

THE SPREAD OF MATCH-FIXING IN ESTONIA

2022

Ordered by: Ministry of
Culture

Conducted by: Eesti Uuringukeskus OÜ

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SUMMARY

- ✓ In the summer of 2022, OÜ Eesti Uuringukeskus carried out a survey, ordered by the Ministry of Culture, aimed at obtaining an overview of the exposure of athletes, coaches and referees involved in the most popular ball games in Estonia to match-fixing, and the common attitudes towards match-fixing.
- ✓ The survey was conducted online between 10 June and 18 July 2022. The interviews were held according to the preferences of the respondents, in Estonian, Russian or English. 504 respondents participated in the survey.
- ✓ The results showed that nearly 40% of those involved in the most popular ball games earn remuneration for their sports-related activity, more than a fifth receive a scholarship and less than a tenth receive benefits in other forms. In nearly 40% of the cases, no remuneration is paid for the sport activities.
- ✓ All referees of the most popular ball games in Estonia, and 93% of the coaches and 41% of the athletes earn remuneration or benefits for their sports activities.
- ✓ Over the years, 16% of those involved in the most popular ball games in Estonia have experienced personal financial difficulties. Financial difficulties have been experienced in the past year by 5% of the target group; 1–5 years ago by 3%, and more than five years ago by 4% of the target group.
- ✓ A sports club or other sports organisation has owed wages or other remuneration for more than three months to nearly one-fifth of the athletes, coaches or referees involved in the most popular ball games in Estonia. In the past year, this has only happened in 2% of the cases, but 1–5 years ago, in tenth, and more than five years ago, in 8% of the cases.
- ✓ Nearly a third of the people involved in the most popular ball games have made bets on sports results in both official sports betting channels and among friends. 2% of the target group make regular bets in sports betting channels; there are no regular contributors among a circle of friends or within a family.
- ✓ 17% of the people involved in the most popular ball games know a player or another person working in a sports club / sports organisation who bets on or has bet on their own matches. 16% are aware of such cases in Estonia and 4% abroad. Only 1% of the target group admitted to having bet on their own matches.
- ✓ 37% of the people involved in the most popular ball games in Estonia know a player or another person working in a sports club / sports organisation who is engaged in an addictive behaviour. 6% of the target group admitted to having an addictive behaviour pattern.
- ✓ Nearly a quarter of the people involved in the most popular ball games know a player or a person working in a sports organisation who consumes excessive amounts of alcohol; 15% know someone betting on sports games; 8% know another type of gambler; 7% know someone playing card games for money to an addictive extent, and 4% know drug abusers. A couple of per cent of the respondents admitted to having various addictive habits.

- ✓ 14% of the people involved in the most popular ball games in Estonia know someone who has participated in match-fixing in Estonia, and 9% know someone who has participated in the manipulation of a sports competition abroad. The most frequently, the respondents reported knowing someone who had been involved in a match-fixing more than five years ago.
- ✓ 4% of the target group admitted to having been involved in match-fixing in Estonia in various periods, and 2% admitted to having been involved abroad. Personal exposure to manipulation with the results of a sports competition most frequently dated back to a period more than five years ago.
- ✓ Both in Estonia and abroad, the people involved in the most popular ball games have been proposed to manipulate the results of sports competitions only in a few cases.
- ✓ All respondents who have been proposed to participate in match-fixing in Estonia at different times have refused to do so. The proposals made abroad have been accepted in a few cases.
- ✓ Nearly 60% have notified or would notify someone of a proposal made to them to fix matches, and a little over a half of the target group has notified or would notify someone about a proposal they know has been made to someone else.
- ✓ In the past five years, 21% of the people involved in the most popular ball games in Estonia have passed training on match-fixing. About a third of the referees have passed training, and nearly a fifth of the coaches and athletes.
- ✓ In half of the cases, the training has been organised by the sports federation; in over one-fifth of the cases, by the international sports federation, and in more than a tenth of the respondents, by the Estonian Anti-Doping and Sports Ethics Foundation.
- ✓ The athletes, coaches and referees involved in the most popular ball games are generally opposed to match-fixing. However, a little more than a tenth of the target group finds that involvement in match-fixing is justified in certain cases.
- ✓ More than 80% of the people involved in the most popular ball games in Estonia agree that match-fixing poses a major threat to sports and its reputation and that the organisers, coaches, referees and other sports workers involved in match-fixing, as well as the athletes themselves, should be severely punished.

BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVE OF THE SURVEY

Match-fixing is gaining more ground in world sports (Cascon, 2022) and a few cases have been published in Estonian media as well¹. To realise the overall extent of the issue in Estonia, OÜ Eesti Uuringukeskus conducted a survey in June and July 2022, ordered by the Ministry of Culture, which was aimed at getting an overview of whether the Estonian athletes, coaches and referees in football, basketball, handball, volleyball, tennis, ice hockey and floorball (hereinafter: the most common/popular ball games) have been exposed to match-fixing in Estonia or in a foreign country in their sports activities, whether they know the risks they face, whether they have been trained on the subject, and what their attitudes to match-fixing are.

This report provides an overview of the main results of the survey and summarises the results.

¹ For example: <https://jalgpall.ee/uudised/riigiprokuratuur-saatis-kihlveopettuses-suudistatavad-kohtu-ette-n5733>
<https://sport.postimees.ee/3631983/kuritegelikud-panustajad-puudsid-mojutada-kalevite-duelli>
<https://sport.postimees.ee/7351701/kokkuleppemangu-kahtlusega-maardu-linnameeskond-meile-on-teada-nimed-kelle-poole-poorduti-kahtlaste-ettepanekutega>

SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

The total target group is approximately 2,900 people, divided between various fields of sports.

The survey was conducted online in accordance with the requirements of the Estonian Data Protection Inspectorate. The sports federations and sports clubs sent the e-mail addresses of the respondents to the authorised data processor of the survey, Norstat Eesti AS, on the basis of the authorisation of the Estonian Data Protection Inspectorate, issued under § 6 (5) of the Personal Data Protection Act. The e-mail addresses of the respondents were only used to send out the invitation to participate in this survey and to notify the winner of the gift card raffle.

The survey was conducted online between 10 June and 18 July 2022. The interviews were held according to the preferences of the respondents, in Estonian (88%), Russian (11%) or English (1%).

In the course of the survey, 1,886 persons were contacted and 504 responses were received, which makes the response rate of 27%.

The breakdown of the respondents by socio-demographic characteristics is shown in Figure 1.

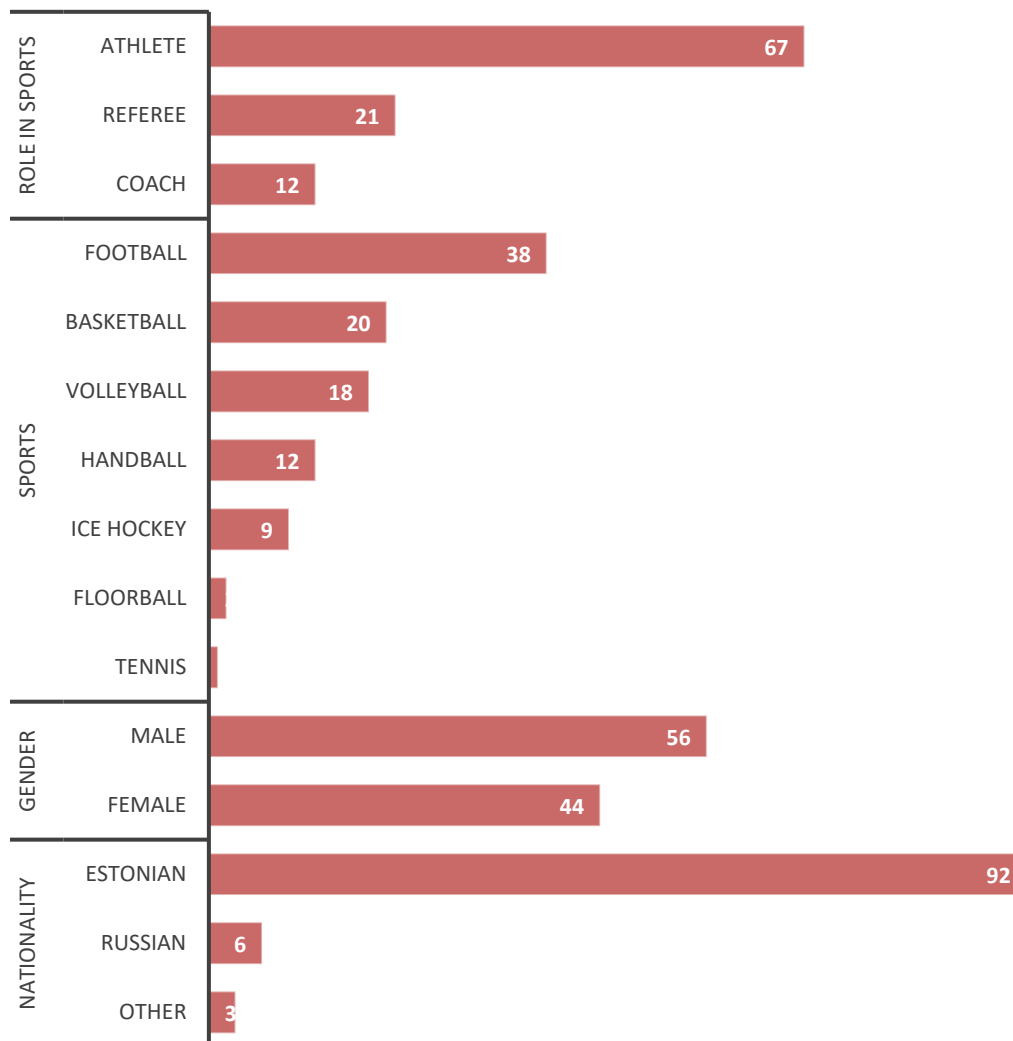


Figure 1. Respondent profiles by socio-demographic characteristics (% , n=504).

The breakdown of the age groups varied depending on the role of the respondents in the sports (Figure 2). In athletes, the age group of 19–23 years was the largest in the sample; in referees, the age group of 31–40 years and in coaches, the age group of 31–45 years.

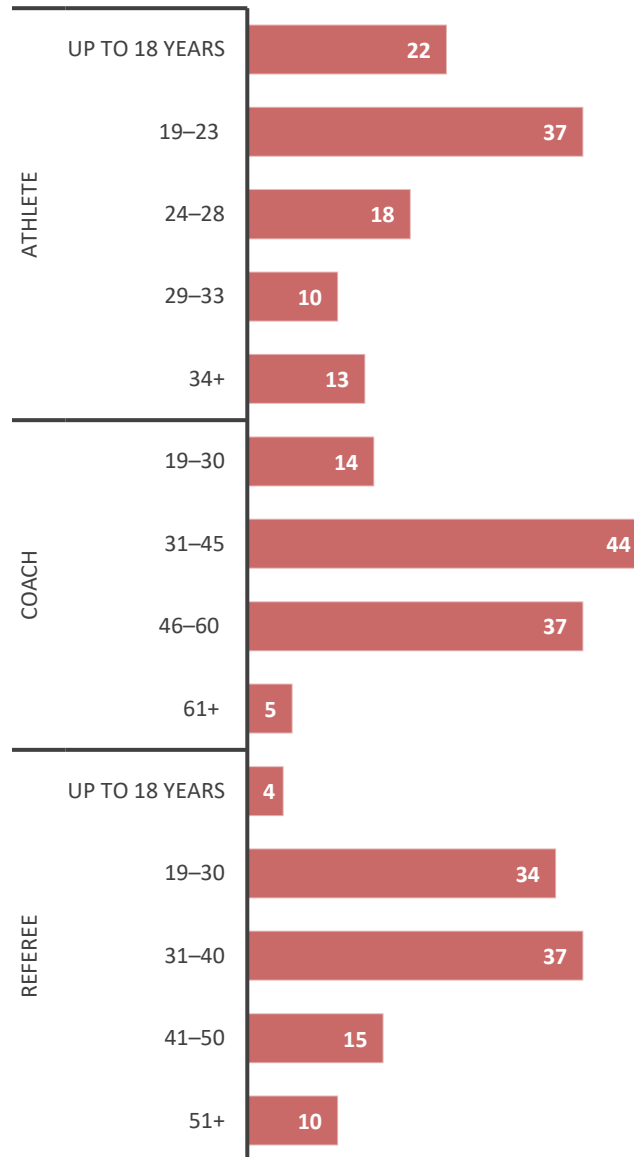


Figure 2. Age distribution of the respondents by roles (% , n=504).

DATA ANALYSIS

Norstat Eesti AS sent the pseudonymised responses received from the survey to another authorised processor, Eesti Uuringukeskus OÜ, who analysed the responses and prepared the final report.

Statistical significance was measured with chi-square tests of background characteristics by sports and roles (athlete, coach, referee), and the report only brings out the differences that were statistically significant and can therefore be applied to the target group of the survey.

The statistical analysis software SPSS and MS Excel were used to analyse the data.

In this report, the results are presented in figures and tables. The data in the figures and tables are rounded off by computer programs and the sums of any rows or columns may therefore sometimes be below or over 100%.

The captions of the figures show the number of respondents in the sample.

The annexes to the report include the IBM SPSS and Excel data files, the questionnaire in Estonian and the data tables by various socio-demographic characteristics.

CONCLUSIONS

As the survey revealed that the people involved in the most popular ball games have been proposed to manipulate the results of sports competitions in a few cases only, and that 4% of the target group has participated in match-fixing in Estonia and 2% abroad, it can be concluded that match-fixing is currently not a major issue in the Estonian sports scenery.

More than a tenth of the respondents knew other persons involved in the most popular ball games in Estonia who had participated in match-fixing, but such participation had generally occurred more than five years ago.

Although research in the field of sports fraud since 2010 has mainly focused on match-fixing (Vanwersch et al., 2022), no known surveys comparable to the results of this survey have been carried out either in Estonia's neighbouring countries or anywhere further. It is therefore difficult to place the results of the survey in a wider international context.

There are results of a similar survey carried out in 2011 in Lithuania in the basketball and football champions' league, which showed that about 15% of the football players and 21% of the basketball players had been personally contacted with a proposal to participate in match-fixing (Trumphyte, 2016). Estonia's results for 2022 are considerably better, but there is no overview of the situation that was here more than ten years ago.

Even though, based on the results of the survey, match-fixing is not very wide-spread in Estonia, there is certainly some room for improvement in the attitudes towards match-fixing. More than a tenth of the people involved in the most popular ball games are of the opinion that, in certain cases, participation in match-fixing is justified, and there are even more of those who do not see it as a major threat to sports and its reputation and do not consider it necessary to impose strict penalties on the participants. Also, more than a tenth of the people involved in the most popular ball games do not find it necessary to notify anyone of the proposal made to them or to anyone else to participate in match-fixing, and a large proportion (app. 30–40%) of the respondents do not have an opinion on the subject.

The risk factors contributing to participation in match-fixing may also include the fact that nearly a fifth of the people involved in the most popular ball games in Estonia know a player or another person working in a sports club / sports organisation who has bet money on their own matches, and nearly 40% know someone from the target group who suffers from an addictive behaviour.

In the past five years, one-fifth of the people involved in the most popular ball games in Estonia have passed training on match-fixing. In view of the above, this participation rate should certainly be raised to make it significantly higher.

Also, the field should be studied more thoroughly in Estonia. Empirical research on sport-related fraud has still not been too extensive on the international level, either, and understanding its complex nature and scope requires an interdisciplinary approach (Vanwersch et al., 2022).