

The puck stops where? Canadians show little confidence in Hockey Canada culture change amid sex abuse allegations

Vast majority say Hockey Canada needs new leadership going forward

August 17, 2022 – A rare summer edition of the World Junior Hockey Championship began [with a whimper](#) last week. The tournament, usually played over the Christmas and New Year holidays, has been overshadowed not only by summer weather but also an ongoing reckoning at Hockey Canada, [believed](#) to be pushing some would-be fans away from the rink.

The national organization that governs hockey has come under intense scrutiny for issues [involving allegations of sexual assault](#) by former players and the use of organizational money [to settle lawsuits](#) against them.

A new study from the non-profit Angus Reid Institute finds a majority of Canadians (58%) say sexual harassment and sexual assault are a major problem in youth hockey, while another 17 per cent feel this is a problem, but a minor one.

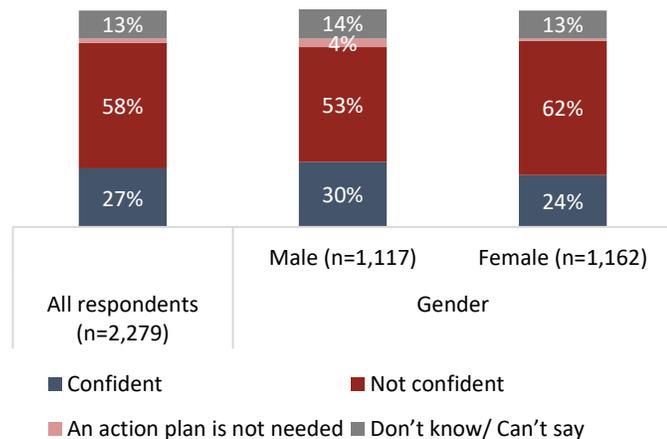
Those closest to the sport share this view. More than half (56%) of Canadians with a connection to youth hockey, whether current or past, see sexual misconduct in hockey culture as a major issue. Among this group, women of all ages are more likely to perceive a major problem compared to men in their same generational bracket. Men younger than 35 are least likely to agree.

As Canadians, their government, and the national hockey organization plot a path forward, most are supportive of action announced so far, but uncertain of its effectiveness in addressing the problematic roots of the culture. Four-in-five say they support the federal government's decision to freeze Hockey Canada's funding until changes are made. That said, when asked about that organization's new "[Action Plan](#)" to address these issues, which includes a review of training of coaches, players, and staff, just one-quarter of Canadians (27%) are confident that the environment will improve for women around the game.

As Canadians, their government, and the national hockey organization plot a path forward, most are supportive of action announced so far, but uncertain of its effectiveness in addressing the problematic roots of the culture. Four-in-five say they support the federal government's decision to freeze Hockey Canada's funding until changes are made. That said, when asked about that organization's new "[Action Plan](#)" to address these issues, which includes a review of training of coaches, players, and staff, just one-quarter of Canadians (27%) are confident that the environment will improve for women around the game.

Hockey Canada board chair Michael Brind'Amour [resigned](#) from his position on Aug. 5, just three months before the end of his term. Many, including Canada's [federal minister for sport](#), have continued to call for a change in senior leadership to begin a new era for the embattled organization. Canadians agree. Fully three-in-five (63%) say a change in senior leadership is needed, while just eight per cent disagree. Others say they aren't sure what should be done (27%).

How confident are you that this new action plan from Hockey Canada will improve the culture within hockey, and how women and girls are treated?



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from Aug. 8-10, 2022 among a representative randomized sample of 2,279 Canadian adults who are members of [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.0 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was self-commissioned and paid for by ARI. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

More Key Findings:

- Among those who perceive sexual misconduct to be a problem in hockey culture, one-quarter of women (24%) say these forthcoming efforts from Hockey Canada will improve the situation, while three-in-five (62%) disagree. Men, too, lean in this direction, with 53 per cent lacking confidence.
- While this is clearly seen as an issue by Canadians, only five per cent see sexual assault and harassment as a hockey-specific problem, rather than a sports problem. More than four-in-five (84%) say this is a broad issue to be dealt with in sports culture, even if hockey gets the most attention.
- Past Conservative Party supporters are far less convinced that sexual misconduct is a problem in hockey culture. Two-in-five (42%) say it is a major problem, while comparatively, seven-in-ten past Liberal, NDP, and Bloc Québécois voters hold this view.

About ARI

*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 foundation 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.*

INDEX

Part One: The scale of the problem, as told by those close to the game

- **Hockey culture and respect – perspectives differ**
- **But most agree sexual misconduct is a problem**

Part Two: What to do about it

- **Support for funding freeze**
- **Little confidence Action Plan will change the culture**
- **Most say a leadership change is needed**

Part Three: A hockey problem or a sports problem?

Part One: The scale of the problem, as told by those close to the game

Canada's love of hockey is storied and rich. This summer, however, the sport has garnered attention for the reporting of a less talked about but [evidently well-known](#) subcurrent in the culture – sexual misconduct.

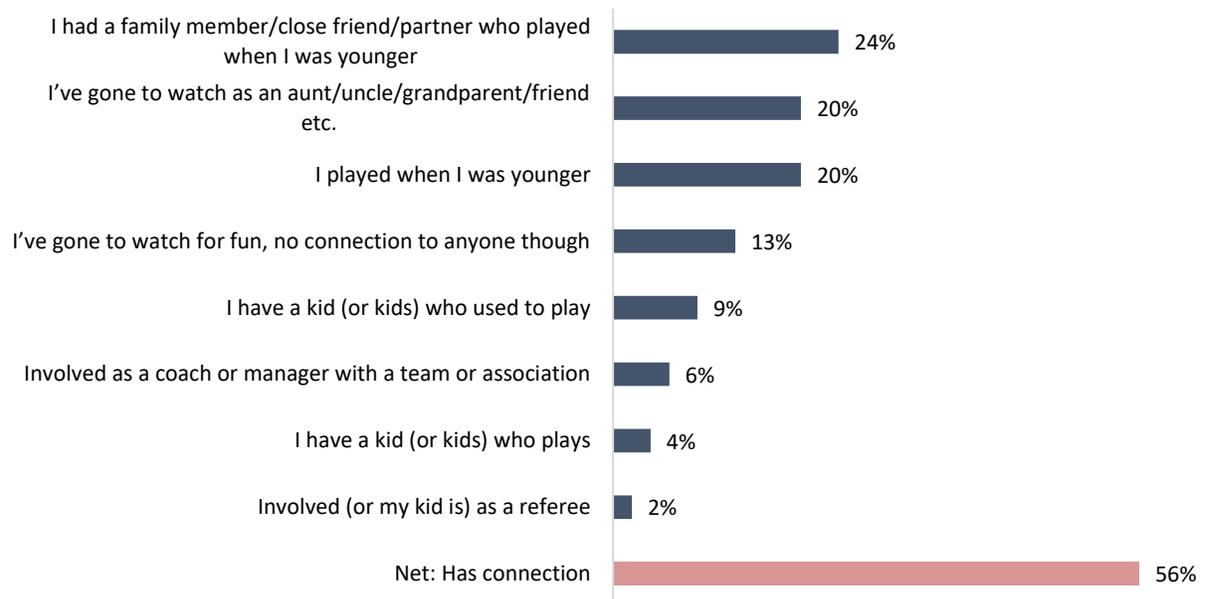
After reports that police in London, Ontario would [reopen an investigation](#) into sexual assault allegations against the 2018 World Junior Hockey Championship team, further investigation found that Hockey Canada had been using organizational funds to pay sexual assault settlements, to the tune of about \$8 million since 1989. Unbeknownst to parents and players, funding came from the organization's [National Equity Fund](#), which is paid for in part by membership fees.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

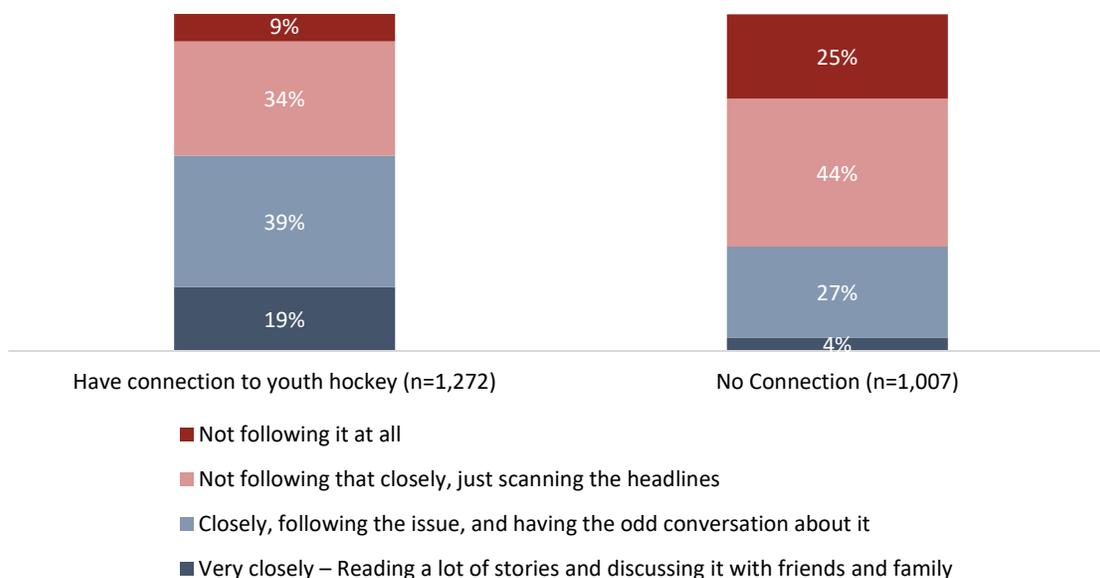
To benefit analysis of this issue, the Angus Reid Institute asked Canadians about their experiences with hockey at the youth level. Overall, 56 per cent say they have engaged with the sport either in the past or currently, as a player, coach, parent, or otherwise:

**Canadian Youth Hockey Connections
(Total sample n=2,279. Have connection n=1,272)**



Engagement with this news is much higher among those with a connection to youth hockey. Three-in-five (58%) close to the game are following this story, compared to approximately half as many who have no direct connection to the game at the youth level (defined as participation between the ages of five and 17):

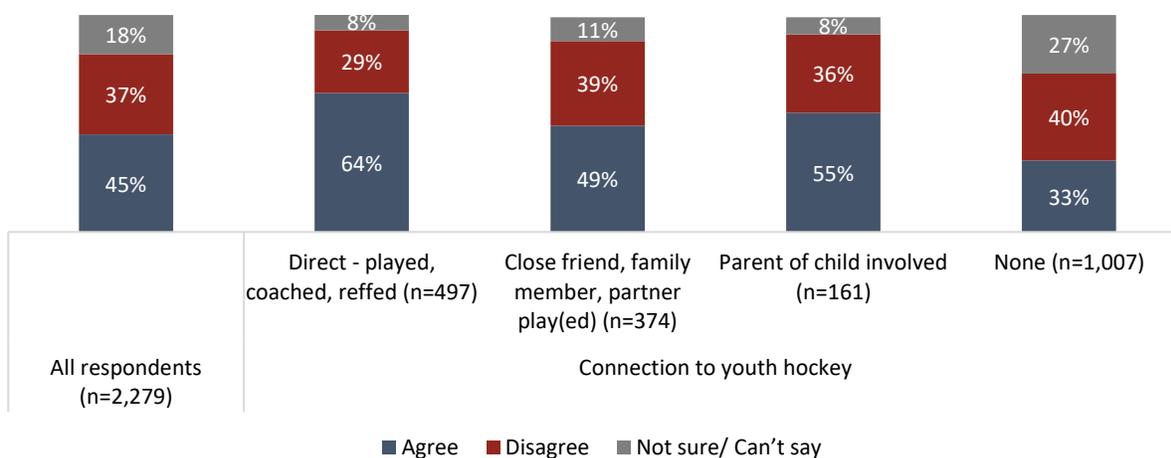
How closely following Hockey Canada sexual assault story



Hockey culture and respect – perspectives differ

For many people, this issue at the most fundamental level begins with respect, and there are competing perspectives among Canadians about just how much this concept defines the culture of the sport. For those who have no connection to the game, more respondents disagree that respect is a big part of hockey culture than agree (40% disagree, 33% agree), while those closest to the game, the players, coaches, and referees at the community rink, largely lean toward agreeing that players embody this principle. That said, those who watch from a degree of separation, the friends, family members, and partners of players, are more divided:

Agree vs Disagree - "Respect is a big part of hockey culture"

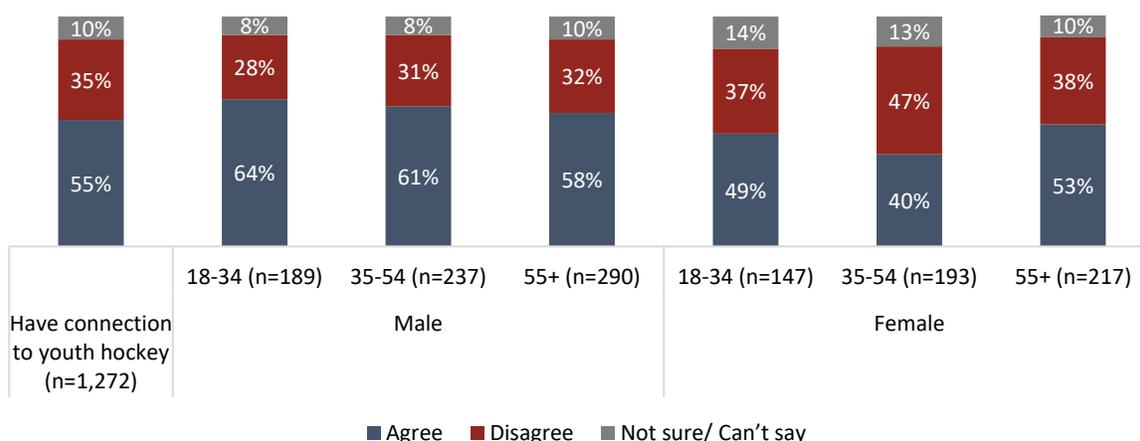


CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

Focusing in on those who are close to the game at the youth level, women are more likely than men in all age groups to disagree that respect is a big part of hockey culture. Young men, however, are particularly convinced that it is, with more than twice as many in the 18- to 34-year-old group saying that respect is part of the culture:

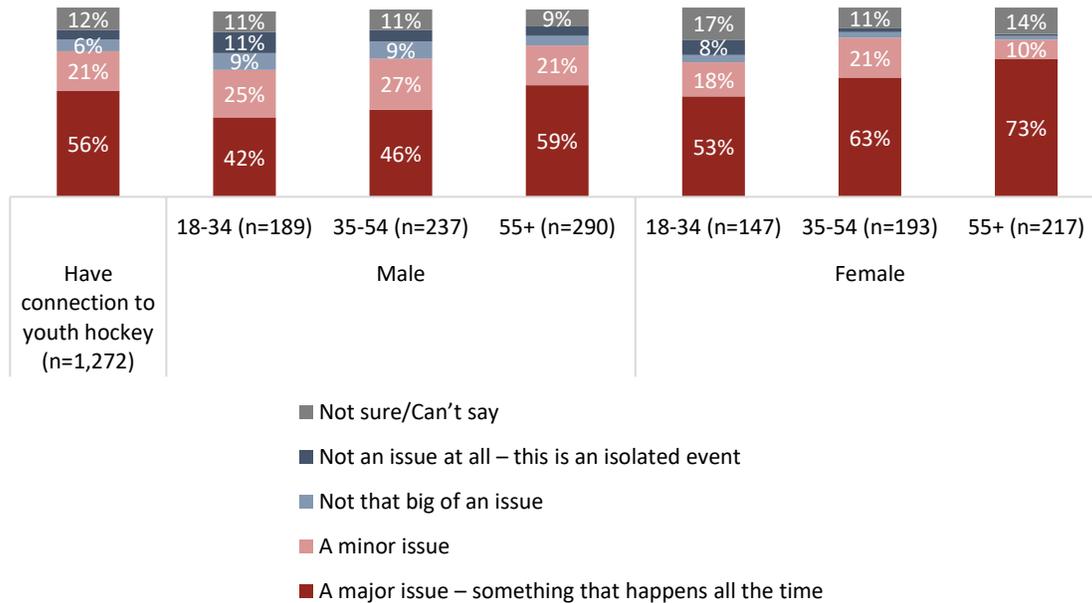
**Agree vs Disagree -
"Respect is a big part of hockey culture"
(Among those with a connection to youth hockey)**



But most agree sexual misconduct is a problem

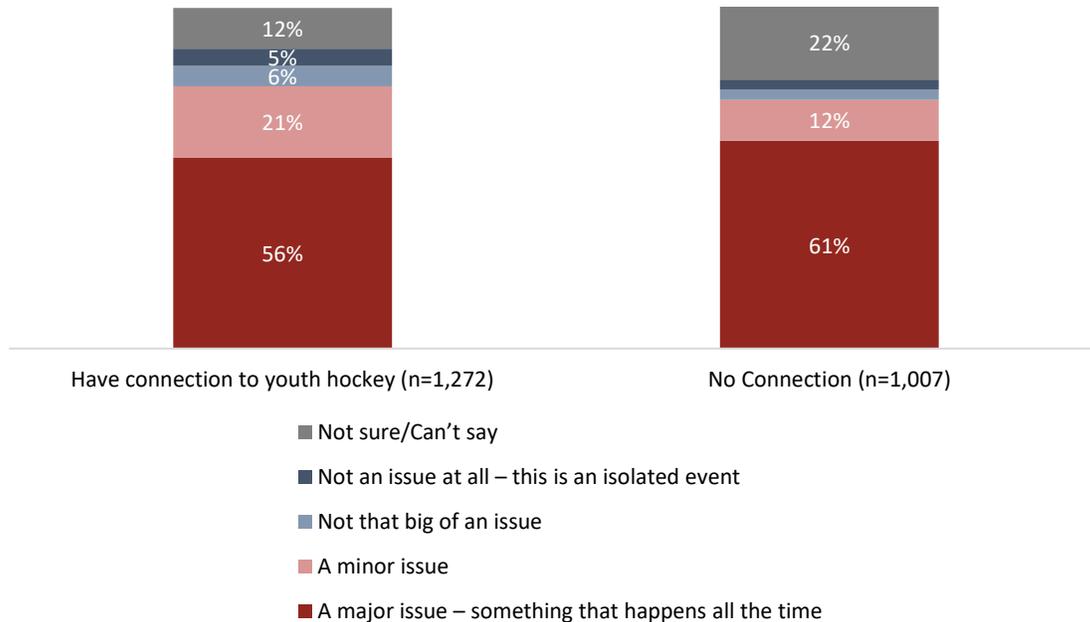
Interestingly, and perhaps counterintuitively, those same young men who are or have been involved in youth hockey largely recognize that sexual harassment and assault is an issue for the sport. Two-in-five (42%) say it is a major issue, something that happens all the time, while one-quarter (25%) say it is an issue, even if not a predominant one. Again, women of all ages are more likely to see this as a major issue, with young men much more likely than other groups to say there is little or no problem, and less likely to view the issue as serious:

**In your opinion, thinking about sexual harassment and sexual assault in youth hockey, do you think this is:
(Among those with a connection to youth hockey)**



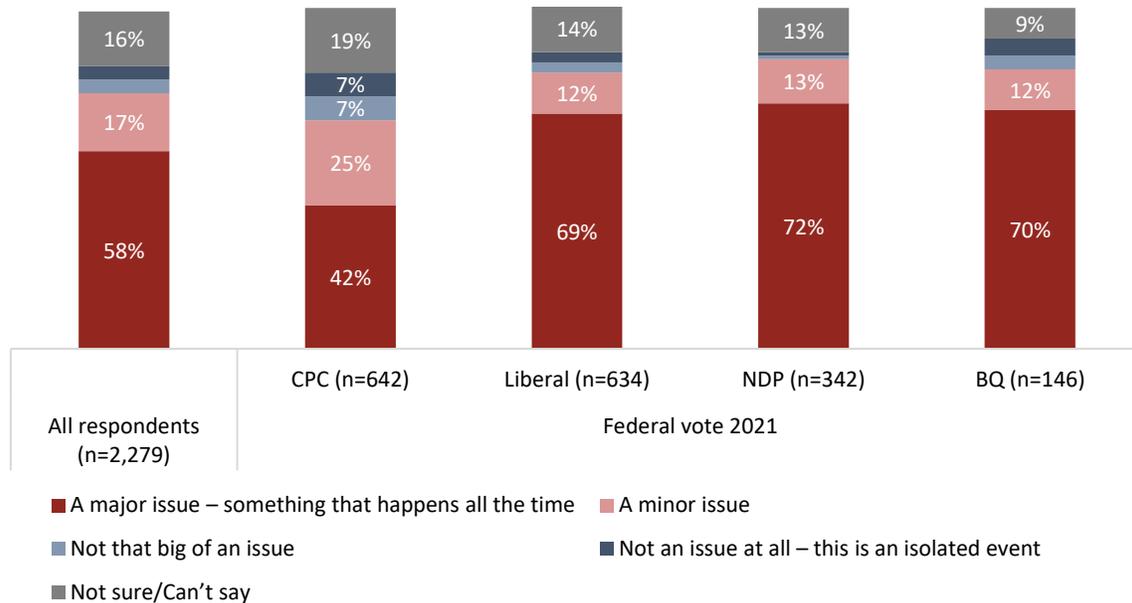
This issue is recognized by those inside and outside the game, with few saying that there is no problem, and majorities saying sexual misconduct is a major issue:

In your opinion, thinking about sexual harassment and sexual assault in youth hockey, do you think this is:



While this issue affects Canadians from all walks of life, it is viewed differently across the political spectrum. Consider that two-in-five (42%) past Conservative Party voters say there is a major problem with sexual misconduct in hockey, while far greater numbers say the same among all other political demographics. Importantly, there is little difference in the level of connection to youth hockey between these groups ([see detailed tables](#)):

In your opinion, thinking about sexual harassment and sexual assault in youth hockey, do you think this is:



Part Two: What to do about it

Support for funding freeze

The federal government responded to revelations about the use of Hockey Canada funds to settle sexual assault allegations by freezing funding that it delivers to the organization each year. This amount totals approximately \$8 million per year, or six per cent of Hockey Canada’s annual budget. Hockey Canada released a response saying it needs to “do more” to regain the trust of Canadians and to receive these funds, which will only be released when certain conditions are met. It will also no longer use the National Equity Fund to settle lawsuits against players.

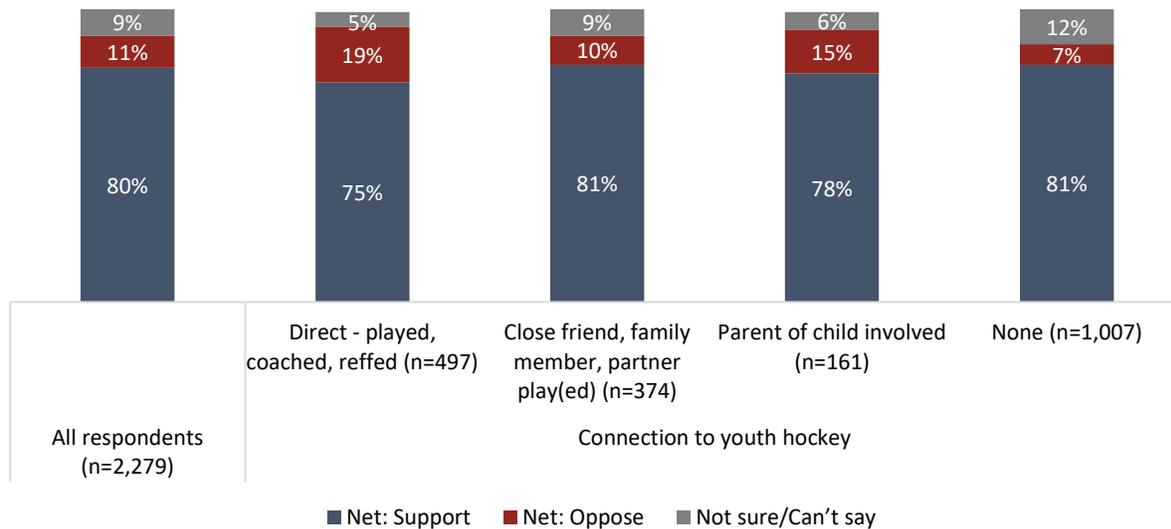
Sport Canada, too, received criticism for reportedly being made aware of the 2018 allegations but not informing the sports minister’s office.

Canadians see this funding freeze as a step in the right direction. Four-in-five support this action, with one-in-ten (11%) dissenting. Opposition rises to one-in-five (19%) among those closest to the game:

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

The federal government has frozen Hockey Canada’s funding – about \$8 million a year – until the organization meets certain conditions and shows it has a concrete plan to deal with sexual assault within the program. Do you support or oppose this decision?



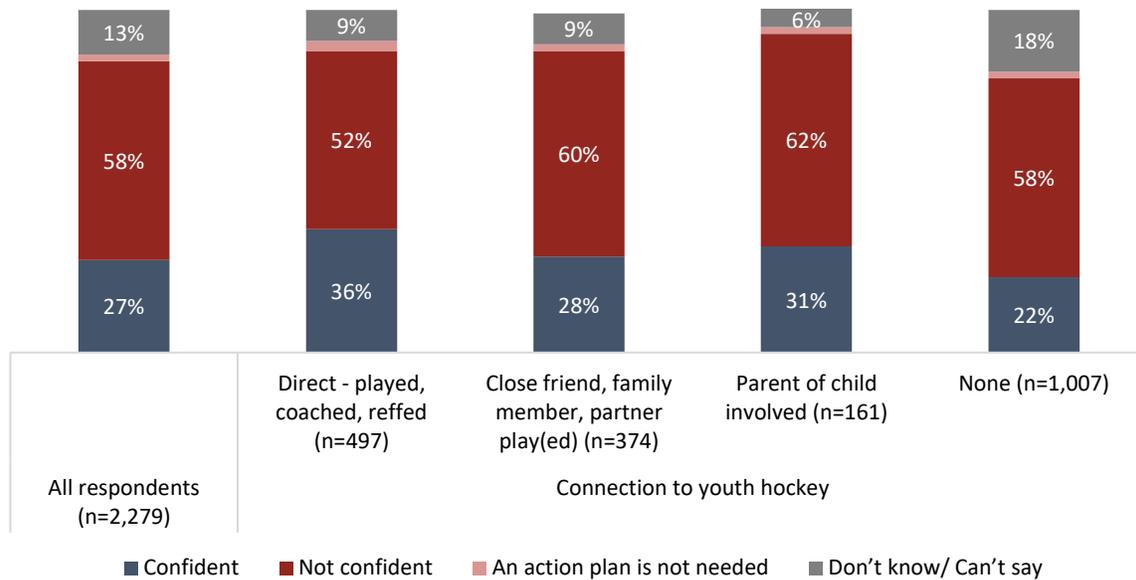
Asked if this funding freeze will adversely affect their own program, one-third of those involved in youth hockey as coaches or parents say it will ([see detailed tables](#)).

Little confidence Action Plan will change the culture

That said, there is considerable doubt in Hockey Canada’s ability to shift the culture when it comes to treatment of women. In response to the conditions set by the government, Hockey Canada released an “[Action Plan](#)” to improve how it handles sexual abuse and harassment. Part of the plan includes annual reports on complaints of abuse and a review of training of coaches, players, and staff, including a focus on “masculinity, consent, and toxic behaviour”.

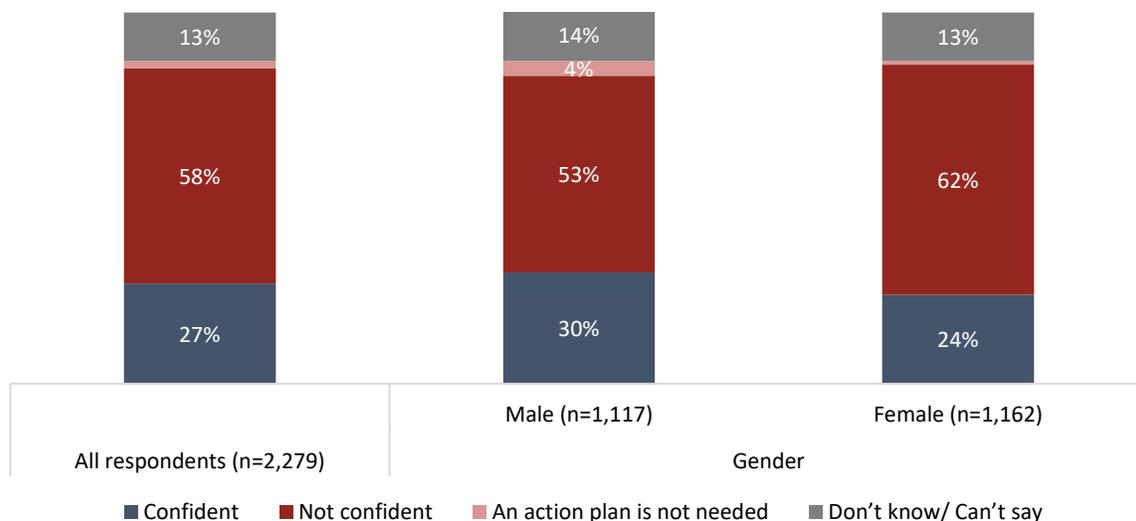
Canadians see this as an uphill battle. Overall, one-quarter (27%) are confident that this will shift the culture in hockey, though more than twice as many (58%) disagree. Those closest to the game are most optimistic (36%) but still half say they have little or no confidence that meaningful change will be made:

How confident are you that this new action plan from Hockey Canada will improve the culture within hockey, and how women and girls are treated?



Women are more pessimistic than men about the potential for change. Three-in-five (62%) say they have little or no confidence that women and girls will be treated better, compared to 53 per cent of men.

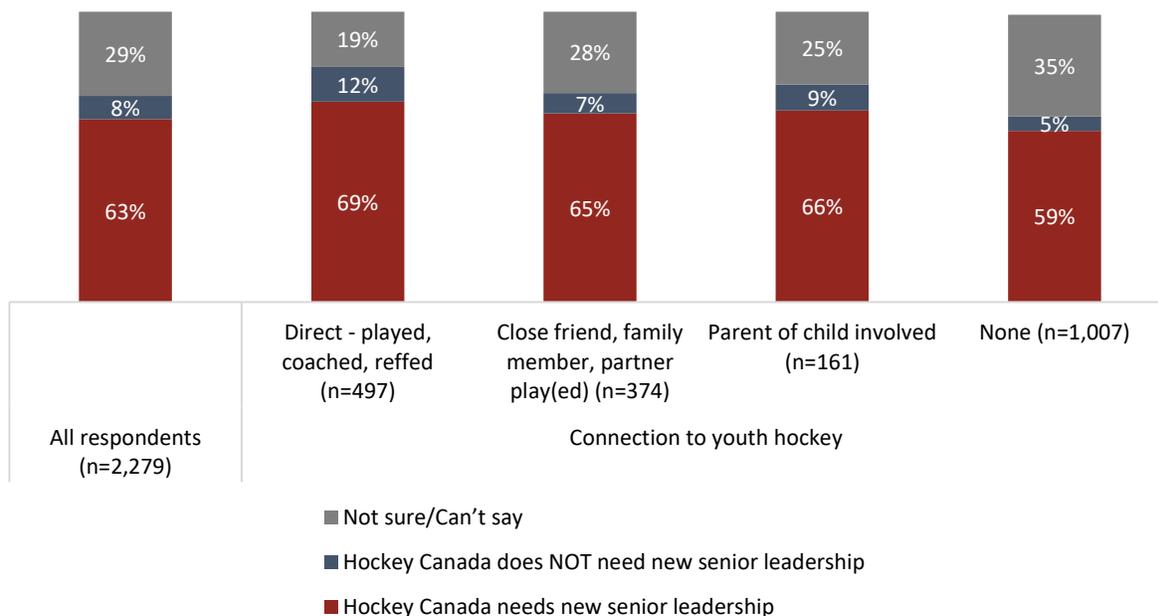
How confident are you that this new action plan from Hockey Canada will improve the culture within hockey, and how women and girls are treated?



Most say a leadership change is needed

To this point, little has changed from a leadership perspective with Hockey Canada. While the organization’s outgoing chair, Michael Brind’Amour, retired from his position a few months earlier than scheduled, CEO Scott Smith has resisted calls to step aside. Smith testified in the House of Commons that in 2018, the organization “should have done more and could have done more” after allegations against members of the World Junior team. Canadians, particularly those closest to the game, say that new senior leadership is needed:

Based on what you have read, seen or heard, would you say:

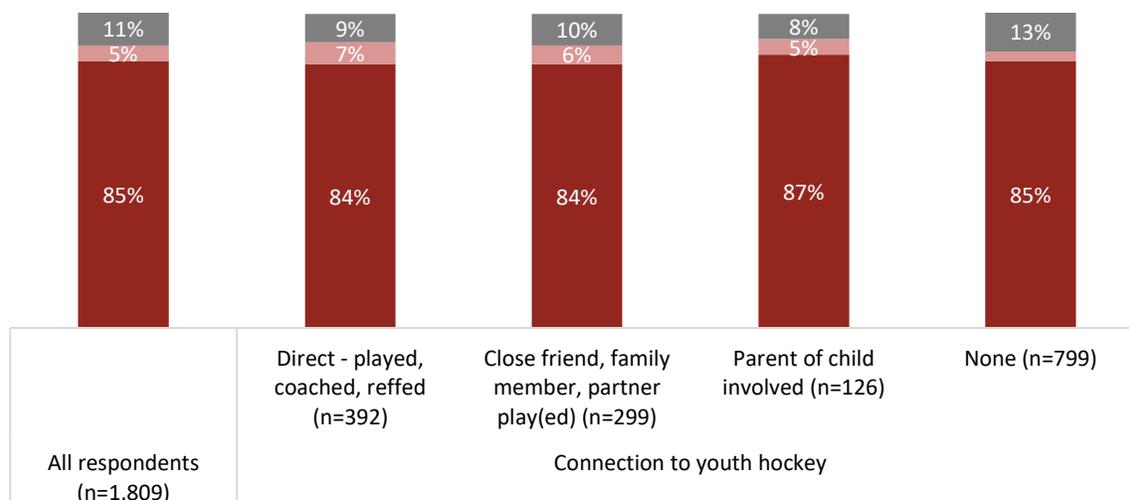


Men and women offer near-identical views on this issue, though older respondents are much more likely to say that leadership must change (see detailed tables).

Part Three: A hockey problem or a sports problem?

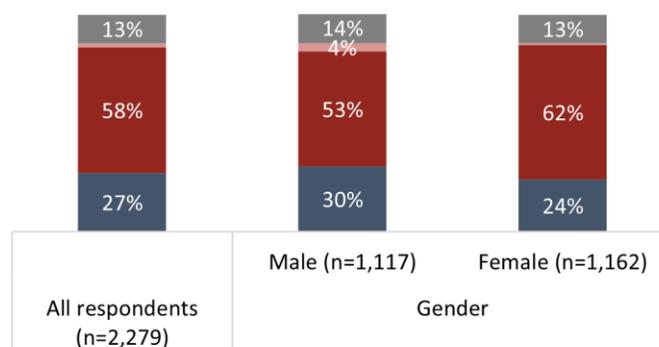
Advocates for change in how women and girls are treated have been careful to note that while this is a hockey-centric story, this is not a hockey-only issue. Canadians were asked for their views on this: is the problem specific to hockey or an issue in all sports? The vast majority say that this is a much broader issue, even if Canadians pay more attention to the hockey culture portion of it:

**Thinking more broadly, do you think that this issue of sexual assault is:
(Among those who believe this is a problem in hockey)**



- Not sure/Can't say
- More of a hockey problem
- A problem in all sports, even if we pay most attention to hockey in Canada

How confident are you that this new action plan from Hockey Canada will improve the culture within hockey, and how women and girls are treated?



- Confident
- Not confident
- An action plan is not needed
- Don't know/ Can't say

The International Olympic Committee has released three Consensus Statements to this affect, in 2007, 2016, and 2019, to [warn sports organizations](#) that sexual harassment and abuse are widespread across different youth sports in "the locker-room, the playing field, trips away, the coach's home or car, and social events, especially where alcohol is involved." [Laurel Walczak](#), a Sport Media & Sport Business professor at the Global Experiential Sport Lab at Toronto Metropolitan University, has [called on men in](#)

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
 Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org

hockey leadership to drive this change, as they are the ones currently in positions of power and leadership.

For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by connection to youth hockey, [click here](#).

For detailed results by age and gender with a connection to youth hockey, [click here](#).

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, President: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl

Dave Korzinski, Research Director: 250.899.0821 dave.korzinski@angusreid.org