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# Fair play : The perception of the young handball players on the parent's behavior

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## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the deviant and negative behaviours of parents during follow-up in their children's sports practice have reached alarming proportions in various sports. This increase may be associated with greater participation of parents, both in the presence in games and in training. With this study, we intend to assess the perception of the athletes about the behaviour of the parents in the sports context, namely in relation to fair play. The sample consisted of young handball players from the Madeira Handball Association, aged 9-16 years of both genders (n = 284, male n = 122, female n = 162) registered by ten clubs and with a minimum of one year of organized sports practice. For the data collection, a questionnaire previously constructed and duly validated was used. In this study were used descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), chi-square and Spearman correlations. The statistical program used was SPSS v.25.0 and the level of significance was 5%. The results confirm that the athletes consider positive the presence of their parents, however, the results point to a perception of inadequate behaviours of the parents regarding the referees, mainly by the boys. It was found that the younger the athletes are the greater is the perception of the enthusiastic support of the parents, the greater the volume of instructions to the field, and the perception of a greater emotional discontent of the parents in relation to the problems and incidents of the game and training. **Keywords:** Parents; Handball; Perception; Fair play; Training.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The development of young athletes requires family involvement (Byrne, 1993) and the presence of parents in the various areas of action and interest of the children. Sports context is one of these areas and parental intervention has been increasing. However, this greater participation has led to the occurrence of many negative and controversial situations arising from this presence, which leads us to understand how young people perceive and characterize their parents' behaviours in this context, regarding fair play.

## **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

### ***Participants***

A total of 284 children and adolescents (122 boys and 162 girls), aged between 9 and 16 years old from u-10 to u-16 (12.82 + 1.67), enrolled at least one year in 10 clubs of the Madeira Handball Association.

### ***Measures***

For this study, a questionnaire was constructed and validated through the Delphi method (Severino, 2014), by discussion and consensus among 6 Handball specialists. Subsequently reliability was determined through the pilot study to quantify the consistency of the information collected and identify possible ambiguous questions. High levels of intraclass correlation coefficients demonstrate the consistency of the information collected (.911 to .976). In this way, the final version of the questionnaire was composed of 38 affirmations according to a Likert scale from 1 (Never) to 5 (Always) and structured in the following dimensions: Characterization of the Practitioner, Participation of Parents in Children's Sports Practice, Fair play, Parent Types, and Athlete Perception of Parent Behaviour. In this study, only Fair play data was used.

### ***Procedures***

The project was approved by the Scientific Committee of the Department of Physical Education and Sport of the University of Madeira. Participants were allowed to participate in the study through consent of the tutors. Questionnaires making lasted for approximately 15 minutes. The questionnaires were applied by field team members, who appeared to be available for any clarification requests that might arise.

### ***Analysis***

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to characterize the sample of the variables under study, the chi-square test was used to determine the association between ordinal and nominal variables. Spearman correlations were used to determine the association between ordinal and discrete variables. The statistical program used was SPSS v.25.0 and the level of significance was 5%.

## **RESULTS**

The results show that the majority of respondents have a perception of parental support for good team practices (83.6%), but one in five states that parents have difficulties in dealing with problems and incidents of the game in a controlled manner (20.3%). 42.5% of the athletes report that parents give instructions to the field, sometimes using offensive language (11.2%). About one in three say that parents criticize their performance during games / training because they have made mistakes.

Regarding the referees, the young people reported that they respected them (75.8%), although only 55.2% accepted their decisions. As for the opponents, most participants perceive that the parents respect them (89.7%), value their abilities (70.1%), however, only 1 in 3 applauds the handsome moves of the opponents

(33, 7%). Considering the coaches, 23.1% of the participants have the perception that the parents question them, as well as their options.

There were differences between the genders in the perception of the behaviour of the parents in accepting the decisions of the referees, in applauding the handsome moves of the opponents and in the use of offensive language. The boys have a more negative perception of their parents' behaviour regarding the acceptance of referee decisions ( $\eta^2 = 11.711$ ,  $p = 0.020$ ) and the use of offensive language ( $\eta^2 = 13.173$ ,  $p = 0.010$ ) compared to girls. girls say that they have more difficulty applauding their opponents' handsome moves ( $\eta^2 = 16.590$ ,  $p = 0.002$ ) compared to boys.

It is verified that the younger the athletes are: (i) the greater is the enthusiastic support to the team ( $r = -0.247$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ); (ii) greater perception of the difficulty in dealing with problems and incidents of the game and training in a controlled way ( $r = -0.140$ ;  $p = 0.019$ ); (iii) and higher the perception of constant instructions within the field ( $r = -0.166$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ).

## **DISCUSSION**

The presence of the parents proves to be positive for the majority of the young players. However, values associated with negative aspects still present high levels of in-field instruction by parents, often with inadequate language. It is also verified that the athletes perceive a questioning of the parents to their coaches, a situation that, according to the bibliography, confirms the results of Ross, Mallet and Parkes (2015) that report more negative interactions than positive in this relationship. This same study points to a considerable amount of negative communication between parents and children. However, Byrne (1993) refers to the need to work with parents so that they focus on their children's performance rather than outcome, and Buceta (2015) refers to the need for parents to be helped to train their emotions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The results of the study refer to a mostly positive perception of athletes regarding their parents fair play and sportive behaviour. However, younger athletes are faced with a different perception from older ones, namely the amount of information and instruction given by the parents during training or competition. These athletes still perceive a greater difficulty of the parents in controlling themselves through the problems and incidents of the games and instructions constant in the field. Differences between genders were also found in the perception of parents' behaviour regarding referees and in applauding opponents.

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