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Learning from elite and recreational soccer girls about sport longevity and “success” through the quantification of practice and play amounts: Methods and some preliminary data

We have been studying variables related to practice, play and motivation which impact successful transitions in soccer. In this current research supported by the SSHRC SPRI, we have studied the practice profiles of Canadian National and Varsity women soccer players to ascertain profiles which might indicate success in the sport. The main distinguishing factor between successful Varsity and National women soccer players is with respect to their time in self-directed soccer play activities in childhood, not practice amounts. However, the quality of practice as assessed by challenge perceptions did distinguish across the 2 groups. In current research we have launched a survey with adolescent girls (13-17yr) who play soccer at various levels (competitive/club to elite/national). Not only are we collecting data on past practice-related activities in soccer, we are also studying involvement in other sports and activities, injury histories and asking questions to assess psychological variables related to motivation, challenge, commitment and mental attitude toward practice. This is a longitudinal study, so we are following up with athletes on a yearly basis for the next 3-4 years. Given the current COVID situation, our recruitment has been delayed, but we have data from ~30 athletes (and parents) so far. In future years we will present more on the development data related to these athletes. In addition to strengthening our understanding of factors contributing to success and dropout in girl's sport, this project will shed light on issues related to early sport involvement and specialization and whether hours in deliberate practice foster motivation to continue or potentially lead to drop-out from sports as a result of over specialization and sacrifices in other activities.