

Perception of fathers and mothers about the sports practice of young athletes: a qualitative study

Percepción de padres y madres sobre la práctica deportiva de jóvenes atletas: un estudio cualitativo

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Short title:

Perception of fathers and mothers about the sports practice

How to cite this article:

Hernández-Guardiola, M. C., García-Roca, J. A., Berengüi, R., & Sánchez-Pato, A. (2024). Perception of fathers and mothers about the sports practice of young athletes: a qualitative study. *Cultura, Ciencia y Deporte*, 19(59), 181-212. <https://doi.org/10.12800/ccd.v19i59.2066>

Received: 02 June 2023 / Accepted: 11 November 2023

Abstract

The balanced development of young athletes in cognitive, social and affective processes is influenced by the psychosocial agents in their environment. The aim of this study was to analyse the perceptions of parents about their children's participation in sport. The data of this research are from 33 semi-structured interviews with parents of athletes belonging to two athletics clubs from U14 to U18. The results indicate that the participants think that sport provides important values and that it is necessary to combine it with studies. In general, they maintain good communication with their children about their sports practice, although there is little communication with the coach, whose qualifications they do not know either. The majority of subjects indicate that they are concerned about managing their children's nerves and failure, because although they mention that they do not have performance expectations of them, they recognise that they have put them under pressure on occasion. The information gathered in this research is of great interest to find out how parents understand their children's sports practice, as this conditions the way in which they understand and experience sport.

Keywords: Young athletes, Psychosocial agents, Athletics, Motivational climate.

Resumen

El desarrollo equilibrado del joven deportista en los procesos cognitivos, sociales y afectivos está influenciado por los agentes psicosociales de su entorno. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar las percepciones de padres y madres sobre la participación de sus hijos/as en el deporte. Los datos de esta investigación proceden de 33 entrevistas semi-estructuradas realizadas a padres y madres de atletas pertenecientes a dos clubes de atletismo de categorías sub 14 a sub18. Los resultados indican que los participantes piensan que el deporte aporta valores importantes y que es necesario compaginarlo con los estudios. En general mantienen buena comunicación con sus hijos/as sobre su práctica deportiva, siendo esta escasa con el entrenador/a del que tampoco conocen su titulación. La mayoría de sujetos indica que les preocupa la gestión de los nervios y del fracaso de sus hijos/as, porque, aunque mencionan que no tienen expectativas de rendimiento sobre ellos, reconocen haberlos/as presionado en alguna ocasión. La información recabada en esta investigación es de gran interés para conocer como padres y madres entienden la práctica deportiva de sus hijos/as, ya que esta condiciona la manera de entender y vivir el deporte de estos/as.

Palabras clave: Jóvenes deportistas, Agentes psicosociales, Atletismo, Clima motivacional.



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Introducción

Initiation, teaching and sports technification converge under the scheme of the holistic nature of sports training where physical characteristics, hereditary, anthropometric and social factors make up the essential parts that determine sports performance (Weineck, 2016). On the social level, in a young person, it is generally marked by the presence of family or guardianship, with him or her not making his or her own decisions. It is not until certain ages when social emancipation or overcoming the world allows it (García-Roca & Martín-Acero, 2021, p. 26).

Within this stage of sports training, it is important to highlight the characteristics that make up sports talent: mental predisposition, body constitution, physical qualities, external conditions, technical or tactical ability, and which are each associated with different areas of knowledge (Henriksen & Stambulova, 2023; Wixey & Kingston, 2023). Although the young athlete is influenced by many factors, the most determining one comes from the social aspects that surround him/her and the sport environment where he/she develops. That is why the support that parents/guardians give to the young athlete will determine both their training and their sport practice.

One of the dimensions to be taken into consideration in the support of young athletes is the value that parents give to their sport practice (Yilmaz, 2018). In this sense, the sporting example, what they think of their children doing sport, the values of sport, or the management of time between studies and sport, are fundamental elements (Amenabar et al., 2008). Along these lines, the parents' satisfaction with the sports offered in their locality is important, as well as whether their chosen sport has a sports school.

Another dimension considered in the sports training of a young person is the social relationship with other parents who take their children to the same sports activity or to the same club (Marcén et al., 2012). To this aspect must be added circumstances such as whether parents are involved in the club, in collaborating in events, in the dynamization of the club, in management and organizational tasks, and how this involvement can affect their personal life (Pinto & Samadiego, 2016).

Regarding the sporting activity of the club itself and of the youngsters, the relationship between parents and their children's coach stands out, in terms of communication, or if there is bilateral communication where parents inform

the coaches of issues concerning their children (Chan et al., 2012; Garrido et al. 2010). Here there is room for the parents' opinion about the coach's sports work and how the training should be applied with their children (Romero et al., 2009).

In addition, from the dimension of support and understanding about the sport activity of young people and how it is perceived by parents, key aspects such as communication with the child about the sport activity derive: whether they talk daily about training; how they are doing in the activity or how they perceive the satisfaction of their children (Freeman et al., 2014; Pedrosa et al., 2012). Other circumstances are added that have to do with sport goals and the relationship with the coach (Holt & Hoar, 2006), as well as economic, logistical and material parental support (Vangelisti, 2009).

In addition to supporting their children, there is the directive behavior of parents on the performance of their children in sport, based on guidelines, advice and other elements on competitions and training, or related actions such as rest, nutrition, recovery, use of sports equipment, etc. (Jeanfreau et al., 2020). From here we can extrapolate the behavior of parents in competitions and trainings generating expectations in young people, created by the parents themselves (Horne et al., 2023).

At this point the presence of parents in sports competitions and communication with their children can determine a pressure on young athletes, not being clear the objectives of participation and "healthy" practice or winning in any way, finding a balance between the support and perception of the same by the young athlete and the pressure exerted by parents in training or competition (Calo et al., 2022; García-Naveira, 2018; Palheta et al., 2022).

The objective of this study is to analyze the perceptions of fathers and mothers on the participation of their children in sport, from the dimension of the value and satisfaction that the participation of their children produces in them, their involvement, relationships and behavior, expectations and direct influence on their children and the sport they practice.

Methodology

Participants and data collection procedure

The study sample consists of 33 subjects, 17 mothers and 16 fathers, with a mean age of 47.3 years (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the sample according to the gender of the parent and the category of the athlete

Gender	Categories		
	Under 14	Under 16	Under 18
	(n=10)	(n = 12)	(n=11)
Man	3	8	5
Woman	7	4	6

The selection of the participants was done by non-probabilistic convenience sampling, seeking participation in the three categories. This work is part of the doctoral thesis "Self-confidence and sport: Influence on the adherence of young athletes and the effect of third parties", so when contacting parents to obtain informed consent from their children, they were offered to participate in the interviews. A total of 50 volunteers were obtained, of whom 33 were interviewed, reaching the level of theoretical saturation of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

The study data were collected through semi-structured interviews lasting between 45 and 75 minutes. The interviews were guided by a single researcher related to the research topic, so that the dependence-stability of the data could be facilitated (Guba, 1989).

The interviews were conducted in an athletics track, during the time when the children were training, to facilitate the participation of the parents. Video and audio recording of the interviews was made with the informed consent of the participants. Due to ethical criteria, pseudonyms will be used to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Data analysis

A conventional data analysis was performed following the steps of Taylor and Bogdan (1987). The first step of this strategy, which is called discovery, was carried out prior to fieldwork, establishing blocks of content based on scientific evidence on the topic of study. The interviews were transcribed using NVivo11 software, after which the content was read on several occasions to establish the definitive blocks, code the data and establish the system of categories, ending the process with the interpretation of the data. As for the validation strategy, we used 1) triangulation of the data, using the information collected with the same interview in another similar Italian sample and 2) triangulation of the research staff in the process of coding and interpreting the data.

Results

The results obtained after analyzing the interviews according to the established content blocks are presented below, with textual fragments of the interviews. Initially, nine blocks were created to structure the questions, but after analyzing the transcripts of the interviews, the "Competition" block was eliminated and the answers were included in the blocks "Managerial behavior", "Support and understanding" and "Parental pressure".

Value given by parents to the practice of sports

This first block gives us information about the relationship that parents have with sports and the value they give to their children's sports activities.

Sporting example

Most of the interviewed subjects practice or have practiced sport during their lives. "I have always played

sports until I went to college... I needed to play sports and I started running. If I'm not running, I walk or jog. Minimum I go out three days to run." (subject MIF4) Some of the interviewees take advantage of their children's training time to practice sports, and even practice together with other parents of their children's training partners.

PCF13: "I have not been involved in sports for very long, when I was a child I used to practice... when I quit smoking when I was 39 years old I started again, first hiking and then running... I usually train three or four days, but I try to make it at least three".

Evaluation of the sport practice

All the parents interviewed are pleased that their children practice sports, mainly because it is healthy and fosters social relations, but also largely because it keeps their children away from negative environments and bad habits.

PJF29: "I am drooling, I tell you honestly, I never imagined that my daughter would compete at the level she is competing at... she is also very sporty, they would get that love, that desire to do sports, to take care of themselves, to lead a healthy life..."

PIF9: "I think it's great... I like that she does a sport, that she relates with people and in the end it's in a team. ...she's very competitive and sometimes we sin, but it's something she feels herself and she wants to set goals... she likes to be with her friends."

Sport values

All interviewees agree that sports teach and work on values that are necessary and transferable to other areas of life, such as effort, companionship, responsibility, managing defeat and leading a healthy life. "The effort, the culture of effort... she knows that effort generally has its rewards... other things such as a healthy environment, meeting healthy people..." (subject PIF7), "there is self-improvement, there is a team aspect... by participating with other teammates or training with other people, she works a bit on values in interpersonal relationships..." (subject MIF3).

Time management. Studies and sports

Although the general opinion is that sport is very important, when it comes to combining it with studies, there is a diversity of opinions. Almost all agree that studies should be the main thing, in some cases they speak of 60% importance of studies compared to 40% of sports practice, although this percentage is also shared with other extracurricular activities. "Sports is the second most important thing he does, school is the most important, at least 75-25" (subject MIF2), "after studies, athletics I think is the first thing... it is good for his mind because I think that in each thing he works on his own thing." (subject PCF11). We observed that many athletes in the U18 category attend reinforcement classes at academies in the afternoons, before or after training. When deciding to miss training

for study reasons, it is the athletes themselves who make the decision. While in the U14 category it is the parents' decision, in the U16 category we find a mixture of both. To a lesser extent, we find parents who believe that sport is as important as studies. The majority of those surveyed affirmed that sports activities help their children to organize themselves better.

Parents' satisfaction with the sports offer

The information obtained in this second block is important because parental satisfaction may influence the decision of whether or not to keep their children in sports.

Local sports offerings

There is a diversity of opinions as to whether the quantity or variety of sports facilities is sufficient. Some of the parents claim to be unaware of it, but most of those interviewed detect that there is a deficiency in the quality and maintenance of the facilities in general and a clear preference for allocating resources to soccer. "There is a good offer, but the facilities are not in very good condition, I think... the money is not used as it should be used, I think that the majority sport, soccer fields... is often given more priority" (subject PCF12).

Satisfaction with sports schools

There is general dissatisfaction with the free offer. Although the sports offer is varied, they miss a free extracurricular sport, as this would encourage greater participation and adherence of children to sport.

MIF6: "I think they have quality, what happens is that when there are so many children, the quality is not reflected in the same way as if there are fewer, but of course there is quality.... In the case of my daughter's school, there are extracurricular activities and they are paid for.

Satisfaction with the athletic school

All the interviewees were satisfied with the organization of the athletic club, felt that the fees were correct and that it was not an expensive activity. The simple fact that there was a waiting list is a good indicator and they recommend the club to their family and friends. "I think so when, I don't know the volume of children, there are so many... I mean what a good organization, I think maybe some materials would be missing... I think the fees seem right" (subject PIF8). Although they did not know the training of the coaches, they thought that they were well trained because they had a good relationship with the athletes, they seemed serious and provided good technical preparation. They thought that the club's philosophy of carrying out multi-training up to the U16 category and then specializing was correct, although some of them preferred to let their children specialize first if they were clear about what they liked or what they were good at. They complained that the state of the facility was inadequate and that the city council did not give value to a club that is in the highest national category.

PCF16: "...I think that things are done better.... the kids are not specialized, they go to the competitions and they have not been prepared specifically for the tests they are going to do, and in the long run that is the best thing... otherwise in the end I think that what it does is to bore them..."

Parental involvement

This third block provides information on aspects of parental involvement in their children's sports, how it affects their lives and how they can interpret it.

Involvement in sports activity

Many of the subjects claim to be fully involved in their children's sporting activities, adapting their schedules, personal and sporting lives to meet the logistics of training and competitions whenever possible. In addition, some go to train with their children outside of school hours or take advantage of the school's training time to play sports themselves. There are a minority of parents who do not feel involved in this sense due to work issues, or who perceive it as a waste of their time.

MIF1: "I 100%, sometimes I think more. Yes, because we are divorced and we have shared custody, sometimes I think I am the only one, I believe what she says, then I give it so much importance that I get involved 100%..."

PCF13: "I love that she does sports... I mean if that's her hobby and I also have fun... I bring her to train and if I can't her mother brings her, but someone always brings her, she never misses a training session... and because we think it's good for her."

Social relationships

At this point we find several cases: the first and most abundant, fathers and mothers who interact both inside and outside the sports environment, but who normally knew each other before; others who share sports activities during their children's schedule; some only interact during competitions; and finally, in a minority, those who do not interact either inside or outside because they cannot accompany their children to sports activities for work reasons. "None, I know a parent of a classmate I had at school... I don't know any parent to say tomorrow you take her and another day I do, as I did before in soccer" (subject PCF11).

PCF13: "Very good, we are very good friends... it's been many years because my daughter arrived when she was seven years old... I have gone to their house, they have come to mine, we have gone on excursions with the kids, very good, to do sports some day, to go out, we know each other, very good people..."

Involvement in the sports school

In most cases they would be willing to collaborate with the club, but the club does not request it. Many of them, when their children compete, collaborate by taking more

athletes to the competition in their vehicle. In some isolated cases, they collaborate in the canteen, as photographers in the competitions or belong to the club's board of directors, they even mobilized before the city council to make visible the poor state of the facility.

PJF29: "We have formed a group of parents ... I have always collaborated with the club whether I have been asked or not. When there is a competition, if there is a need to take children, I have taken them.... basically whatever the club has asked me to do and it's in my hand".

Impact on personal life

All the interviewees agree that it mainly affects their time, "well, especially in bringing and taking them, we live in the town and there are trips every day to take them to training, and even more on Sunday if there is a competition, which lately only the father has been going" (subject MJM26); but, in most cases, they see it as something positive and satisfactory, since the important thing is to see their children enjoying themselves. So they organize their social and family life around sport; during competitions they take the opportunity to go sightseeing or play sports in the area. In addition, it provides a healthy life for their children and keeps them away from other less advisable activities. In a more isolated way, we find cases where they see it as something negative because athletics is added to other activities of several children; others consider it an effort that reduces their personal time, which has to be compensated with the seriousness in which their child lives the sport; and in one case, the involvement is null and therefore does not affect their time.

PCF13: "What it affects is for the better, because I love it, I don't know, it's true, I love to bring her, I love to take her... If she stops doing athletics I would probably do less sport for sure, besides, the sport I do is basically because she does it... but we always have time, if she competes on Saturday, then we meet with family or friends on Sunday".

Relationship with the sports coach

In the fourth block, the information obtained focuses on the relationship and communication between the family and the coach, their satisfaction with the coach's work and the motivational climate generated.

Relationship and communication with the sports coach

There is a poor relationship between parents and coaches. Although they consider them accessible, in most cases, they only have face-to-face communication at competitions". Little, I know them by sight, last year I knew a coach by sight because I took her to a competition... before when she was little I used to bring her, but now she comes alone, well then I have no relationship" (subject PCF11). Apart from the general information received by WhatsApp, they may approach to talk to the coaches, if special situations occur, such as injuries or lack of motivation in

their children. In an isolated case, one parent talked to the coach every two weeks, as opposed to another who hardly knew who the coach was because in a year they had only spoken once.

Personal opinion

Parents do not trust the coaches to share their opinions, so in some cases they express what they think directly to their children. "We have not made any comments, because I have neither technique, nor training in this regard or anything, the only thing is if he/she has a medical problem" (subject MIM10). Some justify this by saying that it is the athletes themselves who have to communicate with them, because the coaches are already busy enough. Only some asked the coaches to evaluate the possibility of letting their children specialize early. In general, they all agree that the coach's opinion is the prevailing one and they have to trust them, either because the parents consider that they do not know about the subject or because they consider that it is the appropriate thing to do.

PJM23: "No, besides, regardless of whether they have training or not, I am of the opinion that parents should not talk to coaches about how their children should be trained, neither in this sport nor in any other sport... but in other sports everyone is a coach, especially in soccer".

Process information

All agree that they do not receive any kind of technical information on the process and evolution of their children, some consider it necessary and others do not, but all would appreciate this information at least once a quarter. "In a formal way, no, it would not be bad to have it, a kind of notes as to the effort he/she makes, if he/she can give more..." (subject MIF5), "I do not have information on that and yes it would be good" (subject MCM18).

Opinion on formative management

None of the parents interviewed were aware of the training of their children's coaches. In general, they thought that they were well trained because their children are happy, progress and improve their marks. They consider that there has been an improvement at the organizational level and that the coaches are motivating, disciplined, objective, they have won over the athletes and that each one has his or her own way of doing things, but they have to trust them.

PJM24: "Since he has had this coach, I have not commented with him on any technical aspects, because everything I have seen him do, from my point of view, was the right thing to do... everyone has improved, everyone believes in him".

Support and backup

This fifth block allows us to know the feelings of parents about the support they provide to their children, how they encourage them and communicate with them about their sports experience.

Communication with children

Communication between fathers and mothers and their children is daily, accentuated before and after competitions. "Very well, we maintain very daily especially when there are many competitions, and if it is a regular topic at home" (subject PCF13). In general they talk in the car journeys or during dinner about how the day has gone, sensations, discomfort, what they have learned or what marks they and their teammates have made. In some cases, parents also explain their own training sessions. During the competitive season, some subjects talk about competitive strategy, nutrition and rest, and if the competition went badly, they try to focus their children more on personal improvement than on the comparison with others.

PJF30: "I ask her every day, what worries me most is if something hurt, I ask her if she had a good time, I always ask her how the training went... she tells me about the training every day."

Athlete satisfaction with sports practice

There is only one case in which the daughter, despite liking athletics, has a hard time because of her shyness and physical complexes. In the rest of the cases, the message is that the children are happy, satisfied, content, motivated and proud of themselves, "I think she likes it and perhaps also because she feels at ease, she has friends here and it has been several seasons" (subject PJF31), although when the results do not go well they may collapse momentarily.

Reasons for sports participation

Most of the interviewees believe that their children do athletics for fun, to be with friends and to improve themselves and others. The competitive component comes to light on several occasions, to the point that they think that if they do not have good results they could abandon the sport. There is also the motive of doing a healthy activity and feeling good. The most ambitious want to be high-performance athletes, get a scholarship, continue with university sports and, in some cases, even participate in the Olympic Games.

MJM27: "Sometimes they feel nervous, sometimes they also collapse, you have to know how to deal with defeat, but coming here is very good, very happy, very motivated. I see my children very happy, they don't come here forced, they don't come here without desire, they don't come here with laziness..."

Athlete-Coach relationship

In the U14 and U16 categories, most of them have a good relationship with their coaches, since they speak well of them to their parents; in some cases, even with admiration, "very good, you can tell when they talk about them that they admire them, that they have a good time with them, that they have a good relationship". (subject PCF12). Trust increases as they go up in category, being in U18 where the relationship with the coach is closer and more trusting.

"There is very good, there is a lot of complicity, not only in particular, I see it in the training group, who work with them a relationship of trust and a lot of complicity, very much believing in the coach" (subject PJM25). Only in one case a father does not know how his daughter's relationship with the coach is.

Relationship between the athlete and his/her teammates

In general, they maintain a good relationship, especially with classmates with whom they have coincided at school; some consider them their best friends. At least half of them stay outside the sports activity to make other plans; the other half simply communicate through social networks or have a good relationship as teammates in training. Competitiveness within the training group can hinder friendship for some; on the other hand, others make friends with rivals from other clubs, "very good, it makes me laugh because in competitions they also make friends from other clubs, that has been a discovery" (subject MJM27). In some cases, parents observe that as they move up in category, the group of friends becomes smaller and they do more activities outside.

PCF21: "Very well... as they get older her circle is more closed, kids and children that she got along well when she was younger now she doesn't get along well. Right now she doesn't get along badly with those who are not close to her. I see that she talks to everyone when she has to talk..."

PCF15: "She has gone through phases, now she has three or four that she leans on more and for the rest, she is indifferent. This year the atmosphere has become more competitive even in training and there can be tension with some..."

Parental support

Two categories are observed, one of internal support with a more emotional support through communication and, on the other hand, another of external support (economic, material, time and logistical), "I don't care about time either... he has even told me that since you never have plans, how come I don't have plans? If I do, what happens is that I prioritize his and his brother's plans" (subject MIF1), highlighting that in no case do parents report that the economic expense is high, "I encourage him to compete, and well then he wants to buy a cooler equipment because he wants something special to train... and I buy it for him... and if only for my interest and economically pay the fees" (subject PCF11); they take advantage of birthdays or Christmas parties to give their children sports equipment as gifts. As a consequence of this support, at least a third of those interviewed ask their children for dedication, seriousness, commitment and effort in their sports activity.

MCF20: "...athletics equipment is very expensive, we always want the same brand of shoes and the cheap ones are no good for us... but I don't mind, he asks me for it, but since he doesn't ask me for other things, well, shoes..."

Parental attendance

Most of the parents have attended 90% or 100% of their children's competitions. Most of them attend as a family, in other cases only the father or the mother can go, but there is always family presence. Only in one case has not been able to attend any competition due to work and that the girl usually goes to competitions with the coach. "Competitions 99% or for work or own competition, training 60%. They love it, they ask us to stay at training and competitions to watch them..." (subject MIF3). In three cases, when the competition is far away, they are lazy to travel; few parents attend when the event takes place outside the region.

Training sessions are generally attended in the U14 category, and they decrease as they move up in category.

PCF11: "I'm not there a lot, I support him in everything and I like him to do sports, I've been a couple of times to competitions, but I'm very busy, his mother can take her now...but I don't go so much, last year I went more".

Supporting demonstration

Most tell their children that they are very happy with their sports practice, proud to see them making an effort and their ability to excel. "I tell them that I am proud and I encourage them... but in that and in everything, I consider that it is basic, to recognize the achievements, to recognize the effort" (subject PCF12). Some consider it a way of showing their support to remember their children's marks and, when they are sad, to be able to help them in their personal improvement.

Some parents share the sport activity with their children, starting thanks to the fact that their children took up the sport. More than half express their satisfaction with words, gestures and actions, and consider it important to communicate this information and put words to feelings, as it will motivate their child to continue with the practice. The remaining cases take for granted that their children are aware of what they feel; for one subject expresses that flattering words can weaken character, "...she knows that we are very proud of her, but I try to be careful not to flatter her too much, you know that flattery weakens you... her mother tells me, that I am too hard." (subject PJF29).

Management behavior

The sixth block helps determine whether intrusive behaviors may occur on the part of parents before, during, or after a sporting event.

Management behavior with your child

Each parent has his or her own particular way of communicating with his or her child but, in general, one can distinguish a psychological or emotional aspect and another more directive part, in terms of recommendations or technical advice to prepare or correct the performance of the competition, "not in the technical aspect, unless he or she asks me something, but it is usually in the psychological aspect, in how important it is to believe in yourself" (subject

PJF24). There are subjects who convey both messages, others opt for only one. Some parents do not give technical indications because they do not know the discipline; in one case, the daughter does not let her, she only wants to listen to her coaches. "She doesn't let me, she is very clear about things and follows what the coaches tell her, if I have been able to tell her a little something but she doesn't... she doesn't let me" (subject PCF16).

Competition assessment

A few comment that it is good to make an effort, but not to sacrifice oneself; that there is more to life than athletics, "I only tell them to make just enough effort, not to overexert themselves, because overexerting themselves could mean an injury, could mean a physical problem" (subject PCF11); in contrast to the generalized opinion that competition is good because of the values it transmits. Almost all describe seeing their children compete as something exciting: they cheer them on, are attentive to them, record them and take photos; in some cases they add that they have a hard time if they see that they fail in their objective.

More than half attend as a family, and many spend the day watching the entire competition, not only their children but also their peers. One parent says that, watching them, he feels that he would have liked to have lived that experience.

PCF23: "I like to see her, what I don't like is to see her having a bad time, it's normal, what do I know, her mother also lives it, it's more fun, she signs up for everything... because she doesn't get hurt, she doesn't fall, when I see her doing hurdles I used to say, by God, don't let her fall."

Expectations

Parents' expectations about their children's abilities and the future of their children's sports practice. In this seventh block, the results of the two dimensions are presented together.

Athlete expectations vs Father or mother expectations

In this section we can find five types of relationships, 1) the athlete has competitive goals (regional, national, European and Olympic championships) and parents are confident that their children can get where they want; 2) the athlete has competitive goals, parents think they are not achievable, although they would like their children to continue in sport; 3) the athlete has competitive goals but parents think they are not achievable and that they should prioritize studies, "...in the last competition I was looking for the records that were in the FAMU... she sees herself as a policeman and an athlete, I wanted her to be a doctor" (subject MIF1); 4) the athlete does not have competitive goals and the parents want their children to continue in sport; 5) the athlete does not have competitive goals and the parents do not see them achieving goals. The first and second type of relationship are the most abundant and go down in the following possible relationships.

MCM18: "...he wants to get to go to a Spanish championship, but not by club, and that he is going to get it, I think so, I also think that there is a high level and that he is going to have to work a lot".

Parents' pressure

In this last block, information is sought on the importance that parents give to competition results and the pressure they can exert on their children.

Join or win

The results obtained give greater importance to participation, although many of the responses are complemented by statements of personal improvement or participating to win, especially when there are clear options, "Participate, if you win better, but always participate" (subject PJF30). They add, in some cases, that winning helps the adherence to participation. In isolation, it is mentioned that the high level carries implicitly the importance of winning. "Participating and winning, winning always helps to keep participating" (subject PJM23).

Perception of the child

The interviewees almost unanimously agree that their children perceive that their sporting activity makes their parents happy; that their presence in competitions and training makes them feel more confident and they are happy, satisfied and grateful for their involvement, "yes my daughter is a very good child, polite and she recognizes me a lot for the things I do because she knows that things do not fall from the sky ... so of course she is grateful" (subject MJF32). ... so of course she is grateful" (subject MJF32); although, on many occasions, they do not verbalize it, or simply believe that it is something implicit in the obligations of being a parent. Three subjects expressed that the relationship of involvement has to be bidirectional, that the child should make an effort and commit to his/her sports activity, "he/she knows that it is an I give you and you give me, if he/she makes an effort and commits his/her father will be there" (subject PCF12). In two cases, fathers explain that their daughters get angry because they are very strict in their comments.

Competitive coping

In a few cases, fathers and mothers declare that their children are calm and without nerves when facing the competition. Most athletes are nervous before competing; some, with nerves that serve as competitive activation, "she is doing well, it is true that at the beginning she was a little more nervous but she has already assumed it, more than nervousness she has attitude, activation, motivation" (subject PIF7); and others, with nerves that negatively affect their sleep, food and physical condition. In some cases, they explain that their children combat these feelings through a routine that helps them to be more focused and calm. In other cases, parents feel that if the competition is stressful, it is no longer a good option.

PCF21: "He gets very nervous, he gets serious, he doesn't like to be told anything, it's like he closes himself in his bubble or in his world before competing, although he doesn't tell me, I think he gets nervous...".

Analysis of competitive results

In all cases parents give feedback to their children after competing. If the performance was as expected or desired, they celebrate and congratulate their children; if expectations are not met, they try to encourage them and orient the experience towards the process of personal improvement. In isolated cases, they downplay the importance of the results or the competition, to avoid disappointing their children. Negative feedback from parents may also appear if they believe that the result was not achieved because the athlete was not focused on the competition or did not try hard enough.

PJF29: "Most of the time congratulate her for how well she did... Sometimes things didn't go well... sometimes it happens and it's an accident... but sometimes it's an accident. sometimes it happens and they are accidents, but sometimes it goes wrong because of factors... and then you can tell I'm pissed off..."

PJM24: "There is always a little bit of reflection, how did you see yourself, how did you feel there... always remove iron, we are not going to put it on a pedestal, but the effort and the hopelessness or lack of motivation must be handled."

Pressure effect

In general, parents perceive that the pressure their children feel comes from the competition and how they interpret it. Half of the parents state that their children do not perform well under pressure, and the other half, that they do know how to manage it, being an activation to face the competition; one father even explains that he puts pressure on his daughter so that she does not relax.

MJM27: "Yes, they handle it well.... not perfect either, but the pressure does not get out of control, they do not somatize it, nor do they show it in the form of aggressiveness, they tolerate it... they handle it well, I think they manage it in a balanced way... the fact of facing the competitions always with a lot of illusion."

Parents' pressure

More than half of the cases respond that they have not pressured them, but then they expose a situation (food, effort, commitment, training attendance, etc.) in which perhaps the child could have interpreted or felt this way, "no, I do not pressure her, but not because of the competitions, because of the responsibility... you don't miss training, you only miss if you are sick or for a major reason" (subject MIF1). Few responded with a resounding no to the question of whether they had ever put pressure on their children. And slightly less than half admit that they have ever pressured them and later regretted it. "If ever,

yes, well, maybe when they wanted to leave a test in the middle, well, I got one wrong and I don't go on, then yes" (subject PCM22).

The final coding of the information obtained from the interviews is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Coding table of the results after data analysis

Content Blocks	Categories	Subcategories	Codes	
Value that parents give to the practice of sports	Sports Example	He doesn't play sports.	Doesn't play sports	
		Practice sports	Sport related to your child's practice Plays sports unrelated to your child's practice	
	Evaluation of Practice of sports	Positive		
		Refusal		
	Values of sport	Indifferent		
		Instrumental	Effort, perseverance, responsibility, self-confidence, self-esteem, organization, ambition, competitiveness, security, discipline, commitment, self-regulation, health, perseverance and willpower	
		Ethical or final	Respect, sacrifice, companionship, admiration and humility	
	Time Management	He combines studies and athletics	Studies are more important They are equally important studies and sport	
		He combines studies, athletics and others	I study the most important things and then athletics	
		Activities	I study the most important things and then the rest of the activities (including athletics)	
Parent satisfaction with the offer sportive	Local sports offer	Enough	Sufficient in quantity and quality Sufficient in quantity and insufficient in quality	
		Insufficient	Insufficient in quantity and quality	
	Satisfaction with sports schools	Stranger		
			Satisfaction Dissatisfaction	
	Satisfaction with The School of Athletics		Overall satisfaction Partial dissatisfaction	
Implication parental	Involvement in Sports activity		Total Partial	
	Social Relationships	Relation	Within the sports activity In and out of sports	
		No relationship		
	Involvement in The Sports School		Involved Not Involved	
	Impact on personal life.	Affectation		Economic Personal Time Social & Family
				Does not affect
		Non-affectation		
Relationship with The Sports Technician	Relationship and Communication with The Sports Technician	Frequent communication	Electronically and in person	
		Sporadic communication	Electronically Personnel	
		There is no communication	There is no relationship	
	Personal Opinion		Communicate your opinions Doesn't communicate their opinions	
		Opinion on the Training Management	Satisfied Dissatisfied*	
	Process Information	Receives	Enough Insufficient	
Do not receive		He doesn't see it as necessary Need for more information		

	Communication with children.		Frequent Occasional* Null*
	Athlete satisfaction with Practice of sports		Satisfied Unsatisfied
Support & Support	Reasons for sports participation		Fun Relational Self Competitive Bless you Instrumental Professional Reliable
	Athlete Relationship with the coach	Good Suitcase* Unrelated* Stranger	The athlete is not comfortable with the coach There is no relationship Unknown to the father
	Athlete Relationship with their peers	Good To be improved	Within the sports activity In and out of sports Relationship problems due to competitiveness Relationship problems due to shyness
	Parental Support		Emotional Internal Support Instrumental External Support
Support & Support	Parental Presence		Both parents Only one parent No parent
	Demonstration of Support		With deeds and words, they consider it beneficial With facts, they do not consider it necessary to express it With facts, they consider it counterproductive to express it
Managerial Behavior	Behaviour with your child	Instructions are given No instructions are given	Psychological or emotional recommendations Technical Directives They don't give instructions of any kind
	Evaluation of the competition		Enriching experience Inconsequential experience
Expectations	Athlete Expectations Vs Expectations Parent	Matching Expectations Differing Expectations	They agree on high performance expectations They agree on low performance expectations Athlete and parent agree on health expectations Athlete with performance expectations and health parent
	Enter or win.	Participate Win	Participate to Improve Yourself Enter to Win Earn to stay engaged Winning at the high level They perceive that their participation makes their parent happy and they appreciate their involvement
Parental pressure	Perception of the child.	Positive Perception Negative Perception	They perceive that their participation makes their parent happy and understand that it is implicit in parenting They perceive criticism from their parents
	Coping competitive	Nervous No nerves	Positively Affect (Activation) Negatively affects Positively affects Negatively affects
	Analysis of competitive results.	Positive feedback Negative feedback	Celebrate the results Comforting results Hold the athlete accountable
	Pressure effect		Athlete's own pressure Parental pressure
	Parental pressure		Conscious Pressure Unconscious pressure No pressure

Note: Levels of responses adjacent to those performed by the sample.

Discussion

The objective of this study was to analyze the perceptions of fathers and mothers about their children's participation in sports. The results provide valuable information that should contribute to the development and more effective organization of sports programs for beginners and grassroots sports.

In the first dimension, on the "value that parents attach to the practice of sports", most of the fathers and mothers interviewed give sport a transcendent role in the development of their children, affirming their satisfaction with the practice, and being aware of its influence on health and social relations, in addition to the acquisition and promotion of important values.

The role of parents and the family environment is decisive in sport initiation. As the main socializing agents, they promote their children's participation in sport (Keegan et al., 2009), but they also have a determining influence on the relationship that athletes establish with sport (positive, negative or indifferent), and which establishes their continuity, dedication and attitude towards the practice (Marcén et al., 2012).

In terms of values, parents are aware of the importance of sport in promoting values such as effort, companionship, and responsibility, among others, which are transferable to other areas of life. The close link between moral education and sports practice has been confirmed (Bruner et al., 2018), and provided that sport is well organized, it can be an excellent means of transmitting positive social and personal values to children and adolescents (Berengüi & Garcés de Los Fayos, 2007; Light & Harvey, 2015). Therefore, it is imperative that clubs and coaches work to ensure the promotion of value systems that foster the task orientation of the athlete, and promote these positive values (Berengüi et al., 2022). Unlike elite sport, sport at young ages should tend to explicitly advocate values that go beyond victory, bringing together diverse educational experiences, such as the development of sport skills, leadership and teamwork (English, 2018).

Regarding the second dimension, related to "satisfaction with the sports offer", most parents confirmed their satisfaction with the organization and operation of the club, finding the economic fees, the philosophy of the club in the training of athletes, and the technical training of the coaches to be appropriate. On the contrary, they were dissatisfied with municipal policies, especially with the quality and maintenance of the facilities. In this sense, parents play an essential role through their influence on their children's interests and decisions, and it is therefore essential for parents to be aware of sports opportunities in order for their children to participate (Columa et al., 2011).

In the third dimension analyzed, "parental involvement", the highest proportion of fathers and mothers affirm full participation in their children's sports activities,

with a high degree of involvement in the demands and needs of the school, fostering relationships both inside and outside of sports activities among them. Although athletic practice affects their lives and daily routines, due to the investment of time and effort required, they find it rewarding for the enjoyment and healthy lifestyle it brings to their children.

The impact of parental involvement is fundamental in the initiation years, as they are the essential watchdogs in the behavioral and physical activity change of their children (Gustafson & Rhodes, 2006). Parental involvement involves sharing their time, money and interests with their children (Holt et al., 2009), and therefore they are basic and necessary agents, as they provide this instrumental support as well as psychological support (Turnnidge et al., 2012), as we see in this study, even adapting their daily obligations to suit the sporting needs of their children. Moreover, in certain studies, the athletes' perception of their parents' involvement has been positively associated with higher levels of motivation and lower levels of demotivation in young athletes (Sánchez-Miguel, Leo et al., 2013, Sánchez-Miguel, Pulido et al., 2015), although also sometimes the intensity of the involvement perceived by the athlete has been associated with greater pressure experienced (Lee & MacLean, 1997).

On the fourth dimension, of "relationship with sports coaches", in general there was a lack of knowledge on the part of parents about their training, although they trust them, as they perceive how their children were happy, and saw progress and improved marks. However, the relationship between parents and coaches is limited, and there is generally no feedback on progress from the coaches.

Both the coaches of sports schools, as well as the parents who involve their children in the different activities, are basic in the orientation and education of these children within the sports environment (Garrido et al., 2010). Coaches are considered important external assets responsible for creating motivational climates and structuring activities that help meet the developmental needs of young people (De Sousa et al., 2018).

From the results obtained, we consider that, although there is confidence in the work of coaches, communication should be more fluid with parents, in order to draw common lines that converge in the understanding of parents of the sporting process of their children, and at the same time, coaches can know the needs and particularities of each athlete, thus ensuring the effectiveness of training and that the sport is better adapted to each one.

Regarding the fifth dimension, "support from parents", it is possibly the block that provided the most information. In general, there is good communication between parents and their children on sporting aspects, they perceive their children as satisfied, happy and motivated, and allude to the fact that practice is done for fun, to be with friends and

to improve themselves and others. The relationship with the coach and teammates is good and positive.

Parental and social support in sport has been analysed for decades. Parental support for their children's sporting career guides their sporting development, and it has been found that young athletes who receive little encouragement from their parents tend not to engage effectively in sport (Calo et al., 2022). On the contrary, athletes who perceive more support present greater personalized education and protectionism from their parents (González-García et al., 2019).

Among the results found, following Beets et al. (2010), parents provide both tangible support (such as the economic cost associated with participation, time commitment, or travel to training and competition) and intangible support, through emotional support, verbal encouragement and advice. Parental support becomes imperative for children and youth at all levels of sport competition, with particular relevance for those transitioning in age to more demanding levels of competition (Todd & Edwards, 2021).

Parents' behaviour has the effect of directing and controlling their children's experience and progress and is considered a powerful source of pressure. Both parents and coaches exert influences through their leadership styles, affective responses and behaviours.

In the sixth dimension, "managerial behaviours," the results are in line with those of the qualitative study by Keegan et al. (2019), which explores the motivational climate of athletes early in their careers and the influences of social agents. The research categorizes the way parents and coaches communicate with the young athlete, both for support and instruction, "leadership styles", distinguishing two central styles, a controlling/autocratic style and an autonomistic/democratic style, which coincide, in terms of meaning, with the strands coded in the present study, psychological or emotional communication and directive communication, as the communication did not always have a valuational component, but rather reflected the tendency of the parent to show positive affection, negative affection or tolerance.

In the study by Wing et al. (2016) it was shown that high perceived parental control was negatively associated with the enjoyment of physical activity. In contrast, parental attitudes and behaviours that are considered positive and encouraging have been linked to favourable affective consequences for children and adolescents in sport (Amenabar et al., 2008). Van Yperen (1997) even highlighted the impact that the athlete's perception of positive parental encouragement of his or her results has in buffering the effect of negative sporting experiences.

The results obtained show that parents can evaluate their children's experience of competition as an enriching experience or as an unimportant one. In this respect, Brustad (1996) proposed that parents play an important

role in interpreting the information referred to their children's sports achievements, influencing their children's cognition, in terms of attributions and self-perceptions in achievement environments, adding that parents prefer to give more practice opportunities in those environments where they perceive high expectations of success for their children.

The seventh block, "expectations", analyzes the relationships that exist between the athletes' sports expectations, what their parents think about them and their own expectations about the future of their children's sports participation. We found, in general, two categories, expectations that coincide and expectations that differ, and two domains, performance and health.

Parents' opinions about their children's abilities have a great influence on their perceptions of their abilities and the evolution of their interests. If young athletes perceive positive beliefs about their abilities from their parents, they will use internal criteria to evaluate their abilities and accept greater challenges. It is important to determine objectively whether young athletes' expectations are realistic or unrealistically high, because if so, they will be frustrated in sports, because even when they perform well, their aspirations will remain unfulfilled.

In almost all cases, parents have expectations that their children will continue with their sports practice, especially from a healthy point of view. There are not many cases that we find where the athlete has competitive performance goals and the parents consider that they are achievable, either because they do not trust in the qualities of their children or because it is a way to protect themselves and their children from the frustration of not achieving them. This may be influenced by the fact that athletics is not a professional sport and it is very difficult to make a living from it, which will influence the fact that few parents have high expectations of performance since they consider it complicated to go far.

Brustad (1996) observed that children's physical self-perception is related to the amount of encouragement they receive from their parents, which directly influences their intention to be physically active. Parents who do not want their children to practice sports, who do not show interest, who do not accompany them to competitions, or if they go, who comment in a derogatory manner on the effort their children make to achieve nothing, are placing negative expectations on the young athletes, which can lead to their abandonment of sports. Conversely, when parents have overly high expectations for their children, they may make them believe that they are capable of doing more than they really can. This situation is equally destructive to the enjoyment of sport, since no matter how well children perform, it can never seem enough for their parents.

Some parents identify so strongly with their children that they experience their children's performance as their own, thus projecting inordinate expectations on their children

to which the children will try to respond (Green & Chalip, 1997). Similarly, this case may also frustrate children and thwart their motivation to participate, as feelings of personal worth are equated with success in sports, and they may fear failure or rejection if they perceive that their parents' love depends on winning. As a last option, parents' expectations of their children are also not influenced, because the children have devalued the value or judgment of the parents and, therefore, of the parents themselves.

In the last dimension, "parental pressure", information is sought on the importance that parents give to competition results and the pressure they can exert on their children. The category of Participate or win is closely linked to goal orientations. Goal orientation is an avenue for defining success and judging one's competence (Duda, 1999). Children's perception of parental goal orientation and their own goal orientation have been found to be linked (Ames, 1992).

The results obtained give greater importance to participation. Participating would be related to a task orientation and winning to an ego orientation. In the first case it is more related to sport adherence, success is subjective and perceived competence results from personal improvements, task mastery and effort, and in the second case, a person feels successful and competent to the extent that he/she has demonstrated a superior ability to others, which is related to greater competitive anxiety and abandonment of sport practice (Duda, 1999).

How parents are involved in their children's sport, either through support or pressure, is one of the most important predictors of children's continued sport participation (Turman, 2007). A positive environment created by parents with positive feedback, positive affective responses, fun, pre-competition pep talks, encouragement, collaboration, and positive parental support are consistently positively related to athlete motivation (Keegan et al., 2019).

The results of the present study agree almost unanimously that children perceive that their sporting activity makes their parents happy; that their presence in competitions and training makes them feel more confident and that they are happy, satisfied and grateful for parental involvement.

When a subject perceives parental involvement as moderate, then the pressure exerted would also be adequate, being at a satisfactory level of experience. When children perceive their parents as not very involved, they are likely to abandon the sport due to the lack of attention and emotional support they require. And when the intensity of involvement is perceived as high, the pressure is high. However, there are individual differences, as some children may perceive parental involvement as high, without this meaning that they feel pressured, as they may perceive it as supportive and experience it as satisfactory and optimal (Lee & MacLean, 1997).

In the category of analysis of the results, we found that all parents give feedback to their children after competing,

this can be positive or negative depending on the results obtained. Negative verbal feedback is related to negative affective responses and the weakening of motivation, and positive feedback is linked to the adoption of goals of mastery and focus and related to motivation. Boys/girls who receive consistent positive feedback, both for the outcome and for their effort to acquire mastery, will achieve a sense of competence and mastery in sport performance (Keegan et al., 2019).

The results coincide with those of Keegan et al. (2019), where the concept of "evaluative communication" also appears, assessed through the subcategories behavioural reinforcement and the aforementioned verbal feedback. Behavioural reinforcement is related to the use of punishments or rewards, and in this sense we can find references in our study in some case, where if the athlete obtained a good competitive result the parents celebrated it by eating out, or if he/she performed badly they could threaten not to bring him/her to future competitions.

Focusing on pressure, most of the interviewees expressed that their children become nervous in competition, many of them unable to control their nerves, and resulting in physiological effects, such as difficulty in sleeping or eating breakfast, being this something that worries their parents, in some cases indicating that, if the nerves reach that extreme, the competition is no longer a good option. In the latter case, parents adopt an overprotective position that may lead young athletes to try to avoid stressful situations instead of taking advantage of this opportunity to learn how to manage them. In other cases, according to the perception of the parents, it manages to channel those nerves into activation, which is beneficial for the competition.

In general, parents perceive that the pressure their children feel comes from the competition and how they interpret it, and this would be related to the term cognitive anxiety, defined as the mental component of anxiety, which is caused by negative expectations about success or negative self-evaluation (Craft et al., 2003). Weiss et al. (1989) found positive relationships between pre-competitive cognitive concerns in young gymnasts and concerns about negative evaluation by their parents.

How parents are involved in their children's sport, either through support or pressure, is one of the most important predictors of children's continued sport participation (Turman, 2007).

In the present study, more than half of the cases considered that they did not put pressure on their children, but then presented a situation (food, effort, commitment, attendance at training sessions, etc.) in which the child may have interpreted or felt this way. Young athletes and their parents have very different views on what behaviours are supportive, and the child will respond based on how he or she perceives his or her parents' attitude, regardless of their actual intentions (Lee & MacLean, 1997).

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to analyse the perceptions of fathers and mothers about their children's participation in sports. The results obtained provide us with information of great interest to know how the interviewees understand and experience their children's sports practice in order to understand the complexity and multifactorial nature of the phenomenon we are analysing. It has also served to detect certain issues that can negatively affect athletes, especially when it comes to promoting an adequate motivational climate and favouring sports adherence.

As limitations of the study we found that there may be differences between how parents perceive their behaviours, how their children perceive it and how it really is, so that future research should address the three areas in order to obtain more conclusive results and to develop strategic guidelines that provide parents with tools to guide their children towards an adequate motivational climate.

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