

Rink Rage: majority who attend youth hockey games have seen young players or referees verbally abused

Nine-in-ten youth hockey fans say verbally abusive spectators are a “serious” problem

March 05, 2015 – Canadians who spend even a modest amount of time watching kids play organized hockey experience a good chance of also watching parents behaving badly. Most who have attended a youth game in the past couple of years say they have seen players or referees, or both, take abuse from angry spectators.

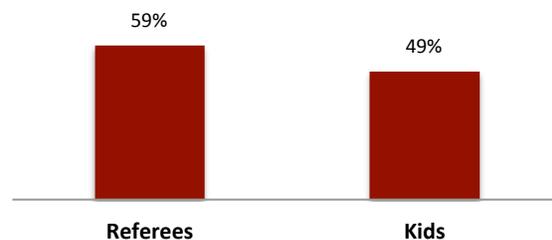
These findings emerge from a recent national Angus Reid Institute opinion poll of self-identified youth hockey fans: Canadian adults who have attended at least one youth game in the past two years.

Although it has been more than a decade since Hockey Canada published [a 119-page guide](#) to help minor hockey organizations maintain a “safe and fun” environment for kids involved in the sport, this new survey shows local hockey rinks are often host to some bad scenes.

Key findings:

- Six-in-ten (59%) have witnessed angry parents berating referees at youth hockey games at least once in the past couple of years and half (49%) have seen the hockey playing kids on the receiving end of this behaviour
- Almost nine-in-ten (87%) of those who have attended a youth hockey game, recently say that adults using inappropriate language and berating kids or referees is “a serious issue” for Canada’s iconic winter sport.
- Those who attend youth games most frequently see more abuse: The majorities of those who have gone to more than 11 games in the past two years have seen either players or referees (or both) being berated by angry parents.

At youth hockey games, have you seen parents using inappropriate language and/or berating:



METHODOLOGY:

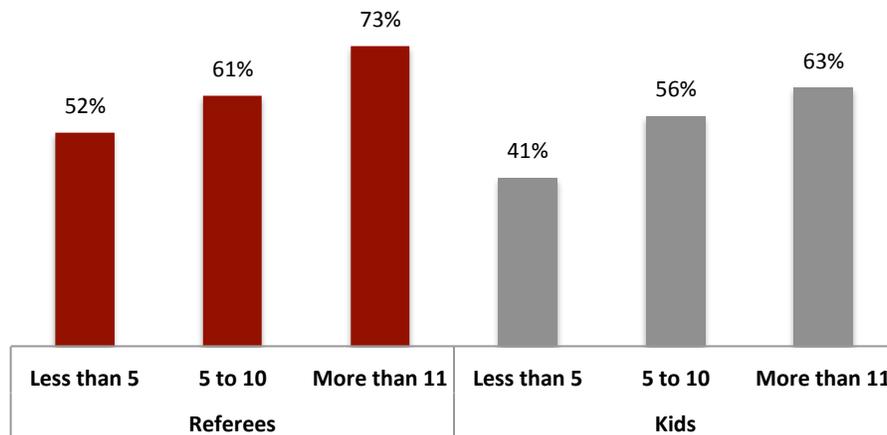
The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey among 698 Canadian adults who have been to at least one youth hockey game in the past two years who are also members of the Angus Reid Forum between February 2-4, 2015 and February 9-11, 2015. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 3.7%, 19 times out of 20.

The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by the ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

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At kids games, have you seen parents using inappropriate language and/or berating: [By number of games attended]



A “pervasive” problem

The results of this Angus Reid Institute survey show Canadian adults who’ve been to one or more youth hockey games in the past couple of years have experienced “parents using inappropriate language and/or berating the referees or players”:

- **Abuse of Referees:** those who may scarcely be older than the players they’re refereeing are the most common targets. A total of 59 per cent of those surveyed said they have seen referees under fire from angry parents on one or more occasions over the past two years.
- **Abuse of Players:** Players are also frequent targets for angry parents shouting from the stands: 49 per cent of the fans participating in the survey said they had witnessed this behaviour at the rink in the past two years.

Among less frequent spectators (those who’ve been to five or fewer, kids hockey games in the past two years), just over half (54%) say they’ve witnessed verbal abuse. The proportion increases to fully four-in-five (79%) of the most frequent spectators (11 or more games in the past two years).

Today, more youth hockey fans say the problem is getting worse rather than improving. While the majority - six-in-ten - say this behaviour is “staying about the same”, one-quarter (24%) say the situation is “getting worse”. Less than one-fifth (16%) say it is getting better. Views on this question are quite consistent regardless of the frequency of attendance at these youth hockey games.

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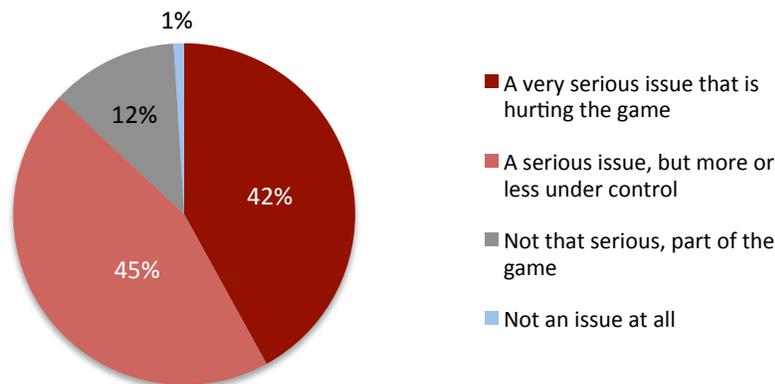
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A “serious” problem

Almost nine-in-ten (87%) survey respondents agree that adults using inappropriate language and berating kids while they’re playing hockey is a serious issue for the sport. This large majority is split on the implications of such behavior:

- 42 per cent say it’s *“a very serious issue that is hurting the game”*
- And 45 per cent took the less critical view that this is *“a serious issue, but more or less under control”*
- Only one-in-ten (12%) said they consider this to be *“not that serious, part of the game”*
- Almost none of the fans surveyed (1%) said this is *“not an issue”*

How serious an issue do you think this is for kids hockey today?



While there is a strong consensus that this is a serious issue, there is divergence of opinion as to whether it is “under control”.

Some encouragement may be found in the fact that the most frequent attendees of youth games tilt towards the view that this issue is “more or less under control” (45% versus 42%) whereas less frequent attendees are as likely to take the more critical view that it is “hurting the game”.

Perceptions of the severity of the problem are related to fans' own experiences watching these games. Those who see verbal abuse and bad behavior as hurting the game are more likely to have witnessed referees and players taking abuse from angry parents.

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What's happening at the rink?

Minor hockey officials struggle for solutions to the nasty side of hockey culture, a side very much in evidence at the younger playing levels. For example, a fed-up minor hockey organization on Vancouver Island recently grabbed national headlines after warning it was considering a '[Spectator-Free Weekend](#)' as punishment for parents who refused to curb their behaviour. Despite plenty of advance warning to a small but persistent group, eight adults were subsequently barred from attending games.

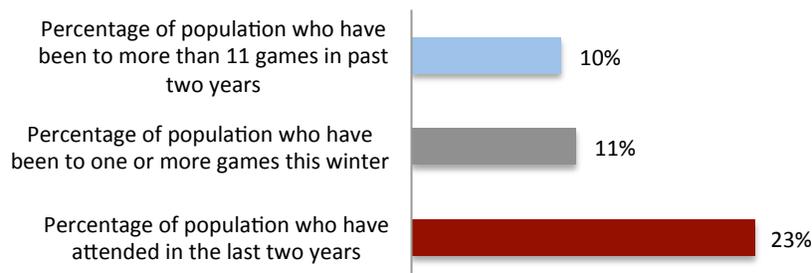
This BC case is hardly unique, according to what youth hockey fans told us about their experiences at the rink. For the purposes of this survey, these "fans" include anyone who has attended at least one organized hockey game for children or youth aged five to 16 within the past two years. The resulting sample of youth hockey fans includes but is not limited to: parents of players, friends and relatives, coaches and managers, referees and parents of referees.

See you at the rink?

Bad behavior aside, this poll provides a high-level profile of Canadians' attendance at youth hockey games.

- A total of 23 per cent of Canadian adults surveyed qualified for our survey by indicating they had attended a children's or youth organized hockey game at some point in the past two years
- About half of these fans said they had already attended one or more games this winter, and half say they've been to more than 11 games in the past two years

Canadian kids' hockey attendance



These fans of youth hockey are found among a wide cross-section of Canadians. Attendance is largely consistent across regions (highest in Ontario), by gender (men do go to the rink more frequently), generationally (dropping off somewhat among those over 55), and across educational and income strata (with a skew towards higher participation among higher income Canadians).

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The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research organization established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

Have you been out to watch a youth hockey game in the past couple of years? If so, how recently?				
(Attended a youth hockey game in past two years)	Total (698)	Number of games		
		Less than 5 (392)	5 - 10 (137)	More than 11 (169)
Yes, went to one or more games already this winter	50%	35%	62%	80%
Yes, not yet this year, but went last year	32%	39%	30%	16%
Yes, went two years ago	18%	27%	8%	4%

How many youth hockey games would you have been out to watch in the past two years? (Your best estimate is fine.)					
(Attended a youth hockey game in past two years)	Total (698)	Region			
		Western Canada (259)	ON (256)	PQ (137)	ATL (46)
Less than 5 games	58%	58%	55%	58%	73%
5 – 10 games	19%	21%	22%	15%	7%
11 – 20 games	9%	9%	9%	12%	5%
21 – 30 games	5%	2%	7%	4%	1%
Over 30 games in the past two years	9%	11%	7%	10%	14%

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How many youth hockey games would you have been out to watch in the past two years? (Your best estimate is fine.)

(Attended a youth hockey game in past two years)	Total (698)	Gender		Age		
		Men (389)	Women (309)	18 – 34 (203)	35 – 54 (282)	55+ (213)
Less than 5 games	58%	52%	64%	67%	54%	53%
5 – 10 games	19%	22%	16%	15%	19%	24%
11 – 20 games	9%	12%	6%	10%	8%	10%
21 – 30 games	5%	5%	4%	2%	5%	6%
Over 30 games in the past two years	9%	9%	10%	6%	14%	7%

Have you experienced parents using inappropriate language and/or berating the referees at any of the youth hockey games you've been to recently?

(Attended a youth hockey game in past two years)	Total (698)	Number of games		
		Less than 5 (392)	5 - 10 (137)	More than 11 (169)
Yes, have seen it	59%	52%	61%	73%
No, have not	41%	48%	39%	27%

Have you experienced parents using inappropriate language and/or berating the kids playing hockey this at any of the youth hockey games you've been to recently?

(Attended a youth hockey game in past two years)	Total (698)	Number of games		
		Less than 5 (392)	5 - 10 (137)	More than 11 (169)
Yes, have seen it	49%	41%	56%	63%
No, have not	51%	59%	44%	37%

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Based on your own experience or on whatever you have heard or seen, how serious an issue do you think this is for youth hockey today?				
(Attended a youth hockey game in past two years)	Total (698)	Number of games		
		Less than 5 (392)	5 - 10 (137)	More than 11 (169)
A very serious issue that is hurting the game	42%	43%	40%	38%
A serious issue, but more or less under control	45%	42%	46%	51%
Not that serious, part of the game	12%	13%	12%	9%
Not an issue at all	1%	1%	2%	2%

Based on your own experience or on what you might have heard or seen, do you think this issue is getting better than it used to be, is about the same, or is it getting worse?				
(Attended a youth hockey game in past two years)	Total (698)	Number of games		
		Less than 5 (392)	5 - 10 (137)	More than 11 (169)
Getting better	16%	13%	20%	19%
About the same	60%	61%	57%	59%
Getting worse	24%	26%	23%	22%

What are your reasons for attending youth hockey?				
(Attended a youth hockey game in past two years)	Total (698)	Number of games		
		Less than 5 (392)	5 - 10 (137)	More than 11 (169)
Got to watch as aunt or uncle or friend etc	66%	73%	74%	45%
Just go for fun/Not other connection	20%	21%	21%	17%
Have a kid/kids in hockey	17%	8%	14%	43%
Involved as a coach or manager with a team or association	6%	2%	6%	14%
Involved (or my kid is) as a referee	3%	2%	1%	8%

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