



Research article

Insight of previous parental sport engagement among competitive swimmers in Kenya

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 29 March 2022

Received in revised form: 7 July 2022

Accepted: 24 July 2022

Available online: 24 August, 2022

Doi: <https://doi.org/10.55376ijtsep.1094679>

Keywords

Sport Psychology,

Active swimmers,

Former swimmers.

ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the relationship between sport involvement of parents and children's involvement in swimming. The study was descriptive and exploratory in nature. Former (N=148) and active swimmers (N=394) responded to the questions as to whether their parents were involved in any sport, and whether their parents supported their participation in competition. More parents of active swimmers (86.3%, N=340) participated in sports, compared to 64.9 % (N= 96) among former swimmers. Specifically, more fathers (75.1%, N=296) of active swimmers were involved in sports compared to mothers (45.9%, N=181). Among former swimmers, there was minimal difference between fathers (N=66) who participated in sports compared to mothers (N=64). Previous parental sporting involvement had significant influence on active swimmers at $p= 0.001$. Parents act as role models and pass on their beliefs, supporting their children in endeavors that they value.

This article has been derived from my PHD thesis, yet to be presented to the University, titled "An Investigation of Selected Psycho-Social and Structural Correlates Influencing Attrition in Competitive Swimming in Kenya".

Introduction

Significant others have been found to have significant influence on children and youth on sports participation (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004). These significant others include parents, siblings, relatives, coaches and teachers. They are the first and at times the main source that provide sporting opportunities to the children, by being enablers either directly or indirectly. Directly by introducing the sports to the children, through teaching them or indirectly by taking them to facilities where they are taught the sports as a group or individually.

Parents have been found to have significant influence, as they are the first influencers of their children, passing on their belief and value system to them. The children pick up what they learn from the environment around them, in this case being their parents. Thus parents are influencers, enablers and role models, though the latter not always the case (Knight et al 2016).

As society has largely began appreciating value of sports for fitness and health, parents are more and more introducing their children in sports so as to be active and healthy. However, in the process parents either discover the talents their children have in specific sports, whereas for some, the parents choose for their children the sports based on convenience of availability of facilities and training or even as a way to push their children live dreams they did not achieve (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2016). Whatever the situation, parental influence has been shown to have influence on their children.

Method

The study targeted former and active swimmers, the active swimmers were sampled from the Kenya swimming federation (KSF) data base swimmers while the former swimmers were sampled through snow balling, clubs/institutions in the. There were a total of 542 respondents who included, 394 former swimmers and 148 former swimmers. The swimmers responded three items on the questionnaire, stating if their parents had ever been or were still involved in sports; whom introduced them to swimming and the extent to which their parents supported their participation in competitive swimming on a scale of 1(strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

The questionnaires was administered physically and via email to some of the swimmers, for those under above 14 years, permission was sought from the parents before proceeding with issuing them the questionnaires.

Results

Table 1.

Introduction to swimming by significant others

Active Swimmers (N= 394)		Significant Others	Former Swimmers (N = 148)	
Frequency	Percent		Frequency	Percent
15	3.8 %	Siblings	1	0.7%
64	16.2 %	Friend	2	1.5%
130	33 %	Coach	86	58.3%
177	44.9 %	Parents	51	34.6%
8	2.1%	Relatives (Aunty/Uncle)	7	4.9%

Results in Table 1 indicate the frequency of significant others that introduced swimming to the respondents. Among the active swimmers, parents were rated highest as the ones who introduced them to swimming at 44.7% (N=177) followed by coaches at 33% (N=130), while among former swimmers, parents were rated second to coaches at 33.6% (N=51) as the ones who introduced them to swimming. Specifically, more mothers introduced swimming to former swimmers (N=29), compared to fathers (N=20), whereas more fathers introduced swimming to active swimmers (N=89) compared to mothers (N=65). Siblings, friends and relatives (uncles and aunts) that were involved in teaching swimming were a negligible number.

Table 2.

Previous parental involvement in sports

ACTIVE SWIMMERS (N=394)			FORMER SWIMMERS (N= 148)			
Responses	Frequency	Percent		Responses	Frequency	Percent
yes	340	86.3%	Parent	yes	96	64.9%
No	54	13.7%		No	52	35.1%
yes	296	75.1 %	Father	yes	66	44.6 %
No	98	24.9 %		No	82	55.4 %
yes	181	45.9 %	Mother	yes	64	43.2 %
No	213	54.1 %		No	84	56.8 %

As shown in table 2, 86.3% (N=340) of parents of active swimmers participated in sports, compared to 64.9 % (N= 96) among former swimmers. Specifically, more fathers (75.1%, N=296) of active swimmers had or were still involved in sports compared to mothers (45.9%, N=181). Among former swimmers, there was not a large difference between fathers

(N=66) who participated in sports compared to mothers (N=64). There was no significant difference among former swimmers ($p=0.73$) and among all the respondents (both former and active swimmers, N=542) at $p=0.105$. However, previous parental sporting involvement had significant influence on active swimmers at $p=0.001$.

For both active and former swimmers, more than 90% of the respondents indicated that their parents supported them while competing in swimming, specifically, 93.7% ($n=369$) of active swimmers and 94.6% ($n=140$) of former swimmers.

Discussion

From the results, parents were found to play a major role among the swimmers, both active and former swimmers. Majority of the parents of the swimmers indicated that their parents were previously or were still involved in sports and this may have contributed their parents valuing sports and hence introducing swimming to their children (the respondents) as they valued sports. Similarly the respondents indicated that their parents supported them as competitors. This finding is supported in studies (Knight et al, 2016; Wolfenden & Holt 2005) that found that it is easier for parents who have had previous experiences in sports to introduce and encourage their children to sports. Environmental and social factors that children are exposed to influence their preferences (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2016), and as such, parents are the first influencers of their children. Parents transmit their values and beliefs to their children as role models and enablers (Fredricks & Eccles, 2004), they also hold specific beliefs about their children's abilities and interests. Parents who place emphasis on sports participation have been linked to their own participation in sports, of which they extend to their children. (Fredricks & Eccles 2005; Xiang, McBride & Bruene 2003).

Though the study did not establish the extent and level to which the respondents' parents were involved in sports, experiences that parents have had in their sporting career are likely to assist their children in sports to manage stressors and emotions that athletes face. The higher the level of competitive sport a parent has been involved in, the more likely to further enhance the amount of sport related informational support they can provide to their children (Fraser-Thomas, Strachan and Jeffery, 2013). However, parental sport experience may not always be a positive influence as some parents put a lot of pressure on their children to achieve what they did not (Knight et al, 2016).

Though no significance on gender of parent that influenced swimming to the respondents, more mothers introduced swimming to former swimmers while more fathers introduced swimming to the active swimmers, Mc-Hale, Crouter and Turker (1999) found that extent of this influence can differ according to gender of parent, with mothers tending to have greater influence with their children's early interaction with sport while fathers take a greater role as the child ages. Mothers were found to provide tangible support eg transport while fathers offered instructional feedback (Fraser- Thomas & Beasley 2015; Knight et al 2011).

Comparing previous parental involvement in sports, the respondents indicated that their fathers were more involved in sports compared to their mothers, though was not significant. This has been supported by the findings of Wilson et al (2016) who established that despite there being more fathers who had history of being in sports among elite athletes, the athletes reported more maternal participation in their sport development, though not significant.

Conclusion

The study was purposively descriptive and exploratory in nature, therefore limiting specific conclusions that can be drawn. The findings of this study suggest that previous parental sporting experience influence an athlete's participation in sports. The study did not establish level to which the parents were involved in sports and assumed their involvement was majorly role modelling of beliefs and support. There is need for a study to compare level of participation of the parents in sports (competitive versus recreational) in relation to level of attainment of their children in sports, further there is need for a study to find out extent to which parents who were elite athletes introduce their children to similar sports they were engaged in.

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