

Australian Sports Commission Harassment of Officials Survey Results 2002

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) conducted research relating to the harassment of officials in Australia. National sporting organisations were targeted for this project and the contributions made were extremely valuable.

Opinions and information were sought from coaches, officials and administrators, from grass-roots to elite levels, on a range of issues concerning the occurrence and related issues around the harassment of officials. Specifically, the project was aimed at collecting data on how significant the problem of harassment towards officials is.

Harassment being defined as offensive, abusive, belittling or threatening behaviour directed at a person or persons because of a particular characteristic of that person or persons. The behaviour must be unwelcome and the sort of behaviour a reasonable person would recognise as unwelcome.

It is important to note that the information gathered for this survey did not come from recorded cases of harassment of officials. It is recalled data from incidents survey participants have been involved in or have witnessed first hand over the last two years.

The information provided through the surveys will help the ASC establish useful guidelines, strategies and direction for sports looking for answers to this problem.

Demographic and sport-related information

Q1: Gender	Q2: Age	Q3: English first language	Q4: Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
Males — 73 per cent Females — 27 per cent	<18 years — 1 per cent 18–24 years — 4 per cent 25–34 years — 12 per cent 35–44 years — 25 per cent 45–54 years — 28 per cent 55–64 years — 22 per cent 65+ years — 6 per cent	98 per cent	<1 per cent

Q5: Location	Q6: Level of sport	Q7: Years at level of sport	Q8: Type of sport
Capital cities — 76 per cent Major urban areas — 7 per cent Other — 17 per cent	Local — 11 per cent State — 29 per cent National — 36 per cent International — 23 per cent	0–5 — 23 per cent 6–10 — 27 per cent 11–15 — 17 per cent 16–20 — 14 per cent 21–25 — 8 per cent 26–30 — 4 per cent 31–35 — 2 per cent 36–40 — 1 per cent >40 — 1 per cent	Team — 53 per cent Individual — 47 per cent

Q9: Main position	Q10: Other role
Director of NSO — 8 per cent Coach — 18 per cent Official — 38 per cent Administrator — 25 per cent Other — 11 per cent	Player — 39 per cent Coach — 36 per cent Official — 33 per cent Administrator — 47 per cent Other — 13 per cent People have on average 1.7 roles other than their main role.

Occurrence and type of harassment

Q11: Have you been involved in, or witnessed first hand, the harassment of officials?

Seventy-eight per cent of participants have witnessed harassment of officials first hand.

Q12: If you answered yes to the question above, what would be the estimated number of incidents of harassment over the last two years?

- Forty-six per cent of survey participants estimated they have been involved in, or have witnessed, 1–10 incidents of harassment over the last two years.
- Twelve per cent have been involved in, or have witnessed, 11–21 incidents of harassment over the last two years.

Q13: From your observations, who has delivered the most verbal abuse to officials?

Most verbal abuse has been directed at officials by athletes and involves yelling, profanity, taunts and insults. Coaches and parents have delivered slightly less abuse in the form of yelling and profanity, while other spectators have been more likely to taunt or insult officials. Administrators and officials have been unlikely to abuse other officials.

Q14: From your observations, who has delivered the most physical assault to officials?

Most physical assault has also been directed at officials by athletes and involves hitting and/or kicking, throwing objects and spitting.

Q15a: Is the rate of harassment higher for male officials; female officials; male and female officials equally; don't know?

Thirty per cent of survey participants believe the rate of harassment is higher for males, while 24 per cent believe males and females are harassed equally.

Q15b: Is the rate of harassment higher for adult officials; junior officials; adult and junior officials equally; don't know?

Forty per cent of survey participants believe the rate of harassment is higher for adults, while 17 per cent believe adult and junior officials are harassed equally.

Q15c: Is the rate of Harassment higher for officials from a non-English speaking background; officials from an English speaking background; officials from a non-English speaking background and an English speaking background equally; don't know?

Forty-five per cent of survey participants are unsure whether the rate of harassment is higher for officials from English or non-English speaking backgrounds.

Q16: Where does most harassment take place?

Most harassment takes place in community/local sport, followed by district, state amateur, then national sports. Harassment of officials is less likely to happen in professional sport and least harassment is considered to take place in international amateur sport.

Q17: Based on the examples provided, what percentage of the incidents you have been involved in, or witnessed first hand, over the last two years would you consider to be:

Moderate (involving arguments or comments directed at an official’s position, not them personally)

Moderate to severe (involving disruption of play, warning from an official, insults or profanity)

Severe (involving fines, suspension, removal from playing area, legal ramifications, actual bodily harm)

Most harassment is considered to have been moderate in nature:

- Moderate — 61 per cent
- Moderate to severe — 30 per cent
- Severe — 12 per cent

Q18: What most likely triggered these events?

Disagreement with rule interpretations and perceived lack of competence by the official were most likely the leading triggers for harassment.

Q19: In the situations you have experienced over the last two years, how many incidents of harassment of officials have been inflicted by the following?

Total cases						
	<i>Yelling or profanity</i>	<i>Threats</i>	<i>Taunts or insults</i>	<i>Racial or religious vilification</i>	<i>Hitting and/or kicking</i>	<i>Spitting</i>
Athlete	2576	188	528	84	75	56
Administrator	160	52	88	1	1	0
Coach	1690	168	270	18	6	8
Other official	78	18	36	1	3	0
Parent	1190	123	306	6	8	0
Other spectator	1148	114	539	25	4	20
Total	6842	663	1767	135	97	84

Total cases cont.				
	<i>Throwing objects</i>	<i>Using objects/weapons</i>	<i>Sexual assault</i>	<i>Total</i>
Athlete	87	2	3	3599
Administrator	0	0	0	302
Coach	30	0	2	2192
Other official	18	0	0	154
Parent	12	0	0	1645
Other spectator	32	0	0	1882
Total	179	2	5	9774

Support and consequences of harassment

Q20: To the best of your knowledge, how was the harassment of the officials dealt with?

Survey participants believe that 50 per cent of the time there was no support given to officials after they had been harassed.

Q21: For the incidents you have witnessed, were any of the following provided for the official?

Mentoring was provided 31 per cent of the time followed by counselling 16 per cent of the time.

Q22: To the best of your knowledge who provided support to the official?

If support was provided to officials, it was by a peer or colleague.

Q23: Were any of the following provided for the offender?

Survey participants believe that 68 per cent of the time there was no support provided for the offender after harassment had occurred.

Q24: To the best of your knowledge who provided input to redirect, educate or change the behaviour of the offender?

Counselling was provided 20 per cent of the time and the sporting body provided input to redirect, educate or change the behaviour of the offender 35 per cent of the time.

General opinion

Q25: To the best of your knowledge, how often are cases of harassment successfully resolved?

There is no clear pattern about the resolution of incidents involving harassment. Resolution falls somewhere between rarely and mostly.

Q26: Do you think enough is being done around Australia to eliminate or reduce the harassment of officials?

Eighty-three per cent of survey participants believe there is not enough being done in Australia to eliminate or reduce the harassment of officials.

Q27: In your opinion, how can harassment of officials be prevented? (What are some strategies that you think might work to reduce/prevent the harassment of officials?)

Suggestions to prevent harassment include:

- educating stakeholders about rules and the role of officials
- imposing tougher penalties
- training for officials in conflict resolution and improving officiating competency standards
- educating about and enforcing codes of conduct with stakeholders
- establishing clear organisational guidelines about how to deal with harassment.

Q28: Do you think Australian officials are generally competent?

Ninety per cent of survey participants believe Australian officials are generally competent across all levels of sport. Coaches are least likely to say officials are competent.

Q29: If you are an official, why did you become one?

Survey participants who chose to become officials have done so for the love of the game or to give back to their sport. Many believe becoming an official is a natural progression from competition, especially when they become too old to compete or they have to retire due to injury. Some also see officiating as a way to help the sport keep running. Some officiate to gain knowledge of the rules and others officiate because there is no one else to do it.

Q30: If you are not an official, would you consider becoming one?

- Sixty-six per cent of survey participants would not consider becoming an official because they have other preferences or commitments, or are simply not interested.
- Twelve per cent believe there is too much harassment.

Q31: What type of people become officials in your sport?

Ex-athletes, parents, then athletes are considered to be the most likely people to become officials. Many consider that ex-athletes and athletes become officials because they do not succeed in sport or struggle in the competitive environment. Some consider officiating as an avenue to elite competition that is otherwise unobtainable. Parents generally help out because there is an identified lack of officials in their sport or they have children competing.

Survey participants consider officials possess many positive personal attributes and professional skills and abilities (78 per cent), while others are seen to possess some negative personal attributes (22 per cent). Positive skills and attributes include being:

- dedicated
- community minded
- confident
- knowledgeable
- forward thinking
- energetic
- enthusiastic.

Negative skills and attributes include being egocentric and power hungry.

Q32: What rights do you think spectators have in relation to officials not performing competently?

- Thirty-six per cent of survey participants consider spectators have no rights in relation to officials not performing competently.
- Sixty-four per cent of survey participants believe spectators have a right to voice concerns through the appropriate procedures.