The balance of benefit and burden – child protection and sports volunteers

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The problem

- Encouraging sports volunteering with children
- Trusting and facilitating volunteers versus
- Protecting children from risk of abuse
- Avoiding unsuitable volunteers
The media context - 2008

Time for sanity in the vetting of volunteers
Daily Telegraph, 26/6/08

Child safety laws mean adults 'scared to approach children'
Guardian 26/6/08

If we can't learn to trust each other, we will lose ourselves and our children
Independent on Sunday 29/6/08

Now you need a licence to interact with children
Spiked 26/6/08

A quarter of adults to face 'anti-paedophile' tests
Daily Telegraph 2/7/08

Parents banned from ferrying children to sports matches
Daily Telegraph, 2/7/08

Volunteering tsar points to hindrance from red tape
Guardian 10/3/08
The media context - 2009

Public outcry amid fears that it could jeopardise perfectly safe and healthy activities for children.

Political concern
Child Protection legislation in Scotland

- Police Act 1997
- Protection of Children (Scotland) Act 2003
- Disclosure checks for new volunteers working with young people <18 years
Previous literature: on the one hand ... 

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

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

- funded by sportscotland 2007/8
- aimed to examine the impact of child protection legislation on volunteers in sports clubs in Scotland
- different because:
  - it focussed on child protection legislation
  - it compared this with other barriers to volunteering
  - it sought the views of individual volunteers as well as organisations
  - it considered benefits as well as problems
Research methods

- telephone interviews with
  - key agencies (14)
  - Active Schools Coordinators (19)
- surveys of
  - current volunteers (744)
  - disengaged volunteers (69)
  - potential volunteers (169)
  - club representatives (52)
  - child protection officers (15)
Results: impacts on preventing unsuitable people and on volunteer numbers

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

- This could mean any or all of the following:
  - unsuitable people are deterred from volunteering (intended result)
  - people with offences irrelevant to volunteering are deterred (unintended result)
  - people with convictions have a low propensity to volunteer
Is Child Protection Legislation a threat to current sports volunteers?

Factors Percentage fairly + very important
- Not enough time
- Paid job demands
- Too much paperwork
- Not right skills/experience
- Efforts not appreciated
- Family/partner complain
- Children no longer involved
- Club disorganised
- Prefer to just play
- Do not fit in
- Disclosure check requirement
- Money reasons
- Start a family
- Too old
Was Child Protection Legislation an important reason for sports volunteers stopping?

![Bar chart showing factors affecting sports volunteers]

- Not enough time
- Paid job demands
- Children no longer involved
- Efforts not appreciated
- Preferred just to play
- Not right skills/experience
- Too much paperwork
- Started a family
- Money reasons
- Too old
- Club disorganised
- Family/partner complained
- Did not fit in
- Disclosure check requirement
Are disclosure checks a barrier to potential sports volunteers?
Nevertheless ...

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

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

- Help to give confidence club has met its legal requirements
- Help to give parents confidence in volunteers
- Important procedure to ensure children's safety
- Help remove unsuitable volunteers
- Help to give children confidence in volunteers
Negative impacts on work of sports volunteers

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

On the one hand:

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

On the other hand:

- A minority of volunteers are very unhappy with disclosure checks
- Multiple disclosures are unpopular (but will not be necessary under new legislation coming into force)
- Low disclosure volumes in sports clubs suggest little or no effect
Conclusions

But – public opinion will be influenced by the media, so views may be different between January 2008 and September 2009.

It is critical that whatever any review decides, the implications are clearly communicated to the public and volunteers.
Conclusions

Furthermore:

- Still no reliable evidence on deterrent effects on both unsuitable and suitable volunteers with criminal records
- As Rochester (2001) suggests, there is a need to "reconcile the drive to reduce risk in many areas of our collective life with the promotion of spontaneous and informal voluntary action"
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