

Relations Between Youth Soccer Participants' Motivation to Play and Parental Involvement in Sport

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that multiple aspects of parents' involvement in children's sports participation is related to children's perceptions of competence, motivation, participation, enjoyment, and stress experienced associated with the sport¹⁰. The current study seeks to expand on this idea to examine the relationships between parents' involvement and support of a premier level soccer club and their children's perceptions of competence and motivation in playing soccer. Forty youth and 32 of their parents served as participants for the study. All children were between the ages of 7 and 14, and were all athletes participating in a regional premier level soccer league. The present study utilized a paper survey to gather information on the children's motivation to play soccer, their perceived competence, and perceived autonomy support from their coach. The measures used included the Sport Climate Questionnaire- Player Version², the Perceived Competence Scale¹⁷, and the Motivation for Soccer Scale¹³. An online survey was used to collect data on parents' involvement and support of the soccer program, as well as their perceptions of their children's potential in soccer and the autonomy support their children receive from their coach. Measures included in this survey were the Sport Climate Questionnaire- Parent Version² and questions adapted from a previous study on the current topic⁷. Preliminary results showed significant positive correlations between parents' exercise routines and children's identified motivation, $r=.387$, $p=.046$, and a marginally significant correlation between exercise routine and children's internal motivations, $r=.348$, $p=.075$. Additionally, children's intrinsic motivation was significantly related to their own interest in the sport, $r=.666$, $p=.000$, as well as how often they thought about the sport, $r=.371$, $p=.018$. Lastly, parents who showed a higher level of support for the soccer program discussed soccer more frequently with their children $r=.499$, $p=.004$. Results from this study provide valuable information regarding the role of parental activity in children's motivation and thoughts about youth soccer. It also provides insight into advantageous parent behaviors that support different types of motivation in youth soccer participants.

Keywords: Motivation, Sports, Autonomy

1. Introduction

Multiple aspects of parents' involvement in children's sports participation is related to children's perceptions of competence, motivation, participation, enjoyment, and stress associated with the sport¹. There has been substantial empirical work aimed at elaborating models to describe children's socialization into sport. Parents have consistently been found to play a key role¹⁴, particularly as a consequence of the encouragement they provide^{1 6}. Previous research has focused primarily on the coaches as arbiters of perceived skill. However studies of sport achievement suggest that parental expectations and encouragement are both equally important⁹.

Parents have been found to provide advice to their child athlete about their future in sport, as well as being involved in a wide array of roles. These roles include "fitness consultant" to "career advisor" to help facilitate their child in their participation in sport³. It is important for athletes to receive types of support to deal with different

problems or stressors. It can be consequential or damaging if the athlete is isolated or does not have support¹². Having positive relationships with parents, peers and close friends on the soccer team has also been linked to optimal motivation and continuation of sport participation¹⁵. Often times, the parent and athlete also perceive influences from one another in regard to the child's sport involvement¹⁶. This includes parents' behavior being modified or changed as a result of their child's participation in the sport, through practices, rearranging schedules, finances for the sport, reading about the sport and pride and enjoyment in their child's achievements in the sport¹⁶. In turn, the child will perceive parental influences in the form of their parent's beliefs and behaviors, interest in their sport and the encouragement to participate, and the positive affect of their parent being pleased and proud of their involvement¹⁶.

Studies suggest that parental exercise is associated positively with children's extracurricular sports participation and cardio respiratory fitness⁴. Having two physically active parents was associated with an even higher number of extracurricular sports participations compared to having two physically inactive parents⁴. Research has shown that parents who expressed that they experience high levels of enjoyment while participating in physical activity also reported encouraging their children to engage in physical activity more than parents who experienced less physical activity³. The same research also found that high parental encouragement was associated with greater perceived competence for children³. Parents who express more encouragement are more likely to give their children opportunities to be physically fit and active, such as extracurricular activities and sports. They also communicated higher expectations of their child's physical activity³. Parents and coaches are important role models for child-athletes; they instill attitudes, behavior and values¹⁸. Parental encouragement may depend on the expectations parents have for their children and may in turn affect children's sense of their own abilities. Higher adult expectations can then lead to increased levels of encouragement which, in turn, leads to higher performance by children⁵.

While it is clear that parent involvement can influence children's motivation in sport, we must look further into what types of motivation are associated with this involvement. Previous research discusses five types of motivation that can be involved in sport participation¹¹. Intrinsic motivation stems from an internal desire and joy from participation in the sport. External motivation, however, is driven by an outside source, for example parental pressure to play may be a child's motivation to play. Stemming from external motivation is introjected motivation, which is when formerly external motivational forces become internalized. Also related to external motivation is identified motivation. This is when a child judges that the sport is important, for example it's healthy, and so they choose to participate in it. Lastly, amotivation is when a child does not know why they participate in the sport¹¹. With so many forms of motivation, it becomes important to identify which forms are associated with different aspects of parental involvement in youth sport, as well as which forms are associated with prolonged participation in sport by the children.

The current study seeks to examine the relationships between parent's involvement and support of a premier level soccer team and their children's perceptions of competence and forms motivation in playing soccer. We hypothesized that different measures of enduring involvement might yield differing relations between parents and children, resulting in different forms of motivation. Specifically, it is thought that participants who report higher levels of competence and enjoyment of playing soccer will also report higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Additionally, it is expected that children will higher levels of intrinsic motivation will be associated parents who report being more supportive and are more physically active.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The study's participants consisted of 40 youth and 32 parents. The children were primarily males between the ages of 7 and 14 ($M=11.53$, $S=1.63$), and were all athletes participating in a regional premier soccer league. Parents consisted largely of females between the ages of 32 and 52 ($M=42.00$, $S=7.37$). Additionally, 71% of parent income was over \$100,000.00, and approximately 91% have an Associate's Degree or higher.

2.2 Materials

2.2.1 *child background:*

The players provided background information by indicating their age, gender and number of years of soccer playing experience. They were also asked two questions about their interest in soccer on a 5 point Likert scale from (“not interested at all” to “very interested”), “How interested are you in the subject of soccer” and “How often do you find yourself thinking about soccer?” also on a 5 point Likert scale from “never”, “not at all” to “very often”.

2.2.2 *sport climate questionnaire- player version*² (adapted)

This 6 item scale ($\alpha=.86$) accessed players perceptions of their coach’s autonomy support. The responses were based on a 5 point Likert scale with higher scores indicating greater autonomy support. Prior research demonstrates acceptable reliability and validity².

2.2.3 *perceived competence scale*¹⁷ (adapted)

This scale ($\alpha=.79$) was adapted for use with youth soccer players with a 4 item survey and based upon a 7 point Likert scale. Higher scores indicated a greater feeling of competence in soccer. Previous research using this scale has demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity¹⁷.

2.2.4 *motivation for soccer scale*¹³ (adapted)

This scale ($\alpha=.82$) measured five different forms of motivation for playing soccer. These included amotivation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and intrinsic motivation. Items were scored on a 5 point Likert scale with higher scores reflecting a greater motivation in that particular domain. Previous research using this scale has demonstrated acceptable reliability and validity¹³.

2.2.5 *parent background*

The first measure included background information, where parents were asked to report demographic characteristics such as education level, age, family income and gender. They were also asked the same interest questions as their children, “How interested are you in the subject of soccer” and “How often do you find yourself thinking about soccer?”

2.2.6 *parental expectations & encouragement*⁷ (adapted)

We measured expectations using a 10 item instrument ($\alpha=.80$). Parents rated their expectations of their child’s achievement in soccer from “participate just for fun” to the highest being “national class or professional athlete”. Parental encouragement was measured by assessing how much parents encourage their child to play soccer with two questions on a 6 point Likert scale. The questions included “How often do you and your child discuss soccer?” and “How often do you watch your child play or practice soccer?”

2.2.7 *organizational commitment*⁷ (adapted)

We measured commitment by asking parents to indicate their agreement with the statements about their commitment to the soccer program ($\alpha=.91$): “I really care about the fate of this program” and “I am willing to put in a great deal of effort beyond that is normally expected in order to help this program be successful”. These were based upon a 6 point Likert scale.

2.2.8 sport climate questionnaire-parent version² (adapted)

This 6 item scale ($\alpha=.91$) accessed parents perceptions of their child's coach's autonomy support. The responses were based on a 5 point Likert scale with higher scores indicating greater autonomy support. Prior research demonstrates acceptable reliability and validity².

2.3 Procedure

After appropriate International Review Board approval, all parents of the players in the soccer league received a letter describing the purpose of the study and requested their permission for both their own participation as well as their child's participation. Player questionnaires were completed individually or in pairs during a soccer practice. After signing an assent form, players affixed a number label at the top of the questionnaire packet to maintain confidentiality so we were still able to connect the child's data to their parent's responses. The questionnaires took 5-10 minutes to complete and each soccer player received an MCLA soccer sling bag as thanks for their participation.

An online survey was used to collect data on parents' perceptions and attitudes about their child's participation in soccer. Researchers e-mailed a link to all participating parents to complete the 5-10 minute survey through the online survey tool Survey Monkey.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics for all child and parent dependent measures can be found in Table 1 below. Pearson correlation coefficient was used to explore the interrelations between the various parent and child variables and can be found in Table 2. Multiple associations were statistically significant and are described below.

There was a moderate, positive correlation between frequency of child's thoughts about soccer and their interest in soccer, such that children who thought about soccer more often reported higher levels of interest in soccer. Additionally, there was a moderate, positive correlation between child's thoughts about soccer and their intrinsic motivation, as well as a moderate, positive correlation between child's thoughts and introjected motivation, with more frequent thoughts about soccer being associated with higher levels of both types of motivation. While looking at children's interest in soccer, we found moderate, positive correlations between interest and intrinsic motivation, and introjected motivation, and a strong, positive correlation between interest and identified regulation, such that children who reported higher levels of interest tended to have higher levels of all three types of motivation.

Additionally, children's perceptions of coach's autonomy support and their perceived competence were positively correlated such that children who perceived more autonomy support from their coach also reported higher levels of perceived competence. There was also a moderate, positive correlation between perceived autonomy support and children's intrinsic motivation, with higher perceived autonomy support being associated with higher levels of intrinsic motivation. Also, parents' thoughts about soccer had a strong, positive correlation with parents' interest in soccer, such that the more parents thought about soccer, the more interested they were in it.

There was a strong, positive correlation between parent exercise rates and children's interest in soccer, such that the more frequently parents reported exercising, the higher the children's interest in soccer. Additionally, there was a moderate, positive correlation between parents exercise rates and children's identified regulation motivation, with higher rates of parent exercise being associated with higher levels of children's identified regulation motivation. Lastly, there was a marginally significant positive correlation between parents exercise rates and children's intrinsic motivation, such that higher rates of parents exercise were related to higher levels of children's intrinsic motivation.

Another area of interest was the possible relationship between parental support of the soccer program and children's involvement and motivation in youth soccer. Analyses found a marginally significant, positive correlation between parents' program support and children's perceived competence, with higher program support being associated with higher levels of perceived competence in the children. Additionally, there was a marginally significant, positive correlation between parents' program support and children's perceptions of their coach's autonomy support, such that higher program support from parents was associated with higher levels of perceived autonomy support from the children.

Table 1: descriptive statistics for parent and child measures

Scale	N	Mean	Min	Max	Std. Dev.
1. Competence	39	4.49	2.00	5.00	0.630
2. SRQ-IM	40	4.40	2.33	5.00	0.605
3. SRQ-AM	40	1.15	1.00	2.67	0.413
4. SRQ-IntR	40	3.88	1.00	5.00	1.126
5. SRQ-IdR	40	4.33	1.33	5.00	0.784
6. SRQ-ER	40	1.82	1.00	5.00	0.975
7. Child SCQ	39	3.95	2.33	5.00	0.712
8. Child Interest	40	4.95	4.00	5.00	0.221
9. Child Think	40	4.13	3.00	5.00	0.723
10. Parent Exercise	32	4.00	1.00	6.00	1.503
11. Parent SCQ	31	3.69	2.00	5.00	0.647
12. Parent Think	32	3.41	1.00	5.00	1.020
13. Parent Interest	32	4.16	1.00	5.00	0.837
14. Program Support	31	3.81	1.67	5.00	0.926

Table 2: parent-child correlation results

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Parent Interest	-	.641**	.442*	-.172	.144	-.042	-.249	-.098	-.050	-.205	-.074	-.294	-.261
2. Parent Think	-	-	.180	.259	.455**	.260	-.202	.186	-.049	-.156	.222	-.246	-.333
3. Parent Exercise	-	-	-	-.236	-.094	.190	.518**	.132	.097	.348	.059	.387*	-.109
4. Parent SCQ	-	-	-	-	.221	.124	-.238	.204	.131	.001	.077	-.056	.015
5. Program Support	-	-	-	-	-	.499**	-.131	.244	.380	-.018	.150	-.065	.373
6. Discuss	-	-	-	-	-	-	.260	.378	.024	.137	.079	.165	.129
7. Child Interest	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.362*	.138	.666**	.354*	.691**	.120
8. Child Think	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.013	.371*	.344*	.151	.045
9. Competence	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.295	.130	.294	.609**
10. SRQ_IM	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.309	.715**	.460**
11. SRQ_IntR	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.268	.047
12. SRQ_IdR	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.103
13. ChildSCQ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed)

** $p < .001$ (two-tailed)

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Our results provide useful information that gives us new insight into the motivational climate involved in youth soccer. The present study explored the roles of parents' exercise and physical activity rates on multiple aspects of children's participation in youth soccer, finding that higher levels of exercise among parents predicts higher levels of interest in soccer in children, which is consistent with findings in previous research⁴. Additionally, our findings showed that higher levels of parent exercise were associated with higher levels of players' identified regulation and intrinsic motivation. Prior research has also suggested a bidirectional relationship between parent and child¹⁶, which is conceivably the case with this finding. The parent may be influenced to exercise and stay fit by their child's interest in sport, and to be a good role model by exercising, while the child may in turn be further motivated and influenced by their parents modeling. Although the relationship between parent exercise and intrinsic motivation was only marginal, due to our small sample size and the fact that the correlation was found between two separate groups of individuals, it is worth discussing. This finding is important because intrinsic motivation stems from a self-want or need to play soccer, purely for the purpose of one's own enjoyment¹¹. Encouraging intrinsic motivation in children will likely lead to more prolonged play in youth soccer, as there is no external pressure or pushing to play. High levels of identified regulation indicate that the children are aware of the benefits of soccer, particularly the health benefits. This awareness could be then what leads them to play soccer. The relationship between parent exercise and children's identified regulation would thus be expected, as parents who are more physically active are more likely to pass on the knowledge of the health benefits of sports and exercise to their children. All of these findings are significant because they help us to paint a picture of the type of environment that will predict children's continued participation in youth soccer. In a culture where childhood obesity is a growing problem, this information could be very valuable in helping to encourage play and exercise through youth sports.

Additionally, the relationships between parental support of the premier soccer league and their children's perceived competence and perceptions of coach autonomy support are valuable in that they add to our picture of the type of environment that is associated with more positive participation of children in youth soccer. Although these relationships were only of marginal significance, they are still valuable and worthwhile to discuss. Parents who reported providing support to the program were associated with children that reported both a higher level of perceived competence and better perceptions of their coach's autonomy support. Multiple speculations can be made as to why this result occurred. It's possible that parents who provide more support to the program talk more positively about the coaches in the program, which causes children to have better perceptions and feeling about their coaches. Consistent with another study⁸, higher levels of coach autonomy support were also related to higher levels of intrinsic motivation in children, which is beneficial to participation. As expected, children's perceived competence was also associated with better perceptions of autonomy support.

In terms of parent perceptions of coach autonomy support, there was a relationship between more positive perceptions and how often they thought about soccer, which was expected. Surprisingly, no significant relationships between parent and child perceptions of coach autonomy support were found, contrary to our expectations. Overall, our data suggest that parents with more positive views of soccer may provide both direct and indirect support of their children's participation in youth soccer.

Some limitations in this study include our small sample size and lack of diversity. The small number of participants turned us away from being able to run other valuable analyses, and the lack of diversity paired with the small sample size poses concerns about generalizability. Additionally, self-report measures were used, which could lead to biased or inaccurate responses on the surveys we used.

The current research provides important information for the field of youth sport psychology, however, and it also gives way for future research in the field. Research in other types of soccer leagues, such as school teams or town clubs could expand on the motivational climate found in other groups of soccer players. Reproducing this study with a larger sample would also allow for more generalizability of results, as well as more possible analyses to run, such as a multiple regression model, which could identify beneficial combinations of variables. Current data supports the notion that parent's lifestyle choices and views of soccer are strongly related to their children's motivation to play soccer.

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6. References

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