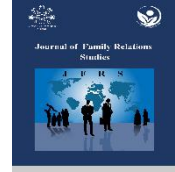




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Journal of Family Relations Studies

Journal home page: <http://jhfs.uma.ac.ir/>



Research Paper

Identifying effective factors in reducing parents' stress during children's participation in sports activities



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Citation: Azizian Kohan, N., Zare Abandansari, M. & Soleymani Tappesari, B. (2024). [Identifying effective factors in reducing parents' stress during children's participation in sports activities (Persian)]. *Journal of Family Relations Studies*, 4 (15): 8-14. <https://doi.org/10.22098/jfrs.2023.12877.1119>



[10.22098/jfrs.2023.12877.1119](https://doi.org/10.22098/jfrs.2023.12877.1119)

ARTICLE INFO:

Received: 2023/05/09

Accepted: 2023/20/26

Available Online: 2024/12/10

Key words:

Stress, Children, Parents, Sport

ABSTRACT

Objective: Participating in sports has many benefits for children, but sometimes there are some problems that make a series of worries and stress in their parents. Therefore, the current research was carried out to identify factors reducing parents' stress while their children participate in sports activities.

Methods: The present study is practical in terms of its purpose and was conducted qualitatively via using the descriptive phenomenological method. The participants in the research consisted of university faculty members in the psychology department, sports psychologists, sports instructors, and parents in 2023. The sampling method was purposeful, and the interviews continued in a semi-structured manner up to number 14.

Results: Effective Factors in reducing parents' stress during their children's participation in sports activities include 6 main contents: motivational awareness; factors relating to parents, children themselves, instructors, and peer groups; and the structure of sports places and clubs, which form a total of 48 sub-contents.

Conclusion: Some of the most important themes expressed in the current research include proper interaction between parents, children, and club coaches, no verbal or physical violence by instructors towards elementary-aged children, and favorable relationships between children and their friends in the club.

1. Introduction

In general, parenting stress refers to conditions or situations in which parents are confronted with environmental demands and requirements beyond their social and personal resources (De Stasio et al., 2018). High levels of parenting stress in the parent-child interaction result in disorders such as anxiety, depression, and aggression, which ultimately lead to a negative interpretation of the child's behavior, increasing punishment and arising problems in family interactions (Obalasi et al., 2022). In addition to the negative factors resulting from parental stress, the

mother, as the main pillar of the family foundation, undergoes more hurt from stress (Maulinda et al., 2022). Parenting stress makes parents pay attention to negative behaviors, reinforces aggressive behaviors, and unintentionally increases disruptive behaviors in children (Felton et al., 2023). Parental stress may have a wide-ranging effect on parents and children and consequently may affect their relationships as well (Eo & Kim, 2018). Thus, it is associated with undesirable health outcomes in parents, children, and their families (Fang et al., 2022).

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Several factors bring about parental stress, one of which is children's participation in sports activities (Kovács et al., 2022). Despite this issue, in today's world, sport is one of the most important indicators of development and progress in society and is one of the effective factors by which the mental health of the family in society is strengthened (Hurley et al., 2018). Exercise is one of the best ways to cope with various physical and non-infectious diseases. Sports activities create unique fields for people's development in various physical and mental areas. Fundamentally, sports are considered a classified environment to which children and teenagers, based on their age group, devote more time, energy, and concentration as compared to the other environments. (Rodriguez et al., 2019). Exercise provides opportunities for children and adolescents to develop personal and interpersonal skills and engage in physical activities, and have required mobility (Bedard et al., 2020).

Basically, the development of positive personal characteristics through sports is directly related to the individuals themselves, but contextual factors such as instructors, parents, managers, organizations, and society play a role in this matter, too (Strachan et al., 2023). In this regard, parents, sometimes as instructors and often as spectators, are often involved in their children's sports experiences. In either of the roles, parents can play a fundamental role (Witt & Dangi, 2018). Parents' support for their children in sports is somehow essential since they provide emotional, informational, and financial support so that they can enjoy their sports activities and achieve success. However, while providing such support, parents experience a large number of stressing factors arising from organizational, competitive, and developmental sources that should be taken into consideration (Lundqvist et al., 2023).

In the following, we will review the related research on parents' stress during children's sports activities. Miladi et al. (2024) stated that humor and games in families can play an important role in creating co-parenting and decreasing the negative effect of parenting stress on co-parenting. According to the research results by Choobforoushzadeh et al. (2023), mental health professionals can use positive parenting programs to improve mothers' psychological health and parenting self-efficacy. Kovács et al. (2022), in their research on the topic of stressing factors of parents in sports, expressed the influence of the characteristics of parents and their children. Factors of expressing stress by parents resulting from children participating in sports are having a previous history of being injured in sports activities, children's own previous injuries in sports, the children's age, having a high educational qualification of parents,

and worrying about the children's education in future as they participate in sports. In another study conducted on the development and initial validation of the scale of parents' stressful factors in sports by Kovács et al. (2022), some factors were declared as: instructors' inattention to children, high expectations of the club from parents and children, the way the instructor communicates with parents, not getting feedback from the children's performance in sports, the children's feelings about losing in sports, the behavior of other parents during exercising, the behavior and the decisions of the referee during the game, fear of the negative impact of sports on children's morals, difficult transportation to the club and the cancellation of parties or trips.

Legg & Rose, (2022), in research, stated that although by participating children in sports activities, parents become pleased with their children's experience in sports, negative emotions, and stress are also shaped because of different factors such as general stress and negativism, responsibilities, role of parents, teacher, and children's performance. To deal with these issues, it is essential to provide financial and educational support from relevant organizations, facilitate communication, divide duties between parents, and facilitate appropriate interaction between instructors and parents. Burgess et al. (2016) expressed in their research that having insufficient time, the need to go on a trip, children's psychological involvement during sports competitions, interference with school, financial issues, and injuries resulting from sports are among the stressful factors in parents. Some strategies are applied to tackle these factors, such as dividing tasks between parents, normalizing and using their own and others' past experiences, talking to themselves, and distracting their attention.

According to the stated cases, children's participation in sports activities entails numerous benefits from different aspects, but as long as the occasional stress of their parents about children's engagement in sports persists, irreparable damages result in the family relationships of children and parents. Therefore, this research seeks solutions that lessen or leave parents' stress as their children participate in sports activities. The review of related research also showed that despite the high priority of considering this issue and conducting several foreign researches in other countries, no research inside the country has investigated this matter. Therefore, by surveying the mentioned issue, the present study attempts to develop children's and their families' physical and mental health. Therefore, the main research question is as follows:

What factors lessen parents' stress as their children participate in sports activities?

2. Materials and Methods

The current research is practical in terms of its purpose and was carried out by applying a qualitative method via a descriptive phenomenological approach. The goal of the study was to identify the factors that reduce parents' stress during children's participation in sports activities, so the phenomenological method was applied, and the method of Colaizzi (1978) was used to analyze the interview data. The Participants in the research consisted of university faculty members in the psychology department, sports psychology, sports instructors, and Parents in 2023. The sampling method was purposeful. In selecting the statistical samples, those who had experienced the subject of the research or had a direct relationship with it were picked out. Therefore, the life, work, and scientific experience of the participants and the complete satisfaction of the people from attending the interview and their ability to run it and tell the contents were the criteria for entering and selecting the samples in the research. The criterion for leaving the research by the individuals was the lack of desire to continue working with the researcher and the insufficient and incomplete information received by the participants in the research. Eventually, a sample of 14 people was selected from the mentioned community. All the ethical issues in the current research were observed and the participants participated with their consent.

In order to take ethical principles into consideration, the goals and necessity of the research were initially explained to the research participants before the interviews. Subsequently, the participants participated in the interviews based on personal consent and initial familiarity with the topic under study. Before starting the interview, people were asked whether they were permitted to record the interviews completely. If they disagreed, the interview process was written by pen with the participants' consent. 12 out of 14 interviews were recorded, and 2 of them were written on paper. Although the participants were allowed to withdraw

from the interview at any time, none withdrew during the interview, and all of them were carried out.

The measurement tool of the interview was semi-structured with open questions. The interviews were between 30 and 45 minutes, and they (14 interviews) continued as long as there was the possibility to extract entirely non-repetitive concepts. The interviews started with planning central questions. 1. According to your experience, what factors reduce parents' stress during children's sports activities? Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the rest of the questions were asked of the research participants. Some of the questions asked within the interview include: 1. According to your point of view, how can sports instructors reduce parents' stress during sports activities? The research participants were asked the same questions in other dimensions based on the interview conditions. Finally, all the interviews were hearkened several times and were written down word for word. Then, the intended steps were carried out in the order of execution via the Colaizzi method.

In this regard, for the final validation of the research, the validity and reliability criteria were applied. For the purpose of validity, the interviews were given to the interviewees after analysis, their comments were incorporated, and the necessary corrections were made. For the reliability of the research, the intra-subject agreement method of two coders was used. Two expert coders, familiar with the coding method and the topic relating to the current study, coded the interviews, by which the percentage of agreement between the two coders, according to the following formula, equaled 82%. To verify the research, several experts in the related field who were not engaged in the research process reviewed all stages of the research, and their points of view were applied.

3. Results

Table 1 demonstrates the demographic information of the people who were interviewed.

Table 1. Demographic information of interviewees

Experts	Proficiency	Gender
1	Faculty member of psychology department	Male
2	Faculty member of psychology department	Male
3	Faculty member of psychology department	Female
4	Faculty member of the sport psychology department	Male
5	Faculty member of the sport psychology department	Male
6	Faculty member of the sport psychology department	Male
7	Faculty member of the sport psychology department	Female
8	Sport instructor	Male
9	Sport instructor	Male
10	Sport instructor	Female
11	Parents of athletic children	Male
12	Parents of athletic children	Male
13	Parents of athletic children	Female
14	Parents of athletic children	Female

According to the results obtained from the information of the research participants, factors affecting the reduction of parents' stress during children's participation in sports activities entail 6 main contents: motivational awareness, parents-related factors, children-related factors, instructors-related factors,

factors relating to the peer group, the structure of the sports places, and the club, which form a total of 48 sub-contents. Table 3 presents the factors that lessen parents' stress during children's participation in sports activities.

Table 2. Effective factors in reducing parents' stress during children's participation in sports activities

Major Content	Minor Content
Parents-related Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suitable educational level of parents. Non-interference of parents' occupation with children's sport hours Departmentation of work and home between parents Proper planning to avoid interference between lessons and sports activities Not having financial concerns to afford the required sport facilities for children Having sport precedent for parents No history of sport injuries from parents Familiarity of parents with their children's sport friends Absence of emotional behavior by the parents of other children during exercising
Children-related Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not having a history of injury in sports activities Having enough self-confidence by the children themselves Training children about proper interaction with friends Conditions relating to the children's age requirements Apt interaction of the children with friends in the club Enjoying the appropriate physical and mental health to perform physical activity in children Playing sports with the aim of amusement and not as a championship by children Psychological pressure on children during the sports competitions
Instructors-related Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate interaction of sport instructors with parents and children Continuous reporting of children's practice sessions to their parents during the week Not providing a high-pressure training program by the trainers Not expecting to perform activities beyond children's individual ability by the instructors Not caring about the results of sports competitions in basic group ages Non-participation of older people during joint exercises of the children Equal attention of instructors to children during sports activities No verbal or physical violence by instructors toward elementary ages Creating a congenial environment in the club by instructors Adequate supervision of instructors during children's practice Acquaintance of instructors with the basic principles of search and rescue of possible injuries during training No smoking and no abnormal behavior by the instructors
factors relating to the peer groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acceptance of children by the peer groups Having athletic friends with proper behavior Non-aggressive behaviors of children during sport competitive activities
Factors relating to the structure of the sports places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety of the sports hall or playground Safety of the changing area and dressing rooms Having proper lighting for the club Apposite temperature and ventilation to the club Having adequate suitable restrooms Use of modern tools and standard sports equipment in places Proper hygiene of the club environment Adequate hall capacity for parents to observe children's exercise Uncrowdedness of hours to participate in sports activities
Club-related Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The reputation of the sport clubs Convenient and safe access to the club in terms of location Having a code of ethics in the club and adhering to it Using experienced and ethical instructors Obliging parents to get sports insurance for their children Appropriateness of club training hours desirable result of the children's presence in the club

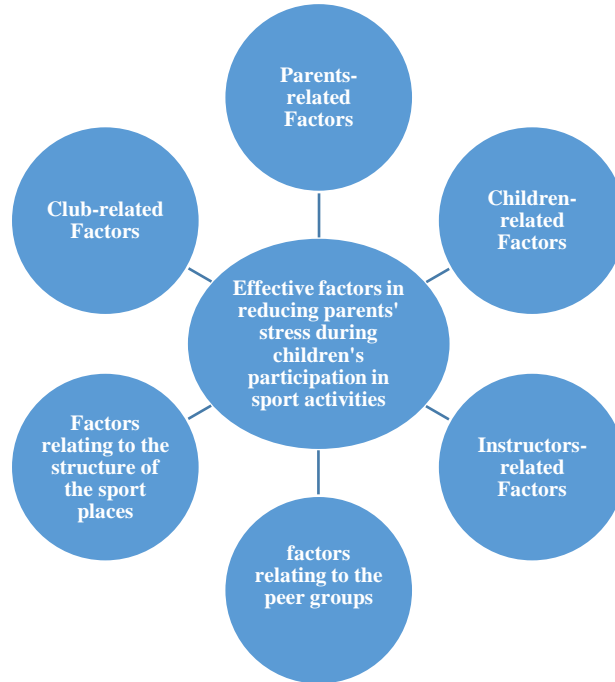


Figure 1. the final model of the research

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The first content identified in relation to the factors affecting the reduction of parents' stress during children's participation in sports activities is the parents-related factors. Fundamentally, parents play a crucial role in growing and developing children, especially in sports. However, some problems make parents unable to provide suitable conditions for children to participate in sports activities. For instance, excessive work or financial problems are some of these factors. Particularly, parents who personally have experience taking part in sports activities show more motivation for their children's participation in sports, although sometimes their history of sports injuries may have a negative impact on their children's presence in sports. Another parent's concern is about their children's future education and career, which should be properly planned so that there is no interference between their lessons and sports activities. Some other factors recognized in this section include the suitable educational level of parents, the familiarity of parents with their children's sports friends, and the absence of emotional behavior by the parents of other children during exercise. Due to the identified items in the section on parents-related factors, the research results are in conformity with the results of (Kovacs et al., 2022), (Burgess et al., 2016), and (Legg et al., 2022).

The second recognized content is the factors relating to the children themselves. Chiefly, parents whose children participate in championship sports bear more

stress than families whose children participate in recreational sports. Some children also do not have sufficient self-confidence to participate in group activities such as sports, so it is indispensable to provide children with the required training to gain interactive qualifications to interact properly with their friends in the club. This problem seems to be almost normal at young ages, and by increasing the issues relating to the children's age requirements, the situation gets better, and the parents' worries are eased. Enjoying appropriate physical and mental conditions to take part in sports activities for children should be definitely taken into consideration. Some children also have experienced injury in sports, and accordingly, their parents are stressed and worried about their possible injury again. The research results in this section are in line with (Kovacs et al., 2022) and (Burgess et al., 2016), and the reason for the alignment is the similarity of the concepts identified in this part with those of the stated research.

The third content relating to the stress reduction factors of parents during children's sports activities is the instructor-related factors, which are the most content recognized in this section. This issue reflects the important role of the instructors. Trainers are required to have proper interaction and mutual communication with parents and even report the children's activity status to them during the week. Another essential factor in this part is disregarding the results of sports competitions in basic ages. At this stage, instructors should not consider heavy exercises

for children and expect beyond their ability. Parents prefer that their children exercise in sports clubs with their peers, and the presence of older people worries them. It is of importance for the instructors to pay equal attention to all the children and never expose them to corporal punishment. It is also necessary for the instructors to be familiar with the basic principles of search and rescue so that in the case of possible problems, nothing threatens the children, and accordingly, the stress of the parents would be eased. Another thing to which the instructors should pay attention is that they are required not to smoke, at least in the confines of the sports club, so that the parents' attitudes towards them would be positive. The research results in this section are aligned with (Kovacs et al., 2022) and (Leg et al., 2022). The reason for being so is the similarity and the necessity of applying the stated items in the mentioned research with the results of the current research relating to the role of instructors in reducing parents' stress during their children's participation in sports activities.

The fourth identified content is the factors relating to the peer groups. Some parents are concerned that their children will not be accepted by their friends or that they will make friends with those who are not in a decent condition in terms of behavior. Therefore, having athletic friends with appropriate behavior and being accepted by them abates the parents' stress to some extent. Another notable issue is the non-aggressive behaviors of children during sports activities since the parents assume that this behavioral and verbal violence may occur while dealing with their children in sports.

The fifth content identified in relation to the factors influencing the reduction of parents' stress during children's participation in sports activities refers to the structure of sports places. One of the main concerns of parents regarding their children's participation in sports activities is the safety of the changing area, dressing rooms, and the sufficient number of qualified toilets. Moreover, the club should enjoy proper temperature, ventilation, lighting, and hygiene. Some children's sports subjects are held in old, non-standard halls with few facilities, which aggravates their parents' stress. Another object that should be taken into account is to use a proportionate number of people for each session in accordance with the hall's capacity because excessive capacity results in rising sports collisions and conflicts, thus increasing the stress of the parents. In order to have less mental pressure, some parents also tend to observe their children's sports training closely. Hence, it is vital for sports halls to have adequate capacity for families to observe their

children's exercises.

The last content recognized regarding the factors affecting the reduction of parents' stress during children's participation in sports activities is the club-related factors. Parents are particularly eager to enroll their children in a club that has easier and safer access to its location, and the reputation of the club and its prominent previous history are quite effective as well in winning parents' trust. The proper hours dedicated to training at the club, likewise, have a direct effect on parents' stress. When the hours of the club interfere with the working hours of the parents, undoubtedly, the stress and worries of parents will rise, which should be taken into account. As the sports clubs recruit experienced instructors with proper conduct, parents' trust will be more attracted to the club, and their worries will be alleviated. Another important subject in this section is to achieve the desired goals of children's participation in sports by their parents, since the failure to gain the expected results is worrisome. Due to the resemblance and indispensability of applying the items stated in the presented research with the results of the current research, the results of the study relating to the role of instructors in reducing the stress of parents during children's participation in sports activities are aligned with (Kovacs et al., 2022). In general, several factors are the grounds for parents' stress during children's participation in sports activities, leading to disruption in family relationships between parents and children if not cared about, and the stress lasts continuously; thence, it is essential to take some steps to eliminate or reduce stress factors. The concepts obtained in this study are suitable guides to tackle this problem, and parents can consider these points to maintain and improve their family relationships as well as improve their children's physical and mental health.

5. Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines

All ethical principles were taken into account in this article. Participants were informed about the research's purpose and its implementation stages. They were also assured of the confidentiality of their information and had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. Additionally, the research results would be made available to them upon request.

Funding

The author(s) did not receive any financial support for the research and writing.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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