

# EXPLORING THE MULTIFACETED DYNAMICS OF PARENTS' ROLES IN YOUTH SPORT

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# Frequently Cited Studies of Parents in Sport

- The influence of the family in the development of talent in sport (Côté, 1999)
- Parental involvement in competitive youth sport settings (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008)
- Parents' perceptions of child-to-parent socialization in organized youth sport (Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2009)
- Young athlete's perceptions of parental support and pressure (Leff & Hoyle, 1995)
- Parental involvement and athletes' career in youth sports (Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004)

(Dorsch, Vierimaa, & Plucinik, 2018)

# Research on Parents in Youth Sport

- Parental involvement in the socialization of young people in sport
- Parents' impact on their children's engagement and outcomes

(Dorsch, et al., 2021; Teques et al., 2018)

# Interventions and Recommendations for Parents

- The impact of evidence-based parent education in organized youth sport: A pilot study (Dorsch et al., 2017)
- Parent education in youth sport: A community case study of parents, coaches, and administrators (Dorsch et al., 2018)
- Parenting in youth sport: A position paper on parenting expertise (Harwood & Knight 2015)
- Factors that influence parents' experiences at junior tennis tournaments and suggestions for improvement (Knight & Holt, 2013)
- Examining the impact of the Respect in sport parent program on the psychosocial experiences of minor hockey athletes (Tamminen et al., 2020)
- Understanding the educational needs of parenting athletes involved in sport education: The parent's view (Gjaka et al., 2021)
- A qualitative study examining parental involvement in youth sports over a one-year intervention program (Lisinskiene & Lochbaum, 2019)
- Mandatory parent education programs can create positive youth sport experiences (Christofferson & Strand, 2016)

# Parents' Research and Interventions: Shortcomings

- Mostly sees parents as “problems” instead of “assets.”
- The goal is to “educate” parents.
- Input from parents is rarely welcome.
- Overlook determinants of parental behaviour, including parents' motivations and capabilities.

Overall, the research mainly focuses on the behaviours and roles of parents to support their children's engagement in sport. The research rarely considers the demands and responsibilities of parents that impact their behaviours and roles.

# Parents' Demands and Responsibilities

- Parents as consumers of youth sport (Murata & Côté, 2022)
- Parents as spectators (Strydom, Murata, & Côté, 2023)
- Parents as coaches (KurtzFavero, Murata, Strydom, Tse, Costa, & Côté, 2023)
- Parents as friends (Smith-Hunter & Côté, 2023)



## Considering the cost(s) of the game: Consumer behavior and parents in youth ice hockey

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### ABSTRACT

Negative sport parent behavior continues to impede athletes, coaches, and program administrators from enjoying positive experiences within a variety of youth sport environments. In conjunction with this issue, the growing financial cost required to support youth sport participation has been identified as a source of stress for parents as well as a barrier preventing athletes from fully enjoying all that youth sports programming has to offer. As such, the purpose of the current study was to explore how sport parent perceptions and behaviors may be understood when examined through the conceptual lens of a framework originating within the consumer behavior literature. Using an established model of consumer decision-making to structure the project's interview guide, 15 semi-structured interviews with Canadian ice hockey parents (seven "moms" and eight "dads") were completed. Interview questions were constructed in hopes of exploring participants' experiences as consumers of their children's ice hockey programming. Following interview transcriptions, the completion of a thematic analysis suggested that ice hockey parents were influenced by a variety of external pressures to continue funding their children's participation rather than their personal perceptions and assessments of program quality. As such, parents were observed to undertake a unique process of consumption—one wherein their purchasing behavior was best understood through the influences of their cultural world and social groups as well as their children's potential attainment of non-sport-related outcomes (i.e., life skills, friendships) rather than their satisfaction with the youth ice hockey programming that they were a part of itself.

*Lay summary:* Fifteen parents with children enrolled in youth ice hockey programming were interviewed regarding aspects of their behaviors as program consumers. Parents disclosed that, although ice hockey provided their families with a variety of benefits, they were (a) dissatisfied with the programming quality itself and (b) felt program improvements were unlikely.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Accounting for parental stress and frustration around their youth sports program purchases (i.e., satisfaction with their purchases) should be considered when creating strategies to combat negative parental behaviors.
- It may be useful for youth sports programs to implement more rigorous mechanisms for receiving and addressing feedback from parents.

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Parents invest time and money in their children's sport programs, but unlike other "purchases" they are not able to provide feedback on their investment which could lead to stress and frustration.

## Missing Out, as Well: The Absence of Youth Sports and Its Effect on Parents During the COVID-19 Global Pandemic

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In December of 2019, COVID-19 began spreading globally. As a result, many youth sport organizations were forced to halt programming. While unfortunate, this imposed disengagement from youth sport provided an opportunity to explore what youth sport means to parents, being that this was the first time many were without it. As such, researchers aimed to explore the attitudes and perceptions of youth sport parents regarding their child's sport participation in its absence. Semistructured interviews were conducted to explore these perceptions, and three themes were constructed through thematic analysis. Findings suggest that sport parents miss their experiences as "live-in" sports fans of their child's sport participation due to the absence of their spectator experiences, social opportunities, and feelings of success, which drive their motivation for continued involvement. Understanding parental motivations to support youth sport participation may lead future researchers to uncovering the influences of parental behavior in the youth sport context.

**Keywords:** sport parenting, parental behavior, parental socialization, consumer behavior theory

The majority of youth sport programming would cease to exist without the investment and support of youth sport parents. In fact, looking into how parents might provide positive support to their child and adolescent athletes, Fredricks and Eccles (2004) suggested that parents play three major roles, these being: (a) role models (modeling sport behaviors and actions), (b) interpreters of experience (providing emotional reaction to events within the youth sport context), and (c) providers of experience (providing opportunities, transportation, or finances). These categories reveal the different forms of parental support required for organized youth sport to function.

In terms of their responsibilities as role models, sport parents are often thought to be critical in demonstrating expected norms and behaviors for their children (Coto et al., 2019; Wiese & Freund, 2011). For example, parents have been shown to provide their children with valuable opportunities for social, cognitive, and physical development (Neely & Holt, 2014), as well as to impart life lessons and instill positive values (Dorsch et al., 2015; Stefansen et al., 2018). Indeed, positive parenting has been identified as critical in fostering young athletes' development both inside and outside of sport (Côté, 1999; Holt et al., 2021; Wuertth et al., 2004). Additionally, with increased opportunities for positive socialization, parents have also been found to develop a greater sense of community and to exhibit more prosocial behavior (i.e., volunteerism) through their child's participation in youth sport programming (Legg et al., 2015; Omoto & Snyder, 2010).

As interpreters of their children's sporting experience, parents have been seen to become emotionally invested in their children's youth sport endeavors and, in turn, often share in the excitement, anxiety, and challenges associated with participation (Dorsch et al., 2009; Peter, 2011). While often positive, this emotional engagement

can also lead to negative feelings such as anger and adverse mental health outcomes for parents (Omli & LaVoi, 2012; Sutcliffe et al., 2021), as well as perceived pressure and decreased self-perception in their children (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). As discussed by Stefansen et al. (2018), many youth sport parents have a history of playing sports when they were growing up and wished their own parents were more involved. Now, with their own children, these individuals have embraced the role of being a sport parent as more hands-on involvement has become normalized (Dorsch et al., 2015; Stefansen et al., 2018). Parental influence has also been shown to have a powerful impact on children's own perception of their sporting experiences. As reported by Sánchez-Miguel et al. (2013), it was found that child athletes appeared to be more strongly influenced by their parents' opinions compared with more objective measures (i.e., coaches' assessments, stats) when formulating assessments of their and their peers' sporting performances.

As providers of the youth sport experience, parents act as key agents in completing tasks such as program enrollment, payment of program fees and equipment costs, and transportation to and from youth sport events (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Green & Chalip, 1998). In addition to providing support to their own children, parents often serve in essential volunteer roles that help to support sport programs, such as administrative, fundraising, and coaching positions (Kim et al., 2010). Strikingly, a study by Busser and Carruthers (2010) found that parents can make up as much as 90% of all youth sport coaches. Unfortunately, despite parents' tangible contributions to youth sport, the financial cost of sport programming continues to become more prohibitive with time (Erdal, 2018; Holt et al., 2011). As outlined by Gould (2019), the cost associated with youth sport program enrollment and the pressure to pay for additional training sessions as well as quality equipment has created a barrier delineating sport as an activity more readily available to children and families of high socioeconomic status. More unfortunate still is the notion that parents continue to attempt facilitating sport participation for their children even going so far as to accrue large amounts of debt or work multiple jobs (Clark et al., 2019; Todd & Edwards, 2020). As the primary financiers, sport

Parents enjoy socializing with other parents from their children's sport.

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## Exploring the Implementation and Practices of the Parent–Coach Dual Role

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Previous research looking into youth sport coaching indicates that a majority of coaches may also be a parent to an athlete on their team. While previous studies have also sought to understand how being a parent–coach might affect parents' relationships with their own child(ren), little work appears to explore how occupying this role might affect an individual's ability to remain effective as a coach. As such, 14 parent–coaches were interviewed to examine how they perceived their dual role to influence their coaching effectiveness and to hear what strategies they used to remain effective. Interviews were analyzed thematically, and findings indicated that parent–coaches have few formalized resources to aid them in navigating the issues associated with their challenging dual-role position. More support would be welcomed by this population to improve their effectiveness and to ensure that all developing athletes in their care continue to have positive experiences within the youth sport environment.

**Keywords:** coaching, youth sport, coaching behaviors, coaching effectiveness

Although participation in sport has been shown to provide child and adolescent athletes with a means to experience an array of positive outcomes (e.g., improved physical health: Balyi et al., 2013; improved mental health: Logan et al., 2019; positive experiences: McKay et al., 2019), it is also evident that obtaining these benefits is contingent on a wide variety of factors and conditions. As discussed by Côté et al. (2022), congruencies or incongruencies between young athletes and (a) their sport of interest, (b) their sporting environment(s), and (c) the personal relationships they form within sport, can often influence their choice to continue participation both season-to-season and throughout the course of their lives. In line with these ideas, a large body of literature have identified the importance of positive relationships between developing athletes and their coaches (e.g., Jowett, 2007; Jowett & Poczwadowski, 2007; Prichard & Deutsch, 2015; Vella et al., 2011), as well as their parents (e.g., Strandbu et al., 2019; Witt & Dangi, 2018). These relationships may foster a continued interest in sport as well as the attainment of positive sport-related benefits. Conversely, previous findings suggest that negative interactions and relationships between young athletes and these important social agents may lead to premature sport attrition (Christofferson & Strand, 2016; Eliasson & Johansson, 2021; Felber Charbonneau & Camiré, 2020; Sherman, 2002).

When looking into the parental behaviors, young athletes have reported to be facilitative in their development, past research has highlighted appropriate levels of encouragement as well as positively framed guidance to be effective and welcomed (Knight et al., 2017). In contrast to these behaviors, within the specific context of sport competition, athletes have described loud and disruptive parents—even if attempting to show support—to be distracting and to induce feelings of pressure as well as embarrassment (Knight & Holt, 2014; Omlil & Wiese-Bjornstal, 2011). Outside

of the competitive context, as discussed by Tamminen et al. (2017), despite parents assuming that the delivery of sport-related feedback was valuable to their children's athletic development, young athletes receiving this communication often reported negative feelings due to these interactions—particularly if feedback was critical. Research regarding preferred parental behaviors has demonstrated athletes' desire for parents to abstain from providing immediate feedback (both critical and complementary), following competition (i.e., Elliott & Drummond, 2017b; Poucher et al., 2015; Sutcliffe et al., 2021; Tamminen et al., 2017). Further, this research reflects the prevalent issue of parents critiquing their child's teammates, coaches, and other parents with their child in private settings (Sutcliffe et al., 2021).

Similar to negative feedback received from parents, coaches who emphasized winning over fun and employed negative motivational strategies or conditional praise were identified as problematic by young athletes hoping to achieve positive sport experiences (Keegan et al., 2010). Instead, developing athletes have reported preferring coaches that are supportive and positive as well as coaches who are more democratic than autocratic in their leadership behaviors (Sharma, 2015; Terry & Howe, 1984; Walach-Bišta, 2019). In line with these findings, Jowett and Poczwadowski (2007) asserted that both positive and negative outcomes can result from coach–athlete relationships, but that these outcomes are dependent on the interconnections between the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of coaches and their athletes. Further, as outlined in Côté and Gilbert's (2009) proposed definition of coaching effectiveness (i.e., the attainment of ideal, context-specific athlete outcomes), coaches were predicted to be most effective when they successfully develop and integrate critical disparate coaching knowledge sets—in particular their (a) sport-specific knowledge, (b) interpersonal knowledge, and (c) intrapersonal knowledge—in ways to develop athletes' competence, confidence, connection, and character (i.e., the 4Cs). This is further highlighted through the most recent iteration of Côté et al.'s (2022) personal assets framework, which details the importance of athletes' social relationships and social experiences (e.g., the behaviors of their coaches) in allowing them to develop and experience

Parents are often asked to coach their children without adequate preparation and resources to complement their professional and interpersonal Knowledge and behaviours.

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## Parent–child co-participation in sport and physical activity: a scoping review

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### ABSTRACT

Parent–child co-participation has often been correlated with physical activity engagement levels. However, both new research and anecdotal evidence suggest that parent–child sport co-participation may provide developmental benefits for both parents and their children beyond simple rates of engagement. The aims of this scoping review were twofold: first, to gather the available research on parent–child co-participation in the sport context and identify how co-participation has been conceptualised in the literature, and second, to discuss the contexts in which parent–child co-participation has been investigated. Through this review, we found that co-participation has most often been conceptualised as either a predictor of physical activity or a one-dimensional outcome variable. A small number of studies have examined co-participation as a developmental process. Future research recommendations include examining co-participation in greater detail as a process, with the intent to further understand the developmental contexts of these sport and relationship environments.

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### KEYWORDS

Co-participation; youth sport; physical activity; parent–child relationships; positive youth development

The role of parents outside of organized sport, where parents do sport with their child as a “friend,” is an important role that parents can play to promote fun and interest.

### Introduction

The outcomes of sport involvement in youth, and the factors influencing those outcomes, have been research topics for several decades. More particularly, research has shown connections between sport participation and improved youth’s (a) physical health, (b) social competencies, (c) scholastic achievement, and (d) holistic well-being in a variety of geographic and social contexts (Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Marsh & Kleitman, 2003). Despite the many positive outcomes empirically linked to sport participation in youth, research has also highlighted growing concerns regarding negative outcomes such as anti-social behaviours, perfectionism, and anxiety related to engagement in youth sport (Boardley & Kavussanu, 2009; Gould & Walker, 2019; Holt & Neely, 2011). The factors influencing these numerous outcomes are well-researched and are typically organised ecologically and developmentally into three high-order categories: environment, activities, and relationships (Côté et al., 2020; Dorsch et al., 2022; Henriksen et al., 2010; O’Sullivan et al., 2021).

How relationships influence outcomes in youth sport is a particularly important question; youth development literature makes it unequivocally clear that relationships are a

# Moving Forward: Research

- Explore parents' demands and responsibilities that influence their behaviours.
- Examine the intricate and sometimes conflicting roles parents undertake in youth sport.
- Examine the developmental process of parents-child co-participation.
- Understand parents' social groups independent of children's outcomes.

# Moving Forward: Sport Organizations

Improve the experience of the parents

- Create partnerships to foster collaborations
- Regular feedback and communication
- Online forums and communities
- Parents' mentorship programs
- Parents-coach partnerships
- Video resources
- Positive reinforcement and recognition