

The prevalence and characteristics of interpersonal violence against children (IVAC) inside & outside sport in six European countries

Introduction

Recent years have seen unprecedented attention on the abuse of children and athletes in sport. Strategic responses are critical and must be informed by robust evidence on the scale and nature of these abuses. The CASES project aimed to provide strong data on the prevalence of violence and harm experienced by children (people under the age of 18) inside or outside sport, across different national contexts. To deliver this overarching aim, and given the international dimension of the study, CASES drew on the concept of ‘interpersonal violence’ as adopted by the World Health Organisation and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to ensure a broad and inclusive approach to harm experienced by children (those under the age of 18).

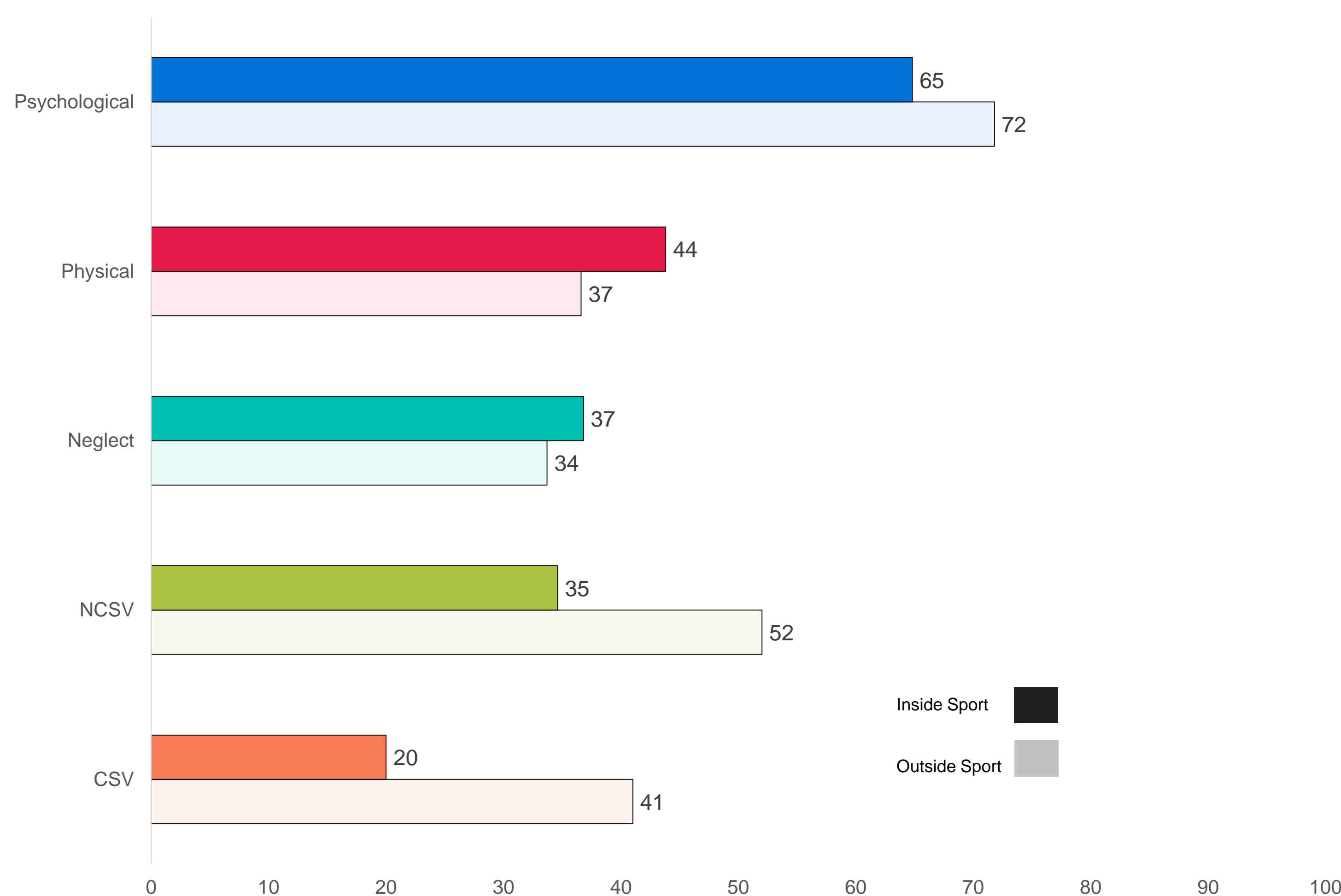
Research Question

What is the prevalence of interpersonal violence against children active in organised sport, inside and outside sport?

Method

- **Convenience sample of 10,302 adults (aged 18-30)** (from Austria, Belgium, Germany, Romania, Spain & UK).
- **Online Questionnaire structured around the four main categories of violence:**
 - physical violence
 - psychological violence
 - sexual violence (contact and non-contact)
 - neglect
- **35 central items were grouped into the 5 categories:** neglect (6 items), psychological violence (9 items), physical violence (5 items), non-contact sexual violence (9 items) and contact sexual violence (6 items).
- The questionnaire, survey invitation, and privacy notice were translated into the respective national languages.
- **Fieldwork between 22 October and 14 December 2020**

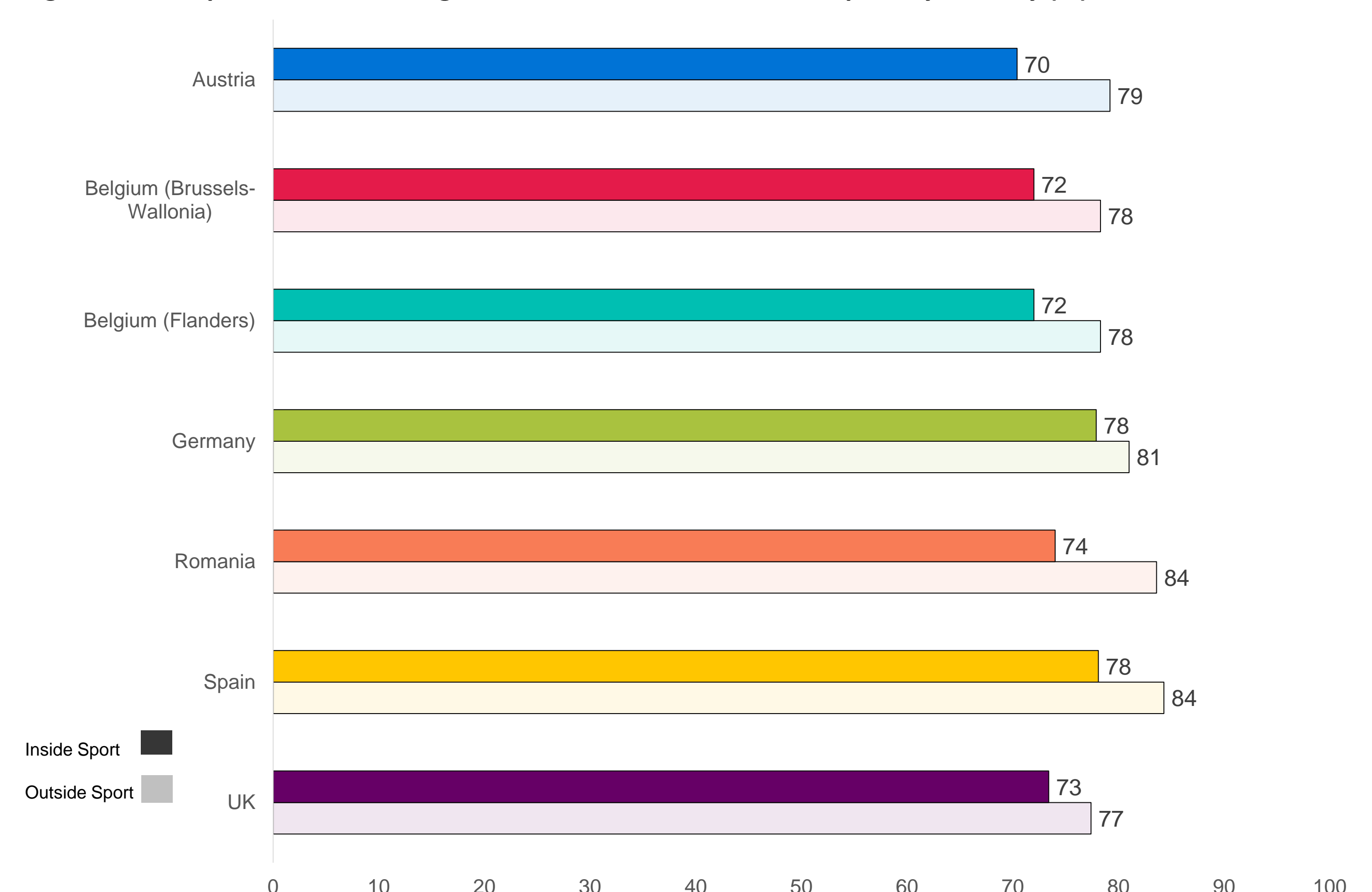
Figure 1. Total prevalence of categories of IVAC inside & outside sport (%)



Key Findings

1. Adults who played sport in their youth are **overwhelmingly positive about their overall experience** of sport.
2. The experience of interpersonal violence in children’s and youth sport is **a widespread problem**.
3. The prevalence of IVAC inside sport is **marginally lower than outside sport** (75% vs. 82%).
4. The **prevalence of specific categories** of IVAC inside sport **varies**: psychological violence (65%); physical violence (44%); neglect (37%); non-contact sexual violence (35%); contact sexual violence (20%).
5. The prevalence of IVAC inside sport is **broadly similar across national contexts**.
6. The prevalence of IVAC inside sport is **higher for boys than girls** (79% vs. 71%).
7. The prevalence of IVAC and the risk of experiencing longer durations increase with the level of performance.
8. IVAC occurs across the full range of organisational sport settings, but **most often in the sport club**.
9. The **perpetrators of IVAC** inside sport were predominantly **identified as male**.
10. IVAC is perpetrated by both **adults and peers**.
11. The perpetrators of IVAC are usually **known to the child** (unknown adult: only 6%).
12. The majority of respondents experiencing IVAC inside sport **did not disclose their most serious experience** and a **disclosure to someone in sport was rare**.

Figure 2. Total prevalence of categories of IVAC inside & outside sport by country (%)



Conclusion

The CASES study shows that IVAC in sport is a serious and widespread problem. Despite adults who played sport in their youth having an overwhelmingly positive experience, the CASES study demonstrates that violence, harassment and abuse in sport is still often ignored and those affected by forms of violence only seldom report their experiences. Addressing interpersonal violence and child abuse in sport requires cultural change in sport. Proactive leadership is urgently needed to address this situation, from inside sport and from national and federal governments.

