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## Parental Influence in Youth Sport

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# Parental Influence in Youth Sport

## **Abstract**

Youth sport has become one of the most popular outlets for children in today's society. Youth sport programs and organizations play an important role in the lives of the children that are participating. Many aspects go into, what would be considered, a successful delivery of sports (Barcelona & Young, 2010). Moreover, this includes coaches and parent's influences and when it contributes to a positive experience (Barcelona & Young, 2010). However, one of the biggest contributions to a positive or negative sport experience, is the role of parental influence.

The culture around youth sports has changed in multiple ways throughout the years. It has started to diminish and one of the reasons that has contributed to this decrease in participation is parents (Rosenwald, 2015). Children are deciding not to play sports anymore because of the pressure that coexists with playing at a young age. Parents and adults within these programs take the competitiveness to another level and forget the real reason why adolescents want to play.

The purpose of this research was to study the relationship of the feelings that former youth athletes have about their sport and how parental influence played a role in their experiences. Furthermore, looking into how former youth athletes feel about sport participation as adults. An abundant amount of research has been conducted to find the benefits, as well as the risks, of participating in sports at a young age and how parents fit into the equation. However, where the research lacks, is in how parent's involvement has an influence on how children feel about sport in the long run. The objective of this research was to examine if this type of relationship exists within youth sport culture.

This research can be beneficial to various parties that are involved in youth sports and the organizations. It allows parents to understand how their actions can have a lasting impression on their children. As well as, allowing children and young adults understand why parents might do certain things when it comes to youth sport. Understanding this type of relationship can help youth programs adjust how they teach children. This can also help structure programs to ensure a positive environment and allowing parents to understand when their influence is necessary or not necessary.

The purpose of this study was to research the current relationship between parental influence in youth sport and how it plays into the feelings former youth athletes have on sport. The research question of this study was:

What relationship does parental influence in youth sport have with the feeling former youth sport athletes have about sport participation as adults?

The intention of this research was to gain a better understanding of how the experience of youth sport combined with parental influence can influence a former youth athlete of their feelings on playing sport as adults. Many factors go into understanding youth sport and the culture that surrounds it. To comprehend this research, there has to be background knowledge on the purpose of youth sport, an understanding of the factors that play a role in youth sport, and the state of youth sport today.

## **Document Type**

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### **Executive Summary**

Youth sport programs and organizations play an important role in the lives of the children that have participated. These programs teach children about not just sports, but also real life skills. The culture around youth sports has changed in multiple ways throughout the years. The purpose of youth sport, factors involved with youth sports, and the state of youth sport today play a role in this change. One of the biggest factors that plays a role is parental influence. The purpose of this research was to study the relationship of feelings that former youth athletes have about their sport and how parental influence played a role in their experiences. The intention was to understand what experiences involving parental influence led former youth athletes to have such feelings about the sport they played.

To find out more about this question a survey was sent out to a random sample at a local college. The desired sample for this research was former youth athletes. They needed to be at least 18 year olds and played for at least one season of organized youth sport. Both men and women were asked to participate. The results from the data collected demonstrated that most of the participants had all good things to say about their sport experiences. The results of the experiment also found clear support for the concept that parents play a role in how the youth sport experience plays out. Understanding this concept can help structure youth sport programs to allow the maximum positive experience to be gained. Parents can also understand that their actions have an influence whether it is major or minor.

### **Introduction**

Youth sport has become one of the most popular outlets for children in today's society. Youth sport programs and organizations play an important role in the lives of the children that are participating. Many aspects go into, what would be considered, a successful delivery of sports (Barcelona & Young, 2010). Moreover, this includes coaches and parent's influences and when it contributes to a positive experience (Barcelona & Young, 2010). However, one of the biggest contributions to a positive or negative sport experience, is the role of parental influence.

The culture around youth sports has changed in multiple ways throughout the years. It has started to diminish and one of the reasons that has contributed to this decrease in participation is parents (Rosenwald, 2015). Children are deciding not to play sports anymore because of the pressure that coexists with playing at a young age. Parents and adults within these programs take the competitiveness to another level and forget the real reason why adolescents want to play.

The purpose of this research was to study the relationship of the feelings that former youth athletes have about their sport and how parental influence played a role in their experiences. Furthermore, looking into how former youth athletes feel about sport participation as adults. An abundant amount of research has been conducted to find the benefits, as well as the risks, of participating in sports at a young age and how parents fit into the equation. However, where the research lacks, is in how parent's involvement has an influence on how children feel about sport in the long run. The objective of this research was to examine if this type of relationship exists within youth sport culture.

This research can be beneficial to various parties that are involved in youth sports and the organizations. It allows parents to understand how their actions can have a lasting impression on

their children. As well as, allowing children and young adults understand why parents might do certain things when it comes to youth sport. Understanding this type of relationship can help youth programs adjust how they teach children. This can also help structure programs to ensure a positive environment and allowing parents to understand when their influence is necessary or not necessary.

The purpose of this study was to research the current relationship between parental influence in youth sport and how it plays into the feelings former youth athletes have on sport.

The research question of this study was:

What relationship does parental influence in youth sport have with the feeling former youth sport athletes have about sport participation as adults?

The intention of this research was to gain a better understanding of how the experience of youth sport combined with parental influence can influence a former youth athlete of their feelings on playing sport as adults. Many factors go into understanding youth sport and the culture that surrounds it. To comprehend this research, there has to be background knowledge on the purpose of youth sport, an understanding of the factors that play a role in youth sport, and the state of youth sport today.

## **Background**

### **Purpose of Youth Sport**

Throughout the decades, the purpose behind youth sport is different for every child that gets involved. Youth sport began as a way for children to get away from their life while becoming physically fit. It has been known as the factor that changes some children's lives. Youth sport programs are reflected as a positive development setting and have the potential to pave the path to an increased youth development (Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2005). These

activities are known for being a social norm and children that participate in them are given an opportunity for skill building in all aspects in life (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Whereas some think that youth sport can be considered a negative impact on children. Adults, parents, peers and coaches influence can be directly attributed to the negative outlook that children have within their sport experience (Fraser-Thomas, et al., 2005).

According to Brown, Clark, Ewing & Malina (1998), the benefits of participation can be divided into three categories. The first category, is the general idea of physical activity (Brown, et al., 1998). Benefits of this include the allowance of exercising on a regular basis. Children that participate in sport have a higher chance of reaching the foundations of motor skills compared to kids that don't participate, and can lead to a more active lifestyle later in life (Brown, et al., 1998). The second category would include the physical/physiological benefits (Brown, et al., 1998). Some of the benefits associated with this would include a positive weight and regulation of that weight, a healthy diet and allows muscular and aerobic strength to grow (Brown, et al., 1998). The third category pertains to the social and psychological benefits (Brown, et al., 1998). Benefits would include the development of working with others and learning to get along with others, development of self-esteem and how it makes one feel, and learning of social competence (Brown, et al., 1998). Other researches also focused on the idea of psychology in youth sports. According to Price-Mitchell (2012), there are three aspects that contribute to positive youth development – intensity, continuity, and balance. These three groupings have allowed children of all ages to receive everything they can out of participating in youth sport (Price-Mitchell, 2012).

Youth sport has had negative undertones within its core since the beginning of its programs. Brown, Clark, Ewing & Malina (1998), identified four potential risks associated with participation in youth sport. The first is the psychological state, which can be altered when

participating in these activities. This includes negative behavior, stress, drop-out rate increases, and unrealistic expectations (Brown, et al., 1998). The second category identifies the risk of injury; overuse of the body can lead to injury. Moreover, having multiple injuries as a child can lead to problems in adulthood (Brown, et al., 1998). The third category speaks on the risks involved with being submerged in a sport environment. This included mistakes from the coaches that can have lasting consequences and poor playing conditions (Brown, et al., 1998). The final category includes the topic of female athletes and how they can only try to reach perfection. This includes the forming of eating disorders and unrealistic expectations for themselves (Brown, et al., 1998). Other aspects that have been focused on is the use of time and energy. One concern is that too much time and energy can be expended in these activities which can have a negative correlation (Price-Mitchell, 2012).

### **Factors Involved with Youth Sport**

According to Rosenwald (2015), fewer children are participating in sport and have no drive to get involved. In his study, he found that over 26 million children played a sport in 2014, this number decreased 4% from 2009. Also, the total number of sports played had dropped over 10% (Rosenwald, 2015). Even with these number falling, some families believe that participating in sport is looked at as an investment (Rosenwald, 2015). Parents believe they are going to get a return on their investment with a college scholarship or some other incentives (Rosenwald, 2015). This mind set is not the healthiest because it can lead to parents taking their feelings way too far in their child's youth sport programs.

In recent years the number of children participating in said sports is diminishing. There are many factors that are going into this, however, one of the biggest reasons is how parents act within these programs. It is no secret that parents want to play a role in their child's life, whether

it be in youth sport or not. However, the actions made by these parents have a long lasting influence on their children. A study was conducted in a suburb in Maryland, right outside of Washington D.C., asking parents to explain their concerns about adult imposition, benefits they believe are gained from youth sport, what went into their purchase decision for said sport, their satisfaction and their thoughts on the commitment form the said programs (Green & Chalip, 1998). Overall the results gave an idea of what most parents think they are doing the best thing possible when it comes to helping their child in the concept of youth sport (Green & Chalip, 1998). The idea came out that parents play one of the biggest role in whether a child is enjoying their time with sport (Green & Chalip, 1998). Another study was given to parents in South Australia that had children involved in youth football, within the study parents and children were interviewed (Elliott & Drummond, 2017). The focus of this study was to ask parents and children their feelings about verbal behavior during play, during the break, and on the car ride home (Elliott & Drummond, 2017). Children were asked when they like their parents talking to them about the sport (Elliott & Drummond, 2017). The outcome of this study lead to the idea that parent verbal involvement plays a critical role in how children see and understand youth sport (Elliott & Drummond, 2017). Also that positive parent involvement can lead to higher enjoyment, higher number of participants, and long term involvement in any given sport and higher capability (Elliott & Drummond, 2017).

### **State of Youth Sport Today**

Youth sport programs do not look much like they did when they first started. In today's world a lot of time and money is spent within youth sport programs and organizations. Kids are starting at a much younger age and playing sport more than twice a week. One aspect of youth sport that has gained a lot of attention is the concept of specialization. Specialization is when a

child takes on one sport with intensive training and leaves any other sports behind (Smith, 2015). This has become a huge part of modern youth sport can be seen all over the world. The concept is much more common than it was 50 years ago and more children today are trying to become the best at their given sport (Smith, 2015). Since specialization has gained attention and more children are trying to be a part of it, multiple parents have had false hope regarding the success of their child. Parents are under the notion that early specialization will result in incentives down the road, for example a college scholarship or even a professional sport career (Smith, 2015). It has been proven that this mindset can be dangerous and lead to parents taking youth sport to a level it does not need to be at (Smith, 2015).

Early sport specialization can have a lasting impact on adolescent athletes. Specialization comes in various forms. High volume, intensity, and duration of training can all fall under the cloud that is considered specialization (Ferguson & Stern, 2014). The reasoning behind this is because when young athletes put this amount of time and energy in their sport, they, as well as their parents, want a return on their investment. There are benefits and risks when dealing with specialization of sport. Benefits include the athlete gains a competitive edge, their skills are shown off at a young age and they develop risks at a fast rate (Ferguson & Stern, 2014). Risks would include injury, loss of interest in the sport and potential burnout (Ferguson & Stern, 2014). Burn out in young athletes is becoming a sizeable problem. According to a study conducted by Russell & Molina, the burnout rate in youth sport participation for intensive training is becoming an issue (Russell & Molina, 2018). This stems from the pressure youth athletes are under to perform (Russell & Molina, 2018). Specialization is a concept that isn't going to go away overnight because of the popularity it has contracted.

## **Summary**

The state of youth sport is seen different than it was decades ago. Multiple factors play a role in the mind set and why people have looked at it differently. Young athletes are starting to look at youth sports differently and its resulting in children not wanting to participate anymore now and even later in life. Parents play a role in this issue and their mindset is not helping. The pressure children are under because of parents and adults is at an all-time high. With that being the case, the purpose of this research was to examine the relationship adults have with sports they played as children.

## **Method**

### **Restatement of Research Question**

The purpose of this research was to study the relationship adults had with sports they played as children and the feelings they had about sport as an adult. The intention was to understand what experiences led former youth athletes to have such feelings about the sport they played. The research question for this study was:

What relationship does parental influence in youth sport have with the feelings former youth athletes have about sport participation as adults?

Conducting this research lead to a better understanding of how certain factors played role in how former youth athletes felt about participation in sports as a whole.

### **Desired sample**

The desired sample for this research was former youth athletes. They needed to be a least 18 year olds and played for at least one season of organized youth sport. Both men and women were asked to participate. Having a range of age, sex, and number of years played gave a range of results. The sampling method used for this research was random sampling within a non-

probability sample of potential participates. The non-probability sample was composed of 1,360 individuals from a population at a local institution.

### **Procedure**

The emails of 700 undergraduate students, 330 graduate students, 180 faculty members and 150 staff members were randomly selected at the institution. Potential participates were invited through email to patriciate in a survey. The demographic variables measured included the categorical data of gender, race, the former sports played, specialization, why they stopped playing and if they play or are involved in sports today. The demographic variables measured included the continuous data of age and how many years were spent playing sports. The variables that were collected based on parental influence included categorical data. This first set of information encompassed parental involvement in attendance of games, feedback given on sports performance, financial support, available transportation, and if they coached. Respondents were asked to rate their response on a Likert scale with options of 1) strongly disagree to 5) strongly agree. The second set of information involved how invested parents were in their sport experiences. This section included finances, their performance compared to others, their performance not compared to others, abilities, improvement over time, attitude, effort, their happiness in playing sports and their interest on playing sports. Respondents were asked to rate their response on a Likert scale with options of 1) far too little to 5) far too much. The last set of information incorporated how positive their parent's investment was. This section also included financial, their performance compared to others, their performance not compared to others, abilities, improvement over time, attitude, effort, their happiness in playing sports and their interest on playing sports. Respondents were asked to rate their response on a Likert scale with options of 1) very negative to 5) very positive.

## **Analysis**

Demographic variables were examined to find the percentage of each category. This allowed the comparing of the frequency of a sub group to the total group. Variables were examined to predict the cumulative relationship between parental influence and the rate of satisfaction as an adult. All variables in the analysis were continuous. A multiple regression was used to determine if a predictive relationship existed between parental influence and adult feelings about the sport.

## **Results**

### **Sample**

Out of 111 responses, 94 were considered useable data. Pairwise deletion was used to delete the responses that contained missing data. Certain responses were chosen to be deleted because they only filled out the demographic question of the survey.

### **Descriptive Statistics**

There were 41 male participants (43.6%) and 52 female participants (56.4%). Ninety-four percent of the sample was white ( $n=88$ ). The mean of age was 10.06 ( $SD= 10.05$ ). The mean of years played in organized sports was 10.60 ( $SD=3.84$ ). Sixty-two percent of the sample participated in soccer, this being the highest number of participates ( $n=58$ ). Three percent of the sample participated in golf, being the least number of participates ( $n= 3$ ). The mean of specialized athletes was 1.61 ( $SD=.491$ ). Twelve percent of the sample specialized in soccer, being the highest number of participates under a specialized category ( $n=11$ ). The mean of parent involvement in attending games was 4.45 ( $SD=1.079$ ). The mean of parental involvement from feedback on performance was 3.76 ( $SD=1.201$ ). The mean of parental involvement in financial support was 4.68 ( $SD=.836$ ). The mean of parental involvement in transportation was 4.61

( $SD=.897$ ). The mean of parental involvement of coaching teams was 2.18 ( $SD=1.532$ ). The mean of financial investment was 3.09 ( $SD=.583$ ). The mean of investment of performance compared to others was 3.06 ( $SD=.673$ ). The mean of investment in performance was 3.04 ( $SD=.732$ ). The mean of investment in technical skills was 3.03 ( $SD=.695$ ). The mean of investment of improvement was 3.04 ( $SD=.621$ ). The mean for investment for attitude was 3.32 ( $SD=.675$ ). The mean of investment of effort was 3.15 ( $SD=.687$ ). The mean of investment of happiness was 3.00 ( $SD=.733$ ). The mean for investment of interest was 2.96 ( $SD=.654$ ). The mean for positive investment for financials was 4.23 ( $SD=.757$ ). The mean for positive investment for performance compared to others was 3.99 ( $SD=.908$ ). The mean for positive investment for performance was 3.95 ( $SD=.965$ ). The mean for positive investment for technical skill was 4.02 ( $SD=.910$ ). The mean for positive investment for improvement was 4.03 ( $SD=.914$ ). The mean for positive investment for attitude was 4.01 ( $SD=.913$ ). The mean for positive investment for effort was 4.00 ( $SD=.919$ ). The mean for positive investment for happiness was 4.04 ( $SD=.953$ ). The mean for positive investment of interest was 4.10 ( $SD=.984$ ). The mean for stopped participating in organized sports was 5.26 ( $SD=2.40$ ). The mean for still play today was .63 ( $SD=.487$ ), The mean for coaching sports was .21 ( $SD=.413$ ). The mean for coaching of youth teams was .19 ( $SD=.392$ ). The mean for parent volunteer was .06 ( $SD=.234$ ). The mean for involved in sports in a different way was .19 ( $SD=.392$ ). The mean for the rate of satisfaction of the sport experience was 1.66 ( $SD=.914$ ).

### **Inferential statistics**

The parental involvement variables of attended games, feedback performance, financial support, transportation and coaching of teams, significantly predicted the rate of significance of sport experiences by adults,  $F(5,85) = 2.467$ ,  $r=.356$ ,  $r^2=.127$ ,  $p < .05$ .

## Discussion

### Sample

The sample was not representative of the overall population. It is impossible for undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty and staff from a local college to represent the entire population of people that participated in youth sports. The study also did not have an equal response rate between men and women. With 111 responses and only 94 of them being considered useable data, the sample also didn't represent the over population of the local college.

### Explanation

Most of the participants had all good things to say about their sport experiences. Respondents reported that 54.3% (n=51) of them were extremely satisfied with their satisfaction of their youth experience and 31.9% (n=30) were somewhat satisfied.

The results found clear support for the concept that parents played a role in how the youth sport experience played out. When asked about parental involvement, participants had an overall positive response. Sixty-nine percent strongly agreed with their parents attending games (n=65). Fourth-four percent agreed with their parents giving them feedback on their sport performance (n=42). Eighty-one percent strongly agreed with their parents financially supporting their sport participation (n=77). Seventy-six percent strongly agreed that their parents provided transportation to and from sport obligations (n=72). The feedback leads to the idea that having a parent that is invested in a positive way, the children's youth sport experience the higher they are going to satisfied with the overall experience. The implications of these findings were discussed in study that was conducted in Maryland (Green & Chalip, 1998). The analysis found evidence for the idea that parents play on of the biggest role in whether a child is enjoying their time with sport (Green & Chalip, 1998).

Another set of results found clear support for the concept that parents play a part in what is considered a successful youth sport experience. When asked about parental investment, participants had an overall positive response. Seventy-three percent stated that their parents were at the right amount of investment when talking on performance compared to others (n=69). Seventy-two percent stated that their parents were at the right amount of investment when talking about performance not compared to others (n=68). Seventy-one percent stated that their parents were at the right amount of investment when talking about their technical skills (n=67). Seventy-four percent stated that their parents were at the right amount of investment when talking about their improvement over time. Seventy percent stated that their parents were at the right amount of investment when talking about their altitude (n=66). Seventy-six percent stated that their parents were at the right amount of investment when talking about their effort (n=72). Sixty-nine percent stated that their parents were at the right amount of investment when talking about their interest in playing sports (n=72). Finally, 69% stated that their parents were at the right amount of investment when talking about their happiness while playing sport (n=65). The results demonstrated that having the right amount of parental investment is vital to the overall sport experience. The implications of these findings were discussed in a study that was conducted in South Australia (Elliott & Drummond, 2017). This analysis found that parent verbal involvement plays a critical role in how children see and understand youth sport (Elliott & Drummond, 2017). Additionally, parental involvement and investment can lead to higher enjoyment, higher number of participants and long term involvement in any given sport (Elliott & Drummond, 2017).

One aspect of the results highlights that little is known about the difference between regular youth athletes and specialized athletes. The results are inconclusive with respect to sport

specialization. Out of all the participants, 39% reported that they were consider a specialized athlete (n=37). However, they were put into the same pool as the regular athletes when answering the rest of the questions in the survey. This leads to the idea that maybe the participants that answered they weren't satisfied with their youth sport experience could have been the ones that were specialized as youth. It has been proven that parents of specialized athletes can be invested for the wrong reasons and that could lead to an unsuccessful sport experience (Smith, 2015).

### **Limitations & Delimitations**

Overall, this study was successful in answering the research question. However, with every study, limitations and delimitations were present. One limitation that showed up was the limited number or responses. The response rate was low compared to how many people the survey got sent out to. If the study was to be repeated it would be benefit to address each email personally to the selected people so they know that its important.

Throughout the study, there were many delimitations that were brought up. One decision that was made that likely impacted this research was the format of the questions. The questions could have been worded differently and more specific. Also ask questions about different aspect of the youth experience. If this study was to be conducted again it would beneficial to make sure the questions are specific. Another decision that was made that likely impacted this research was the sample of the study. The sample of this study did not represent the entire population of youth sport athletes. If this study was to be conducted again it would be beneficial to make sure that there is a wider range involved with the sample. Finally, the last decision that was made that likely impacted this research was not having the results for the specialized athletes be put

somewhere separated. If this study was to be conducted again it would be beneficial to have those results separated because it would show if there is a new relationship to be investigated.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, this study displayed how important paternal involvement is in youth sport. Parental influence plays a huge part in whether someone had a positive youth sport experience as perceived during adulthood. Understanding this concept can help structure youth sport programs that allow the maximum positive experience to be gained. Parents can also understand their actions have an influence whether it is vast or minor. To have a deeper understanding of this topic more research needs to be done. Using each section to find more information and how it holds power over the youth sport experience.

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