variables	OS1	Organized sport context	In the context of organized sport
	TF1	Technology-facilitation	Facilitated by technology
	Set3b	Setting	Closed places for leisure, sports, art, music and other recreational activities (including youth centres)
	Set7a	Setting	Social media, both web-based and applications
	SV1	Sex of the victim	Male
	SP1	Sex of the perpetrator	Male
	AP2	Age of the perpetrator	15–17 years
	IP4	Individual perpetrator	Peer
	GPer5	Group perpetrator	Other group
Additional variables	CV1	Concurrent victimization	The victim has concurrently experienced multiple violent acts

43 Regarding how to measure technology-facilitated violence against children in line with the ICVAC, see United Nations Children's Fund, *Measuring Technology-facilitated Violence against Children in Line with the International Classification of Violence against Children*, UNICEF, New York, 2025.

Case study 2: Abuse of medical authority in an elite youth tennis programme

Scenario: A 16-year-old female athlete trains at a national-level tennis academy preparing players for international junior competitions. The academy hosts athletes from several regions and provides medical services delivered by a male physiotherapist in his early 40s, contracted by the programme to oversee injury prevention and recovery. During scheduled treatment sessions at a nearby medical facility, the physiotherapist begins conducting examinations involving prolonged physical contact unrelated to the athlete's reported injuries. This includes repeated touching of intimate areas without clear medical justification. He explains that the procedures are necessary to improve flexibility and prevent future performance limitations. The athlete feels uncomfortable but does not question the treatment, as the practitioner is introduced as a trusted expert working closely with coaches and selection staff.

Over several months, the examinations become increasingly invasive and take place without another adult present. Sessions are scheduled during regular training hours within the medical facility. The athlete believes refusal could affect her access to treatment and future competition opportunities. After experiencing anxiety and declining well-being, she discloses the situation to her mother.

A subsequent internal review identifies that multiple female athletes aged 15–17 years had previously raised concerns by bringing this behaviour to the attention of their coach over several seasons, but no formal safeguarding report was filed, allowing the practitioner to continue working with junior athletes across training camps and competitions.

Insights for ICVAC measurement

This case describes repeated sexual abuse of adolescent athletes by a medical professional operating within an elite sport development pathway, enabled by authority relationships and failures to act on earlier warning signs.

The acts are deliberate, as examinations are intentionally conducted under controlled professional conditions; unwanted, as agreement is constrained by dependency on medical care and selection pathways; non-essential, because procedures exceed legitimate medical necessity; and harmful, reflected in sexual violation and cumulative psychological harm.

The following violent act is identifiable:

- **302 Sexual assault of a child:** invasive examinations of a sexual nature conducted without medical necessity

The indispensable variable records the victims as children aged 15–17 years (AV4). Minimum disaggregating variables identify the context as related to organized sport (OS1), setting as other medical, rehabilitation and care facility (Set4e) and the perpetrator as medical personnel exercising formal authority (IP5a). Recording the sex and age of victims (SV2) and perpetrator (SP1; AP4) enables an analysis of power differentials within elite athlete development systems. Additional disaggregating variables capture institutional linkages (IL1b), where organizational structures enable the continuation of harmful conduct, as well as previous history of violence (PHV), where multiple victims are identified over time. Where available, recording geographic location (Geo) and date and time (DaT) enables an analysis of prolonged abuse occurring across different contexts.

Potential insights for policy, prevention and response

- **Strengthening safeguards in sports medicine environments:** Disaggregation by perpetrator role enables violence involving medical personnel to be analysed separately from coaching or peer violence, revealing risks linked to therapeutic settings characterized by bodily contact and authority asymmetries. Such data support policies requiring supervised treatment environments, standardized examination protocols and clearer separation between health-care provision and performance evaluation structures.
- **Identifying institutional enabling conditions:** Recording institutional linkages variables allows for an analysis of situations where concerns are informally recognized yet not formally documented. Aggregated patterns can highlight organizational conditions under which safeguarding responsibilities diffuse across staff roles, supporting governance reforms that strengthen reporting pathways and independent oversight mechanisms.
- **Detecting serial abuse through aggregated data:** Coding repeated acts affecting multiple victims enables the identification of recurring perpetrator patterns that may remain invisible when incidents are recorded individually. Linking victimization histories and perpetrator characteristics across time and locations supports the earlier detection of systemic abuse risks within athlete development systems.
- **Monitoring risks within elite athlete pathways:** Comparable classification across jurisdictions allows for the collective examination of safeguarding risks associated with centralized training academies and international competition preparation environments. This supports coordinated safeguarding standards across sport systems, where athletes move between institutions, competitions and national contexts.

Table 3. Example of recording and coding an act of sexual violence, in line with the ICVAC

ICVAC	Code	302-AV4-OS1-Set4e-SV2-SP1-AP4-IP5a-IL1b-PHV1b	
Category	302	Sexual assault of a child	Touching the private parts of a child (not including penetration) or making a child touch the private parts of someone else, with or without the use of force and without consent because the child is too young to consent or consent is not given
Indispensable variable	AV4	Age of the victim	15–17 years
Minimum variables	OS1	Organized sport context	In the context of organized sport
	Set4e	Setting	Other medical, rehabilitation and care facility
	SV2	Sex of the victim	Female
	SP1	Sex of the perpetrator	Male
	AP4	Age of the perpetrator	30–44 years
	IP5a	Individual perpetrator	Doctor or other medical personnel
	IL1b	Institutional linkages	The perpetrator is mandated, supported, incited, covered up or justified by a private institution
Additional variables	PHV1b	Previous history of violence/ recidivism	The perpetrator committed similar acts in the past

Case study 3: Performance pressure – Overtraining in youth football

Scenario: A 13-year-old girl plays in a competitive youth football academy and is widely regarded as one of the strongest players on her team. Her father (aged 48 years) serves as an assistant coach within the academy, regularly attending training sessions and contributing to decisions related to player development and match preparation. Over the course of a season, his involvement intensifies into sustained pressure for improved performance. In his capacity as a coach, he insists that she continue training and competing despite recurring knee pain and visible fatigue. Following matches, he publicly criticizes her performance in front of teammates, labelling her 'lazy' and warning that failure to improve could jeopardize her future opportunities in the sport, including the possibility of a sports scholarship. When the child requests rest, her concerns are dismissed. She is explicitly instructed not to disclose her injury to the other coaches or medical staff.

As a result, the child continues training while injured. The combined physical strain and psychological pressure begin to significantly affect her well-being. She develops sleep disturbances and increasing anxiety about training sessions and matches. Her confidence declines, and she becomes more withdrawn within the team environment. This pattern persists throughout the season. Her injury becomes chronic, and her performance deteriorates further. Ultimately, she is removed from the programme and withdraws from the team. She does not return to organized sport.

Insights for ICVAC measurement

This case describes repeated psychological harm and omission of care arising from sustained parental performance pressure within an organized sport environment rather than a single incident. Behaviour framed as encouragement or commitment to performance may constitute violence when assessed using act-based criteria.

The conduct is deliberate, unwanted (as the child expresses a wish to rest but cannot meaningfully refuse parental authority), non-essential (because sporting development does not require participation while injured) and harmful, reflected in escalating physical and psychological consequences over time.

The following violent acts are identifiable:

- **402 Harassing, spurning and humiliating a child:** repeated public criticism and degrading treatment linked to performance
- **503 Neglect of a child's physical or mental health:** ongoing failure to obtain appropriate medical care and continued pressure to train despite injury

The indispensable variable records the victim as a child aged 10–14 years (AV3). Minimum disaggregating variables identify the act as in the context of organized sport (OS1), setting as a sports and recreational environment (Set3b) and the perpetrator as a coach (IP8) – i.e., a parent acting as a coach within the sport context.[44] Additional variables provide further analytical insight. Repeated exposure

44 If multiple perpetrator types or multiple settings apply, it is recommended to select the category that is most relevant from a policy perspective. In this case, the perpetrator is a parent but is acting as a coach. In the context of this violent act in organized sport, the category IP8 would be selected as the dominant perpetrator type.

Table 4. Example of recording and coding acts of psychological violence and neglect, in line with the ICVAC

ICVAC	Code	402-503-AV3-OS1-Set3b-SV2-SP1-AP5-IP8-CV1	
Category	402	Harassing, spurning and humiliating a child	Repeated interactions with a child that convey that he/she is worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered or only of value in meeting others' needs
	503	Neglect of a child's physical or mental health	Ongoing withholding of proper medical care when those responsible for the child's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so
Indispensable variable	AV3	Age of the victim	10–14 years
Minimum variables	OS1	Organized sport context	In the context of organized sport
	Set3b	Setting	Closed places for leisure, sports, art, music and other recreational activities (including youth centres)
	SV2	Sex of the victim	Female
	SP1	Sex of the perpetrator	Male
	AP5	Age of the perpetrator	45–59 years
	IP8	Individual perpetrator	Sports coach or training staff
Additional variables	CV1	Concurrent victimization	The victim has concurrently experienced multiple violent acts

across the season reflects concurrent victimization (CV1) through overlapping psychological violence and neglect.

Potential insights for policy, prevention and response

- **Making performance-related harm statistically visible:** ICVAC-aligned measurement enables sustained pressure to train through injury and omission of care to be recorded as violence when definitional criteria are met, even when behaviour is framed as motivation or commitment. This allows for safeguarding systems to distinguish supportive parental involvement from conduct that compromises a child's health or development.
- **Clarifying safeguarding responsibility beyond coaching staff:** Disaggregation by perpetrator type highlights situations in which harm originates from parents while occurring within organized sport participation. Such data support policies defining when sports organizations retain a duty to intervene to protect a child's well-being, even where perpetrators fall outside formal organizational authority.
- **Monitoring cumulative harm over time:** Recording repeated exposure across training sessions, competitions and travel periods enables the identification of gradual deterioration in well-being that may not trigger incident-based reporting. Longitudinal data allow for safeguarding actors to recognize escalation patterns and initiate earlier protective responses.

Case study 4: Performance monitoring – Harmful weight-control practices in youth gymnastics

Scenario: A 10-year-old girl joins a competitive gymnastics club participating in regional and national competitions. Eager to secure selection and integrate socially within the team, she trains six days per week under a 61-year-old female head coach responsible for athlete development and competition selection.

The programme emphasizes strict body conditioning and regular performance monitoring. Athletes undergo weekly weigh-ins in the training hall, where results are announced aloud to teammates. Over several months, the coach begins imposing additional requirements on selected gymnasts, including daily weight reporting and restrictions on food intake before competitions. After the athlete gains weight during a growth period, the coach instructs her to skip evening meals and assigns extra conditioning sessions as corrective training. These sessions involve repeated high-intensity exercises, during which the child is required to continue despite visible pain and fatigue and is not permitted to stop.

The gymnast experiences dizziness and fatigue during practice but continues training, believing compliance is necessary to maintain her position on the squad. Teammates are encouraged to monitor adherence to dietary rules, and concerns raised informally by an assistant coach are dismissed as part of elite preparation. The athlete's weight drops drastically, and she develop disordered eating patterns alongside increasing physical and psychological distress.

Insights for ICVAC measurement

This case describes a young competitive gymnast subjected over time to coach-imposed weight-control practices within a high-performance training environment.

The conduct is deliberate, as monitoring and restrictions are intentionally imposed despite observable physical distress; unwanted, as participation occurs under performance dependency and constrained refusal; non-essential, because athletic development does not require harmful weight-control practices; and harmful, reflected in physical risk and cumulative psychological suffering.

The following violent act is identifiable:

- **503 Neglect of a child's physical or mental health:** ongoing failure to respond to signs of physical harm (e.g., dizziness, fatigue) and to seek or enable appropriate medical care; continued pressure to lose weight despite drastic loss

The indispensable variable records the victim as a child aged 10–14 years (AV3). Minimum disaggregating variables identify the act as in the context of organized sport (OS1), setting as a sports and recreational environment (Set3b) and the perpetrator as a sports coach or training staff (IP8), a 61-year-old female coach (SP2; AP6).

Potential insights for policy, prevention and response

- **Clarifying boundaries between training practice and violence:** ICVAC's act-based criteria allow for sport systems to distinguish legitimate performance monitoring from harmful weight-control practices using consistent behavioural thresholds. Aggregated data can support the development of safeguarding guidance defining acceptable coaching conduct while maintaining comparability across sport disciplines.

- **Strengthening oversight of high-performance environments:** Combining perpetrator role, age characteristics and setting enables monitoring of environments where performance expectations may normalize harmful practices. Data generated through consistent classification can inform periodic safeguarding reviews of athlete development programmes and coaching systems.

Table 5. Example of recording and coding an act of neglect, in line with the ICVAC

ICVAC	Code	503-AV3-OS1-Set3b-SV2-SP2-AP6-IP8	
Category	503	Neglect of a child's physical or mental health	Ongoing withholding of proper medical care when those responsible for the child's care have the means, knowledge and access to services to do so
Indispensable variable	AV3	Age of the victim	10–14 years
Minimum variables	OS1	Organized sport context	In the context of organized sport
	Set3b	Setting	Closed places for leisure, sports, art, music and other recreational activities (including youth centres)
	SV2	Sex of the victim	Female
	SP2	Sex of the perpetrator	Female
	AP6	Age of the perpetrator	60 years old and over
	IP8	Individual perpetrator	Sports coach or training staff

Potential approaches to collecting data on violence against children in organized sport

Data on violence against children in organized sport remain limited and are not routinely captured through national monitoring systems in most countries. Existing evidence is derived primarily from cross-sectional research studies, sport-specific survey initiatives, isolated sport-related questions within broader violence surveys or inquiry processes following public cases. While these sources have generated important insights, they are typically cross-sectional and not designed for continuous monitoring. Underreporting further limits visibility, as many incidents are never disclosed, formally reported or recorded. Strengthening the measurement of violence against children in organized sport therefore requires drawing on multiple complementary data collection approaches. The ICVAC provides a structure through which these different data sources can be harmonized.

The following section sets out potential approaches through which data on violence against children in organized sport may be collected; the appropriateness and feasibility of each will depend on the context.

Administrative data sources

Administrative reporting systems provide information on cases that come to the attention of institutions and can support the monitoring of safeguarding implementation and institutional responses. However, they capture only disclosed and formally recorded incidents and therefore provide an incomplete picture of violence in sport settings. Potential administrative sources include:

- safeguarding and complaint mechanisms within sports federations and clubs;
- national 'safe sport' authorities or ombudsperson offices;
- national or sport-specific integrity agencies;[45]
- disciplinary tribunal or ethics panel decisions within sports organizations;[46]
- police and justice sector records identifying sport as the setting of incidents;

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45 Examples include national integrity bodies (e.g., Sport Integrity Australia or the Sportintegritéit Lëtzebuerg in Luxembourg) and sport-specific integrity agencies (e.g., The Gymnastics Ethics Foundation, YourSide, Athletics Integrity Unit, International Testing Agency, Biathlon Integrity Unit or Aquatics Integrity Unit).

46 FIFA's (Fédération internationale de football association) judicial bodies make all decisions public on its legal platform: <https://inside.fifa.com/legal/judicial-bodies/ethics-committee-decisions>.

- child protection system data where sport participation is recorded as a context of harm; and
- health system data documenting sport-related assault or abuse.

Where adopted, recording and applying the organized sport context along with the ICVAC categories and other disaggregating variables within administrative systems can support more consistent classification and interpretation of cases across institutions.

Survey data sources

Surveys can provide population-based estimates of violence against children in organized sport and capture experiences that remain unreported in administrative systems. Applying the ICVAC within regularly implemented surveys supports consistent definitions and classification of violent acts across contexts. Including sport as a clearly defined setting allows for comparisons with other environments, such as schools, homes or online spaces, and supports national monitoring.

Dedicated sport-focused surveys include:

- retrospective surveys of former athletes, such as the Interpersonal Violence against Children in Sport Questionnaire,[47] which examine childhood experiences in organized sport and enable cross-national prevalence estimation.
- surveys of adolescent athletes, including instruments such as the Violence toward Athletes Questionnaire,[48] which has been applied both during active participation and retrospectively with adult former athletes.
- periodic surveys conducted at regular intervals among elite or high-performance athletes to track well-being and safeguarding experiences over time.
- coach and sport personnel surveys examining safeguarding climate, witnessed behaviours and organizational culture.

Integration into existing national surveys can offer a scalable and cost-efficient approach, for example by incorporating sport-related modules into:

- violence against children surveys;
- crime victimization surveys; and
- multitopic household or youth well-being surveys.

Other data sources

Additional evidence streams can contribute contextual understanding of risks and institutional dynamics. These sources are not designed to estimate prevalence but can help identify patterns of harm or systemic safeguarding challenges. Examples include:

- national commissions of inquiry or independent reviews into abuse in sport;
- qualitative survivor and participatory research studies;[49]
- case audits or safeguarding reviews within sports federations;[50] and
- media investigations, civil society reports and court record analysis.[51]

Towards a multisource evidence approach

Measuring violence against children in organized sport is most effective when multiple data sources are used together. Administrative systems support the monitoring of responses, surveys estimate prevalence and experiences, and complementary evidence helps interpret patterns and risks. Applying the ICVAC's operational definitions and disaggregating variables where feasible strengthens comparability and supports the integration of sport into national violence monitoring systems.

47 Hartill et al., 'Prevalence of Interpersonal Violence against Children in Sport in Six European Countries'.
48 Pankowiak et al., 'Psychological, Physical, and Sexual Violence against Children in Australian Community Sport'.
49 Sport and Rights Alliance, '"No One Wants to Talk About It": Voices of impacted people on the participation of athletes convicted of sexual offenses at mega sporting events', Sport and Rights Alliance, the Netherlands, 2025.
50 Rhind, Daniel, et al., 'An Analysis of Child Safeguarding Cases Managed by National Governing Bodies of Sport across England and Wales', *Child Abuse Review*, vol. 33, no. 6, 18 November 2024.
51 Human Rights Watch, '"I Was Hit So Many Times I Can't Count": Abuse of child athletes in Japan', 20 July 2020, <www.hrw.org/report/2020/07/20/i-was-hit-so-many-times-i-cant-count/abuse-of-child-athletes-in-japan>; Sport and Rights Alliance, 'Olympics Abuse in Indian Wrestling Exposes Need for Global Hotline', 23 July 2024, <https://sportandrightsalliance.org/olympics-abuse-in-indian-wrestling-exposes-need-for-global-hotline>.

Advantages of measuring violence against children in organized sport in line with the ICVAC

Measuring violence against children in organized sport using the ICVAC strengthens the production of statistics that are consistent and comparable across contexts. The greater visibility of violence in sport within national monitoring systems supports more effective prevention and response, thereby contributing to safer environments and improved participation outcomes for children in sport.

Standardization of data collection

The ICVAC provides a common, act-based framework for recording violence against children across sectors involved in sport, including sports organizations, child protection services, justice systems, health services and research initiatives. By focusing on behavioural acts rather than sport-specific terminology or legal classifications, the framework helps address long-standing inconsistencies in how harmful practices in sport are defined and recorded.

Standardized categories and disaggregating variables allow for data from different sources (e.g., safeguarding complaints, athlete surveys or administrative records) to be structured using the same conceptual language. This supports a more systematic documentation of violence occurring in sport environments, including forms that may otherwise be normalized or overlooked.

Comparability across contexts

Sport systems vary widely across countries in terms of governance structures, legal frameworks and cultural norms. The ICVAC enables measurement based on the nature of the violent act, rather than national legal definitions or sport-specific rules, allowing for the comparison of data across sport contexts, athlete populations, competition levels and regions. Identifying organized sport as a setting through standardized tags makes it possible to analyse how patterns of violence differ between countries with different safeguarding systems. Comparable data strengthen the global evidence base and support shared learning across sport contexts.

Evidence-based policy development

ICVAC-aligned data provide policymakers and sport authorities with a clearer basis for prevention and safeguarding strategies. Consistent measurement over time enables the monitoring of trends, identification of populations at heightened risk and assessment of whether safeguarding interventions are achieving intended outcomes. Because the framework captures contextual variables, such as perpetrator role and institutional linkages, it supports the analysis not only of individual acts but also of organizational and systemic factors associated with violence. This helps shift responses from reactive case management towards targeted prevention and safer sport environments.

International cooperation and collaboration

A shared measurement framework facilitates collaboration between governments, international sports bodies and child protection actors. ICVAC-aligned data enable cross-country analysis and support the development of a common evidence base on violence against children in organized sport. Harmonized measurement also strengthens coordination across sectors and jurisdictions by aligning how violence is defined, recorded and interpreted. This supports international policy dialogue and contributes to more consistent safeguarding approaches across sport systems.

Annex 1. Broad and detailed structure of the ICVAC

Section 1 Violent killing of a child	
101	Intentional homicide of a child
102	Attempted intentional homicide of a child
103	Non-intentional homicide of a child
109	Other acts leading to death of a child not elsewhere classified

Section 2 Physical violence against a child	
201	Severe assault against a child
202	Minor assault against a child
203	Isolating a child
209	Other acts of physical violence against a child not elsewhere classified

Section 3 Sexual violence against a child	
301	Rape of a child
302	Sexual assault of a child
303	Non-contact sexual violence against a child
309	Other acts of sexual violence against a child not elsewhere classified

Section 4 Psychological violence against a child	
401	Terrorizing a child
402	Harassing, spurning and humiliating a child
403	Exposure of a child to domestic violence
404	Exposure of a child to other violent experiences
409	Other acts of psychological violence against a child not elsewhere classified

Section 5 Neglect of a child	
501	Physical neglect of a child
502	Psychological neglect of a child
503	Neglect of a child's physical or mental health
504	Educational neglect of a child
505	Abandonment of a child
509	Other acts of neglect of a child not elsewhere classified

Section 9 Other acts of violence against a child not elsewhere classified	
909	Other acts of violence against a child not elsewhere classified

Annex 2. Disaggregating variables needed to measure violence against children in organized sport

AV: Age of the victim

This tag determines whether the victim is under the age of 18 and qualifies as a child (indispensable variable).

AV – Age of the victim	1. 0–4 years old
	2. 5–9 years old
	3. 10–14 years old
	4. 15–17 years old
	5. Age not known

Notes: Age should be collected by date of birth or in months/years. The age bands shown here are recommended for analytical purposes.

OS: Organized sport context

This tag determines whether the act was perpetrated through participation in organized sport. It was developed as an additional ICVAC disaggregating variable to specifically measure violence against children in organized sport.

OS – Organized sport context	1. In the context of organized sport
	2. Not in the context of organized sport
	3. Context of organized sport not applicable
	4. Context not known

'In the context of organized sport' refers to an act against a child that is perpetrated through participation in organized sport, where such participation provides the perpetrator with access to the child. Access may arise:

- during organized sport activities or related arrangements (e.g., during training or competition, in locker rooms, during team travel or at residential training camps).
- through relationships established within organized sport (e.g., between a coach and athlete or between teammates, including where interactions occur outside of organized sport activities).

This excludes acts that involve persons connected to organized sport or that occur in sport-related settings but are not linked to the child's participation in organized sport.

Set: Settings tag

This tag measures where violence against children is perpetrated (minimum variable).

1. **Home**
   - 1a. The home/place where the victim lives
   - 1b. The home/place where the perpetrator lives
   - 1c. The home/place of a third party other than the victim or perpetrator (of other family members, friends, tutors, etc.)
   - 1d. Other home setting
2. **Places for education and vocational training**
   - 2a. Public educational institution
   - 2b. Private educational institution
   - 2c. Boarding/residential school
   - 2d. Places for special needs education
   - 2e. Non-formal education setting
   - 2f. Other education setting
3. **Community**
   - 3a. Open spaces (streets, parks, public spaces, etc.)
   - 3b. Closed places for leisure, sports, art, music and other recreational activities (including youth centres)
   - 3c. Public and private transport (trains, buses, taxis, etc.)
   - 3d. Places of worship and religious institutions
   - 3e. Camps/settlements for refugees/displaced persons
   - 3f. Military barracks, camps, bases
   - 3g. Other community setting
4. **Medical, rehabilitation and care facilities**
   - 4a. Residential care, orphanages, shelters
   - 4b. Community centre
   - 4c. Hospital, nursery, emergency or rehabilitation care centre
   - 4d. Open reception centre for migrants/asylum-seekers
   - 4e. Other medical, rehabilitation and care facility
5. **Working places**
   - 5a. Premises/physical space where work is carried out (office, farm, factory, shop, restaurant, street, etc.)
   - 5b. House of the employer (i.e., for domestic workers, housekeepers, etc.)
   - 5c. House of the workers (when work is taken home by the workers)
   - 5d. Other working place
6. **Places of detention**
   - 6a. Police station
   - 6b. Correctional facility/prison/pre-trial detention centres
   - 6c. Centre for immigration detention
   - 6d. Other place of detention
7. **Digital space and platforms**
   - 7a. Social media, both web-based and applications
   - 7b. Social gaming platforms
   - 7c. Discussion boards, groups and forums
   - 7d. Dark web
   - 7e. Other digital space/platforms
8. **Setting not applicable**
9. **Setting not known**

IP: Individual perpetrator / GPer: Group perpetrator

The perpetrator variable identifies who committed the violent act, whether it is an individual (IP) or a member of a group (GPer).

IP – Individual perpetrator

1. **Family member**
   - 1a. Parent or adoptive parent
   - 1b. Legal guardian or foster parent
   - 1c. Stepfather/stepmother
   - 1d. Sibling, half-sibling, step-sibling
   - 1e. Other family member (uncle, aunt, grandparent)
2. **Non-family household member (domestic worker, temporary or permanent guest)**
3. **Intimate partner**
   - 3a. Current intimate partner/spouse, including boyfriend/girlfriend and during dating relationship
   - 3b. Former intimate partner/spouse
4. **Peer or schoolmate**
5. **People with formal authority**
   - 5a. Doctor or other medical personnel
   - 5b. Teacher or other school personnel
   - 5c. Law-enforcement and justice personnel, police officer, guard
   - 5d. Care worker, social worker, case worker, personnel of orphanages and child welfare centres
6. **Employer (formal or informal) or co-worker**
7. **Clergy, including priest, nun, pastor, imam**
8. **Sports coach or training staff**
9. **Staff of non-governmental organizations, UN staff, including of peacekeeping forces and UN missions**
10. **Procurer/pimp**
11. **Other perpetrator**
12. **Stranger**
13. **Perpetrator not known**

GPer – Group perpetrator

1. **Organized criminal group**
2. **Non-state armed group**
3. **Armed forces**
4. **Terrorist group**
5. **Other group**
6. **Group not applicable**
7. **Group not known**

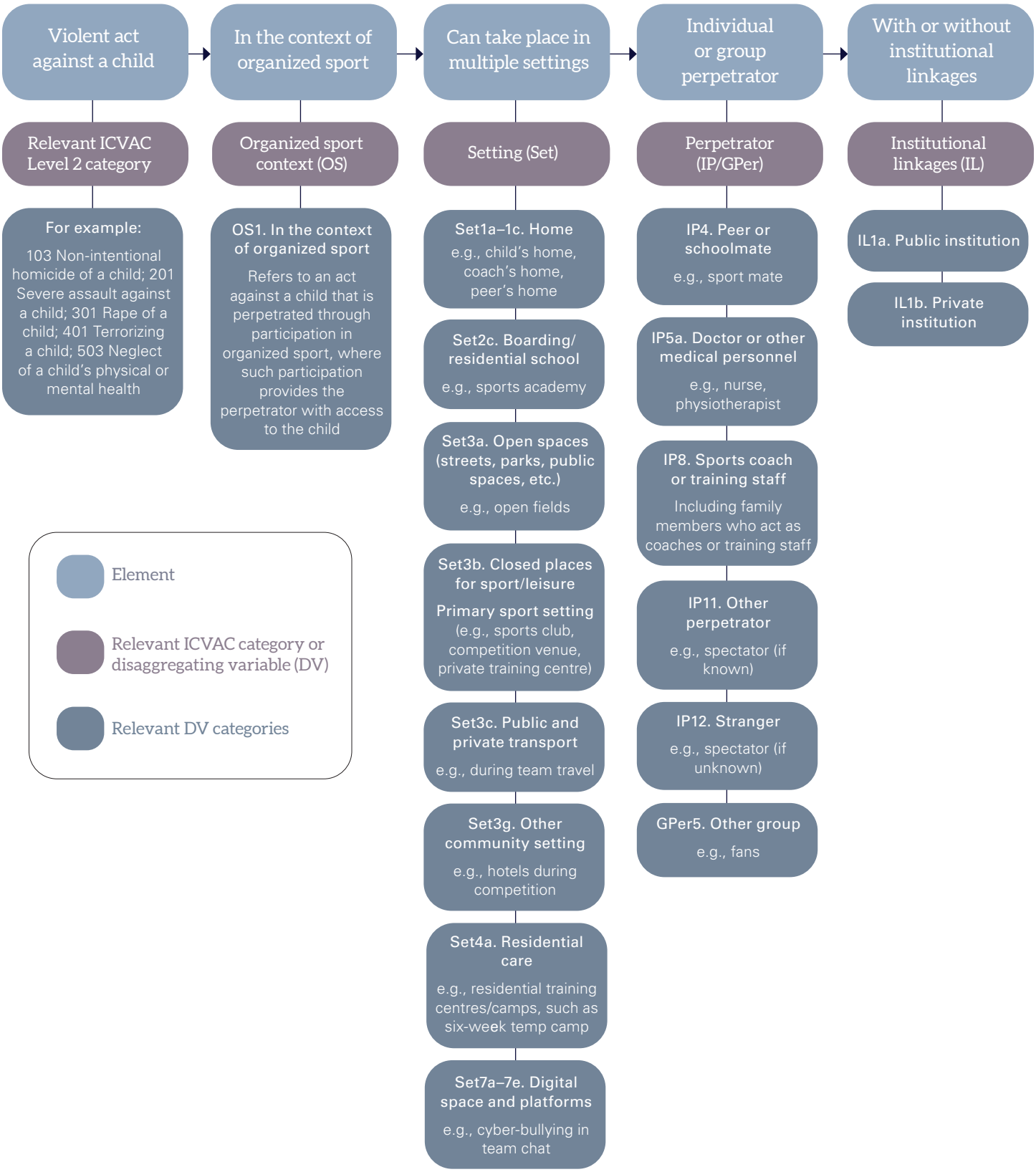
IL: Institutional linkages

The institutional linkages (IL) variable identifies whether the act was mandated, supported, incited, covered up or justified by a public or private institution.

IL – Institutional linkages

1. **The perpetrator is mandated, supported, incited, covered up or justified**
   - 1a. by a public institution
   - 1b. by a private institution
   - 1c. by an international organization
2. **Institutional linkages not applicable**
3. **Institutional linkages not known**

Annex 3. Example of applying the ICVAC standardized categories and disaggregating variables to record and classify a violent act against a child in organized sport



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