



Parents and Student-Athletes: The Propensity to Underestimate the Importance of Social Factors for Sports Performance

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Abstract: Recent investigative studies reveal that social support and parental behaviour are protective against poor performance, and positive involvement is compatible with better performance. The current research investigates insights into the contribution of parental involvement to student-athletes. Student-athletes from different colleges of the district (N=202) completed a survey on an adopted questionnaire with the permission of Prof. Dr Craig Williams, assessing the perceived importance of parental behaviour with student-athlete. Participants reported positively moderate to higher levels of relationship between parent's behaviour and sports activity with $r=.374$ and a p-value less than 0.01, representing positive-relationship between parents' behaviour and sports activity. The regression model also indicates the same, with an unstandardised coefficient for parent's involvement $B=.326$, parent's behaviour $B=.089$ and significance level less than 0.05. This research points to a range of challenges provoking those who seek to promote a greater understanding of the significance of social factors for higher sports performances.

Key Words: Social Support, Social Identity, Parents Support

Introduction

Athletic careers are rarely linear; that is, performance progressions fluctuate throughout an athlete's life. Understandably, mental health also varies with athlete's performance and social conditions, which makes it one of several key elements that influence progression, e.g., when athletes make career plans or need to deal with various athletic and nonathletic adaptations (Schinke et al., 2018; Schinke et al., 2021). This mental health is dependent upon many variables in life. Still, family and peers can naturalise the overwhelmingly negative effect of any kind of social pressure

and can help in building up a mentally stronger athlete (Nassar, 2021). Just like physical training should be well-adjusted with sufficient recovery means to foster development and advancement, psychological demands are also supported by mental health strategies. Athletes with better mental health than their counterparts can perform well, particularly over a longer period (Henriksen et al., 2019). Several types of research have illustrated substantial levels of mental ill-health among the athlete population (e.g., Schaal et al., 2011; Foskett & Longstaff, 2018), which is cause for concern. Therefore, the focus of this research is to examine those interventions (Iftikhar,

[Mallett, & Javed, 2018](#)) that can deal with fluctuations in performance by providing initial/ basic support to counter any early difficulties in an athlete's career.

Within the sports science literature, mental health investigators frequently look for the predominance of particular mental disorders, like visible disorders of change in eating habits or sleep routines and sometimes not such visible disorders like anxiety and, most importantly, depression ([Schinke et al., 2018](#)). Mental health is implicitly conceptualised as a lack of such conditions; however, mental health is more than just the non-existence of mental ill-health (WHO, 2014). Mental health varies over time, reflecting a dynamic feature of the lived experience that also includes adaptive mental health ([Henriksen et al., 2019](#)). Factors including injury, not making to the team, or having failed to perform can trigger distress in student-athletes during periods of transition (Erpic et al., 2004; [Kuettel et al., 2018](#)). Furthermore, social environments can jeopardise athletes' mental health when they allow bullying, condone excessive weight training, or are unable to inhibit sexual abuse ([Henriksen et al., 2019](#)). This is where a young mind needs a strong backup from family and peers. There is a need to contemplate the potential impact of more putative malpractices and characteristics like pressure to specialise at an early age by the parents, the pressure of training and competing with injury or pressure to sacrifice academic pursuits and non-sports friendships, and sessions of intense training without adequate recovery by the coach. In addition to these malpractices, daily hazards like the condition of commute finance [Wilson & Spink \(2006\)](#) and the non-availability of sportswear; have an accumulative harmful impact on the mental and physical health of a student-athlete ([Ivarsson et al., 2015](#)). Studies on talent-hunt and athletic progression, athlete safeguarding, organisational psychology in sports, and cultural psychology, permits to hypothesise that social factors supporting athletes' mental health are cohesive, value-based, sends clear message and helps in engage into the practices that are coherent with these values, allowing multiple identities, and

resultantly empowering the athlete ([Mountjoy et al., 2015](#); [Henriksen & Stambulova, 2017](#)).

Social Support

The mental health of an individual is strongly conditioned by social/ environmental factors influencing his/her social identity ([Jetten et al., 2017](#)). Reliable to this notion, interest has grown in the way that one's social identity can be directly responsible for mental and physical health (e.g., see [Cruwys et al., 2014](#); [Greenaway et al., 2015](#); [Jetten et al., 2015](#); [Jetten et al., 2017](#)). The mental health and well-being of any person are closely connected with the environmental conditions of which he/she is a part. Group memberships can be enriching and make people healthier and stronger only if one belongs to a particular group that supplement's his mental needs with belonging, self-esteem, a sense of purpose, agency, efficacy, and control in life (i.e., a positive sense of social identity). Nevertheless, when group membership is not associated with these positive psychological resources or when social identity is challenged in other ways (e.g., devalued or stigmatised group memberships; groups that promote toxic and unhealthy norms; and do not provide them with social support), social identities may become a curse, threatening, and potentially harming mental health and well-being (e.g., [Dingle et al., 2015](#); [Jetten et al., 2017](#)). An examination of athletes in contexts that don't support social identification and subsequently adversely impact health and performance warrants empirical attention.

One of the major factors related to student participation in sports highlighted by many authors ([Carron, 1996](#); [Knowles et al., 2018](#)) is the social influence of the family and peers around an individual and the absence, which results in a decline ([Iftikhar et al., 2021](#)). Social support is directly related to healthy activity ([Scarapicchia et al., 2017](#)). According to Booker et al. (2007), a student's physical activity is associated with demographic, psychological, social and environmental variables. Parental support could supplement college-based support and home-based

support. Adding to this notion, [Anderson et al. \(2000\)](#) depict in their research that if the stress of winning by parents increases on youngsters, the pleasure associated with that sport decreases. Their frustration is passed over to their child resulting in poor performance.

When we talk about basic/ initial support, parents can be the workforce behind every individual athlete, uplifting their child's physical and mental performance at a very earlier stage when it is required the most (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2016). They can not only provide all sort of primary support but can also act as a volunteer that does the necessary work for their kid's sports program. In the last couple of decades, multiple research publications depicted an increase in parental contribution to organised sports for their young ones ([Eriksen, & Stefansen, 2022](#); Stan Fanson et al., 2016; [Wheeler & Green, 2014](#)). If parents take an interest in developing basic physical skills ([Glozah et al., 2018](#)) like running, jumping, throwing, and kicking, for instance, it will be helpful in the development of major skills later when required.

In developing countries with lower literacy rates among parents (Afidi' 2008; & [Aljassim, & Ostini, \(2020\)](#), a lack of information about the impact of mental health and physical fitness on a child's development, can lead to devastating results (Suleiman, et al., 2014; Rentaugo, et al., 2013). A lack of education to understand the value of physical activity and organised sport is a major hurdle in promoting sports at the institutional level because most people are oblivious of the importance why developing countries pay so much importance to sports activities. Many researchers have depicted that when it comes to participating in sports affects the overall atmosphere of the family positively ([Dorsch, Smith, & McDonough, 2009, 2015](#)). This leads to this approach to identifying positive and negative parental behaviours (Shields et al., 2005; Knight & Holt, 2014; MacMach & Penny, 2014) and their effects on student-athletes.

Student-athlete

Early age physical and mental development in school not only gives them a better chance of producing better athletes but also yields a tough mind that makes them withstand difficulties in their studies ([Doan et al., 2022](#)). Previous literature has depicted that active involvement in sports activities positively affects a child's cognitive and physical development ([Dionigi et al., 2018](#)). Multiple findings have already depicted that people participating more in organised sports or even in regional/ small area games in schools are comparatively more physically and mentally active than others (Hands et al., 2010). For this association, the educational institution's environment plays an important role ([Sidhu & Iftikhar, 2018](#)) that can motivate students, increase teamwork, and improving academic outcomes.

In most underdeveloped countries, student-athletes are facing numerous challenges in educational institutions because of different factors like financial, environmental, social, motivational, and psychological ([Qurban, 2018](#)). Many studies have been done to find out the parents' involvement and the subject-wise grades ([Jeynes, 2022](#)), but few depict the impact on sports performance and close to none is found in underdeveloped countries. In this research, the authors focused on these unanswered questions, trying to find possible approaches which will help students perform better at organised sports with the support of family and peers.

Knowing the fact that physical activities have so much importance in a child's growth, the involvement of school-age pupils ([Sidhu & Iftikhar, 2018](#)) in athletic activities and the amenities provided are very low in underdeveloped countries ([Zia-ul-Islam et al., 2013](#); [Bibi et al., 2016](#)). many limitations cause hurdles regarding participation in organised sports or physical activities for students, but one problem that might be at the root is the inactive involvement of parents, which will be the focus of the current study. The interaction between parents and children is of great

importance. Therefore, the question arises, what amount of involvement is required by the parents that can result in noticeable performance? So, top achievers in a variety of sports are selected for this research.

Significance of the Study

The authors of this research highlighted the significance of parental engagement in their child's sports program and its influence on students' performance. The importance of this study for the parents in terms of making them aware of the responsibility they bear in their child's development has been displayed.

Method

The method of the survey has been used to collect data. The researcher used a convenience sampling technique for data collection. The researcher approached the population for data collection by sending questionnaires through google forms, and the second author physically visited the institutions with the help of sports teachers for those athletes who do not have internet access. A questionnaire consisting of close-ended questions is used in light of research objectives.

Participants

The population of the current study included college students who participated in a variety of sports in inter-collegiate competitions in the district. The second author collects the district colleges list from the Sports Director, Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education. Out of twenty institutions for boys, only eleven of them participate in organised sports events. The total number of student-athletes (male) approached for the study was four hundred and sixteen (416). The second author distributed the questionnaires to all the student-athletes. Out of which N=202 of them completed and submitted the questionnaire (see table 1). The researcher also physically visited the colleges and gathered data for those students who do not have an internet facility. A total of 43% of data was collected through a google form and the remaining 57% through questionnaires filled by players in person.

Survey Instrument

For the aim of getting quantitative analysis, an

adopted questionnaire with close-ended questions was used with the permission of Prof. Dr. Craig Williams (University of Exeter UK.) to collect data. While using the questionnaire, two basic criteria have been prioritised for finalising the adopted questionnaire with the discussion and consent of co-authors. First and foremost, the questions were translated into the native language to better understand respondents. Secondly, making adequate changes to it eliminates inclinations, for instance, language that is difficult to understand, vagueness, clarity in a language that displays emotions, disarray, questionable information, and invalid reference frame. These values facilitated the authors to influence student-athletes for the maximum output (Foodie, 1994).

Results

Correlation

Participants reported moderate to high levels of a positive relationship between participation in sports activities and parents' behaviour (See Table 2). Table 2 also shows a significant correlation by $r=.374$ and a p-value less than 0.01 in-between parents' involvement and sports activity, which indicates a positive relationship between participation in sports activity and parents' behaviour.

Regression Analysis

The results of regression analyses are shown in Table 3. The results indicate the impact of parents' behaviour and their involvement in sports participation. It displays the substantial results that indicate parental contribution to their child's participation in any sport (see table 1). The unstandardised coefficient for active involvement by the parents in Table 3 is $B = 0.326$ in this model, while for parents' behaviour shown in the Table 3 is $B = 0.089$. The results show a positive effect on the Dependent variable with a significance level of less than 0.05. The R^2 in Table 3 indicates the change of the dependent variable because of the independent variable, which is $R^2 = 0.163$. Parents active involvement's beta value is $\beta = 0.215$ while for parents' behavior, its value is $\beta = 0.221$, with $F = 19.413$. These outcomes show the positive effects on students' performance in sports.

Table 1. Sports of the Respondents

Name of Sports	Frequency	Percentage
Track & Field	31	15.3 %
Soccer	18	8.9 %
Cricket	43	21.3 %
Field-Hockey	3	1.5 %
Kabadi	30	14.9 %
Volley-ball	12	5.9 %
Weightlifting	12	5.9 %
Badminton	7	3.5 %
Hand-ball	10	5.0 %
Basket-ball	8	4.0 %
Tug of War	28	13.9 %
Total	202	100 %

Table 2. Relationship between Parents' Behavior and Sports Activity

		Sports Activity	Parents' Behavior
Sports Activity	Pearson Co-relation	1	.374**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	202	202
Parents' Behavior	Pearson Correlation	.374**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	202	202

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 Displays the Moderately Significant Positive Co-relation among Parents' behaviour and Sports Activity.

Table 3. Effect of Parents' Involvement and Parents' behaviour on Sports Activity

Variables	R ²	B	β	F	Sig.
Parents' Involvement		.326	.215		
Parents' behaviour	.163	.089	.221	19.314	.000

B = Unstandardised co-efficient, β = Standardise co-efficient, Sig= Significance

Table 3 of the Multiple Regression Model Indicates the Impact of Parents' Involvement and Parents' behaviour on Sports Activities.

1. Dependent Variable: Sports Activity
2. Predictors: (Constant), Parents' Behavior, Parents' Involvement

Discussion

We aimed to examine the worth of parental support/ parental behaviour necessary to produce better student-athletes. Results suggest a positive association between high-performing student-athletes and parental

support. Authors used quantitative methods to explore parental behaviour, and, in this regard, student-athletes shared that their parents were a big reason that they started their sports and continued to participate. In the process of this research, deficiency has been observed in two main areas: firstly, parents' interaction with

coaches and secondly, it has been observed that parents do not talk about or encourage discussion on problems in playgrounds, but on the other hand, the positive side is that parents take good care of their diet and rest for better training and better preparation for competitions.

During face-to-face interactions, coaches from different games elaborated that those high-performing athletes with positive parents' influence have better mental health and had better ability to cope with difficult situations like playing away from home, performing against tougher opponents, or when trying for a comeback in a losing game. The findings from this study through the multiple regression model indicate a significant effect of the contribution of parents. This model shows an unstandardised coefficient for parents $B = .326$ while for parents' behaviour $B = .089$. The results show a positive effect on the Dependent variable (Sports activity) with a significant difference of less than 0.05. The R^2 indicates the change in the dependent variable (Sports activity) because of the independent variable, which is $R^2 = 0.163$. Parents' involvement ($\beta = 0.215$), parents' behaviour ($\beta = 0.221$), and $F = 19.413$ depict that high-performing athletes have a considerable amount of support from their parents, which helps them perform better.

There is another area that came under discussion that while active participation in competitive sports, parents need to focus on the fun and entertainment part of the game, not too much on the competition part. The environment of competitive sports is sometimes pretty, though, which can discourage a student's brain from further participating in sports. Putting young people in a highly competitive position might be harmful to their mental growth as well. The important thing that parents need to learn is that, instead of forcing their children to win at any cost, they should encourage them to put full effort into performing better than before. In short, parents should put winning second and their child's effort to perform better first. Perceived parental pressure, irrespective of their intention, can have an adverse effect ([Anderson et al., 2004](#)),

and this unnecessary pressure can lead to conflict, resulting in withdrawal from sports.

Implications

Considering the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

- i. An increase in awareness of the importance of sports among parents can resurrect sports in the colleges of Pakistan.
- ii. The contribution of parents to sports activities can lead to a healthier life for the next generation.
- iii. Parents should discuss the performance of the players with their coaches, which may result in better performance.
- iv. Parents must go to see sports activities on the grounds and encourage their children to enjoy the moment, and this will also efficiently help them to help their needs economically.
- v. The involvement of Parents will not only let them know about the highest performance of their child in the related sport but also help them understand the social issues that their child might be facing in-ground.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

- Data collection only includes male institutions from the public sector that took part in the college-level competition.
- This study was only focused on one variable that is parental behaviour.
- Future research might include Private sector colleges.
- University athletes might be included in future investigations.
- The importance of the relationship between parents and coaches might be hypothesised.
- Parents' perspectives should also be added in the future.
- Which Games/Sports do parents support the most?

- Impact of parents' education on the support.
- Support is directly proportional to the training years or the level achieved by an athlete.

Conclusion

The parental contribution to sporting activities plays a vital role in any society. If the parental involvement is encouraging, then the performance of their child is much better, but on the other hand, if the connection between the two is missing, then the performance may be less than expected. Parents who are more supportive, encouraging, consistent, actively participate, positively respond to the problems, believe in their child's athletic ability, and motivate their children to perform even better next time, has a greater contribution to their child's sports performance. However, further

investigation is required on the different nature and effects of parental influence, like what they expect from their kid, how much pressure they put to fulfil these expectations or their reactions to unexpected performances.

Taking the evidence provided in this knowledge deficit, the query that this study leaves unsolved is how this could be implemented on a larger scale and how much time will it take to see its results on a much higher level in performance. One response is simply to conduct more high-quality educational programs and seminars for parents and engage subject teachers with the head of Institutions to be involved in this scientific communication. Nevertheless, the suggestion that this knowledge deficit has foundations that are partly ideological suggests that this strategy alone is unlikely to win the day.

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