



**CANADIAN DEAF SPORTS  
ASSOCIATION**



**ASSOCIATION DES SPORTS  
DES SOURDS DU CANADA**

# Sport Safety For Deaf and Hard of Hearing Athletes

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# Acknowledgement

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Cynthia Benoit, M. Sc.

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# Summary

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The current report introduces results and recommendations as part of CB Linguistic Services' study conducted on behalf of the Canadian Deaf Sports Association (CDSA). This study occurred between January and April 2020.

This project's goal was to examine Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' experiences in regard to safe sports, as well as CDSA's role, especially about various forms of maltreatment. The independent consulting firm, CB Linguistic Services, was mandated to conduct this study.

The study was conducted in three phases:

## **Literature Review:**

The horizontal scan of the literature addressed the following questions:

- What are possible sport safety issues as experienced by Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, such as bullying, abuse, harassment, and discrimination?
- Which kind of barriers as experience by Deaf and hard of hearing athletes have an impact on their overall safety in sports?
- How could these barriers be addressed by CDSA?
- Which prevention measures would work best for CDSA and their stakeholders?

## **Data Collection:**

Twenty-eight (28) anglophones and 1 francophone completed the online survey. Among the individuals that took the survey, there were 15 Deaf participants (14 ASL and 1 LSQ), 8 anglophone hard of hearing participants as well as 6 hearing participants (anglophones). The hearing participants group is composed of coaches, team managers, and other staff groups.

Eleven interviews took place with various CDSA stakeholders, including nine (9) Deaf and hard of hearing athletes (5 ASL and 4 LSQ), one (1) coach, and one (1) team manager. The participants were recruited through social media, CDSA's internal network and the Deaf grapevine. Due to the anonymity of the survey, it is possible that some survey participants also took part to the interviews.

## **Data Analysis:**

The survey data was analyzed through descriptive statistics. The analysis was limited to this approach due to the very low number of participants, making the survey results not significant enough to proceed with an in-depth analysis. It is worth exploring it further in future studies.

Semi-directed interviews were conducted in LSQ, ASL, English or French, which were transcribed in English and French. The transcripts were then coded and analyzed based on the thematic analysis approach in order to highlight prevalent issues among Deaf and hard of hearing athletes.

## **Findings:**

The findings revealed several issues relating to safe sports among Deaf and hard of hearing athletes during CDSA events and beyond. It would be useful to first address communicational and attitudinal barriers that are the cornerstone of safe sports for CDSA's athletes. It would, in turn, constitute the foundation of the organization's efforts in their cultural shift towards a healthier and safer sports environment for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes as well as their staff.

The top three gaps identified through this study are as follows:

1. The absence of an independent third-party that is accessible in sign language, either in ASL or in LSQ, making it difficult for CDSA and their stakeholders to report safe sports issues without fear or hesitation.
2. The gaps in regard to sports staff awareness about Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' experiences, which is one of the most significant factors in regard to communicational and attitudinal barriers.
3. The gaps in regard to Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' awareness of safe sports and various issues

There are also opportunities to improve CDSA's role in regard to safe sports environment. Some of the strongest themes across all the data included:

- The appointment of an independent third-party who would provide safe sports resources that are accessible in four languages.
- Developing a safe sports culture for all of their stakeholders.
- Raise awareness on various topics related to safe sports that would be designed for each party, e.g., athletes, coaches, team managers, Board of Directors members, and volunteers, among many.



Data collected seem to indicate these priorities, which are elaborated in the Recommendations section:

- 1.** Address sport safety issues:
  - a.** Raise awareness about safe sports among Deaf and hard of hearing athletes;
  - b.** Provide trainings, workshops, and resources
  - c.** Build trust and positive relationships within CDSA
- 2.** Make the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport accessible in ASL and LSQ:
  - a.** Make it readily accessible for anyone who would need it.
- 3.** Develop and implement safe sports policies and procedures accessible in ASL and LSQ:
  - a.** Establish a checklist of policies and procedures reviews
  - b.** Develop CDSA's own Responsible Coaching Movement Implementation
  - c.** Support Provincial Deaf Sports Associations with their own Responsible Coaching Movement Implementation efforts
  - d.** Implement a thorough background screening process as well as a matrix
  - e.** Establish and implement the Rule of Two policy through an implementation matrix
  - f.** Establish a clear and independent complaint resolution process and guidelines
  - g.** Raise awareness about these policies and procedures
  - h.** Develop a safe sports culture
- 4.** Implement an independent third-party who would provide safe sports resources accessible in four languages:
  - a.** Ensure proper representation from Deaf and hard of hearing minorities
  - b.** Develop different types of awareness tools
  - c.** Provide information about safe sports related resources
  - d.** Build partnerships with safe sports organizations
- 5.** Raise awareness about Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' experiences, including Deaf culture
  - a.** Deploy targeted approaches
  - b.** Develop an open communication culture
  - c.** Provide training about various topics related to safe sports
- 6.** Address communicational and attitudinal barriers
  - a.** Provide sign language training to all hearing sports staff
  - b.** Provide training about attitudinal barriers
  - c.** Develop online resources
  - d.** Support coaching opportunities for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes

7. Hire qualified sign language interpreters in sports settings
  - a. Professional development
  - b. Partnership building
  - c. Consider hiring qualified Deaf Interpreters

Based on the data gathered in this study, several recommendations and areas for improvement were identified as shown above. The improvement opportunities noted in this review are dependent on ensuring appropriate personnel and fiscal resources are dedicated to this important project.

# Context Shaping This Study

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In the winter of 2020, Cynthia Benoit and CB Linguistic Services' team were contracted to conduct a safe sports study for CDSA. The purpose of the study was to understand the strengths and gaps within CDSA and the opportunities to ensure a safe sports environment for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes and the whole sports staff, be it coaches, team managers, or volunteers, to mention a few.

The project has identified several safe sports issues and gaps that are common for athletes, and more specifically those that are unique to Deaf and hard of hearing athletes. The report aims to provide an overview of these issues as well as recommendations to properly address these issues. Through the data analysis stage, we have identified strengths, gaps and provided recommendations that can inform safe sports planning.

While it is clear that CDSA has some invaluable resources with talented people working to deliver a safe sports environment for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes and this, along with Provincial Deaf Sports Organizations (PDSOs), there are a number of key gaps that require CDSA's attention for the issues to be efficiently tackled. This includes addressing communicational and attitudinal barriers, raising awareness among Deaf and hard of hearing athletes about sport safety, and the implementation of an independent third-party group.

It is hoped that the data and the recommendations contained in this report will be a catalyst for positive change in enhancing CDSA's efforts in terms of safe sports for all Deaf and hard of hearing athletes as well as their sport staff.

# Literature Review

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The following review presents a summary of the crucial literature that shapes the topic of safe sports among Deaf and hard of hearing athletes. It is important to note that due to the scarcity of the literature that discusses sport safety among Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, we opted to proceed on two different approaches in regard to literature review. The essentials of safety within athletic environments. Then, various barriers as experienced by Deaf and hard of hearing people are discussed. These two categories helped us design the survey and the interview canvas, which purpose was to allow us to gain a better understanding of various sport safety issues as experienced by Deaf and hard of hearing individuals, which, in turn, allowed us to develop a training curriculum that actually discusses these issues and their needs.

The literature review attempts to answer the following questions by drawing on Canadian and other international publications, and peer-reviewed documents:

- What are possible sport safety issues as experienced by Deaf and hard of hearing athletes?
- Which kind of barriers as experienced by Deaf and hard of hearing athletes have an impact on their overall safety in sports?
- How could these barriers be addressed by CDSA?
- Which prevention measures would work best for CDSA and their stakeholders?

While the review does not purport to be exhaustive, it represents the key elements and/or best practices that exist at the time of writing.

## An Overview of Possible Sport safety Issues as Experienced by Deaf and Hard of Hearing Athletes

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The topic under study is to examine and identify various sport safety issues as they might be faced by Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing athletes. This identification of safe sports issues allows multiple viewpoints to be examined and incorporated into the training curriculum.

Regarding the various sport safety issues terminology, it varies greatly in the literature as several researchers and practitioners approaches these issues from different perspectives (Kerr and Stirling, 2019). For the purposes of this project, we will use the term maltreatment, as well as barriers. The latter will be elaborated in the second section of this literature review. In addition to

the focus on various forms of maltreatments in athletic environments, we will discuss these forms of maltreatments as experienced by the Deaf and hard of hearing population in general as there is a severe gap in the literature in regard to Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' sport safety.

## Psychological Maltreatment

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The Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC, 2020) defines psychological maltreatment as follows:

“Psychological Maltreatment: Any pattern or a single serious incident of deliberate conduct that has the potential to be harmful to the psychological well-being of the Participant. Psychological Maltreatment includes, without limitation, verbal conduct, non-assaultive physical conduct, and conduct that denies attention or support. Psychological Maltreatment is determined by the objective behaviour, not whether harm is intended or results from the behaviour.” (p. 6)

Psychological maltreatment can indeed take various forms, including verbal abuse, bullying, harassment, and hazing. In 2019, AthletesCAN submitted a study report, written in collaboration with the University of Toronto, regarding prevalence of maltreatment among current and former national team athletes (Kerr, Willson, and Stirling, 2019).

According to their report (Kerr, Willson, and Stirling, 2019), current and former athletes on national teams went through various forms of verbal abuse, including shouting at in an angry or critical manner, gossip and lies told about them, being put down, embarrassed, and humiliated, intentionally ignored, criticized as a person, removed from practices, weight criticism, sworn at, and called names. These most frequently experienced behaviours by athletes were in the range of 14.8% and 39.1%, with a very notable difference among women, whose prevalence is significantly higher for various forms of psychological harmful behaviours as mentioned above.

## The Deaf Context

A review of the literature in regard to four forms of abuse among Deaf and hard of hearing population, including emotional abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, conducted by Wakeland et al in 2018, reveals that the prevalence of psychological and emotional abuse in the Deaf and hard of hearing population is higher according due to communication barriers, which increase Deaf and hard of hearing children's vulnerability to abuse victimisation and perpetration. Communication barriers as experienced by Deaf and hard of hearing population, especially children, make it harder for them to report these occurrences, which leads perpetrators not being reported and the lack of prevention of future assaults (Wakeland et al, 2018).

All the studies that Wakeland et al (2018) analyzed “reported physical abuse to be more prevalent in the deaf and hard of hearing population than the hearing population” (p. 444). In one of these studies, Schild and Dalenberg (2012, 2015) demonstrated a physical abuse prevalence rate of

72.2% within their Deaf and hard of hearing sample. Actually, the publications under the scrutiny of Wakeland et al (2018) found that the prevalence rates varied from 39% to 46.8%.

The higher rates of psychological maltreatment as shown above could also be the case of Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, be it with their peers or anyone who might have a form of authority over them such as coaches, for instance.

Psychological maltreatment as experienced by Deaf and hard of hearing athletes also includes discrimination, attitudinal barriers, and audism, which are an inherent part of their lives, which is why it is discussed in this project.

## Discrimination, Attitudinal Barriers, and Audism

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The Canadian Human Rights Commission (CHRC) defines discrimination as “an action or a decision that treats a person or a group badly for reasons such as their race, age or disability. These reasons, also called grounds, are protected under the Canadian human Rights Act” (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2020). There are various grounds for discrimination, including, but not limited to: race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, disability, genetic characteristics, and a conviction for which a pardon has been granted or a record suspended (Canadian Human Rights Commission, 2020).

In the Deaf and hard of hearing context, the most common form of discrimination is known as audism, which is the notion that one is superior based on one’s ability to hear or behave in the manner of one who hears (Humphries, 1977). One may assume that Deaf and hard of hearing oriented services should be readily accessible to the target population. However, audism can be most prevalent in services that ‘serves’ the Deaf population (Benoit, 2015; Bauman, 2004). This paradox could be explained by the fact that hearing staff aren’t aware of their own actions, comments, or behaviours, despite their knowledge about the Deaf and hard of hearing population (Bauman, 2004). This form of discrimination and oppression are part of various direct factors that causes toxic emotions among those who are experiencing it (Benoit, 2015; Bauman, 2004).

Attitudinal Barriers are “pervasive negative perceptions and value systems that focus on a person’s disability rather than their ability and other valued characteristics. Attitudinal barriers may be present in societies, communities or in specific individuals.” (Preedy and Watson, 2010). In the case of Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, this type of barriers emerges from the lack of understanding of their experiences and needs. Although there are positive attitudes such as neutrality and empathy, there are various toxic attitudes manifested towards Deaf and hard of hearing people, there are paternalistic attitudes, condescendence, contempt, pity and indifference (Benoit, 2015; Lane, 1993). These psychological barriers make them more reticent to use services that are paradoxically designed for them and the most effective approach to avoid such attitudinal barriers is to either use sign language to communicate or to make actual efforts to communicate (Benoit, 2015).

There is a strong consensus among Deaf studies scholars regarding Deaf and hard of hearing individuals’ experiences, as a part of a sociolinguistic minority, that tend go through prejudice, oppression and stigmatisation on a daily basis (Bauman 2004; Brueggemann 1999; Gertz 2008; Dunn 2008; Ladd 2003; Lane 1993; Leigh 2009; Mathews 2011; Padden et Humphries 2005).

Indeed, audism is quite pervasive in our today's society and it has significant impacts on Deaf and hard of hearing people's lives, especially on the communication level (Bauman 2004; Lane 1993; Leigh 2009; Padden et Humphries, 2005). In other words, audism is also the idea that the person's ability to hear or to behave like a hearing person makes it superior (Bauman 2004; Harold 2013; Lane 1993). It emerges from the normalization ideology, omnipresent in our society (Lane 1993; Padden et Humphries 2005; Poirier 2005). This ideology has long impregnated in society and can be explained by hearing professionals' authority, such as doctors and professors (Lane 1993; Mathews 2011; Parisé 1999; Poirier, 2005). This audiocentric approach based on "fixing" hearing issues promotes the idea that Deaf and hard of hearing individuals would greatly gain from oral communication while minimizing access to sign language (Lane 1993). It is important to recognize that due to these phonocentric beliefs, reinforced by the urban environment mainly designed according to sound, a great number of Deaf and hard of hearing individuals feel like intruders when they're trying to use these services specifically designed for them.

## Sexual Maltreatment

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The American Psychological Association (2020) defines sexual maltreatment as "unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using force, making threats or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent". On the other hand, the SIRC defines sexual maltreatment as follows:

"Sexual Maltreatment involving a person over the Age of Majority: Any sexual act, whether physical or psychological in nature, that is committed, threatened, or attempted against a Participant without the Participant's Consent. It includes any act targeting a Participant's sexuality, gender identity or expression, that is committed, threatened or attempted against a Participant without that Participant's Consent, and includes but is not limited to, the Criminal Code Offences of sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching, indecent exposure, voyeurism and non-consensual distribution of sexual/intimate images. Sexual Maltreatment also includes sexual harassment and stalking, cyber harassment, and cyber stalking of a sexual nature. Sexual Maltreatment can take place through any form or means of communication (e.g. online, social media, verbal, written, visual, hazing, or through a third party)." (p. 6)

In addition to these two definitions, the Kerr, Willson, and Stirling report (2019) states that the most frequent sexual harmful behaviours as experienced by national team athletes are : sexist jokes and remarks; intrusive sexual glance; sexually explicit communication; sexually inappropriate touching; indecent exposure; attempt of sex against your will; forced to have sex; asked to undress; and made to kiss someone. Always according to their report, 60% of these behaviours were perpetrated by peers while 62% were by coaches.

This kind of maltreatment has received the most attention by scholars in the scientific literature as stated by Kerr and Stirling (2019). It is worth noting that in the literature, the prevalence rates of such maltreatments as experienced by athletes from various levels of sports, from the recreational to high-performance sports are between 2% and 42%. The authors emphasize that this wide range of prevalence rates are due to varying definitions and inconsistent measurement tools of sexual abuse that are quite common in this field of research (Kerr and Stirling, 2019).

Notwithstanding these varying prevalence rates and various behaviors, it is clear that sexual maltreatment is a serious issue in sports and could very well be experienced by Deaf and hard of hearing athletes as well.

The Deaf Context

The prevalence rate of sexual abuse is significantly higher within the Deaf and hard of hearing population, and that children from that group are especially vulnerable to such maltreatment (Wakeland et al, 2018). Some researchers suggest that Deaf and hard of hearing children are at

“greater risk of sexual abuse, perhaps due to the abuser assuming it safer to abuse a deaf child [...], the abuser may believe that the deaf child would not be able to complain or would be unaware that the behaviour was unlawful, or the deaf child may have limited sexual awareness or be over-dependent on others” (Wakeland et al, 2018, p. 438).

Kvam (2004) demonstrated that their Deaf and hard of hearing sample’s sexual maltreatment experiences are significantly higher compared to their hearing sample. Their study compared the prevalence rates among Deaf and hard of hearing girls and boys to hearing girls and boys, as follows:

Table 1.: Prevalence rate of sexual abuse among Deaf and hard of hearing girls and boys compared to hearing girls and boys

Forms of sexual maltreatment	Deaf and hard of hearing		Hearing	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
Exposure to unwanted sexual experiences as a child	45.8%	42.4%	n.a.	n.a.
Sexual abuse with physical contact	39.6%	32.8%	19.2%	9.6%
Sexual abuse involving intercourse	39.3%		10.8%	



Wakeland et al (2018) pointed out that among the literature they studied, the sexual abuse prevalence rates among the Deaf and hard of hearing population varied from 34% to 39.6% in women, and 6% to 32.8% in men, with overall rates varying from 32% to 39.3%.

While Deaf and hard of hearing athletes are in the age of majority, it is still crucial to recognize these issues among Deaf and hard of hearing children who later can become athletes and perpetuate or even experience unhealthy behaviours in athletic environments due to their experiences and their lack of awareness about various forms of maltreatment.

## Physical Maltreatment

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The SIRC (2020) defines physical maltreatment as follows:

“Physical Maltreatment: Any pattern or a single serious incident of deliberate conduct that has the potential to be harmful to the physical well-being of the Participant. Physical Maltreatment includes, without limitation, contact or non-contact infliction of physical harm. Physical Maltreatment is determined by the objective behaviour, not whether harm is intended or results from the behaviour.” (p. 5)

The most severe form of physical maltreatment according to the Kerr, Willson, and Stirling report (2019) is excessive exercise with 11% of participants who are current athletes and 18.4% of participants who are former athletes.

## The Deaf Context

Several studies show evidence of higher prevalence rates in regard to physical abuse as experienced by Deaf and hard of hearing population compared to the hearing population (Schenkel et al., 2014; Titus, 2010; Ohre et al, 2015; Schild and Dalenberg, 2012, 2015; Sullivan and Knuston, 1998; Knulston et al, 2004). The prevalence rates varied from 39% to 46.8% among these studies.

As previously discussed, it is important to be aware of these issues among Deaf and hard of hearing population who could very well be athletes and perpetuate or experience physical maltreatments in athletic environments.

# An Overview of Barriers faced by Deaf and Hard of Hearing Athletes

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The topic under study is to examine and identify barriers faced by Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing athletes. This identification of barriers allows multiple viewpoints to be examined and incorporated so that sport safety can be expanded further, not just physical injury. This aim leads to support training and materials (a training curriculum) designed for coaches and team managers in support of Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing athletes. With an understanding of barriers faced by Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing athletes by coaches and team managers, this allows a safe, accessible, ethical and equitable sports environment.

Sport safety aspects were historically based on physical injury frameworks however this definition of safety has been expanded to include other aspects (i.e. psychological/emotional aspects of athletes). Many sport frameworks have been described in the literature however they all appear to share a commonality: the need to integrate multiple viewpoints into curriculum that can be incorporated by coaches and team managers. Those viewpoints include cultural sensitivity, incentives, leadership and resources to access and engage with stakeholders amongst others.

The parameters of the topic of barriers is narrowed to those faced by Deaf individuals, rather than defined factors/barriers identified as important, i.e. that has been identified in long-term athlete development (LTAD) general resources (Sport for Life, 2020). Aspects important for coaches, sport psychologists and team managers are included for recommendations to create a safe sport environment. Excluded are aspects important to parents, officials or structures (organizations).

## Deaf and Hard of Hearing Athletes' Historical Background in Regard to Barriers

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Historically Deaf individuals/athletes have been associated as a cultural minority due to linguistic and psychological factors (Stewart & Ellis, 2005). This self-determination has led to the formation of sport organizations, ranging from local Deaf clubs to the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD) and can also be viewed to reduce barriers formed by the majority society. However, over time, these sport structures have evolved due to external forces and currently the mainstream/inclusion structures which have taken place. A good illustration is the public mainstream school programs that are now more common as opposed to Deaf schools that were the main structure of schooling in past decades and were known to form prominent sport traditions (Palmer, 2018; Stewart & Ellis, 2005).

The changes in Deaf sports is clearly described by Atherton et al, 1999 using Deaf football as a prominent example. The social and cultural ties of members in the Deaf community were conducted through sport – particularly football. It provided a rational reason to meet other Deaf people and attending social events that were held along with the football game as well as visiting new parts of a country and different countries. In the 1990's there was a reduction of Deaf football clubs, so matches between two deaf clubs declined. It was thought that this decline was closely linked to the changing structures of the Deaf community. This included changes in government

policies in educating Deaf children, changing perceptions of deafness/disability and funding for sport in general (Atherton et al., 1999). As well as that, there is the factor of broadening in range of leisure pursuits by Deaf people, not just football, and the ease of keeping in contact with Deaf friends through advances in technology. Of interest is that Deaf athletes do like to play in hearing teams even though it has been reported that the athletes in Deaf teams do still face prejudice and misconceptions from opponents who are hearing (Atherton et al., 1999). All this have been a concern for the Deaf community in Britain, more so in limiting the “natural progression” into Deaf sports and community for Deaf children.

### **Expansion of Sport Safety Dimensions**

Traditional sport safety aspects were initially based on physical injury (Timpka et al., 2008). However, more recently safety dimensions have been expanded to include the athlete's internal feelings of being safe. Due to the additional dimensions included in sport safety or safeguarding, it has been realized that multiple viewpoints must be incorporated to ensure minimization of threats to sport safety.

### **Current Viewpoint of Majority- Mainstream / Inclusion vs. Deaf Schools**

The current viewpoint of Deaf sports is now that of the mainstream audience of Deaf and hard of hearing athletes due to inclusion philosophies. Such mainstream/inclusion structures have taken place instead of past sporting traditions that emerged from Deaf schools and local Deaf clubs as structures of a cultural minority. Those ideological viewpoints have to be taken into account when describing barriers faced by Deaf and hard of hearing athletes.

### **Self-Determination and Contact Theories**

For Deaf-Blind athletes, self-determination is based on awareness in the ability in setting goals and applying skills to achieve those goals, evaluating the progression of achieving their goals and ability to learn from experiences (Lieberman & Stuart, 2002). Skills include communicating with others, self-centered planning, evaluating opportunities of sport activities amongst others. Self-determination theory enables comparison in preferences of which sporting activity is important compared to what is offered. Another aspect is the need of socialization where interactions with others produce changes in attitudes, especially those who are not similar to you (Lieberman & MacVivar, 2003). Contact theory assures that contact is an important dimension in forming attitude towards others and friendships. To improve attitudes or perceptions one has of a person is equal status relationship. That is the more independent a person is, the more they can participate in goal setting and socialization.

### **What Differing Theoretical Assumptions for Barriers Are Described in the Literature?**

Sport can be viewed as outcomes resulting from physical, psychological and sociological activities of individuals and groups (Clark & Mesch, 2018; Stewart & Ellis, 2005). So, barriers may be thought to differ the outcomes achieved between Deaf athletes. In the sense of disability lens, a personal development model (psychological skills training, PST) has been utilized as a method to achieve personal excellence in sport (Martin, 1999). Those approaches include foundation concepts, psychological methods/skills and facilitative factors. Barriers are created when athletes are lacking understanding of approaches or methods for personal excellence.

## Possible Approaches to the Subject

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### **Sport Safety Structures**

To establish sport safety, it is necessary to have multiple avenues involved. For example, the eight (8) pillars of safeguarding as suggested by Mountjoy et al., (2015) include “C”ultural sensitivity, “H”olistic, “I”ncentives, “L”eadership, “D”ynamic, “R”esources, “E”ngaging stakeholders and “N”etworks, abbreviated to “CHILDREN”. This overall overview of sport safety (as policy) would require interactions of science and policy making for sport safety to be more strongly integrated (Timpka et al., 2008). Rich (2000) agrees to the need of a multiple avenue strategy including the development of education/promotional materials are developed, however, Rich also suggested that risk management should be used in identifying sport safety risks.

### **One Possible Framework: Community vs Individual Outcomes**

A theoretical community building/psychology framework has emerged in literature in that emphasizes the need for structures to be made for structures that allow a “sense of community” in individuals rather than focusing on individual outcomes. This sense of community has been found to improve student (athlete) life experience with sports or extracurricular activities on campus (Warner & Dixon, 2013) and could be a framework in creating sport experiences for Deaf sports in Canada.

## Current Research Studies

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### **Sport Safety Framework Structures**

Historically, sport safety approaches were structured on prevention of general physical injury (Timpka et al., 2008). More recently, safety has been expanded to have two dimensions: a person’s internal feelings of being safe as well as physical safety factors. This expanded scope will require skills of multiple professionals with integrated efforts from different organizations in sports. Outputs would include definitions of knowledge and the integration of scientific knowledge into policy (explanations, predictions). Processes that define/describe a safety problem and designs for potential solutions would need coordination between scientific and policy processes. Processes that include education and training would be influenced by policy orientation. Processes of networking would need to channel scientific sport safety knowledge to practitioners/policy makers. Sport safety scientists would need to participate in policy processes, influencing and reporting their values and

interests. From this, it is a clear need to have an overall sport safety policy and is a mandatory component of all sport organizations, with the necessary intersection of science and policy making to enable future development of sport (Timpka et al., 2008).

For implementation of sport safety practices, developed material needs to be easily up taken by coaches, athletes and sport administrators (Rich 2000). To induce incorporation of sport safety (i.e. injury prevention) multiple avenues strategies are needed, where regulation, education/promotional and environmental design are all developed. Rich (2000) proposed a circle of risk management should be incorporated (with identification, assessment, management (avoidance, control, transfer, finance), implementation, evaluation) in developing sport safety materials. In doing this, risks are identified and described before a sport safety plan is adopted. The benefits coming out of this should include fewer/less severe injuries, lower insurance premiums, recognition of care of players, satisfying needs of members, increased athlete education, responsible and a coordinated approach to sport safety.

It is clear that participating in sporting activities have many physical, psychological and social benefits for children, although it is increasingly made aware of that there are threats existing to the child's well-being (Mountjoy et al., 2015). This model of safeguarding sport for children under the age of 18 has eight underlying principles: developing policy, procedures to respond to safety concerns, advice/support, minimizing risks to children, guidelines for behaviour, recruiting/training/communicating, working with partners, monitoring and evaluating. Mountjoy et al (2015) suggests that research gaps include the need of quantifying occurrence of violence/threats and how they are developed/maintained. Systematic research that explores whether strategies to protect the well-being of child athletes are effective. As well, cost/value analysis of preventive initiatives so they can be used to encourage action for safety in sport is needed. It is suggested that there is a need to move beyond basic strategies in mitigating safety risk to a holistic approach of understanding and meeting a child's needs.

## Sociocultural Barriers

In the context of this research project, sociocultural barriers are as “human-made constructs mainly stemming from social norms and normative expectations, as well as cultural values” (Savolainen, 2016: 54). Savolainen (2016) argues that these types of barriers appear at various levels, be it societal, institutional, or organizational, and it includes local communities and small groups. According to Savolainen (2016: 54), “social norms are exogenous factors internalized by the members of a community during the socialization process, and they function as standards defining the boundary between acceptable and unacceptable behavior”.

Opposed to internal schooling environments, Demare (2019) looked at various barriers in outdoor education through a survey. Results show that economic and legal/accessibility barriers were primarily significant for the Deaf participants, out of four barriers surveyed (social, economic, legal/accessibility, educational) (Demare, 2019).

Stewart and Ellis (2005) argued that the barriers encountered are communication and simply lack of awareness, especially with people who are hearing. They suggest that the curriculum should be developed to show what is available and allow exploration of sociocultural forces (group identity, self-esteem, social competence) of the Deaf community. Mentioned studies described how participation increases by parental/school influences lead to increases in overall physical fitness levels.

In a literature review, Palmer (2018) noted that Deaf children struggle in physical education participation mainly due to communication barriers and social anxiety. There is a significant difference in success and attitudes between Deaf students going to schools for the Deaf and general (mainstream) schools, in that Deaf schools have students with more positive attitudes toward physical education and sports, more than seen in students attending mainstream schools. Adapted physical education teachers in mainstream schools do not have adequate knowledge of ASL or other methods of communication to work with Deaf students. Peer tutor students were found to be a useful intervention depending on the circumstances. Palmer describes a study on fundamental motor skills development (catching, overhand, throw, etc.) Deaf students scored higher at age 4 and younger but scored lower at age 5 and higher, as opposed to hearing students scoring higher after age 4. This difference was thought to be communication needs or having formal schooling at an earlier age for Deaf students.

For a sense of community to exist, Warner and Dixon (2013) found that the most critical factors are: common interest, leadership opportunity, voluntary activity, competition (moderated by gender) and salient. To foster a sense of community in unstructured sport, it is fundamental that all athletes are accountable to themselves, however this factor is not noticed in more directed models of sport (inclusion of coach or sport administrator). In terms of leadership skills, too much administration organizing can impact a sense of community. In terms of competing, the sense of community needs internal and external rivalries. This however is moderated by socialization processes in place, i.e. females prefer external rivalries more than internal whereas for males prefer both types.

Clark and Mesch (2018) found that low participation by Deaf women and girls were primarily due to attitudes, communication, language, culture, environmental, religious and social beliefs, lack of access, and financial need. J.M. Jordan, former president of ICSD, describes how those barriers are



“...outside us, in the social realm of communication” which was attributed .

In Manitoba, 80% of Deaf and hard of hearing children use oral language only. The other 20%, approximately more than 10% use both oral language and ASL, less than 10% use ASL only (Osborn, no date). Fatigue is seen when reliance of a second language not well versed in (instead of primary language) due to efforts to pay attention during communication dialogue. Osborn emphasizes that coaches need be aware of the sociocultural group that the athlete identifies with and the associated communication preferences/knowledge for each sociocultural group (Deaf, deaf or hard of hearing, oral deaf, deafened).

A survey of Deaf-blind adults showed that 60% were not satisfied with recreational offerings, in that those offerings did not match their preferred recreational activities (Lieberman & Stuart, 2002). Barriers to this mismatch of preferences were identified as lack of transportation, others to participate with, appropriate programming and time. As well in programming, it was found that communication and negative attitudes of instructors leading the programming were barriers. Solutions suggested to resolve the preference mismatch were social support, finding others to participate with, creating group activities, improved communication and ensuring that isolation did not occur. Results of the survey implied that recreational opportunities need to be offered to Deaf-blind individuals at a much earlier age. Exposure to a wider range of programming should lead to better self-determination, meet participation needs and provide access to further programming.

From a questionnaire completed by parents of Deaf-blind children, barriers to play activities included the disability itself, lack of knowledge by those offering the programming, lack of programming or staff, and inadequate communication (Lieberman and MacVicar, 2003). The majority of those barriers can be pinpointed to the issue of lack of awareness. Solutions suggested include offering in-service training programming to increase awareness and providing appropriate strategies to recreational staff, administrators, specialists as well as parents. Learning more about the unique needs of individuals is helpful in creating appropriate programming and can minimize communication issues.



## Psychological Barriers

Martin (1999) states that the challenge and associated ethical responsibility requires an understanding of disability sport/concept of disability to be effective in ensuring the personal growth of athletes. Psychological advice/interventions do not emphasize short-term solutions. There must be personal growth/development to see maximal athletic performance. Those solutions include foundation skills (self-awareness, self-esteem, self-determination), and psychological skills/methods including goal setting, self-talk, competition planning to obtain confidence and anxiety management. As well, facilitative factors, including handling injury/illness, effective training and leaving sport, are needed.

Burning out of sport is a common occurrence in sport. Ho et al., (2015) looked at relationships between symptoms of burning out and perfectionism in Deaf and hearing athletes. Perfectionism is thought to have three dimensions, of which two were looked at: self-oriented (defined as setting standards as self) and socially prescribed (defined as others holding unrealistic standard for that individual and engaging in critical evaluations). Burnout is seen as a response of withdrawal (psychological, emotional or physical) from a previously engaged sporting activity due to chronic dissatisfaction or stress. It was observed that burnout responses were consistent across deaf and hearing athletes (that is no difference based on hearing mechanisms) (Ho et al., 2015). Solutions purposed for burnout symptoms include basic skills training (relaxation, self-talk, mental rehearsal, problem-focused coping strategies). Use of Cognitive Behavioural therapy (CBT) was suggested. Coaches should be made aware of how to develop and create task-involving and autonomy supportive environments.

## Commonalities in Barriers

Taking a tabular overview (Table 1) some emerging commonalities in barriers exist across literature sources. Those barriers could be grouped into communication, sociocultural (psychological), economical and systematic, all of what are faced by Deaf and hard of hearing athletes face.

Table 1.: Overview of Barriers Identified in the Literature Survey

Barriers identified	Solutions	Reference source
Economical, legal / accessibility		Denmare, 2019
Communication, lack of awareness, parental/schools	Curriculum to allow exploration of sociocultural aspects, parental / school involvement	Stewart and Ellis, 2005
Social and economical, access to training, minimal media coverage / exposure, communication, double discrimination issues	Ongoing advocacy, support, networking in mainstream and deaf/disability organizations necessary to empower. More research/statistics needed, communication mode depends on age of deafness onset, degree of deafness, type of school/sociocultural environment	Clark and Mesch, 2018
Fatigue due to reliance on as “a second language”, social skills, incidental learning, identity/sociocultural group awareness, communication	Sport vocabulary/concepts, critical thinking, following directions, social skills inclusion, create practice plans/team documents before instruction/competition/play	Osborn, no date
Personal growth/ development knowledge, absence use of coach	Foundation skills (self-awareness, self-esteem, etc), psychological skills (goal setting, imagery, self-talk, competition planning), confidence, anxiety management	Martin, 1999
Lack of community	Sense of community requires common interest, leadership skills for all athletes, volunteering - “be accountable for yourself”, competition aspects, focus on personal goals/mastering of skills	Warner and Dixon, 2013
Communication, social anxiety, attitudes, school type, lack of awareness about methods by PE teachers or sport psychologists	Peer tutor students, communication methods, learn ASL or use interpreter	Palmer, 2018

Table 1 cont'd.: Overview of barriers identified in the literature survey

Barriers identified	Solutions	Reference source
Media promotion, communication tools, athlete development		CDSA, 2013
Burning out due to psychological dimensions	Burnout psychological mechanisms consistent across d/Deaf and hearing athletes. Basic psychological skills training (relaxation, self-talk, mental rehearsal). Apply problem-focused coping strategies. Use of CBT. Coaches should be aware of how to develop task-involving and autonomy supportive environments.	Ho et al., 2015
Mismatch in recreational programming preferences due to lack of transportation, others to participate with, appropriate programming, communication and negative attitudes of instructors	Better self-determination. Social support, finding others to participate with, creating group activities, improve communication and ensuring that isolation did not occur. Offer programming to Deaf-blind at an earlier age.	Lieberman and Stuart, 2002
Lack of awareness, due to lack of knowledge by those offering the programming, lack of programming or staff, inadequate communication	In-service training programming, appropriate strategies and minimizing communication problems.	Lieberman and McVicar, 2003

As well, commonalities exist in suggested solutions (Table 1). Those include the need of curriculum development or resources made available to athletes and coaches in multiple communication modes. As well as psychological skills development and the ability to understand frameworks in Deafness due to linguistic and psychological aspects (i.e., cultural minority, mainstream/inclusion philosophies).

## Conclusion

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Types of barriers identified from the literature were found to be of three areas: communication (audism), sociocultural (psychological), economical and systematic. With those three areas of barriers identified from the literature, creating and developing solutions to understand and resolve will allow a safe, accessible, ethical and equitable sports environment (abbreviated to safe sports environment). This is consistent to principles typically described in sport safety structures: cultural sensitivity, holistic, incentives, leadership, dynamic, resources, engaging stakeholders and networks.

Additionally, the solutions to those barriers should also fill in the gaps that has been identified in the literature. Those gaps identified from literature were of the following: the need of curriculum development or resources made available to athletes and coaches in multiple communication modes. Being able to identify and modify approaches to coaching athletes who are Deaf and hard of hearing will be greatly facilitated if modes of communications were deeply understood by coaches and team managers. With solutions provided in a curriculum for the communication barrier, coaches and team managers should be able to support a safe sports environment.

Psychological skills development and the ability to understand frameworks in Deafness due to linguistic and psychological aspects (i.e. cultural minority, mainstream/inclusion philosophies). This will be particularly a difficult topic to master for coaches and team managers. Mastery of this topic requires some in depth self-thinking to better understand audism as well as being allies to the Deaf and hard of hearing athletes. There are available resources in becoming an ally to the Deaf community. Having an in depth understanding of frameworks and ability to be an ally will additionally lead to a safe sport environment. Once this difficult topic is mastered then application of tools from psychological aspects (basic psychological skills training, etc.) would be of benefit.

Athletes who are Deaf and hard of hearing clearly do face multiple barriers (communication, sociocultural (psychological), economical and systematic) and are often experienced in intersectional/interactive aspects. While there are commonalities to the barriers being identified, there are solutions that appear to be specific to each barrier type. However, it is clear that solutions can be utilized across barriers, in particular to develop curriculum to better support the interactions between coaches/team managers and athletes.

To provide a safe sport environment to Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, it is appropriate to create and develop curriculum in the topics of barriers as well as a sense of community. This will allow coaches and team managers to utilize those resources while they work with Deaf and hard of hearing athletes as they progress through the development pathways to success in sport.

# Research Results

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## Methodology

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From January to April 2020, qualitative and quantitative data were collected through semi-directed interviews and a survey among CDSA's community members, that includes Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, coaches, and team managers.

Participants recruitment for semi-directed interviews were based on specific criteria to ensure significant representativeness among various groups, such as gender, age, ethnics, main language, and their hometown. Screening to ensure diversity was done prior to the interview. Overall, 11 interviews were conducted and included 4 Deaf LSQ participants, 6 Deaf ASL participants and one hearing anglophone participant.

Regarding the survey, the quantitative part of the study designed for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, they were recruited through social media such as CDSA's Facebook page. Coaches and team managers working with these athletes were contacted by email. Overall, 29 individuals took part of the survey, with 28 anglophones and 1 francophone. However, the survey completion rate was of 69%, which means 31% didn't complete the survey. Only those who completed the survey were taken into consideration for the analysis.

This combined approach some exploratory data in order to gain a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in terms of sport safety among Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, which in turn, allowed us to determine recommendations which aims to reinforce CDSA's position on these matters.

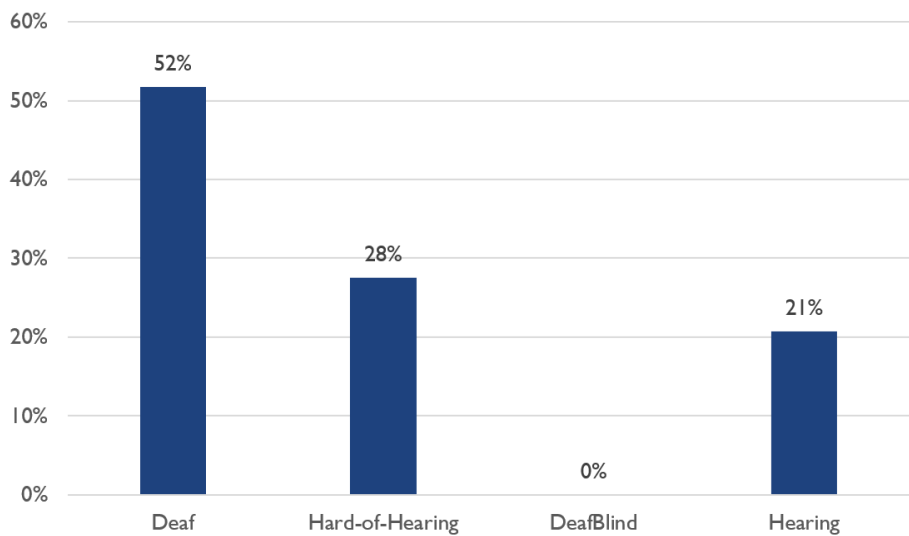
# An Overview of Survey Results

Overall, 15 Deaf participants (14 ASL and 1 LSQ), 8 anglophone hard of hearing participants, and 6 hearing participants (anglophones), completed the survey.

## Participants' Sociodemographic Profile

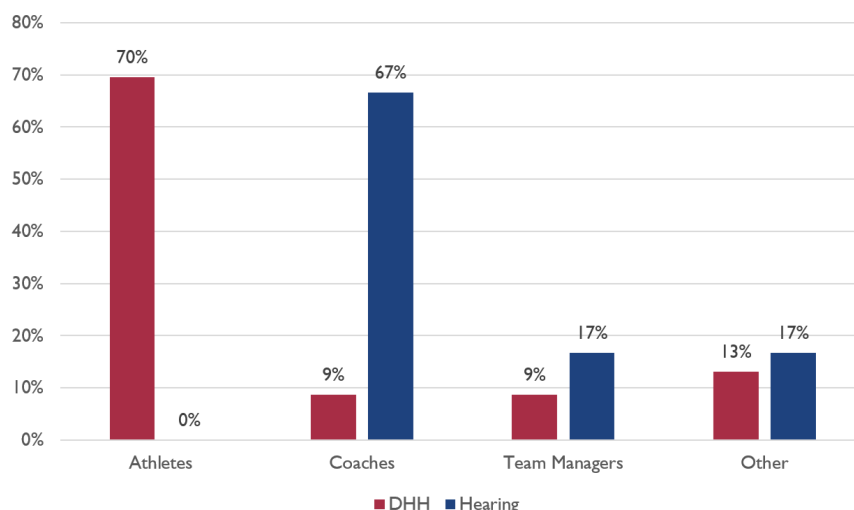
This section will be introducing the survey participants' profile based on various sociodemographic variables. It will contribute to a better understanding of the participants' general profile, who have completed the survey.

Graph 1.: Number of participants by auditory status



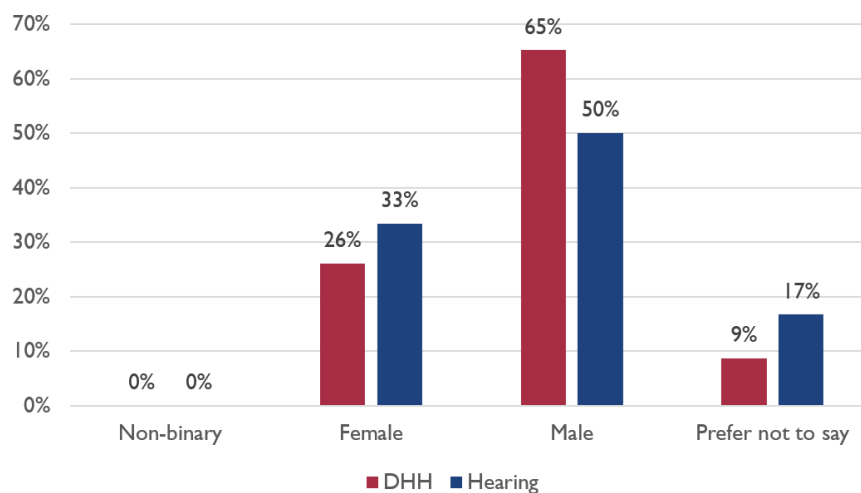
This graph reveals that, for the Deaf and hard of hearing group of participants, 52% of them are Deaf (n=15) and the other 38% are hard of hearing (n=8). Regarding hearing participants, there were 6 hearing participants (21%).

## Graph 2. Number of Participants by Their Role With CDSA



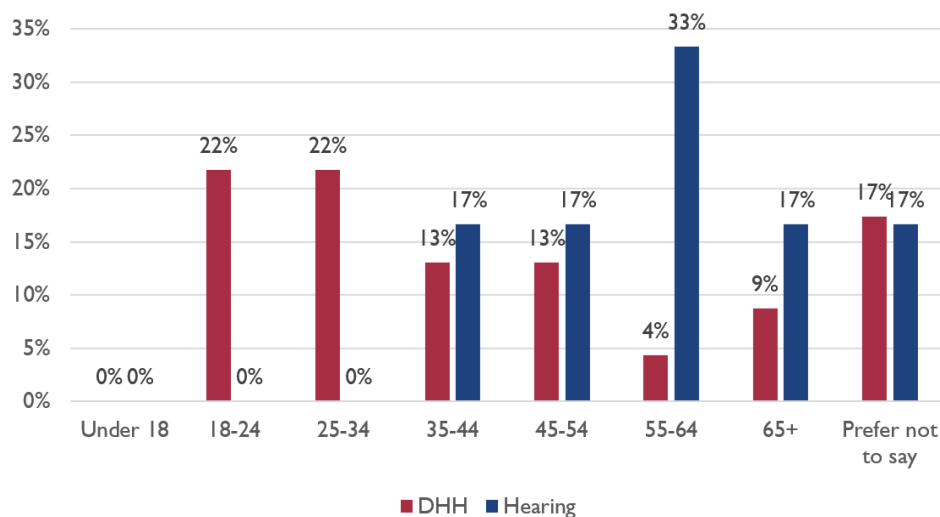
Due to the nature of CDSA's services, it is clear that coaches are in great majority hearing, and that all athletes who completed the survey are either Deaf or hard of hearing. The majority of team managers and other staff are also hearing with a lower difference (between 4% and 8%) compared to the coaches category.

## Graph 3. Number of Participants by Gender



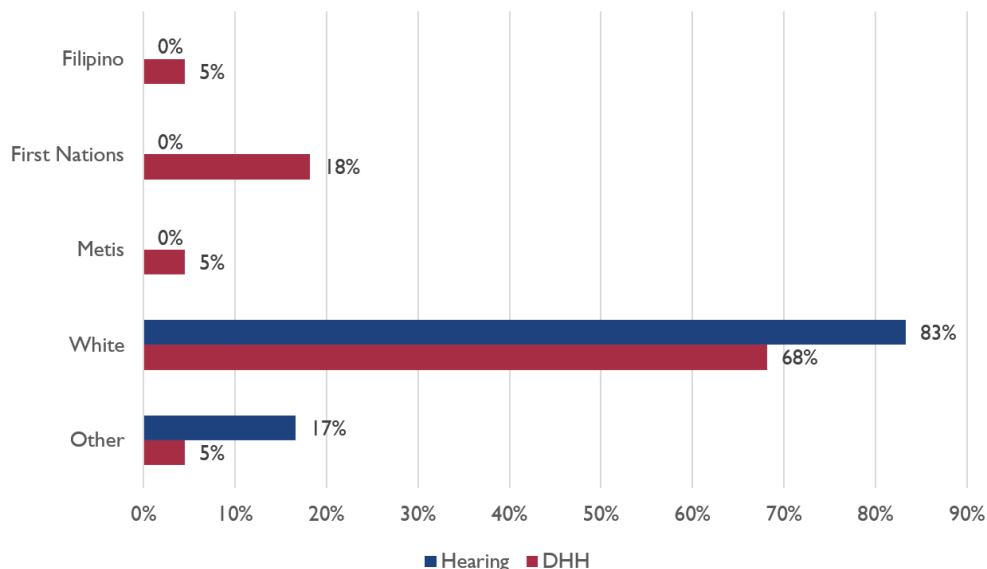
Less than two third of the participants are men with 62% (n=18), while women form 28% of the participants (n=8). The rest opted not to self-describe.

Graph 4. Number of Participants by Age Category



This graph shows that the majority of the Deaf and hard of hearing participants are under 44 years old with 57% (n=14), while hearing participants are older. The majority of them are over 55-64 years old category (50%; n=10). Given that these hearing participants are coaches and team managers, we can expect them to be older than the athletes they train and work with.

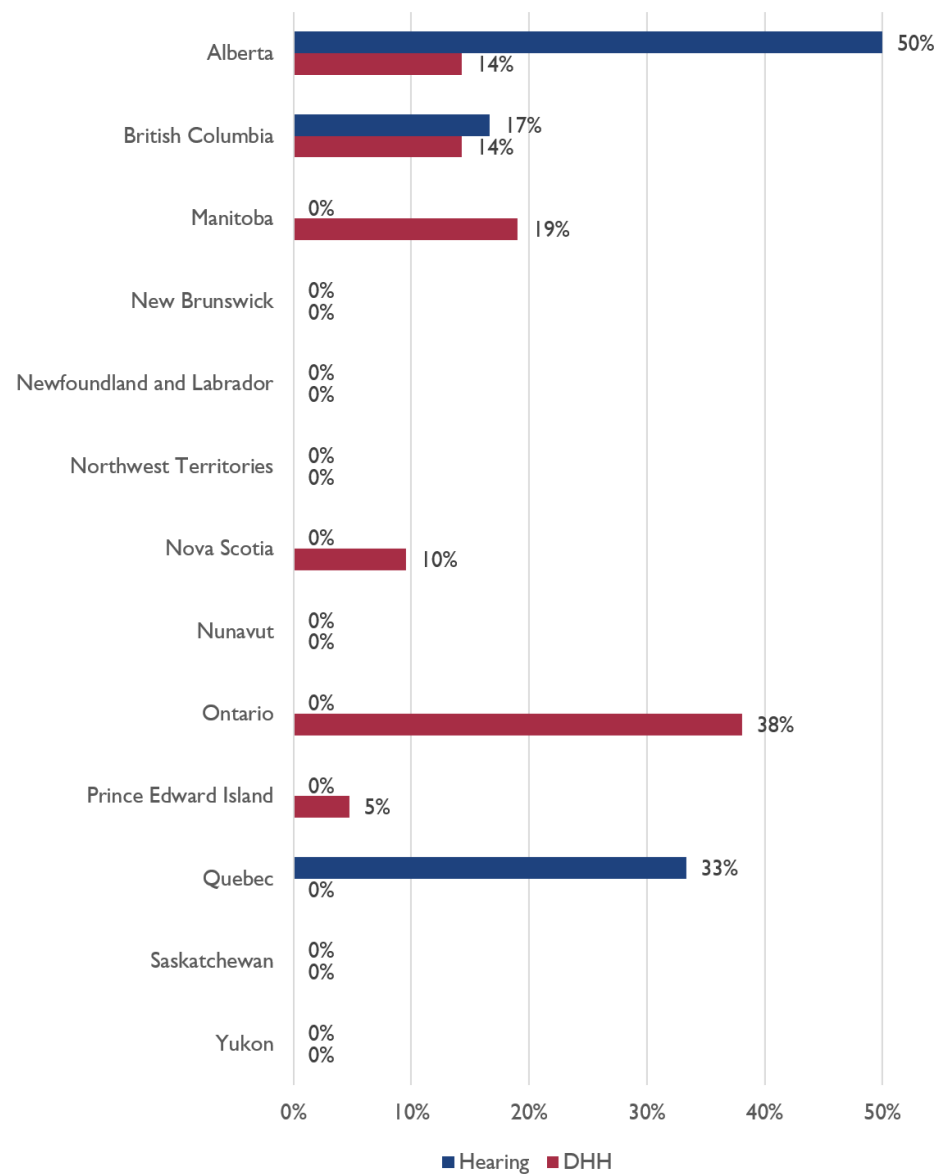
Graph 5. Number of Participants by Ethnic Background



This graph reveals that the majority is Caucasian with 71% (n=20). Regarding the rest of the participants, four are First Nations, one is Metis, and one is Filipino for a total of six participants other than Caucasian (29%). Among the six coaches and team managers who took the survey, five are white, and one in the “Other” category specified they are White/East Indian.

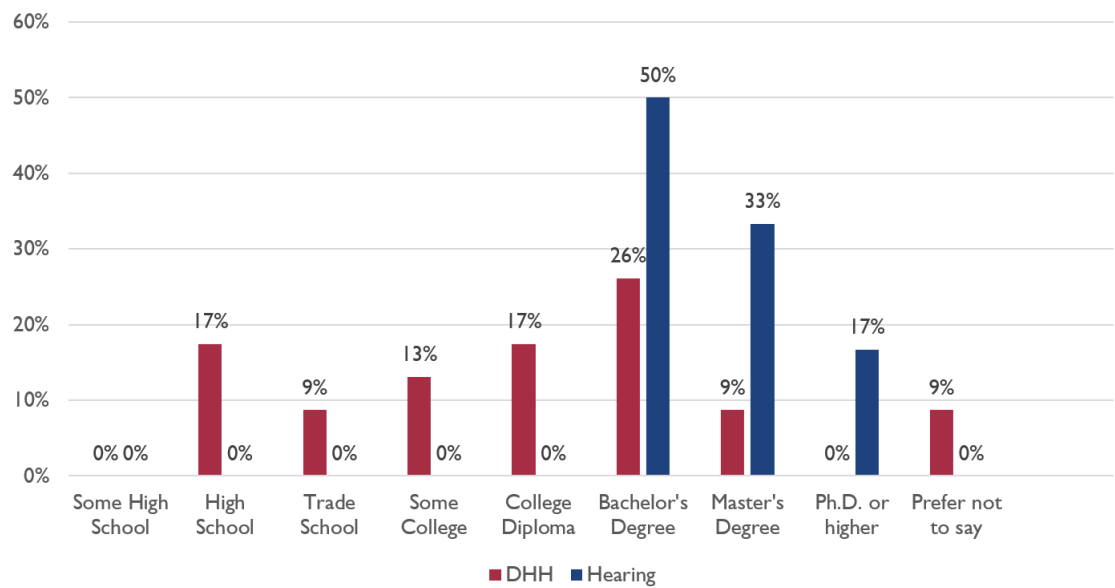


Graph 6. Number of Participants by Province



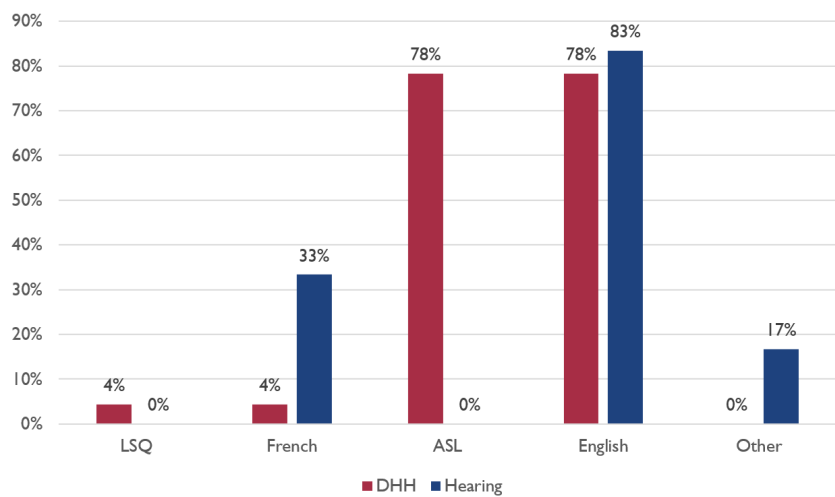
Overall, 28.6% of the participants are from Ontario (n=8), 14.3% from British Columbia (n=4), 21.4% from Alberta (n=6) and 17.9% from Manitoba (n=5). Only 7.1% of the participants are from Quebec (n=2), 3.6% are from Prince-Edward-Island (n=1) and 7.1% are from Nova Scotia (n=2). One participant skipped the question.

Graph 7. The Highest Degree or Level of Education Completed by Participant.



It is worth noting that all hearing participants (100%) have a university-level degree, be it a bachelor's, a master's, or a doctorate degree, while Deaf and hard of hearing's educational levels vary greatly between high school and higher education.

Graph 8. Language Use by Participant.

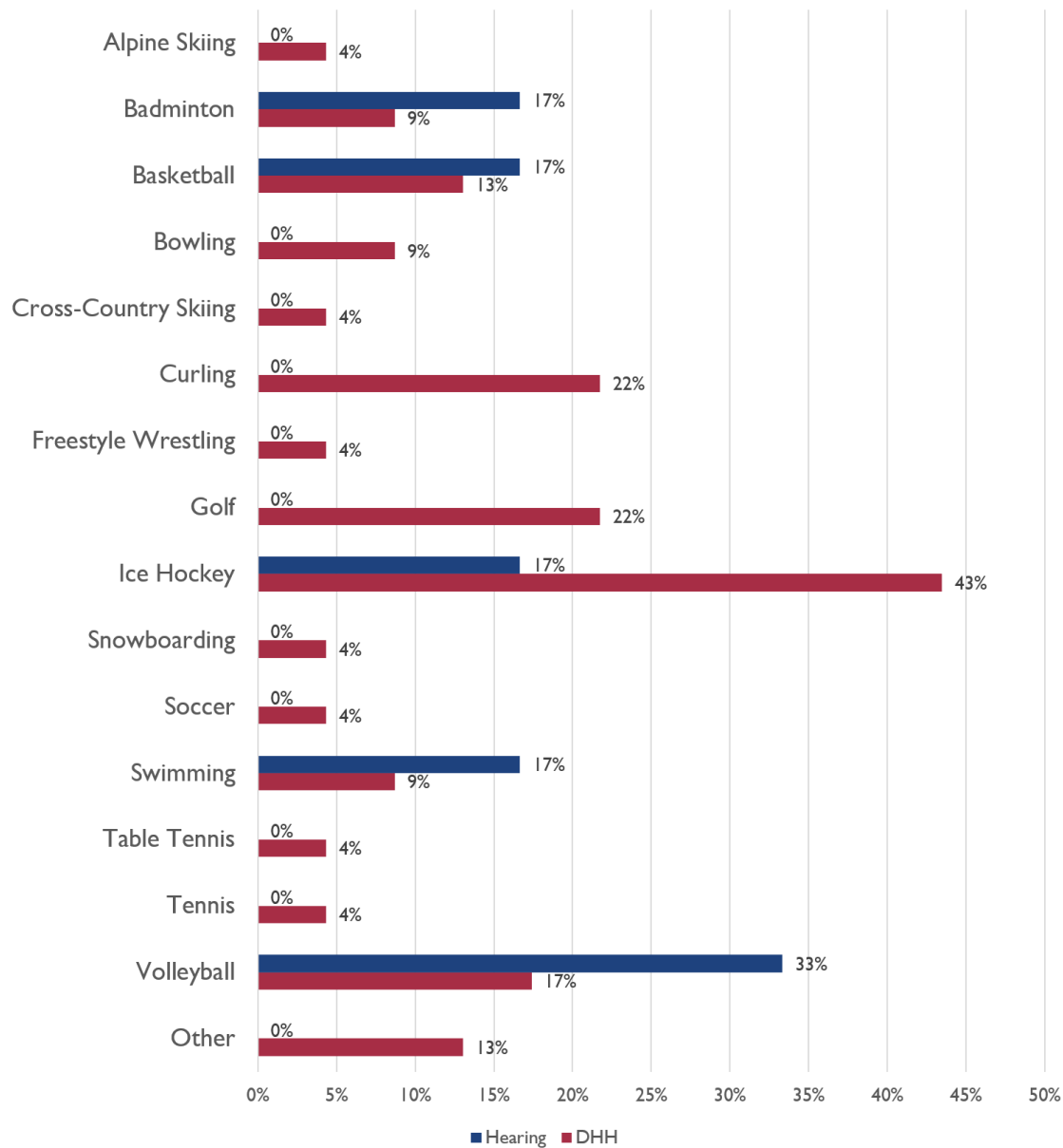


The strong majority of participants use ASL (n=18) and English (n=23). It is explained by the higher percentage of participation from the ASL/English communities compared to the LSQ/French community's participation.

## Participants' Sports Profile

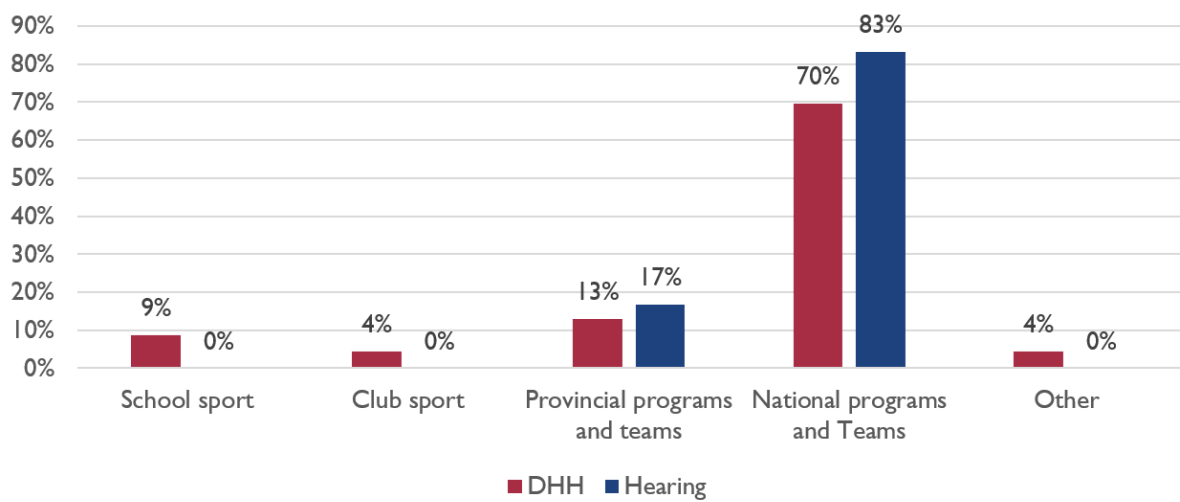
Participants' sports profile, be it athletes, coaches, or team managers, are as diverse as we can notice in the two following graphs.

Graph 9. Sports disciplines practiced by participants.



Ice hockey, followed by volleyball and curling, is by far the most played sports by the survey participants. It is worth noting that it's possible for one participant to practice more than one sport. Regarding the sports that weren't listed above but mentioned by athletes in the "Other" category, there are Track & Field and Slow-Pitch.

Graph 10. The highest level of competition completed by participants.

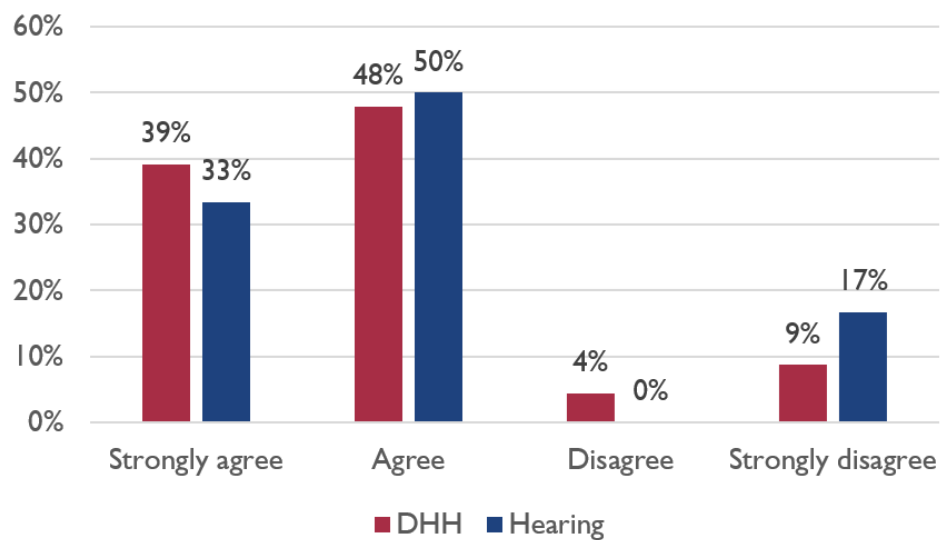


With 71%, the majority of the survey participants figured in national teams and their programs (n-21). One participant used to be involved in both Deaf and hearing national programs and teams.

# Deaf and Hard of Hearing Athletes' Accessibility in Sports

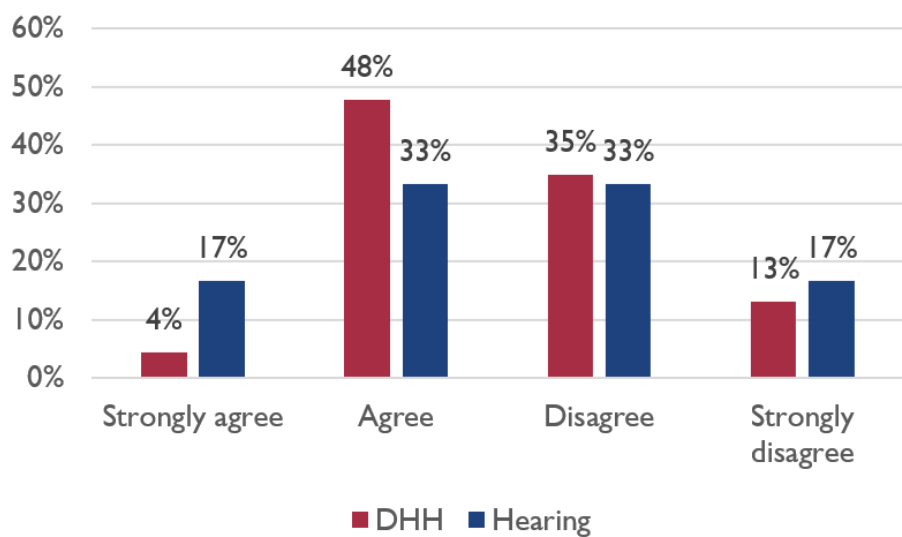
In this section, Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' access to sports is approached from the “Deaf friendly” point of view as well as those of coaches and team managers' qualifications to work with these athletes.

Graph 11. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “The sports climate is respectful to Deaf individuals in Deaf sports”



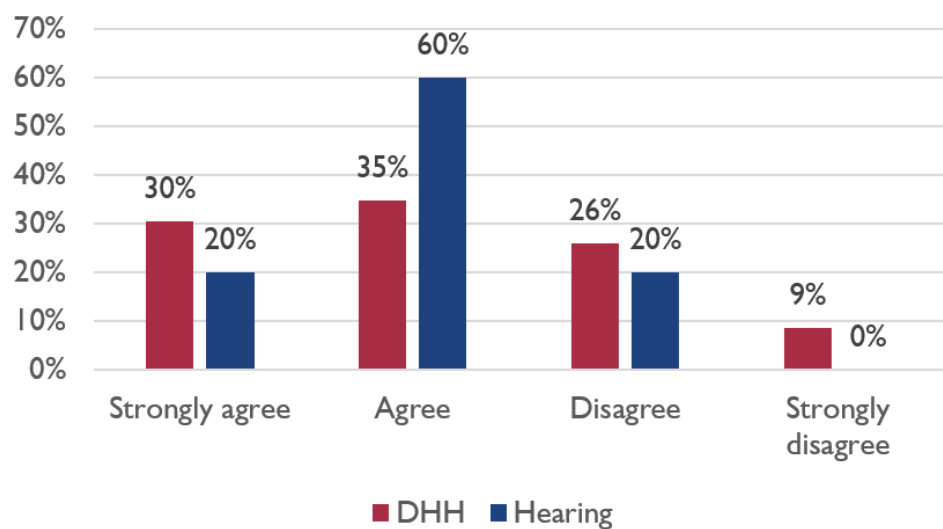
The majority of participants (86%) agreed with the statement “The sports climate is respectful to Deaf individuals in Deaf sports”, while at least 10% strongly disagreed.

Graph 12. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “The sports climate is respectful to Deaf individuals in hearing sports”.



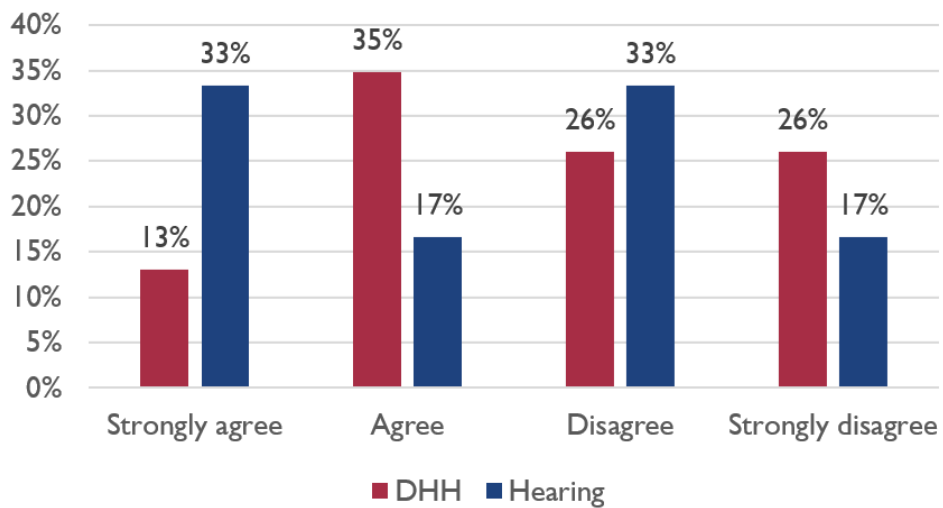
Near half the participants (51%) agreed that “the sports climate is respectful to Deaf individuals in hearing sports” while the other half disagreed.

Graph 13. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “Coaches and team managers are well-trained in working with Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing athletes”.



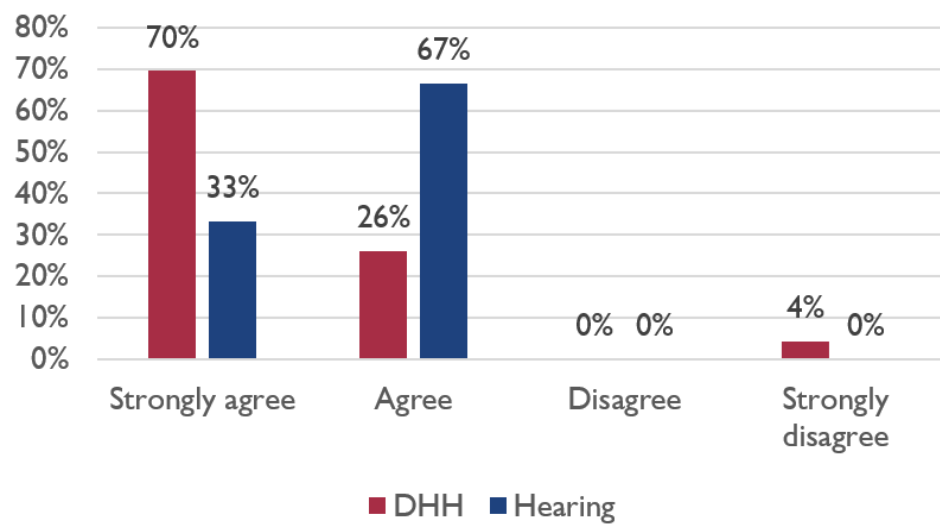
The majority of participants agree or strongly agree that coaches and team managers are qualified to work with Deaf and hard of hearing athletes while 35% of Deaf and hard of hearing participants and 20% of hearing participants disagreed.

Graph 14. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “Programs and competitions for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing athletes are well advertised”.



Near half the participants, with 45%, think that programs and competitions designed for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes are well promoted compared to more than half the participants (55%) who don't share the same view on this.

Graph 15. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “Deaf/Hard of hearing awareness training would be beneficial for sport staff”.

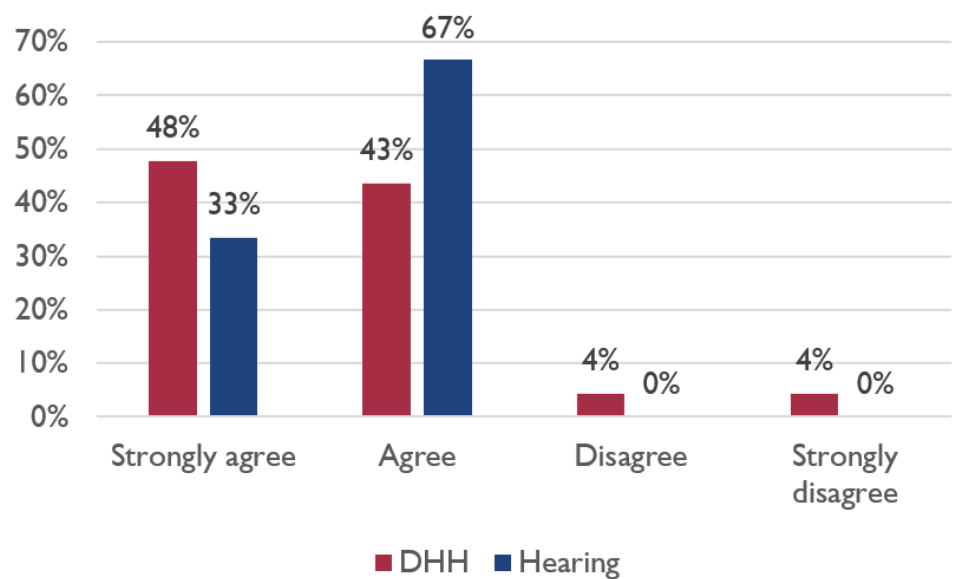


The majority of participants (62%) strongly believed that Deaf/Hard of hearing awareness training would be beneficial for sport staff, compared to only 3% who strongly disagreed.

# Social Experiences in Sports as Viewed by Deaf and Hard of Hearing Athletes

Given that Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' participation in sports barriers could be related to the social aspect of sports and various incentives, this section aims to collect participants' input regarding various sports related social experiences and how they impact their sports activities.

Graph 16. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “You feel included in sports”.



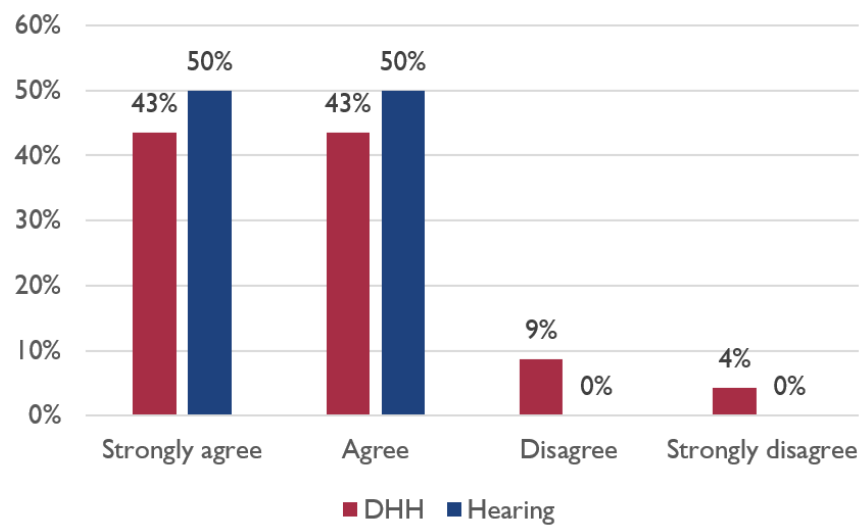
The majority of participants feel they are included in sports, while 8% of Deaf and hard of hearing participants disagreed.



# Legal and Systemic Accessibility to Sports

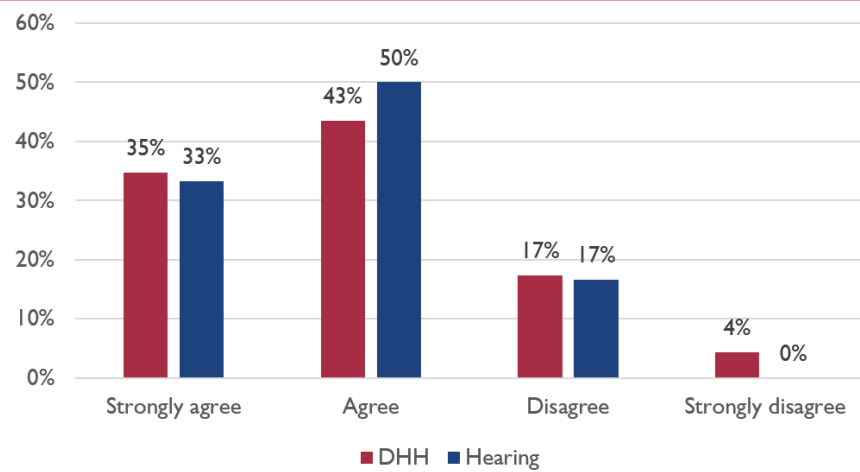
According to the literature review, one of the Deaf and hard of hearing athletes’ significant barriers to participation in sports are legal and systemic. This section aims to collect participants’ input regarding legal and systemic accessibility to sports and how it impacts their sports activities.

Graph 17. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “If there is an opportunity to stand up for Deaf/Hard of hearing rights, you will take it”.



The majority of participants, with 89%, agreed on the fact that they won’t hesitate to advocate for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes’ right, should there be any barriers, unlike the other 10%.

Graph 18. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “You know where to request interpreters or other accommodations for communication needs”.

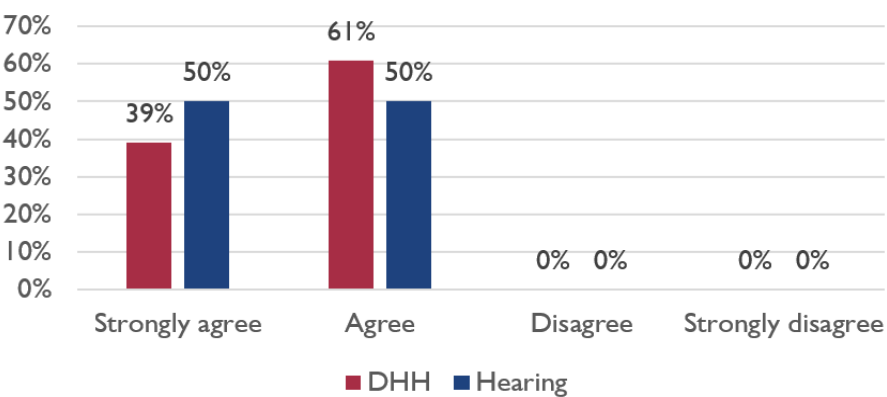


Overall, 79% of the participants claimed knowing where to get resources to meet their communication needs, such as interpreters or other accommodations, unlike the other 20% who disagreed (Deaf: n=2; hard of hearing: n=2; hearing: n=1).

# Accessibility to Trainings and Competitions

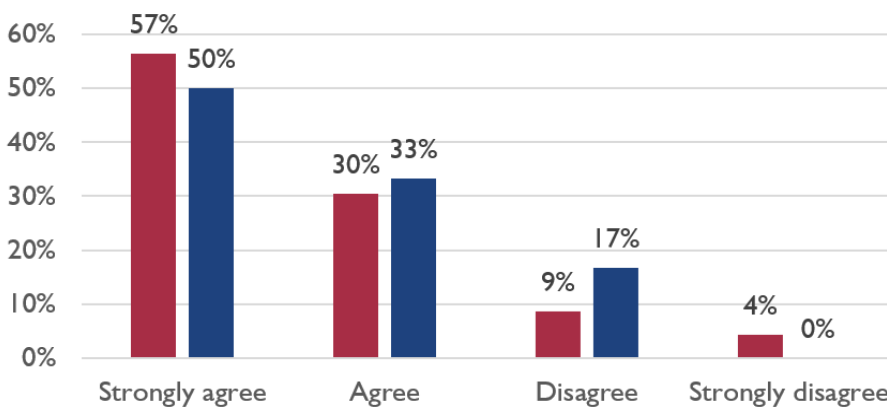
According to the literature review, there are several barriers in sports for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes. This section covers their access to trainings and competitions.

Graph 19. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “You usually understand what is taught in training”.



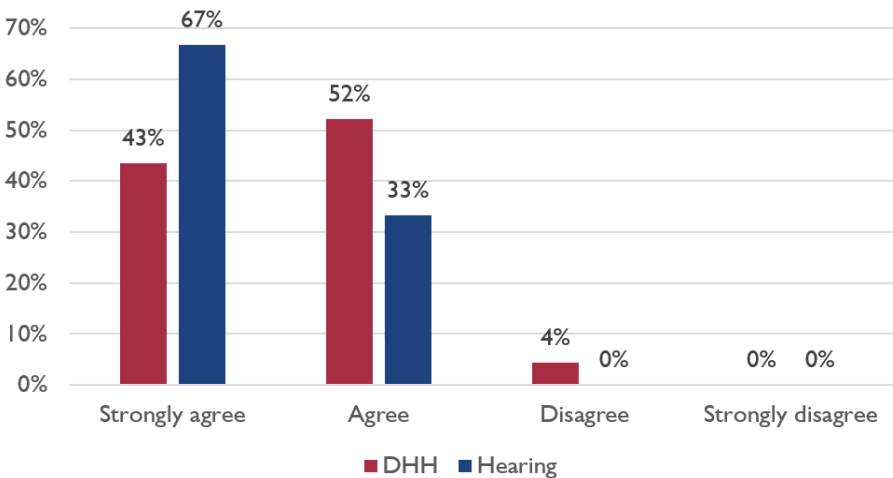
Based on this graph, there is a clear consensus among participants regarding their understanding of what is taught in training.

Graph 20. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “You would attend sports-related training for Deaf/Hard of hearing people”.



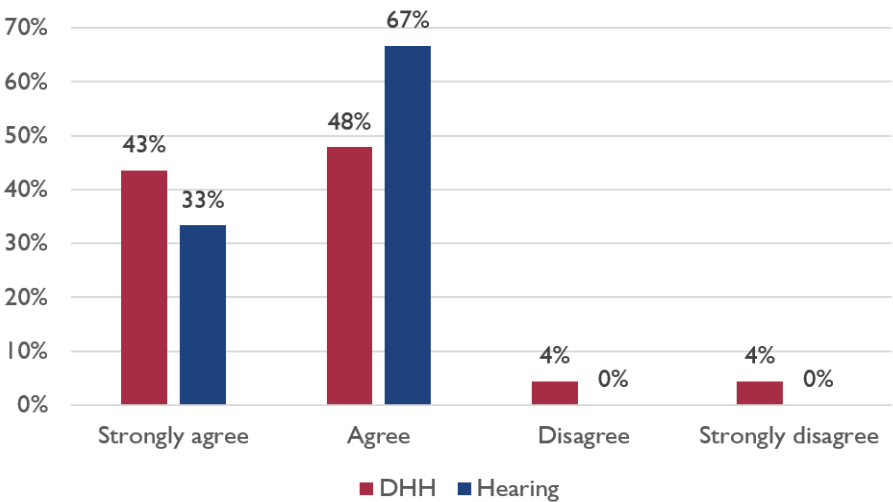
On one hand, 86% of the participants are interested to take part to training programs designed for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, with 55% who are strongly interested. On the other hand, 13% aren't interested to take part to these training programs.

Graph 21. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “You would attend training locally/public (hearing)”.



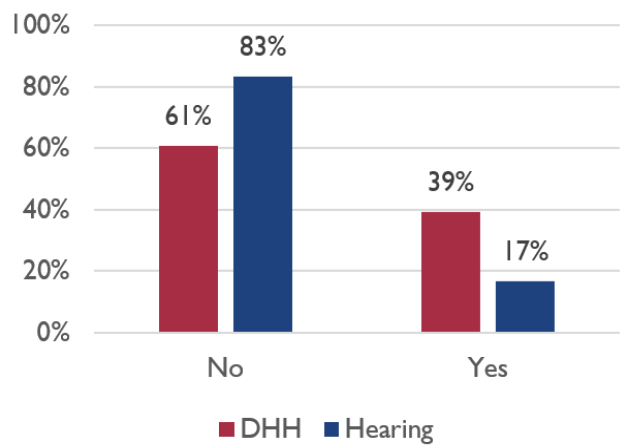
Almost all the participants (96%) would attend local or public trainings among hearing individuals, while only 3% would not.

Graph 22. The degree to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement “You are encouraged to improve (e.g., participate in competitions, take training, etc.)”.



93% of the participants felt encouraged to improve by participating in trainings or competitions, unlike the other 8% who disagreed, which means they don’t feel encouraged to improve themselves as an athlete.

Graph 23. The number of athletes who encountered various barriers.



Even though 61% of Deaf and hard of hearing participants said they didn't encounter any barriers, the other 39% said they went through barriers, which is 22% higher compared to hearing participants (17%). Among the comments collected for this question, there is exclusion that hard of hearing athletes felt from Deaf athletes, which made them feel unwelcome:

“As a hard of hearing athlete, I have never felt accepted by the deaf athletes and supporters. I am looked at as a cheater because I wear hearing aids or because I don't come from the deaf community. I qualify to participate under the guidelines, and I am still looked at as not a proper representative or I am cheating the sport.”

Communicational barriers are also pointed out by several participants, including one who explained it as such:

“Number one always is communication. If there is no communication, then athletes will just walk away. If there is communication, then the athletes will feel motivated.”

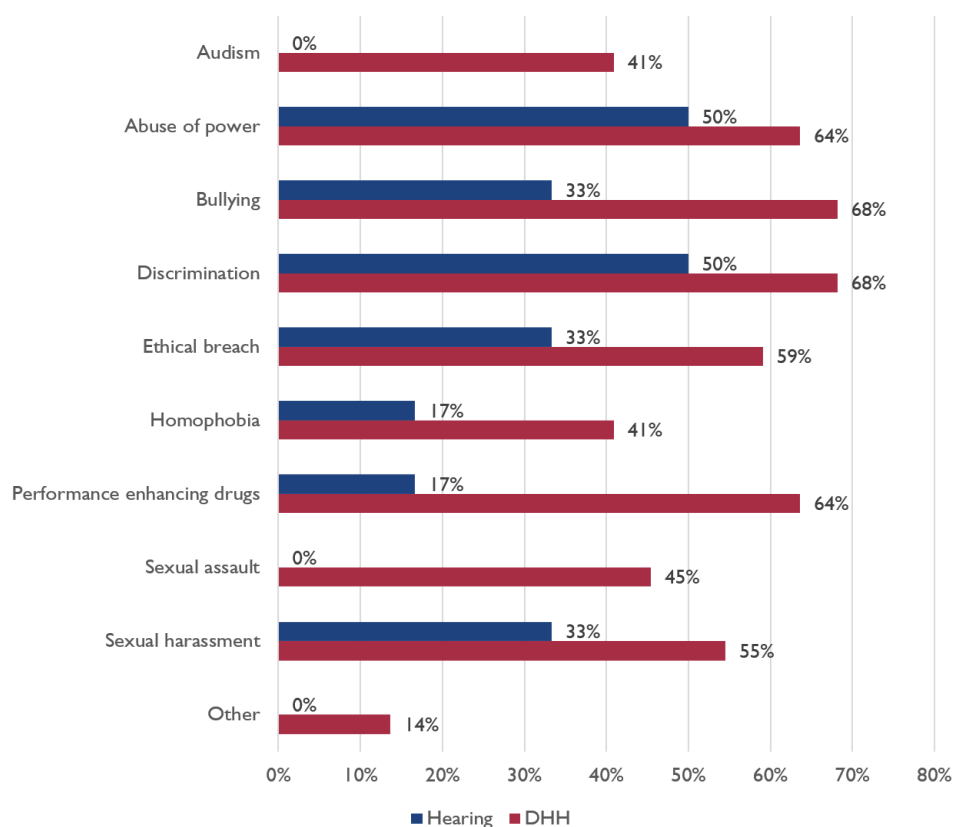
Audism is also one of the significant barriers in regard to sports participation, according to one participant:

“I had a hearing coach who oppressed me, thinking that being deaf and playing sports will never make me a good athlete.”

## Unsportsmanlike Behaviour

With the literature review which outlined several unsportsmanlike behaviours that frequently happens among athletes ingeneral, this section covers this issue from Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' point of view.

Graph 24. Priorities in regard to prevention according to athletes.



More than half of the participants, at least 57%, prioritize the following topics: 1) abuse of power; 2) bullying; 3) performance enhancing drugs; and 4) sexual harassment. Almost half of them agreed on the fact that ethical breaches should be among the priorities.

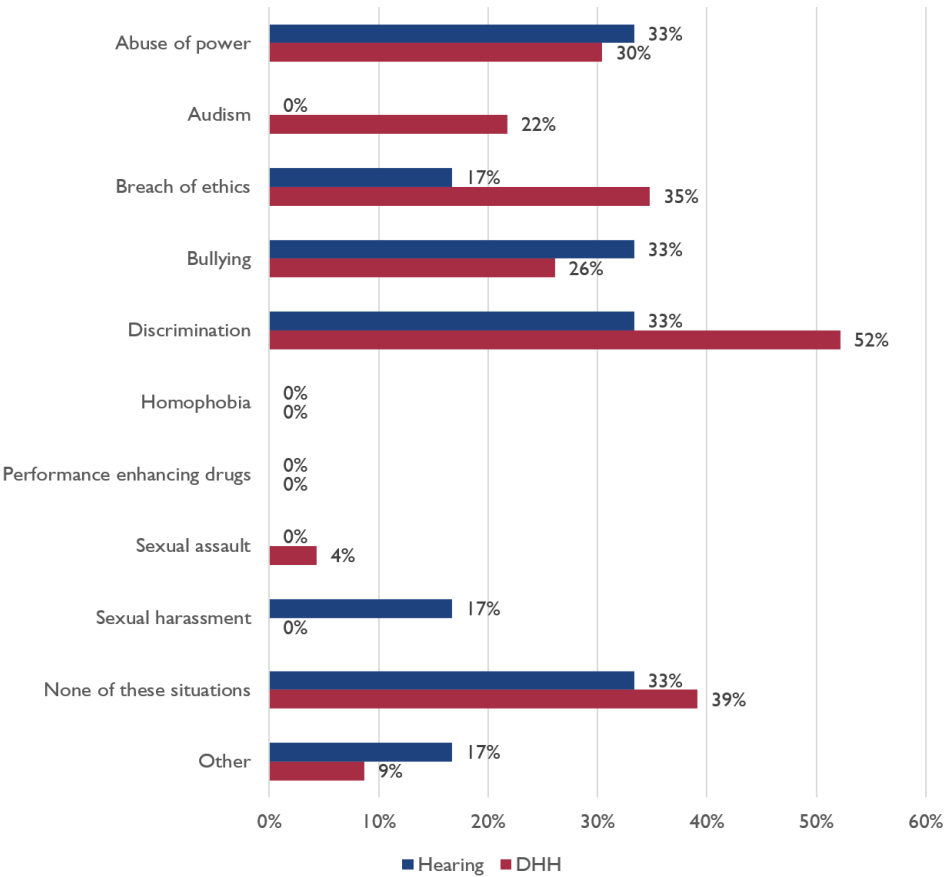
Between 32% and 36% of the participants think that the three problematic issues such as homophobia, sexual abuse, and audism should be covered as one of CDSA's priorities.

Despite these overall results that reunites Deaf, hard of hearing and hearing participants, we need to recognize that some issues are perceived differently between Deaf and hard of hearing participants and hearing participants. While Deaf and hard of hearing participants perceives audism (41% vs 0% of hearing participants) and sexual assault (45% vs 0% of hearing participants) as important topics in regard to prevention awareness, hearing participants seem to prioritize abuse of power (50%) and discrimination (50%).

Some other participants pointed out the importance of covering teamwork and one of them outlined relationship issues between athletes and hearing coaches:

“Not to discriminate against hearing individuals; be inviting of hearing people to integrate into the deaf community; accessibility for hearing people in deaf settings.”

Graph 25. The rate of participants who have experienced each of the following unsportsmanlike situation.

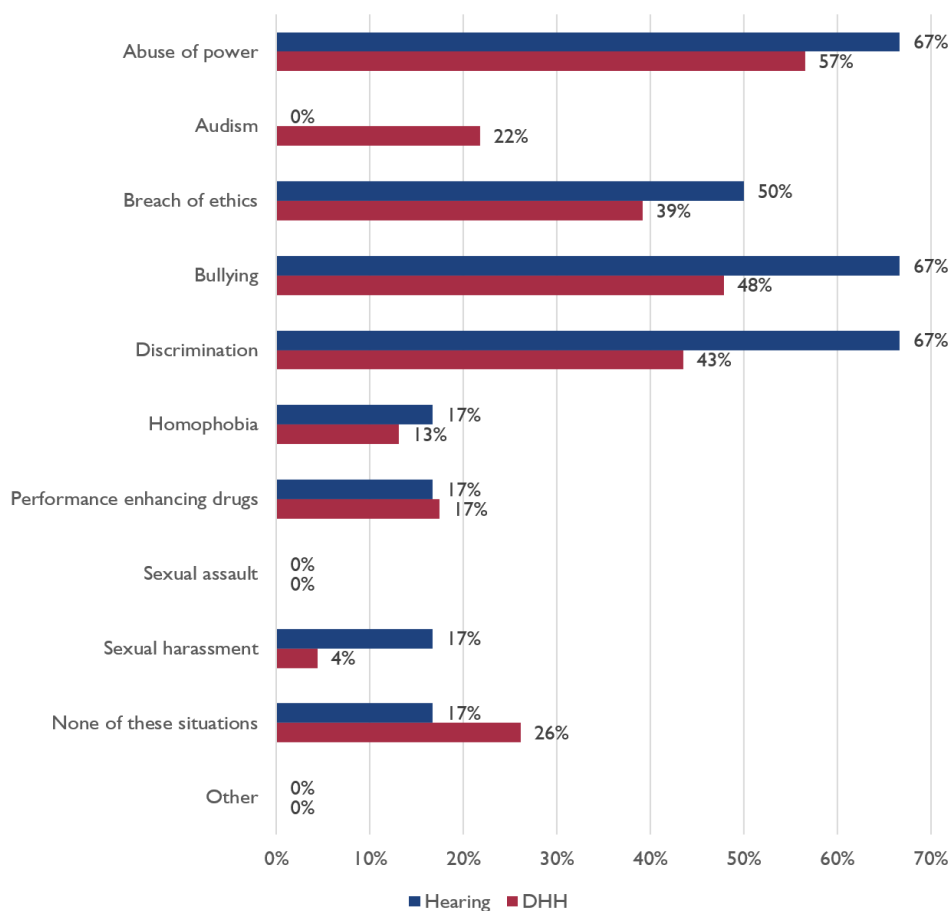


More than half the participants (52%) have experienced discrimination in sports settings. About one third of the participants have experienced various unsportsmanlike behaviours such as breach of ethics, bullying, and abuse of power. Audism was encountered by 17% of the participants.

It is important to take note that at least 3% of the participants have experienced sexual harassment and/or sexual abuse.

Regarding the other forms of unsportsmanlike behaviours that were mentioned by athletes in the “Other” category, there were favoritism and the absence of inclusion.

Graph 26. The rate of participants that witnessed unsportsmanlike behaviours.



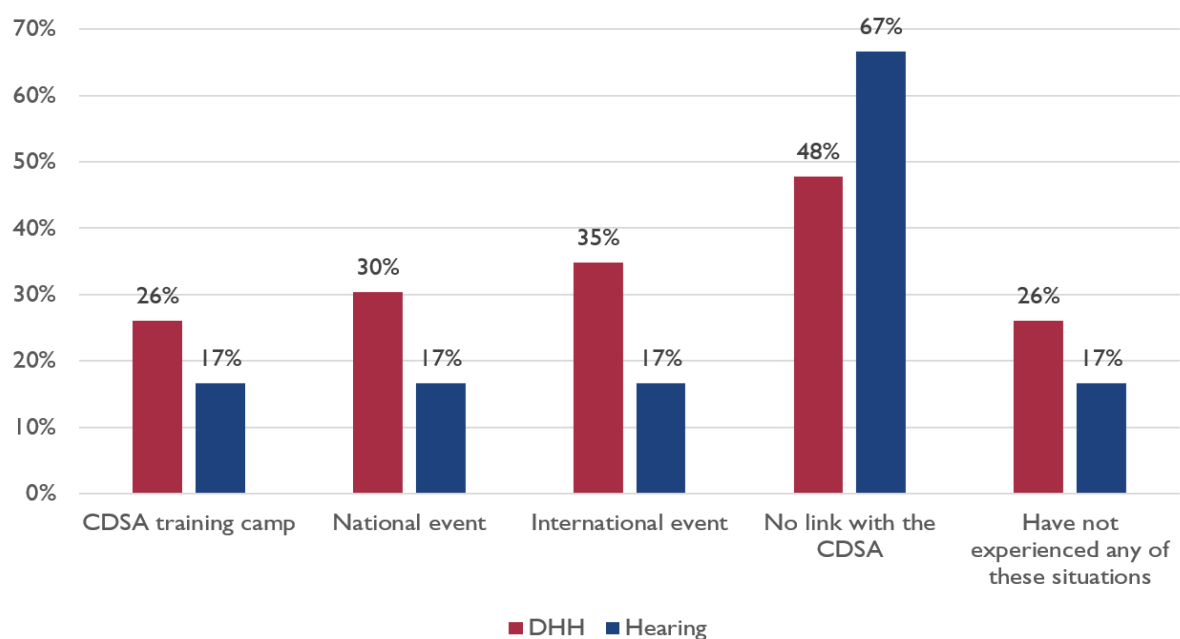
At least 45% of the participants have witnessed, by order of importance, the following unsportsmanlike behaviours:

1. Abuse of power;
2. Bullying;
3. Discrimination; and
4. Breach of ethics.

Less than 17% of the participants have witnessed the following unsportsmanlike behaviours:

- Use of performance enhancing drugs (17%)
- Audism (17%)
- Homophobia (14%)
- Sexual harassment (7%)

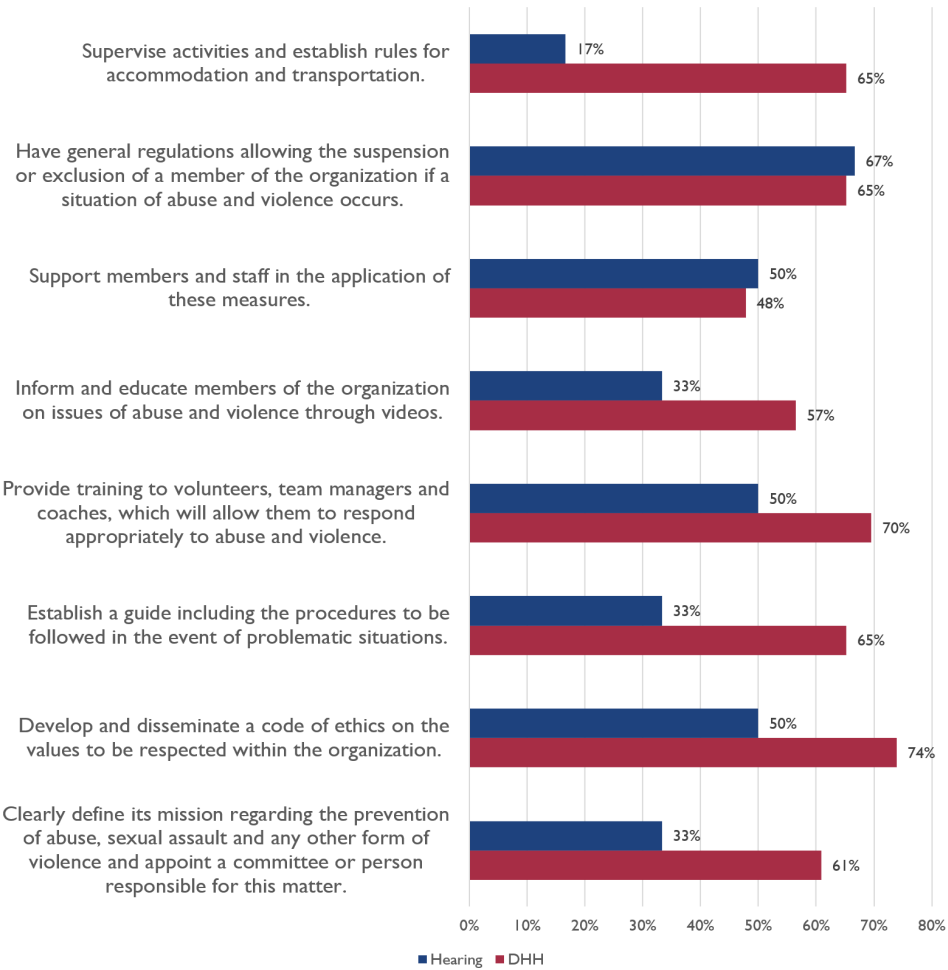
Graph 27. The rate of participants who have witnessed unsportsmanlike behaviours for each type of sports events.



Regarding events hosted by CDSA, at least 24% of the participants have witnessed various unsportsmanlike behaviours during training camps. These behaviours were noticed by 28% of the participants during national events and 31% during international events. However, 55% of the participants have witnessed various unsportsmanlike behaviours in various events hosted by other organizations than CDSA.



Graph 28. The rate of participants supports for each unsportsmanlike prevention strategy that CDSA should deploy.



This graph clearly shows that over than half the participants believe it is important to deploy all of these strategies, including the development and dissemination of a code of ethics on the values to be respected within the organization as their top priority.

## Additional Comments

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Several participants not only took the survey but also added some additional comments at the end of the survey.

Conflict of interests from the coaches' team and the Board of Directors who seem to have too much power in some sports were one of the most recurring comments, as this participant stated:

"COI = CONFLICT OF INTEREST BY THE COACHING STAFF AND BOARDS MEMBER HAS TOO MUCH SAYING IN SOME SPORTS. The issues and misconduct I have experienced have all be manifested by the CDSA. The Board members and directors have perpetuated a long history of abuse of power and neglect for what is best for the athletes while putting personal goals ahead of the people who matter the most.... the athlete!"

Some others underlined their wish to see CDSA develop a more open and welcoming culture for hearing people within CDSA, as one of the participants explains:

"Need to build a more inviting culture with hearing people. Inclusive and understanding. Thoughtful of everyone's needs - deaf, Deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing. Find ways to bring everyone together. Find ways to expand knowledge of CDSA and deaf sports to the general population. Many hearing people are unaware of what CDSA has to offer."

Lastly, some mentioned they'd like to see more ASL, LSQ, or international signs courses and workshops:

"Would be amazing if CDSA had the ability to provide special ASL/LSQ/ International Sign classes/workshops related to general and specific sport vocabulary so many oral non-signing players can feel more included and have more opportunities to socialize and be involved with the Deaf community and fans. :) Thank you!"

# An Overview of Interviews Results

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## Qualitative Data Gathered Through Semi-Directed Interviews

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Eleven interviews took place with various CDSA stakeholders, including nine (9) Deaf and hard of hearing athletes (4 LSQ and 5 ASL), one coach, and a team manager. All participants were recruited by Cynthia Benoit, Audrey Beauchamp, and Alayna Finley, with the support of CDSA's Executive Director, Alain Turpin. Due to the recruitment through social media not going as expected, we adjusted our approach during the process in order to recruit more participants, and this, through the Deaf grapevine as well as the snowball method, which included inquiries among participants to spread the word and to refer to us more participants that meet the recruitment criteria. We were able to ensure proper representation of the participants, e.g., gender, visible minorities, age, LGBTQIA+ community members, etc.

Interviews were conducted in ASL, LSQ, and in English, depending on the participants' preferences. Transcripts were then analyzed and coded according to recurring themes.

The interviews' main goal was to grasp various issues in regard to sport safety as perceived by these participants. The interviews revealed a number of themes. It is important to note that the perception of sport safety among Deaf and hard of hearing athletes was especially oriented towards communication and attitudinal barriers, in opposition to hearing people's perception and understanding of sport safety, which has long been strongly associated to athletes' physical safety.

## The Importance of Sport safety Underestimated Among Athletes

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One of the most striking points that we noticed during the interviews with Deaf and hard of hearing athletes were the confusion and ignorance regarding how sport safety is important. One of the athletes stated that he didn't really know much about sport safety:

"I don't really know much about sport safety and I don't look for more information. All I'm interested in is the information related to the competition in which I take part to, including financial support, the coach, etc. I'm not curious, nor interested about sport safety."

Another participant mentioned a policy implementation effort that wasn't easily accepted or reinforceable due to some Deaf community members' resistance:

"[They] introduced a new policy which separated athletes who were playing and those who are on the Board of Directors. [They] introduced the Code of Conduct, which addressed drinking and drugs. Many people did not like that. They did not want structure. They did not want to be controlled. [The Board] faced a lot of resistance. It was a challenging time."

## Communicational Barriers at the Core of Various Issues

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From the sport safety point of view, communicational barriers are among the most recurrent themes during the interviews. According to participants, communicational barriers are the very core of several issues, including coaches' oppressive attitudes, limited communication and the lack of actual connection between coaches and athletes, as well as barriers in hearing settings (e.g., prior to competition, safe space, etc.).

### Signing Instead of Screaming

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Regarding coaches' oppressive attitudes, several athletes mentioned their wish to have coaches who sign instead of screaming for no reason:

“Solutions must be found to compensate for the fact that she does not intend, for example, to make signs instead of shouting.”

Proper use of sign language by coaches would overcome communicational barriers and ensure a safe sports environment for everyone:

“The [...] coach knows the signs himself, which is even better!”

These observations are confirmed by a participant from the coaches and team managers category, to which they brought up solutions to resolve this issue:

“I did have one complaint from a [...] player that the coach yelled into his ear when he was not understanding what he wanted. The coach also kept his head down so those who were speech reading were always having a difficult time. I think there needs to be some training with hearing coaches on what works for communication, behaviors to avoid, and mental fatigue of trying to catch instructions.”

### Deeper Interpersonal Connections: Highly Sought by Athletes

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Several athletes mentioned their wish to overcome communicational barriers and stop depending on interpreters in order to develop actual deeper interpersonal connections with their coaches instead of maintaining a superficial bond with them:

“I think the assumption is there; hearing coaches are audist - interpreters are placed. Look at the coaches who don't know ASL, they rely on interpreter. The full connection is not there. The interpreter is depended on.”

Another participant clearly mentioned the presence of superficial relationships between athletes and coaches, which would be mainly due to communicational barriers:

“I'm proud, yes, but I need connections. Only hearing [athletes] have these connections. It's same for us, except for one factor - communication. We only have surface level connection [with them].”

One of the participants also mentioned that a coach who can communicate through sign language would be greatly helpful from the interpersonal connection perspective:

“Deaf athletes in hearing environments? Yes, they need interpreters. That opens the door to everything. [...] I encouraged one Deaf player to take part to hearing sports, but they said they couldn’t because there weren’t interpreters. [...] Interpreters are important.”

## Hearing Spaces aren’t Designed for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Athletes

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Several participants brought up that, due to communicational barriers, trainings and competitions in hearing settings are a priori a space designed for those who aren’t Deaf or hard of hearing. In such hearing environments, a great number of Deaf and hard of hearing athletes miss out on several elements that could’ve contributed to their sport safety as well as their success:

“[In] hearing environments, it’s completely different because as a deaf athlete, I have been isolated. In hearing spaces, I’m always behind.”

Another participant mentioned various obstacles they encounter during competitions with hearing athletes:

“I have frustrations when I almost miss my turns during competitions. Other athletes would tell me when my name was called - I could have missed my race. The Deaflympics are much more accessible. Access is not sufficient in hearing competitions. It needs to improve.

These statements coincide with one of the coaches who recognized that communicational barriers, due to the lack of interpreters in hearing settings, make several athletes reticent to train with them:

“Deaf athletes in hearing environments? Yes, they need interpreters. That opens the door to everything. [...] I encouraged one Deaf player to take part to hearing sports, but they said they couldn’t because there weren’t interpreters. [...] Interpreters are important.”

## Qualified Interpreters: An Essential Asset

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Despite the importance of having interpreters present in hearing training and competition settings, it is even more important to ensure the recruitment of qualified interpreters who are also knowledgeable in specific sports disciplines:

“He is [an athlete]. We need more interpreters like him. Interpreters who know [the sport] through and through. There are interpreters who want to join. They think it’s fun, but they need the skills.”

Some athletes mentioned that they had to depend on family members or their teachers, who took over an interpreter’s role during their trainings and competitions:

“The teacher interpreted. She would explain announcements and supported me on the team.”

“Hearing athletes’ ability to learn is unlimited. But, for me, nothing. If I had interpreters, it could have helped. It would have been better.”

Even though these athletes didn’t mention sport safety, we still need to wonder how sport safety can be ensured for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes when there are unqualified interpreters onsite.

Furthermore, qualified interpreters are huge assets according to one of the participants from the coaches and team managers group:

“We have the same interpreter for our program. She has been phenomenal. She is an active participant in the sport she interprets for and this is a huge asset. She makes or breaks our program”

However, this same person pointed out that it would be important that everyone receives proper training on that matter in order to make sure they know how to work with them:

“As a hearing person, it might be helpful when hearing staff come on board to give an orientation of the role of the interpreter. I learned most of it through trial and error and reading an introduction to interpreting textbook.”

## Sign Languages: The Keystone of Accessibility and, by Extension, Sport Safety

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There is a strong consensus among participants regarding the importance of knowing at least one of the sign languages, be it ASL or LSQ. One of the participants mentioned that, among all the coaches they had, the best one knew sign language:

“I had 5 different coaches and I particularly liked a coach. He learned [sign language] and it brought me a lot on many levels.”

One of the coaches insisted on the fact that sport safety and communicational accessibility through sign language go hand in hand:

“Communication in ASL, yes, it’s important to know about safety, be it concussions or falls. If a hearing player of mine falls, I would shout “Don’t move!”. But, for Deaf players, how do we do it? We have to pre-teach them.”

## Awareness Gaps About Their Accessibility Rights: Several Impacts

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Awareness gaps about Deaf and hard of hearing athletes’ accessibility constitute a significant risk from the sports and mental health safety points of view:

“[The organization] was willing to provide a grant for training and an interpreter. That was a huge help. I wish desperately I had that support back when I was 14. I wished I had advocated for myself and asked for interpreter. I had no power then; I didn’t know what I didn’t know. I was vulnerable, very vulnerable. I am a strong person but also was vulnerable. My mother was focused on working, dad out of the picture, friends didn’t advocate for me. I was on my own. Looking back, I wish I had advocated more but, that’s how it goes. IF, back then I had an interpreter, I would have been better, it would have been very different.”

## Attitudinal Barriers and Audism

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Attitudinal barriers are an important aspect of sport safety, according to several participants, due to how it affects their psychological safety. One of the athletes pointed out how he felt discouraged when faced with these attitudinal barriers:

“I’m well liked. My skills are well recognized. They love all that, but when I tell them I’m Deaf, they come off as at a loss don’t want to commit to me. Regardless of my skill, the Deaf factor equals a loss in opportunities, networking, funding, sponsorship, opportunities for doors to open. [...] It’s exhausting.”

Some others shared their experiences with coaches who showed oppressive attitudes:

“Some coaches look down on athletes. They have an attitude. If the athletes make a mistake, the coaches blast them out. They should not. That’s a form of abuse.”

One participant relativized about this, pointing out that it really depends from one coach to another:

“I think the assumption is there, that some hearing coaches are audist. The interpreters are placed there, we look at these coaches who don’t know ASL. They rely on interpreters. [...] From what I’ve seen, some athletes accept, some don’t.”

The coach’s lack of involvement is also problematic:

“The [...] athletes were good, but they were frustrated most of the time because of the lack of help from their coach.”

These observations are shared by one of the participants from the coaches and team managers group:

“The coach may be less likely to give feedback, support, corrections as they require the interpreter. The coach may perceive that it is more work than the comment will provide in importance.”

Despite these examples that are mainly related to attitudinal barriers, one of the athletes shared an excellent experience he had with one of his coaches:

“He is ‘cool’ but disciplined at the same time. I prefer this kind of attitude. Coaches must at least be aware of deafness and be able to communicate with deaf players.”



## Economical Barriers: Being Deaf as the Main Factor

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Economical barriers are also a major issue of inequity in sports where Deaf and hard of hearing athletes feel they can't invest in interpreting fees, nor in any participation related costs as expressed by one of the athletes who took part to the interviews:

“At the time, if you wanted coaching or interpreters, there was no funding. There were brief opportunities – introduction-level events, not sufficient enough for my skill level.”

“Deaf people have other issues and other types of barriers. Skill-wise, I had no barriers. To reach Olympic level, there were more barriers: money. I couldn't train full time, I needed support for that, nutrition, and such. I didn't have that kind of support. Other hearing athletes had support through carding and rose up. My friends included.”

With difficulties that athletes face such as looking for a job and communicating with potential donors, it is even harder for them to cover all the costs associated to competitions at the national level.

“The biggest complaint I hear is how difficult it is for the athletes who communicate through ASL to go and find sponsors because they can't walk up to them and tell them how wonderful the program is and how the company/person can sponsor. Many Deaf people struggle to find employment so this limits their ability to be involved in national level sport.”

With Canada being a huge country, it is very difficult for athletes in team sports to meet and train together, as stated by one of the participants:

“Canada is a big country and the [...] Getting athletes together is very costly, yet without training on a regular basis we cannot compete with the rest of the world. We have very limited access to training and competition. We are fortunate that we can find excellent competition during training camps, but we need to play at international competitions, and we need to train often.”

## Athletes' Sports Psychology and Their Mental Health: An Aspect Frequently Sidelined

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The majority of participants shared their concerns in regard to Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' sports psychology and to which extend this aspect being sidelined can have an impact on their mental health and their mental state during competitions.

One of the participants compared various reactions between Deaf and hard of hearing in various competitions such as Deaflympics and Deaf World Championships:

"We have to distinguish between two things. Hard of hearing, oral, and mainstreamed athletes tend to have an eye-opening experience during the Deaflympics. Their identity becomes stronger. It affects their performance because of the culture shock they're going through there. Oh yes! They make mistakes. On the other side, some Deaf athletes are overconfident and face a wall there. [...] Those are the two trends I've noticed. Among those who have Deaf culture in them, the volume of training differs. It has an impact on their self-esteem, their confidence. [...] Oral athletes go through culture shock, which impacts their performance... [...] How can we mitigate this ahead of time?"

Another participant specified that Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' mental health could be affected by the fact they have to constantly juggle between trainings and their full-time job:

"Mental health - emphasizing mental health is a priority. Some athletes are working and training. It's not like the ABC card system that hearing athletes have. Deaf athletes don't. This support is missing. We do everything on our own. [...] LTAD is there but there's always more potential to show CDSA heart.

Lastly, one athlete stressed that, during competitions, 95% of the work is related to the mind and that it is important to focus and work on the Deaf or hard of hearing athlete's psychology:

"We don't have that with Deaf sports, it's a big gap. Competitions are 95% in there, in the head. For example, I trained one athlete whose time improved. It almost met hearing time. The issue was his nervousness. We needed more time to focus on sports psychology."

## Tensions Between Athletes and Coaches: A Matter of Roles, Intergenerational Gaps and Culture

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During interviews, there were several mentions of tensions between athletes and coaches, which seemed to emerge from cultural conflicts, misunderstandings of coaches' roles and intergenerational gaps.

### A Cultural Gap: The Importance of Deaf Culture Awareness

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Significant cultural and identity gaps between hearing coaches and Deaf and hard of hearing athletes were frequently pointed out by the majority of the participants. These gaps are at the source of some conflicts as one of the participants noted:

“Most coaches don't know how to work with Deaf athletes. They don't know what to do, you can see it in their eyes. Look at other hearing athletes with skill and potential; they help and support with sponsorships and that - but what about me? Deaf? I don't always want to deal with the hearing world because of communication barriers. They don't understand my culture.”

Another athlete emphasized on the importance that coaches understand Deaf culture:

“Coaches must at least be aware of deafness and be able to communicate with deaf players. The first two did not know deaf culture at all.”

One participant from the coaches and team managers group expressed their uncertainty regarding some different ways of doing things that seem to be an inherent part of Deaf culture, such as lateness, “emergency” meetings, and communication types:

“Sometimes there are frustrations particularly when my experience with best practices goes counter to “Deaf community” practices. The lateness and not being punctual is something that I hear often as just the way “Deaf people” are. Regarding paper copies of information, for example, several times, we have been asked to attend technical meetings and are presented at length the information. In my hearing sports, this info is given in writing first, assumed to be read before the meeting and then the meetings are more efficient. But I am told that, “that's not how Deaf groups operate”. I wonder if it is fear of missing out, so communication is more direct. Sometimes we are called to an “emergency meeting” at competitions when a simple written message would suffice.”

These situations could lead to frustrations and discomforts among coaches and team managers. Furthermore, they shared their incomprehension about some Deaf individuals' reactions:

"I also understand that Deaf people do not consider themselves as people with a disability but a communication difference. In fact, at [an event] put on by CDSA, the [person] was so offended by a statement about disability that we could not even have a civil conversation about how to help Deaf children become more involved in sport. Not everyone is educated in difference vs disability but becoming belligerent does not help this conversation.

It is clear there are significant cultural conflicts between Deaf and hard of hearing athletes and hearing people involved in their sports.

### Athletes' Attitudes and Intergenerational Gaps: Problematic for Them and Their Coaches

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Another important tension factor between some athletes and coaches is caused by significant intergenerational gaps in regard to their perceptions of coaches' roles.

One of the participants reminded that, in the past, Deaf people viewed sports as recreational activities while it evolved through time within CDSA:

"Sports were for recreation, it was not serious. [...] From their perspective, Deaf sports is not serious, it's for fun, to have a good time. Competitions were for recreation too. It was also to party, people could drink. [...] Responsibilities were thrown out; the focus was on the enjoyment. That's what I mean by old and new culture. In the new culture, they're serious about sports. It's a challenge to shift or change what people are used to."

Another participant associated athletes' attitudes to intergenerational gaps, which is the source of values conflicts between individuals from different generations and their coaches:

"There were many challenges. It was a lot. No one person wanted structure but younger, more mainstreamed kids. They joined and expected something. It caused culture clashes between the old and new culture/generations. I could understand where the expectations were coming from."

## Resistance: Coaches' Roles Not Quite Well Understood by Some Athletes

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Some participants, especially coaches and team managers, shared their concerns regarding some athletes' lack of understanding of coaches' roles, which is at the source of several attitudinal issues among athletes and, in turn, deceptions and misunderstandings among the coaches.

One participant mentioned that some athletes ignored authority, despite the fact that they are there to support them:

“One person said some Deaf people disregard authority – they don't care for coaches, directors, board members, everything. There are many negative reasons. I don't understand that. Coaches are there to support you. Coaches are there, I could see the positive side, but others saw the negative part. It's tough, it's a challenge. And the Deaf community is small. It's easy for things to spread. It's hard to accept. [...] It hurts the Deaf community at some level in some way. It's unfortunate.”

Some other participants clearly stated that, because no one informed them about coaches' roles and their authority towards athletes, a significant number of athletes aren't aware of their roles or don't understand them well enough:

“That comes from not knowing, lack of experience. I use peer-to-peer approaches – I will address these issues in front of the team. I would ask who gave them the authority to do that. The players don't know what it means to be a coach or who the coach is. They think their coach is a friend, an equal. I would also tell them to sit out. I think maybe I am tough, but I have to teach them what it means to be a coach, they have not been involved in sports growing up.”

This remark is consistent with one of the coaches and team managers who also specified that parents of Deaf and hard of hearing children and their various therapists from health settings tend to prioritize communication and reading skills over motor skills, which might explain their lack of awareness regarding the sports milieu and their rules :

“If I may compare to other families who have children with differences, sometimes the concerns of making the reading, writing, communicating, milestones take precedent over motor skills.”

On the other hand, one of the participants specified that expectations tend to be different for each party from the sports skills development point of view, which might be a tension factor between these parties:

“The coach expects the athletes to already have skills. Some athletes expect coaches to teach those skills - two different sets of expectation. They expect more higher-level athletes. It's a game of team development.”

This comment coincides with one of the participants, who is one of the coaches and team managers:

“For an athlete to make a community/club program they need some good prerequisite motor skills and sport specific skills. My experience in watching Deaf schools and their sport programs is that there is a great deficiency in coaching.”

## The Ideal Coach: A Strong Consensus

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There is a strong consensus among participants from all categories in regard to the ideal coach model. The most frequently mentioned qualities are as follows:

- Fluency in sign language
- Significant efforts in communication (e.g., gestures, signs, use of interpreters, etc.)
- Knowledge of Deaf culture
- A good understanding of the Deaf and hard of hearing experience
- Awareness about Deaf culture and to be involved
- Accept Deaf and hard of hearing athletes for who they are
- Have a respectful and positive attitude
- Have high expectations regarding their athletes
- Be aware of the athletes who don't have the same opportunities as others (e.g., still in school, financial struggles, age differences, etc.)
- Be ready to commit and be available
- Be ready to provide detailed feedback right away instead of at the end of trainings or competitions

This participant summarizes the aspects of the ideal coaches as brought up by many:

All areas would be outstanding: specific sport skill and tactical knowledge, instructional skills, communication skills, planning and organization for practices and season, integrity, personal skills of patience, compassion, understanding and commitment to develop players as better people and athletes.”

One of the participants pushed it further by suggesting a mentoring model to allow future Deaf athletes to grow with them:

“The bottom line would be to have a Deaf coach, or a coach involved in the Deaf community, someone who understands Deafhood. Certification is fine, but you need to explain how psychology impacts performance. We also need to give job opportunities too. Certification and Deaf coaches... It could be a deaf-hearing team for five, ten years, mentoring. Certifications are a one-time thing. We need ongoing mentoring. You don't see results from certification alone.”

## Bullying, Harassment, Sexual Abuse, and Drug Use Are Existent in Deaf and Hard of Hearing Sports

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During interviews, several participants shared their experiences in regard to bullying, harassment, sexual abuse, and drug use, including those they witnessed. This section covers their stories.

### The Impact of Communication Barriers in Regard to Bullying Prevention and Intervention

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One of the participants shared a situation during which he witnessed bullying, but felt that he failed to intervene due to communication barriers:

“Also... bullying sometimes happen - I’ve been straightforward and direct. [...] Sometimes enough is enough, it needs to stop before they escalate. Yes, I’m tough, it can be viewed with resistance. At that time anyway, really, it’s a hard place to be in. There’s no room to maneuver on both parts. We have to keep an open mind; there’s a barrier there with signing - no interpreter – it was difficult to diffuse the situation. We need to make sure hearing people have good attitudes, and deaf athletes show respect. It goes both ways.”

Other participants shared their experience with coaches who bullied them, such as these participants:

“Some coaches look down on athletes. They have an attitude. If their athletes make a mistake, coaches blast them out. They should not. That’s a form of abuse.”

“Some coaches are abusive; some others are not... [...] Some coaches are verbally abusive and won’t tell athletes the policy for reporting.

### Harassment Can Take Various Forms in Different Sports Contexts

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One of the participants shared an experience she went through at one of the international events. She accidentally found herself alone surrounded by masculine athletes, a traumatizing event during which she felt intimidated:

“I was alone, I was the only woman. At the [event], there are many single men or married men who took their rings off, so I faced that. Some were friendly, some were not. It was about 4 or 5 in the morning, I was too tired. I had no room.”

It should be underlined that harassment can take various forms, be it sexual, psychological, verbal, or online (cyberbullying), only to mention a few examples. These forms of harassment were noticed during the interviews, even though it wasn’t clearly identified. The fact that several harassment situations were shared during interviews without being clearly identified as such might show how often Deaf and hard of hearing athletes frequently face these toxic behaviours either by minimizing them or not knowing their actual nature, which leads to a high number of unreported cases.



## Sexual Abuse: Frequently Unreported?

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One participant shared a sexual abuse case that involved a coach and an athlete, which happened several years ago and that profoundly affected her, even though it didn't happen to her:

“He did the wrong thing and crossed the line. I never thought a coach would cross the line with an athlete, sexually. What was he thinking? We have to make sure the athletes who are infatuated, crushing on coaches, learn to separate the roles. Coaches are coaches. That hit me hard.”

Even though sexual abuse was brought up only once during the interviews and that they're frequently left unreported, it doesn't mean it isn't serious or it didn't happen.

## Recreational or Competitive Contexts: The Impact of Perceptions on Athletes' Drug Use

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The issue of drug use came up several times during interviews. According to participants, it has been very difficult to discipline those who used drugs in sports due to their perception of sports, which is more recreational than competitive. One of the participants told his story on that issue:

“Some are vulnerable and have low self-esteem. At the time, [they ordered a] drug test. There was finger pointing. So, [they] took a neutral approach and required drug testing for all. After that, expectations were higher. [They] had to remove a drug pusher. [...] The situation hurt the Deaf community and hurt the athletes.”

According to several participants, drugs use in sports is very challenging to address and to eliminate.

## Precarious Sport safety Among Athletes From Various Minorities Such as Visible Minorities, LGBTQIA+, and Various Ethnic Backgrounds

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One of the participants shared their concerns in regard to training and competition spaces' safety for specific minority groups, such as the LGBTQIA+ community and visible minorities:

“There are two concerns about safe sports. It's good, but there is a need to look at mental health and LGTBQIA+ visibility. There is a need to reinforce both topics. There's missing content there. Other organizations will showcase gay week, pride month, but within CDSA – that's missing. CDSA needs to show neutrality.”

## Some Concerning Structural and Political Gaps in Regard to Sport Safety

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There are several sport safety policies and structures that needs to be developed and implemented in order to ensure Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' sport safety as stated by some of the participants:

"So much of the control was gone. There was no structure. If I compare hearing sports and Deaf sports - hearing sports have structure and everything in place, Deaf sports have none. [...] Also, at the time, many people were apathetic about roles. For example, being on the board and being an athlete at the same time. That potentially has issues. If you have a complaint, where do you go? It wasn't safe there. It's hard to navigate those issues, you have to watch out for yourself and stay in your lane, navigate yourself. On your own, be assertive, but others didn't know how."

"Even though I went to the world championships [few] times, it was positive overall. But, I lost some control, for example, there were no safety policies. There were no policies back then. There were no waivers, nor agreements. Many things were lacking. It was free for all, just go."

Some other participants shared their concerns regarding double standards and the lack of consistency in regard to interventions:

"Sometimes, one athlete will have an ego and an attitude of being able to get away with anything because of their skills or their connections with the Board. There's one situation that recently happened [...]. Some people were caught drinking. One was disciplined, suspended, the other wasn't. There are double standards here. It really bothers me. Where's the discipline? It needs to be consistent with the approach. Where are the standards?"

Some athletes expressed their concern regarding the lack of consistency among relevant authorities, which leads to confusion. They don't know where to go nor if it is worth taking all these steps. They aren't sure how to be heard, and if they should they move forward with their complaint:

"I would like to feel more support from CDSA. If a situation is difficult with a coach and/or the team manager, I would like to be able to talk to someone about it. I passed on my experience through a survey that was sent after the [event], but I've had no feedback on it. I'm still waiting, and I would have liked to be listened to. I don't know who to turn to, other than the Executive Director. I have to take steps to contact him in order to share my situation."

## Communication Accessibility in LSQ for Quebec Deaf Athletes

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There is one important particularity mentioned by some Quebec athletes regarding their communication accessibility in LSQ, which wasn't noticed nor mentioned by anglophone participants:

"If the interpretation is offered, it is only in ASL, which is not my native language. In addition to focusing on training or competition, I have to concentrate to understand everything that is going on and cannot express myself easily or be 100% understood. I let the situation go so as not to make anything worse and stay positive. But it is difficult, and I feel frustrated. Being the only LSQ athlete with athletes who are mostly ASL, I often feel lonely."

## Some Additional Remarks

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Despite these findings that seem to be more negative than positive, it is still important to recognize that several athletes had positive experience, such as this participant:

"My experience as an athlete has always been positive, always good. I've been lucky to be around good people in my life journey. Coaches, support people, donors, peers, friends, many people. I've played [this sport] and other sports as well."

Parents' involvement in the sports development of their Deaf or hard of hearing child is among the most discussed points during the interviews. One of the participants mentioned it as such:

"There is probably also a great deficiency in parents teaching and playing sports with their children as it may not be valued. To become an elite athlete (which is what is needed for the National program), it takes parents who teach fundamental movement skills to children, school coaches that teach sport specific skills and provide competitive opportunities, and high-level involvement in community or club sports. If we had more athletes who have club experience in their sports then YES this would make a huge difference."

Some other Deaf and hard of hearing athletes mentioned their wish to see CDSA take on a bigger role in regard to advocacy from the human rights perspective, and this, among different levels of government in order to support them better:

"I couldn't rise up because of funding, interpreting too. CDSA should be involved on a government level and advocating for barriers. I tried to explain that, got tired, hit a wall there. CDSA could have become sports advocates, more involved with each athlete."

One of the team managers initiated the idea that, eventually, include Deaf interpreters in some CDSA related contexts:

“We need better interpreters. And Deaf interpreters. DIs are key, those who are knowledgeable about [the sport]. Sometimes interpreters don’t have full understanding themselves and the message is watered down. I often have to expand for the players. It was not just one time, but quite a number of times, we had a priest as an interpreter. The priest had no knowledge of [the sport]. I really had to take the DI’s role on and expand on everything. That’s an example. We need DI. Interpreters, yes, but definitely DIs.”

## Sport Safety: What Works Well? What Are the Strengths?

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Several study participants agree with the fact that sport safety within CDSA have some strengths, such as their policies already in place, the Coaches Summit, the LTAD guidelines, the bylaws and their significantly improved relationship with Sport Canada. The fact that it is a Deaf-led organization is quite appreciated by the majority of the participants.

Due to this being a Deaf-led organization, people feel there’s a significant increase in terms of accountability, positiveness, solidarity between the organization and the provincial Deaf sports organization, which was previously practically non-existent.

# Limitations of the Study

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Among the challenges we encountered throughout this study, there was the scarcity of scientific documentation and publications that covered Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing sport safety topic. It's the main reason why we opted for two literature reviews; sport safety and various forms of maltreatment of athletes, and the accessibility and communicational frameworks.

One of the challenges with this study was the recruitment of a greater number of participants for the survey, especially among francophones. A greater number of participants to survey would've contributed to data of better validity, reliability, and accuracy. These data were still shown for reference only, which should lead to new studies that would provide a deeper insight of these results. On the other hand, this challenge was offsetted by semi-directed interviews, which filled the gaps and provided a picture of CDSA's current situation in regard to safe sports.

Another challenge was to determine the best approach to recruit participants' responses, either through the survey or semi-directed interviews, due to the vast topic that is safe sports. The very majority of participants perceived safe sports in different ways, but most of them strongly connected it to communication, which complicated data analysis.

Despite these challenges encountered throughout the project, we are convinced that we delivered an overall assessment of various issues related to safe sports among Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing athletes.

# Recommendations

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It is clear that based on our findings, both from the survey and the semi-directed interviews, supported by the literature review, it isn't sufficient to simply provide ASL or LSQ interpreting services to ensure sport safety among Deaf and hard of hearing athletes. For sport safety measures to be effective in our community, it implies several types of actions, such as raising awareness about Deaf and hard of hearing experiences, a shift in mentality and attitudes, policies development and implementation, and so much more.

CDSA's efforts in terms of sport safety in the past few years did not go unnoticed. Despite all of the progress, there are still several things that CDSA need to work on in order to ensure Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' safety in various sports related contexts.

With these points in mind, the following recommendations were developed based on survey and semi-directed interviews results. Far from criticizing CDSA's efforts, these recommendations aim to support the organization by outlining what need to be done in order to reach their goal of ensuring a safe sports environment for all. It is also important to note that the implementation of these recommendations will depend on CDSA's financial and human resources capacities, including their relationship with various stakeholders and collaborators.

- 1. Address sport safety issues:** it would be crucial that CDSA examines their sport safety prevention measures in order to address various issues that has been occurring within the organization and through their events (e.g., abuse of power, bullying, discrimination, performance enhancing drugs, harassment, ethical breaches, etc.). This may include an in-depth analysis of various hiring, prevention and intervention practices, as well as policies development and implementation, in order to determine how these practices has impacted Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' sport safety.
  - a. Raise awareness about safe sports among Deaf and hard of hearing athletes;** due to the importance of sports security being underestimated by several Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, it would be important to raise awareness about safe sports. It could include the coaches and team managers' roles, and their rights as Deaf and hard of hearing individuals.
  - b. Provide trainings, workshops, and resources** to everyone working for CDSA about safe sports, including bullying, harassment, sexual abuse, and drug use, which are existent in Deaf and hard of hearing sports, but frequently unreported.
  - c. Build trust and positive relationships within CDSA** with Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, coaches, team managers, and all other sports staff, which would support CDSA's efforts to tackle unhealthy behaviours and to ensure a safe sports environment.

- 2. Make the Universal Code of Conduct to Prevent and Address Maltreatment in Sport accessible in ASL and LSQ:** and ensure that it is specifically designed for each of CDSA's various parties, be it Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, coaches, team managers, Board of Directors, volunteers, and more.
  - a. Make it readily accessible** to various stakeholders through website and social media.
- 3. Develop and implement safe sports policies and procedures accessible in ASL and LSQ:** that would support CDSA's efforts in regard to sport safety prevention and this, based on a targeted approach in order to address the issues identified through this report as well as new issues that should be identified on a regular basis.
  - a. Establish a checklist of policies and procedures reviews** in order to implement a Responsible Coaching Movement, which could be inspired by the Coaching Association of Canada's checklist ([Responsible Coaching Movement Checklist](#)).
  - b. Develop CDSA's own Responsible Coaching Movement Implementation Chart**, which includes SMART goals, which could be inspired by the Coaching Association of Canada's checklist ([Responsible Coaching Movement Implementation Chart – Phase 1](#)).
  - c. Support Provincial Deaf Sports Associations with their own Responsible Coaching Movement Implementation efforts**, which could be inspired by the Coaching Association of Canada's checklist ([Responsible Coaching Movement Implementation Chart – Phase 1](#)).
  - d. Implement a thorough background screening process as well as a matrix**, which could be inspired by the Coaching Association of Canada's checklist ([Responsible Coaching Movement – Background Screening Check Matrix](#)).
  - e. Establish and implement the Rule of Two policy through an implementation matrix**, which could be inspired by the Coaching Association of Canada's checklist ([Rule of Two Implementation Matrix – Three year options](#)).
  - f. Establish a clear and independent complaint resolution process and guidelines** and make it readily available in four languages on CDSA's website and other communication means, when relevant.
  - g. Raise awareness about these policies and procedures** by providing trainings and workshop among CDSA's different groups, including but not limited to Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, coaches, team managers, and Board of Directors
  - h. Develop a safe sports culture** by raising awareness about these policies and procedures which, in turn, would allow various parties to know where to report any issues that might arise while feeling safe to report them without prejudice or any consequences.

- 4. Implement an independent third-party who would provide safe sports resources accessible in four languages:** in order for CDSA to optimize its safe sports efforts, it would be crucial to develop and implement, in collaboration with specific stakeholders, an independent third-party resource that would provide proper safe sports support to anyone who is working with CDSA, be it Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, hearing coaches and team managers. It could include the appointment of independent mediators or lawyers who are fluent in sign language, or a website hub where all the safe sports resources are readily available in four languages (ASL, LSQ, English and French).
  - a. Ensure proper representation from Deaf and hard of hearing minorities** by involving individuals from various stakeholders (e.g., visible minorities, LBGTQIA+, IBPOC, etc.).
  - b. Develop different types of awareness tools** such as videos, website, and messages through social media platforms.
  - c. Provide information about safe sports related resources** that are available across Canada, such as the Canadian Sport Helpline.
  - d. Build partnerships with safe sports organizations** such as the Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC), the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sports (CCES), the Sport Dispute Resolution Centre of Canada (SDRCC), and the Canadian Sport Helpline.
- 5. Raise awareness about Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' experiences, including Deaf culture:** in order to actually provide qualified coaches and team managers to work with athletes, it is important they understand the various characteristics of Deaf culture and their experiences.
  - a. Deploy targeted approaches** in order to reinforce the relationships between Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, their coaches and their team managers by getting them involved throughout various safe sports measures development and implementation processes.
  - b. Develop an open communication culture** between all the parties in order to give everyone a safe space to learn and adjust to everyone's needs and expectations.
  - c. Provide training about various topics related to safe sports,** be it psychological or physical. It would be important for coaches and all those who are working directly with Deaf and hard of hearing athletes to understand the multiple layers of sports psychology and how their behaviours, their attitude, their communication and everything else relevant could have an impact on Deaf and hard of hearing athletes' performances (e.g., mental fatigue, sense of insecurity, low self-esteem, etc.).



- 6. Address communicational and attitudinal barriers:** as communication is the cornerstone of a safe sports environment for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes, it would be essential to identify various communicational and attitudinal barriers that affects directly and indirectly CDSA's Deaf and hard of hearing athletes from the sports safety perspective.
- a. Provide sign language training to all hearing sports staff,** be it in ASL or LSQ, which would help all the parties to communicate directly with each other and develop a stronger bond. It would, in turn, create a psychologically safe sports environment for athletes.
  - b. Provide training about attitudinal barriers** in order to provide a better understanding of the Deaf and hard of hearing's overall experience, which would help dismantle attitudinal issues as experienced by several athletes.
  - c. Develop online resources** such as online courses and LSQ lexicon related to sports (e.g., sports disciplines, rules, policies, safe sports, etc.)
  - d. Support coaching opportunities to Deaf and hard of hearing athletes** or former athletes so they could gain coaching experience in order to eventually become head coaches through mentorship.
- 7. Hire qualified sign language interpreters in sports settings:** in order to ensure proper communication between the parties, it would be crucial not only to hire qualified sign language interpreters, but also those who are knowledgeable in sports disciplines that they are interpreting for. It's also important to note that sign language interpreters would need to be in the athletes' native language, be it ASL or LSQ.
- a. Professional development** such as sports terminology in sign language or various dos and don'ts in sports settings, for instance, wouldn't only be a great recruitment and retainment approach, but also a plus-value for athletes and coaches who have to work directly with them.
  - b. Partnership building** would be a good way to recruit qualified sign language interpreters across Canada while giving these interpreting agencies visibility and opportunity to grow their pool of sports interpreters
  - c. Consider hiring qualified Deaf Interpreters,** including ASL-LSQ interpreters, to ensure access to all Deaf and hard of hearing athletes who might need them.

# Conclusion

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In order to promote a safe sports environment, accessible, ethical and equitable, the main goal of this report was to identify safe sports issues that have been happening within CDSA. Indeed, the report aims to provide an overview of the organization's strengths and weaknesses that need to be addressed through recommendations in order to ensure a safe sports environment for Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing athletes.

At CDSA's request, we opted for a combined approach for this research project, which included a survey and semi-directed interviews. On one hand, the survey included questions that were mainly designed for Deaf and hard of hearing athletes. On the other hand, the semi-directed interviews' purpose was to complete the survey and was conducted among Deaf and hard of hearing athletes as well as coaches and team managers. It is important to note that this combined approach is ideal in a diverse environment that is characteristic of CDSA, which includes Deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing individuals. Deaf individuals tend to take part to interviews while the rest tend to complete surveys.

Based on survey and interviews results, we outlined main themes that came out of this study, including strengths and weaknesses, in order to make recommendations that aim to support CDSA's efforts in sport safety.

Without surprise, collected data shows that, despite CDSA's conclusive efforts in the past few years, there are several safe sports issues that need to be addressed. Among these issues, there are communicational and attitudinal barriers, various forms of abuse, the lack of awareness about Deaf culture, and the absence of an independent third-party resource to support complaints. Although CDSA already has the foundation to address these issues, the organization still needs significant support, be it financial or human resources, from governmental instances to immediately address and resolve important safe sports issues.

Furthermore, it is clear that the majority of participants of this study would like to see CDSA keep working on implementing a safe sports environment for Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing athletes by tackling down various issues that impacts them at different levels and bring a significant change of culture in its Canadian Deaf and hard of hearing sports landscape.

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