



## Sport Participation in Low-income Families

**Executive Statement:** This study examined low-income parents' and their children's perceptions of the benefits of participating in youth sport and parent's perceptions of the challenges associated with accessing sporting opportunities for their children.

**Introduction:** Sports participation has declined among youth; however, it is lowest among children from lower income households. Financial barriers are a major factor that restrict sport participation among children from low-income families. While efforts have been made to develop programs that promote physical activity and life skills among low-income youth, little is known about the benefits and challenges experienced by families who receive funding and/or participate in these programs or other sporting opportunities. This study examined the personal and contextual factors that influenced sport participation and any potential developmental and health benefits that may be gained by children from low-income families.

**Methods:** 17 parents and 18 children representing a total of 17 families from the lowest Socio Economic Status bracket who had received funding to pay sports registration fees in the last 12 months completed individual semi-structured interviews.

**Results:** There is a clear association between sport involvement and children gaining social and personal development benefits. Social benefits include building relationships with coaches, making new friends, and team work skills. Personal benefits include higher degrees of emotional control, exploration, confidence, discipline, academic performance, weight management, and 'keeping busy.' Many of these benefits were noted to transfer from sport to other areas of the children's lives. Continuing barriers and constraints limit the extent to which developmental benefits of sports participation will be realized by children from low-income families which may affect their long-term development. Parents face barriers that restricted the extent to which they can support their child's participation in sport such as time management and scheduling demands. Even with funding, parents still face significant financial barriers, especially as the children improve and progress in sport. Potential solutions include parents finding ways to 'help themselves' (make sacrifices in other areas or fundraise), increasing awareness of available funding, and adding additional funding resources.

**Conclusion:** Many developmental benefits are associated with children's sport participation. With the proper support, children from low-income families can participate in sport and realize these benefits. They will have to overcome constraints and barriers in order to gain long-term, sustainable positive developmental and health outcomes.

**Recommendations:** Encourage parents of low-income children to volunteer in sport organizations, provide opportunities where fees can be waived in return for service hours. There is a need for direct funding to low-income families as well as direct federal government subsidization of sport programs.



**Reference:** Holt, N. L., Kingsley, B. C., Tink, L. N., & Scherer, J. (2011). Benefits and challenges associated with sport participation by children and parents from low-income families. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 12(5), 490-499.

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