



Parents' Perspectives on the Benefits of Sport Participation for Young Children

Executive Statement: This study explored the benefits that parents believe their 5-8 year old children gain through sport participation. The researchers also looking into how parents believed their children gained the multiple benefits.

Introduction: The benefits associated with participation in youth sport have been termed positive youth development (PYD). PYD is a strength-based approach to helping children learn physical, social, and other life skills necessary to transition into adulthood. Most studies on PYD focus on adolescents, so this paper looks into the less-known area of young childhood, considered ages 5-8. Young childhood is an important time for growth where children develop rapidly and typically begin to participate in organized sport. Thus it is an important period in a child's development.

Furthermore, this study showcases the perspectives of parents, which is necessary in order to understand why parents should enroll their children in sport activities. Most parents and children agree on the benefits attained through youth sport participation, so by looking at the parent's perceptions, this study was able to find the common benefits experienced by young children.

Methods: Participants included 22 parents with children aged 5-8 years old who participated in a range of organized sports. Each participant was interviewed on their perspectives of their child's benefits.

Results: Parents identified 3 main areas where their children gained benefits through their sport participation: (a) personal benefits, (b) social benefits, and (c) physical benefits. Personal benefits included positive self-perceptions, such as gaining confidence and a sense of identity. Personal benefits also included developing personal responsibility and learning fair play and sportspersonship. Social benefits described by parents were gaining friendship, learning teamwork and cooperation, learning to respect authority, and being more engaged in school. Physical benefits included developing fundamental sports skills, and improving their health and well-being.

Parents believed the main ways their children gained these benefits was through exploration, coaches creating a mastery-oriented motivational climate, and parental reinforcement. Youth sport allowed children to explore themselves and different environments and gave them an opportunity to try new and different activities. Parents also believed that coaches were able to help their children gain benefits by creating a positive atmosphere where they focused on play and learning rather than on competition, allowing children to feel comfortable and safe trying new things. Parental reinforcement was considered the most important way that children gained benefits. Parents utilized 'teachable moments' in the home environment where they capitalized on their child's sport experiences.



Conclusion: The benefits found for young children were consistent with findings from studies with older children and adolescents. Children were able to acquire a variety of personal, social, and physical benefits as sport allowed them to explore their abilities and try new activities. Children gained benefits when their coaches created a motivational climate that focused on play and most importantly when their parents reinforced the benefits at home.

Implications/recommendations: Sport program administrators should strive to include opportunities for playful exploration in a mastery-oriented motivational climate, by limiting structured practice and ensuring that children feel comfortable when trying new activities. Sport program administrators should also look for ways to engage parents in their organized programs, as this study has shown that parents play the most important role in their young child's PYD. Sport programs can involve and educate parents on ways they can help transfer skills to their child through seizing teachable moments at home to ensure their child has the best sporting experience.

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