

Discovering the Perceived Social Benefits of Young Peoples' Involvement in Juvenile Sports Clubs Including Sports Clubs' Friends and Club Involvement as Perceived by Youth Members

Conor Hogan

Independent Researcher, hogan_conor@yahoo.ie

Abstract

By young people participating in sport they are experiencing many holistic benefits that are not only physical in nature but also beneficial to their social lives. For almost a century and a half young Irish sports participants have had the opportunity to participate in their native team games of hurling, camogie, and Gaelic football. Although volunteer-led and unprofessional sports for young and adult athletes alike, their governing bodies provide young people with an informal yet organised avenue to experience real-life socialisation with their peers and adult leaders. This paper seeks to establish the perceived social benefits of young peoples' involvement in juvenile sports clubs including sports clubs' friends and club involvement as perceived by youth members. As a result of this research, it is obvious that the respondents of this study (who identify as females and males only between the ages of 11 and 18 years of age) feel that having fun, being friends, and having respect for teammates are a social benefit. Adopting these practices will also help with sports success. Another notable outcome of this study showed that the young people researched could be good friends and would be dependable for the respondents if required by them in their lives. They felt happy because of the socialisation that they were experiencing as a result of being involved in their sporting clubs and perceived those in their social network enhanced their lives.

Keywords: social lives, juvenile sports clubs.

1. Introduction

The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) has more members than any other sporting organisation in Ireland [1]. Although many of its members who play the more popular team sports of hurling and Gaelic football within the GAA are male, the same games fall under the Ladies Football Association (LGFA), and the Camogie Association (CA) associations for females in the country.

Within this article, a study of 130 young people from 11 to 18 years of age obliged the researcher from a total possible number of 177 young people in four sports clubs in Galway city, Ireland. All of the young people came from either the hurling or camogie clubs of Castlegar or the football clubs of St. James', in which there are two single clubs for each male and female genders

involved. All of the respondents' feedback was preceded by a theoretical framework adopted from that of the Positive Youth Development (PYD) ideals. Designing sporting youth practices with the PYD way of thinking allows for the positive development of young people [2].

The young people that this paper concentrated on were going through the time of adolescence when they took part in the study which the resultant data arose from. The study which was entitled 'An exploration of the perceived friendship, social support and understanding of empathy among the membership of four Gaelic Athletic Association juvenile clubs' provided rich data to choose from.

Adolescence is a time that focuses on graduation from the years of being a child to adulthood. Coined in the 19th century, 'adolescence' is a time that can be broken down into early, midlife, and late adolescence. Early adolescence occurs from ages 10 to 13 years of age, middle adolescence occurs from 14 to 17 years old, and finally, late adolescence happens from 18 to 21 years of age [3]. Mood disorders and anxiety are very common among young people at present [4]. The time of adolescence can be brutal for young people due for many reasons not least the changing relationship between them and their parents and the curiosity for a new independence. Common also is more independent thinking that can lead to disagreements between young people and their parents or guardians [5].

Socrates has told us that education is about discovering learners' initial thoughts before clarification is verified which then leads to the student reaching their hypotheses and welcoming the outcome [6]. Once this stage has been reached with young people's learning it's important to be aware of who and what people are surrounding them throughout their developing years. This is especially true in non formal education, where the data for this paper arises from.

Having young people and children become part of the design of social spaces is an initiative that UNICEF has championed [7]. They recognise that young people appreciate their own social spaces and the research agrees as when young people have social spaces to hang out in it accommodates early intervention of potential problems, and builds on collaborations and positive partners [8]. (Settipani, et al; 2019). Many of these social spaces are where nonformal education can take place. Within these walls, social development can prosper and natural socialisation between youth can occur [9]. (Baldrige, 2020). Young people in Irish second-level schools have a low level of civic engagement [10]. (Silke, Brady, Dolan, and Boylan, 2020) so there is a need to establish what are social benefits in out-of-school social spaces other than those are individuals providing personal development for young people in Ireland. Of course though socialisation comes in more forms than young people having real-life interactions. In the past quarter century, the internet has allowed young people to socialise in a variety of ways including gaming, social media, and using internet chat rooms. Author Angela McRobbie held the view Great Britain has influenced Ireland by broadcasting British media content in Ireland [11]. (McRobbie, 2005) and the same can be true of the US and other cultures of media which are now available at the touch of a phone for most young people [12] (Conley, et. Al; 2022).

This article discovers the perceived social benefits as perceived by youth members of their involvement in four of these juvenile sports clubs. Utilizing the researching tools of the Social Provision Scale (SPS) and the Indices of Friendship Observation notable quantitative data is

gathered. The research for this paper is then completed by qualitative data arising from semi-structured interviews of the research participants.

2. Methods:

The data for this article arose from a study named ‘An exploration of the perceived friendship, social support and understanding of empathy among the membership of four Gaelic Athletic Association juvenile clubs’. In all, there were four sports clubs from the GAA, the LGFA, and the CA. Combined, there was the potential for 177 respondents and 73% of them decided to do the study (n= 130). Although the fieldwork began in 2018 and was originally to be completed in 2020, due to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and university closures there was a delay in the full study coming to light.

Recruiting for the young people of this study began when the researcher first held an open evening for all potential respondents of the study and their parents and guardians. Once this was completed, self-addressed envelopes were sent to those that were interested in taking part in the study together with a prepaid stamp and information sheets within the envelope. Separately, there was an explanation of the study and separate consent forms for both young people and their parents and guardians. Following this, an information session was offered to potential respondents before the author sought official university ethical approval.

In all 130 young people completed the SPS. This was followed by the researcher observing 64 young people, 16 in each of the four sports clubs. He filled out the Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule in each case for every individual young person who was observed. Lastly, he asked 20 young people, 5 from each club semi-structured questions.

To understand the perceived social benefits perceived by youth members of their involvement in four GAA Juvenile Sports Clubs, the researcher carried out quantitative data collection using the SPS. The SPS acknowledges that there are six individual provisions of socialisation in relationships with others according to Weiss (1974) [13]. (Effective services, 2023). The Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule allowed the researcher two stages of observing individuals and the ability to rate their respondents for their indications of friendship in tenths of a percent and so was favourable to the researcher in the study [14]. (Cumbria, 2023). Semi-structured questions enabled the interviewee respondents to relax and answer the questions in their own time while also giving them a well-directional prompt for specific areas of research interest.

Table 1 Showing the total of people who participated in this research study

Total Number of Research Participants:	Survey: (Comprising of the Social Provision Scale)	Observations: (the Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule created by Tony Attwood, 1999)	Interviews: (Semi-Structured)
130 (n=130)	130 (n=130)	64	20

3. Results:

This paper established the perceived social benefits of involvement in juvenile sports clubs including friends and club involvement as perceived by youth members. Having researched 130 respondents across four individual sports clubs, three different sports, the genders of male and female, and those in late childhood to early adulthood it is clear that there are social benefits to their involvement in these clubs.

Most notably, the data showed that young people had fun, liked being friends, and admired being respectful to their team members. They saw their clubs as supportive places for them to socialise and felt that their social involvement there increased the likelihood of team success.

A vast majority of respondents (90%, n=118) felt that they would talk to an adult if they needed someone to turn to. Similarly, they thought that adults in their circle were dependable if they needed their help when responses showed that over 70% (n=91) felt that adults in their sports' clubs were dependable.

The overall perceived quality of social support in young people's life was reported to be good. More so, the young people stated that their lives were enhanced by participating in their sports clubs.

4. Discussion:

After a review of the data from this study, the author found a handful of main findings that are concerned with discovering the perceived social benefits of their involvement in sports clubs including friends and club involvement as perceived by youth members are.

Firstly, generally, the young people responded that it felt they had good social support in their lives. This was especially high when they spoke of their friends within their sports clubs. This provided them with a sense of friendship and overall support.

The young people felt respected whilst also having fun in their clubs as well and this was their communication of how the support was evident for them. They were also hopeful of success as they enjoyed feelings of being accepted in their clubs which made them happy as a result. Finally, they were confident that they could turn to adults within their clubs in their clubs should a problem arise in their lives.

These results provide the researcher with a series of suggestions for sporting clubs of this nature and other out-of-school agencies:

As author Erikson (1968) once mentioned that young people have a tendency for depression, suicidal thoughts, and bullying therefore young people are vulnerable at this time of life[15].. It was apparent from this study that felt that friendship was a good ally for their self-awareness. They also valued loyalty and trust in real-life gatherings. All of this gave them a sense of fun.

As a result, out-of-school organisations and agencies must acknowledge that sport at this age must not be all about winning and losing as these are chosen voluntary activities and the young

people are of a developing age and their ability to feel the pressure is evident in other areas of life already.

The young respondents appreciated friendships that were led by competent adults who value empathy and felt their clubs adequately employed this form of leadership for them and so it is imperative that all clubs and societies that provide for young people show a high level of empathetic leadership too.

Although the process of police checking and Children first is in place in Irish youth sports this does not teach good leadership as a subject. Nor does it promote the ideas of empathy. Extra workshops on these subjects are needed to help develop more human qualities and traits in all out-of-school youth services.

Most of the respondents (82.3%, n=107) felt that their abilities and talents were recognised by adults. The respondents did not expect that they would be 'friends' with managers and this mimicked what former elite senior inter-county players Jackie Tyrrell and former Tyrone

player Seán Cavanagh said of their managers when they were successful too. Tyrrell[16]. (O'Connor, C; 2017) and Cavanagh [17]. (Fluck, P. And Cavanagh, S.; 2018) both knew their abilities were acknowledged by their managers though there was a fine line between them calling their managers their friends, yet respect still existed between the two. With that in mind, GAA clubs and other out-of-school organizations must properly recognise all of the players under their control. Many players do not get too much game time. As there are up to five substitutions allowed in Gaelic games in each game there are a further handful of players that will be on the squad and never see any action [18] (Keys, C; 2021) and so managers and coaches need to be able to keep the harmony in their team and keep individuals happy who are not seeing game time. For example, managers and coaches need to communicate to players about their value to the team so that young players continue to feel appreciated.

Although, by young people training they still considered it safe and enjoyable and this was proven to socialise them and give them at least one friend but sports clubs and out of school organisations need to be aware that they need to continue to make young people feel welcome at training.

Many young people socialise online but socialising in real life helps their self-concept much better. Proof of this came from a University of British Columbia, Canada's study which involved 733 adolescents where it was found that those that only socialised online had lower perceptions of self-concept [19]. (Khan, Gagné et al. 2016). Since the Covid-19 pandemic, there is also clear evidence that too much internet socialisation for young people can cause addiction to the internet and this has a negative effect on their self-esteem [20]. (Sechi, Loi, and Cabras, 2021). GAA clubs and sporting organisations need to be aware that having their young people attend training is giving them a social space to develop their social skills and enable activities that boost their self-esteem, especially if the young people are not part of first team plans on the day of the game.

Many of the young respondents did not use social media as a means of social support so there is no need for sporting bodies to use social media by way of supporting players. As well as this

many people reported that face-to-face contact in the dressing room and on the training field was a way their perceived social support from others in their clubs.

A great emphasis should be put on real-life and interactive social support for young people instead of spending time using social media applications for young people.[21]. Author Bell (2013) noted that democratic leadership can be instigated by social support so it is important that sports clubs support participants in these most effective ways not only for their clubs' benefit but for their local communities. [22]. Bowles and O'Sullivan (2012) felt that cultural identity can then grow from here and so clubs need to be aware of this too.

Greater education is required for GAA and sporting clubs in Ireland on what technologies can socially support young people in the future and adult leaders in these organisations need to be trained to be abreast of any new technologies also so as to be able to support young people in their social development.

In conclusion, this article attempted to establish the perceived social benefits of young people's involvement in juvenile sports clubs including sports clubs' friends and club involvement as perceived by youth members and it is clear that young people involved in these clubs feel that there are many social benefits from being involved in their clubs including friendships and overall personal development. In the future, further researchers can broaden the geographical area of this study to other parts of the world where these games are played to discover if these findings are evident there too, as this is a limitation in this specific paper.

Ethics approval:

This study was performed in line with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Galway (10 July 2023).

Consent to participate:

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Informed consent was obtained from legal guardians.

Written informed consent was obtained from the parents.

Verbal informed consent was obtained prior to the interview.

Consent to publish:

Patients signed informed consent regarding publishing their data.

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