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Understanding the views and experience of those charged with implementing FIFA Guardians

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**Understanding the views and experience of those charged with
implementing FIFA Guardians**

Anuska Marjanovic

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of
Sheffield Hallam University

in collaboration with Zagreb school of Economics and Management

for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

July 2025

Candidate Declaration

I hereby declare that:

1. I have not been enrolled for another award of the University, or other academic or professional organisation, whilst undertaking my research degree.
2. None of the material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.
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Ethics review reference number	Title of research study	Approval date	Date of any post-approval amendments
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Abstract

The safety and protection of everyone in football, especially children, remains a priority at the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA). Central to this effort is the FIFA Guardians programme, which is designed to globally prevent and manage child abuse in football. This research explores how the child protection policies of FIFA Guardians are implemented by Member Associations (MAs) and, specifically, how personnel on the ground experience integrating these policies into their daily activities. In doing so, the study seeks to gain a greater understanding of the challenges faced by those working in MAs charged with operationalizing FIFA's safeguarding initiatives. The FIFA Guardians Programme is a global initiative, and the sample of MAs included in the study are taken from a range of social, political, and cultural contexts. In doing this, more understanding can be gleaned on how different contexts can impact differentially on the implementation of FIFA Guardians.

The research has three objectives. First, to better understand the views, perceptions and lived experiences of those responsible for implementing the FIFA Guardian programme at various MAs around the world. Second, to apply Elias' concept of Game Models to help explain the views, perceptions and lived experiences of those responsible for implementing the FIFA Guardian programme. And finally, in line with the qualification, to identify recommendations that may improve the implementation of FIFA Guardians globally.

Interviews were conducted with child protection managers from various MAs tasked with implementing FIFA Guardians. The research highlights how MAs, as 'players' in a complex, multi-layered game, are constrained and enabled by their surrounding networks of power and influence. The dynamic interplay between individual actions and departmental behaviours impacts child protection practices in a positive and negative way. The work highlights how incorporating safeguarding into multifaceted roles presents challenges in managing time and resources effectively. Regional challenges, such as geographical barriers and varying infrastructure, require scalable solutions like technology and community partnerships. Mandatory safeguarding policies are essential for ensuring compliance, and robust monitoring systems help maintain adherence.

However, customising FIFA Guardians for different regions requires adaptive policies for local laws and cultural norms while helping maintain global standards.

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My sincere thanks to you all.

Anuska

Dedication:

My husband

Michael Marjanovic

My Children

Amelie and Anthony Marjanovic

My parents

Toncica and Zlatko Celjuska

My Sister

Tihana Celjuska

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List of Abbreviations

The thesis uses a number of abbreviations which are outlined below in alphabetical order along with their full title.

AFC – Asian Football Confederation

BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

CAC – Coaching Association of Canada

CAF – Confederation of African Football

CP – Child Protection

CPSU – Child Protection in Sport Unit

FA – Football Association

FIFA – International Federation of Association Football

FIFA Forward – FIFA Development Funding Programme

FIFA Forward 3.0 – The latest version of the FIFA Development Funding Programme

FIFA Guardians – FIFA Child Safeguarding Programme

IFs – International Federations

IOC – International Olympic Committee

LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and others

LTA – Lawn Tennis Association

MA – Member Association

NHL – National Hockey League

OFC – Oceania Football Confederation

UN – United Nations

UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

WHO – World Health Organisation

Chapter 1: Introduction

Child protection in sports, particularly in football, has emerged as an area of critical concern in recent years, prompting the implementation of various safeguarding initiatives. This chapter aims to introduce the background and context to the child protection measures that have emerged within football, focusing specifically, but not exclusively on the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) Guardians safeguarding programme. Having done this, the chapter then highlights the significance of the attempts to address child protection issues in sports and the specific relevance of the FIFA Guardians programme to that process. The chapter concludes by providing an overview of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Background

It is often assumed that sport provides a healthy environment for everyone, especially children and youth, to enjoy the benefits that sport participation brings in relative safety. However, over the past thirty years or so, academic disciplines and areas of professional practice have become increasingly interested in child protection within sport and raised critical questions in this area (Brackenridge, Bringer & Bishop, 2005).

For example, according to Kerr et al. (2019), maltreatment has become a systematic issue in sport, impacting athletes of all ages across various sports and levels globally and rates of harmful psychological experiences in sports are documented in various studies across different areas (also see, for example, Alexander et al., 2011; Parent & Vaillancourt-Morel, 2020). Similarly, Donelan (2019) argues that instances of abuse in sports, such as cases involving team physicians in American gymnastics, football coaches in the United Kingdom, and coaches in Canada's national alpine skiing team, engaging in sexual misconduct with athletes, are only a few of numerous examples and illustrate a wider issue within sport globally. Notwithstanding this research, child protection, and its associated fields of safeguarding, abuse, exploitation, and maltreatment have had little attention from researchers within business. This seems odd given that

there has been an increase in exposure around child protection issues across, among other things, media platforms, and organisational policies.

Child protection in sports has emerged, therefore, as an area of critical concern, with numerous high-profile cases highlighting the vulnerability of young athletes to abuse and exploitation. One significant initiative that helps to highlight this concern is Operation Hydrant, the United Kingdom's national police coordination centre. Operation Hydrant streamlines the investigation of non-recent child sexual abuse by cross-referencing information from various agencies, avoiding duplication, and facilitating the sharing of intelligence across police forces. The findings from Operation Hydrant revealed widespread abuse within professional sports clubs and their feeder teams, where perpetrators exploited their associations with pro clubs to gain access and trust (Collomosse, 2017). Grassroots games also saw extensive incidents of abuse, underscoring the need for comprehensive safeguarding measures at all levels. Reports, such as the English Football Association review (2021), noted that youth teams often operated as isolated entities, making oversight and accountability challenging. The Barry Bennell cases, widely reported in the UK media (BBC Sports, 2018), reverberated across all levels of football, and prompted a re-evaluation of safeguarding policies, significantly raising awareness across the football community.

The vulnerabilities extend beyond the UK. McDougall (2008) had already reported cases of young footballers from West Africa being trafficked to Europe under false pretences, often ending up stranded without support. More than a decade later, Esson (2020) highlighted that such practices continue, with an estimated 15,000 young players relocated annually from West Africa, often with little to no oversight. This exploitation could be regarded as a demonstration of the systemic shortcomings in the football industry's safeguarding structures, where professional affiliations often serve as mere façades to enable abuse or trafficking. These cases, among others, increase the pressure on the governing organisations, such as FIFA, to develop and implement robust policies, structured coordination, and cultural shifts to address systemic failings and protect vulnerable young athletes across all levels of sport. One such policy that aimed to do that, and specifically explored in this research, was FIFA Guardians. In such manner, international and national sports governing bodies, such as FIFA, have

taken preventative steps to address child protection, safeguarding, violence, abuse, maltreatment, and exploitation in sport. The next section outlines the significance of addressing these issues for FIFA specifically.

1.2 Significance of Safeguarding in the Context of Football

Recent media coverage and academic work have drawn attention to historic cases of child abuse in many places and sports around the world. A good example of this is in the United Kingdom where, having waved their rights to anonymity, victims of sexual abuse in football began to identify themselves towards the end of 2016, many publicly talking to high profile media outlets. It was initiated by Andrew Woodward, a survivor of the abuse, who did an interview with sports journalist Daniel Taylor on November 16th, 2016, claiming he suffered abuse by one of his coaches from the age of 11. Within a few days, the media was flooded with stories of other players and the abuse they suffered during their time playing the game as teenagers and pre-teens. Over the next few years an inquiry was launched by the Football Association (FA), which produced the Sheldon Report (Sheldon, 2021). The Hydrant investigation uncovered widespread sexual abuse in football from 1970 to 2005. It identified 240 suspects, 692 survivors, and numerous allegations, with the likelihood of more unreported cases.

The report, which included accounts from survivors, highlighted the devastating impact of the abuse, resulting in loss of trust in caregivers and the sport itself. Barry Bennell, one of the perpetrators convicted of sexual abuse, was sentenced to a prison term of 30 years, and as part of their investigation, UK authorities discovered that Bennell was a member of a paedophile ring involved in the sexual abuse of over 800 boys in 340 different football clubs (BBC News, 2018). Professional clubs were also implicated in these cases, with civil actions for damages claims being waged against them. These cases, which occurred all through the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and the early 2000s emphasised the responsibility of sporting organisations to ensure that children and young people feel and are secure during training, matches and other involvements. Similarly, it highlighted the need to ensure that adults involved in football at any level are adequately trained and qualified to identify signs of abuse, neglect, or

discrimination, as well as to address such issues appropriately via reporting mechanisms, for example.

Football, and indeed the United Kingdom, is not the only sport to have been exposed to this issue. In 1995, for example, Paul Hickson, a former Olympic swimming coach, was convicted of sexual misconduct in the UK (Nery, Smith, Lang, Vertommen & Stirling, 2023). A similar scenario occurred in Canada when coach of the year Graham James was accused of sexually abusing children and according to Donnely (1997), a paedophile circle was later discovered in an ice hockey rink. Perhaps one of the most infamous abuse cases witnessed in recent years related to gymnastics in the USA. The case concluded with the conviction of Larry Nassar, the former team doctor of the United States of America gymnastics team, for the rape of hundreds of young female gymnasts supposedly in his care. According to Pesta (2019), abuse cases took place in the USA in 2016 within not only gymnastics, but a few other sports such as dancing, figure skating, basketball, swimming, and athletics. Several dancers affiliated with the Bern Ballet have come forward with allegations of abuse perpetrated by senior members within the company, echoing similar instances reported across Switzerland (2022). According to Kerr et al. (2020) abuse has also occurred in alpine skiing, gymnastics, wrestling, speed skating, and swimming. In 1996, National Hockey League (NHL) player Sheldon Kennedy came forward, accusing his junior league coach of sexually abusing him over a span of ten years.

The coach, Graham James, received a five-year prison sentence for his crimes. Importantly for this piece of research, in this case criticism emerged towards sports officials for their perceived lack of action in implementing systemic changes following this national scandal. Another notable case involved Kyle Beach, a left winger for the Chicago Blackhawks, who publicly disclosed last year that he was sexually assaulted by the team's former video coach during the 2010 Stanley Cup playoffs. An investigation later revealed that the team had been aware of Beach's allegations at the time, but chose not to address them until after the Blackhawks' victorious playoff run. Once more, this helps to underscore the significance of a need for safeguarding to be understood and implemented within the institutions and businesses that make up sport. The above cases highlight how vulnerable athletes, and particularly young athletes, can be in a sporting environment. The institution at the heart of this research is FIFA. The next section

of this chapter briefly outlines who FIFA are and the significance of child protection for them.

1.2.1 Safeguarding in Sport and Football: Historical and Organisational Context

Safeguarding in sport has undergone significant development over the past three decades, evolving from a reactive response to individual cases of abuse into a proactive framework of policy, education, and accountability. In the UK, early research and advocacy, most notably by Celia Brackenridge and colleagues, were instrumental in drawing attention to the prevalence and impact of abuse in sport (Brackenridge et al., 2008). Their work led to the establishment of the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) in 2001, in partnership with Sport England, Sport Scotland, and Sport Northern Ireland. The CPSU introduced a comprehensive system of safeguarding standards, guidance, and monitoring that has since become a model for other national systems. Football, as the most widely participated in and commercially influential sport, has played a pivotal role in shaping safeguarding practices. The English Football Association (FA) was among the first governing bodies to embed safeguarding within its governance structure, developing mandatory safeguarding training, designated welfare officers, and case-management protocols. The FA's safeguarding framework has evolved through continual reform, partly in response to historical cases of abuse and the subsequent independent reviews that highlighted systemic failures (Sheldon, 2021).

At the international level, FIFA's commitment to safeguarding was formalised through the launch of the FIFA Guardians programme in 2019, which provides a global framework for child protection and welfare across all Member Associations. The programme outlines five key principles: policy, people, promotion, procedures, and accountability. It also requires each Member Association to appoint a safeguarding officer and implement context-specific action plans. While this initiative represents a significant step forward, the degree to which these global standards are implemented locally varies considerably. Factors such as resources, organisational culture, leadership commitment, and national governance contexts influence how safeguarding is interpreted and enacted across different regions.

By situating this study within both the UK safeguarding tradition and FIFA's international framework, this research provides essential context for understanding the experiences and challenges of those responsible for implementing FIFA Guardians at the Member Association level.

1.3 FIFA

FIFA is the international governing body for soccer. It is FIFA that regulates the game worldwide by advancing football globally while upholding its values and integrity. According to FIFA Statutes (2022) this includes continual enhancement and promotion of the sport through youth and development programmes, organising international competitions, and ensuring the implementation and enforcement of regulations governing football. FIFA also strives for inclusivity, working to make football accessible to all regardless of gender or age, and actively promotes the development of women's football and their involvement in governance. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly given the topic of this study, FIFA emphasises integrity, ethics, and fair play to maintain the essence of the game and prevent misconduct. Through these endeavours, FIFA seeks to foster a thriving and equitable football community worldwide. FIFA is also a member organisation and has 211 'Member Associations' (MAs) who represent FIFA in their own countries. FIFA supports each affiliated MA through finance and the development of programmes (such as the FIFA Guardians programme).

FIFA claims it is committed to ensuring that all children who play football, regardless of age or ability, have a safe and enjoyable experience (FIFA Guardians, 2019). The FIFA Guardians programme therefore is an initiative established by FIFA aimed at safeguarding children and young people involved in football activities from the types of abuse outlined in the previous sections. It encompasses various measures and guidelines to ensure the protection and well-being of minors within the football community and, according to the FIFA Guardians programme, people involved in football have a right to protection against harassment, abuse, and exploitation, regardless of whether it be sexual, physical, or emotional. Moreover, it is argued that engaging in abusive behaviour or misconduct within the football family (by players, coaches, officials, volunteers, and staff), undermines FIFA's mission and interferes with its efforts to promote the integrity of football and the values of safe sport (FIFA Guardians, 2019).

Taking its lead from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), FIFA has adopted the notion that children (all those under age 18) have an immediate need for protection and dependence on others. For that reason, FIFA developed the FIFA Guardians child protection, which focuses on areas such as capacity building, education, and awareness training of staff and children within the 211 affiliated MAs.

The FIFA Guardians programme and FIFA Forward investment (which is the development funding linked to this) focus on helping each MA attain enough financial resources and knowledge to educate and properly train their staff members in safeguarding and football development. The FIFA Forward investment programme is global, like FIFA Guardians, and aims at providing financial and technical support to FIFA's MAs for football development projects, fostering infrastructure improvements, capacity-building programmes, and initiatives to promote grassroots participation and gender equality in the sport (FIFA Forward 3.0, 2022). The intersection with FIFA Guardians lies in the requirement that all FIFA-supported initiatives incorporate safeguarding standards and child protection training, ensuring that development funds not only expand football participation but also uphold player welfare and safety.

As noted earlier, the FIFA Guardians programme was developed to address the varying stages of child protection and safeguarding within each MA. To do that, a comprehensive framework consisting of five essential steps to mitigate risks, and to ensure the safety of children involved in football was developed (FIFA Guardians, 2019).

These steps are (FIFA Guardians, 2019):

1. **Assess existing reality** – involves understanding the current state of safeguarding measures.
2. **Define your safeguarding policy** – establish clear and structured guidelines.
3. **Implement the policy** – ensure that safeguarding practices are effectively put into action.
4. **Communicate and educate** – promote awareness and understanding among stakeholders.

5. Monitor and improve – continuously review and enhance the effectiveness of the safeguarding measures.

These steps encompassed several key topics, such as the evaluation of existing safeguarding policies within the MAs, and the development of new ones where necessary. Another topic covered relates to the procedures and guidelines to facilitate the implementation of these policies, as is the topic of communication and how to raise awareness and foster a strong understanding of safeguarding issues within each association. Furthermore, the FIFA Guardians programme emphasises the importance of establishing monitoring systems and regularly evaluating procedures to continually enhance existing policies. While there is currently limited research on the programme's effectiveness across different MAs, success stories and best practices are shared among members to facilitate knowledge exchange and improvement. One notable aspect of the FIFA Guardians programme was the introduction of online training programmes designed to educate safeguarding managers nominated by each MA every two years. This highlights the significance of the FIFA Guardian programme in enhancing safeguarding practices across MAs, with an emphasis on continuous improvement through monitoring and knowledge exchange.

There is, as it stands, limited research on the programme's effectiveness within different MAs, and the role of online training for safeguarding managers remains underexplored. This leads directly to the rationale for this research. Given the number of high-profile cases relating to failings in child protection within sport globally, and the increased response from organisations such as FIFA to develop policies to address this issue, it seems an important next step that these policies are systematically monitored and evaluated. In that regard, as someone who works at FIFA, it became clear to the researcher that very little was in place to help understand how those individuals charged with implementing FIFA Guardians 'on the ground' were experiencing the policy. Moreover, as a policy rolled out across 211 Member Associations, it was evident that a single safeguarding framework was being transferred into highly diverse social, cultural, political, and economic contexts worldwide. Such contextual diversity raises critical questions about policy transfer and localisation, specifically how global safeguarding standards are interpreted, adapted, or resisted within different environments. These variations are not merely operational but may

fundamentally shape the policy's effectiveness, legitimacy, and sustainability within local football systems.

1.4 Aims and objectives

The aim of this research, therefore, is to explore the views and lived experiences of individuals charged with implementing and delivering FIFA's Guardian programme.

Objectives of the research:

1. To understand the views, perceptions and lived experiences of those responsible for implementing the FIFA Guardian programme at various MAs around the world;
2. To apply Elias' concept of Game Models to help explain the views, perceptions and lived experiences of those responsible for implementing the FIFA Guardian programme
3. To identify recommendations that would help improve the implementation of FIFA Guardians.

1.5 Theoretical and Practical Contribution of the Study

This study makes both theoretical and practical contributions to the field of safeguarding in sport, and particularly within international football governance structures. From a theoretical perspective, this research extends existing work on safeguarding by integrating Elias' concept of *Game Models* into the analysis of policy implementation. While previous studies (e.g. Brackenridge et al., 2007; Lang & Hartill, 2014) have examined safeguarding frameworks and their structural limitations, this thesis situates these dynamics within the broader sociological processes of interdependence, power, and culture. By doing so, it deepens the understanding of how safeguarding actors, particularly within FIFA's Member Associations, navigate complex organisational figurations, competing priorities, and global-local tensions in implementing the FIFA Guardians programme. The study thereby contributes to the limited body of literature that connects sociological theory with the operational realities of safeguarding in football. From a practical perspective, the findings provide evidence-based insights for policy makers, safeguarding officers, and football administrators

seeking to strengthen child protection practices within football. By examining how safeguarding responsibilities are interpreted, communicated, and enacted at different organisational levels, this research identifies barriers and enablers that influence the effectiveness of safeguarding implementation. The results will support FIFA and its Member Associations in refining training materials, policy frameworks, and monitoring systems to ensure that safeguarding measures are consistently embedded in football operations worldwide.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 1 focuses on providing the necessary background and context for the study. This includes an exploration of the historical and contemporary developments surrounding safeguarding in football. The chapter delves into the significance of safeguarding within the footballing community, highlighting its importance for the well-being and integrity of the sport. It also elaborates on the rationale behind the selection of the investigative setting, including the criteria used to choose sample MAs from different confederations. Finally, it outlines the structure of the thesis, providing an overview of the subsequent chapters and their respective contributions to the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 is focused on conducting a comprehensive review of existing literature related to child protection and related areas in football. This includes an exploration of key concepts, theories, and empirical studies relevant to the topic. The chapter starts by outlining the objectives and intentions behind the literature review, clarifying the rationale for examining existing research in this area. It also discusses the methodology employed for conducting the literature search, including databases, keywords, and the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Chapter 3: Game Models

In Chapter 3, the concept of Game Models derived from Norbert Elias' theory of figurational sociology is outlined, so they can be explored further in the study to help try and explain how FIFA Guardians is implemented on the ground. These

models helped examine the power dynamics and figurations between FIFA and its MAs and between different groups of people within MAs themselves. By exploring how power as a structural characteristic of the relationship between groups people manifested itself in both intended and unintended consequences, this chapter exposes a deeper understanding of how child protection and safeguarding practices might have differential outcomes in different places around the world.

Chapter 4: Methodology

Chapter 4 focuses on detailing the research design and methodology employed for the study. This includes an exploration of the epistemological and ontological underpinning of the research, clarifying the researcher's stance on knowledge and reality. The chapter discusses the overall research strategy adopted for the study, including the rationale behind the choice of a qualitative strategy.

It also outlines the approach taken to ensure cultural sensitivity in the research process, including strategies for data collection and analysis and ethics. The data collection process, such as undertaking interviews with representatives from sample MAs, and the criteria used for selecting these associations, is also discussed. The chapter explains the strategies used to improve the validity and reliability of the data and how interview transcripts were systematically analysed to identify key themes and patterns.

Chapter 5: Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews derived from the thematic analysis. It uncovered insights into safeguarding within football, highlighting stakeholder experiences and perspectives. The findings offer a nuanced understanding of safeguarding complexities, addressing challenges, and contributing to advancing knowledge in the field. To help with this, the chapter is structurally broken down into three parts. First, the chapter outlines how the context of each MA is a vital prerequisite for understanding the remainder of the findings. Then the chapter outlines *what* is happening before moving to use Elias' Game Models to help illuminate *why* it is happening.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Chapter 6 presents the implications of the study. This is done from both a scholarly and managerial perspective. This chapter outlines how this research has contributed to the understanding of the problems and how the findings might be used in more practical terms. This chapter also synthesizes the discoveries made throughout the research process, drawing connections between theory and practice. By highlighting some of the constraints, consequences, theoretical and managerial implications of the research, the chapter concludes by providing insights to guide future research, policy development, and organisational practices in child protection and safeguarding in football.

1.6 Chapter 1 Summary

In summary, this chapter introduces the comprehensive examination of child protection measures within football, focusing on the FIFA Guardians safeguarding model. It highlights the increasing importance of addressing child protection issues in sports and the relevance of the FIFA Guardians programme in the context of a growing recognition of the unsafe environments that exist in sport around the world. Having done this, the next chapter will outline the academic and grey literature that has explored child protection and other related areas to help develop the research questions for the study.

Chapter 2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the literature on child protection, safeguarding and the related areas such as abuse, exploitation, violence, and neglect. The chapter focuses on academic and grey literature sources to find out what knowledge already exists and, in doing so, help inform the remainder of the study. The chapter analyses global perspectives, highlighting patterns and gaps within the literature, while noting that despite increased attention to child protection in sports, there is limited academic research on the effectiveness of FIFA's Guardians Model.

As the topic being covered by the research is largely explored by the social science subjects, the chapter was constructed using a narrative literature review. A narrative (traditional) review offers a comprehensive understanding of the background on a topic, partly because the goal of the narrative review is to integrate existing knowledge, to evaluate the theoretical position of how the phenomenon is explained, and to explore the historical development of a topic (Hart,1988). According to Bernardo, Nombre and Jatene (2004), a narrative literature review is less formal than a systematic review, as it does not follow defined procedures for search terms, data selection, or inclusion and exclusion criteria. Rather, authors approach their review with attention to their own set of experiences, qualities, and beliefs, and consider how these impact on their investigation. In this way, the author must be careful that emotions of such a sensitive and emotive topic do not create a certain bias about the topic discussed. Given the close connection to the topic through work within the organisation, a reflective approach was maintained to support the development of greater objectivity. This involved consistently acknowledging and managing any emotional responses to this sensitive and emotive subject to minimize potential bias in the research process.

The narrative review ordinarily begins with an assertion of the issue or pronounces the inquiry around which the conversation develops; this inquiry is frequently expansive and may advance or reformulate more particularly during

the review (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). This is how this chapter will start. The chapter then consists of a brief review of some of the leading authors in the area of child protection within sport; how child protection is defined and how it is applied in different disciplinary areas; a discussion of the implementation and limitations of child protection; and a discussion of the development and adaptation of a child protection governance model. Lastly, implications are drawn from the review, which includes an acknowledgment of the methodological limitations of a narrative review. Despite the use of a narrative review, there was a search strategy used for the development of the chapter and, as such, this is outlined briefly in the next section. One important caveat for this chapter is that it will not cover the theoretical framework of this study. This is done in the following chapter where Game Models are outlined.

2.2. Literature Search Strategy

This section describes the evolving stages that shaped the development of the review, highlighting how ideas were gathered, explored, and gradually refined. According to Gustenbauer and Haddaway (2020), the search systems that provide access to evidence in databases offer varying levels of precision and effort to ensure recall, reproducibility, and accuracy in collecting evidence.

If left unchecked, this can lead to research bias and misrepresentation of evidence. On top of this, researchers must carefully consider the quality of the search system they use to ensure accuracy and precision in their findings. Overcoming these two interrelated issues was done via a strategic selection of high-quality, specialised databases that are known for their credibility and comprehensive coverage. To ensure the databases used for the literature review were of high quality, they were assessed based on factors such as peer-reviewed content, inclusion of reputable journals, frequency of updates, and alignment with the specific field of study. This will be outlined next, detailing the process of selecting databases, evaluating their relevance, and ensuring a balanced representation of existing literature.

2.2.1 Search Strategy

Before selecting the databases, the researcher, in consultation with the supervisors, established specific criteria to guide the literature review search. Relevant keywords were identified through an initial scoping of the research area, which informed both the choice of databases and the development of search strategies. Several factors were considered to ensure the selected databases aligned with the objectives of the literature review. These included the relevance of the databases to the specific field of study, the breadth of coverage to capture a wide range of studies and publications, and the inclusion of peer-reviewed sources to ensure academic rigour and credibility. This collaborative process aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of the most relevant literature for this research. The databases used in the narrative review were ProQuest, SAGE Journals, and Scopus. These databases are widely recognised and contain journals relevant to the research topics. For example, ProQuest offers access to a broad range of interdisciplinary studies, making it ideal for exploring diverse perspectives. SAGE Journals provides extensive coverage of social sciences, humanities, and related disciplines, ensuring high-quality, peer-reviewed research. Scopus, as one of the largest abstract and citation databases, provides access to reliable, current, and authoritative publications across multiple fields.

The databases were searched for articles published in the period between 2019 and 2023, coinciding with the launch of the FIFA Guardians programme in 2019, which marked a significant development in child protection and safeguarding in football. It was therefore reasonable to assume that papers published during this period would provide the most up-to-date insights into child protection and safeguarding. The review of academic literature offers an overview of the most recent studies published in academic journals and books. In addition to this, a grey literature review was conducted utilising the same time period to identify relevant reports, conference papers, and proceedings that could further inform the study.

A study or source had to comply with several requirements for inclusion in the academic review, including (i) being written in English, (ii) being either a peer-reviewed journal article or a reputable academic book, and (iii) for journal articles, containing specific keywords in the abstract to ensure relevance to the research

topic. Inspired by the approach outlined by Gaß et al. (2014), the review began with an exploration of relevant academic work, drawing from journals, books, and conference proceedings across a range of databases. Keywords such as “child protection”, “child welfare”, “sport”, “football”, “abuse”, and “safeguarding” were used to locate relevant literature. Boolean operators were employed to narrow the focus of the search, with examples like “child protection AND sport” and “safeguarding AND football” helping to refine the search results to those most relevant to the intersection of child protection and sport. The second phase of the search included adding certain conditions to ensure that the articles being retrieved were relevant. This process is outlined in Table 1.

These conditions include ensuring that the articles, books, or conference proceedings were written in English and published in 2019 or after. For journal articles and conference proceedings, an additional requirement was the inclusion of at least one of the chosen keywords in the abstract. This ensures that the literature is both current and relevant to the research topic. Phase three of this process was the ‘clustering process’, the identified results are grouped into thematic areas based on key constructs. These thematic areas included the ‘definition of child protection’, the ‘characteristics of child protection policies’, the ‘drivers of child protection in sport’, and the ‘impacts of child protection measures’ for example. Each cluster provided a focused look at different aspects of the field. Finally, the analysis took place where themes from the various books, articles and conference papers were highlighted. Gradually, themes began to emerge and take shape, revealing patterns and areas of overlap across the literature. This thematic mapping offered insights into the evolving landscape of research on child protection and safeguarding in sport, particularly within football (Webster and Watson, 2002).

Table 1. *Four-Phase Literature Analysis Approach (from Gaß et al., 2014)*

Phase	How it was used
<p>Phase 1: Searching Process search for academic journals & conference papers using academic databases</p>	<p>Search keywords include: “child protection”, “child welfare”, “sport”, “football”, “abuse”, “safeguarding”</p> <p>Search using keywords and Boolean operators: “child protection AND sport”,</p>

	“Safeguarding AND sport”, “child protection AND football”, “safeguarding AND football”, etc.
Phase 2: Screening Process screening conditions were developed and used to focus results obtained from the searching process	Conditions used to narrow the search included: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Articles should be written in in English. 2. Articles should be published in 2019 or after 3. Articles should have at least one of the keywords above listed as part of keywords in the abstract
Phase 3: Clustering Process clusters were developed based on thematic areas – constructs	Thematic Areas identified included: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is Child Protection 2. Characteristics of Child protection policies 3. Drivers of Child protection in sport 4. Impacts of Child protection
Phase 4: Analysis Process thematic analysis technique was used to synthesize articles to create a body of literature using constructs above	Thematic Analysis Technique

Note. Adapted from *Four-Phase Literature Analysis Approach*, by Gaß et al., 2014.

Table 2 presents the databases consulted and the number of articles identified at different points in the review journey. Starting with a broad exploration of the topic 'child protection in football' across Proquest, SAGE Journals, and Scopus, the initial results were then narrowed based on factors like publication year (2019 onward) and language (English). This narrowing process significantly reduced the volume of material, helping to focus attention on more recent and accessible contributions. The final filter highlighted articles whose abstracts addressed the core themes of the review. Rather than a rigid selection mechanism, this was a reflective progression from broad curiosity to thematic focus.

Table 2. Selection of databases for literature search (own creation)

	Proquest	Sage Journals	Scopus
1st search in child protection football	277,604	8022	48
2nd search AND (LIMIT-TO (PUBYEAR,2022) OR LIMIT- TO (PUBYEAR,2021)or LIMIT-TP (2020)), LIMI- ENGLISH	2,152	1244	45
1st sift (in Abstract)	317	281	10

The literature review revealed several recurring themes in relation to abuse in sport. These included the prevalence and forms of abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual), the power dynamics between coaches and athletes, the role of organisational culture in enabling or preventing abuse, and the impact of safeguarding policies and interventions. Additionally, studies frequently highlighted barriers to reporting, the long-term psychological effects on survivors, and the importance of education and awareness among stakeholders. These themes form the foundation for the charting of abuse in sport that follows.

2.3. Charting abuse in sport

To understand why safeguarding policies, such as FIFA Guardians, are essential in the context of child protection in sport, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of what children are being protected from. The literature points to the different forms of abuse that children and young people might suffer and the implications these abuses have on young athletes. Unfortunately, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, there are many reported cases of abuse in sport, highlighting the extent and seriousness of the safeguarding issue (Villa Hughes, 2024). While the instances noted in the introduction were largely derived from examining media outlets, the search of academic literature gave rise to a wealth of research that also adds weight to the rationale for the study. Because this work is of an academic nature, it also adds some theoretical and historical depth to the understanding.

In sports generally, according to Everly (2020), the number of abuse cases is now more obvious, in comparison to the early 2000s. A major contributing factor to the increased reporting of child abuse is the increased awareness of it. In the past, child abuse was not often discussed or even acknowledged, and the victims of the abuse often felt ashamed or afraid to speak out. However, Everly (2020) notes that, in recent years, there has been a growing understanding of the issue, and victims are now more likely to come forward and report what has happened to them. In addition, the communication between parents and children has also improved in recent years, which has helped to make it easier for victims to come forward (Everley, 2020). Parents are now more likely to talk openly with their children about the issue of child abuse, and to believe what their children tell them, which has made it easier for victims to feel supported and safe when speaking out against abuse (McMahon et al., 2018). That being said, there is research which shows that the assumed importance of sport to children's psychological, social, cultural, and physical development, can often come at the expense of a focus on child protection issues (Baker et al., 2014).

Brackenridge (2003) argues that sport is characterised by poor reporting procedures, fear, and complex governance that obscure cultural contexts. Similarly, Guiora (2021) found that young athletes experience institutional complicity and betrayal when bystanders or enablers fail to report abuse, even when adults are aware of it.

This complicity was more traumatizing to some athletes than the abuse itself, because adults or authority figures either ignored or actively sent them toward abusers when they were children. Children are not able to voice their concerns and are abused because of this culture (Guiora, 2021). Although there were some cases of child abuse in the 1980s, media and public involvement were needed to show the need for policy development (Hartill, 2013).

Baker and Byon (2014) report that abuse in all its forms, such as emotional, moral, physical, and sexual, impacts children's well-being. There is concern about the material and relationship contexts of sport that facilitate the continuation of abuse against children. For example, according to Komaki and Tuakli-Wosornu (2021) due to potential reputation damage and loss of trust in the organisation, high-level individuals can be protected, and cases can be shut down. This often

leads to the victim feeling powerless and unable to report the abuse. The cycle of abuse continues, and the abuser is rarely held accountable for their actions. This is a major issue in the sport industry (Komaki & Tuakli- Wosornu, 2021).

One of the ways in which children and young people are protected against abuse is by the development of policies. However, it is pertinent to mention, in a section detailing what children and young people are being protected from, that some of the cultures active within sport seem to work against such policies.

As such, activating policy implementations on the ground can be difficult due to a variety of factors. These can include bureaucratic delays, lack of resources, lack of awareness about the policy, and a lack of political will or commitment to implementing the policy (Stevens, 2013). A lack of resources, fear, and administrative challenges seem to be the most prominent obstacles preventing child protection policies from being implemented in sport, according to Malkin et al. (2000). Additionally, Brackenridge (2005) highlighted a gap in the implementation of child protection policies, between federations and affiliated local clubs in the United Kingdom. As with federations and local clubs, communication of child protection strategies and policies does not seem to be taken as seriously at the bottom level as it is at the top level (Brackenridge, 2005). This is evident in the lack of training of coaches and other volunteers on how to identify, respond to, and report abuse (Bennett et al., 2023).

According to Gillard et al. (2024), prevention and protection practices are not always implemented at the lower levels, which has the potential to create a dangerous environment for children, young people, and vulnerable adults. Child protection measures that are implemented at the highest levels of an organisation do not reach the lower levels, according to Parent and Demers (2011) due to low capacity of people assigned on topic and low interest in education about the topic. The results of a study from Brackenridge (2005) concluded that coaches, athletes, and parents were not aware of protective measures. There is also evidence that administrative staff encounter difficulties in the implementation of the plans due to the lengthy time it takes to receive criminal background checks of coaches or any person working with children (Gillard et al., 2024).

All the evidence presented above highlights the ongoing tension between the recognised need for safeguarding measures in sport and the practical challenges faced by organisations responsible for implementing them. For example, many sports organisations have developed policies and complaint procedures in response to recent highly publicised cases of abuse in sport that are outlined in the introduction. For Brackenridge (2005) however, implementing safeguards and preventing child abuse is considered a burden rather than an advantage because it takes capacity, time, and resources. As an example, in a recent study by Stoltenborgh et al. (2022), it was found that despite increased awareness, funding for child protection services remains insufficient in many countries, hindering effective prevention and intervention efforts.

Maybe because of the burden that this places on organisations, abuse typically becomes a topic of discussion only when it is reported because the reporting brings the issue to light, prompting investigations and awareness (Sheldon, 2021). On the other hand, it is imperative to focus on the prevention of abuse. Sports organisations developed crisis management procedures, but they did not seem to provide adequate protection for children, in part because the organisations were at the start of a journey surrounding child protection and inadequate education was offered to different sport federations (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2023). While the reporting of abuse has prompted necessary discussions and some initial measures, the lack of regulation in the coaching industry underscores a critical gap in prevention efforts, leaving athletes vulnerable despite growing awareness and emerging initiatives (Bennett et al., 2023). This means that anyone can become a coach, regardless of qualifications or experience (Smith et al., 2020). In the absence of regulation, there is little guarantee that coaches are competent and ethical, leaving participants vulnerable to abuse. Guiora (2020) emphasises the profound sense of institutional complicity and betrayal that young athletes experience when bystanders or enablers fail to report abuse, even when adults - such as athletes, coaches, parents, and other stakeholders - witness it firsthand or are directly informed. For some athletes, the most traumatic aspect was not just the abuse itself, but the knowledge that adults or authority figures were aware of their suffering and either took no action or, in some cases, knowingly placed them in harm's way (Guiora, 2020).

The FIFA Guardian programme focuses on dealing with these issues. It includes areas addressing poor coaching practices, education of children, and capacity building. However, despite this and evidence that federations and clubs are releasing more documents and running more courses on these issues, many people are still working with kids without any formal training or knowledge (Bennett et al., 2023). Lang and Hartill (2014), for example, highlight a significant issue in sports organisations concerning the assurance of coach quality, which presents a risk of child abuse. Frequently, these organisations operate independently, lacking awareness or integration with national child welfare frameworks that govern child-involved entities. This oversight, coupled with the mistaken belief that children in sports environments are inherently safe, leads to the conclusion by researchers that these young athletes are, in fact, a vulnerable group.

The concept of safeguarding in sport emerged from the wider child protection reforms in the United Kingdom during the late twentieth century. A series of high-profile abuse cases in residential care and youth institutions during the 1980s prompted major legislative and cultural change, most notably the Children Act (1989), which established the statutory duty to protect children from harm (Parton, 2014; Frost & Parton, 2009). In the years that followed, the policy focus expanded from *child protection* to *safeguarding*, emphasising prevention, education, and organisational responsibility (Brackenridge, 2001; Hartill, 2014). Within sport, the late 1990s saw increasing recognition that abuse could also occur in athletic contexts (Brackenridge, 1997; Kirby et al., 2000). This led to the creation of the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU) in 2001 a partnership between the NSPCC and Sport England to guide national governing bodies in implementing safeguarding frameworks (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2018).

Football played a particularly influential role in these developments. The Football Association (FA) was among the first governing bodies to adopt formal safeguarding policies, publishing its *Child Protection Policy and Procedures* in 2000 and introducing the Welfare Officer system soon after (FA, 2000; FA, 2006). These measures were later strengthened through the 'Every Child Matters' agenda (HM Government, 2003), which embedded safeguarding duties across all youth-oriented organisations. The FA's structured approach, underpinned by mandatory training and vetting (DBS) checks, positioned football as a pioneer

and model for other sports (Brackenridge et al., 2008; Rhind & Hills, 2015). Subsequently, international federations such as UEFA and FIFA drew on the UK experience to develop their own safeguarding frameworks (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2019; FIFA, 2022). Thus, the origins and evolution of safeguarding in football illustrate how the sport became central to shaping both national and global safeguarding standards in sport.

Despite these significant developments, contemporary studies demonstrate that abuse and interpersonal violence in sport remain widespread. Multi-country surveys across Europe and North America reveal that between **44 % and 86 %** of athletes report experiencing at least one form of psychological, physical, or sexual violence in sport environments (Hartill et al., 2021; Kerr et al., 2020). Psychological abuse is the most common, typically associated with coercive coaching and verbal aggression, while physical and sexual abuse are also frequently documented. Systematic reviews confirm that such experiences occur across all performance levels and age groups, indicating that safeguarding failures are not limited to isolated or historical cases but persist systemically. Recognising this prevalence underscores the continuing need for robust safeguarding implementation and provides critical justification for this study's focus on the FIFA Guardians. Recent research has significantly advanced understanding of the prevalence of abuse in sport, revealing far higher levels of maltreatment than previously acknowledged. Large-scale studies such as the VOICE project (Hartill et al., 2021) and the Canadian longitudinal analyses of Kerr et al. (2019; 2020) demonstrate that emotional, physical, and sexual harm are widespread across youth and elite sport. For example, Kerr et al. (2020) found that 75 % of athletes reported at least one form of psychological violence, while Hartill et al. (2021) identified systematic patterns of interpersonal violence affecting athletes in multiple European countries. These studies confirm that abuse is not limited to isolated cases but is embedded within structural and cultural features of sport. This growing prevalence evidence strengthens the rationale for FIFA Guardians by highlighting safeguarding as a global, cross-sport issue requiring coordinated organisational response.

2.3.1 Type of abuse

To understand the different types of abuse that can occur in sport, it is crucial to recognise them, as this awareness makes it easier to identify such incidents and take appropriate action. Next, using the literature, details and explanations will be presented to provide further context for the different types of abuse that exist in sport, starting with emotional abuse.

2.3.2 Emotional abuse

One of the highly contested areas of coaching behaviour is emotional abuse. Earlier work by Glaser and Prior (1997), for example, discovered that even in academic writings, the words 'physical abuse', 'emotional abuse', and 'mental cruelty' have been used interchangeably. This lack of consensus on what is meant by emotional abuse presented an issue for researchers and others who are developing policies. Even though there is no consensus on the terminology, experts and professionals have a clear understanding of the effects of emotional abuse. A form of trauma that is often misunderstood, emotional abuse is perhaps the most damaging type of abuse that, when received during childhood, leads to long-term consequences for adulthood (Heim et al. 2013). Not only this, but emotional abuse damages a child's developing brain, which affects both their emotional and physical health, as well as their social and cognitive development (Heim et al. 2013). According to Heim (2013) self-esteem is affected by emotional abuse as well as the nervous system.

Emotional abuse leads to changes in the brain, particularly in regions related to understanding and controlling emotions, as well as recognising and responding to others' feelings. Researchers found thinning in areas of the brain involved in self-awareness and emotion regulation, particularly in the prefrontal cortex and median temporal lobe. This suggests that emotional abuse can have long-term effects on the brain and lead to a decreased sense of self-esteem (Teicher et al., 2016). Prolonged exposure to emotional abuse can lead to serious mental health issues including depression and anxiety. As described by Barnett et al. (1993, p. 67), emotional abuse is "persistent or extreme thwarting of the child's basic emotional needs [such as] parental acts that are harmful because they are insensitive to the child's development level." Enoch (2011), Dutton and Hart (1992) and Heim et al. (2013) have all shown that emotional abuse causes

adverse development consequences equivalent to, or more severe than physical and sexual abuse and it is worth delving into their findings a little more.

According to Heim et al. (2013) abuse, especially during childhood, can have long-lasting consequences on both psychological and neurological development. They highlight that studies show different types of abuse lead to specific patterns of cortical thinning in the brain, which may serve as an adaptive mechanism to protect the child at the time, but can result in difficulties later in life. For instance, childhood sexual abuse is linked to changes in brain regions associated with sensory processing, potentially leading to sexual dysfunction in adulthood. Emotional abuse, on the other hand, affects areas related to self-awareness and self-evaluation, contributing to challenges with self-perception and emotional regulation. These findings by Heim et al. (2013) highlight the deep and lasting impact of abuse on brain development and mental health. The work of Enoch (2011) is similar and showed that early life stress, including maltreatment and cumulative stressful events before puberty, significantly increases the risk of alcohol and drug dependence later in life. Such stress can lead to lasting changes in brain structure, hormone regulation, and gene expression in reward pathways, contributing to addiction vulnerability. However, interestingly for this particular study, not all individuals exposed to early adversity develop substance dependence, highlighting the role of protective factors such as genetic influences, family support, and social relationships.

Understanding these interactions is crucial in identifying at-risk individuals and developing interventions to promote resilience against addiction. Finally, Dutton and Hart (1992) suggest that childhood abuse and neglect have long-term effects that can increase the risk of criminal behaviour in adulthood, particularly in men. They argue that research suggests early maltreatment can lead to difficulties in emotional regulation, impulse control, and social functioning, which may contribute to delinquent and criminal activities later in life. These effects are linked to changes in brain development, stress response systems, and behavioural patterns shaped by early adversity.

Table 3. *Self-Reported Experience of Various Types of Harm in Main or Second Sport by Gender (from Alexander et al., 2011)*

Type of Harm	Total (%)	Male (%)	Female (%)
Emotional harm	75	77	74
Sexual harassment	29	17	34
Physical harm	24	26	23
Sexual harm	3	5	2

Note. Adapted from *Self-Reported Experience of Harm in Sport: A National Survey of British Athletes*, by K. Alexander et al., 2011, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 35(10), pp. 676–686. © 2011 Elsevier

Table 3 provides an overview of self-reported experiences of different types of harm in sport, categorized by gender. This table serves as a foundation for the subsequent discussion on specific forms of abuse physical, emotional, sexual by offering a broad perspective on the prevalence and distribution of these harms. By presenting data from Alexander et al. (2011), it helps contextualize the discussion and highlights key patterns that will be explored in greater depth in the following sections.

2.3.3 Physical abuse

As defined by the International Olympic Committee (IOC), “physical abuse is any deliberate and unwelcome act that causes physical harm or injury, such as punching, kicking, biting and burning” (IOC, 2016, p.1). In addition, this type of act can involve forced or inappropriate physical activity (for example, training that is not appropriate for a person's age or physique). Expanding on the definition provided by the IOC, physical abuse encompasses a range of deliberate actions that cause harm or injury to a child athlete. These actions may include not only direct physical violence such as punching, kicking, biting, or burning but also extend to forms of coercion or inappropriate training practices such as punishments. The inclusion of forced or excessive physical activity, beyond what is suitable for a child's age, developmental stage, or physical condition, underscores the importance of recognising the boundaries between rigorous training and abusive practices. Such abuse can have profound physical and

psychological effects on young athletes, compromising their well-being and long-term development. Therefore, it is imperative for sports organisations, coaches, and stakeholders to remain vigilant in preventing and addressing instances of physical abuse in sports settings (International Olympic Committee, 2016).

Academic literature emphasises that physical abuse is not limited to visible injuries but also includes long-term consequences such as chronic pain, impaired physical development, and psychological trauma. Gattis and Moore (2022) highlight that physical abuse can manifest in various environments, including sports, where the power dynamics between coaches and young athletes may increase the risk of mistreatment. The cumulative impact of such abuse can lead to decreased self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and even a diminished interest in sports participation. Recognising the multifaceted nature of physical abuse is crucial for implementing effective prevention strategies and fostering a safe and supportive environment for young athletes.

2.3.4 Sexual abuse

According to the IOC (2016) the term "sexual abuse" refers to any type of unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature, where consent is coerced, manipulated, or not given voluntarily. Brackenridge et al., (2008), go further and claim sexual abuse encompasses a wide spectrum of unwelcome behaviours of a sexual nature that violate a child athlete's boundaries and rights. This can include verbal harassment, sexual advances, touching, or any form of sexual contact that occurs without the athlete's consent or against their will (Brackenridge et al., 2008). Importantly, sexual abuse can involve coercion, manipulation, or the exploitation of a power imbalance, where individuals in positions of authority misuse their influence to engage in or facilitate abusive behaviour (Nielsen, 2001). Therefore, using these definitions any form of sexual conduct with a child athlete is inherently abusive and unacceptable. Addressing sexual abuse in sports requires comprehensive prevention strategies, including education, training, and robust reporting mechanisms, to ensure the safety and well-being of young athletes (International Olympic Committee, n.d.)

2.3.5 Neglect

According to Dubowitz et al. (1993), neglect is the most common form of child maltreatment; however, considerable confusion remains regarding its definition. In part this is because research has largely focused on the study of sexual abuse, while neglect has received comparatively less attention, though its representation has been steadily increasing (Mayer, et al., 2007). The issue of neglect, often referred to as the “neglect of neglect” (Dubowitz & Bennett, 2007; Wolock & Horowitz, 1984), persists due to several factors, not least the ongoing challenges in establishing a clear and consistent definition. It is important to keep in mind that neglect, as outlined by Mennen et al. (2010), involves a failure by a parent or caregiver to provide for a child's needs. In the context of child safeguarding within sports, such as the FIFA Guardian framework, safeguarding managers are asked to remain vigilant to signs of neglect. While they are typically focused on the abuse that may occur within the sporting environment, neglect by parents or caregivers is just as critical to identify, as it can significantly impact a child's well-being and development both on and off the field. Understanding neglect and its implications within the sporting context is essential for safeguarding children both on and off the field. While much attention has been given to other forms of abuse, the “neglect of neglect” remains a critical issue requiring further awareness and clarity. With this foundation established in understanding the types of abuse that occur in sport, the discussion now turns to the governance of sports organisations and, in particular, how their independence has shaped their approach to child protection and broader safeguarding responsibilities.

2.4 Governance of Sport Organizations and FIFA

Regardless of the level at which sports organisations operate, whether they are international or more local, there has been a continuous position of independence among all. In this respect, while there has been a building of consensus around the defining of various forms of abuse as noted by the previous section, according to Stirling and Kerr (2012) their independence gave them the illusionary right to self-government and exempted them from government and judicial interference. This has enabled many organisations to create their own regulations and make decisions about their members without external pressure. It has also allowed them to set their own standards for conduct and competition and ensure that their

members abide by them. This is a further complexity that those researching this area have highlighted and deserves some examination here.

Despite obvious changes in sport on the global scale such as child protection policies, training, and programmes, sports bodies pursue their independence in their closed-door governance (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021). According to Guris and Kerr (2021) athletes are thus more easily manipulated in such a climate as they can be controlled by fear of marginalisation, humiliation, stigmatisation, losing their identity, or going unnoticed or unnoticeable. One obvious example of this is when athletes accept treatment from various individuals that they would never accept from any other person within an organisation so as not to lose their place in the team or squad. This is something of an unusual scenario because as Donnelly et.al (1997) notes, this means those athletes can be subjected to violations of their human rights, even sometimes with their consent. The IOC consensus statement, reflecting a commitment to uphold the best interests of young athletes, contrasts starkly with the findings of Donnelly and Petherick (2004), who assert that the majority of the regulations outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child are often overlooked at the elite level in children's sports. Their findings suggest that, despite international commitments, the implementation of child protection policies can be inadequate, with the pressures of high-level competition sometimes overshadowing the rights and protections afforded to young athletes.

The number of formal reports following abuse remains low, a metric often outlined by researchers to highlight the institutional power held by self-regulated organisations (Arnetz et al., 2015). This power dynamic is further explored by Hartill (2013), who emphasises that in many organisations, abusers occupy elevated positions of authority. These positions grant them significant power and capital, which makes it difficult for children to report their abuse, as they may fear retaliation or lack the means to challenge those in power. In the same area of research, Westcott (1991) identifies four primary challenges in reporting abuse: undeveloped reporting policies; the tendency to view institutional abuse as a personal matter rather than an organisational issue; the closed-mindedness intrinsic to organisations; and the insular belief systems that often encompass these entities. It could be argued based on the work of Hartill (2013) and Westcott (1991) that this makes it difficult for victims to report abuse and, simultaneously

less likely for organisations to address abuse at an institutional level. In the context of football governance, sociological analyses by Tomlinson and Sugden (1999; 2002; 2017) offer essential insight into FIFA's organisational culture, power dynamics, and political economy. Their work illustrates how FIFA's global authority, complex internal hierarchies, and historically opaque governance structures have shaped the implementation of policy initiatives, including those relating to child protection. Tomlinson and Sugden argue that FIFA's institutional logic often reflects geopolitical interests, commercial priorities, and entrenched bureaucratic practices; these factors may influence how safeguarding frameworks such as FIFA Guardians are interpreted, prioritised, or operationalised across Member Associations. Including these perspectives strengthens the conceptual foundation for analysing safeguarding implementation within a global football governance system.

After conducting a thorough analysis of the existing literature review on child protection within sport, it becomes apparent that there is a need to also consider grey literature to gain a comprehensive understanding of this complex topic. While my primary focus was on papers and books from 2018 onwards, I included some earlier studies where they provided foundational theories, key methodologies, or critical background information that remain relevant to the field. These papers were selected based on their continued impact and citation frequency, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the research landscape. However, I have made every effort to prioritize recent literature wherever possible. Grey literature refers to sources that are not traditionally published in peer-reviewed journals, and often take the form of reports, guidelines, policy documents, and unpublished research for example. Specifically for this research, grey literature will be scoured to provide insights into current practices, policies, and initiatives related to child protection in sport that are not captured in formal academic literature. This may include information from sports organisations, government agencies, non-profit organisations, and other relevant stakeholders involved in child protection within sport. By analysing the grey literature in conjunction with the academic literature, a more comprehensive and holistic picture of the state of child protection in sports can be obtained, allowing for a more nuanced and informed analysis of the topic.

2.5 Synthesis of academic and grey literature

While the earlier sections of this chapter draw primarily on academic scholarship, safeguarding in sport is a field in which policy reports, organisational guidelines, and practitioner documents play an equally critical role. Much of the progress in safeguarding has been driven not by academic research alone but by grey literature produced by organisations such as UNICEF, the Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the English Football Association (FA), and FIFA. As Godin et al. (2015) and Paez (2017) note, grey literature is essential in fields where practice develops faster than peer-reviewed research, helping to reduce publication bias and provide real-time insight into evolving policy landscapes. For this reason, this review integrates grey literature directly into thematic discussions rather than presenting it separately.

Grey literature was sourced from UNICEF, the European Commission, CPSU, IOC, FA, FIFA, and targeted Google Scholar and organisational searches, prioritising the most recent and authoritative documents. The inclusion criteria focused on English-language publications from government bodies, international organisations, and national governing bodies. Rather than analysing grey literature in isolation, the following sections incorporate these reports into the thematic review of safeguarding prevalence, governance, implementation challenges, and policy frameworks.

Across academic and grey literature, three prevention approaches consistently emerge: (1) social norms and behaviour change, emphasising cultural awareness, education, and shifts in attitudes; (2) situational prevention, involving structural safeguards such as screening, supervision, and environmental design; and (3) child empowerment and socio-economic strengthening, focusing on resilience, life skills, and reduced vulnerability (Presler-Marshall et al., 2021; IOC, 2025; CPSU, 2020; Clearinghouse for Sport, 2021). These prevention mechanisms are reflected widely in academic discussions (e.g., Mountjoy et al., 2015; Kerr & Stirling, 2019), demonstrating strong alignment between research findings and practice-based recommendations. Integrating these sources provides a more comprehensive and realistic understanding of how safeguarding models operate in sport. To ensure transparency in how grey literature sources

were selected for inclusion in this review, the eligibility criteria used are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. *Review eligibility criteria for grey literature (own creation)*

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Published by government or National Government Organisation at either federal or territorial level	Published on a regional level
English language	Unavailable in English
Most current version	Draft version or summary version

2.6 Real world applicability of safeguarding policies

In this section, the implementation of child protection policies will be examined. The focus will be on assessing the effectiveness of current policies, identifying challenges, and understanding the barriers to successful implementation. By linking the key components of effective child protection models to real-world applications, this examination will provide a clearer picture of what those who are charged with implementing child protection or safeguarding policies are likely to be experiencing. It will help in the formulation of the lines of questioning for the participants in this study.

2.6.1 Defining and Implementing Child Protection Measures

According to the UNICEF Child Protection Strategy (2021), child protection involves the prevention of and response to exploitation, abuse, neglect, harmful practices, and violence against children. There are several definitions and conceptualisations of child protection used in different studies, making it difficult to synthesise research. Given that no standardised definition of child protection in sports exists, it is impossible to draw definite conclusions about its prevalence.

Child protection in sports can be seen as a complex, multifaceted issue that not only focuses on immediate harm but also addresses underlying structural, social, and cultural factors that contribute to children’s vulnerability. This complexity becomes evident when considering the global scope of child protection efforts,

where different cultural contexts and legal systems may shape how child protection policies are formulated, implemented, and evaluated (Mountjoy et al, 2015). As outlined by Fasting, Sherry, and Gatz (2016), safeguarding children in sports requires an intersection of cultural awareness and legal frameworks, ensuring that child protection measures are adapted to fit local contexts while upholding universal standards of care and protection. A crucial body of implementation knowledge derives from the UK's Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), which has shaped safeguarding practice for over two decades. Since its establishment in 2001, the CPSU has developed national standards, monitoring frameworks, and implementation tools that support sport organisations in translating policy into operational practice (Rhind & Owusu-Sekyere, 2018). Research by the CPSU highlights common implementation challenges, including inconsistent workforce training, variable leadership commitment, and gaps between policy adoption and behavioural change at grassroots level (CPSU, 2020). These insights are directly relevant to international football, as many of the difficulties encountered by Member Associations (MAs)—such as limited resources, lack of clarity around roles, and inconsistent communication—mirror the early challenges documented within the UK system. Incorporating CPSU learning therefore provides an important comparative foundation for evaluating policy implementation across FIFA MAs.

According to Save the Children (2007, p. 1):

The goal of child protection is to promote, protect and fulfil children's rights to protection from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence as expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights, humanitarian and refugee treaties and conventions, as well as national laws.

This definition underscores the dual focus on both safeguarding children from harm and promoting their rights as part of a broader human rights framework. Save the Children places strong emphasis on the social and legal mechanisms that are in place to uphold these rights, linking child protection efforts to global treaties and conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and related humanitarian law. By focusing on these frameworks, Save the Children advocates for a rights-based approach to child

protection, one that sees protection not merely as preventing harm, but also as actively ensuring that children's rights are met in all contexts. A similar definition is provided by the IOC (2016), which emphasises the importance of safeguarding athletes, particularly minors, within the context of sports, focusing on both preventative measures and the safeguarding of their rights through international treaties and conventions.

A similar definition is offered by UNICEF (2021, p. 1), which states, "Child protection is the prevention of, and response to, exploitation, abuse, neglect, harmful practices, and violence against children." UNICEF's definition provides a more immediate, action-oriented perspective, focusing primarily on the prevention and response to specific forms of harm such as exploitation, abuse, neglect, and harmful cultural practices. While it acknowledges that child protection is rooted in a rights-based framework, it focuses more on the practical, on-the-ground measures required to address and mitigate harm in real-time. UNICEF's focus is on child protection as a dynamic, ongoing process of intervention, one that requires immediate responses to emerging threats, while also ensuring that systems and practices are in place to prevent such occurrences in the future (Kulkarni, 2021). This action-oriented approach to child protection is also echoed by Sport New Zealand (2015), which underlines the importance of safeguarding in sports by ensuring that measures to prevent abuse are immediately actionable and that response protocols are effective and timely.

Both Save the Children (2007) and UNICEF (2021) offer definitions of child protection that emphasise the importance of safeguarding children from harm, particularly from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and violence. However, their approaches differ in scope and focus. Save the Children presents a broader, more comprehensive view, framing child protection within a rights-based context, emphasising not only the protection of children but also the need to promote and fulfil their rights, as expressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international legal frameworks. This definition highlights the role of legal and humanitarian treaties in supporting child protection efforts, encouraging a multi-dimensional approach that includes advocacy, legal reform, and active engagement with international organisations and governments to ensure compliance with children's rights. This framework is crucial in establishing a global consensus on child protection, as suggested by the International Labour

Organisation (2016), which calls for international collaboration in enforcing legal standards for child protection across industries, including sports.

In contrast, UNICEF's definition is more action-oriented, concentrating on immediate measures to address child protection issues. UNICEF addresses child protection issues through a comprehensive framework that includes primary prevention, secondary prevention, and tertiary response strategies. According to Kulkarni (2021), for example, in terms of primary prevention, UNICEF focuses on raising awareness and engaging communities to prevent violence, abuse, neglect, and exploitation before they occur. Through global and local campaigns such as the "End Violence Against Children" initiative, UNICEF educates the public on child rights and protection measures. In addition to that, the organisation also works closely with governments to develop and implement child protection policies, ensuring that legal frameworks align with international child rights conventions. UNICEF also provides training for teachers, social workers, and community leaders to equip them with the skills to identify and prevent child abuse. Parenting programmes are another crucial aspect of primary prevention, offering guidance and support to caregivers to promote safe and nurturing home environments. For secondary prevention, which involves early intervention for at-risk children and families, UNICEF implements targeted programmes to support vulnerable groups. These include families experiencing poverty, parental substance abuse, mental health issues, or those with children who have disabilities (Kulkarni, 2021). UNICEF also provides specialized support for migrant children, including unaccompanied minors and those left behind by migrating parents, ensuring they have access to essential services such as education, healthcare, and social protection. Child protection helplines, supported by UNICEF, serve as a critical resource for at-risk children and their families, offering immediate assistance and referrals to appropriate services. In schools, UNICEF collaborates with educators to identify children exposed to violence or neglect, providing them with necessary interventions and psychosocial support. At the tertiary response level, UNICEF intervenes when children are already experiencing or are at high risk of serious harm. The organisation supports emergency response systems that provide immediate assistance to children who are victims of abuse, trafficking, or exploitation, ensuring their safety through shelters and safe spaces. UNICEF also works to

strengthen child-friendly justice systems by advocating for legal aid, diversion programmes, and rehabilitation services for children in conflict with the law. In cases where children need to be removed from harmful environments, UNICEF facilitates alternative care arrangements, such as foster care or community-based care, to ensure their well-being (Kulkarni, 2021).

For children who have suffered trauma, UNICEF provides psychosocial support, therapy, and reintegration programmes, helping them recover and reintegrate into society. Through these multi-layered interventions, UNICEF ensures that child protection is not only about responding to harm but also about preventing it and addressing the root causes that make children vulnerable in the first place.

Its approach focuses on the prevention of and response to specific forms of harm, making it more intervention focused. UNICEF's definition suggests that child protection policies and practices must be dynamic and adaptable to evolving challenges in the field, including the increasing use of technology and social media that can expose children to new forms of exploitation and abuse. This focus on response and prevention provides a more tactical framework for addressing issues as they arise, with clear guidelines for intervention at the community, national, and international levels. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2018), ensuring that effective reporting and intervention mechanisms are in place is critical in combatting abuse and exploitation in any setting, including sports environments, where children may be particularly vulnerable to different forms of abuse.

While both definitions are rooted in the protection of children's rights, their varying scopes and emphases highlight different aspects of child protection efforts. UNICEF's practical, action-oriented focus complements Save the Children's broader, rights-based approach, suggesting that effective child protection must strike a balance between legal frameworks, advocacy, and proactive intervention strategies. This dual approach is especially relevant in sports, where both structured legal frameworks and on-the-ground, context-specific interventions are needed to effectively protect children and ensure their rights are fully realised. The challenge lies in integrating both dimensions into a coherent and comprehensive child protection strategy, particularly within complex and diverse

sectors like sports where cultural norms, local regulations, and institutional capacities can vary widely.

2.6.2 Policies in Safeguarding

According to Brackenridge et al. (2002) there are seven potential policy frameworks for dealing with abuse in sport. Each of those policy approaches is different but still relevant in keeping children safe on each level. Brackenridge claims that in order to accomplish harmony within child protection management, each of these approaches must be tackled in sport organisations. As part of child protection measures recognised, sports organisations are encouraged to strengthen child protection systems; increase awareness by educating and empowering parents, teachers, coaches, and others to protect children; foster evidence collection and research to develop an evidence base, and support sport for development programmes (Brackenridge, 2002).

Table 5. Framework for Policy on Sexual Exploitation in Sport (from Brackenridge et al., 2002)

Policy Approach	Description
Child protection	Narrowly focused on prevention and recognition of types of child abuse (sexual, physical, emotional, and neglect) and on referral.
Duty of care	Focused on children and emphasizing legal duties <i>in loco parentis</i> .
Child welfare	Focused on children but emphasizing broader concerns, including social, environmental, and educational opportunities, peer group relations, and ensuring that the child thrives overall.
Athlete protection	Focused on athlete protection from sexual harassment and bullying, with particular controls on authority figures.
Athlete welfare	Wider concerns for the overall health and well-being of athletes that encompass freedom from exploitation and the development of athlete autonomy.
Anti-harassment	Focused on compliance with national equal opportunities law and employment standards. Often underpins liberal aspirations for equal/fair treatment.
Equity/equal opportunities	Risk management systems that embed sexual safety within the overall operation of the organization: regularly monitored and evaluated.
Quality assurance	Ensures that risk management systems related to athlete welfare and safety are

	regularly monitored, evaluated, and improved.
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Note. Adapted from *The End of Innocence: The Sexual Abuse of Children in Sport*, by C. Brackenridge et al., 2002, *Routledge*.

In the table above, the framework developed by Brackenridge et al. (2002) is shown as a structured guide to developing policies aimed at preventing sexual exploitation in sport. According to Tuakli-Wosornu et al. (2023), sexual violence is the most frequently discussed form of abuse in historical literature related to the sports sector. Consequently, while this discussion places some emphasis on sexual violence, it does not intend to overlook other forms of abuse. Table 5. outlines key elements necessary for effective safeguarding, including preventative measures, educational strategies, reporting mechanisms, and accountability structures. The framework emphasises a multi-dimensional approach that integrates individual responsibility, organisational accountability, and societal influence, ensuring a comprehensive response to safeguarding challenges. This alignment between theoretical underpinnings and practical policy implementation is a particularly significant area for this research given the focus on understanding how the policy from FIFA is implemented by people who work in MAs around the globe.

2.6.3 Safe Sport movement

A detailed explanation of the concept of Game Models will be provided in Chapter 3. However, there are important theoretical debates that have been gathered from the academic and grey literature regarding child protection and safeguarding in sport, which can act as a foundation for this study. One of the more pertinent theoretical discussions that has manifested itself through the literature is the concept of fostering a culture of Safe Sport. As noted earlier, a combination of increased public awareness, increased media scrutiny, and studies showing that maltreatment is a common occurrence in sport has pushed sport organisations to act attempting to curb harmful practices (Boocock, 2002; Kerr et al., 2014; Lang et al., 2021). One consequence of this has been the emergence of the Safe Sport movement (Gurgis & Kerr, 2021). At present there are a wealth of organisations in different countries around the world who are driven to increase

awareness and drive a cultural change in organisations to pioneer 'safe sport'. Although Safe Sport has been widely adopted and related initiatives have been initiated, no consensus has been reached on its definition or conceptualisation. In most cases it simply relates to an aspiration to see sport with zero instances of maltreatment of any form.

Coaching Association of Canada (CAC) Safe Sport Summit Ontario, for example, initially aimed its Safe Sport initiatives at preventing sexual abuse of athletes based on the assumption that it was the most egregious and harmful form of abuse. Therefore, the CAC encouraged sport clubs and organisations to join the Responsible Coaching Movement, which stipulates that two coaches must be present (Gurgis, Kerr & Battaglia, 2022). While this initiative may help prevent the abuse that often occurs in private, it did not reduce the equally harmful and more prevalent type of abuse that occurs in public (Kerr & Kerr, 2020).

When Safe Sport is conceptualised as the promotion of human rights, interventions are more likely to educate coaches about athletes' rights to be heard and to participate in safe, inclusive, and enjoyable sports (Stevens et al., 2022). It is important to establish a consistent definition of Safe Sport so that all stakeholders are aware of their responsibility to contribute to a Safe Sport environment, especially those in positions of power and authority.

Based on Gurgis et al. (2022) it is unlikely that some athletes will be able to fully realise the concept of Safe Sport because they are discriminated against based on who they are. There are microaggressions against all of them, as well as barriers from sports environments and systems that influence the perception that sports are unsafe. For example, Gurgis et al. (2022) recommend advocacy, education, and community involvement for Safe Sport. In order to confront social injustices in sport, it is essential to engage others in critical dialogue. Safe Sport requires policies and education that address social injustices, promote rights-based sport, and accommodate the specific needs of diverse, equity-deserving groups. Gurgis et al. (2022) addressed environmental safety, relational safety, and optimizing sport as overarching themes. As a starting point, issues of physical danger, relational safety and preventing harmful experiences such as sexual abuse, emotional abuse, and physical abuse were addressed. Last but not least, optimizing sport with a focus on inclusion, accessibility, and fairness.

The concept of safety extends far beyond abuse. Unsafe environments present a whole new set of problems without any connection to abuse (Needlman, 2011).

Taken together, the literature on prevalence, governance, and policy implementation highlights substantial variation in safeguarding maturity across national contexts. While countries such as England have developed highly structured, well-resourced safeguarding systems, many football associations operate with limited expertise, constrained resources, or differing cultural norms around child protection. Comparative findings from both CPSU research and sociological studies of FIFA governance underline that the effectiveness of safeguarding measures depends not only on policy design but also on organisational culture, leadership commitment, and broader political and institutional conditions. These contextual factors are crucial for understanding the challenges faced by the MAs included in this study.

2.7 Chapter 2 Summary

Firstly, research indicates that child abuse, including sexual, physical, and emotional abuse, is a prevalent issue in football, with research noting reported cases involving both professional and grassroots levels of the sport. In particular, the vulnerable nature of young athletes, power imbalances, and the close relationships between coaches, officials, and players can create opportunities for abuse to occur (Brackendrige, 2002). This highlights a significant gap in current research and literature, as child protection is often not prioritised across all sports. While child protection involves social, governmental, and economic factors, it is essential to recognise how these factors vary in importance across different MAs.

Secondly, the impact of child abuse in football on children's physical and psychological well-being is well documented. Studies have highlighted the long-term consequences of abuse, including mental health issues, impaired performance, and disrupted pathways to professional football careers. The traumatic effects of abuse on young athletes can be far-reaching and require comprehensive support and intervention (Mountjoy et al., 2015). However, the definition and framework of child protection remain inconsistent across research, which complicates the implementation of effective models within football. It will be interesting to find out how different MAs define the work they do.

Thirdly, the literature emphasises the importance of safeguarding policies and child welfare practices in football. Many football organisations have implemented child protection measures, such as background checks for coaches, mandatory reporting of suspected abuse, and education programmes for players, coaches, and parents. These policies are aimed at creating safer environments for young athletes and preventing abuse from occurring (Brackenridge & Fasting, 2002). Nevertheless, there is a lack of comprehensive research on how these policies are applied across different MAs, and how the hierarchical importance of child protection factors varies between them. Addressing these gaps would provide a clearer picture of the safeguarding landscape, benefiting both theory and practice for FIFA and its MAs, and contributing to a safer and more supportive environment for young athletes in the sport.

Chapter 3. Game Models

Building on the work of the literature review, the aim of this chapter is to outline the theoretical framework that informs this piece of research. In that regard, the following chapter presents an in-depth exploration of Elias' Game Models concept, which was developed in the early 20th century and was first introduced in his seminal work, *'What is Sociology'* (1978). After an overview of Game Models, the chapter provides the rationale for using Game Models to analyse member associations and their approach to safeguarding in football. The application of Norbert Elias' Game Models provides a lens through which to examine how cultural variability influences the implementation of safeguarding policies in football. Elias' concept of "figuration" highlights the interconnectedness of individuals and social structures within a given context. In football, this translates to the intricate web of relationships among players, coaches, administrators, fans, and other stakeholders, all of whom contribute to the shaping of cultural norms or a 'safety culture' and practices within the sport.

3.1 Figurational Sociology and Game Models

Figurational sociology, developed by Norbert Elias, provides a robust framework for analysing how social processes and interdependencies evolve over time, particularly within the context of sport and its organisational and cultural dynamics. The concept of Game Models was one of the tools that Elias developed to help explain how human interactions, constructed around power dynamics, have intended and unintended consequences for people within society. Game Models is also a very good concept for emphasising the interplay between individuals and the broader social structures, focusing particularly on the shifting balances of power that shape human behaviour and relationships (Elias, 1978).

In the context of sports and in this case, child protection in sport, figurational sociology offers a lens to understand the relational dynamics between participants, parents, coaches, teams, and wider institutions. Elias used the idea of a game in his concept of Game Models because the notion of power balance becomes especially pertinent in competitive environments like games, where outcomes are not only determined by the skill of a player but also by the

strategies, hierarchies, and collective interactions within and across teams (Dunning, 2004). These interactions form a dynamic "game" in both a literal and metaphorical sense, where the balance of power influences tactics, decision-making, and the overarching structure of play. So, the concept of a Game Model is a metaphor for the 'games' that are played between people in everyday life.

Game Models, as structured representations of play, emerge as a practical and analytical tool to encapsulate these dynamics. They offer insights into how teams organise themselves, respond to opponents, and adapt to changing conditions within a match, reflecting the intricate balance of power within the figurational web of sport (Wolff, 2013). By embedding the concept of Game Models within this theoretical foundation, their relevance can be better appreciated not only as a tactical framework but also as a sociological construct that mirrors the complexities of human interaction in sports and in the case of this research, those characteristic of different MAs and their relationships with organisations like FIFA.

3.2 Power Dynamics and Safeguarding in Football Governance: A Figural Approach

Figural sociology is to be used to help understand how MAs, child protection managers, FIFA, National Governing Organisations (NGOs), and confederations are interwoven in a continuous web of interdependence. In his writing on figural sociology, Elias asserted that social structures (like the web of relationships that forms between child protection managers, FIFA, NGOs, and confederations) do not simply start but, rather, emerge through ongoing processes of negotiation and power interplay between the individuals and groups (Elias, 1978; Hughes & Coakley, 2012). In this context, this power interplay encompasses the desire for the different groups to try and influence, negotiate on topics, and the capacity to shape policies and practices related to safeguarding across the football ecosystem (Dunning & Hughes, 2013). The interplay of power between the groups of people who make up a figuration (often referred to as power dynamics) are not fixed. They fluctuate and are constantly in flux as, among other things, shifts in governance structures, the roles of child protection managers, and evolving societal expectations surrounding child safeguarding in football change the power balances between the groups making up the figuration.

This relational understanding of power is crucial when considering the implementation of safeguarding measures in football. Safeguarding policies were not simply dictated by FIFA or confederations; rather, they emerged from negotiations among organisations with varying levels of power and influence, including national football associations, child protection managers, NGOs, and grassroots organisations. FIFA and confederations wield their institutional power; however, child protection managers play an operational role, and NGOs contribute through advocacy, this both having an impact on the way these policies are implemented. These actors shape how safeguarding policies were and are developed, enforced, and accepted. In short, these groups have power too. The concept of Game Models, therefore, helps to illustrate this power interplay and as already noted, does this by mirroring the complexities of human interaction. In theoretical terms, for this study, the researcher wanted to understand how the stakeholders who were charged with implementing FIFA Guardians had to continuously adapt and adjust their strategies, negotiating power through policies, partnerships, and collaborative efforts (Dunning, 2004; Wolff, 2013) in order to undertake their roles within their MA.

Power dynamics are not monolithic; they are influenced by historical, cultural, and institutional contexts (Coakley, 2009) and this is one of the things that attracted the researcher to using this concept in this research. By framing safeguarding policies within Game Models, the analysis shifted from examining the tactics of football teams to studying the complex figurations that influenced the behaviour of organisations and individuals across football governance. Just as teams adapted their strategies during a match based on the balance of power, organisations in football had to adjust their safeguarding strategies in response to shifting power relations within the broader football community and beyond.

Elias' concept of figuration and the subsequent development of Game Models are to be employed to enhance understanding of the fluid nature of safeguarding practices. For example, what may have been deemed acceptable or commonplace in the past is no longer tolerable due to shifting power dynamics and changing societal values, such as the increasing emphasis on child protection (Wolff, 2013). Game Models provided not just a static analysis of tactics but a dynamic view of how power balances were continually recalibrated within governance structures, influencing the safety and well-being of individuals

within the football ecosystem (Dunning & Hughes, 2013). By embedding power balance within the figurational framework, the shifting dynamics of relationships between stakeholders in football governance could be better understood, in the context of broader social, political, and cultural transformations (Hargreaves, 2000). Given the centrality of Game Models to this study, the next section aims to offer an in-depth outline of the concept.

3.3 What are Game Models?

At the core of Norbert Elias' sociological work is the concept of a figuration, which seeks to explain how relationships and the power dynamics between individuals produce both intended and unintended consequences. Elias contended that to understand the behaviour or actions of individuals, one must examine the patterns of their interdependence and the social structures in which they exist - essentially, the figurations they form (Elias, 1978). To clarify this concept, Elias used Game Models as a framework to illustrate how individuals, through their interdependence and the way their actions interconnect, create a type of social order. He argued this order is relatively autonomous from the order found when investigating individuals in isolation or as mere representatives of their species (Elias, 1978, p. 73). Elias used Game Models as simplified analogies of more complex social processes. The next section of this chapter discussed these 'games,' starting with the Primal Contest, which was the most basic of games Elias proposed. It then progresses to multi-layered games that provided a framework for understanding organisations and policies, such as FIFA Guardians.

3.3.1 Explaining Game Models

According to Norbert Elias (1978), a person needs to be a member of a survival unit to achieve security and material foundations for life. These groups are essential to the functioning of society. As a result, these groups change and form over time. As a result, the power ratio within individuals, groups, classes, etc., is constantly changing. Elias (1978) begins Game Models by explaining the most basic of games. In such a scenario, Elias gives an example of a game which involves two people, where one player is significantly more able than the other. Elias contends that, in such a scenario, it is logical that the more able player is in

a more powerful position within the game and, thus, that player is better placed to constrain the actions and limit the options of the weaker player to make certain moves. The opposite is also true. Because the balance of power that characterises the relationship between the two players lies heavily in favour of the more able player, the less able player struggles to constrain the actions of their opponent. Importantly, notwithstanding the disparity in ability, Elias stressed that even in a one-on-one encounter such as this, no player is ever completely free to dictate the direction of the game. Indeed, despite their powerful position, the stronger player is planning their moves based on the weaker player and therefore, the weaker player must have some sort of influence over the stronger player (Dopson, 2001). Expanding on the concept as described by Elias, one can consider the interplay and dynamics within smaller team settings, such as 2v2 or 5v5 games. In these scenarios, the complexity of interdependence becomes even more pronounced. While individual players have a direct influence on the game's outcome, their actions are not only shaped by their own capabilities but also by the actions, strategies, and movements of their teammates and opponent.

In a 2v2 game, for example, players are closely knit in their interactions. The fluidity of the game depends on the partnership and mutual understanding between the two players on a team. Each player's decision has an immediate and significant impact on the other, creating a dynamic where both players alternately influence and are influenced by each other. This creates a reciprocal relationship of power and dependency, where the 'stronger' player cannot unilaterally control the game without considering the 'weaker' player's actions and reactions. In a 5v5 setting, the structure of the game allows for more complex configurations. The interactions are not just linear or dyadic but form a web of relationships on the field (Elias, 1978). Elias' perspective would suggest that each player is a node within this web, exerting influence and being influenced in turn. The collective strategy and moment-to-moment decisions within such a game are the results of a continuous negotiation of power and influence among all ten players. Even in the presence of a dominant player, their influence is moderated by the collective actions of the others, creating a balance where the 'weaker' players have opportunities to assert their agency.

The microcosm of these small-sided games reflects Elias' larger concept of figuration in society, where individuals are bound by a network of

interdependencies. Each player, regardless of perceived strength, is a part of an intricate dance of give-and-take, action and reaction, strategy, and counterstrategy. Therefore, the dynamics of power, control, and dependence in such games are fluid and ever-changing, illustrating the essence of Elias' view on social figurations.

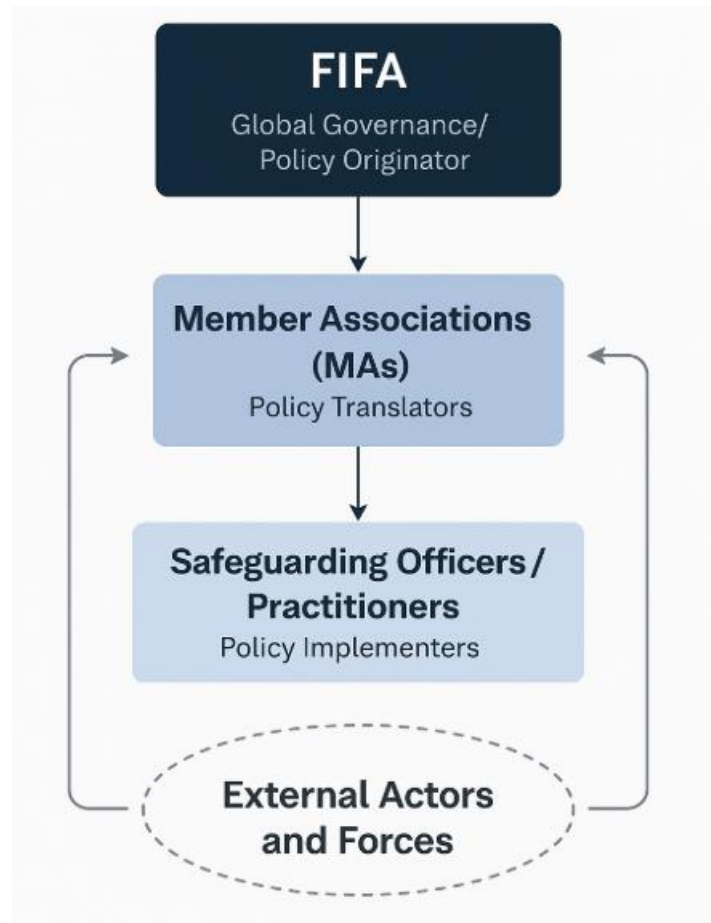
3.3.2 Multi-level Games

As an advance on the multi-player game, such as a 5v5 contest, Elias proposed 'multi-level' games, which have several levels and infinitely more balances of power. These include games between top-tier players, followed by games between top-tier and lower-tier players, and finally games between lower-tier players only. A top-tier player, in the context of this research, would be someone at FIFA. A mid-tier player would be a manager at an MA, while a lower-tier player would be the safeguarding officer. If the game is really unequal, then that might be considered an oligarchic game (Dunning, 2004). This distinction helps to clarify how power dynamics and roles are distributed within the framework of this research.

One example of a significantly unequal game in the context of child protection and safeguarding in MAs would be if safeguarding is not considered an important area strategically by the senior managers within the organisation. In this scenario, for example, resources for that department could be significantly lower than other departments, thus reducing the power of the safeguarding team to 'play their game'. Perhaps there is little buy-in from the senior management and safeguarding is simply viewed as what is often referred to as a 'box to check'. In this scenario, Elias would highlight how this game is being played across different levels. While the safeguarding department is a multi-player game with other departments - those on the same level as themselves - they are also in a game with the senior management group who are on a different level. For this reason, it is essential to understand that there are many aspects to a game with multiple levels of organisation and levels of players. In a game with multiple levels of organisation and players, there are many aspects to consider. Management interest, power relationships, and structure can all affect all aspects. And for this research, there are more levels to consider. The layered nature of these interactions macro (FIFA), meso (Member Associations), and micro

(safeguarding practitioners) and the formal and informal rules that bind them can be represented as follows.

Figure 1. Application of Elias' Game Models to Safeguarding Implementation in Football



The figure positions FIFA (macro) as the policy originator; Member Associations (meso) as policy translators; and safeguarding officers or practitioners (micro) as policy implementers. Solid arrows represent formal accountability and reporting relationships, while dashed arrows represent informal influence and feedback. A surrounding dotted boundary indicates external forces such as media, survivors, CPSU standards, national law, and culture that shape power interdependencies and practice.

3.3.3 Unintended Consequences

In his analogy of games, Elias' contended that with more players (actors) in the game (for example, more departments and more levels), the game becomes

more complex. As the game becomes more complex, this gives rise to what Elias termed unintended consequences. Baert (1991) explored Norbert Elias' theories in his work, particularly examining Elias' concept of games and unintended consequences. He analysed how increasing complexity in social interactions leads to outcomes that may differ from the original intentions of the actors involved. There is a definition of an unintended consequence as "a particular effect of purposive action which is different from what was wanted the moment of carrying out the act, and the want of which was a reason for carrying it out" (Baert, 1991, p. 201). In other words, although it results from a conscious action, the consequence of those actions becomes something that is not intended or foreseen. The unintended, often undesirable, consequences are, according to Elias, normal and are simply the result of the intended actions of groups of people who make up a figuration or 'game'.

The field of sociology is best known for studying "unrecognised, unintended and emergent consequences of goal-oriented action" or "the science of the unexpected" (Portes, 2000, p. 1). There are several assumptions associated with research on unintended consequences (Baert, 1991; Mica et al., 2017). As a starting point, it assumes a person or actor has a recognised intention. The goal is to improve the current situation. Second, it recognises that unintended consequences are unavoidable. It is possible for some of these unintended consequences to be beneficial, whereas others may be detrimental or dysfunctional, potentially becoming perverse (the opposite of what was intended). Third, it concludes that unintended and undesirable consequences may be minimized, but they cannot be eliminated.

As a fourth point, it holds that it is key to theorize unintended undesirable consequences to prevent the outcome of an action, policy or practice that backfire (i.e., causes more harm than good). According to Elias, unintended consequences are often caused by social relationships between individuals. Humans are unavoidably imperfect, incomplete, and inaccurate in their knowledge of social relationships. In most cases, the consequences of their actions, which are based on inadequate knowledge, are unforeseeable (Mennell, 1987). According to Elias, it is only by investigating social relationships that one can understand the consequences of intended actions. In the same manner, people's behaviour can only be understood in light of their social relationships.

Essentially, Elias argues that unintended consequences of intended actions will always occur, and these consequences will be used to guide future decisions. This interrelationship between planned and unplanned processes that are included in processes of managed change are another reason why Game Models have been used as the conceptual framework for this piece of research.

3.3.4 Critical Evaluation of the Elias' Game Model and Alternative Frameworks

While Elias' *Game Model* provides a valuable sociological framework for analysing interdependence and power dynamics, it is important to critically assess its application and acknowledge alternative theoretical models that have informed safeguarding research in sport. Elias' figurational approach offers a unique strength in conceptualising the relational and dynamic nature of social systems. By focusing on power balances between interdependent actors, it captures the complex interplay between governing bodies, organisations, and individuals in ways that more static models cannot. This approach allows for the analysis of safeguarding as a "social game" in which no actor whether FIFA, Member Associations, or safeguarding officers operates independently, but rather in continuous negotiation with others.

However, a key criticism of Elias' Game Model is its conceptual abstraction and limited operational guidance. The model provides a rich metaphor for interdependence but lacks prescriptive clarity on causal mechanisms or measurable variables. As such, it relies heavily on interpretive analysis, which can make practical policy translation challenging. Furthermore, the model has been critiqued for being structurally neutral it pays less explicit attention to gendered or intersectional power relations, a limitation particularly relevant in safeguarding research where issues of sexual exploitation, abuse, and gendered violence are central (Brackenridge, 2001).

Brackenridge's theorising, both feminist and sociological, offers an alternative perspective that directly engages with the gendered dimensions of abuse and exploitation in sport. Her *Sport Abuse Model* (Brackenridge, 1997, 2001) highlights how patriarchal structures, hierarchical coaching relationships, and cultural silence around sexuality perpetuate abuse. This model was instrumental in shaping early safeguarding policy and advocacy, especially by linking research

to practical reform. However, while Brackenridge's framework provides a powerful feminist critique and historical foundation, it is less suited for the organisational analysis undertaken in this research. The present study seeks to understand *how safeguarding policies are implemented* across governance layers (FIFA → MAs → practitioners), rather than focusing primarily on gendered mechanisms of abuse. Therefore, Elias' Game Model was selected because it better conceptualises multi-level power relations and organisational interdependence.

Another influential framework is the Ecological Model of child abuse, which has been widely adopted in public health and, more recently, in sport (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024). The ecological perspective explains abuse as the outcome of risk and protective factors operating across multiple levels: individual, relational, community, and societal. The recent IOC Consensus Statement (Tuakli-Wosornu et al., 2024) explicitly applies this ecological framework to violence and abuse in sport, underscoring its contemporary relevance. While this model offers strong explanatory power for understanding *risk environments* and prevention strategies, it is less effective for analysing organisational processes and policy translation. It tends to describe *where* abuse emerges rather than *how* institutional relationships shape the implementation of safeguarding interventions.

Hartill's (2016) work on *Sexual Abuse in Youth Sport* integrates sociological and ecological perspectives, situating abuse within broader cultural and institutional contexts. His approach offers important theoretical insights into how organisational culture, authority, and masculinity influence safeguarding. However, similar to Brackenridge's framework, Hartill's work primarily examines *causes and cultures of abuse*, whereas this thesis focuses on the *implementation and governance of safeguarding policy* at different structural levels within global football.

In summary, while Brackenridge's feminist framework and the Ecological Model have been instrumental in explaining the *aetiology* of abuse and guiding prevention, they are less equipped to explore *the relational, multi-level power dynamics* that characterise policy implementation in sport organisations. Elias' Game Model, despite its interpretive nature, provides the most appropriate

theoretical lens for this research. It enables an analysis of safeguarding implementation as a dynamic game of interdependence, negotiation, and power balancing among interconnected actors across global, national, and local levels of football governance.

3.3.5 Figurational Sociology and its Development in the UK

Figurational sociology, the broader theoretical framework underpinning Elias' *Game Model*, has had a profound influence on the sociology of sport particularly within the United Kingdom. The development of this school of thought in the UK can be traced to the 1970s and 1980s, when scholars such as Eric Dunning and his colleagues at the University of Leicester established the "Leicester School of Sociology." Building directly on Norbert Elias' foundational work, Dunning and his collaborators applied figurational theory to the study of sport, leisure, and social change (Dunning, 1999). Their work marked the institutionalisation of Eliasian sociology within sport studies, positioning it as one of the most enduring and influential theoretical traditions in the field.

Figurational sociology emphasises the analysis of long-term social processes, interdependence networks, and shifting power balances among individuals and groups (Elias, 1978). Within sport, it provided a means of explaining the civilising process of behaviour regulation, the transformation of violence into controlled forms of competition, and the role of sport as a microcosm of broader social structures. The UK was central to these developments because of its academic proximity to Elias himself, who worked in Leicester after emigrating from Germany. This proximity fostered a distinctive British intellectual lineage that combined empirical research with theoretical innovation. The *Leicester School* thus became the primary vehicle through which figurational sociology entered mainstream sport studies.

Subsequent scholars, including Dunning, Maguire, and Sheard, further demonstrated how Elias' concepts of figuration, habitus, and power interdependence could explain organisational and cultural dynamics in sport (Maguire, 2011; Sheard, 2002). Their work established figurational sociology as one of the most sophisticated approaches to understanding sport as a social process rather than a static institution. Importantly, this tradition also provided the

foundation for examining *organisational relationships and policy implementation*, making it especially relevant to studies of governance and safeguarding.

By situating this research within that intellectual lineage, the choice of Elias' *Game Model* is both theoretically and contextually justified. It aligns this study with a long-standing British tradition of using figurational sociology to analyse power, control, and interdependence in sport. Moreover, it extends that tradition by applying Eliasian thinking to a contemporary and globally significant issue of safeguarding in football, thereby bridging classical sociological theory with modern policy challenges.

3.4 Application of Game Models in Organisational Contexts

It is now worth outlining several examples of where Game Models have been applied to organisations, starting with Dopson and Waddington (1996) research on sociological approach to understanding organisational change within the National Health Service (NHS) in the United Kingdom. This research is applying the concept of Game Models to a large multi-national organisation in the form of FIFA. It is useful, therefore, to understand how this concept has been applied to other organisation and businesses inside and outside of sport and the learning that can be gleaned from this work.

3.4.1 Game Models in the NHS

One case study that provides an in-depth analysis of how Game Models can be used in understanding organisational complexity was published by Dopson and Waddington (1996). In this research, they examined the implementation of a mental health strategy within a district of the United Kingdom. In doing this, Dopson and Waddington highlighted the complexities involved in policymaking within a public health system like the NHS. The policy process within this case was shaped by numerous stakeholders, each with competing interests. The District General Manager (DGM), for example, aimed to improve mental health services by shifting from hospital-based to community-based care. However, another group, the psychiatrists, fearing a loss of power and resources, resisted this change. Meanwhile, community members opposed the idea of resettling psychiatric patients in their neighbourhoods, and paramedical professionals

hoped for greater involvement in care delivery. These conflicting interests from each group who made up the figuration or 'game', made consensus challenging and led to power struggles that, in the end, influenced the outcome of the strategy (Dopson and Waddington, 1996). Writing in 2001, Dopson noted that in an organisational context, as individuals interact with one another within an organisation, they negotiate and contest their positions, creating a fluid and dynamic social landscape (Dopson, 2001).

The case study also reveals how the policy's implementation deviated from its intended outcomes. The DGM's goal was to reduce the power of psychiatrists, decentralise care, and demonstrate the effectiveness of a new management structure. However, the psychiatrists' resistance reinforced their power, and the focus on hospital care remained central to the mental health system. Additionally, the local community, initially sidelined, later organised to oppose the resettlement plan, highlighting how lower-tier players could, when mobilized, significantly alter the course of policy (Dopson and Waddington, 1996). The involvement of the local community in opposing the resettlement plan was an unintended consequence of the policy's implementation. The policymakers likely assumed that power struggles would remain within institutional actors, such as between the DGM and psychiatrists. The community was initially excluded from decision-making, suggesting that their role was not anticipated as a significant factor in shaping the policy's trajectory. However, their eventual mobilisation disrupted expectations and demonstrated that even lower-tier actors, when organised, could challenge institutional power and reshape outcomes. This aligns with broader sociological theories on unintended consequences, where excluded or marginalised groups find ways to exert influence, often in ways that policymakers fail to foresee.

Through the lens of Elias' Game Models, the study illustrates how the policy process is a complex game involving multiple levels of players, each with varying degrees of power. Upper-tier players such as the Health Advisory Service and the Royal College of Psychiatrists had more influence on the policy's direction, while lower-tier groups, like local residents and paraprofessionals, struggled to have their voices heard initially. As a result, those involved in the policy process, including the DGM and other senior managers, had a limited understanding of the broader dynamics at play. Their focus on their immediate goals prevented

them from recognising the full range of constraints and resistance they would face, leading to missed opportunities for more effective engagement (Dopson and Waddington, 1996).

Although psychiatrists initially resisted involvement, they later became a powerful force in opposing the resettlement, using their authority and expertise to derail the plan. Conversely, the local community, despite being initially overlooked, successfully challenged the resettlement proposal by organising campaigns and engaging the media, emphasising the influence that lower-tier players can have when they unite. The case also underscores the challenges faced by the DGM, whose inability to navigate the political landscape led to the strategy's partial failure. According to Dopson and Waddington (1996) the DGM's lack of a broad understanding of the power dynamics at play limited their ability to anticipate and manage the opposition.

Finally, the case emphasises the importance of a detached perspective in understanding the policy process. When leaders become too involved in the immediate struggles of the game, they fail to grasp the broader social and political forces influencing the outcome. The ability to step back and analyse the situation from a broader perspective could have enabled the DGM and other leaders to make more informed decisions. The case highlights that successful policy implementation within complex systems requires a nuanced understanding of the interwoven relationships, power imbalances, and the potential for unintended consequences (Dopson and Waddington, 1996). This dynamic is particularly relevant to FIFA's governance structure, where decision-making involves a complex web of relationships between the organisation, continental confederations, MAs, national governments, and sport federations. Just as the case highlights the necessity of a detached perspective in understanding the policy process, FIFA and its leaders must navigate the broader social and political forces shaping football governance. MAs, responsible for implementing FIFA's policies at the national level, often face challenges balancing global directives with local realities, especially when government intervention or financial constraints come into play. Power imbalances between wealthier and less resourced confederations further complicate policy implementation, sometimes leading to unintended consequences. By stepping back and analysing these interwoven relationships, FIFA, its confederations, and MAs could adopt more

informed and effective governance strategies, ensuring that policy decisions account for both structural constraints and cultural nuances within the sport.

Other papers on Game Models have also been written in sporting contexts. For example, work in boxing, tennis, and anti-doping policies. In Lake's (2010) analysis of the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA) policy, Elias' Game Models were used to illustrate the difficulty of regulating change because of complex social figurations. Lake argues that when the LTA operated prior to and during the 1980s, the structure within which it operated was much smaller, less complex, and more easily understood. However, over time, their plans developed and organisation became more complex. This resulted in a more complex 'game' with increasing numbers of interdependent 'players' to use Elias' analogy. Lake claims that a lack of foresight for this occurring and restraint in implementing change, their success became less assured. They became less capable of controlling the direction of change as they became more involved in 'managing' changes. It is not unusual in games or situations of this type, it seems, for the organisation, such as the LTA, to find it extremely difficult to formulate policies that result in the desired outcomes, despite being the central player. A good example of this is that their failure to achieve what they saw as success occurred despite having a variety of financial assets, partnerships, and specialised expertise at their disposal.

Despite their different objectives, anti-doping initiative from IOC followed a similar pattern of crisis-driven reform as FIFA Guardians, characterised by centralised control, strategic reputation management, and unintended consequences shaped by competing interests. By applying Elias' Game Models, it became clear that the interactions between key stakeholders, such as, governments, federations, advocacy groups, and sport's governing bodies, played a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of these programmes, often in ways that diverged from their original intentions (Waddington, 2016). The establishment of both the IOC's Anti-Doping Programme and FIFA's Guardians Programme followed a similar trajectory, emerging as responses to crises that threatened the credibility of their respective organisations. In both cases, external pressure helped push these institutions to act. The IOC's anti-doping efforts intensified after major scandals, particularly state-sponsored doping cases, leading to the formation of WADA and stricter testing regulations (Hanstad et al., 2008).

Similarly, FIFA introduced the Guardians Programme in response to increasing concerns about child abuse in football, with reports exposing systemic failures in safeguarding young athletes. Despite their different focuses, both programmes were centrally controlled, with the IOC ensuring oversight of anti-doping measures through partnerships with WADA (Hanstad et al., 2008) and FIFA structuring its safeguarding framework for federations while retaining control over compliance.

Both initiatives also served a strategic function in maintaining institutional legitimacy. The IOC sought to reassert authority over anti-doping efforts rather than allowing governments to dictate policy (Hanstad et al., 2008), just as FIFA pre-emptively introduced the Guardians Programme to manage external scrutiny. Applying Elias' Game Models to these cases highlights how different actors engaged in interdependent interactions, often with unintended consequences. In the anti-doping case, while the IOC established stricter testing policies, doping scandals persisted, and the creation of independent agencies like WADA reduced the IOC's control (Hanstad et al., 2008).

Similarly, FIFA's safeguarding framework remains inconsistently applied across federations, leading to ongoing challenges in enforcement. Both cases illustrate that while sports organisations introduce reforms to protect their image and maintain control, the complex web of stakeholders and competing interests often results in outcomes that no single entity can fully dictate.

3.5 Applying Game Models to Safeguarding

As has been shown in the previous section, according to Elias, organisations can be conceptualised as games, with their own sets of rules, players, and power dynamics. In this framework, different individuals or groups within an organisation have their own roles, responsibilities, and goals, and these roles are not fixed but constantly shifting. This shifting often occurs over time and, as such, taking a broader historical context into account when analysing people's actions and the unintended consequences that may flow from them, is an important finding from the Eliasian approach.

In short, therefore, this piece of research is going to use the concept of Game Models to try and understand how the complex set of relationships between

different groups results in intended and unintended consequences for those charged with implementing the FIFA Guardians programme in different MAs around the world. The work will examine how departments, such as those responsible for safeguarding in MAs, are enabled and constrained by the figuration and networks of interdependence within which they are enmeshed. Using the idea of Game Models, the work will explore the ways in which MAs are 'players' in what Elias describes as a multi-layer game.

The research will examine the distinct dynamic between the behaviour of individuals and the behaviour of whole department as individuals are impacted by these power dynamics as they emerge, evolve, and interact with each other. As an example, the relationships between senior management of MAs and employees of the safeguarding department who are involved with subjects on a daily basis will be explored. Questions will be asked to try and understand how the different people within MAs manage their relationship with organisations who are on different levels within the game.

For example, how do MAs negotiate and communicate with FIFA, their own NGOs, and sponsors? Another example of how Game Models can be used in this research is to explore the power dynamics which different MAs around the world. Anecdotally, having worked in this area, the researcher has an idea that not every MA follows the same rules and policies. Some are following confederation strategies for example, others follow FIFAs, some follow a strategy from a local government, and some do a mixture of each. Why is this? And what is the impact of different approaches for those who are trying to implement FIFA Guardians?

It is worth noting that this approach to using Game Models as an analysis of the football ecosystem is a unique one. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no one has applied this framework to this topic at this level on a wide scale. This, in turn, will provide a theoretical contribution to the research, allowing it to contribute to the development of theory as well as the field of knowledge as a whole. This is a unique theoretical take on policy implementation that, while used before, has not been applied to safeguarding within professional football, and particularly the FIFA Guardians programme. In applying his framework to unpick the views and lived experiences of those implementing FIFA Guardians, it is

hoped that the contribution to knowledge will be both theoretical, by advancing Elias' work, and practical, by offering concrete examples for MAs to utilise and implement.

The interests of management and the capacity of people and knowledge of MAs are not the same. An under-educated member of a team can cause insecurity in management when implementing strategies. The development of a game can be affected by all of these factors. Among the topics that will be covered in the interview are team implementation, confidence in management, and capacity and knowledge of team members. A player's perspective will limit their ability to comprehend the game as a whole, but only to the extent that their understanding of the game allows. This means that a player may not be able to fully understand the game's mechanics, strategies, and goals. As a result, they may struggle to find success in the game. To gain a better understanding of the game, players need to take a step back and look at the game from a more global perspective.

There will be different groups in the game that are only interested in their own interests and will only support other goals in line with their perceived needs. Having a game (in this case an organisation) with different levels of players (management vs safeguarding managers) it is vital to understand that the higher tier has more power than the lower tier players. Even so, it is essential to recognise that some groups have a greater capacity to shape or resist change than others. Like in single level games, it is worth remembering that balances of power are continuously in flux, that is to say power is not a static principle that never changes.

On the contrary, it is continually evolving. As team members and departments gain more knowledge about safeguarding, management's understanding and acceptance will strengthen, as well. As the journey progresses, the power of lower tier players will become more powerful. This will lead to a more unified organisation with a stronger security posture. Everyone will be better equipped to identify risks and take action to mitigate them. The MA will be better prepared to protect vulnerable adults and children from potential threats.

The concept of game models can be useful for understanding how power relations are formed and maintained within organisations, as well as how

individuals and groups navigate these relations to achieve their own objectives. Furthermore, researchers can gain deeper insights into the dynamics of social dynamics and how they are shaped by broader factors such as social, cultural, and historical factors by studying the game models of various organisations.

3.6 Chapter 3 Summary:

Chapter 3 explores how Norbert Elias' Game Models and figural sociology can be applied to understand power dynamics in football governance, specifically regarding child protection. Elias' concept of "figuration" highlights the interconnected relationships between stakeholders, such as FIFA, national associations, and NGOs, and how power balances shift over time.

The Game Models concept is used to analyse how these evolving power dynamics shape safeguarding policies like FIFA Guardians. The chapter emphasises that these dynamics are fluid, influenced by societal and institutional changes, and can lead to unintended consequences, which in turn impact the development and implementation of safeguarding practices in football.

Chapter 4: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to justify the research methods chosen for this research and explain how the research questions were operationalised through meaningful data collection tools. After briefly outlining the philosophical underpinning of the research, the research design is then discussed in the following section, including the data collection methods, the data analysis techniques, and the approaches to manage validity and reliability. Finally, the ethical considerations of the research are discussed, including the protection of data, participant anonymity, and informed consent.

4.1 Research Philosophy

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) suggest that research philosophy serves as the initial stage in the research process, forming the foundation from which a continuous thread, akin to a guiding principle, leads the investigation. Consequently, the philosophical standpoint influences decisions regarding methodology, strategy, and data analysis techniques (Gill & Johnson, 2010) and this starts with the consideration of one's ontological position.

4.1.1 Ontology: Reality in the Lens of Research

Ontology, as per Burrell and Morgan (1979), is the study of being and existence and is foundational to a researcher's approach. It concerns what constitutes reality. For example, objectivism posits that reality is independent and consists of tangible structures, while constructivism views reality as a construct of the mind influenced by human perceptions and social experiences. This ontological perspective informs the methodology of a research project; in the context of child protection programmes, it directs the investigation towards understanding the phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, rather than as detached, objective facts. The assertion is that child protection and the other elements associated with it, such as abuse or exploitation are socially constructed and people have the power to change those things.

4.1.2 Epistemology: Knowledge Acquisition and Validation

Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge how it is obtained and validated. Positivism, which is more closely aligned with objectivism, adheres to the idea that knowledge comes from observable and quantifiable data and is traditionally linked with a quantitative research strategy. However, this can be limiting in the social sciences, where phenomena like child protection in sport are not readily quantifiable and are better understood through qualitative analysis. In contrast, interpretivism assumes that knowledge is constructed through human experience and social interaction rather than discovered as objective fact (Schwandt, 1994; Bryman, 2016). It seeks to understand the meanings individuals attach to their actions and the contexts in which those meanings are formed. Interpretivism therefore emphasises understanding over measurement, and depth over breadth. This epistemological stance is particularly suited to research in safeguarding, where individuals' perceptions, emotions, and lived experiences provide insight into how policies and programmes - such as the FIFA Guardians initiative are interpreted and implemented across diverse organisational and cultural settings. While interpretivism informs how the researcher understands and approaches knowledge, it does not, in itself, prescribe a particular methodological approach. It is therefore important to distinguish interpretivism from induction. Interpretivism is an epistemological position centred on how meaning is constructed through social interaction, whereas induction is an analytical logic that describes how theory is generated from data. Although the two are often used together in qualitative research, they operate at different levels of the research process and should not be treated as interchangeable. Within this interpretivist paradigm, the research follows an inductive reasoning process, through which theory and understanding are derived from empirical observation rather than tested against pre-existing hypotheses (Thomas, 2006; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Induction and interpretivism are related but distinct: interpretivism provides the philosophical foundation (how knowledge is understood), while induction provides the analytical logic (how knowledge is generated). This approach allows patterns and meanings to emerge from participants' accounts of safeguarding practice, ensuring that any theoretical insight remains grounded in their lived experiences.

Furthermore, qualitative methodologies enable a deeper exploration of participants' perspectives, thereby giving voice to those involved in child safeguarding in football, an aspect that positivist approaches often struggle to capture (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). By combining an interpretivist philosophical stance with an inductive analytical approach, which represent two distinct but complementary elements, this research prioritises understanding over prediction, thereby allowing the study to engage with the complexity, context, and subjectivity inherent in safeguarding within global football.

4.1.3 Axiology: Values Influencing Research

Axiology concerns the role of the researcher's values in the research process how personal beliefs, assumptions, and ethical positions influence decisions at every stage of inquiry. Within an interpretivist paradigm, the researcher's values are not eliminated but acknowledged as integral to the construction of knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019).

In this study, the researcher's own professional and ethical orientation towards safeguarding in football inevitably shaped the research journey. As an individual working within FIFA, the researcher brought an insider understanding of safeguarding policies, governance systems, and organisational dynamics. This position contributed to an intrinsic motivation to strengthen safeguarding practices and ensure that the research produced meaningful, practice-based insights. The researcher therefore approached the study with a deep-seated belief in the moral and social responsibility of sport organisations to protect children and vulnerable individuals—a value that influenced the formulation of the research aim, the selection of participants, and the empathetic tone adopted during interviews. However, axiology also requires critical self-awareness of how such values might shape interpretation. The researcher recognised that prior professional experience and personal commitment to safeguarding could lead to interpretive bias, such as overemphasising organisational intentions or underplaying structural barriers. To address this, a process of reflexive practice was embedded throughout the study. Reflexive journaling was used to document emerging thoughts and emotional reactions after interviews, while supervisory discussions provided opportunities to challenge assumptions and re-examine interpretations.

This reflective approach aligns with the interpretivist view that research is a co-construction of meaning between the researcher and participants, guided by empathy, ethical sensitivity, and transparency. The researcher's values—rooted in fairness, integrity, and social justice—therefore served both as a compass for ethical conduct and as a lens through which safeguarding practice was understood. By acknowledging and critically engaging with these values, the study ensures that subjectivity is not seen as a source of distortion but as a resource for depth, authenticity, and moral engagement within the research process.

4.2. Research design

Following the decision on research philosophy and strategy, the next section focuses on research design. Research design refers to the structured plan and methodology employed to systematically investigate a specific research question. It serves as the blueprint for conducting a study, guiding researchers in collecting, analysing, and interpreting data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The design used in this study is cross-sectional, focusing on the collection of data from a sample at a single point in time, thereby providing a snapshot of that moment (Bryman, 2016). A cross-sectional design was chosen because it allows for the efficient examination of the current state of phenomena, particularly in contexts where time constraints or resource limitations exist. It is ideal for gaining insights into trends or patterns within a specific population, without requiring long-term commitment or follow-up. This approach also helps in understanding relationships between variables at a specific moment, making it suitable for capturing data on attitudes, behaviours, or opinions related to the research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

4.2.1 Purpose of research design

Research can also be categorised into various types, such as exploratory, descriptive, explanatory, or evaluative, depending on how the researcher formulates the research questions. This helps in framing the study and determining the most appropriate approach to understanding the subject matter (Robson, 2011). Because the research questions sought to understand the views

and experiences of those who are implementing the FIFA Guardians programme, an exploratory and evaluative research project was undertaken. The goal of an exploratory study is to discover what is happening and to acquire insights about a topic of interest by asking open-ended questions. For example, a question that begins with 'what' or 'how' is likely to be exploratory according to Robson (2002), who suggests that such inquiries are well-suited for initial investigations into complex, multifaceted areas.

If a researcher is unaware of the exact nature of a complex issue, problem, or phenomenon, an exploratory study can clarify understanding. This is useful for this project because it allows for a thorough investigation into the various factors that influence the effectiveness of child protection programmes, including cultural nuances, organisational structures, and policy interpretations, which may not be immediately apparent without an in-depth exploratory approach. Flexibility and adaptability are among the advantages of this type of research, as noted by Saunders et al. (2019). This is particularly useful for research into child protection programmes within MAs because it is hoped it will allow for a responsive approach as new information and insights emerge.

The exploratory nature of the research is beneficial in settings where variables are numerous and not clearly defined. For example, in the context of child protection in sports, there are multiple factors such as organisational policies, cultural attitudes, social networks, and individual behaviours that can influence safeguarding practices. These variables are not easily quantifiable or always well-understood in their full complexity. For instance, organisational policies may be influenced by diverse interpretations of what constitutes effective safeguarding, while cultural attitudes towards child protection can vary greatly across regions, sports, and organisational hierarchies. Moreover, social networks and interpersonal relationships within sports organisations are often fluid and dynamic, making it difficult to establish clear cause-and-effect relationships. The challenge with these variables is that they are interdependent and shaped by a range of social, cultural, and contextual factors, which makes them difficult to measure using traditional quantitative methods. As a result, these complex, multidimensional variables require an exploratory, qualitative approach to better understand their interactions and impact. By adopting an interpretivist paradigm and an inductive approach, the research explores the subtleties of these

variables, capturing nuanced perspectives that quantitative methods may overlook. This enables a deeper understanding of how these variables operate in practice, how they influence child safeguarding efforts, and how they evolve over time.

It also allows flexibility. This is important for a study that is trying to gather data from people in a wide range of social, political, cultural, and economic situations. In short, this adaptability is essential to accommodate the varied cultural, organisational, and contextual factors that influence child protection policies and their implementation across different regions. As a result, adopting a more exploratory approach to the research can help the work remain relevant and insightful even as it delves into the complex and possibly changing landscapes of child safeguarding in sports. As a result, adopting an exploratory approach aligns closely with the research's interpretivist philosophy, constructivist ontology, and subjectivist epistemology. From this perspective, reality is viewed as socially constructed and context-dependent, shaped by the experiences and meanings individuals ascribe to their interactions. An exploratory approach supports this worldview by allowing the researcher to investigate how safeguarding practices are understood, experienced, and negotiated by those involved, rather than seeking to test predefined hypotheses. This flexibility ensures that the study remains relevant and insightful as it engages with the complex and evolving landscape of child safeguarding in sport.

Evaluation research is a slightly different approach and is concerned with determining the effectiveness of a given approach. Research questions are usually phrased with 'how', or include 'to what extent', as part of the 'what' (Saunders et. al, 2019). Research focused on evaluation in business and management usually involves assessing an organisation's strategy, policy, programme, initiative, or process (Smith et al., 2019) and this is where this has some relevance for this study. Such work often relates to operations, such as a communications campaign, personnel policy, or financial strategy for example. In an evaluative study, researchers compare events, situations, groups, places, or periods, and thus ask 'which', 'when', 'who' and 'where' questions. This would allow comparison of the lived experience of those implementing FIFA Guardians. A conceptual contribution could be made through a study that looked not only at 'how effective' something was but also at 'why', and compared these explanations

with existing theories. This research will be cross-sectional, which involves the study of a particular phenomenon (or phenomenon) at a particular point in time (Johnson et al., 2020).

An exploratory, evaluative approach was particularly appropriate for this study on child protection within MAs due to its inherent capacity to delve deeply into uncharted or under-researched areas. Given that child protection is a multifaceted issue influenced by cultural, legal, and organisational factors, the exploratory aspect allowed for an open-ended investigation, providing the flexibility to probe various dimensions of the topic without the constraints of a predetermined hypothesis (Robson, 2011). Evaluative research complemented this by critically assessing the effectiveness of child protection programmes, enabling the identification of best practices, gaps, and potential areas for improvement (Mertens, 2014). This combined methodology was ideal for the study as it not only mapped the current landscape of child protection efforts but also sought to understand their impact and efficacy within the unique settings of each MA. The chosen research strategy was perfectly aligned with the study's objectives: To understand in detail the views, perceptions and lived experiences of those responsible for implementing the FIFA Guardian programme at various MAs around the world; to apply Elias' concept of Game Models to help explain the views, perceptions and lived experiences of those responsible for implementing the FIFA Guardian programme; and to identify recommendations that would help improve the implementation of FIFA Guardians.

Finally, it is worth noting that comparative research serves as an essential complement to the exploratory and evaluative aspects of this study on child protection. While the exploratory component is designed to uncover new insights and understandings in a broad and open-ended manner, and the evaluative part aims to assess the effectiveness of existing programmes, comparative research bridges these two by providing a structured framework for analysis (Esser & Vliegthart, 2017). By juxtaposing child protection programmes across different MAs, comparative research enables the identification of patterns, similarities, and differences. This side-by-side examination offers a nuanced perspective that is critical in understanding how various factors such as cultural norms, governance structures, and resource allocation affect the views and experiences of the participants in the study (Bryman, 2016). Comparative research is particularly

valuable in evaluating how different contexts influence outcomes, providing insights that would be difficult to obtain from a single case study (Bryman, 2016). It also fosters cross-cultural understanding and the potential for broader application of findings across diverse environments (Ragin, 2000).

In essence, the comparative approach enhances the exploratory and evaluative aspects by:

1. **Enriching Understanding:** It allows for a deeper exploration of the topic by contextualising findings within a broader spectrum of cases and scenarios, promoting a more holistic view (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003).
2. **Benchmarking Best Practices:** It facilitates the evaluation of programmes by setting benchmarks and standards derived from comparing multiple cases, which can help pinpoint what works well and why (Schneider & Ingram, 1993).
3. **Supporting Generalisation:** Comparative research helps in cautiously generalising findings, making it possible to apply learnings from specific contexts to broader settings. This is invaluable for policy development and programme design (Ragin, 2000).
4. **Highlighting Unique Cases:** It also uncovers unique or outlier cases that may lead to innovative approaches to child protection, thus contributing to the exploratory goals of the research (Gerring, 2007).

The power of comparison, when applied to the realm of child protection in football, underscored the dynamic and context-dependent nature of social phenomena (Gerring, 2007). In the context of child protection within football, it served as a potent tool to highlight that the boundaries and causes of issues were not fixed or predetermined. By comparing different levels of child protection measures in football, valuable insights can be gained into the varied approaches and strategies employed to safeguard the well-being of young athletes (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). As an example, at the grassroots level, where aspiring young footballers often take their first steps into the sport, child protection measures might revolve around creating safe and supportive environments. This could involve implementing thorough background checks for coaches and volunteers, establishing codes of conduct, and ensuring proper supervision

during training sessions and matches (Brackenridge, 2002). The comparison comes into play when we contrast these grassroots initiatives with the measures in place at higher levels of the football hierarchy or how this is done in a different MA faced with different cultural or economic circumstances for example. To allow for a better understanding of this, the next section briefly outlines how the different MAs have unique qualities that give rise for the need to employ a comparative approach.

Cultural and Organisational Differences: MAs operate within diverse cultural and organisational contexts. Each association may have its own set of policies, procedures, and approaches to safeguarding. Conducting a comparative study allows researchers to explore how these cultural and organisational differences influence safeguarding practices. What may be considered effective or acceptable in one association may not necessarily translate to another due to variations in cultural norms, values, and organisational structures.

Legal and Regulatory Frameworks: Different countries or regions may have distinct legal and regulatory frameworks governing safeguarding in sport. Comparative research enables examination of how these legal frameworks impact safeguarding measures across various MAs. For example, some countries may have stringent laws and regulations regarding child protection, while others may have more relaxed standards. Understanding these variations can shed light on the effectiveness and shortcomings of safeguarding practices.

Resource Allocation and Implementation Challenges: MAs vary in terms of resources available for safeguarding initiatives. Some may have robust funding, infrastructure, and dedicated personnel for implementing safeguarding measures, while others may face resource constraints. Comparative research can highlight disparities in resource allocation and identify how this impacts those trying to implement FIFA Guardians. It can also reveal innovative strategies adopted by associations with limited resources, challenging the notion that financial investment is the sole determinant of success in safeguarding.

Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Safeguarding: How do cultural attitudes towards child protection and safeguarding differ across various MAs? There can be many ways that social entities, such as organisations, may be categorised, for

instance geographically or politically in the form of cross-national and regional comparisons (Mills et al.,2006). The reason the researcher decided to go ahead with comparative research was to identify issues of FIFA Guardians between different locations. The distinctive nature of MAs stemmed from a range of factors that contributed to variations in the implementation of the FIFA Guardian programme. These differences could be attributed to diverse economic strengths, cultural backgrounds, and management structures within each MA.

The paragraph above highlights the key differences across Member Associations (MAs), revealing the unique challenges and opportunities each faces in implementing the FIFA Guardians programme. These differences include economic disparities that affect resource allocation, cultural variations in the perception of abuse and communication styles, diverse management structures that influence decision-making and local adaptations, varying levels of understanding of abuse shaped by educational and socio-cultural factors, and differences in management effectiveness regarding training and feedback mechanisms.

The primary decision in selecting the methods of a study revolves around opting for either quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods research (Creswell, 2014). A fundamental means of distinguishing between quantitative and qualitative research lies in their respective approaches to data collection. Quantitative research predominantly deals with numerical data, which can be subjected to statistical analysis (Bryman, 2012). In contrast, qualitative research centres on the interpretation of meanings conveyed through language, narratives, or visuals, providing deeper insight into participants' perspectives and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Finally, mixed methods research combines both approaches, leveraging the strengths of each to offer a more comprehensive analysis (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The table below offers an example of the differences between qualitative and quantitative approaches.

According to Rahi (2017), qualitative methods are used to gather in-depth information on a particular subject. Individual feelings or emotions are, likewise, important. It is vital to understand that this is not the case when using a quantitative approach. As explained by Tashakkori and Creswell (2007),

researchers use this approach with the intention of observing or interpreting an environment to construct a theory.

Fitting in with the strategy and design of the research is then methods. As noted earlier, the research had an interpretive philosophical underpinning since it attempted to 'unravel patterns' (Roth and Mehta, 2002, p. 132), as well as analyse elements that were not quantifiable, such as feelings, thoughts, experiences, and emotions (Gratton & Jones, 2004) of practitioners. For this reason, the researcher used qualitative methods, and the decision was made to use interviews as a key tool for data collection. Interviews offered a unique opportunity to delve deeply into the perspectives and insights of participants. In that regard, through open-ended questioning and follow-up probing, the researcher explored the nuanced aspects of the experiences that participants had when it came to trying to implement FIFA Guardians in their own MA. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), in contrast to questionnaires and other quantitative approaches, interviews allow two or more people to freely share information. Qualitative interviews, perhaps more importantly for this work, as argued by Thomas (2006), were crucial to make sense of complex realities.

The particular interview method used was semi-structured interviews, as they allowed the researcher a good level of control over the interview, while also enabling the respondents to express their own opinions and views and provide further details through inquiry (Silverman, 2010). This meant outlining a broad interview schedule but then allowing that schedule to change and adapt depending on the experiences of the participants. According to Bryman (2016) semi-structured interviews are a form of qualitative research method that falls between fully structured and unstructured interviews. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher used a predetermined set of open-ended questions as a guide, but keeping a flexibility in the conversation to explore unanticipated topics or delve deeper into responses. This approach allowed for a more dynamic and responsive interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher had a list of key questions designed to gather information on the research topic. These can be seen in Appendix A. However, unlike fully structured interviews, there was room for the interviewer to adapt the questions or ask follow-up questions based on the participant's responses. This flexibility enabled a more natural and conversational flow,

fostering a deeper exploration of the participant's experiences, perspectives, and insights. Such openness aligns with an inductive approach, as it allows themes and patterns to emerge from the participants' narratives rather than being imposed by predefined categories or assumptions.

Since the study involved human subjects, ethical considerations needed to be taken note of to ensure a successful research outcome, this is something that will be addressed in section on ethics. Moreover, qualitative interviews done well can address ethical considerations effectively by creating a safe space for participants to share their insights. This was important here as the topics that were to be discussed included abuse, exploitation, safeguarding and welfare, which are all deemed sensitive topics. As emphasised by Thomas (2006), these interviews are indispensable for obtaining full background information, offering a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors that influence the efficacy of child protection policies and initiatives. Lastly, the flexibility of qualitative research allows for the adoption of diverse epistemological and disciplinary approaches, ensuring that the research design aligns with the specific context and goals of the study, thereby enhancing the validity and relevance of the findings.

Before commencing each interview, the interviewer provided every interviewee with the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix C), typically a couple of days in advance. This sheet contained comprehensive details about the study, including the research project's title, legal framework, context, participation requirements, and data storage procedures. Additionally, the Participant Consent Form, which also covered permission for interview recording, needed to be signed beforehand (see Appendix B). This form ensured that participants understood the study's details and agreed to its conditions.

The author emphasises the importance of effective communication between the researcher and participants as a critical factor for the research project's success. Therefore, at the interview's outset, the purpose, objectives, and background of the study were clearly explained to establish a positive rapport with the interviewees. Creating a trusted environment built on mutual respect and tolerance was essential for encouraging open and honest responses from interviewees (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019).

4.3 Sample

The composition of the research sample was shaped primarily by access and participant response. Invitations to participate were sent to all 211 FIFA Member Associations, and inclusion in the study was based on voluntary response and willingness to be interviewed. Following confirmation of participation, the researcher subsequently consulted FIFA's contemporaneous internal classification of safeguarding development stages to contextualise the participating Member Associations and to ensure visibility of variation across implementation contexts. This organisational classification was used descriptively to support contextual understanding and comparative analysis, rather than as a selection criterion or evaluative judgement. The qualitative analysis remained inductive and grounded in participants' accounts.

The researcher conducted interviews using a purposive sampling strategy focused on participant roles rather than organisational characteristics. Participants were selected based on their direct responsibility for, and experience of, safeguarding implementation within football contexts. By deliberately targeting safeguarding managers and equivalent roles, the study generated rich, practice-based insights aligned with the research aims and objectives.

A second analytical layer was applied at the level of Member Associations in order to reflect contextual variation across the sample. To support comparative understanding, participating MAs were grouped into three descriptive categories based on safeguarding development: very limited development, partly developed, and advanced. These groupings reflected the contemporaneous FIFA classification and were informed by indicators such as the length of time safeguarding structures had been in place, staffing capacity, and organisational status. Importantly, these categories were used to describe contextual differences across the sample rather than to rank or evaluate safeguarding quality.

In practice, MAs operating within more established safeguarding environments often benefited from existing policy support from confederations or national authorities, while others were at an earlier stage of development and relied more heavily on FIFA guidance. These contextual differences helped to frame the analysis and interpret participants' experiences but did not predetermine

analytical themes. The researcher’s insider positionality facilitated access to this contextual information, while reflexive practices were used to ensure that such knowledge did not shape interpretation beyond providing background understanding.

It is important to note that Member Associations at an early stage of safeguarding development were included deliberately alongside those with longer-established frameworks. Including this range of contexts was essential to capturing the diversity of experiences associated with implementing safeguarding within global football. The table below outlines the Member Associations included in the research sample.

Table 6. *Interview Sample: Confederation, Safeguarding Stage, and Department*

Confederation	Safeguarding stage	People working in department	Safeguarding policy	Country number
UEFA	Partly developed	1	UEFA	1
UEFA	Advanced	1	FIFA/ UEFA	2
UEFA	Partly developed	1	Ministry of Education	3
UEFA	Partly developed	1	Ministry of Education	4
UEFA	Very little child protection developed	1	UEFA	5
UEFA	Partly developed	1	UEFA	6
UEFA	Partly developed	1	UEFA	7
UEFA	Partly developed	1	FIFA/ UEFA	8
AFC	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	9
UEFA	Partly developed	1	FIFA/ UEFA	10

CAF	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	11
AFC	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	12
CAF	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	13
UEFA	Very little child protection developed	1	UEFA	14
AFC	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	15
UEFA	Partly developed	1	Ministry of Education	16
AFC	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	17
CAF	Partly developed	2	FIFA	18
UEFA	Very little child protection developed	1	UEFA	19
CAF	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	20
CAF	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	21
AFC	Partly developed	1	FIFA	22

AFC	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	23
AFC	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	24
AFC	Very little child protection developed	2	FIFA	25
AFC	Partly developed	1	FIFA	26
AFC	Very little child protection developed	1	FIFA	27

Table 6 provides an overview of the interview sample, detailing the confederation, safeguarding stage, department, safeguarding policy, and country number for each participant. It categorises participants by their respective confederations, including UEFA (Union of European Football Associations), AFC (Asian Football Confederation), and CAF (Confederation of African Football). The safeguarding stage for each participant is also indicated, with three levels: "Basic," "Middle," and "Advanced," representing varying degrees of safeguarding development within each confederation. Additionally, it highlights the safeguarding policies each participant adheres to, including those set by UEFA, FIFA, or a combination of both. The country number column assigns a unique identifier to each participant, allowing for easy differentiation between the various countries represented in the sample. This structure helps illustrate the diverse approaches to safeguarding in football across different regions, providing insight into the varying stages of policy implementation and the involvement of different governing bodies in child protection efforts within the sport. As a researcher is working within the football governance and safeguarding sector, primary focus was on gathering data through interviews with key stakeholders from various MAs and confederations. While the researcher has access to relevant information through their professional position, the research process followed a clear and transparent methodology, ensuring that all data collection adhered to ethical standards. The table presented here reflects the diverse safeguarding stages and

policies within each confederation and country, based on insights gathered through the researcher's professional role and through interviews with key stakeholders involved in safeguarding within football. It is important to note that the information was gathered through independent, anonymised interviews to ensure the integrity and neutrality of the findings, and that researchers professional role did not influence the participants' perspectives. This approach enables the research to present a holistic view of safeguarding practices across football without any bias or conflicts of interest.

The research sample consisted of participants from Member Associations (MAs) within three football confederations: UEFA, AFC, and CAF. Although the original intention was to secure representation from all six global confederations, limited response particularly from North and South America and Oceania meant that participation was ultimately restricted to these three. Repeated outreach efforts through direct contact and professional networks were unsuccessful in securing broader representation. Nevertheless, the final sample reflected a relatively even distribution across the three involved confederations and offered a rich range of insights into child protection practices under FIFA's Guardian programme.

In terms of safeguarding policies, most national associations in the sample followed FIFA's guidelines. A smaller number adhered to frameworks set by UEFA, while others implemented a blend of standards from UEFA, FIFA, and national ministries. This variation illustrates the differing levels of institutional engagement and interpretations of safeguarding requirements across regions.

The following section discusses the ethical principles and reflexive considerations that guided this research, ensuring transparency, integrity, and respect for participants throughout the data collection and analysis process.

4.4. Data collection and analysis

This section outlines the practical process of data collection and analysis, explaining how interviews were conducted, how data were handled and analysed, and how analytic decisions were made. The section focuses on what was done in practice, while the theoretical rationale for thematic and inductive analysis is developed in Section 4.5.

As with most qualitative approaches, in this research, the experiences and perspectives of the participants were reflected in the data generated (Saunders et al., 2019) and, in that regard, the means of assessing this data had to acknowledge and respect the breadth of their experiences and perspectives. Consequently, in line with the interpretivist epistemology that underpins the work, the analysis of data had to capture the variability and complexity in the participants answers if it was to be of use to the researcher.

The geographical location of the different participants was spread around the world and the use of video conferencing technology was employed to conduct the interviews. This meant the interviews were easily recorded, the transcripts were downloaded, however, the additional practice of taking notes during the interview sessions was employed to help make sense of the transcripts. Apart from the geographical constraints associated with interview venues, electronic interviews notably offered a greater level of flexibility in terms of scheduling and reducing logistical barriers. Participants from different time zones could be interviewed without the need for extensive travel or physical presence, making the process more accessible and efficient (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). However, a downside of online interviews is the potential for technical issues, such as connectivity problems, which could disrupt the flow of conversation or cause delays in data collection. Additionally, the lack of in-person interaction might limit the ability to fully gauge non-verbal cues, potentially reducing the depth of insight into participants' emotions and engagement during the interview.

Despite these drawbacks, the flexibility provided by online interviews was essential in reaching a diverse group of participants spread across various geographical locations. As part of an ethical commitment to reflexivity and researcher transparency, careful attention was given to the emotional responses experienced during data collection. One example of this was the stark contrast observed between smaller Mas, that struggled due to limited resources, and financially stable MAs that, at times, appeared unaware of their advantages. Empathy was felt toward the under-resourced MAs, whose challenges often hindered their ability to operate effectively. Simultaneously, frustration emerged when well-funded MAs appeared not to fully appreciate the benefits available to them. These emotional responses were critically acknowledged to ensure they did not influence the analysis. To maintain ethical integrity and objectivity, these

feelings were documented in a research journal and discussed with peers, supporting a more balanced and reflexive approach to interpreting the findings.

This study adopts an exploratory, qualitative design using semi-structured interviews and inductive thematic analysis to address its aims: (i) to understand the views, perceptions and lived experiences of those implementing the FIFA Guardians programme; (ii) to interpret these experiences through Elias' Game Models; and (iii) to identify practice recommendations. Methodologically, the approach aligns with a constructivist ontology (safeguarding practices and meanings are socially constructed), an interpretivist epistemology (knowledge is generated through participants' accounts in context), and an axiological acknowledgement that the researcher's values and reflexivity are part of the knowledge-making process. Practically, purposive sampling ensured participants had direct, relevant experience of safeguarding delivery within Member Associations. Inductive coding allowed patterns to emerge from the data rather than from pre-set categories; themes were then refined and related back to the research objectives and the Game Models to explain multi-level dynamics (FIFA–MA–practitioner). This design was chosen because it best supports the study's goal of producing context-rich, actionable insights into how safeguarding is implemented and how it can be improved, while remaining philosophically coherent with the study's interpretivist stance.

In addition, this study is informed by methodological developments that focus specifically on evaluating safeguarding policy implementation in sport. Brackenridge et al. (2005) developed the Activation States methodology to assess child protection implementation in football, highlighting that safeguarding should be understood as a process shaped by organisational engagement, readiness, and capacity rather than as a binary measure of compliance. While the present research does not apply the Activation States framework as a formal measurement tool, it is conceptually aligned with its core emphasis on implementation dynamics. This study similarly examines how safeguarding policies are operationalised in practice, how responsibilities are distributed and enacted within Member Associations, and how capacity constraints and contextual factors shape the extent and quality of implementation. By situating the study within this established methodological tradition, the research demonstrates continuity with prior safeguarding scholarship while extending it

through a governance-focused, cross-context qualitative examination of FIFA Guardians implementation.

4.4.1 Cleaning and processing

In the data analysis phase of this study, attention was dedicated to the critical stage of cleaning and preprocessing the gathered data. This process was facilitated by the utilization of Quirkos, a software tool renowned for its efficacy in qualitative data analysis. Quirkos enabled the systematic organisation and refinement of the raw data, ensuring its suitability for subsequent analysis. At the beginning of the data analysis process, Quirkos was used for data cleaning and preprocessing. However, as the process progressed, manual coding proved to be a more effective approach for making sense of the data. While Quirkos was useful for organising and structuring initial insights, manually engaging with the data provided a clearer and more intuitive overview of the topics. This hands-on approach made it possible to better identify key themes, inconsistencies, and contextual meanings that automated tools might overlook. By manually categorising and refining the data, it was also easier to distinguish between meaningful content and filler words, ensuring a more accurate and insightful analysis. Ultimately, this method allowed for deeper engagement with the data, improving both accuracy and coherence in the findings.

In addition to leveraging Quirkos for data cleaning and preprocessing, manual cleaning procedures were also employed to ensure thoroughness and accuracy in the refinement process. This hybrid approach involved a meticulous review of the data by the researcher, allowing for the identification and resolution of nuanced discrepancies or irregularities that may not have been captured through automated means alone. The researcher was able to address repetitive or redundant verbal fillers such as "mhmmm," "yes yes," "uh-huh," and similar utterances commonly found in spoken responses. This was particularly important when working with data from non-native speakers, where repeated affirmations or hesitation markers could skew qualitative analysis. Through systematic manual review, these duplicates were either removed or categorised based on their contextual relevance, ensuring that the cleaned data maintained its integrity while accurately reflecting participants' intended meanings. This step was crucial in enhancing the clarity and coherence of the dataset before proceeding with

further analysis. This dual strategy underscored the commitment to rigor and precision throughout the data analysis phase, thereby bolstering the integrity and credibility of the outcomes from the study.

4.4.2 Data Saturation and Conclusion of Data Collection

After conducting the initial interviews, it became evident that no new data or codes emerged beyond what had already been obtained. In total, 27 interviews were conducted. This indicated that data saturation had been reached. In some cases, a second call was arranged with participants as the initial interview had run over time. These follow-up discussions reinforced the insights gathered, with participants providing local examples of cultural and operational nuances but no novel codes, further affirming data saturation. Following Glaser and Strauss's perspective that further data mining at this point yields minimal benefits to theory development, the researcher concluded that saturation had been achieved. Satisfied with the rigor of the process and the repeated patterns observed in the data, the researcher confidently concluded the data collection phase.

4.4.3 Pilot Study and Instrument Testing

A formal pilot study was not conducted as part of this research. This decision was based on the exploratory and qualitative nature of the study, the specificity of the participant group, and the limited availability of safeguarding professionals within Member Associations. Given that participants occupied highly specialised roles, conducting a separate pilot risked reducing access to the already small and hard-to-reach population required for the main study. Although initial contact was attempted with all 211 Member Associations, the resulting participation rate reflects the access constraints typical of elite safeguarding and governance research; this recruitment process informed sampling decisions but did not constitute a pilot study.

Instead, elements of pilot testing were integrated into the early stages of data collection. The semi-structured interview guide was initially reviewed through supervisory discussion and refined to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. The first interviews conducted functioned as an informal pilot, allowing the researcher to assess question flow, terminology, and

participant understanding in real-world conditions. Minor refinements were subsequently made to the interview guide, including adjustments to question wording and sequencing, while maintaining consistency with the study's exploratory aims. This approach is consistent with qualitative research practice, where interview guides are often iteratively refined rather than fixed in advance. The combination of supervisory review, reflexive evaluation, and early interview refinement ensured methodological rigour while preserving access to a specialist participant group and supporting the inductive, interpretivist design of the study.

4.4.4 Research Rigour and Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, rigour is commonly assessed through criteria of credibility, transferability, and dependability rather than statistical validity and reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study adopted several strategies to enhance trustworthiness across these dimensions.

Credibility was supported through prolonged engagement with the research context, iterative data collection, and repeated engagement with the interview transcripts. The researcher conducted multiple readings of each transcript and employed inductive coding to ensure that themes were grounded in participants' accounts. Reflexive memo-writing and supervisory discussions were used throughout the analytic process to challenge interpretations and minimise the influence of researcher bias. The use of in-vivo coding further strengthened credibility by preserving participants' meanings and language.

Transferability was addressed by providing rich, contextualised descriptions of the research setting, participants, and Member Association contexts. Rather than aiming for statistical generalisation, the study offers analytic insights into safeguarding implementation across diverse organisational, cultural, and economic environments. This enables readers and practitioners to assess the relevance of the findings to other safeguarding and governance contexts.

Dependability was ensured through transparent documentation of the research process. The stages of data collection, coding, and analysis were systematically recorded, including decisions relating to interview design, coding refinement, and theme development. The use of both manual coding and qualitative software

(Quirkos) provided a structured audit trail, while supervisory review of analytic decisions further strengthened consistency and dependability.

Taken together, these strategies support the methodological rigour of the study and enhance confidence in the credibility, transferability, and dependability of the findings.

4.5 Thematic Analysis

To clarify the progression from initial coding to final themes, analysis followed an iterative sequence. First, transcripts were read in full for familiarisation, with initial in vivo codes noted manually to capture participants' language. Second, codes were organised and clustered (initially supported by Quirkos) to identify repeated patterns across interviews. Third, through repeated re-reading and manual refinement, overlapping codes were merged, less relevant codes were removed, and broader analytic codes were developed. Finally, these analytic codes were reviewed against the full dataset and consolidated into a smaller set of coherent themes aligned with the research questions and interpreted through the Game Models.

Importantly, the transition from early coding to final themes was not treated as a linear or purely technical exercise, but as an analytic decision-making process. Initial groupings of codes were reviewed in relation to four criteria: their relevance to the research questions, their explanatory value across different Member Association contexts, their internal coherence, and their ability to be meaningfully interpreted through Elias's Game Model. Themes that overlapped conceptually were combined, while those that contained multiple organising ideas were separated to improve analytic clarity. Codes that appeared infrequently or lacked explanatory relevance were retained only where they illuminated contextual nuance or deviant cases. Final themes were confirmed when they demonstrated stability across the dataset and offered clear interpretive value in explaining safeguarding implementation as a relational and systemic process. Analytic memos and supervisory dialogue were used to document and challenge these decisions, strengthening transparency and rigour.

The methodological positioning of this study aligns with established qualitative and narrative research traditions in safeguarding and child protection within sport.

Brackenridge (2001) and Fasting and Brackenridge (2005) emphasise that qualitative and case-based approaches are particularly appropriate for examining safeguarding because they enable attention to context, power relations, and the meanings that stakeholders attach to safeguarding practices. Their work demonstrates that safeguarding phenomena (including abuse dynamics and organisational responses) are not adequately captured through formal policies or quantitative indicators alone, but require detailed qualitative inquiry to understand how safeguarding is interpreted, enacted, and experienced within sporting environments.

The analysis was guided by a qualitative framework (Bernard, 1996) and employed thematic analysis combined with analytic induction to identify patterns, themes, and relationships within the data, consistent with the exploratory nature of the study.

Defining the word 'theme' in this analysis method was necessary before diving into the specific steps. A theme, therefore, was determined to be a 'patterned response or meaning' (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 82) derived from the data that informed the research question. According to Holloway and Todres (2003), a lack of consistency and coherence in developing themes derived from research data could result from the thematic analysis being flexible. To mitigate this risk, a systematic and rigorous approach to thematic analysis was adopted by following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. This involved familiarising with the data, generating initial codes systematically, and incorporating *in vivo* codes, which are direct quotes from participants, to ensure that the themes remained grounded in their lived experiences. By using *in vivo* coding, the authenticity of participants' voices was preserved, and the risk of researcher bias in interpreting the data was minimized.

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis involves carefully examining and categorising qualitative data to identify recurring themes or patterns. Researchers immerse themselves in the data, collected from surveys, interviews or textual sources by organising thematic elements. It is akin to unravelling the underlying narrative threads within the data, thereby shedding light on the central themes, and providing a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation. Braun and Clark (2006) suggest it needs to be thought of as

organising the pieces of a puzzle to see or present the bigger picture. Braun and Clarke (2021) argued that thematic analysis should be viewed as the main method for qualitative analysis, as it offers essential skills for completing many other forms of qualitative analysis. The purpose of analytical induction, as stated by Saunders et al. (2019), was to construct and test an explanation for a phenomenon by carefully examining it. This meant that, in order to establish a viable explanation for the phenomenon being studied, a number of repeated steps were undertaken.

While Braun and Clarke's framework provides the practical steps for coding and theme development, the study's analytic logic was also inductive, consistent with the exploratory aims of the research (Thomas, 2006).

According to Thomas (2006) there are key elements of data analysis in an inductive approach and inductive analysis involves deriving insights directly from raw data rather than testing predefined hypotheses. This aligns with the exploratory approach in the table, where codes and analytic categories emerge from the data rather than being predetermined. The focus is on evaluating themes based on the research objectives and the responses of the participants, rather than confirming specific expectations, which further supports the use of an exploratory, content-driven method for analysing interview data. The first of these areas is to analyse data by the evaluation objectives, which define domains and topics that should be explored. The analysis is performed through numerous readings and evaluations of the raw data, which is an inductive element. In this respect, when taking this approach, the results do not originate from expectations, but from the direct analysis of raw data. The analysis is based on evaluation objectives, not on specific expectations for results. For example, during the evaluation of responses from football officials and safeguarding officers, recurring topics such as awareness of FIFA Guardians, challenges in implementation, and the need for further training were identified. These themes were not predetermined but surfaced organically through the data analysis process, aligning with the exploratory approach described by Thomas (2006). This method ensured that the findings were grounded in participants' experiences rather than shaped by prior assumptions or hypotheses.

Second, Thomas (2006) suggests that the main goal of the analysis is the creation of categories from raw data in a theoretical framework. It consists of key topics and procedures recognised by researchers during analysis. The categories that were developed from the research were themes of participant experiences, key patterns of behaviour, contextual influences, and emerging relationships between variables

Interestingly there are two final parts that Thomas argues need consideration. First the results are derived from several assessments of the raw data. In this research this was done by ensuring the researcher engaged with the data on three occasions. First was a read through of the transcripts. This was largely a familiarisation process, which allowed the researcher to gain an overview of the topics. Next was the first analysis of the transcripts where codes and themes were identified. Having done that for all of the transcripts, the researcher then re-engaged with each transcript for a third time to find any further elements that may have been missed.

This final read was a way of self-checking the data. It was a process employed to circumvent the fourth point that Thomas makes when it comes to data analysis. The observations and beliefs of the researcher performing the investigation naturally influence the results. To use the most results, research has to determine what is relevant and different researchers can come up with different results and findings that do not overlap. As a way of improving the validity of the results, the transcripts were shared and discussed during supervisory meetings so that other academics had also supported and critiqued the analysis.

Qualitative data is often collected as free-flowing text (for example, focus groups or in-depth interviews) and this was the case in this piece of research. Data are described using this technique, but the selection of codes and the development of themes also require interpretation. Codes are like labels helping to organise and categorise information, making it easier to analyse and extract meaningful patterns or themes. They play a pivotal role in the analytical process, facilitating the identification and exploration of recurring patterns, themes, or concepts within the dataset.

The transcripts were read multiple times, with the researcher initially identifying several 'in-vivo' codes by hand, which are words or phrases directly used by the

participant (Roulston, 2010). Afterward, themes emerged as codes related to the research questions (Roulston, 2010), commonly referred to as 'analytic codes'. Based on the interviews, the most frequently occurring in vivo codes were prevention, safeguarding, culture, response, strategy, training, support, and collaboration. Based on the interview analysis, the following analytic codes emerged: systematic implementation, which highlights the structured approach to safeguarding through policies and risk assessments; resource allocation, emphasising the challenge of managing personnel and training for effective safeguarding; leadership and accountability, focusing on the roles of key stakeholders in ensuring safeguarding practices; collaborative effort, showcasing the importance of collective actions among various groups for safeguarding; sustainability and continuity, addressing the challenges of maintaining safeguarding efforts over time despite turnover; capacity building, which refers to the development of skills and knowledge to improve child protection practices; cultural change, indicating the need for shifts in attitudes towards safeguarding, especially in conservative environments; and operational challenges, capturing the obstacles faced in implementing safeguarding measures within organisations. By identifying topics in the analysis, researchers had the possibility to direct attention to important aspects. During data analysis, it was imperative that researchers looked for patterns, meanings, and recurring themes. In this research, analytic induction was appropriate to analyse the themes. Essentially, this was an inductive approach to explanation building. In order to build and test an explanation or theory, this method used incremental steps.

The researcher employed thematic analysis in coding, with a particular emphasis on analytic and in-vivo codes. The next section of the chapter moves to explaining how this was undertaken. Gibbs (2007, p. 2) defines coding as "how you describe what your data are all about." It involves identifying a passage in a text, identifying concepts, and identifying relationships between them. Coding as a process is essentially a form of analysis because data can be linked to indicate the same aspect or meaning, or can be compared and contrasted. In this stage, the researcher can reorganise original data into groupings for further analysis and there is no limit to how many codes can be applied to a unit of data. Researchers may refine themes and relationships between those themes during the analysis process. The themes need to be coherent so that an analytical framework can be

used for further research. The researcher will organise coded data extracts according to themes or sub-themes. A crucial part of coding is identifying whether coded data are meaningful together and in relation to your data, and whether separate themes are meaningful together. During the developmental process, it is likely that re-reading and reorganising will be necessary (Saldaña, 2013).

Writing progress summaries, transcript summaries, document summaries, self-memos, or entries in a research notebook and reflective diary helps the researcher capture their thoughts as they identify possible themes, patterns, and relationships within the data (Saunders et al., 2019). Document summaries, particularly those focused on FIFA's guidelines and related reports, helped me connect the experiences of Safeguarding Managers with the broader objectives of FIFA's safeguarding policies. In self-memos, one example noted that many managers felt that although FIFA Guardian offered a central, unified approach to safeguarding, the system's flexibility to address local context and specific needs was sometimes lacking. This led the researcher to categorise the relationship between standardised policies and local adaptations. This process provided a reflective space for the researcher to process thoughts and insights throughout the research process. Self-memos facilitated critical thinking by allowing me to step back and reflect on emerging themes, patterns, and my own reactions to the data. It helped me identify recurring ideas in the transcripts, such as frustrations with certain aspects of the system, before formal categorisation.

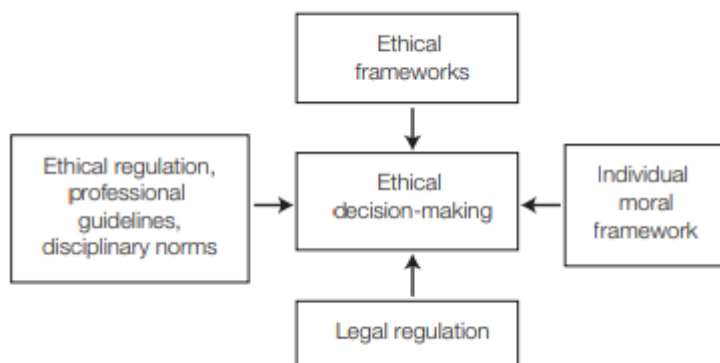
Once all the data in the data set had been coded, the researcher began searching for themes. In addition to the data, the researcher included a long list of codes that were developed to make sense of it and to gain insights from it (Appendix D). In addition to describing how participants were selected and data collected, data analysts should provide appropriate reflections on bias or conflicts of interest (Meyrick, 2006).

4.6 Research Ethics

Ethical considerations were integral to every stage of this study from gaining access and collecting data to analysis, reporting, and dissemination. The interpretivist, inductive nature of this work required particular attention to researcher reflexivity and the management of insider–outsider dynamics. Ethics

plays a vital role in academic research. As Fisher and Anushko (2008) point out, academic institutions, governmental bodies, and the public are increasingly focusing on ethical issues in research. Presently, researchers face a notably heightened level of ethical scrutiny compared to previous generations, necessitating a greater burden of responsibility in adequately addressing ethical issues (Bell, Bryman & Harley, 2019). Given this context, the ethical considerations for this research needed to be understood. To begin thinking about ethics, one must consider how morals, ethics, ethical approaches, ethical frameworks, ethical regulation, and legal regulation overlap and differ. This is outlined in Figure 2 and will form the discussion in the next section.

Figure 2: Factors shaping ethical decision-making in research



- Adopted from Wiles (2013)

The diagram illustrates ethical decision-making as a process influenced by four key factors: ethical frameworks, legal regulations, professional guidelines, and individual moral values. This model directly relates to the implementation of the FIFA Guardians programme, which ensures child safeguarding in football. Ethical frameworks guide the programme's principles, aligning with international child protection standards. Regulations, professional guidelines, and disciplinary norms set by FIFA establish mandatory safeguarding policies that member associations must follow. Legal regulations ensure compliance with national and international child protection laws. Finally, the success of FIFA Guardians depends on individuals, including coaches, officials, and players, embracing their moral responsibility to safeguard children. Effective implementation of the programme requires integrating these elements to create a strong ethical culture within football.

According to Gregory (2003) moral outlooks direct our behaviour based on what we believe is right and wrong. Despite this, the specific moral beliefs held by individuals are invariably shaped by their experiences and interactions. Although there is considerable disagreement about how moral principles apply to circumstances and contexts, society has largely agreed on some specific moral principles about right and wrong (such as justice and fairness). To conduct ethical research, therefore, researchers must engage in moral debate about right and wrong and researchers use ethical principles established by the research community to accomplish this. A researcher's view of ethics in research and their own moral perspective inform the specific ethical issues they identify in their research. The ethical principles outlined in professional ethical regulations and different books on the topic provide a framework for thinking about and managing these topics.

To introduce the research to participants in this study, it was important to state that the researcher was working within FIFA. However, reminding participants that data will be anonymised and nothing what is said can be linked to them personally was one way, for example, of reducing the ethical issues that could arise from such research. This transparency is essential to avoid any participant perceiving this association as a potential conflict of interest. In addition, transparency and truthfulness will enhance the research process and its credibility (University Research ethics committee,2017). Research aims and background should be clearly stated on an information sheet for any participant, leading to informed consent. Data analysis, interpretation, and reporting should not be conducted by non-academic interests, suggest Fisher and Anushko (2008).

In conducting semi-structured interviews with Safeguarding managers with of diverse backgrounds and experience levels, the author underscores the importance of adhering to key ethical principles, including:

- Beneficence: promoting positive outcomes
- Non-Maleficence: avoiding harm
- Integrity: ensuring scientific rigor
- Informed Consent: providing sufficient information on research aims, methods, and potential risks to participants

- Confidentiality and Anonymity: complying with data protection laws
- Independence and Impartiality: maintaining honesty from research inception to publication

These principles serve as guiding lights throughout the research process. Ethical considerations hold paramount importance throughout all stages of the research process and must be addressed from the project's outset. Thus, the research plan should encompass substantial considerations of ethical principles. The research project can be segmented into various cycles, each with its own specific ethical issues.

Notably:

- Formulating and clarifying the research topic involves recognising responsibilities towards participants and upholding integrity, fairness, and open-mindedness.
- Designing research and gaining access entails respecting participants' right to give informed consent and ensuring their privacy.
- Collecting data requires safeguarding confidentiality, anonymity, and participants' right to withdraw.
- Processing and storing data necessitates maintaining objectivity and securing personal data.
- Analysing data and reporting findings mandates avoiding harm and adhering to agreed consent terms (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019).

Doctoral students at Sheffield Hallam University are expected to follow a set of policies and procedures to ensure that their research complies with ethical standards. SHU has a strong focus on human participants as part of its guiding regulations. The most critical values to be followed in projects involving human participants are “‘doing positive good’, ‘doing no harm’, Integrity, Informed Consent, Confidentiality/Anonymity, Impartiality” (University Research ethics committee, 2017, p. 2).

To gain access to experts, the researcher leveraged a network of personal business contacts and external contacts within a specific area of the subject. As a practical matter, anonymity meant removing information that could identify research participants (such as name, nationality, ethnicity, place of residence,

and occupation) from the final research results. The researcher first decided what information should be anonymised and who should be anonymised.

In the early stages of the research, all interviews and other sources of data referring to individuals were anonymised. As a common strategy of anonymisation, the use of pseudonyms was employed with caution. According to Corden and Sainsbury (2006), characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, faith, class, location, and age can be conveyed through pseudonyms. Depending on the reader, different assumptions might be made, potentially contrary to the author's intentions. As a result, interviewees expressed their views, which were not necessarily reflective of the views of their affiliated organisations.

4.6.1 Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

As an employee of FIFA, the researcher occupied an emic, or insider position, within the organisational context under investigation. This positionality brought both advantages and challenges that required careful reflexive management throughout the research process. From an interpretivist perspective, the insider role offered several benefits. It enabled access to key participants within Member Associations (MAs) who might otherwise have been difficult to reach, facilitating trust and rapport during interviews. The researcher's professional familiarity with safeguarding frameworks and football governance structures also allowed for more contextually informed questioning and nuanced interpretation of responses. This insider knowledge enriched the quality and depth of data collection, ensuring that the study captured the complex organisational realities of safeguarding implementation across different cultural and administrative settings.

However, the insider position also introduced several limitations and ethical considerations. Participants may have perceived the researcher as representing FIFA's institutional authority, potentially leading to social desirability bias that is, a tendency to present their MA's safeguarding work more favourably. To mitigate this, the researcher explicitly clarified their independent academic role at the outset of each interview and assured participants that all data would be anonymised and analysed confidentially. Additionally, participants were reminded that no information would be shared with FIFA in a professional capacity and that their identities would remain protected. A further limitation

concerned the risk of interpretive bias the potential for the researcher's prior experience and professional values to influence how data were coded and analysed. This was addressed through reflexive journaling and supervisory triangulation: analytic memos were used to document emerging thoughts, feelings, and assumptions after each interview, and these reflections were discussed with academic supervisors to challenge and refine interpretations. This process helped ensure that the data analysis remained grounded in participants' lived experiences rather than the researcher's professional preconceptions.

From an axiological standpoint, acknowledging the researcher's values and positionality is integral to the interpretivist paradigm. The researcher's commitment to safeguarding in football inevitably shaped the lens through which the data were viewed; however, by embracing reflexivity rather than seeking to eliminate subjectivity, the study aligns with the view that meaning is co-constructed between researcher and participant.

In summary, the insider position enhanced access, contextual insight, and credibility, but also demanded heightened ethical vigilance and reflexive awareness. Recognising these dual dimensions not only strengthens the transparency and rigour of the research but also situates the study authentically within its interpretivist framework where understanding arises through interaction, empathy, and critical self-awareness.

4.7 Chapter 4 Summary

This chapter outlines the research methodology used in the study, detailing the rationale behind the chosen methods and how the research questions were operationalized through systematic data collection. It begins by discussing the philosophical foundation of the research, emphasising how the selected research philosophy shaped methodological choices. The chapter then explores the research design, including the data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and strategies for ensuring validity and reliability. Additionally, ethical considerations are addressed, focusing on data protection, participant anonymity, and informed consent to ensure the research was conducted with integrity. The chapter highlights the importance of research philosophy as the guiding principle that influences methodological decisions, as suggested by

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019). By establishing a clear methodological framework, this chapter provides transparency in how the study was conducted, ensuring rigor and credibility in its findings.

Chapter 5 Results and Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the findings of the interviews and uses Elias' Game Models as a concept to explain how the dynamics of power, interdependencies, and social processes impact the safeguarding ecosystem in football, with particular emphasis on the FIFA Guardians safeguarding model and those charged with implementing it. The chapter commences with an overview of the significance placed on safeguarding within the different MAs, followed by an examination of the way in which various demographic factors influence safeguarding practices. Together, these two topics set a crucial context for understanding the remaining findings. That is to say, one of the crucial findings of this work is that it is hard to understand the implementation of FIFA Guardians without first appreciating the ways in which the size of the MA and cultural vary across different areas of the world.

Once the demographic elements of the MAs are understood, the chapter then delves into the practical ramifications of FIFA Guardians implementation 'on the ground', shedding light on the intricate power dynamics that shape safeguarding policies and practices for those working in MAs. Because the context is such a crucial prerequisite for understanding the implementation, this chapter is structured in two specific parts. The first part focuses on the results that illuminate what was happening in MAs. This part, for example, includes topics such as safeguarding practices and activities undertaken by MAs. The second part of the chapter then draws on the data that helps to explain why these issues occur. In this part, areas examined include the significance of safeguarding in football and the social and cultural factors affecting the implementation of safeguarding. This approach represents a way of organising the data, but the topics discussed are considered part of the same interconnected processes that intertwine daily in the lives of those working in MAs.

The chapter begins with an exploration of **Global Variations in Safeguarding Definitions and Practices**, highlighting how different countries and regions define and approach safeguarding. This set the stage for understanding the diverse landscape of safeguarding efforts worldwide. Next, the research

addresses **Challenges in Timely Policy Implementation**, identifying the obstacles that MAs encountered when attempting to enforce safeguarding policies promptly and effectively. Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing strategies to overcome them.

The Safeguarding Department Structure within MAs is examined to reveal how different organisations are structured to address safeguarding. This section sheds light on the importance of having a clear and well-understood structure for managing safeguarding issues. It then discusses **Strategies for Implementing and Sustaining Safeguarding Practices**, focusing on the approaches and frameworks MAs use to ensure ongoing safeguarding efforts. This includes both initial implementation and long-term maintenance of safeguarding policies.

Collaborative Training and Support Approaches are explored to understand how MAs leveraged collaboration to provide effective training and support for safeguarding. This section highlights the benefits of working together and sharing resources. The role of **Enhancing Safeguarding Through External Partnerships** is examined, demonstrating how partnerships with external organisations strengthen safeguarding initiatives and provide additional resources and expertise.

The section **Addressing Reporting Mechanisms and Capacity Constraints** focuses on the systems in place for reporting safeguarding issues and the capacity challenges MAs face. This is vital for ensuring that safeguarding concerns are addressed promptly and effectively. **Protocols for Reporting Safeguarding Cases** detail the guidelines and procedures that MAs follow to handle safeguarding reports, ensuring a consistent and thorough approach.

Efforts to **Raise Awareness and Ensure Accessibility** are discussed to highlight how MAs work to increase understanding and accessibility of safeguarding practices among their members and stakeholders. The role of the **FIFA Guardians in Safeguarding** is analysed to understand how this initiative supports and enhances safeguarding efforts within MAs.

The chapter also examines the **Impact of Organisational Size on Safeguarding**, exploring how the size of an organisation influences its ability to implement effective safeguarding practices. Finally, **Resource Allocation:**

Finance, Structure, and Personnel is considered to understand how the availability of resources affected safeguarding efforts. This includes financial resources, organisational structure, and personnel dedicated to safeguarding.

The findings presented in this chapter are interpreted through an Elias' Game Models, introduced in Chapter 3. The model provides a framework for understanding safeguarding implementation as a dynamic and relational process shaped by interdependent actors, uneven power distributions, and evolving institutional relationships. In this study, the 'game' of safeguarding is played across multiple levels, including FIFA, Member Associations, and safeguarding practitioners, each operating with differing degrees of authority, resources, and dependency. The analysis that follows highlights how the empirical findings relate to specific elements of the Game Models, while also demonstrating how these elements interact to shape safeguarding outcomes across the system as a whole.

5.2 Global Variations in Safeguarding Definitions and Practices

This section synthesises how safeguarding is understood and defined across different Member Associations, highlighting how cultural, social, and economic contexts shape divergent interpretations of safeguarding in practice.

Perhaps one of the most important findings of this study, and an important caveat for interpreting the other results of the investigation is that, while the ideas underpinning the concept of safeguarding are universally recognised as essential for protecting vulnerable individuals, the ways in which they are implemented vary significantly across different countries. These variations appear to stem from, among other things, cultural, social, and economic differences that shape each nation's approach to safeguarding. The concept of safeguarding is not understood by everyone in the same way, which is why there is no universal definition of safeguarding globally; therefore, data are presented that illustrates the variations in this concept.

The first example comes from MA20, where safeguarding is seen primarily as preventive actions aimed at promoting the wellbeing of children, youth, women, and vulnerable adults, especially in the context of sports. The focus is on internal parties ensuring safety from harm, abuse, and exploitation. This is contrasted with child protection, which involves external parties and is a reactive response

to specific concerns for children at risk or suffering from harm. The participant from MA20 claimed:

“Safeguarding are preventive actions taken to promote the wellbeing of children, youth, women, and vulnerable adults to ensure that they are safe from harm abuse and exploitation when involved in sport. Safeguarding involves mainly internal parties. Child Protection Action taken in response to a specific concern for a child who is at risk or suffering from harm. These may involve external parties” MA20

According to MA27, safeguarding and child protection are understood within the constraints of cultural conservatism. Traditionally, the child protection laws used by MA27 emphasise the physical and psychological aspects of wellbeing, with little discussion of sexuality. This is a good example of the way in which the culture of a country shapes the ideas around safeguarding. The concept of safeguarding as a proactive measure that includes sexual safety is relatively new and not widely embraced due to cultural sensitivities. This was clear in this extract taken from the interview with MA27:

“I think I have mentioned it in my presentation because normally for child protection, our country have this kind of laws. For child protection, it's more focused on the physical and, like, psychological, part. But, in the conservative country such like [country name], we didn't talk much about, sexuality, aspect. So as regarding what I'd say is a very new, very brand new concept for me because it's, not only focused on the physical part and the psychological part, but also mentioned the sexual impact, which, which people in [country name] really don't talk don't like to talk about them.” MA27

Then there is an example from MA24, which highlights that the distinction between safeguarding and child protection is clear yet the two can be interconnected. Safeguarding is viewed as a proactive step to ensure the overall well-being of children, involving the identification and prevention of potential risks like abuse, neglect, trafficking, and exploitation. The terms child protection and safeguarding are often conflated and used interchangeably, but many have argued they are not the same (see for example, Chambers, Cantrell & Booth,

2021). One of the findings from this research, however, is that this is not the reality for those working in this space. The distinction between them is portrayed as clear yet interconnected. Safeguarding is viewed as a proactive step to ensure overall well-being, involving the identification and prevention of potential risks such as abuse, neglect, trafficking, and exploitation. Safeguarding also extends to protecting vulnerable adults and minority groups, including LGBTQ+ individuals. On the other hand, child protection specifically addresses actions taken in response to instances where a child is suffering or likely to suffer significant harm (Chambers, Cantrell & Booth, 2021). Child protection, conversely, is a reactive measure addressing specific concerns for children at risk. This dual approach highlights a comprehensive system of preventive and responsive actions to protect children. The quote from MA24 highlights the important distinction between child safeguarding and child protection in football. For them, safeguarding focuses on preventing harm through proactive measures, while child protection involves responding to specific incidents where a child is at risk. This difference is key to understanding the varied interpretations and applications of these concepts across different contexts in sport.

“Child safeguarding means to identify and address any risks, in order to prevent any kind of harm or abuse from happening such as physical, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect, trafficking, and exploitation. This includes having appropriate systems in place in order to address and respond to concerns. Child protection is action taken in response to a specific concern for a child or children who may be suffering or is/are at risk of suffering harm or abuse.” MA24

But this view is not consistent across the different MAs in the study. As can be seen from the next quote, MA9 defines safeguarding as a proactive set of actions to prevent harm or potential risks of abuse, while child protection is viewed as the response to concerns and instances of abuse. This data highlights the wide range of different definitions of safeguarding that exist.

“Safeguarding to me is a wider context compared to child protection and it’s always a step forward in ensuring the child benefit as a whole.” MA9

Interestingly, MA2 used a metaphor to try and illustrate the relationship between safeguarding and child protection. They described safeguarding as the technician, meaning hands-on, practical aspect of directly addressing immediate risks and concerns. Child protection, however, is the 'engineer'. In this regard, MA2 saw child protection as the strategic, problem-solving role that designs and oversees the systems and frameworks needed to ensure long-term safety and security for vulnerable individuals. This analogy illustrates the complementary roles of safeguarding and child protection in protecting vulnerable individuals.

“Child protection is the engineer of a preventive and responsive system supported by a comprehensive foundation of knowledge, necessary legislation, policies, response systems, and other components to enforce its effective implementation of protecting the vulnerable. Safeguarding, on the other hand is the technician, specialized and licensed like the pilot that uses this already invented system with knowledge and a strong focus on preventative measures.” MA2

MA19 views safeguarding as a system designed to protect individuals from harm, emphasising preventive measures. Child protection is specifically focused on safeguarding children from various types of abuse, indicating a clear yet connected distinction between general safeguarding and targeted child protection efforts.

“Safeguarding is the process that protects from harm within certain measures at place, it is the system, while child protection is the safeguarding of children from certain types of abuses.” MA19

In MA26, safeguarding is considered a proactive approach to create safe and supportive environments for children and adults at risk. This includes implementing safety policies, providing education on abuse prevention, and fostering a culture of respect and empathy.

“Safeguarding is a proactive approach that focuses on creating safe and supportive environments for children and adults at risk, this can include implementing policies and procedures that promote safety, providing education and training on recognising and preventing abuse, and fostering a culture of respect and empathy, It is also important to empower

individuals to protect themselves from abuse by providing resources and support services, by working together as a community, we can create a safer and healthier environment for all children and adults at risk. Child protection focuses on responding to specific instances of harm or abuse, while safeguarding takes a broader approach by promoting prevention, creating safe environments, and supporting the overall welfare of children. Child protection is a vital component of safeguarding, but safeguarding encompasses a wider range of measures that aim to create a culture of safety and well-being for children” MA26

In conclusion, the lack of a uniform definition of safeguarding within MAs inevitably leads to varied implementations across different regions. As the understanding of safeguarding differs significantly on the ground in each area, it becomes clear that standardised implementation across borders is impractical. Each region faces unique challenges and cultural contexts that influence how safeguarding policies are interpreted and applied. Given these complexities, it is essential to recognise that effective safeguarding practices must be adaptable to the specific needs and circumstances of each region. This requires not only an understanding of the local context but also a willingness to engage with and respect the unique perspectives of those involved. Tailoring safeguarding strategies to fit these diverse environments ensures that the policies are relevant and effective, thereby enhancing their ability to protect vulnerable individuals. Moreover, the dynamic nature of societal challenges means that safeguarding practices must be continuously reviewed and adapted to respond to emerging issues and changing conditions.

Fostering effective safeguarding practices requires acknowledging and respecting these diverse perspectives, tailoring strategies accordingly, and continuously adapting approaches to ensure the protection and wellbeing of all vulnerable individuals within sports and beyond (Dart, 2021). For this reason, the next paragraph goes into the challenges in the safeguarding department structure.

5.2.1 Safeguarding Department Structure

It became clear from the research that the structure of the safeguarding department, or sometimes where it sits in the structure of the MA, can place it in a division that may not fully represent its importance for those who work within it. The placement of the safeguarding responsibilities within the activity and development department may sometimes lead to challenges in ensuring that child safeguarding and related issues receive adequate attention and resources. As an example, one participant who worked for MA7 said:

“I am working in the activity and the development department. And in that department, we have four units. And my unit is called club and activity. We work with club development, leaders, insight, futsal, referees, Fair play, inclusion, child safeguarding, sustainability etc. We are eight people in my unit and we have, three other units in the department, who are working with, coach and player development, international work and facilities/stadiums.” MA7

This finding reflects broader concerns raised in the safeguarding literature regarding the organisational positioning of safeguarding within sport federations. Research by Hartill and Lang (2014) highlights that safeguarding responsibilities are frequently marginalised within organisational structures, often embedded within multi-functional departments and assigned to under-resourced teams with limited decision-making authority. Similarly, Hartmann-Tews et al. (2020) demonstrate that when safeguarding roles lack formal commissioning power or clear structural integration, prevention efforts tend to remain reactive rather than strategically embedded within organisational governance.

Interpreted in this context, the experience described by MA7 illustrates not simply an isolated organisational arrangement, but a recurring structural pattern in which safeguarding is recognised in principle yet positioned alongside multiple competing priorities. This organisational placement helps explain why safeguarding departments within some Member Associations struggle to influence broader strategic decision-making, despite formal policy commitments and stated organisational support.

Despite operating within different structures, those working in associations underscore the importance of clear organisational roles and direct reporting lines to ensure effective management and implementation of their respective responsibilities. Here one participant claimed:

“We are organised in at the five different departments and the Football Social Responsibility (FSR) department is part of the organisation and administration department at the Country name federation, but we are directly, informing our general secretary.” MA4

Taken together, the findings in this section reveal that safeguarding structures across Member Associations are shaped less by policy design and more by organisational capacity and governance positioning. While safeguarding departments exist in most MAs, their effectiveness is contingent on structural authority, access to resources, and leadership support. These patterns suggest that safeguarding implementation is not random but systematically shaped by organisational context, providing a foundation for the explanatory analysis that follows.

5.2.2 The Need for Mandatory Safeguarding Policies Across Member Associations

Other challenges were raised in this study such as the need for FIFA to adopt mandatory safeguarding policies by its 211 MAs. Without this mandate, MAs do not feel the weight of consequences if they do not implement these policies as thoroughly as they should. With other priorities often taking precedence for MAs, safeguarding is not treated with the seriousness it warrants.

“Then FIFA followed, and I went and I said, you have to mandate this. We can't, none of us, no safeguarding officer cannot spend the energy and the time to try to justify their exist. You know, if we created something called safeguarding, then it should be mandated so that everybody knows that there's no way out of this. It's not a choice. I mean, ethics in football comes with every federation [and we] should know that football is just not technical, tactical and physical. So, FIFA in essence, started a beautiful programme and so did UEFA, but they did big mistake. They didn't mandate it.” MA2

Being part of the same confederation does not mitigate the issue created by non-mandated programmes for many MAs.

“I think the problem with the child protection in every federation or also in FIFA is that it's not mandatory, you know. So, it's always, you know, if people do have time to implement it, to have open eyes. I guess if it will be mandatory, the things would be maybe somewhere a little bit more different.” MA6

In the context of the quote, the lack of mandatory regulation means that implementation is left to individual discretion, which can lead to inconsistencies and inadequate safeguarding. Making child protection mandatory could potentially formalize these practices, helping to ensure they are more uniformly applied and adhered to. This approach aligns with the broader theme of how structured regulations might contribute to more civilized and orderly social conduct. The fact that child protection is not currently mandatory reflects Elias' idea of societal norms and regulations evolving over time.

This inconsistency can lead to varying levels of commitment and implementation, which Elias would view as reflective of incomplete social integration and regulatory frameworks (Elias & Dunning, 2010). Without a universal mandate, different sports federations may implement child protection measures to different extents, which can lead to varying levels of commitment and effectiveness. According to Elias, this reflects the ongoing process of social development where norms and regulations are still in the process of being fully established and integrated across different sectors (Elias & Dunning, 2010). Elias argues that power structures within institutions influence the formation and enforcement of rules (Van Kriken, 2018). In the context of sports federations, the absence of mandatory child protection policies may reflect power struggles or differing priorities among MAs, impacting the uniformity and effectiveness of safeguarding measures. Furthermore, Elias' theory of "figural sociology" emphasises interconnectedness and interdependence within social groups. Applied here, the data suggests that despite being part of the same confederation (such as FIFA), MAs may operate semi-autonomously regarding child protection policies.

This decentralised approach can create challenges in achieving consistent standards and coordination across a global organisation like FIFA, echoing Elias' insights into the complexities of societal interdependencies and power dynamics.

5.2.3 Challenges in Timely Policy Implementation

Another smaller finding that was not universal to all MAs from this research is that the timely implementation of safeguarding policies is not always a top priority for some MAs. For example, at MA2, issues arise if an issue follows the tournament schedule, which can lead to delays in crucial safeguarding policy adoption. One key observation is the consistent struggle in prioritising the implementation of safeguarding policies. The revelation that timing often aligns with the technical priorities of MA, such as tournament preparation, talent development, and infrastructure upgrades, signifies a potential unintended consequence. This could imply that the urgency of safeguarding policies is not being recognised independent of tournaments, training, and other technical priorities. The delay in policy adoption due to these different priorities could jeopardize the safety of children involved in sports activities.

"Football's structure may not consider children to be a priority amongst so many technical targets just like most other countries that have competitive sports. You know, and if they win, they're there. If they don't win, they're out. So, you know, their priority is not gonna be safeguarding and this is why it should be supported. And all these issues should be converged."

MA2

On a similar note, MA11 suggested:

"While management is generally supportive, there may be challenges in spreading awareness at the national level due to competing priorities and limited resources." MA11

This indicates a structural issue where financial constraints and a lack of perceived importance are hindering progress. Addressing these issues could involve advocating for increased financial resources or budget allocation and emphasising the crucial role of safeguarding in creating a safe sports environment. This aligns with Elias' (1978) argument that organisational

structures and interdependencies shape decision-making processes, often prioritising technical and competitive goals over social responsibilities like child protection.

5.2.4 Strategies for Implementing and Sustaining Safeguarding Practices

Safeguarding policies do not implement themselves; it requires the collective effort of the entire community. This is a theme that came from several of the interviews. Among other groups, coaches, parents, and all MAs are encouraged by MAs to engage in these discussions and practices, setting an example for everyone. For example, MA7 suggested:

“We work two ways preventive and react. Train the focus the board, um, To share the code conduct to get the to with their players, parents to which, in 2023 gets digital. To get coaches and obviously, of course, and the other way where we, and cases and we, either on my level on or the regions where I, support them or take, to them to.” MA7

MA7 employs an approach to safeguarding that emphasises training the board to digitally disseminate codes of conduct to players and parents, alongside providing regional support for handling cases as they arise. In contrast, MA9 demonstrates a structured approach with established policies such as a child protection policy and a code of conduct. They also engage community members through safeguarding training sessions, ensuring the thorough implementation and understanding of their safeguarding initiatives across their organisation.

“We have a child protection policy, code of conduct, and an ethics committee... Members of the community are invited to attend safeguarding training sessions.” MA9

A collective approach to safeguarding could be beneficial on a global scale, as it might encourage stronger and more consistent implementation across different regions. Involving a diverse range of stakeholders - such as coaches, parents, local authorities, and international organisations - could make the process more inclusive and comprehensive (Elias, 2000).

5.2.5 Involving Internal Staff and Key Stakeholders

This section explores the importance of engaging all stakeholders in safeguarding, highlighting how the success or failure of implementation depends on their active participation. This also creates networks of interdependence between different groups, which is central to Elias' conceptualization of Game Models (Elias, 1978). There is evidence of how the differential power balances between groups impacts on the implementation of safeguarding on the ground. Take for example that in certain MAs, involvement and training in safeguarding may be voluntary, while in others, it may be mandatory. Similarly, as is shown from the discussion below with MA26, many MAs involve the end users in discussions about safeguarding.

"At that time I started by conducting focus group discussions with the players, focus group discussions with the trainers, with the staff members, club members, administrators with the managers to gather information. We moved from that point to prepare the policy, review it another thing, we established the Steering Group committee so we can review all the documents step by step. You know it's a baby step." MA26

Another example of stakeholder involvement is that at certain MAs the attention was directed at the grassroots, ensuring that each club appoints a responsible individual who undergoes training on this subject to maintain consistency throughout the federation.

"[Country Name] federation child protection officer can devote 100% to this area... Each club has a competent child protection officer... A clear and understandable scheme for dealing with cases... A consistent training system in this field has been made for the clubs." MA10

Yet, it is evident that individuals recognise the necessity for a stable structure within the department to ensure its continued operation and functionality in the event of one person's departure.

"We need a much more robust structure and strategy in order to keep it alive and proactive even if the person is gone." MA28

MA 10's emphasis on dedicated child protection officers, clear protocols, and consistent training aligns with Elias' (1978) concept of establishing structured roles and procedures during the establishment phase of an organisation. Societies and organisations, though different in scale and purpose, share similarities in how they shape behaviour and structure interactions among their members. Both societies and organisations influence behaviour, with societies using a combination of formal laws and informal norms, while organisations rely on formal structures like hierarchies and procedures. Despite these differences, both systems evolve over time, adapting their frameworks in response to changes, though organisations typically have the capacity to adapt more quickly.

5.2.6 Collaborative Training and Support Approaches

In numerous federations, it was evident that football relies heavily on the support of volunteers for its operations around safeguarding. These volunteers, who often work directly with children, must undergo training akin to that of official staff members within any MA. For example, in MA16, they said:

“And so we have like maybe 70,000 volunteer coaches working on our pitches, so that's a just we are happy that they're there. And Save Sports and Child Safeguard is one of the topics within this programme as well as tactical and fundamental football skills, training sets that you can check to get to improve of training” MA 16

MA7 also highlights the importance of training and supporting volunteer coaches, with a particular focus on child safeguarding and skill development, emphasising collaborative efforts to ensure that coaches are equipped to create both safe and effective sports environments.

“Together with Save the Children [country name] we have developed a course to educate our coaches and volunteers on how to behave, discuss dilemmas, what they have to do if anything happens etc. And we are all in a process to build this course, digital so they can reach more coaches and more volunteers to get through the course base.” MA7

The implementation of safeguarding measures in the education programmes for volunteer coaches by MAs 16 and 7 illustrates both their commitment to child

protection as well as their distinct approaches. According to Wicker, Swierzy, and Breuer (2018), people remain willing to volunteer even without compensation. This willingness is especially crucial for volunteers at the beginning of their work, as it highlights the need for timely training and support in areas such as child safeguarding.

Providing this guidance from the outset ensures that volunteers are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to create safe environments for the children they serve.

“It's one game show, I guess. It's you know, I got some help from people from outside, but it's like helping. Even I have to note in the department, I volunteer. I'm volunteering in the department. It's me alone.” MA23

Their probit model results indicate that both the current voluntary workload and potential increases in voluntary working hours are positively linked to the willingness to volunteer, suggesting that volunteering is a stable construct. This stability in volunteer behaviour highlights the importance of understanding how existing engagement levels influence future willingness, which can inform strategies for maintaining and boosting volunteer participation.

There is, however, another side to the study regarding volunteering. Lang and Hartill (2015) highlight a significant issue in sports organisations regarding the assurance of coach quality, which presents a risk of child abuse. In addressing the complexities of volunteer management within MAs, several key perspectives highlight both the challenges and necessary strategies for trying to maintain coaching standards among volunteers. MA5 emphasises the voluntary nature of their workforce, pointing out operational hurdles like capacity and turnover. These insights reflect the ongoing efforts to navigate recruitment practices and safeguarding measures within sports organisations.

“They're volunteering. There's no need to check-in, you know, as it would be the proper recruitment. Additionally, capacity remains a challenge, as many volunteers work without compensation, and turnover can pose continuity issues.” MA5

Meanwhile, MA8 underscores the importance of governmental support in ensuring the safety of young athletes through thorough background checks for

volunteers as an illustration of the interdependent relationships Elias describes in his game models, where no actor (such as an MA) operates in isolation but is shaped by power balances with other actors like governments.

“Our strategy aims to provide assistance to victims while also implementing preventive measures for clubs and volunteers. Government involvement is crucial for background checks on volunteers, ensuring a safer environment for young athletes. With government support, we can verify the criminal backgrounds of coaches and volunteers, a measure that was not consistently implemented before 2018.” MA8

The management of volunteers in the sports industry presents a complex and evolving landscape, which can be understood through Elias’ concept of dynamic figurations networks of interdependent actors whose roles and power balances are constantly negotiated. This is particularly evident in the contrasting approaches of MAs 5 and 8. MA5’s more lenient stance on volunteer oversight reflects not only the practical challenges posed by high volunteer turnover and the logistical complexities of managing unpaid workers (Shin & Kleiner, 2003), but also its relatively weaker position within the broader safeguarding figuration. In contrast, MA8 adopts a more structured and proactive strategy, leveraging its position to implement robust background checks and criminal record verification (Schlesinger et al., 2015). This divergence illustrates how varying power configurations shape institutional responses, with MA8’s approach signalling a greater capacity to influence the safeguarding “game” through preventive measures and stronger regulatory enforcement.

The differences in these approaches can be further understood by examining the broader context of volunteer management in the sports and non-profit sectors. Effective strategies for recruiting and retaining long-term volunteers are essential for the survival of voluntary sport clubs (Schlesinger et al., 2015), as they grapple with the challenges of bounded rationality and reactive decision-making in their volunteer recruitment processes. Additionally, the management of unpaid volunteers requires a nuanced understanding of volunteer motivations and the different types of volunteers, ranging from spot volunteers to more formal, long-term commitments (Shin & Kleiner, 2003). The implications of these contrasting approaches extend beyond the immediate concerns of volunteer management,

as they highlight the delicate balance between practical considerations and safeguarding priorities in the football industry. As voluntary sports organisations navigate this landscape, they must strive to develop holistic volunteer management strategies that address both the logistical challenges and the critical need for athlete safety and programme continuity.

While certain MAs may establish robust safeguarding focal points, the high turnover of locally employed personnel and coaches in some sub-regions reflects the unstable nature of power figurations at the grassroots level. As Elias would suggest, such fluctuations disrupt the ongoing “game” of safeguarding implementation by undermining the informal rules and routines that govern behaviour. Consequently, there is a perpetual need to retrain new personnel to ensure they remain aligned with current safeguarding policies. This constant renegotiation of responsibilities and influence among actors not only hampers continuity but also requires repeated efforts to instil safeguarding as a shared priority especially in contexts where its importance may not yet be fully internalised.

“We have like 21 sub-regions, the sub-regional associations directly. And I think it's in, in both, it's like talking about the subregional associations and, and grass root football first it's hard because the obviously officers in the sub-regions change, so you have new officers and then you, they (have to start often have to start from scratch again, and you have to train them and get them yeah. Set up to do their work.” MA3

In this context, the frequent turnover of safeguarding officers in sub-regional associations presents a significant challenge. Each new officer must be trained from the ground up, which can disrupt continuity and delay effective implementation of programmes. This process of re-training and setting up new officers is crucial to ensure they are prepared to handle their responsibilities effectively.

And a lot of them yeah, find it difficult in the beginning to prioritise and to find the right person to support them in their association as well and then for the DP with the, especially with the youth national teams, it's kind of the same, you have new staff all the time and you need to train everybody

and you need to make sure that everybody has child protection at heart and finds it important enough to find time to address safeguarding with the youth teams as well.” MA3

These challenges are further compounded by the significant disparities in size and resources among regional associations (something that will be expanded on later in the chapter), affecting their ability to address and solve issues effectively.

“I mean, the thing with our for regional association is that they are very different in size. We have some that are just 1 or 2 people and others that are 50. So it's very different how much resources they have to be able to solve.” MA6

In conclusion, the collaborative training and support approaches within football federations underscore the critical role of volunteers actors whose roles in the safeguarding figuration are vital yet often structurally weak. Echoing Elias’ model, the interplay between centralized policy (from FIFA or MAs) and localized implementation (via volunteers and regional staff) highlights the tensions between planned social structures and their practical enactment within evolving power configurations. The emphasis on providing comprehensive training and resources for volunteer coaches ensures they are well-prepared to create safe environments for young athletes. However, the challenges posed by high turnover rates and varying resources among regional associations highlight the need for consistent training and robust safeguarding measures. As Elias’ concept of figurations suggests, this instability produces ongoing shifts in responsibilities and influence, disrupting continuity and requiring repeated efforts to embed safeguarding as a shared and sustained priority across the system.

As federations navigate these complexities, a balanced approach that prioritises both volunteer management and child protection is essential for fostering a safe and supportive sporting landscape. The next section will explore the phased implementation of safeguarding policies in football, highlighting the importance of a strategic and methodical approach. It will discuss how this approach enables MAs to build a solid foundation for safeguarding by first establishing essential policies and infrastructure before gradually introducing additional measures and initiatives.

5.2.7 Phased Implementation of Safeguarding Policies in Football

Few of the participants advocated for an abrupt, high-pressure approach to addressing safeguarding concerns within the realm of football. Instead, one respondent highlighted the importance of a deliberate and strategic progression, suggesting that rather than inundating MAs with a barrage of requirements and expectations prematurely, it is crucial to lay a solid foundation by ensuring that the necessary infrastructure and support mechanisms are in place before introducing additional measures. This emphasis on a phased approach aligns closely with Elias' (1978) notion of long-term social development, where shifts in behaviour and culture occur through gradual, planned recalibrations of power and structure. As Elias (1978) would suggest, safeguarding norms must evolve incrementally, with a recognition that such changes occur within the web of interdependent actors. In this context, the phased method reflects a strategic adaptation, prioritizing the establishment of essential safeguarding policies and procedures before rolling out supplementary initiatives.

“MA28 first steps on the child safeguarding journey, the steps that are planned for the next 4 years are as follows:

- 1. Implemented policy for child and youth protection.*
- 2. Regulations/forms for children and parents in different occasions.*
- 3. Criteria for selection of coaches that will work with youth categories.*
- 4. Introducing training for child and youth protection for coaches who apply for UEFA licenses.*
- 5. Training for child protection for children and parents*
- 6. Cooperation with state institutions and NGOs that are experts on this subject.”*

Next, MA26 also focuses on establishing comprehensive safeguarding measures within football. Together, they highlight a systematic approach to enhancing child safeguarding through clear policies, collaboration, and ongoing evaluation of existing practices to identify areas for improvement.

“Follow that up with FIFA toolkits and FIFA guidelines to know exactly what we are looking for. Forward to achieve. Putting an action plan for the department for myself. Gathering information about the safeguarding measurement that already been there and what we need to establish

more what point exactly need to be developed? In which area we need to develop the policies, the arrangements regarding the child rights and safeguarding.” MA26

According to one MA, effectively advancing safeguarding measures necessitates alignment with FIFA’s toolkits and guidelines. This involves creating a detailed action plan and assessing existing safeguarding measures to identify gaps. It also requires pinpointing areas where policies and arrangements related to child rights and safeguarding need further development.

I followed the guidelines from FIFA the five steps. Identify what kind of children we are dealing with, or we are working with risk assessment. We did the risk assessment in the association with the national teams and the facilities and actually I start by putting gathering the information and start by documenting and putting the policies, guidelines and procedures and prepare the documents. At that time, I started by conducting focus group discussion with the players, focus group discussion with the trainers, with the staff members, club members, administrators with the managers to gather information. We moved from that point to prepare the policy, review it another thing, we established the Steering Group committee so we can review all of the documents step by step. You know it's a baby step.” MA26

The phased approaches to implementing safeguarding policies by MA 28 and MA 26 demonstrate both structured planning and practical execution, with each model highlighting unique focuses and methodologies that together broaden our understanding of safeguarding implementation. MA 28 presents a detailed, multi-year plan with clearly defined, step-by-step actions over the next four years, emphasising the establishment of a child and youth protection policy, creating specific regulations and forms for children and parents, setting criteria for selecting coaches, and providing comprehensive training for both coaches and youth on child protection. This thorough, structured approach ensures not only compliance but also a cultural shift within the organisation towards prioritising child safety.

In line with Elias' concept of long-term social development, the approach reflects gradual, planned recalibrations of power and structure, where shifts in behaviour and culture occur through incremental adaptation. This phased method acknowledges that safeguarding norms must evolve within a network of interdependent actors, and through continuous refinement over time, these norms take root and evolve in ways that align with the specific needs and context of the organisation. This progressive development ensures that the safeguarding framework is both robust and adaptable, enhancing long-term effectiveness.

MA28 also plans to collaborate with state institutions and NGOs, expanding the scope of safeguarding practices through partnerships with external experts, which fosters accountability and keeps their policies aligned with current standards. In contrast, the person at MA26 takes a more flexible approach, focusing on adaptability and responsiveness rather than adhering to a rigid, multi-year timeline. This allows for a responsive safeguarding strategy that can address specific issues as they arise, which is particularly advantageous in dynamic or resource-constrained environments.

Echoing Elias' (1978) theory of power structures and social development, both approaches reflect the shifting power relations within organisations. MA28's structured collaboration with external bodies mirrors Elias' concept of institutionalised power dynamics, where external influences (in this case, state institutions and NGOs) play a critical role in shaping the structure of safeguarding policies. This collaboration ensures accountability and alignment with broader social standards, reinforcing the stability and long-term sustainability of safeguarding practices.

On the other hand, MA26's flexibility and adaptability align with Elias' view on the importance of fluid power configurations. By focusing on responsiveness, MA26 allows for the dynamic recalibration of safeguarding measures in response to emerging needs and challenges, which is crucial in changing social contexts. This approach emphasises evolutionary development within the structure of safeguarding policies, where power and responsibility are continuously renegotiated to meet the evolving demands of the environment.

Together, these two approaches offer complementary methodologies: MA28 provides a model for organisations that benefit from a prescriptive roadmap, reflecting Elias' notion of stable social configurations, while MA26's approach is better suited to organisations needing an adaptable framework, resonating with Elias' view of social systems in flux. Examining both methods enables a wider range of organisations to tailor safeguarding strategies to their specific contexts, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of child protection practices across diverse settings.

Their approach begins with assessing existing safeguarding measures and identifying areas for improvement through risk assessments involving national teams and facilities. They prioritise active stakeholder engagement, conducting focus groups with players, trainers, staff, and administrators to gather input. The process includes policy preparation, review, and validation by a Steering Group committee, ensuring thorough, step-by-step evaluation.

While MA28 follows a broad, long-term strategy with external collaboration, MA26 takes an iterative approach, emphasising stakeholder involvement and adherence to international guidelines. Both strategies demonstrate a strong commitment to safeguarding but differ in execution and scope, each highlighting strengths in policy development.

MA6 focuses on developing a specialized web education tool to introduce safeguarding principles within football. This initiative aims to raise awareness among stakeholders, ensuring everyone understands and implements essential safeguarding practices effectively. In the digital age, web-based tools have become crucial for enhancing education and knowledge dissemination across

“At the moment, we talk about creating our own web education tool to introduce safeguarding in football. That will be directed towards, to the clubs and the leaders in the clubs, but also the children and the parents, something that is very general that introduces safeguarding to everyone getting involved. Because, I mean, for us, it is important to emphasise that that is, something we do together.” MA6

The strategies presented by the various MAs highlight distinct yet complementary approaches to safeguarding, demonstrating a collective dedication to fostering a

culture of safety and accountability. By leveraging both structured frameworks and innovative tools like web education, they promote comprehensive stakeholder engagement and enhance the overall understanding and implementation of safeguarding principles within football organisations.

5.2.8 Enhancing Safeguarding Through External Partnerships

MA2 recognise that partnerships and local agencies and external stakeholders play a crucial role in supporting and facilitating the implementation process. For example, MA2 said:

“While FIFA Guardians provides valuable resources, additional support may be needed in the form of workshops or seminars to enhance understanding and implementation. Collaborating with AFC and UN agencies can further bolster training efforts.” MA2

5.2.9 Addressing Reporting Mechanisms and Capacity Constraints

The data from the interviews pointed to the ways in which reporting mechanisms are the most important way of detecting violence and abuse, and often provide the initial lead or compounding evidence in investigations of any wrongdoing. The power dynamics involved in reporting are crucial: the system offers a channel through which those who hold less formal power (e.g., players, volunteers) can expose abuses of power and advocate for justice. The approach to case management and safeguarding levels differs among MAs. While some associations may not prioritise case management, assuming it does not necessitate specialized trauma informed training and practices and resorting instead to generalisations, others it appears have well-defined, structured processes in place. This variation reflects Elias’ notion of the evolving ‘game’ of social control, where different institutions (in this case, MAs) develop different practices based on their structural and power configurations.

“We also have a reporting system, where everyone who wants tell us about anything they have experienced or seen or something the football activity, on and of the pitch, they can report just either with full name or anonymous. So we have a system that, where people, can use to tell you

about things they, experience in, football that we, don't want to have in football.” MA7

The next quote highlights how both MAs prioritise accessible reporting systems to address concerns in football, emphasising different methods to ensure individuals can share their experiences. Together, these approaches demonstrate a commitment to fostering safe environments in football by encouraging open communication about issues both on and off the pitch.

“We wanted to launch an app for reporting concerns and everything because, When we talk about region, it's very different than a national helpline. Because there can be any regional to free helpline. And just not everyone, not every player, every young person is efficient with sending emails for a reporting. So for making the reporting like system more accessible, we just wanted to make a multilingual app.” MA17

This emphasis on accessible reporting systems can be seen as an effort to reinforce accountability, ensuring that individuals within the football community can raise concerns without fear of reprisal. According to Elias, the spread of responsibility and empowerment of actors within a system can increase social cohesion and stability, as it allows individuals to take part in the process of regulating their environment. Many associations still rely on non-anonymous email forms, which leads individuals to hesitate to report incidents due to concerns about victimisation or exposure. Elias' theory of social control and the regulation of behaviour can be applied here, as the lack of anonymity in reporting systems directly impacts the power dynamics between individuals (especially those who may be victims or whistleblowers) and the institutions responsible for safeguarding. The absence of confidentiality undermines the effectiveness of these systems and can discourage individuals from coming forward, thus allowing harmful behaviour to go unreported and unpunished.

The data suggest that in some MAs, complaints are handled haphazardly, even at the early stages of investigation, with suggestions that the accused might face a lifetime ban. This lack of consistency in responses reflects the informal regulation of behaviour that Elias discusses where norms are not codified or universally enforced, leading to variations in the implementation of rules across

different institutions. When safeguarding procedures are not uniformly applied, the power relations between the individuals and the organisations remain unequal, leaving victims vulnerable to inconsistent outcomes. However, the reliance on clubs to manage these issues independently raises concerns, as there is often no established process or expertise for handling safeguarding matters, nor for supporting victims and whistleblowers. This underscores Elias' concept of the importance of structured social systems where institutions need clearly defined roles, rules, and processes to maintain stability. The absence of a centralised authority or expertise leads to a fragmentation of social control, where the safeguarding system cannot properly function or ensure the safety of participants in the sport.

This lack of oversight is problematic, as it can lead to inconsistent responses and inadequate protection for those involved. From an Eliasian perspective, this represents a failure to develop and formalise the social control mechanisms necessary to safeguard participants. The lack of a formal structure or inadequate procedures for managing these cases demonstrates a weakening of the power structure at the grassroots level, where issues are not sufficiently regulated, leading to an erosion of accountability and inconsistent treatment of safeguarding concerns.

“We have created a flowchart that, the clubs can use. And depending on what kind of things go wrong, I mean, most things can be handled by the club because the club, the board of the club is responsible for what's what's going on in the club. if it's a minor thing, of course, they can handle it. But then we also, in this documentary, emphasise that you could contact your local regional office and the local respect Sports Federation, but also having the contact information to the, Sports Federation and the two people that are working with it, working with safeguard issues there and also in in inform about the whistleblower function and things like that. We can't we don't know if every club has, implemented it or using this flowchart, but it's something we in different, when we have the chance, recommend that” MA6

While MA6 focuses on equipping clubs with structured guidelines and local support networks to address safeguarding issues effectively, MA26 underscores

the importance of implementing clear consequences for misconduct within football, ensuring accountability and upholding standards of behaviour across the sport.

"In terms of football, we draft some punishment for the coach and for the players who broke the code of conduct. Or maybe if they hit the players, if they hurt the players, maybe they get banned for life, or it depends on how brutal it is." MA26

The number of MAs, despite having proper strategies and policies for safeguarding, still face issues with its reporting mechanism. Some coaches bypass the established procedures and go directly to management, who lack expertise in this area. As a result, cases may not be resolved as effectively as they should be, and this practice could deter victims and whistle-blowers from coming forward in the first place.

"At the moment, cases and letters of concern sometimes reach me in questionable ways. Out of habit, clubs go directly to the executive management, who then attempt to solve the cases improperly. Additionally, older trainers (coaches) who come from the [country name] and training methods pose a significant challenge. Training them is a real challenge." MA10

Since some MAs are quite small, their system for reporting cases is directly connected to an external agency specialized in handling such matters. This setup, they argue, provides an objective solution to the issue of reporting. Several MAs have adopted this means of reporting and case management, mainly due to limited resources. However, a specialised external agency can provide independent reporting mechanisms and trauma informed case management, and this is adopted by some MAs. Such an approach may also help to build trust amongst victims and whistle-blowers who might otherwise be afraid to come forward (for example, through fear of not being believed or of retribution for doing so).

"Additionally, we have external organisations dedicated to addressing these issues. Essentially, if an incident occurs, we notify everyone

involved—coaches, parents, players - enabling them to reach out through a 24/7 hotline, email, WhatsApp, or other channels." MA5

This approach is attempting to ensure that all stakeholders are promptly informed and have multiple avenues for seeking support.

"Both we receive so far to put like a policy in place and then, uh, we contacted local organisation more, on the action on the operation. If something is happening, we get in touch with them, the local organisation." MA1

MA5 emphasises a proactive and comprehensive approach by providing multiple channels for stakeholders - coaches, parents, and players - to report incidents and seek support, including a 24-hour-a-day hotline, email, and WhatsApp. This method focuses on ensuring that everyone involved is promptly informed and has various means of communication to address concerns effectively. From an Eliasian perspective, this approach reflects a more developed and structured system of social control where formal mechanisms are in place to ensure consistent and immediate responses to safeguarding issues. The use of multiple reporting channels creates a network of social regulation that helps maintain stability and order within the football environment. By ensuring that participants have access to a range of communication tools, this system reduces power imbalances by offering equal opportunities for all stakeholders to report concerns, regardless of their position within the hierarchy.

MA1, on the other hand, describes a more reactive approach. The focus is on implementing policies and then relying on local organisations to handle incidents as they arise. This approach involves contacting local organisations for operational action when issues occur, indicating a more localized and potentially less immediate response compared to the broader, multi-channel strategy highlighted by MA5. In Elias' terms, this reactive model suggests a less formalised, more fragmented system of control where responsibilities and actions are decentralised. The reliance on local organisations means that the power dynamics between the central authority (MA1) and local actors play a significant role in determining the speed and effectiveness of the response. This system lacks the immediate, structured response mechanisms that MA5 employs, and

therefore may struggle with maintaining control and enforcing consistent norms, which can lead to uneven outcomes across different regions or contexts.

By designing a child safeguarding competition protocol, MA12 emphasises the importance of implementing necessary activities in line with this protocol. This approach highlights the value of establishing policies and collaborating with local organisations to ensure a coordinated response to incidents, effectively managing operations.

“Currently we are working on designing child safeguarding competitions protocol so we can implement all the necessary activities in line with our mentioned protocol. We also, will keep organise seminars and webinars with aim to educate and creating awareness in the region.” MA12

Developing specific protocols for child safeguarding in competitions highlights a proactive approach to integrating safeguarding measures into all aspects of football activities. Regular seminars and webinars are delivered in an attempt to further enhance education and awareness, ensuring continuous improvement and engagement in safeguarding practices. In the following example, it is evident that even though MAs are making efforts to hold regular seminars and webinars, it takes time to initiate safeguarding and achieve full involvement in education offered. Providing training and support to regional associations could help ensure that safeguarding measures are consistently applied across all levels, fostering a cohesive and reliable safeguarding environment.

5.2.10 Strategies and Challenges in Policy Implementation for Child Protection

According to MA22 there is importance of creating a structured approach to policy implementation, including drafting, ratifying policies, and ensuring strategic guidance through designated groups. This sets the groundwork for coordinated action, ensuring that once a policy is in place, it is supported by a strategic plan and appropriate leadership to oversee its success.

“Once the draft is in place, the policy is ratified, then we want to have like the guidance, who do it, it's a test, right? We need to have a group of people who can help guide the project or the programme. And once the

once we have a policy in place, then we'll also have a strategic plan. In 2 different activities that we have under our obligation” MA22

MA10 complements this by explaining how policies and activities are built upon local needs and reinforced by legislation.

“We have based our activities precisely on the basis of need. In addition, our activities are also supported by local legislation. We cooperate with various national institutions: police, local child protection, social insurance board, ministry of justice, ombudsman for child welfare, ministry of social affairs, [country name] Olympic Committee, [country name] Anti-Doping and Sports Ethics Foundation.” MA 10

Elias’ concept of power and social structures is evident here, as the cooperation with national institutions highlights the role of external authority and the multidimensional governance structures that work together to enforce safeguarding practices. The influence of external authorities and legislation points to the dynamic relationship between centralised policies and localised practices in safeguarding efforts.

MA24 brings attention to the gap between policy and practice. Even though child protection laws exist, the real-world implementation is hindered by factors such as a country’s size and inadequate monitoring processes. This exemplifies the difficulties in maintaining control within a large, complex social system, as noted in Elias’ work on the limits of power and the challenges in enforcing norms across vast territories.

“The protection of children everywhere is mentioned and is guided by the books and laws but in reality, far from the desired point and needs a holistic approach to touch this area. Due to the huge size of the country and lack of monitoring process can’t say there is proper control in place.” MA24

These quotes paint a picture of the lifecycle of policy implementation: from drafting and strategic planning (MA22), through cooperation with various national and legal entities (MA10), to the difficulties faced in ensuring comprehensive and effective application in the real world (MA24). These quotes reflect the challenges faced in implementing effective child protection measures,

highlighting the gap between legislative guidance and practical application. It points to the need for a holistic approach and improved monitoring to address the shortcomings and ensure comprehensive protection across large and diverse areas. However, some associations, like MA24, face significant challenges due to the vast size of their country and the lack of an effective monitoring process. They acknowledge that despite being guided by existing laws, there is a considerable gap between policy and practice, necessitating a holistic approach to improve control and implementation. In summary, these MAs highlight a range of strategies and challenges in implementing child safeguarding policies, from collaboration with local and international organisations to education and legislative support, underscoring the complexity and necessity of a multifaceted approach to effectively protect children in sports.

The implementation of safeguarding policies across Member Associations reveals a multifaceted and collaborative approach to addressing child protection issues. MAs employ a range of strategies, including partnerships with external organisations, proactive educational initiatives, and structured implementation processes, to strengthen safeguarding practice. By integrating external expertise, prioritising education, and supporting the practical application of policies, Member Associations seek to address implementation challenges and promote more effective safeguarding outcomes.

These findings reflect wider research on sexual violence prevention in sport, which highlights that safeguarding effectiveness is closely tied to how responsibility and accountability are commissioned and supported within national sport governance structures, rather than the existence of formal policies alone (Nite & Nauright, 2020)

5.3.1 Protocols for reporting Safeguarding Cases

The following section differs from the previous section as it highlights the varied protocols for reporting safeguarding cases, whereas the previous section focused on the analysis of interview data related to child protection measures within organisations. So, where the previous section examined the internal policies and experiences of safeguarding officers, this section demonstrates how organisations use different committees to address violations, including ethical

committees that deal with cases like doping and human rights issues. Additionally, these protocols often involve collaboration with government agencies to ensure proper resolution and accountability in managing such cases. This reflects the complex web of interdependencies described by Elias (2000), where multiple actors and institutions must coordinate their actions within a shared social figurational structure.

A general secretary sits at the top of any MA and it is often claimed, plays a crucial role in the management and administration of a MA. They are responsible for overseeing the smooth operation of the MAs day-to-day activities, including coordinating between different departments, managing communications, and ensuring compliance with regulations. The data indicate that effective communication with the general secretary can facilitate discussions and reporting of safeguarding cases. However, practice in this area can be inconsistent. Some general secretaries may have limited communication channels with safeguarding teams, leading to a lack of collaboration. In contrast, one participant emphasised the importance of close collaboration with organisations active throughout the country, highlighting the potential for improved coordination and support in safeguarding efforts.

“We have very short ways of communication with [the] general secretary... We have these organisations... which are active all over [country name], and we are working together very closely.” MA4

Some MAs address safeguarding issues by leveraging established ethical frameworks within their organisations that are typically used for handling violations such as doping and other integrity matters. They often utilize existing reporting lines and case management systems designed for handling integrity violations in sport to manage these new issues. Such systems almost always fail to provide the specialist services required in cases of violence and abuse, and may well prevent victims and whistle-blowers from coming forward. According to many of the participants it would undoubtedly be beneficial to obtain additional formal training on that matter.

“It's possible that it's end up in my hands. Because they know I'm the Focal social responsibility person and then it makes sense that I'm the child protection officer. In theory, I know how to proceed. That's the

moment where I think I need a bit more training, a more support about that.” MA1

In some instances, a formalized case management system has not yet been established, as some MAs are at the initial stages of their journey. However, this absence of a system complicates matters further, as there is no designated place for reporting.

“Currently, there is no formal reporting mechanism in place due to the absence of a policy. However, once the policy is established, we will follow the guidelines outlined in the FIFA Guardians toolkit, ensuring confidentiality and appropriate handling of concerns.” MA23

Another example of a MA which is preparing to implement a reporting mechanism.

“We are working on case management training with staff, with family council in (country name). They are technical institution in (country name).. We look at them as leaders, we are thinking about case management. We are preparing reporting and responding mechanisms in (country name). We want to have safeguarding line, email, accident report, we designed a complaints box, posters for policy, code of conduct, child rights. That is regarding reporting mechanisms. We have done so through training in induction, we provide people how to report, to whom you must report. How to deal with children if children disclose, what type of behaviour. We prepare a chart that they can follow, steps by steps, what are good practice, where they should go. Regarding responding, we already establish partnerships with child protection department within Family Affairs with police, we are trying to work on side of social support, to know exactly how to deal with a case and to transfer to experts.” MA27

Interestingly, for many of the participants, establishing clear reporting procedures and offering ongoing specialized support and training can effectively address these challenges, such as inconsistent reporting practices, lack of awareness about safeguarding protocols, and insufficient training for staff, and ensure continuity in safeguarding efforts. For example, the following participant claimed:

“We have, like, external, like, organisations which deal with that. So basically, if something happened, we tell all of them, like coaches, parents, players, they can call like a 24 hour 7 hotline, they can send email, WhatsApp, they’re everywhere.” MA5

MA5 is actively enhancing its reporting and responding mechanisms to safeguard individuals involved in football. This includes the development of comprehensive channels such as a safeguarding hotline, email, and incident reporting system. Moreover, the (country name) is forging partnerships with governmental agencies and law enforcement units to ensure that reported cases are addressed with the utmost sensitivity and expertise, and to ensure the earliest involvement of the relevant statutory authorities where a crime has occurred.

“We work more in that, this field I would say, having the foundation and working with the government or having like, you know, basic rules, I think they are already there and it’s really strong. So we only work at like, you know, how can we be more visible, you know, and that, kill the nerve.” MA5

Furthermore, the introduction of governmental agencies and law enforcement units as additional stakeholders adds complexity to the relationships within the safeguarding framework, echoing Elias’ (2000) theory of interdependence among multiple actors. This proactive approach underscores a commitment to prioritising the safety and well-being of all participants within the football community:

“We’re developing comprehensive reporting and responding mechanisms within the (country name), including a safeguarding hotline, email, and incident reporting system. Through partnerships with government agencies and the police, we’re ensuring that cases are handled with sensitivity and expertise.” MA27

Some MAs have collaboration between their organisation and governmental bodies, for example, governmental agencies. A member of staff from MA14 mentions the Ministry's direction on child protection, including a telephone hotline available for children to report issues 24 hours a day. However, MA14 notes a discrepancy in the attention given to safeguarding within the sports realm, suggesting that cases related to sports are not given the same priority or avenue

for reporting as in other contexts, such as the broader community. They attribute this gap partly to cultural factors, where parents may attempt to handle issues directly with coaches rather than through formal channels.

“We work with the ministry of how to say, child protection, But, they have in their, the direction on child protection, and they have, telephone, Then the children can, call 24 hours Any case. But it's not me that we have in this extension. In (country name), in if happen some case or bullying or something, it's happened because, the parents try to, resolve a discussion with coach.” MA14

In conclusion, while some MAs are utilizing established ethical frameworks and reporting systems designed for other integrity issues to address safeguarding concerns, these approaches often lack the specialized support needed for cases involving violence and abuse. This gap can hinder effective reporting and discourage victims and whistle-blowers from coming forward. Many participants have emphasised the importance of additional formal training to address these challenges and enhance safeguarding efforts. The development and implementation of clear reporting procedures, combined with ongoing specialized support, are crucial for ensuring continuity and effectiveness in safeguarding practices. Additionally, overcoming capacity issues and cultural factors is essential for creating a robust and comprehensive safeguarding environment.

5.3.2 Role of FIFA Guardians in Safeguarding

Having outlined some of the specific ways in which Mas implement safeguarding, the role of FIFA Guardians can now be explored in more detail. The data above gives important context to the rest of the debate. For example, systemic challenges of safeguarding in football include inadequate reporting mechanisms and limited specialized training, which hinder effective handling of abuse cases. Additionally, inconsistent implementation of policies, cultural barriers, and resource constraints further complicate efforts to ensure comprehensive and consistent protection for all participants. This study has shown that, and it is important, that any evaluation of FIFA Guardians and how it is implemented is not understood in isolation from these other, largely social, processes (Elias, 2000).

In tackling these systemic challenges, FIFA has sought to address key issues through the FIFA Guardians programme. As a reminder, according to FIFA, this programme represents a concerted effort to establish a global standard for child protection in football. By examining the FIFA Guardians framework, this next section will attempt to assess the effectiveness of the FIFA Guardians programme, exploring its strategies, implementation, and impact on safeguarding children in the realm of football with input from those who are charged with implementing it. To start this process, participants were asked to give their general feelings towards FIFA Guardians. In that regard, when it comes to implementing FIFA Guardians and safeguarding policies, opinions vary among MAs. While most MAs view the programme as valuable, they also recognise that there are areas with room for improvement.

“Parents view about FIFA Guardian is positive because there is no parent who does not want their children to play in a safe environment. Parents believe that the FIFA Guardian is here to protect the children from abuse and other sports related risk.” MA20

The quote below reveals that while there is positivity and support present, resistance persists due to the continued influence of traditional methods within the coaching culture.

“With positivity and support for the change, yes there is a little resistance from a number of old coaches due to their old methods in coaching but still they supported the safeguarding in the end and compline to the changes by signing a code of conduct and attending safeguarding training workshops.” MA26

It is also clear that some suggest that incorporating more topics could enhance their overall experience.

“There is always room for developing things. It must speak a little more football than now. The grasping knowledge of football and its unique dynamics should be apparent perhaps a little more in its content. This makes it acceptable and understood by stakeholders even more. We cannot talk about bullying without acknowledging the rank system in football. It will make it more useful.” MA2

Another example suggested by one MA is additional training that focuses on psychological characteristics.

“One additional module about psychological characteristic of young football players. We are talking all the time about child-oriented approach but we need picture about characteristic of the child on the specific age (which concepts they can understand, which fears they have, what is the attitude towards authorities at that age.” MA28

It appears that MAs at the beginning of their safeguarding journey frequently adopt FIFA Guardians comprehensively, considering it their primary source of knowledge about safeguarding. For example, the following association who are quite developed in their safeguarding policies suggests:

“FIFA is more football oriented and UEFA is more child protection and child rights scoring into, I love them both and I use a mixture. cannot sit down and write a safeguarding system with, without really understanding the ins and outs of football.” MA2

In confederations where safeguarding measures are not yet well-established, many seem to be making every effort to align with the FIFA Guardians programme. For those just beginning their safeguarding journey, FIFA Guardians serves as a crucial reference and starting point. They offer positive feedback on the programme, considering it their initial step in safeguarding. Nevertheless, they perceive potential for further advancement, especially concerning financing mechanisms and in-person training opportunities.

“We've utilized FIFA's Guardian strategy extensively, benefiting from workshops, online courses, and ongoing assistance. However, we see potential for further development, particularly in financing mechanisms and face-to-face training.” MA13

Amid the acknowledgment of the benefits derived from FIFA's Guardian strategy by MA13, the sentiment is echoed by MA23 highlighting the pivotal role the programme plays in providing comprehensive training and resources for safeguarding practitioners.

“The FIFA Guardian programme has been instrumental in providing comprehensive training and resources for safeguarding practitioners. While the courses have been beneficial, more regular engagement and support from FIFA could enhance the programme's effectiveness.” MA23

The requirement for safeguarding programmes and tools in the local language or dialects reflects a recognition that effective communication is essential for widespread comprehension. The implication is that a lack of linguistic alignment can hinder the understanding of safeguarding principles among children, coaches, officials, and other stakeholders. This insight suggests that language customization is crucial for ensuring the accessibility and effectiveness of the FIFA Guardian programme in diverse linguistic contexts. In this regard, the participant from MA9 argued:

“I think the language is a main factor. I would think a lot more children, coaches, officials, etc. would understand safeguarding better if it was explained in our language, or even in their respective dialects in the country as well.” MA9

Another example of a MA where language plays a crucial role in the effective implementation, ensuring that all materials and training are accurately communicated and accessible to everyone involved. This respondent said:

“As for FIFA Guardian, completing the course has provided us with valuable insights, but translating the material into our local language would facilitate better understanding and implementation. We believe that with additional support, we can effectively integrate safeguarding principles into our organisation's practices.” MA21

The acknowledgment that language remains a challenge for those willing to take FIFA Guardians courses highlights a potential obstacle to participation and engagement. This implies that the language barrier may deter individuals from accessing valuable training and resources related to safeguarding, limiting the programme's reach and impact. When asked if there any cultural factors that impact on you implementing FIFA Guardians MA26 responded:

“On a personal level no, but for others the language is still a challenge for other coaches and individuals who are involved in football how are willing to take FIFA guardians courses” MA26

Similarly, the need for continuous improvement is echoed by other associations.

“The FIFA Guardian programme has been invaluable in guiding our efforts to strengthen child safeguarding within [country name] football. While the programme has been beneficial, there is a need for more resources in Arabic and specialized training on case management and investigation techniques.” MA27

The emphasis on language underscores the need for a linguistically inclusive approach to ensure the universal understanding and application of safeguarding policies. Addressing the remaining language barriers will be crucial for the ongoing success of the FIFA Guardians programme. According to this research, MAs whose languages are not supported face challenges in implementing consistent policies, which could potentially lead to gaps in safeguarding measures. To enhance the programme's effectiveness, FIFA could consider adopting inclusive language strategies, including further translations and localized content, to cater to the linguistic diversity among its MAs. There is evidence that this approach would contribute to a more universally accessible and comprehensible safeguarding framework, promoting consistent enforcement and understanding across different linguistic and cultural contexts. Some MAs already do this with some success. For example, one participant who works in MA17 said:

“So I took in their local language, native language so that they could ask question. It was very interactive, it was very good.” MA17

Likewise, there was evidence that not having the material in an accessible form caused issues for people in MAs. Here, one participant discusses this very thing:

“As for FIFA Guardian, completing the course has provided us with valuable insights, but translating the material into our local language would facilitate better understanding and implementation. We believe that

with additional support, we can effectively integrate safeguarding principles into our organisation's practices.” MA21

The answers from MA17 and MA21 underscores that the effective implementation of the FIFA Guardian policy hinges on more than just distributing documents or giving presentations in English.

It requires employees to take extra steps and show determination by translating the FIFA Guardian policy into the local languages of their colleagues. This effort ensures that everyone can understand and engage with the policy thoroughly. The speaker illustrates this by sharing their own experience of conducting sessions in the local language, which made participants feel comfortable asking questions and resulted in highly interactive and positive sessions. This approach emphasises that successful policy implementation depends on clear communication and active involvement, facilitated by using the participants' native language.

One of the key areas where FIFA Guardian falls short is the lack of a comprehensive manual for using the platform, tailored for the various stakeholders involved with children. This gap makes it difficult for users to fully utilize the features of the platform. Additionally, one MA suggested there is a need for a clear timeline for implementation and updates, which is currently missing a module focused on the psychological characteristics of young football players. While there is a constant emphasis on a child-oriented approach, there is a lack of detailed understanding regarding the developmental stages of children, including their cognitive abilities, fears, and attitudes towards authority at different ages. Addressing these issues is crucial to create a more effective and supportive environment for young athletes.

Returning to a quote previously analysed, it is important to emphasise MA28 highlights additional challenges, particularly the lack of a clear manual for stakeholders working with children, the need for a structured timeline, and the importance of incorporating psychological characteristics of young football players into safeguarding efforts.

“Lacking of the small manual for using the platform from different stakeholders that are involved with children. Clear timeline. One

additional module about the psychological characteristic of young football players. We are talking all the time about the child-oriented approach, but we need picture about characteristic of the child on the specific age (which concepts they can understand, which fears they have, what is the attitude towards authorities at that age).” MA28

In conclusion, while the FIFA Guardians programme represents a significant step towards establishing a global standard for child protection in football, its effectiveness is contingent upon addressing several key challenges. The programme’s current limitations, such as inadequate language support and the absence of a comprehensive manual, underscore the need for further refinement. To maximize the impact of FIFA Guardians, it is essential to adopt a more inclusive approach that addresses linguistic diversity and integrates localized content. Additionally, a clearer timeline for implementation and updates, along with a module focusing on the psychological characteristics of young players, would enhance the programme’s overall effectiveness. Importantly, these findings should be understood within the broader social processes and power relations that shape safeguarding in global football. As Elias (2000) argues, systemic change in organisational fields such as sport safeguarding is not achieved through top-down mandates alone but is negotiated within a complex web of interdependencies, traditions, and institutional cultures. The evidence from this study illustrates how safeguarding implementation is influenced by linguistic, cultural, and structural factors that reflect these wider figurations of power and social relations within football. Consequently, for FIFA Guardians to realise its full potential, it must engage more deeply with these contextual dynamics — adopting a more inclusive, locally sensitive, and dialogic approach to safeguarding that acknowledges and works within the realities of its diverse member associations. By tackling these issues, FIFA can strengthen its safeguarding framework, ensuring that more participants benefit from a consistently applied and deeply understood protection system, ultimately fostering a safer environment for children in football across the globe.

5.3.3 Impact of Organisational Size on Safeguarding

The extent to which different Member Associations (MAs) implement safeguarding measures varies significantly. In countries with vast territorial areas

and multiple regional associations, achieving comprehensive safeguarding measures can be challenging. As this MA suggested, implementation is more challenging in bigger territories.

“The policies, is easy to be prepared. But for the implement, it is much harder because our role is a staff in the football association. We are not actually, like, a police people or legal people. So, for our side and country name is really, really big country. It’s not like magic.” MA26

MA26 highlights the inherent difficulties in implementing safeguarding policies across vast territorial areas with multiple regional associations. They stress that while policy preparation is relatively straightforward, practical implementation is significantly more challenging. This is due to the sheer size of their country and the limited capacity of association staff, who lack enforcement authority akin to police or legal personnel. Conversely, in smaller territories, it is more feasible to oversee the stages of implementation and engage directly with the relevant stakeholders. This was evidenced by the following MA, who claimed education and training is much easier when the MA is of a smaller size.

“You know, [country name], you have to know, it’s a small country. So a 50 50 clubs of [country name] from [country name] with their coaches and with their administrators, and we did a full day, like, a full day seminar about safeguarding and all the principles and what she do.” MA23

Conversely, MA23 demonstrates that in smaller territories, implementing safeguarding measures is more manageable. The smaller scale allows for more direct oversight and engagement with stakeholders, making it feasible to organise comprehensive educational and training sessions. This MA managed to conduct a full-day seminar covering safeguarding principles with clubs, coaches, and administrators, illustrating the ease of implementation in a more confined area. Conversely, MA23 demonstrates that in smaller territories, implementing safeguarding measures is more manageable. The smaller scale allows for more direct oversight and engagement with stakeholders, which facilitates the coordination and implementation of safeguarding strategies. For example, this MA initiative conducted a full-day seminar focused on safeguarding principles for clubs, coaches, and administrators. The advantage of the smaller territory is that

it provides a more intimate environment for organising comprehensive educational sessions. This setup makes it easier to ensure that all relevant parties are actively involved and can receive tailored training, fostering a stronger commitment to safeguarding practices. The closer proximity of stakeholders in a confined area ensures that the safeguards are well understood and integrated into the day-to-day operations of the clubs and institutions. Additionally, it allows for real-time feedback and adjustments, which can significantly enhance the overall effectiveness of the safeguarding measures.

On the other hand, for larger member associations with multiple regions, it can take significantly more time and resources to cover the broader area. Coordinating training sessions, ensuring that all regions are included, and maintaining consistent quality across the entire territory can present logistical challenges. The larger geographical spread requires more time to engage all stakeholders effectively and to ensure the safeguarding measures are uniformly implemented. In these instances, the process of delivering training may need to be broken down into smaller, region-specific sessions, prolonging the overall timeline.

However, the size of a MA does not necessarily indicate the strength of its safeguarding measures, as economic, cultural, and social factors can significantly influence a MA's situation. For instance, there are cases of strong economic countries with small geographical areas, as well as small countries with good economic statuses. Each MA differs in terms of geographic expanse, economic influence, and social setting. According to MA5, even though they are part of the strongest economic MA in the sample, they still face significant challenges. They lack a sufficient number of people working on key topics and rely heavily on volunteers. This reliance on volunteers, who often experience high turnover, results in difficulties with training and continuity. Many factors need to align to ensure a successful safeguarding story, as it cannot be achieved in isolation. Returning to a quote previously analysed, MA5 highlights the difficulties in maintaining a stable and well-trained workforce, ultimately affecting the consistency and effectiveness of child protection initiatives.

“Additionally, capacity remains a challenge, as many volunteers work without compensation, and turnover can pose continuity issues.” MA5

In the example of MA2 the impact of the area size on the implementation of safeguarding measures becomes apparent, particularly due to the presence of numerous regional associations. Despite the existence of a robust safeguarding plan, the disparities in regional development across the country pose challenges to achieving uniform implementation on the ground.

“In 2015, we adopted a 10-point child protection concept, which was accepted by the board and regional associations. The fluctuation of officers at subregional associations poses challenges in training and prioritisation. It's essential to ensure that safeguarding remains a top priority amid other organisational tasks. Maintaining continuous training and support for staff is crucial to embedding safeguarding practices at all levels.” MA3

In certain MAs, it is evident that the individuals responsible for safeguarding often work alone, balancing multiple responsibilities simultaneously. Some operate without a dedicated team, while others fulfil safeguarding duties alongside their roles in different departments. The absence of a mandated organisational structure within MA makes it challenging to sustain momentum and effectiveness.

“It has to be mandated so that people in football understand they're more technical. That this is not a choice. That this is what they're gonna have to do to be able to continue doing what they're doing in football.” MA2

Frequently, MAs rely solely on one individual to manage safeguarding efforts, which is ultimately unsustainable in the long term. In my sample, only one person per MA was dedicated to safeguarding topics. Additionally, some individuals volunteer their time to address safeguarding concerns within their associations.

“Currently, I am the sole project manager dedicated to child protection, but I collaborate with national volunteers to shape our strategy. In the coming months, I will be joined by another team member to further enhance our efforts.” MA8

The MA8 project manager, currently the sole person dedicated to child protection, collaborates with national volunteers to shape their strategy. They anticipate enhancing their efforts with the addition of a new team member in the coming

months. Similarly, in MA24, the safeguarding department operates with a single person but receives support from other association departments. Despite some misunderstandings about the department's scope, cooperation and assistance are readily available when needed, underscoring the collaborative approach within the organisation.

"While working alone in the safeguarding department, I've received assistance from various departments within the association. Although there's a lack of understanding about the scope of my work, I've found cooperation and support when needed, even though I volunteer in this role." MA24

These insights underscore the need for better recognition of the growing responsibilities within safeguarding roles and the importance of collaboration across departments to address these challenges effectively.

"Thought that people always think we are a small country [country name], and it's okay for one or two people to work on, but we are really busy. After pandemic think everything is going big much faster now, and every topic has its importance." MA4

Meanwhile, MA4 reflects on the challenges faced due to perceptions about being a smaller country. They note an increased pace of developments post-pandemic, highlighting the growing importance of various topics, including child protection in sports. However, in certain MAs, despite the absence of dedicated departments, there is a strong commitment to the protection of children. Through initiatives like the FIFA Guardians programme, these associations are actively striving to implement safeguarding policies on the ground. They serve as commendable examples of proactive engagement in child protection and safeguarding efforts.

"Currently, there is no dedicated safeguarding department within the (Country name federation) However, I've taken on the responsibility of developing a child safeguarding policy based on guidance from FIFA and other local and regional agencies. Once the policy is finalized, the goal is to raise awareness and implement it across various levels of the footballing community." MA23

In certain MAs, individuals are tasked with multiple responsibilities, potentially weakening the implementation of safeguarding measures due to time constraints and limited capacity.

“I am working as a commercial manager... and then the system said that we need a safeguarding policy to be in place... So, like, I am multitasking it. So I'm a safeguarding for profession, and, like, I'm still learning about safeguarding.” MA15

In conclusion, the impact of organisational size on safeguarding within MAs is complex and multifaceted. Larger MAs often struggle with the practical implementation of safeguarding policies due to geographical challenges and limited staffing, while smaller MAs may find it easier to engage directly with stakeholders and organise training initiatives. However, size alone does not determine the effectiveness of safeguarding measures; economic, cultural, and social factors play crucial roles as well. The reliance on volunteers and the presence of individuals juggling multiple responsibilities can further complicate safeguarding efforts, highlighting the need for a more structured approach and clearer mandates within organisations. Ultimately, successful safeguarding requires a concerted effort that transcends organisational size, emphasising the importance of collaboration, ongoing training, and a shared commitment to protecting the welfare of all participants in football.

5.3.4 Resources Allocation: Finance, Structure and Personnel

Managing priorities, both financially and operationally, becomes challenging when dealing with a large area. Even within MAs, financial priorities and distribution of funds can vary significantly. Similarly, in MAs with strong financial standings, the distribution of wealth and influence may not be different within the same country due to factors such as levels of development. Further, the investment levels of member associations often vary across provinces and regions. For example, the stark contrast can be noticed between smaller MAs that struggle due to limited resources and financially stable MAs that, at times, seem unaware of how fortunate they are. I became aware of feelings of empathy toward under-resourced MAs, whose structural constraints often limited their operational effectiveness. Conversely, I experienced frustration when

comparatively well-funded MAs appeared not to recognize the advantages afforded by their resource base. Acknowledging these responses as potential sources of bias, I engaged in systematic reflexive practice to mitigate their influence on the analysis. These reflections were documented in a research journal and discussed with peers to support analytical rigor and maintain critical distance, thereby strengthening the objectivity of the findings.

“We have 44 regional MAs, which are from different provinces and, in social cities. So it's 44 regional MAs in total. And for this 44 regional MAs, they still have their regional MAs, like, for the big ones. That MA Football Association has just changed the whole map financially.” MA28

The complexity of managing MAs within a vast country becomes evident through the variety of regional and subregional organisations. This restructuring poses additional challenges for growth and governance. Similarly, MA24 stresses the difficulty in ensuring adequate oversight, particularly in protecting children, due to the size of the country and lack of monitoring:

“The protection of children everywhere is mentioned and is guided by the books and laws but in reality, far from the desired point and needs a holistic approach to touch this area. Due to the huge size of the country and lack of monitoring process can't say there is proper control in place.” MA24

Similarly, MA3 had a similar experience:

“We have like 21 subregion. The subregional associations directly. And I think it's in, in both, it's like talking about the subregional associations and, and grass root football first it's hard because the obviously officers in the sub hazing change, so you have new officers and then you, they have to start often have to start from scratch again, and you have to train them and get them yeah. Set up to do their work.” MA3

Keeping this in mind, countries do not necessarily have uniform levels of development in terms of safeguarding. Disparities can vary by region, and unfortunately, the greater the imbalance within a country, the higher the potential for issues to arise. Currently, funding for many child safeguarding programmes

comes from the federation's general budget. As a result, the resources received are often minimal. For instance, in a recent study by Stoltenborgh et al. (2022), it was found that despite increased awareness, funding for child protection services remains insufficient in many countries, hindering effective prevention and intervention efforts. Child safeguarding is increasingly becoming a priority within sports organisations, with federations integrating protective measures into their broader operations.

At the moment, any requirements for Child Safeguarding is taken from the federation's general budget. However, some activities of different departments such as competitions, coaching education, grassroots and youth already include a portion of their operational budget to accommodate promotional materials for Child Safeguarding. Grassroots and coaching education also include in their budgets short presentations and/or discussions on child safeguarding and invitation to guest speaker.”
MA9

The FIFA Forward Programme 3.0 is an initiative launched by FIFA to support the development of football globally by providing financial assistance and resources to its MAs. FIFA Forward 3.0 focuses on several key areas, including infrastructure development, youth and women's football, capacity building, and good governance. By allocating funds for projects like building training facilities, acquiring equipment, and enhancing administrative capabilities, the programme seeks to create a more sustainable and equitable football ecosystem worldwide (FIFA, 2022). FIFA Forward 3.0 is relevant to this discussion as it outlines the financial framework that supports member associations in developing and implementing key programmes, including safeguarding initiatives.

The following quote highlights the financial challenges and considerations related to these efforts. As this MA noted in their interview:

“That's the problem. They use the money somewhere else. So they don't even ask me if I would like to receive a money from FIFA Forward because they use it for the building of HQ or stuff like that. So it's already all spent on something else.” MA1

As much as there is a shortage of capacity and resources, there is also a deficiency in the number of experienced individuals educated on the topic of safeguarding according to these findings. Safeguarding officers within MAs understand that the responsibility for safeguarding should not rest solely on their shoulders if they are the only ones managing it within the team. They emphasise the need for a more comprehensive and sustainable structure and strategy to ensure that safeguarding remains active and proactive even if they are no longer present. If the system relies solely on a few individuals within the MA, it indicates a flaw in the system rather than a sustainable and effective solution.

“Now, if I'm at this point, the only reason why or a few people in any federation is the only reason why the system is running itself, then that's not the system.” MA2

The constantly changing top management within some MAs leads to a fluctuating commitment to safeguarding. The influence of senior management and failure to identify safeguarding as a crucial priority with a dedicated department and limiting its scope to coaching courses only reveals a potential disconnect between the perception of safeguarding and its comprehensive implementation.

The necessity to seek support and approval for a safeguarding department is seen as a fragile and challenging mission, emphasising the need for FIFA's mandate to ensure stability and commitment.

Some MAs report substantial support and prioritisation by the leadership and senior management, reflecting a positive organisational attitude toward safeguarding.

“It was one of the benefits that the managers over here were very supportive, welcoming to the idea, providing all the needs for this regarding to be established. All of the all the tools, it was the only it was a great journey actually in Jordan it's just for one year and the association related, we are talking about child rights related to football, from football aspect. From the game aspect. Yes, for a year they've been supporting. They provide me with all of the materials that I need.” MA26

Similarly, the response from MA2, highlighted the strength of having leadership aware of this issue:

“However, as top management changes, we also see the attitudes shift each time. Some presidents are advised by General Secretaries to acknowledge SG as a troublesome department of any federation. Limiting SG to coaching courses without dealing with the complaints and other issues and standards. This hurdle is very hard to get over as a SG practitioner without looking like you are confrontational or pushy as you campaign on behalf of the children. The necessity to seek support and approval by MA’S for a SG department to function fully in a federation makes the mission to protect children fragile and slippery.” MA2

However, even with supportive leadership, challenges may exist in translating this support into tangible safeguarding advancements.

“To be honest, I’ve got a big support from our general secretary and the Board of presidents. Nevertheless, within the last two years, there was not a big progress in the Child Safeguard project.” MA4

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there was limited progress on safeguarding topics across MAs. The pandemic shifted priorities, placing significant strain on resources and disrupting normal operations. As a result, safeguarding efforts were often deprioritised, and the focus on advancing these initiatives slowed down. It became evident that even with funding available, the absence of experienced staff hindered concrete implementation. To ensure sustainable success, having both funds and enough capable personnel to implement the safeguarding programme is essential. In conclusion, it is evident that the challenges in implementing effective safeguarding policies extend beyond mere resource allocation. As noted by a MA17:

“There is no dedicated personal, people are still understaffed, under qualified, the staffs are under qualified with the safeguarding knowledge. So lots of barriers, but you know, with funding things gets easier but even at times, fundings cannot change things because if the country's practice and the country's laws are not positive towards that kind of, practice, then it just becomes a word in black and white.” MA17

There is a critical gap in the numbers of trained and experienced safeguarding officers in sport and the wider society and an urgent need to build robust and competent capacity around the world urgently. As such, the ongoing success of the FIFA Guardians remains dependent on the availability of time.

“I think time frame will be hardest, timeline for people. It is new aspect and new approach for people. They look safeguarding as a new thing. Coaches are busy, tournaments, trainings. It would require time to teach them.” MA27

Safeguarding often falls within the social responsibility division in many MAs, mirroring the structure within FIFA. It is established as a department under the umbrella of social responsibility. Social responsibility strategy typically takes precedence over safeguarding and serves as the initial starting point. In some MAs, it highlights the challenge of overseeing and enforcing safeguarding policies across all regions, clubs, and academies, especially in countries with limited resources and infrastructure for such oversight.

““Like, we monitor them. So, like, we have a girls academic boys academic. So, like, so they are underage and they stay in the academic. So, like, we monitor them on a daily basis and we supply our reporting form to them. And time and again, we ask whether they have anything to do, like, anything happening, like and then, like, we monitor them on a regular basis. Whereas, like, other clubs, we can't do that. So, like, direct academy, we do that.” MA15

Changes in personnel within clubs or different regions can lead to varying levels of safeguarding knowledge within the federation.

“The fluctuation of officers at sub-regional associations poses challenges in training and prioritisation. It's essential to ensure that safeguarding remains a top priority amid other organisational tasks. Maintaining continuous training and support for staff is crucial to embedding safeguarding practices at all levels.” MA3

The allocation of resources, including financial, structural, and personnel capacities, plays a crucial role in the successful implementation of safeguarding

initiatives. The disparities between regions, inconsistent leadership commitment, and insufficient trained personnel are significant barriers. Even with available funding, these challenges hinder the effectiveness of safeguarding policies. To ensure long-term success, a comprehensive approach is necessary - one that integrates consistent training, experienced personnel, and unwavering leadership commitment. Without these, safeguarding efforts risk becoming unsustainable and ineffective in truly protecting vulnerable individuals.

5.4 Why is this happening?

The second part of this chapter delves into the underlying reasons behind the safeguarding practices observed across Member Associations. This section moves beyond description to explore the motivations, governance arrangements, and contextual factors that shape safeguarding strategies in practice. In doing so, it draws on existing research on the management and commissioning of sexual violence prevention within national sport federations to deepen interpretation of the findings. By situating Member Association experiences within broader governance dynamics, this section helps to explain how safeguarding outcomes are influenced by structural capacity, leadership, and system-level expectations rather than policy design alone.

To deepen interpretation of these findings, it is useful to consider existing research on the governance of sexual violence prevention in sport. Studies examining the role of commissioners within national sport federations emphasise that safeguarding effectiveness is shaped by how responsibility is delegated, resourced, and monitored at system level rather than by policy presence alone (Nite & Nauright, 2020). This perspective provides a useful interpretive framework for understanding the findings presented in this study, particularly the way safeguarding implementation within Member Associations is influenced by external expectations, internal governance arrangements, and capacity constraints. In this context, the challenges identified across Member Associations can be understood not as isolated operational failures, but as outcomes of broader governance configurations in which safeguarding competes with other organisational priorities and is unevenly supported through commissioning, oversight, and resource allocation.

This section begins by examining the significance of safeguarding in football, highlighting why safeguarding represents a critical concern within the sport. This includes consideration of the specific vulnerabilities of young athletes and the ethical responsibilities of football organisations to protect them. The discussion then turns to the cultural and social factors influencing safeguarding, exploring how differing social norms and cultural contexts shape the adoption, interpretation, and effectiveness of safeguarding measures across Member Associations.

The Theoretical Framework: Norbert Elias' Game Models will be introduced to provide a conceptual foundation for understanding safeguarding dynamics. It will explain how Elias' theories can be applied to analyse the interactions and power structures within football organisations. It will then discuss Applying Multi-Layered Game Models to Safeguarding, demonstrating how these complex models can enhance our understanding of safeguarding practices. This section will explore the benefits of using multi-layered approaches to address safeguarding challenges.

Influence of Social Processes and Figurative Interactions will be explored to understand how social interactions and relationships within football organisations affect safeguarding. Research will examine the role of these social processes in shaping attitudes and behaviours related to safeguarding. The Impact of Civilizing Processes on Safeguarding will be analysed to understand how long-term societal changes influence safeguarding practices. This section will highlight the evolution of safeguarding measures in response to broader civilizing trends.

Research will also examine the role of conflict and cooperation in safeguarding, discussing how conflicts and cooperative efforts within MAs influence the development and implementation of safeguarding policies. This includes an analysis of the challenges and opportunities arising from these interactions.

Finally, working within established figurative interactions will be considered to understand how existing social structures and relationships affect the effectiveness of safeguarding practices. This section will explore the importance of navigating established figurative interactions to implement successful safeguarding strategies.

5.4.1 Significance of Safeguarding in Football

The start of this section highlights how the significance that is placed on safeguarding by people in powerful positions within MAs impacts on the strategic approach to safeguarding and its integration into the overall mission of football organisations. This strategic effort aligns with departments within MAs to foster a safe and responsible environment within football, promoting best practices and proactive engagement in safeguarding efforts. The data below emphasises that the safeguarding project was primarily focused on building a strong organisational structure and developing high-quality content to support the implementation of safeguarding initiatives. This approach aims to develop clear procedures and comprehensive educational resources handle safeguarding concerns within the football environment.

“A big part of the project was creating the structure and make sure that if something happens, we know how to handle it, and there are responsible people responsible in place. Now it depends a little bit for the strategy page. At the moment, we talk about creating our own web education tool to introduce safeguarding in football.” MA6

Additionally, this specific MA underscores the importance of ongoing support and guidance from partners throughout the implementation process. This includes providing resources, training, and mentorship to MAs as they navigate the complexities of safeguarding in football. They argued:

“We would like to implement the guidelines and the code conduct, within, uh, the next three or four months. I would say February, March, next year, and then creating awareness campaign within the grass clubs and together the corporation with the regional association. So that at least everyone has already heard that there is support on point that you can contact and you can ask, anonymously, or even with your data and get advice, how to get support in some cases and after that, we would like to, support the clubs. Mentioned education, to get experts. And as we're talking with our partner, they said it's always easier to go through open doors than to run through walls. For the first that we will contact clubs, grassroots clubs, which are already motivating in doing things, for social

responsibility and we would like to contact if they would like to do something more in child protection topic.” MA4

To delve deeper into the vital role of safeguarding within MAs, the importance, and the varied stages of implementation across different organisations will be explored. This exploration is crucial to understand why safeguarding efforts being strategically integrated to enhance the welfare of children and other vulnerable groups is seen as important by MAs. It is suggested that any subject involving the welfare of children holds paramount importance and should be intricately woven into a MAs strategic framework (FIFA Guardian, 2019). The necessity for safeguarding was clear across all participants within the three distinct categories of MAs irrespective of confederation or region. For further information on MA categories, please refer to Chapter 4 of this thesis, where they are explained in detail.

MAs fall into three categories regarding the status of their safeguarding efforts: beginning, middle, and advanced. However, this classification does not necessarily apply uniformly across each MA and this research uncovered some of the reasons why. It was clear from the data that some MAs, despite their smaller size, may possess a highly developed safeguarding roadmap, demonstrating significant progress and commitment. Conversely, larger associations might still be in the early stages of their safeguarding journey.

Thus, the safeguarding status can vary widely within and across different MAs and for multiple reasons. For example, this participant fell into the category of a ‘middle’ developed MA:

“Because children and teenagers are the future hope of ours [and] of the football development. It’s really important and essential things to keep them safe.” MA28

However, implementing safeguarding measures within the football ecosystem is undoubtedly challenging, given its intricate and often politically influenced nature. At the apex of this pyramid, one may encounter either strong support or blatant disregard for such initiatives. To gain a deeper understanding of the categories, please refer to the Chapter 4: Methodology, where all three categories are thoroughly discussed.

“People in football, the organisation itself and the coaches and even the professional management, they know each other for many long years. They are either friends minimum 20 to 30 years, or they are enemies from 20 to 30 years. It's not always doable because you're complaining about somebody that perhaps he's known for 30 years that they see off the field. You know, they go drinking together. So, it came to a point where safeguarding was being campaigned against, but also being protected by a lot of people. And I found myself in a very strange situation where I had to over and over again, go and explain why safeguarding was needed.”

MA2

According to Komaki and Tuakli-Wosornu (2021), due to potential reputation damages and loss of trust in the organisation, high-level individuals can be protected, and cases can be overlooked. MAs with dedicated safeguarding departments tend to have a more visible and integrated approach to safeguarding. The presence of such departments emphasises the importance of safeguarding within the organisation. According to MA2 placement of safeguarding departments should be mandated by FIFA rather than being a choice for its MAs. This reflects a belief by MA2 that a standardised approach enforced by FIFA could provide consistency and clarity, ensuring that safeguarding departments are strategically positioned for optimal impact.

“The organisational placement of a Safeguarding dept is vital to its success. If placed in a middle management level, the priority will not be the change of attitudes but the everyday implementation of regular duties. If in a solo department it will be avoided by all departments as a specialist department with a duty of its own singling them out, with no interaction. Again, it will be almost impossible to change the approach of all departments. It is hard to place SG under a board member, as this is a sensitive issue that many may not want to deal with. Personally, I believe that SG should be linked to the legal department that can focus on its implementation through policies and legal enforcement in a football environment. It took me almost 8 years to get into the right position. This should not be a choice for MA's, it should be dictated by FIFA.” MA2

In conclusion, safeguarding in football is a multifaceted and essential effort that requires strategic planning, strong organisational structures, and a commitment to creating a safe environment for vulnerable individuals. The data reveals that MAs are at different stages of implementing safeguarding initiatives, with some demonstrating significant progress, while others face challenges due to political dynamics, resource limitations, or structural complexities. The importance of integrating safeguarding into the fabric of football organisations is clear, as it not only protects children and young athletes but also strengthens the overall integrity of the sport. A standardised approach, such as mandating dedicated safeguarding departments through FIFA, could provide the necessary consistency and support to ensure these initiatives are implemented effectively across all levels.

This aligns with Elias' game models, where interconnected systems and relationships within social structures influence the behaviour of individuals and organisations. The safeguarding efforts reflect the need for cooperation, regulation, and balance in managing power dynamics and responsibilities within football's broader social framework, ensuring that the welfare of vulnerable individuals is prioritised across all interactions.

5.4.2 Promoting awareness and accessibility

To understand why the implementation of the FIFA Guardians programme is structured the way it is, it is essential to first explore the challenges and priorities around raising awareness and promoting safeguarding within MAs. In regions where safeguarding is still in its early stages, the emphasis is often on internal efforts, ensuring that stakeholders within regional associations comprehend the importance and scope of safeguarding measures.

This foundational understanding is critical for the effective implementation of the FIFA Guardians framework. However, promoting awareness within some MAs can be difficult due to a lack of local expertise, further complicating efforts. This section explores these challenges and the proactive steps some associations are taking, such as distributing informational resources to ensure that support and guidance are accessible to all. In MAs where safeguarding is in its early stages, those who were interviewed suggested it is crucial to prioritise internal efforts first.

This means raising awareness of safeguarding among internal stakeholders of regional associations. It is essential to ensure that their people fully understand the importance and implications of safeguarding measures.

“So this is the priority of him to raise the awareness of the internal staff and also external staff to know about the, the safeguarding and the important of it. The essential of the safeguarding.” MA26

Raising awareness within certain MAs poses challenges due to a scarcity of on-the-ground experts. This discrepancy within the same association can complicate efforts to promote awareness effectively.

“It's hard to be an expert in every area it's important to have the cooperation because the sports federation also have regional offices. So, the operation between our regional offices and the sports federation's regional offices is very important to create best possible help for our clubs and in working.” MA6

One MA took the initiative to distribute contact information posters which demonstrate a proactive approach to promoting awareness and accessibility within the football community. By making support resources readily available, they aim to facilitate communication and ensure that individuals know where to turn for assistance or guidance.

“We've taken steps to promote awareness and accessibility by distributing contact information posters in all clubs. This ensures that parents, children, and coaches have easy access to support and information when needed.” MA5

In summary, the structured approach of the FIFA Guardians programme reflects the varying stages of safeguarding development within MAs. In regions where safeguarding is nascent, the focus is on building internal understanding and capacity among stakeholders, which is foundational for successful implementation. Challenges such as a lack of local expertise and the need for effective cooperation among regional offices further complicate these efforts. Proactive measures, like distributing informational resources and contact

information, are essential steps some MAs are taking to enhance awareness and ensure that support is accessible to all involved in the football community.

5.4.3. Social cultural implications

This theme brings together evidence showing how deeply embedded cultural norms and attitudes towards authority, discipline, and abuse shape resistance to, or engagement with, safeguarding initiatives across Member Associations.

Cultural challenges present significant barriers to effectively implementing child protection and safeguarding measures in football within certain MAs. Discussions on violence and abuse are often considered taboo, creating a reluctance to address these critical issues openly. This cultural silence around sensitive topics hinders the promotion of safeguarding efforts, as indicated by MA10, where conversations about abuse remain difficult and uncomfortable. The resistance to openly discussing abuse, coupled with entrenched beliefs about harsh discipline and authority, underscores the deep-rooted societal attitudes that complicate the adoption of child-friendly coaching practices. These challenges highlight the importance of understanding and navigating cultural norms to successfully integrate safeguarding initiatives, such as the FIFA Guardian programme, within football environments.

By addressing these cultural barriers, MAs can create a safer and more supportive space for children, ensuring that safeguarding becomes an integral part of football at all levels. In MA10 discussions on child protection and safeguarding face cultural challenges, particularly regarding the taboo nature of discussing violence and abuse. This indicates a cultural reluctance to openly address and deal with sensitive topics related to child protection. In the next quotes it is visible that more MAs are collectively highlighting the cultural challenges faced in promoting child protection and safeguarding within football in various regions.

“Discussions on child protection and safeguarding face cultural challenges in country name, particularly regarding discussions of abuse, which may be considered taboo.” MA28

This reluctance to engage in conversations about child abuse contributes to the persistence of harmful practices. MA25 expands on this, explaining that some coaches and parents hold outdated views about discipline, believing harsh treatment like yelling or even physical punishment is acceptable:

“They don’t care what the student gonna be. If even, like, the parents gonna hit the student, it’s just the right thing, but it actually not the right thing. We are trying to change the mindset of the people. Especially in football. You can still seeing some coach yelling at the players in country name saying some not really good word.” MA25

These ingrained attitudes create additional barriers to implementing child safeguarding measures in football. Similarly, MA20 reinforces this challenge, noting that many coaches still believe discipline through shouting or physical force is necessary for children to perform.

“There are coaches in my Country who think that children can not perform when disciplined like shouting or beating, they still think that children should not be handled politely during coaching, grassroot or competition.” MA20

The quotes from members of different associations highlight significant cultural and attitudinal barriers to implementing the FIFA Guardian programme, which focuses on child protection and safeguarding in football.

According to MA28, discussing abuse and child protection is culturally sensitive and often avoided in the country mentioned. This cultural taboo makes it difficult to address these issues openly, educate the community, and implement safeguarding measures effectively, as necessary conversations for implementing FIFA Guardian are not occurring or not being taken seriously. MA25 underscores a pervasive attitude of indifference towards child welfare, where actions like parents hitting children are deemed acceptable, even though they are harmful. This mindset extends to football, where coaches still yell at players and use inappropriate language, demonstrating a lack of understanding and commitment to safeguarding principles. MA20 reveals that some coaches believe children cannot perform without harsh discipline, such as shouting or beating, and resist the idea of handling children politely during coaching or competitions. This

entrenched belief in the effectiveness of punitive measures over supportive and protective approaches creates a substantial obstacle to the successful implementation of the FIFA Guardian programme. These cultural and attitudinal challenges collectively make it harder to promote and enforce child protection and safeguarding in football within these contexts. Although some MA indicates that there is resistance or reluctance among people to accept the concept of safeguarding fully. This resistance suggests a lack of openness or willingness to embrace the importance of safeguarding measures.

“People were not accepting. They were not very much open to the idea. And to a certain extent, a lot of the countries, including [country name], I would say, is not very appreciative of taking the safeguarding journey for. Some of the countries, they’ve got in still a tokenism.” MA17

Regrettably, certain MAs continue to encounter shame, embarrassment, and disbelief when addressing instances of abuse and harassment.

“Cultural factors such as shame and embarrassment may hinder discussions around abuse and make it challenging to address child protection issues openly.” MA25

Cultural factors, including communication styles and attitudes towards authority, play a significant role in the implementation of child protection and safeguarding measures according to MA9. This suggests that cultural norms and values impact how child protection initiatives are perceived and executed within different societies.

“Cultural factors also play a role in implementation, such as communication styles and attitudes towards authority.” MA10

This was also pointed out at MA28, where they argued:

“Cultural factors, such as societal norms and attitudes towards child protection, may influence the implementation of child protection measures.” MA28

However, within numerous MAs, the attitude towards hierarchy and power significantly influences the implementation and seriousness with which safeguarding measures are taken.

"Cultural factors, such as resilience and respect, may impact the implementation of child protection measures in football." MA9

And, likewise, the participant from MA20 claimed:

"Cultural factors, such as attitudes towards authority and hierarchy, may impact the implementation of child protection measures in football." MA20

The cultural habit of keeping quiet even in unfavourable conditions poses a challenge in terms of recognising and addressing safeguarding issues according to the data. The emphasis on organising a safeguarding campaign indicates a proactive approach to addressing cultural challenges. Unfortunately, there are still misconceptions within the coaching community of some MAs about disciplinary methods, indicating that cultural beliefs about how children should be handled during coaching can pose challenges in adopting more child-friendly approaches. Recognising and addressing these cultural challenges is essential in fostering a global environment where the rights and safety of children are prioritised across diverse cultural contexts.

"There are coaches in my Country who think that children cannot perform when disciplined like shouting or beating, they still think that children should not be handled politely during coaching, grassroot or competition."
MA20

The mention of societal beliefs causing shame and embarrassment among victims of violence and abuse highlights the cultural barriers that deter individuals from speaking out. The fear of stigmatization within local communities poses a substantial challenge, creating a reluctance to address safeguarding issues openly.

"The feeling of shame and embarrassment caused by the society's culture, threatens the possibility of speaking about this among children as the belief in the society is that the victims of any actions will be

stigmatized and tainted among the local community if they find out about what happened to the child.” MA24

Lastly, it is evident that cultural factors often play a pivotal role in comprehending and implementing any form of safeguarding within MA and its regional associations (local federations).

“There are no identified local or cultural factors that are hindering the implementation of child protection measures in football.” MA19

The implications of this contrast suggest a need for further exploration into how cultural considerations can either facilitate or impede child protection efforts in football. Understanding the nuances of local cultural contexts may be vital for effectively promoting and integrating safeguarding practices within the sport.

“Cultural factors are important considerations in child protection, as they may influence norms and behaviours related to child protection within football.” MA27

Having explored the cultural dynamics that influence child safeguarding, it is imperative to shift our focus to the systemic challenges that further complicate the effective implementation of protection measures. These systemic issues, ranging from institutional inertia to resource constraints, must be meticulously examined and addressed to create a robust and comprehensive child protection framework.

Collectively, these findings demonstrate that cultural resistance to safeguarding is not uniform, but emerges through specific configurations of authority, silence, and normalised practices, reinforcing the need for context-sensitive safeguarding strategies rather than universal behavioural assumptions.

5.4.4 Theoretical Framework: Norbert Elias’ Game Models

Building upon the insights garnered from the data analysis of interviews representing diverse MAs, the subsequent section delves into theoretical perspectives, particularly Norbert Elias’ game models, to deepen our understanding of the underlying dynamics shaping the implementation of the FIFA Guardian's programme and its safeguarding policies.

5.4.5 Applying Multi-layered game modes to Safeguarding

Reflecting Norbert Elias' concept of a "multi-layered game," some MAs highlight the challenges faced by large federations in implementing safeguarding strategies effectively across vast regions. Even with strategies in place at the federation level, the sheer size and complexity of the area make it difficult to monitor and control everything consistently. The frequent turnover of coaches exacerbates this issue, as each new coach requires time-consuming training.

“We have around 21 subregions, each with their own associations. It's a challenge because the officers in these subregions change frequently, leading to a constant need to retrain new officers from scratch. These new officers often struggle initially to prioritise safeguarding and find the right support within their associations. This issue is mirrored in youth national teams, where there is also frequent staff turnover. Ensuring that everyone values and prioritises child protection and allocates time to address safeguarding with the youth teams, remains a significant challenge.” MA3

This underlines the difficulty in maintaining consistent safeguarding standards due to the continuous need to educate and train new personnel, making it hard to ensure that safeguarding measures are upheld uniformly. Indeed, a collaborative approach involving all relevant stakeholders is essential to address the needs of every child and prioritise their well-being (Spinks & McClure, 2007). The topic of leadership commitment was also a main topic in Owusu-Sekyere et al. (2022) research. Organisational safeguarding cultures are largely affected by the highest level of authority. Commitments should not only be based on policies but also on daily activities. Unsurprisingly, the football community universally recognises the necessity for robust safeguarding practices, regardless of confederation or region (Baker et al., 2023). Some MAs highlight an important perspective on the advantages of small countries in organising and executing initiatives efficiently. Due to their small geographic size, smaller countries can often mobilize resources and participants more quickly and easily than larger ones.

“So what I did is we invited 50 clubs from [country name]. You know, [country name], you have to know, it's a small country. So a 50 clubs of [country name] from [country name] with their coaches and with their

administrators, and we did a full day, like, a full day seminar about safeguarding.” MA24

Sometimes, a multilayered game model is viewed as a challenge. It is crucial to seek support beyond the association, especially concerning legal aid and victim and whistleblower support mechanisms. Even when MAs have robust policies in place, they often rely on experts from governmental entities for on-ground impartial support, helping to build trust and strengthening support for victims within the football community.

“We are working on case management training with staff, with family council in [country name]. They are a technical institution in [country name]. Regarding responding, we already establish partnerships with the child protection department within Family Affairs with police, we are trying to work on side of social support, to know exactly how to deal with cases and to transfer to experts.” MA27

One could argue that the success of safeguarding initiatives, as highlighted by MA27, may depend on the organisational frameworks and influences established by larger governing bodies like FIFA and UEFA. For effective child protection in football, both strong local partnerships and the strategic direction set by international organisations are essential.

“FIFA seems to be considered the father of football but UEFA has the upper hand and is acknowledged as being the pillar of competitive football. Therefore, they listen to FIFA practices as much as it lends itself to UEFA.” MA2

The successful implementation of FIFA Guardian, which focuses on child protection and safeguarding in football, requires proper integration, collaboration, and alignment with UEFA and other confederations. This necessity stems from the fact that MAs often follow the guidance and regulations set forth not only by FIFA but also by confederations, national ministries, and NGOs. MA27 highlights ongoing efforts in case management training and establishing partnerships with local child protection departments, police, and social support services. This indicates that effective safeguarding involves a network of various stakeholders working together.

Furthermore, as MA2 points out, while FIFA is considered the overarching authority in football, UEFA holds significant influence, especially in competitive football. Consequently, for safeguarding measures to be truly effective and widely adopted, FIFA's practices must align with UEFA's standards and regulations. This alignment ensures that MAs receive consistent and coherent guidelines, facilitating smoother implementation of child protection policies. Without such collaboration and integration, the efforts of individual associations may be fragmented and less effective. Therefore, success in safeguarding within football hinges on coordinated efforts between FIFA, confederations, and other relevant bodies to create a unified approach that MAs can follow.

5.4.6 Influence of Social Processes and Figurations

Elias emphasises the fluidity and long-term nature of social processes. The FIFA Guardians programme, when analysed through this lens, can be seen as part of a broader, evolving process of improving safety in sports. The effectiveness of the programme might depend on the shifting social figurations within football's global community. In MA4 the child protection policies are determined and governed by the country's institutions, such as the Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Youth and Gender. MA4 suggests a hierarchical structure where decisions regarding child protection are made at a higher level of authority, potentially limiting individual agency or influence over the implementation of such policies. Elias emphasises the continuous and interconnected nature of social processes, highlighting how institutions and individuals interact and shape each other over time. Applying this lens to the Guardians programme, we can view it as a part of the ongoing social process aimed at improving safety in sports. The effectiveness of the programme may be influenced by the shifting social configurations within football's global community, including changes in power dynamics, cultural norms, and institutional frameworks.

“I have not much control since the country has its own policies on Child protection through the Human Rights Commission and Ministry of youth and Gender.” MA20

5.4.7 Impact of Civilizing Processes on Safeguarding

Elias' concept of the "civilizing process" can be applied to understand how norms and behaviours around child safeguarding in football have evolved. The FIFA Guardians programme could be seen as a step in the ongoing process of establishing more refined and universally accepted standards of conduct in youth football. The mindset of some MAs reflects a lack of awareness or acceptance of more modern, child-friendly coaching methods that prioritise respectful and positive reinforcement.

“There are coaches in my Country who think that children cannot perform when disciplined like shouting or beating, they still think that children should not be handled politely during coaching.” MA20

Issue in coaching culture suggests that normalizing rudeness in coaching practices leads to resistance among coaches when they are encouraged to adopt approaches that are more considerate of children's needs. This resistance stems from the entrenched belief that harsh or rude behaviour is an effective or acceptable method of coaching, making it difficult to shift towards more empathetic, child-centred methodologies.

“I think that considering rudeness as “normal way “of coaching will contribute to the resistance from the coaching staff to adopt more child mindful way of coaching.” MA28

MA outlines a proactive strategy aimed at fostering a culture of safeguarding within their community. After conducting initial training with staff and clubs, they plan to organise a safeguarding campaign. This campaign is designed to raise awareness about child rights and challenge existing norms and cultural attitudes surrounding child protection. This approach aligns with the idea that changing cultural norms requires targeted efforts to shift attitudes and behaviours over time.

“Middle control, the culture is a very important part in child protection, so one of my goals is after finalizing the first training round with the staff and the clubs I'll start organising a safeguarding campaign to spread the child rights and to try to change the norms and culture step by step.” MA27

With positivity and support for the change, there is still some resistance from a number of older coaches due to their adherence to traditional coaching methods. However, despite their initial scepticism, these coaches ultimately lend their support to safeguarding efforts. This acknowledgment of resistance from older coaches highlights a generational gap in coaching philosophies, with some coaches still relying on outdated disciplinary methods. Nevertheless, the presence of positivity and support for change within the coaching community indicates a growing recognition of the importance of safeguarding in youth sports. It suggests a willingness among coaches to adapt and embrace new practices, even if it requires overcoming initial reluctance.

This dynamic landscape underscores the potential for education and awareness initiatives to foster a culture of safety and well-being within the coaching community, contributing to the ongoing evolution of coaching practices towards more progressive and child-centred approaches.

5.4.8 Role of Conflict and Cooperation in Safeguarding

Elias' theory also deals with the balance between conflict and integration within social figurations. The FIFA Guardians programme's success could be analysed in terms of the impact it has in addressing harmful practices and cultural norms that may cause harm or neglect for competitive success and the need to safeguard participants and to foster integration among different stakeholders. This is evident in the interactions between various stakeholders (such as coaches, parents, and football authorities) in the realm of child protection in sports.

5.4.9 Functioning within Established Figurations:

Finally, Elias' model would suggest exploring how the FIFA Guardians programme works within the existing structures of football governance.

This involves analysing how the initiative aligns or clashes with the established interests, power relations, and cultural practices in football.

“Football is a half military kind of environment where everybody has a rank and if you as a safeguarding officer do not have a rank then all those

wonderful theoretical things just fall around, like, you know, like, uh, castle of Cards” MA2

According to MA2 hierarchical structure and strict ranking system within football, likening it to a military environment where rank and authority are crucial. This hierarchical system implies that, without proper rank or authority, an individual's influence, or ability to implement theoretical ideas is diminished or ineffective, much like a castle of cards collapsing without a strong foundation. Norbert Elias' game models provide a useful framework to understand this analogy, as they emphasise the interdependence of players within a social or organisational structure and how these dynamics influence behaviour and outcomes. In Elias' view, social interactions and power balances are akin to a game where individuals and groups have varying levels of power and influence, and their actions are interconnected. In football, rank determines one's ability to influence decisions and actions within the team, and a safeguarding officer without rank is unable to exert influence, reflecting the interdependent nature of power dynamics described by Elias. The comparison to a "castle of cards" illustrates the fragility of a system where authority is not properly established or recognised, just as Elias' models show that stability in social structures requires balanced power relations.

Furthermore, the quote underscores that without rank, theoretical safeguarding measures fall apart, much like how Elias would argue that theoretical models need practical support within the given power dynamics to be successful. Thus, the principles of Elias' game models are reflected in the necessity of hierarchical structure, interdependence, and the practical application of theory within the context of football.

With positivity and support for the change, there is still some resistance from a number of older coaches due to their adherence to traditional coaching methods. However, despite their initial, these coaches ultimately lend their support to safeguarding efforts. This acknowledgment of resistance from older coaches highlights a generational gap in coaching philosophies, with some coaches still relying on outdated disciplinary methods. Nevertheless, the presence of positivity and support for change within the coaching community indicates a growing recognition of the importance of safeguarding in youth sports. It suggests a

willingness among coaches to adapt and embrace new practices, even if it requires overcoming initial reluctance. This dynamic landscape underscores the potential for education and awareness initiatives to foster a culture of safety and well-being within the coaching community, contributing to the ongoing evolution of coaching practices towards more progressive and child-centred approaches.

“With positivity and support for the change, yes, there is a little resistance from a number of old coaches due to their old methods in coaching but still, they supported the safeguarding in the end.” MA26

Conclusion 1: Role Diversification: Safeguarding as an Added Responsibility

Incorporating this finding into the "Hybrid Roles" game model of the Elias' Game Models entails recognising that individuals within organisations tasked with safeguarding often have multifaceted roles. They must balance their primary responsibilities with safeguarding duties. This hybrid role presents challenges in managing time, resources, and expertise effectively. By integrating safeguarding responsibilities into existing roles, organisations can create a more seamless approach to child protection. Training programmes and support mechanisms should be implemented to equip staff with the necessary skills and resources to fulfil their safeguarding duties alongside their primary responsibilities. This integration fosters a culture of collective responsibility for safeguarding within the organisation, enhancing overall effectiveness and accountability.

Conclusion 2: Regional Challenges: Programme Implementation in Vast Areas

In the "Scale and Scope" game model of the Elias' Game Models, the regional challenges of implementing safeguarding programmes across vast areas are addressed. These challenges include geographical barriers, cultural differences, and varying levels of infrastructure and resources. To overcome these obstacles, scalable solutions are essential. This involves adapting programmatic approaches to accommodate diverse regional contexts while maintaining core safeguarding principles. Utilizing technology, community partnerships, and decentralised implementation strategies can enhance the scalability and effectiveness of safeguarding initiatives across expansive regions. Tailoring

interventions to specific regional needs and leveraging local knowledge and resources are key strategies for overcoming regional challenges and ensuring comprehensive coverage of safeguarding efforts.

Conclusion 3: Mandatory Safeguarding Policy: Ensuring 100% Compliance

Aligned with the "Regulation and Compliance" game model of the Elias' Game Models, the finding on mandatory safeguarding policies emphasises the critical role of regulatory frameworks in ensuring full compliance with safeguarding standards. Mandatory policies establish clear guidelines and expectations for behaviour, making it unequivocally clear that safeguarding is a non-negotiable priority. To achieve 100% compliance, organisations must implement robust monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, including regular audits, training programmes, and disciplinary measures for non-compliance. Leadership commitment and organisational culture play crucial roles in reinforcing the importance of adherence to safeguarding policies at all levels of the organisation. By embedding safeguarding into organisational values and practices, compliance becomes ingrained in the organisational ethos, promoting a culture of accountability and responsibility for child protection.

Conclusion 4: Tailored Approach: Customizing FIFA Guardians for Global Impact

In the "Localization and Cultural Adaptation" game model of the Elias' Game Models, the finding on tailoring FIFA Guardians for global impact underscores the importance of customizing safeguarding interventions to suit diverse social, political, and geographical contexts. While FIFA Guardians provides a comprehensive framework for safeguarding in football, its effectiveness depends on its relevance and applicability in different settings. Customizing FIFA Guardians involves adapting policies, protocols, and interventions to align with local laws, cultural norms, and community preferences whilst adhering to international standards and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). This requires engaging stakeholders from diverse backgrounds in the development and implementation process to ensure buy-in and ownership of safeguarding initiatives. By tailoring FIFA Guardians to accommodate local

realities and sensitivities, its impact can be maximized, fostering a safer and more inclusive environment for young athletes worldwide. The MA7 emphasises the importance of collaboration with local independent expert agencies in the context of child safeguarding. It underscores the effectiveness of MAs to partner with dedicated local agencies, benefiting from their expertise and resources to ensure policy compliance. MA7 approach serves as a notable example, showcasing the success of comprehensive collaboration with various local agencies. This approach, tailored to meet local needs and supported by responsive strategies, highlights the importance of adapting safeguarding initiatives to diverse social, political, and geographical contexts. By leveraging local legislation and engaging with a range of national institutions, including child protection and law enforcement, sports-related entities and non-governmental organisations, MAs can adopt a multi-stakeholder approach that ensures a well-supported framework for child safeguarding with global impact.

Table 7. Key Challenges and Considerations in Managing Safeguarding Initiatives within Organisations (own creation)

Management	Explain to your boss the importance and long-term necessity of safeguarding, emphasising that it requires more than one person to manage effectively.
	Coordinate with various departments and encourage cross-functional collaboration to ensure safeguarding efforts are integrated across the organisation.
	Provide clear, ongoing guidance and an introduction to safeguarding to local MAs, ensuring they understand its importance and know how to implement it.
Budget	The MA's budget is quite tight this year, but securing dedicated resources for safeguarding is crucial for maintaining effective programmes.
	No specific funds have been allocated for the programme, making it challenging to ensure safeguarding efforts are prioritised and well-supported.

Stakeholders	You need to ensure that coaches and participants understand that safeguarding is a critical priority integral part of the organisation's responsibilities.
Culture	In conservative traditional cultures, individuals often tend to hide negative experiences, especially when it affects their reputation, making it important to create a safe space for open discussions.

Table 9 provides a comprehensive overview of some of the multifaceted challenges and considerations involved in managing safeguarding initiatives within an organisation. It underscores the need for proactive leadership, effective communication, resource management, multistakeholder (audience) engagement, and cultural sensitivity to successfully address safeguarding concerns. It is important to note that the insights presented in Table 9 are derived from the original findings of this thesis and not from existing literature. As safeguarding in football remains an under-researched area, particularly at the organisational and member association level, these findings offer new perspectives drawn directly from the data gathered and discussed in this study. They reflect real-world challenges and considerations as experienced by practitioners and stakeholders within the football environment, rather than previously established academic research.

5.5 Chapter 5 Summary

The findings presented in this chapter offer original insight into safeguarding in football by demonstrating how implementation outcomes are shaped by power relations, cultural resistance, organisational scale, and interdependencies across governance levels, rather than by policy design alone. The chapter delves into a comprehensive exploration of the findings derived from the study of the FIFA Guardians safeguarding model in football. It is structured into two main parts, each addressing distinct aspects of the implementation and consequences of the safeguarding model.

Part One: Understanding the elements for successful implementation of safeguarding

The initial segment of the chapter meticulously analyses the findings pertaining to the significance and intricacies of safeguarding within football. Through empirical investigation, it elucidates the multifaceted nature of safeguarding, emphasising its pivotal role in ensuring the well-being and protection of individuals within the football community. This section further examines the diverse elements that influence the implementation of the FIFA Guardians model, delineating the factors that dictate the efficacy and success of its application on the ground. By scrutinizing these factors, the study offers valuable insights into the nuances of implementing safeguarding measures within football organisations and elucidates the determinants of successful implementation.

Part Two: Assessing Consequences

The latter part of the chapter shifts the focus towards evaluating the consequences of implementing safeguarding measures within the football context. It endeavours to provide a comprehensive examination of both the positive and negative ramifications arising from the implementation of the FIFA Guardians model. Through empirical analysis and critical assessment, this section identifies and elucidates the adverse effects that may accompany safeguarding initiatives on the ground. By delineating these consequences, the study not only highlights the potential pitfalls of safeguarding implementation but also offers valuable insights into mitigating and addressing these challenges effectively.

In conclusion, the chapter on results and findings offers a holistic examination of the FIFA Guardians safeguarding model in football. Through rigorous empirical analysis, it sheds light on the complexities of implementing safeguarding measures and underscores the importance of understanding the diverse factors that influence their success. Furthermore, by assessing the consequences of safeguarding implementation, the study provides valuable insights into navigating the challenges associated with ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals within the football community. Overall, the chapter contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge on safeguarding in football, offering insights that are

instrumental in enhancing the efficacy and impact of safeguarding initiatives within the sport.

Viewed through Elias' Game Models, the findings presented in this chapter illustrate safeguarding implementation as a dynamic and relational process shaped by interdependence, power balances, and contextual constraint. Across both the conditions for implementation and the consequences observed, safeguarding outcomes emerge not from isolated organisational decisions but from the interaction of multiple actors operating across different levels of the football governance system. The variation identified across Member Associations reflects differing configurations of capacity, dependency, and authority within this multi-level 'game', reinforcing the value of the Game Models as an explanatory framework for understanding both intended and unintended safeguarding outcomes in football.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1. Theoretical overview of thesis

This study aimed to explore the implementation and effectiveness of FIFA Guardians' safeguarding policies across different member associations, with a focus on the challenges and practical implications of such initiatives. The key objectives were to identify the factors that influence safeguarding efforts and to examine the cultural, organisational, and financial dynamics shaping the effectiveness of these policies.

From the findings, it is evident that safeguarding within international football varies significantly across regions. These findings support earlier literature emphasising the importance of safeguarding within the broader context of sports governance (Hartill, 2013; Kerr et al., 2019). MAs demonstrated varying levels of development, with some fully integrating safeguarding into their operations while others struggled with foundational elements. This variation underscored the importance of adapting safeguarding efforts to local contexts, a key aspect examined in this research.

By situating these findings within Elias' Game Models, the study conceptualises safeguarding not as a standalone policy issue, but as a relational process shaped by interdependencies, power balances, and organisational positioning across the football system.

6.2. Key Insights and Contributions to Knowledge

This thesis makes several distinct and original contributions to knowledge in the field of safeguarding in sport, particularly within the context of global football governance. Drawing on first-hand empirical data, the study advances theoretical, empirical, and practical understanding of how safeguarding policies are enacted, constrained, and negotiated across diverse organisational, cultural, and resource contexts, addressing an under-researched area within international football.

As no previous study has comprehensively explored the implementation of safeguarding initiatives within football's global governance structures, the

insights presented here are based on new, first-hand evidence and extend existing theory and practice in this area. The research provides several significant theoretical and practical contributions to the field of safeguarding in sports. By applying Norbert Elias' Game Models, the study uncovers the multi-layered and interdependent nature of safeguarding implementation, offering a fresh perspective on the complex power dynamics between various stakeholders involved in the safeguarding process at multiple levels. Elias' theoretical framework allows for a nuanced exploration of how power is distributed across the global football network and how these power structures influence the adoption and enforcement of safeguarding policies.

One of the most notable findings from this research is the role of hierarchical structures within football organisations, which often create bottlenecks in policy execution. In large federations, these hierarchical layers comprising multiple levels of governance tend to complicate decision-making processes, particularly when competing priorities arise. In theoretical terms, multiple layers of governance represent more players in the game and more people comprising the figuration. It increases the chances of unintended consequences. These consequences can delay or dilute the implementation of safeguarding measures, despite their increasing importance within the football community from a policy perspective. In these cases, the study highlights the importance of streamlining governance frameworks to ensure that safeguarding practices are not only prioritised but also executed efficiently across all levels. The complexity of decision-making in larger organisations may require a more centralised and agile approach to safeguarding that maintains flexibility while maintaining accountability and transparency.

In contrast, smaller federations, with their more centralised organisational structures and fewer bureaucratic obstacles, were found to be more agile and proactive in implementing safeguarding measures. These federations, while more responsive to the immediate needs of safeguarding, were often constrained by a lack of financial and human resources. This contrast highlights a significant challenge in the safeguarding landscape: while smaller federations may be able to move quickly, they face limitations in their ability to sustain comprehensive programmes due to resource constraints. The research suggests that addressing

these disparities through targeted support for resource-poor federations could significantly enhance the global safeguarding effort.

Additionally, another original contribution from this study is a deeper understanding of the profound impact that cultural norms and values have on safeguarding practices. In several MAs, cultural taboos surrounding sensitive topics such as abuse, gender equality, and the role of children in sports created significant barriers to adopting and implementing modern safeguarding standards. In some cases, deeply entrenched coaching traditions that prioritise success and competitiveness over welfare further hindered the acceptance of safeguarding measures. These findings underscore the necessity for FIFA and other governing bodies to develop policies that are sensitive to the diverse cultural contexts of member associations. Rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all model, policies must be adaptable to local cultures and realities, ensuring that they are both practical and effective in addressing the unique challenges faced by different regions.

The research also sheds light on the uneven distribution of resources and awareness programmes across MAs, which significantly influenced the efficacy of safeguarding implementation. Federations that had access to robust educational initiatives - whether through support from regional confederations or governmental ministries - demonstrated greater adherence to safeguarding policies compared to those operating in less developed regions. These findings emphasise the need for a more equitable distribution of resources and support. The study advocates for a global safeguarding approach that not only addresses the immediate needs of larger and wealthier federations but also emphasises capacity building and tailored educational interventions for those in less resourced contexts.

Moreover, the study identifies several barriers to the effective implementation of safeguarding measures, such as limited understanding of safeguarding principles among certain stakeholders and a lack of formalized training. This highlights a critical gap in the development of safeguarding programmes - specifically the need for comprehensive educational and awareness campaigns that equip all stakeholders with the knowledge and tools to recognise and address safeguarding issues. By focusing on the development of these educational

resources and ensuring they are accessible, federations can overcome some of the foundational barriers to implementation.

Ultimately, through these original findings, this research contributes significantly to the evolving dialogue on safeguarding in sports by providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the complex interplay of governance, culture, and resources in the implementation of safeguarding policies. The insights gained from the study offer actionable recommendations for policy development and implementation, stressing the importance of a tailored, culturally sensitive approach to safeguarding in the global context of football.

Through its findings, this research advocates for an ongoing commitment to safeguarding that is both sustainable and adaptable, ensuring the protection and well-being of all involved in the sport, especially vulnerable populations such as children. By contributing to a more holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the safeguarding landscape, this study lays the groundwork for future research and practical interventions aimed at enhancing the safeguarding efforts across football federations worldwide.

While these findings have been discussed thematically above, their significance lies in how they collectively advance understanding of safeguarding implementation within global football governance. Taken together, the key contributions of this thesis can be summarised as follows.

First, the study provides rare empirical insight into safeguarding implementation across a diverse set of FIFA Member Associations, addressing a significant gap in the literature where safeguarding has typically been examined at national or single-sport levels rather than within global governance systems.

Second, by applying Elias' Game Models to safeguarding, the research offers an original theoretical contribution. It demonstrates how safeguarding implementation is shaped by interdependent figurations involving FIFA, confederations, Member Associations, and individual practitioners, and how power asymmetries, resource dependencies, and governance positioning influence safeguarding outcomes.

Third, the research advances understanding of safeguarding as an implementation process rather than a policy artefact. By identifying how organisational structure, leadership authority, cultural norms, and capacity constraints interact, the study moves beyond compliance-based interpretations of safeguarding and contributes a process-oriented, governance-focused perspective.

Finally, the study makes a practical contribution by developing an empirically grounded classification of Member Associations based on safeguarding development and capacity. This classification strengthens the relevance of the findings and provides a foundation for targeted recommendations, enabling governing bodies to move away from one-size-fits-all approaches toward more context-sensitive safeguarding support.

6.3. Challenges and Practical Implications

Importantly, the challenges identified in this study should be understood as systemic rather than exceptional, reflecting broader governance, cultural, and capacity-related dynamics within international football.

The challenges identified in this research, particularly related to capacity and resource constraints, align with the findings of Malkin et al. (2000), who highlighted the significant bureaucratic and financial barriers to the implementation of child protection policies within organisations. The study found that many football associations struggle to prioritise safeguarding due to limited financial resources, often having to allocate funds and attention to other operational demands, such as competitive performance or infrastructure development. This prioritisation of immediate operational needs over long-term safeguarding goals creates a situation where safeguarding efforts are not fully integrated into the organisation's core functions but are rather seen as secondary or peripheral. The lack of dedicated resources to implement comprehensive safeguarding policies leads to a piecemeal approach that is less effective in protecting vulnerable individuals, especially children.

In many federations, safeguarding is not treated as an urgent or fundamental issue, and this sentiment resonates with the findings of Stoltenborgh et al. (2022), who discussed how competing operational priorities often hinder the prioritisation

of child protection policies. While safeguarding efforts may exist in some form, the research indicated that they are often inconsistent, underfunded, or unsupported by robust systems of oversight. These federations may lack trained personnel to oversee child protection measures or fail to invest in educational campaigns that raise awareness about the importance of safeguarding in football. Consequently, federations with fewer resources are left with insufficient capacity to implement, monitor, or improve safeguarding practices, thereby limiting the effectiveness of any existing policies.

Cultural barriers also emerged as a major challenge, particularly in regions where discussing abuse and misconduct remains a significant taboo. This is particularly true in football cultures where masculinity, authority, and hierarchy are often emphasised, and addressing sensitive issues such as abuse may be perceived as challenging the established power structures. The reluctance to openly discuss safeguarding issues, including abuse, creates a significant barrier to the effective implementation of child protection policies. As noted by Kerr et al. (2020), the stigma surrounding abuse is compounded by cultural norms that view such discussions as uncomfortable or inappropriate, further perpetuating the silence and inaction that can enable abuse to go unreported and unaddressed.

This issue reflects the earlier concerns raised by Hartill (2013), who pointed out that power imbalances and fear of repercussions contribute to the reluctance to report abuse within sporting organisations. Coaches, administrators, and other stakeholders may fear negative consequences if they speak out, whether it be damaging their careers, tarnishing the reputation of the organisation, or facing social ostracism. These power dynamics and the associated fear of reprisal are amplified in hierarchical settings, where authority figures may be protected from scrutiny, and their actions may be less likely to be challenged. In such environments, safeguarding efforts can become significantly undermined, as those who hold the power may not feel accountable to reporting abuse or taking preventative measures seriously.

Addressing these deeply ingrained cultural issues is crucial for creating more effective and comprehensive safeguarding practices across all member associations. However, this requires a significant shift in how the sport community views safeguarding, which cannot happen without ongoing education and cultural

change. Practical steps to address these barriers could involve training for leaders within the football community - particularly those in positions of authority such as coaches, referees, and administrators - about the importance of safeguarding, the impact of abuse on individuals, and how to address these issues within the context of football culture. Training programmes must also focus on breaking down cultural taboos, creating safe spaces for individuals to report concerns without fear of retaliation.

The research also suggests that federations should consider involving local communities, including parents and youth players, in safeguarding efforts, helping to shift cultural perceptions and normalize open discussions about child protection. In addition, FIFA and other governing bodies should collaborate with MAs to develop culturally sensitive safeguarding policies that consider the specific social, political, and cultural contexts of each region. These policies must be flexible, adaptable, and tailored to local needs while still adhering to global child protection standards.

From a practical perspective, the research points to the need for a more integrated approach to safeguarding within football organisations. Rather than viewing safeguarding as a separate or auxiliary issue, federations should embed it into the core of their governance structures, ensuring that safeguarding is prioritised across all levels of the organisation. One recommendation is for FIFA to create a comprehensive, global safeguarding framework that all member associations can use as a baseline, with room for regional adaptations based on local contexts.

Furthermore, the research suggests that federations with more resources should take on a mentorship role, sharing best practices and offering support to those with fewer means. This could be facilitated through regional or global networking events, workshops, and collaborative initiatives aimed at fostering a global culture of safeguarding in football. By helping less-resourced federations build the capacity to implement effective safeguarding measures, the football community as a whole can make strides toward a more equitable and safer environment for all players.

Ultimately, the challenges highlighted in this study underscore the need for a multi-faceted and sustained effort to address the barriers to safeguarding in

football. While cultural and resource-related challenges persist, the research also points to practical solutions that could foster meaningful change. By addressing these barriers through comprehensive, culturally sensitive strategies and ensuring that safeguarding becomes a priority at all levels of football governance, the sport can move toward creating safer and more protective environments for children and vulnerable individuals across the globe.

6.4. Recommendations for FIFA and Member Associations

One recommendation at the end of this research is for future research to use the findings generated here to help understand more about the confederations that were not present in this sample. The following recommendations, based on the identified challenges, are presented in the following table (Table 8).

Table 8. *Recommendations for FIFA and Member Associations: Addressing Key Challenges (own creation)*

Recommendation	Description	Intended Impact
Standardisation and Enforcement	Mandate that all member associations establish dedicated safeguarding departments. Provide clear guidelines and enforce compliance through regular audits and evaluations.	Ensuring uniform implementation of safeguarding policies enhances overall safety standards across all regions.
Cultural Adaptability	Translating safeguarding materials into multiple languages and incorporating cultural considerations into training programmes. Address local norms and ensure policies resonate with	Increases accessibility and relevance of safeguarding policies, fostering greater acceptance and adherence across diverse cultural contexts.

	specific cultural challenges in different regions.	
Ongoing Support and Partnerships	Expand partnerships with local agencies to support safeguarding efforts, especially in smaller federations. Provide continuous, context-specific training and establish clear, accessible reporting mechanisms.	Strengthening local capacity for safeguarding, ensuring sustained implementation, and enhancing trust in reporting systems.
Financial Investment	Allocate specific funds solely dedicated to safeguarding initiatives within member associations. Ensure these funds are protected from being diverted to other operational expenses unrelated to child protection.	Provides necessary resources for effective safeguarding implementation, reducing financial barriers and enabling comprehensive protection measures.
Comprehensive Training Programmes	Develop and implement robust training programmes for all levels of staff and volunteers, emphasising trauma-informed practices and effective reporting mechanisms.	Enhances the competency of personnel in handling safeguarding issues and promotes a knowledgeable and responsive safeguarding culture.

<p style="text-align: center;">Enhanced Reporting Mechanisms</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Establish secure, anonymous reporting channels and ensure they are well-publicized within all member associations. Collaborate with external agencies to manage and support the reporting process.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Encourages victims and whistle-blowers to come forward without fear of retaliation, improving the detection and management of safeguarding issues</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Leadership Commitment</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Encourage top-level commitment from the leadership within FIFA and member associations. Leaders should actively promote and participate in safeguarding initiatives, setting a positive example for the entire organisation.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Cultivates a strong organisational culture that prioritises safeguarding and drives widespread acceptance and implementation of policies.</p>

6.5. Limitations of the Study

While this study offers significant contributions to understanding safeguarding practices within football, it is not without its limitations. These limitations must be acknowledged to provide a more nuanced interpretation of the findings and to highlight areas for future research.

First, the study relied on interviews conducted with representatives from a specific set of MAs within the global football community. While this sample allowed for a detailed exploration of safeguarding practices within these associations, it limits the generalisability of the findings. The sample was not fully representative of the diversity of football associations worldwide, particularly in terms of geographical representation, organisational size, and cultural context. As a result, the findings may not reflect the full range of experiences, challenges, and successes encountered by MAs from different parts of the world. For

instance, safeguarding issues in small, resource-poor federations in the Global South may differ significantly from those faced by large, well-funded federations in Europe or North America. Furthermore, this research did not encompass the perspectives of all possible stakeholders involved in safeguarding, such as players, parents, or independent child protection organisations, which could have provided a broader and more balanced understanding of the issues.

Second, the focus on football, while providing valuable insights into the unique challenges and strategies within this sport, may not fully capture the safeguarding challenges experienced by other sports. As discussed by Brackenridge (2005), each sport has its own culture, structure, and historical context, which can significantly influence how safeguarding policies are developed, implemented, and received. For example, team sports like rugby or basketball may have different dynamics, power structures, and organisational priorities that shape safeguarding measures in ways distinct from football. Therefore, while the findings of this research contribute to the football sector, they may not be directly transferable to other sports, limiting the broader applicability of the study's conclusions. Further research that examines safeguarding practices across multiple sports would be beneficial to understand whether the challenges identified in this study are unique to football or whether they reflect wider trends in the sports world.

Additionally, the study's reliance on semi-structured interviews as the primary method of data collection could also be seen as a limitation. Although interviews allow for in-depth insights into the perspectives of stakeholders, they are inherently subjective and may be influenced by the biases or personal experiences of the interviewees. Participants may have been reluctant to discuss sensitive issues such as abuse, misconduct, or internal failings within their organisations, either due to fear of reputational damage or because they felt loyalty to their federations. This limitation is particularly relevant in the context of safeguarding, where fear of repercussions may prevent participants from fully disclosing the challenges their federations face or acknowledging shortcomings in their safeguarding practices.

Moreover, while the study employs Norbert Elias' Game Models and figurational sociology as theoretical frameworks, the application of such frameworks may not

have fully captured all the nuances of the complex and dynamic relationships within football organisations. The use of these models helped to illuminate the power dynamics and social interdependencies that shape safeguarding, but they may not have fully accounted for the broader political, economic, and social forces that influence safeguarding decisions and outcomes. Future research could benefit from incorporating additional theoretical perspectives to provide a more comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing safeguarding practices within football.

Another limitation of the study is the relatively narrow focus on the implementation of FIFA's safeguarding policies and programmes, particularly the FIFA Guardians initiative. While this allowed for an in-depth examination of one specific programme, it may have overlooked other important safeguarding initiatives within football or alternative approaches that have been adopted by different governing bodies, such as UEFA or national football associations. Expanding the scope to include a broader range of safeguarding initiatives and comparing their effectiveness could offer valuable insights into the relative strengths and weaknesses of different approaches.

Finally, the study's cross-sectional design, which focuses on a specific point in time, means that it does not account for changes in safeguarding practices that may have occurred after the data was collected. Safeguarding is an evolving field, and practices, policies, and perceptions can shift rapidly in response to emerging issues, societal changes, or high-profile incidents of abuse. Longitudinal research, which tracks the implementation and evolution of safeguarding practices over time, could provide a more dynamic and comprehensive understanding of how safeguarding systems develop, adapt, and improve in response to new challenges.

Despite these limitations, the study makes important contributions to the field of safeguarding in football, offering valuable insights that can inform future research and practice. By acknowledging these limitations, the research also sets the stage for future studies to build on its findings and address the gaps that have been identified, particularly in terms of broadening the scope, incorporating other sports, and refining the theoretical frameworks used to analyse safeguarding practices.

6.6. Future Research Directions

Future research could delve deeper into the cultural dynamics that shape safeguarding practices across different regions and sports, offering a nuanced understanding of how local customs, values, and societal norms influence the implementation of child protection measures. In many countries, safeguarding in football is shaped by deeply entrenched cultural attitudes toward authority, power, and the role of sport in youth development. These cultural factors often determine how safeguarding policies are perceived, implemented, and accepted by key stakeholders such as coaches, players, and administrators. Further investigation into the role of culture in shaping these dynamics would help uncover how cultural sensitivities and societal structures can either facilitate or hinder the adoption of safeguarding measures. By exploring these factors more comprehensively, researchers could better understand how to navigate cultural barriers and design policies that are more adaptable and relevant across different contexts.

Comparative studies examining safeguarding frameworks in other sports, such as athletics, rugby, or even non-contact sports like tennis, could provide a broader understanding of how safeguarding policies are applied and adapted in various sporting environments. Each sport has its own unique culture and organisational structure, which may offer distinct challenges and opportunities for safeguarding. For example, the dynamics of safeguarding in team sports like football, where large groups of children and coaches interact in complex hierarchical settings, may differ significantly from individual sports, where athletes may have more autonomy and less direct supervision. Comparative studies could also assess how safeguarding policies in different sports intersect with other elements such as athlete mental health, gender equality, and inclusivity, providing a more holistic view of safeguarding in the wider sports community.

Additionally, longitudinal studies tracking the long-term impact of safeguarding initiatives, as suggested by Holt et al. (2021), could help assess the effectiveness of these programmes in changing cultural norms and practices over time. A longitudinal approach would allow researchers to monitor the progress of safeguarding initiatives, track any changes in attitudes toward child protection, and assess the long-term sustainability of these policies within football and other

sports. Such studies could evaluate the effectiveness of training programmes, the consistency of policy implementation, and the real-world impact of safeguarding initiatives on the safety and well-being of young athletes. These insights could be critical in determining whether current safeguarding measures are truly capable of transforming organisational cultures and improving long-term outcomes for children involved in sports.

Furthermore, longitudinal research could explore how safeguarding measures evolve in response to emerging issues such as new forms of abuse (e.g., online abuse), the influence of social media on young athletes, and the growing recognition of mental health challenges within sports environments. These studies could provide valuable data on how sports organisations and governing bodies adapt to these evolving challenges and whether existing safeguarding frameworks are flexible enough to address new concerns.

In order to further support the academic community and guide future research in this area, Table 11 outlines specific Academic Contributions and Future Research Directions. These recommendations aim to identify key research gaps in the safeguarding literature, such as the need for cross-disciplinary approaches that integrate insights from sociology, psychology, and sport management. The table highlights actionable suggestions for advancing the understanding and implementation of safeguarding policies in sports, including the development of standardised tools for assessing safeguarding practices across different sports organisations. By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to a more comprehensive and globally applicable framework for safeguarding in sport, helping to create safer environments for young athletes worldwide.

In conclusion, while this study provides important insights into safeguarding in football, future research offers opportunities to build upon these findings and explore the broader dynamics at play across sports and regions. By investigating the cultural, organisational, and policy-related factors that influence the effectiveness of safeguarding initiatives, researchers can help refine existing practices and develop more contextually appropriate approaches to child protection. Additionally, by adopting longitudinal and comparative methodologies, future studies could provide the evidence needed to support the continued development and improvement of safeguarding policies, ensuring that children in

sports are protected from harm and able to participate in a safe, supportive environment.

Table 9. Future Research Directions (own creation)

Research Area	Gap Identified	Academic Recommendation
Cultural Influence on Safeguarding	Limited research on how cultural norms shape safeguarding practices	Conduct comparative studies on the impact of cultural differences on safeguarding across various regions and sports disciplines, as suggested by Hartill (2013).
Longitudinal Impact of Safeguarding	Lack of studies assessing the long-term effectiveness of safeguarding policies	Initiate longitudinal research to track the long-term impact of safeguarding initiatives on cultural change and policy implementation, as recommended by Holt et al. (2021).
Safeguarding Across Different Sports	Most research is football-centric, neglecting other sports' safeguarding issues	Expand research to other sports such as athletics, rugby, and swimming in order to compare safeguarding frameworks and their unique challenges, as supported by Brackenridge (2005).

<p>Effectiveness of Reporting Mechanisms</p>	<p>Insufficient academic focus on the real-world use of reporting mechanisms</p>	<p>Study the effectiveness of current reporting systems and their adoption rates within member associations, particularly focusing on anonymity and protection of whistleblowers (Guiora, 2020).</p>
<p>Technological Interventions in Safeguarding</p>	<p>Lack of research on technological solutions for safeguarding in sports</p>	<p>Explore innovative technological tools, such as apps and online platforms, to enhance reporting mechanisms and safeguard monitoring (Holt et al 2021)</p>
<p>Capacity Building and Training Impact</p>	<p>Little research on the efficacy of safeguarding training programmes in different regions</p>	<p>Investigate the effectiveness of capacity-building programmes in different cultural contexts, and evaluate how training improves safeguarding awareness and implementation</p>

		(Parent & Demers, 2011).
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6.7. Final Thoughts

This study underscores the critical importance of safeguarding in football, particularly the pivotal role that FIFA plays in setting global standards for child protection. As the governing body of international football, FIFA's influence on safeguarding policies cannot be overstated. FIFA's leadership has been instrumental in driving the agenda for child protection across the sport, but the research highlights that while policies exist, there is still significant work to be done in ensuring that these policies are effectively implemented and adapted to the diverse contexts of different MAs. The study shows that despite FIFA's global reach and resources, the implementation of safeguarding measures faces barriers related to cultural norms, governance structures, and financial constraints, as discussed by scholars such as Baker & Byon (2014) and Brackenridge (2005).

The challenges presented by cultural norms and attitudes towards child protection in different regions are particularly noteworthy. In many cases, deeply ingrained cultural values regarding the authority of coaches, the role of sport in society, and attitudes towards abuse create significant obstacles to the adoption of modern safeguarding practices. These cultural barriers are compounded by financial and resource constraints, which often leave MAs struggling to implement policies effectively or to provide adequate training and support to key stakeholders. This highlights the urgent need for FIFA and other governing bodies to not only set high-level policies but also provide tailored, culturally sensitive training, resources, and ongoing financial investment to ensure that safeguarding efforts are not only implemented but also sustained and adapted to the local context.

Furthermore, the study illustrates that safeguarding in football is not a static or one-time endeavour, but rather an evolving process. As the sport continues to grow globally, and as new challenges emerge, safeguarding practices must also evolve to keep pace. The research contributes to the growing body of knowledge that advocates for continuous improvements to child protection practices in

sports. It emphasises that safeguarding is not just about reacting to incidents, but about creating a proactive culture of safety that permeates every level of the sport, from grassroots to elite competitions. This requires a shift in mindset, where safeguarding is embedded in the organisational culture and is seen as a core responsibility, rather than an add-on or afterthought.

Ensuring that football remains a safe environment for all participants, particularly vulnerable children, will require sustained commitment from all stakeholders involved. This includes not only FIFA and the governing bodies but also the coaches, administrators, players, and parents who play a role in fostering a culture of safety. The findings of this study highlight that safeguarding is not a single entity but a shared responsibility that requires collaboration, communication, and accountability at every level. Therefore, future efforts to improve safeguarding should focus on creating an ecosystem of support that spans from grassroots initiatives to international programmes, ensuring that the necessary tools, knowledge, and resources are accessible to all.

Looking ahead, the continued commitment from FIFA and its MAs will be pivotal to transforming safeguarding practices across the sport. This study has highlighted the progress made in certain federations but also underscored the challenges that remain, particularly in less resourced regions. To truly make football a safe and inclusive environment for all participants, there must be a continued investment in both the structural and cultural changes needed to implement effective safeguarding measures. Ensuring that safeguarding policies are not only developed but also deeply embedded within the football community will require ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and a commitment to addressing the complexities of governance, culture, and resources in safeguarding efforts.

In this way, the thesis contributes not only to academic debate but also to the practical evolution of safeguarding governance within football, offering a framework that can inform future policy development, implementation strategies, and evaluation efforts.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Data Collection Instrument

Semi-structured interview questions for member association safeguarding managers:

Interview set-up:

- Duration - ca. 50 min.
- Interview type - Synchronous electronic interviews (visual interviews via Zoom/Teams)
- Interview recording - Audio recording plus application of transcription software

Interview questions:

Child protection department

1. How many people work in safeguarding department
2. How long does safeguarding department exists
3. Under which department is safeguarding
4. Is support from management strong when it comes to safeguarding

Child protection programme:

1. What have you done in the past 12 months to improve child protection in the workplace?
2. Do you have a child protection strategy developed in federation?
3. Is it developed with help of confederation child protection programmes or child protection local experts?
4. What was the hardest in implementation of programme on the ground?
5. Did you have enough expertise and candidates which could help in implementing the programme on ground?
6. Did you have timeline in implementation of programme?
7. Is there short term, middle term and long term goals in safeguarding strategy?
8. Do you work with local child protection agencies on ground?
9. Do you have case report mechanism?
10. Do you know how to behave before, during and after a disclosure?

FIFA GUARDIAN Programme:

1. Did you use FIFA guardian strategy?

2. If yes is there enough workshops, seminars organised by FIFA to implement programme?
3. Do you miss assistance of FIFA in implementation of programme?
4. Is FIFA Guardian programme understandable enough?
5. Is there areas which you think are missing in FIFA guardian programme?
6. What do you think opportunities are for improvement of available informations?
7. Do you have recommendations for FIFA Guardian programme?

Appendix B: Participant Consent Form

TITLE OF RESEARCH STUDY: Understanding the views and experience of those charged with implementing FIFA Guardians

Please answer the following questions by ticking the response that applies.

1. I have read the Information Sheet for this study and have had details of the study explained to me.
2. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I may ask further questions at any point.
3. I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study within the time limits outlined in the Information Sheet, without giving a reason for my withdrawal or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study without any consequences to my future treatment by the researcher.
4. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out in the Information Sheet.
5. I wish to participate in the study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
6. I consent to the information collected for the purposes of this research study, once anonymised (so that I cannot be identified), to be used for any other research purposes.

Participant's Signature:

Date:

Participant's Name (Printed): _

Contact details:

Researcher's Name (Printed): ANUSKA MARJANOVIC_

Researcher's Signature: _

Researcher's contact details:

Please keep your copy of the consent form and the information sheet together.

Appendix C: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

1. **Title of Project** Understanding the views and experience of those charged with implementing FIFA Guardians
2. **Legal basis for research for studies.** The University undertakes research as part of its function for the community under its legal status. Data protection allows us to use personal data for research with appropriate safeguards in place under the legal basis of **public tasks that are in the public interest.** A full statement of your rights can be found at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/about-this-website/privacy-policy/privacy-notice/privacy-notice-for-research>. However, all University research is reviewed to ensure that participants are treated appropriately and their rights respected. This study was approved by UREC with Converis number ERxxxxxxx. Further information at <https://www.shu.ac.uk/research/ethics-integrity-and-practice>
3. **Opening statement:** You are being invited to take part in a research project. The study is about FIFA Guardian, a global child protection programme. My goal is to obtain a Doctorate in Business Administration ('DBA') from Sheffield Hallam University in the United Kingdom by completing this dissertation. The child protection programme FIFA Guardian has existed for almost three years now, but not all FIFA member associations have implemented it yet. Therefore, the research will contribute to the understanding of critical success factors in the implementation process and to discovering the programme's limitations.
4. **Why have you asked me to take part?**
You have been chosen to participate in this study to obtain feedback from safeguarding protection managers active in the member associations. It is planned to perform semi-structured interviews with around twenty participants from different football member associations.
5. **Do I have to take part?** It is up to you to decide if you want to take part. A copy of the information provided here is yours to keep, along with the consent form if you do decide to take part. You can still decide to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, or you can decide not to answer a particular question.
6. **What will I be required to do?** You will be involved in the online interview, which should take approximately 1 hour over a videoconference

system Zoom. This interview contains questions about the child protection programme and FIFA Guardian programme. Your responses will be anonymous and confidential. The interview will be audio recorded. You will have an opportunity to review and correct the transcript of your interview within three months of receiving it via email.

7. Where will this take place? If you agree to participate, we will schedule a time that suits you for the interview (videoconference).

8. How often will I have to take part, and for how long? There will be one interview and it will take about one hour to conduct the interview.

9. Are there any possible risks or disadvantages in taking part? During this research project, no significant risks or disadvantages are expected. Any concerns you may have before, during, or after the video-conference interview can be brought to my attention directly.

10. What are the possible benefits of taking part? Despite the lack of immediate benefits for those involved in the project, the work will contribute to the ongoing discourse on child protection and provide insight into child protection in global football.

11. When will I have the opportunity to discuss my participation? No formal debriefing is planned, but you are welcome to contact me with any questions about your participation

12. Will anyone be able to connect me with what is recorded and reported? We will keep your personal information strictly anonymous during the research process. No one will be able to identify you in any reports or publications.

13. Who will be responsible for all of the information when this study is over? Dedicated storage areas for research data with controlled access are used to protect the information held by the University. The first item provides a link to the University's privacy notice describing how your private information is protected.

14. Who will have access to it? Your personal information is protected and will not be disclosed. Whenever a student is conducting research, their supervisors will have access to the data. There may be an audit of our research and we may be required to release the data. As part of our Research Misconduct Procedure, the University ensures that audits are conducted in a secure and confidential manner. In the case of complaints regarding a research project, the Head of Research Ethics may require access to the data.

15.What will happen to the information when this study is over? Generally, we don't keep your information for longer than necessary, and it's kept in an anonymised format. Your data will be retained for a period of time dependent on several factors, including the importance of the data, the nature of the study and the requirements of the publisher. Additional or subsequent research may be conducted using the data collected from this study.

16.How will you use what you find out? In order to communicate research to the public and academic community, anonymised data will most likely appear in a research publication, conference presentation, or public talk. The participants will not be identified in any report or publication.

17. How long is the whole study likely to last? Fieldwork is expected to be completed by the end of 2022, but the project will run until calendar year 2023.

18.How can I find out about the results of the study? As part of my DBA with Sheffield Hallam University, I will submit a dissertation to the Sheffield Business School based on the results of the research project. My dissertation will provide the results.

Researcher/ Research Team Details:

You should contact the Data Protection Officer if:

- you have a query about how your data is used by the University
- you would like to report a data security breach (e.g. if you think your personal data has been lost or disclosed inappropriately)
- you would like to complain about how the University has used your personal data

DPO@shu.ac.uk

You should contact the Head of Research Ethics (Professor Mayur Ranchordas) if:

- you have concerns with how the research was undertaken or how you were treated

m.ranchordas@shu.ac.uk

Postal address: Sheffield Hallam University, Howard Street, Sheffield S1 1WBT Telephone:
0114 225 5555

Appendix D: In vivo and analytic codes

In Vivo Codes	Analytic Codes
Wellbeing	Systematic Implementation
Prevention	Resource Allocation
Risk	Leadership and Accountability
Safety	Collaborative Effort
Empowerment	Sustainability and Continuity
Culture	Capacity Building
Protection	Cultural Change
Response	Operational Challenges
Mandate	Engagement with Stakeholders
Structure	Policy Development
Strategy	External Partnerships
Training	Volunteering Challenges
Policy	Scalability
Support	Innovation in Education
Volunteer	Monitoring and Evaluation
Consistency	Barriers to Implementation