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PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON SPORTS PERFORMANCE AMONG YOUTHS OF USHONGO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Background*: Parental behaviours, opinions, attitudes or actions exert a strong influence on their children in a number of domains including sports performance. Young adolescents are greatly influenced by their parents' interest in their endeavours. Their performance and achievements in varied activities are facilitated by positive parental involvement. Parental involvement is such a powerful influence that its effects may last for many years and may enhance children's participation and performance in many different areas like youth sports.The research design for this study was a cross-sectional survey design. The population of the study comprised of all players participating in The Chairman's Cup - a local regional soccer competition in Lessel, Ushongo LGA of Benue State. Total Population Sampling technique was used in the study. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection in this study. The data collected through the use of questionnaire was analysed using chi-square goodness of fit test at 0.05 level of significance. All the analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23).* ***Results****: parental involvement has a significant positive influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 102.63; df=3; P<0.05]; parental support has a significant positive influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 84.17; df = 3; P<0.05]; parental encouragement has a significant positive influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 73.57; df = 3; P<0.05]; parental pressure has a significant negative influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 89.30; df = 3; P<0.05].* ***Conclusions:*** *Most youth sports require assistance from parents who serve as volunteers, coaches, and fundraisers in an effort to support the league. By facilitating their child's youth sports experience, parents can come to understand the positive effects that youth sports can have on their child.*

Keywords: Parent, Influence, Sports Performance, Youths.

Introduction

Parental behaviours, opinions, attitudes or actions exert a strong influence on their children in a number of domains including sports performance. Young adolescents are greatly influenced by their parents' interest in their endeavours. Their performance and achievements in varied activities are facilitated by positive parental involvement. For instance, research has found a positive association between parental involvement and children's performance in elementary school, reading performance, as well as academic and sporting activities (Hewison, 2018; Reynolds, 2019). Parental involvement is such a powerful influence that its effects may last for

many years and may enhance children's participation and performance in many different areas like youth sports.

Millions of children engage in physical activity and participate in competitive youth sport programs around the world. Involvement in sport provides important health benefits and helps children learn physical skills that they can use throughout their life. Through the social interactions in sport programs children build friendships and learn important interpersonal skills such as cooperation and teamwork. Sport involvement also provides an opportunity for children to develop characteristics and values that may assist with academic or personal growth as they mature (perseverance, commitment, dedication). While there are many benefits associated with sports involvement, there are also some potential downsides. The emphasis placed on achievement in our society can put excess pressure on children to perform in sports and physical activity. Because not all children have equal motivation or genetic potential for success at sports, some may experience negative emotions or develop negative self-perceptions through their involvement in athletics (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 2014).

Although there are opportunities for children to undertake sports activities, a child's involvement in sports is determined by many social and environmental factors including sex of the child, socio-economic class, background, geographic location, home environment among others. The home environment is the most important influence on a young person's sports performance. Parents with an active interest in sports will naturally exert a positive influence on their children's sport activities (Bloom, 2015).

Undoubtedly, parents' influence on a child's involvement in sports and physical activity is significant. As the demands of youth sports participation have become more complex and competitive, so has the role of a parent become more difficult (Wiersma& Fifer, 2018). It is usually parents who provide the first opportunity for their child to take up a sport. They also have significant influence on a child's decision on continuing or quitting a sport at some later point in time (Passer & Wilson, 2012). On one hand, parental help seems to be very important (bringing their child to a training session, supporting them during competition, motivating them when discouraged, providing them with feedback or sharing a child's success and progress in sports), but, on the other hand, parents' actions at times may hinder a young athlete's development and sports performance (Lindner & Johns, 2011).

Sport performance is the manner in which sport participation is measured. Sport performance is a complex mixture of biomechanical function, emotional factors, and training techniques. Performance in an athletic context has a popular connotation of representing the pursuit of excellence, where an athlete measures his or her performance as a progression toward excellence or achievement. There is an understanding in sport that athletes interested in performance tend to the competitive or elite level; athletes interested in simple participation, for broader purposes such as fitness or weight control, are most often recreational athletes who do not set specific performance goals.

Parental involvement is often referred to as the time a parent invests for the child to participate and succeed in the sport. This includes the time spent driving to games and practices, time spent at practices and games, and the overall energy given to the sport for their child to have the best experience possible (Weiss & Hayashi, 2015). In recent decades, parental involvement in organised youth sports has intensified substantially (Stefansen, Smette, &Strandbu, 2016; Wheeler & Green, 2014). Coleman (2013) described sport as a pillar of independent adolescent culture, representing values in opposition to adult society. Parents' increased interest and involvement in their children's participation in sport illustrates the cultural shift towards involved parenthood that has taken place in recent decades. Although this form of parenting may be most pronounced in the middle class (Lareau, 2013; Stefansen & Aarseth, 2011; Vincent & Ball, 2007), parents now seek emotional closeness and a reciprocal relationship with their child and see themselves as responsible for all aspects of their development.

Parental support refers to unconditional warmth toward and acceptance of a child athlete by their parents (Power &Woolger, 2014) and the parental behaviours that youth athletes perceive as assisting both their sports participation and their sports performance (Hoyle &Leff, 2017). Therefore, supportiveness by parents of youth athletes, as shown in affect and behaviours, can be emotional and instrumental. Emotional support involves the provision of security and comfort to the youth athlete during stressful times in the sport. Tangible support from parents includes financial support. Supportive behaviours such as encouragement and performance-contingent feedback (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2018) and autonomy supportive parenting styles have been found to be of a great influence on the sports performance of adolescents. Positive correlations have been found between perceived parental support and player enjoyment in highly competitive sports athletes (Hoyle &Leff, 2017; Leff& Hoyle, 2015). In addition, parental support is associated with athletes' enjoyment of sports and the level of importance a particular sport holds in their lives (Hoyle &Leff, 2017).

Greater parental encouragement is associated with greater perceived physical competence in children. Parents of committed athletes are usually willing and happy to attend their children's competitions and tournaments, and are often present during practice sessions (Monsaas, 2015; Sloan, 2015). Motivation and encouragement have emerged as potential factors that contribute to promote an appropriate sports performance (Weiss & Ferrer-Caja, 2012). Thus, it would be interesting to determine how parents' behaviour influences encouragement aspects for appropriate sport performance (Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes, &Pennisi, 2016). Parents' encouragement is therefore, a significant element in the development of young participants' goal achievement motivation (Roberts, 2011).

Parental pressure is a commonly discussed form of social influence in the paediatric sport psychology literature. Although there is no single consistent definition, the exertion of pressure by parents have typically been conceptualized in a manner that reflects children's perceived parental expectations,

how critical parents are, their response to loss/defeat, parental concerns about winning, and the pressure parents put on them to succeed (Leff& Hoyle, 2015, p. 192). Anderson et al. (2013) 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, 2017). According to Lee and McLean (2017), pressure was associated with perceived directive or controlling behaviours by parents. Youths' perceptions of their parents' attitudes and behaviours concerning the sport are associated with self-perceptions of ability, motivational orientation and attitudes and behaviours in sport (Fredricks&Eccles, 2014).

The influence from parents can be positive and negative depending on how it is received and perceived by the youth. Praise, encouragement and support can help to enhance a child's perception of their ability and increase their interest and involvement. Pressure and criticism, on the other hand, can damage a child's confidence and take the inherent enjoyment out of the activity. This study therefore is set to investigate the influence that various parental behaviours and attitudes have on the sports performance of youths in Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State.

Positive parental contribution can significantly influence a child's motivation in the sport they play because they are the main socializers influencing children's sport involvement. Parental support of young athletes relates to enjoyment and high self-esteem. Parental support and encouragement enables children develop important life skills when participating in sports. Examples of these life skills are competition, sportsmanship, teamwork, listening to adults, following directions, communication skills, being able to balance and maintain perspective, staying focused, and dealing with adversity. Parental involvement and support for their youth athlete can affect their child's self-esteem in many positive ways, including high levels of enjoyment and an increase in longevity of participation in the child's specific sport.

These benefits of youth sports participation and parental involvement in youth sports notwithstanding, very few parents in the Nigerian context encourage, talk less of support or get involved in their children's sports activities. Until recently, most Nigerian parents considered sports participation a gross waste of time and an activity for wayward children. Most Nigerian parents entertain fears of accident and other hazards which are inherent in sports. Because of this, they are often reluctant, if not completely against their children engaging in any form of organised sports. Parents also fear that participation in sports will affect the academic performance of their children hence, most Nigerian parents discouraged their children from participating in youth sports. As a result, there is invariably

inherited false impression of their parents on sports participation by some youth. They develop a sense of insecurity and a poor attitude towards sports participation. The few who show interest in sports are in dire need of parental encouragement, support and involvement for the desired performance.

Considering the potential of parents to have either a positive or negative role in children's sports experience, it is unfortunate that research on this topic is limited. Hence, understanding more about parents' actual involvement and behaviors in youth sport may represent an important contribution to the literature. This study therefore, aims to achieve this by investigating parental influence on sports performance among youths of Okpokwu Local Government Area of Benue State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to investigate parental influence on sports performance among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area. Specifically, the study aims to find out the influence that;

Parental involvement has on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State.

Parental support has on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State.

Parental encouragement has on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State.

Parental pressure has on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were postulated to be tested in the study.

Parental involvement will have no significant influence on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State.

Parental support will have no significant influence on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State.

Parental encouragement will have no significant influence on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State.

Parental pressure will have no significant influence on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State.

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Material and Methods

Study Design: The research design for this study was a cross-sectional survey design. Cross sectional studies are usually carried out to identify the relationship(s) between variables (Easterby-Smith, Jackson & Lave, 2008). It is particularly useful when examining the interrelationship among a number of variables. Thus, the research observed the study variables without any attempt to manipulating them. Thus, this design is considered most appropriate for this study as it attempts to examine parental influence on sports performance among youths.

Sample and Sampling

Total Population Sampling technique was used in the study. Total population sampling is a type of purposive sampling where the

whole population of interest is studied. Total population sampling is done when the target group is small and set apart by an unusual and well-defined characteristic.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher in line with the objectives of the study. The instrument sought the perceptions of the participants on parental influence on their sports performance. The instrument was presented in four clusters. Each cluster contained five (5) items for each research question giving a total of twenty (20) items.The questionnaire was set on a four point likert type scale rated as Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1.

Procedure methodology

Data for this research was obtained through the administration of the questionnaire on respondents. Hand delivery method was used for both the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. The researcher was assisted by a research assistant, preferably an official in the tournament, in collecting data under the strict supervision of the researcher. The researcher was present at the venue of the tournament daily, to seek permission of the respondents in participating in the study until all the teams have been exhausted. The respondents were required to fill the questionnaire and return the completed copies to the researcher or her assistant who in turn passed them to the researcher.

Statistical analysis

The data collected through the use of questionnaire were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while chi-square goodness of fit test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. All the analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 23). In testing the hypotheses, p-value was used to test for significance. The hypotheses were rejected if p value is < 0.05 and vice versa.

Presentation of Results

Table 1Summary of Chi-Square (χ^2) Analysis on Influence of Parental Involvement in Youth Sport on Sports Performance

Responses	Frequency Observed	Frequency Expected	χ^2_{cal}	χ^2_{tab}	df	P	Remark
SA	72	60.0					
A	119	60.0					
D	22	60.0	102.63	7.82	3	0.00	Significant
SD	27	60.0					
Total	240	240					

χ^2_{cal} = 102.63; df=3; P<0.05

Table 1 presents the summary of chi square analysis on the influence of parental involvement in youth sports on sports performance. Results available indicate that parental influence has a significant positive

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influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 102.63; df=3; P<0.05]. Since the calculated value of chi-square (χ^2_{cal} = 102.63) is greater than the table value (χ^2_{tab} = 7.82), it therefore means that the null hypothesis which states that parental involvement will have no significant influence on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State has been rejected. This means that the more parents are involved in their children's activities, the higher their performance will be.

Table 2: Summary of Chi-Square (χ^2) Analysis on Influence of Parental Support in Youth Sport on Sports Performance

Responses	Frequency Observed	Frequency Expected	χ^2_{cal}	χ^2_{tab}	df	P	Remark
SA	97	60.0					
A	94	60.0					
D	23	60.0	84.17	7.82	3	0.00	Significant
SD	26	60.0					
Total	240	240					

χ^2_{cal} = 84.17; df=3; P<0.05

Table 2 presents the summary of chi square analysis on the influence of parental support in youth sports on sports performance. Results available indicate that parental support has a significant positive influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 84.17; df=3; P<0.05]. Since the calculated value of chi-square (χ^2_{cal} = 84.17) is greater than the table value (χ^2_{tab} = 7.82), it therefore means that the null hypothesis which states that parental support will have no significant influence on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State has been rejected. This means that the more support parents give their children concerning their sports activities, the higher their performance will be.

Table 3: Summary of Chi-Square (χ^2) Analysis on Influence of Parental Encouragement in Youth Sport on Sports Performance

Responses	Frequency Observed	Frequency Expected	χ^2_{cal}	χ^2_{tab}	df	P	Remark
SA	65	60.0					
A	112	60.0					
D	37	60.0	73.57	7.82	3	0.00	Significant
SD	26	60.0					
Total	240	240					

χ^2_{cal} = 73.57; df=3; P<0.05

Table 3 presents the summary of chi square analysis on the influence of parental encouragement in youth sports on sports performance. Results available indicate that parental encouragement has a significant positive influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 73.57; df=3; P<0.05]. Since the

calculated value of chi-square (χ^2_{cal} = 73.57) is greater than the table value (χ^2_{tab} = 7.82), it therefore means that the null hypothesis which states that parental encouragement will have no significant influence on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State has been rejected. This means that the more parents encourage their children on their sports activities, the higher their performance will be.

Table 4: Summary of Chi-Square (χ^2) Analysis on Influence of Parental Pressure in Youth Sport on Sports Performance

Responses	Frequency Observed	Frequency Expected	χ^2_{cal}	χ^2_{tab}	df	P	Remark
SA	93	60.0	89.30	7.82	3	0.00	Significant
A	100	60.0					
D	25	60.0					
SD	22	60.0					
Total	240	240					

χ^2_{cal} = 89.30; df=3; P<0.05

Table 4 presents the summary of chi square analysis on the influence of parental pressure in youth sports on sports performance. Results available indicate that parental pressure has a significant negative influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 89.30; df=3; P<0.05]. Since the calculated value of chi-square (χ^2_{cal} = 89.30) is greater than the table value (χ^2_{tab} = 7.82), it therefore means that the null hypothesis which states that parental pressure will have no significant influence on sports participation among youths of Ushongo Local Government Area of Benue State has been rejected. This means that the more pressure that parents put on their children concerning their sports activities, the lower their performance will be.

Discussion of Findings

This section presents the discussion of findings made in the study based on the data presented in Tables 1 – 5. The first finding of the study revealed that parental involvement has a significant positive influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 102.63; df=3; P<0.05]. The study found that when parents are actively involved in their children's sports activities, they feel encouraged to play, motivated to do their best, learn a lot from their parents as youths, take corrections when their parents provide direct feedback about training or game sessions. When parents are actively involved in their child's sports activities, it creates an avenue for the parent and the child to talk about important issues related to the child's sporting experience during training session and competitions. Play the role of spectators in child's sporting activities and it offers an opportunity through which parents can provide direct and immediate feedback to the child. This finding is in congruence with that of Olson (2014) who carried out a study titled parental involvement in youth sports. The results of the study revealed that parental involvement had a significant influence on the child's

performance in basketball. Teques, Serpa, Rosado, Silva and Calmeiro (2018) also carried out a research on parental involvement in sport and the results of the study indicated that out of the parents' reported behaviours, parental involvement was positively associated with positive sports achievement among youth athletes.

The second finding of the study revealed that parental support has a significant positive influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 84.17; df = 3; P<0.05]. The study found that the more support parents give their children concerning their sports activities, the higher their performance will be. Children's sports participation is dependent on parents' ability to invest the necessary resources of money, time and energy in their children's sports activities. Parental support takes the form of investment with regards to the significant financial, logistical and emotional contributions parents make in an effort to provide a positive sorting experience for their children. The study also reports that parents also make a substantial contribution to their children's sports participation through commitment of their time and through not only transporting children to venues, but also waiting and watching their games and training sessions. Provision of financial, logistic, material and emotional support makes it easy for the youth to participate in sports activities and improve their performance. This finding is in agreement with that of Hoyle and Leff (2017) who carried out a study titled the role of parental involvement in youth sport participation and performance in Atlanta, Georgia. The results of the study revealed that parental support was significantly associated with enjoyment of tennis (r = 0.63), performance (r = 0.52) and self-esteem (r = 0.47) of the players. Players who reported a higher level of parental support also had greater enjoyment of tennis and performed better than those who report lower levels of parental support. The study is also in line with that of Marcen, Gimeno, Gomez, Saenz and Gutierrez (2013) who investigated socioeconomic status, parental support, motivation and self-confidence in youth competitive sport. The results of the study showed a positive relationship between parental support and self-confidence in competitions (r = 0.43, P<0.05) and between parental support and motivation toward sports (r = 0.41, p<0.05). Sánchez-Miguel, Leo, Sánchez-Oliva, in support of the finding of the study, Amado and García-Calvo (2013) also investigated that importance of parents' behaviour in their children's enjoyment and motivation in sports. Their study showed a positive relationship between parents' support of the sport and players' enjoyment of it.

The third finding of the study revealed that that parental encouragement has a significant positive influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 73.57; df = 3; P<0.05]. The study found that the more parents encourage their children on their sports activities, the higher their performance will be. Parents who encourage their children verbally, clap and cheer for them during games and display a general show of encouragement makes their children strive harder in order to perform better. This could be because when parents help and guide their children so that they may not feel disheartened at a particular point of difficulty with verbal encouragement and by participating in active lifestyles themselves, by frequently using words of encouragement

and supportive actions to show their children how and to cheer their children on to perform at their best even when that performance falls short, they offer encouragement and support and largely influence their children's participation and performance in that sport. This finding supports that of Bindu and Aruna (2014) who investigated the relationship between parental encouragement and sports performance in youth sports. Result of the study show that parental encouragement is positively related to sport performance of the youths. This finding also agrees with that of Teques, Serpa, Rosado, Silva and Calmeiro (2018) carried out a research on parental involvement in sport whose study indicated that out of the parents' reported behaviours, parental encouragement was positively associated with positive sports achievement among youth athletes.

The fourth finding of the study revealed that parental pressure has a significant negative influence on sports performance [χ^2_{cal} = 89.30; df = 3; P<0.05]. This means that the more pressure that parents put on their children concerning their sports activities, the lower their performance will be. The study reported that youths feel ashamed when their parents yell at them or scold them for poor performance during or after games, and also they become anxious when parental expectations are too high. This could be due to the fact that pressure and stress relate to a number of negative outcomes for young athletes, including somatic complaints, fears of failure, feelings of inadequacy, guilt and high dispositional anxiety. The study also found that parental pressure is associated with negative appraisals of self-worth, unhappiness with sports involvement and participation, and negative evaluations of performance. Athletes who perceive high levels of pressure from their parents also experience higher levels of negative emotional responses like embarrassment.

Conclusion

This study explored how parents influence their children's sports performance through their involvement, support, encouragement, and pressure in youth sports. Most youth sports require assistance from parents who serve as volunteers, coaches, and fundraisers in an effort to support the league. By facilitating their child's youth sports experience, parents can come to understand the positive effects that youth sports can have on their child. With these benefits in mind, it is important that parents play an active role in supporting, assisting, and nurturing their child in the youth sports environment.

Recommendations

Parents should be actively involved in their children's sports activities by being present at their games, providing direct feedback about training or game sessions.in order to motivate them to do their best.

Parents should support their children by providing significant financial, logistical and emotional support to provide a positive sporting experience for their children.

When youths feel disheartened at a particular point of difficulty about their sports performance, parents should provide them with verbal encouragement and by participating in active lifestyles themselves and by cheering their children on to perform at their best even when that performance falls short.

Parents should not put undue pressure on their children by yelling at them or scolding them for poor performance during or after games. They should also not put high expectations and demands on their children in order not to demotivate them from participating in sports.

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