



INFLUENCE OF PARENTS IN YOUTH SPORTS

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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine the influence of parental motivation and support on the performance of their children. Given the state of the literature and the concerns about parents in youth sports it was concluded that in order to motivate and increase children's enjoyment of sporting practice, it is essential to promote parents' supportive behaviors and involvement in their children's school sports, as well as to lower parent's pressure, thereby decreasing the children's competitiveness and the emphasis on victory. Parents who put too much pressure on their children's to perform , criticize their children's performance , and are too involved in their youth's sporting activities can contribute to anxiety , stress and burnout. In order to motivate and increase children's enjoyment of sporting practice, parents should not put excess pressure, thereby decreasing the children's competitiveness and the emphasis on victory. It is essential to promote parents' supportive behaviors and involvement in their children's school sports,

Key words: Parents, Schools, Sports , Children, Competitiveness, Performance .

INTRODUCTION

Parental involvement in sports can be looked at as a continuum from not involved at all to over-involved (Stein et al 1999). It can range from low to high and from positive to negative. Positive involvement includes supporting your child through ways such as verbal encouragement, your presence at a game, allowing your child to make his/her own decisions about what sport to participate in, and providing financial and other resources that enable his/her participation. Negative involvement refers to directive behavior, and pressure to win or perform up to a parent's expectations. Recent research has shed light onto the relationship between parental involvement and the type of youth sports experience a child has.

It is most often the parent who is the first person to introduce a child to sports, and parental involvement can affect whether a child enjoys the experience or not. (Wuerth et al 2004), (Funk al. 2003) & (Stein et al 1999). Socialization into sport and physical activity can be considered a modeling process in which family members are powerful role models. Most of the studies revealed that both parents' exercise patterns and encouragement have an effect on children's exercise behavior, and that physically active parents tend to have physically active children (Sallis et al., 1999). Thus, youth sport experiences can provide opportunities for personal growth and development that extend beyond the physical domain to athletes' psychological processes (Boixadós et al., 2004; Müller and Sternad, 2004). Knight et al(2010) conducted a research with 42 Canadian tennis players aged from 12 to 15. This study was meant to identify the way athletes would like their parents to behave during competition. Data analysis uncovered one dominant theme: the players wanted their parents to be involved in and to support their sporting experience. In accordance with this, Horn and Horn (2007) explain that parents' belief and value systems (e.g., their beliefs, attitudes, values) determine their behaviors toward their child. The behaviors (e.g., modeling, providing opportunities, emotional support) then influence the child's belief and value systems, which determine the child's behavior. In other words, most young athletes believe that their parents provide them with a supportive, stable, secure and encouraging environment (Helldsted, 1995) Family participation and an active involvement in the children's physical activity promote players' greater satisfaction and positive participation in their sport career (Torregrosa et al., 2007;Wuerth et al., 2004). Consequently, children's motivation to participate in sport is a key consideration for researchers, coaches and parents (Keegan et al., 2009). Basically, if we want to engage children in sport practice from an early age and progress to reach their full potential, then it is definitely essential to have a good environment during these formative years, and parents play a very important role in this process.

There is no doubt that there is a strong connection between positive, supportive parental involvement and a child's level of enjoyment and success in the sport he or she is playing. (Hoyle et al 1997). It has also been suggested that a moderate level of involvement would be the optimum level of parental involvement (Wuerth et al 2004) theorized that over-involved parents may create high levels of pressure, while under-involved parents do not provide enough support to facilitate a child's desire to participate. But those parents who are moderately involved seem to provide just the right balance not only to facilitate enjoyment, but also to challenge the child to continue to grow and develop his/her skills. On the surface, this theory seems to hold up. Without support, especially financial and

emotional, it would be very difficult for a child to be able to participate, and the pressure felt from the parent who is over-involved could easily take out all the enjoyment of playing sports.

Therefore, motivation has emerged as a potential factor that contributes to promote an appropriate physical activity (Weiss and Ferrer-Caja, 2002). Thus, it would be interesting to determine how family behavior influences motivational aspects and other crucial psychological variables for appropriate sport practice (Gould et al., 2006; 2008). In this regard, most of the studies have not directly measured significant others (e.g., family, peers, coaches...), but they have assessed participants' perception of their coaches (Olympiou et al., 2008), peers (Smith et al., 2006) or parents (Papaioannou et al., 2008). At the same time, this research reveals new information about the relationships between parents and athletes in sport practice, and aims to examine the influence of parents' behaviors on their children's adaptive or maladaptive behaviors. This assessment was carried out using parents matched with their own children. This study is therefore unique because only a few works in the sport domain have analyzed the psychological aspects of both groups. Another important aspect of this work is that only a few works in the scientific literature have directly examined parents' perceptions of their children's motivation.

Gender Stereotypes

Greendorfer, et. al. (1996) concluded that differential treatment of play styles, toy preferences and gender labeling of physical activities continues to exist. Researchers have documented that parents are gender stereotyped in their level of encouragement and provision of opportunities in the home (Eccles, 1993; Greendorfer, 1993). Since the advent of Title ix, women have made great strides in their athletic participation, today, young girls are much more likely to be encouraged to be involve in sports. However, despite these advances, parents continue to endorse the gender – stereotypic belief that boys are more suited for sports than girls. In addition, parents continue to encourage their daughters to try certain sports (e.g., gymnastics, skating, tennis) that may also communicate gender stereotypic beliefs. Gender differences in parental encouragement of opportunities begin at a very young age. Both mothers and fathers are more likely to encourage motor activity in their sons than in their daughters, (Huston, 1983; Power & Parke, 1986). Boys are also given earlier autonomy and are less restricted in their opportunities to play outside than are girls (Huston). Fathers are also more likely to play roughly with boys and teach them motor behavior (Huston; Power & Parke) this early exposure to rough and tumble play is likely to prepare boys for the context of many athletic teams. There is also evidence that parents reward and encourage gender stereotyped play and discourage cross – typed (Caldera, Huston & O'Brien 1989). Boys are more likely to be given toys that are congruent with their gender such as athletic equipments, trucks and military toys (Fisher & Thompson 1990). This differential exposure to toys and activities gives children the opportunity to develop different competencies and values. Without the opportunity to try a particular activity children will never get the chance to find out if they are good at it or if they enjoy it.

Parental differential treatment by gender continues in middle childhood and adolescence. Parents are more likely to encourage their sons to be physically active and participate in sports than they are to encourage their daughters (Brustad, 1993; Eccles, 1993; Greendorfer, 1993). Parents also report gender stereotyped differences in time use with children; they are more likely to spend time playing sports with their sons

and are more likely to take their sons to sporting events (Eccles,1993; Eccles et al 2000).these results clearly demonstrate that parents are providing different types of athletic experiences for boys and girls. An important question is how this differential treatment within the family affects children's sports participation over time.

Extent of Over-involvement

The amount of parental involvement in athletics activities helps to make a statement in the family about the relative importance of sports. According to Hellstedt (1987) , parent involvement ranges on a continuum from under – to over-involvement. Parents who are under-involved do not make much of an emotional, financial, or functional investment in their children's athletics. In contrast, parents who are over-involved emphasize winning; become angry if their children don't perform well is between these two extremes. Parent who are moderately involved support their children's participation without being excessive, leaving ultimate decisions about participations levels up the athlete. (Hellstedt, 1987). However, although the benefit of moderate involvement is an appealing idea, there is presently no empirical data to verify the relationship between over- and under-involvement and child outcomes.

There is a growing concern about parents excessive involvement in athletics. (Williams & Lester, 2000). For some parents ,their own self- esteem is tied to their child's athletic success , which results in high levels of parental involvement and an emphasis on winning at all costs(Hellstedt,1987).this over -involvement by parents can contribute to children's negative sports experience and can undermine even the best- intentioned youth sports program (Kamm,1988; smilkstien, 1980). Parents can also contribute to athlete burnout , as negative emotional outcome that is the consequence of chronic stress(Gould et al 1996; smith 1986).in his research Coakley (1992) reported that highly accomplished athletes whose parents made great commitments of time and energy most frequently experienced burnouts. However, although there is strong anecdotal evidence of the negative effects of excessive levels of parental involvements, more systematic research is needed to document the extent of this problem and differences in the athletic experiences of children with overly involved parents and those with less involved parents.

Parental Optimal Level of Involvement in Sports

However, what appears to be the most significant finding is that it may not actually be what you do that affects your child's experience. Rather what appears to be important is how your child perceives what you do (Anderson et al. 2003). For example, you might be classified by others as a parent who does not seem very involved, yet if your child perceives your support and feels that your level of involvement is just right, they would be more likely to have an enjoyable experience than another child in the same situation who did not feel like their parent's level of involvement was optimal.

Therefore, instead of behavior that pressures players to perform and succeed, they would prefer supportive comments about the positive aspects of their attitude, sportsmanship and effort. Furthermore, unless their parent had legitimate experience with their sport, the athletes did not want technical or tactical coaching from them. However, they were happy to receive practical advice. The athletes were also aware of the occasions when their parent's verbal comments were not consistent with their nonverbal signals, and of what their body language communicated (Horn and Horn, 2007).

Furthermore, Holt et al. (2008) found that parents' verbal reactions to their children's performance ranged on a continuum from supportive to more controlling

comments, including remarks such as praise/encouragement, instruction, and derogatory remarks. Regarding parental pressure, Anderson et al. (2003) pointed out that as parental pressure increased, children's reported enjoyment and satisfaction decreased. Parents may believe that expressing disappointment regarding a child's poor performance will promote the motivation for improvement, but from the child's perspective, even well meant parental pressure can backfire and may contribute to a child's lowered enjoyment and motivation. Additionally, excessive parental pressure has been linked to athlete's perceived negative affect. To avoid placing excessive pressure on a child, it is crucial to be realistic about what they can and want to accomplish in the sport (Hellstedt, 1995). According to this, Lee and McLean (1997) studied the perceptions of parental pressure in adolescent swimmers and reported that pressure was associated with perceived directive or controlling behaviors by parents. Youths' perceptions of their parents' attitudes and behaviors concerning the sport were associated with self-perceptions of ability, motivational orientation and attitudes and behaviors in sport and physical education (Brustad et al., 2001; Fredricks and Eccles, 2004)

So how do we know if our level of support and involvement is optimal? Simple – ask the child. Stein et al. (1999) recommend that you discuss with your child the ways in which you are involved, and ask your child how he or she wants you to be involved. They also recommend discussing with your child things that you might do involving their sports participation that could be perceived as stressful for your child, and also things that your child enjoys. If your child feels you are a bit over-involved, it may be difficult to hear. The best thing you can do for them in this case is to really take to heart how they feel and reduce your involvement if necessary, no matter how much it hurts.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, the main conclusion that we can reach from the study is that in order to motivate and increase children's enjoyment of sporting practice, it is essential to promote parents' supportive behaviors and involvement in their children's school sports, as well as to lower parent's pressure, thereby decreasing the children's competitiveness and the emphasis on victory. Diverse strategies can be employed, like the ones used by García-Calvo et al. (2009) or Cruz et al. (2003), who promoted teaching parents so their children could achieve adequate sporting practice, based on positive values, creating pro-social habits and an integral education in the school sport, which allowed the children to develop the sport with pleasure and to keep up their practice for a long time.

Researchers have surveyed youth athletes about what they want from their parents (Stein et al 1999; Wood & Abernethy 1991). These results support the assumption that moderate levels of parental involvement are ideal. Parents need to remember that the child's enjoyment of athletics is the paramount concern. They can enhance their child's experience by providing support and encouragement, not becoming overinvolved, and not placing too much pressure on the child (Wood & Abernethy).

Parents who put too much pressure on their children's to perform, criticize their children's performance, and are too involved in their youth's sporting activities can contribute to anxiety, stress and burnout. Parents can positively support children's athletic involvement through beliefs and behaviors. Specifically, they can support children's participation by communicating positive feedback about their children's ability, giving messages to their children about the value of participation, encouraging their children's

involvement , providing financial support for equipment and lessons , and attending their children's games and competitions. However, there can be too much of a good thing.

In the end, decisions about participation should be left up to the athletes. Finally, hope this study will provide guidelines for parents to optimize their children's socialization.

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