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Parents and Athletes' Perceptions of Parental Involvement Practices in Youth Basketball

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Abstract

Parental involvement in youth sports is an increasingly relevant topic because of its key implications for children's development in youth sports. This study's aims are threefold: (1) to investigate parental involvement practices based on parents' previous sports experiences, (2) to examine athletes' and parents' perceptions on parental involvement practices across different age categories, and (3) to compare the athletes' and parents' overall perceptions on parental involvement practices. In total, 423 participants (151 youth players and 272 parents) completed the Parental Behaviors in Sports (PBSP) questionnaire. The PBSP includes separate versions for parents and athletes, each assessing five key dimensions: (1) sports support, (2) competition attendance, (3) technical influence, (4) performance pressure, and (5) sports expectations. In the parents' group, 154 participants (56.6%) reported previous sports experience. No statistically significant differences were observed in the PBSP dimensions between parents with and without previous sports experience. Parents' years of sports experience negatively correlated with performance pressure ($r = -0.155$, $p = 0.013$) and expectations ($r = -0.149$, $p = 0.017$). Age group analysis showed lower competition attendance in the U18 group and higher expectations in the U12 group. When comparing parents' and athletes' responses, statistically significant differences emerged in all PBSP dimensions except for performance pressure. These findings underscore the importance of aligning parental involvement with children's experiences to foster enjoyment, reduce pressure, and support sustained engagement in youth sports.

Keywords: performance pressure; sports expectations; support; technical influence; competition; youth sports



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1. Introduction

Parental involvement in youth sports is an increasingly relevant topic because of its fundamental implications for children's enjoyment, motivation, and development in youth

sports [1–3]. As recently advocated, in an integrated youth sport system, parents play a central role in shaping young athletes' behaviors, actions, and outcomes [4]. According to the literature, parental involvement can be described as the time, energy, and financial investment in children's sports participation [5,6].

Through parental involvement, interactions between parents and children can be fostered, stimulating an emotional bond [7]. Overall, parental involvement refers to the actions undertaken by parents that are perceived by their children as potential influencers of their sports participation [8]. Previous research has described that parents have been involved in their children's sports experiences by attending practices and competitions, and providing instructional feedback [5,6]. Parents' behaviors may lead to positive or negative outcomes, such as strengthening the relationships between parents and children or leading to low self-perception and demotivation [5,9,10]. For instance, adolescents whose parents attend their practices and games perceive sports activities as fun, meaningful, and useful [11]. On the other hand, a recent systematic review described positive goals and values, positive parent/child relationships, and moderate parental involvement as optimal parenting strategies [9]. Conversely, some parents might have unrealistic expectations, become overly invested, and view children's worth based on their athletic success, which can lead to stress, anxiety, demotivation, or even dropout [12,13]. Previous research has found that parents' directive behavior and pressure were positively associated with pre-competition anxiety [3]. In contrast, children reported higher levels of sports enjoyment when their parents were positively involved and expressed satisfaction with their participation [14].

In the meantime, parents differ in the demands they put on their children and how responsive they are to them, reflecting variations in parenting styles [15]. For instance, authoritarian parents are highly controlling and demanding, while autonomy-supportive parenting styles give children options to choose and solve problems on their own [5,15]. In youth sports, authoritarian parenting styles might lead to more pressure, fear of failure, and increased dropout. In contrast, autonomy-supportive parenting is linked to higher motivation, self-confidence, and enjoyment.

Since sports are contexts to promote children's physical, mental, and social development, fostering favorable experiences to encourage long-term sports participation is crucial, highlighting the importance of parental behavior. According to the literature, several moderators of parental involvement exist, including the child's age and the parent's previous sporting experience [16]. From the parents' perspective, as children's age increases, there are more requirements and expectations since the competitive level also increases [16]. On the other hand, parents with little or no previous sport experience revealed more significant changes in their lives, particularly in socialization [16]. Indeed, the literature has reported that previous experience as a sports parent and overall knowledge and experience of sports influence parents' type of involvement [17]. For instance, parents tend to gain experience with their older child's sports participation, influencing their perception of their younger child. Overall, their expectations change for younger children, and they appear to be more relaxed about their sports participation, providing more unconditional support [17]. In addition, children often engage in the same sporting experience as their parents since parents are familiar with the process and recognize its value. On the other hand, when parents have negative experiences during childhood or adolescence, they appear to be motivated to facilitate positive experiences for their children [17]. Nevertheless, details on the effect of children's age and parents' previous sports experiences on their parental involvement practices, such as sports expectations and accompaniment, are still missing.

Although research has corroborated that parents play an essential role in an athlete's career development [18], there remains a gap in the literature concerning how a child's age may influence the nature of parental involvement. Previous studies have primarily focused

on differences between athletes' and parents' perceptions of parental involvement [19], the role of sex [19,20], and the effects of parental involvement on young athletes [3,21].

Considering the increase in parents' engagement in organized sports and its influence on athletes' sports participation, it is of great interest to explore parents' and athletes' perceptions of parental involvement practices. This study's aims are threefold: (1) to investigate parental involvement practices based on parents' previous sports experiences, (2) to examine athletes' and parents' perceptions of parental involvement practices across different age categories, and (3) to compare the athletes' and parents' overall perceptions of parental involvement practices.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

This study involved 423 Portuguese participants, comprising 151 youth basketball athletes (aged 14.5 ± 2.3 years, 31.1% males) and 272 parents (aged 46.3 ± 6.7 years, 38.6% males). The inclusion criteria for participation were as follows: (a) youth basketball players registered in the Portuguese Basketball Federation, (b) players aged between 11 and 18 years, and (c) parents of youth players within the age range previously mentioned. A priori sample calculations were performed using the G*Power 3.1 software [22,23]. The Mann–Whitney U test determined that a minimum of 244 participants were required to achieve 95% power for detecting an interaction effect size of 0.5 at the 0.05 significance level. Subsequently, a priori Kruskal–Wallis test based on four groups (age groups) indicated a total of 128 participants would be needed to achieve 80% power to detect an interaction effect of 0.30 at the 0.05 significance level. Finally, a priori two-tailed Spearman Rho correlation calculated 145 participants as necessary to achieve 95% power to detect an interaction effect of 0.3 at the 0.05 significance level.

2.2. Instruments

The Parental Behaviors in Sports (PBSP) questionnaire [24] was used to evaluate parents' and youth athletes' perceptions regarding their sport participation. The questionnaire includes separate versions for parents and athletes, each covering five dimensions: (1) sports support, (2) competition attendance, (3) technical influence, (4) performance pressure, and (5) sports expectations (details can be consulted in Table 1). Dimension scores are calculated based on 18 questions with total scores ranging from 1 to 5. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from never (1) to always (5). Participants rate each question separately for their mother and father in the athlete version. Both parents were asked to fill out the questionnaire separately. In the athlete version, a section related to the mother and another one related to the father were presented for independent rating. In the parents' group, besides the PBSP questionnaire, a question regarding their previous sports experience ("Have you been involved in any sport practice in a competitive setting?") was included. If the response was positive, then parents were asked to identify the sport or sports and for how many years they were involved. This information was used to analyze parents' previous sports experiences. Both the athletes' and parents' overall responses showed an acceptable reliability ($\alpha = 0.72$ and $\alpha = 0.73$, respectively).

The questionnaires were accessible online via Google Forms for two months. Informed consent was gathered after an introductory section summarizing the study's objectives, time for questionnaire completion, type of data collected, risks and benefits, contact information for questions or concerns, confidentiality, and data management. The Google Forms link was shared via email among national clubs and associations. Afterwards, all data collected were compiled into Excel files for data analysis.

Table 1. Dimensions and items of the Parental Behaviors in Sports Questionnaire [24].

Dimensions	Items	Description
1. Sports support (4 items)	1, 8, 12, 17 Total score = 1–5	Parental support, satisfaction, and interest in the child’s sports activity.
2. Competition attendance (3 items)	2, 7, 13 Total score = 1–5	Parents’ presence at the child’s competitions.
3. Technical influence (4 items)	3, 6, 11, 16 Total score = 1–5	Parents’ tendency to provide advice or suggestions on how their child can improve technical skills and how they should train and/or compete.
4. Performance pressure (4 items)	4, 9, 14, 18 Total score = 1–5	Parents’ negative behaviors in response to poor performance in competition and to the child’s unfavorable sports results.
5. Sports expectations (3 items)	5, 10, 15 Total score = 1–5	Parents’ positive expectations regarding their child’s sporting future.
Total items = 18		

The study procedures were approved by the University of Madeira Ethics Committee (Reference 137/CEUMA/2024, 16 July 2024), and participation was entirely voluntary.

2.3. Statistical Analysis

Data normality was not guaranteed in preliminary analysis. Median values and interquartile ranges were used to explore athletes’ and parents’ responses to the PBSP questionnaire. The Mann–Whitney U test was conducted to compare the results between parents with and without previous sports experience and to compare athletes’ and parents’ responses in the PBSP questionnaire dimensions. Subsequently, the Spearman Rho correlation assessed the relationship between the PBSP questionnaire dimensions’ scores and parents’ years of sports experience. The strength of the correlation was interpreted as follows [25]: small ($r = 0.10$ to 0.29), medium ($r = 0.30$ to 0.49), and large ($r = 0.50$ to 1.0). The comparison based on the athletes’ age group was performed using the Kruskal–Wallis test. All the statistical analyses were conducted using the IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0 (SPSS Inc., Chicago, IL, USA) and the GraphPad Prism (version 10, GraphPad Software, San Diego, CA, USA). The significance level was set at 5%.

3. Results

Table 2 presents the number of participants (athletes and parents) who have completed the questionnaire according to each age category. Among athletes, the largest number of participants were seen in the older groups (U16 and U18), while parents from the U14 and U16 age groups were the most participative.

Table 2. Number of participants (athletes and parents) who participated in the study according to each age category.

	U12	U14	U16	U18	Total
Athletes	24	33	53	41	151
Parents	45	80	97	50	272

In the parents’ group, 154 participants (56.6%) reported previous sports experience. Figure 1 compares the PBSP dimensions between parents with and without previous sports experience. No significant statistical differences were observed between groups

(sports support: $p = 0.382$; competition attendance: $p = 0.059$; technical influence: $p = 0.731$; performance pressure: $p = 0.161$; sports expectations: $p = 0.208$).

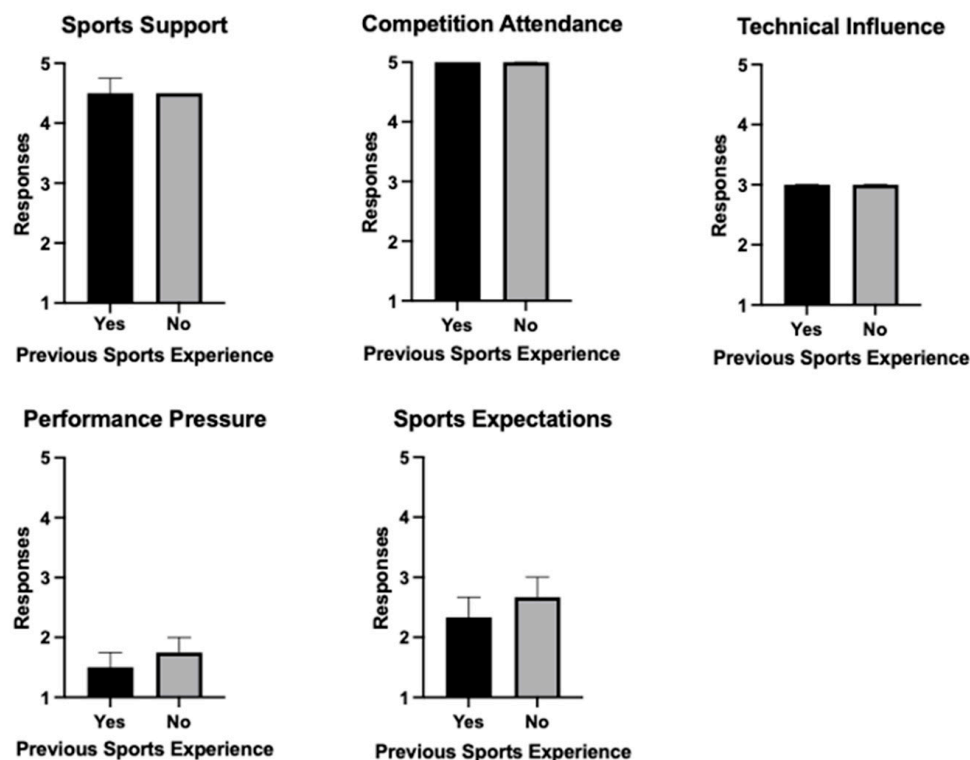


Figure 1. Comparison of parents' responses based on previous sports experience.

Among parents with previous sports experience, 43 reported 0 to 5 years of experience, 57 reported between 5 and 10 years of experience, and 54 had more than 10 years of experience. The correlation analysis between the parents' years of sports experience and the PBSP dimensions (Table 3) showed a small, significant, and negative relationship between years of sports experience and performance pressure ($r = -0.155, p = 0.013$) and sports expectations ($r = -0.149, p = 0.017$).

Table 3. Correlation coefficients between parents' years of sport experience and PBSP questionnaire dimensions.

	D1	D2	D3	D4	D5
Years of sports experience	0.060	0.117	-0.047	-0.155 *	-0.149 *

D1: sports support; D2: competition attendance; D3: technical influence; D4: performance pressure; D5: sports expectations; * $p \leq 0.05$.

Figure 2 displays the scores for the age category of the parents' group. Overall, no significant statistical differences were found in the perceptions of parents of athletes of different ages (sports support, $p = 0.651$; competition attendance, $p = 0.363$; technical influence, $p = 0.325$; performance pressure, $p = 0.456$; sports expectations, $p = 0.980$). The highest score for the sports support dimension was found in the U12 group. Curiously, the U12, U14, and U18 groups showed similar scores in the technical influence dimension, while the lowest score was reported in the U16 group. The highest median values were observed in the U18 group regarding performance pressure and sports expectations.

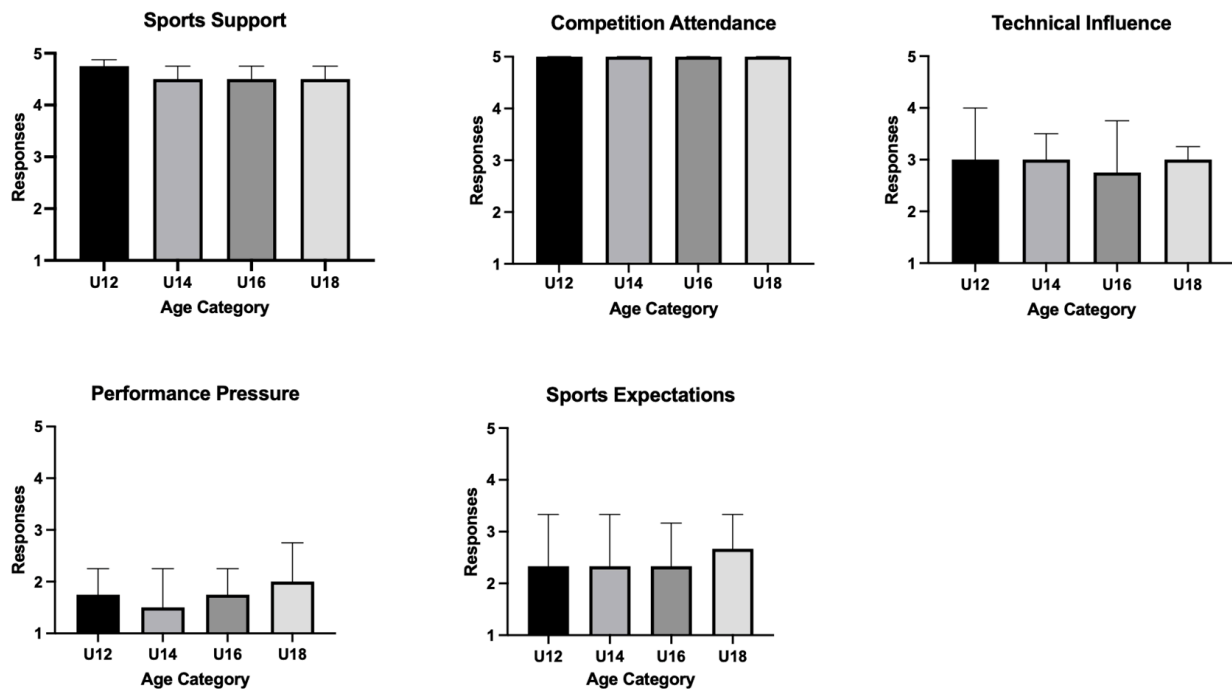


Figure 2. Comparison of parents' responses based on the age category.

Figure 3 summarizes the results according to the age category among the athletes' group. Significant statistical differences were found in competition attendance ($p = 0.013$) and sports expectations ($p = 0.052$). The U18 group reported a significantly lower competition attendance than their younger peers, while the U12 group had significantly higher scores in sports expectations than their older peers.

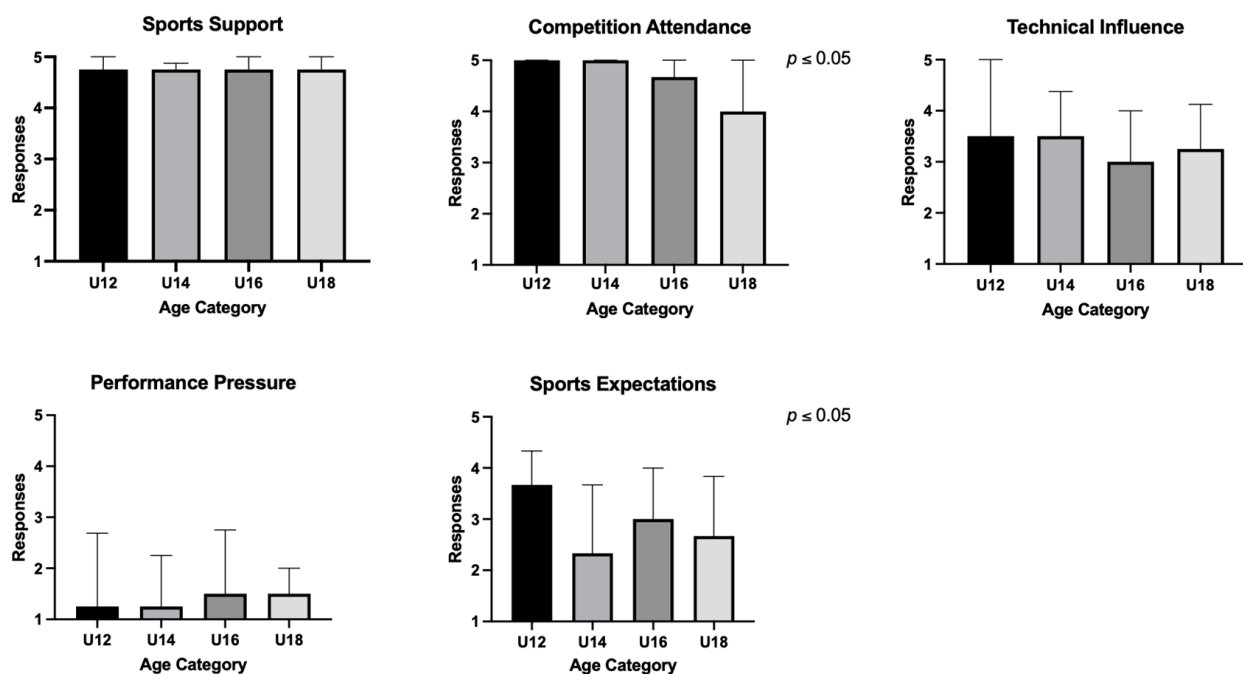


Figure 3. Comparison of athletes' responses based on the age category.

Finally, Figure 4 displays the overall comparison between athletes' and parents' PBSP responses. Significant statistical differences were found for all dimensions except for performance pressure ($p = 0.068$). Athletes scored significantly higher on sports support

($p = 0.024$), technical influence ($p \leq 0.001$), and sports expectations ($p \leq 0.001$), and significantly lower in competition attendance ($p = 0.029$).

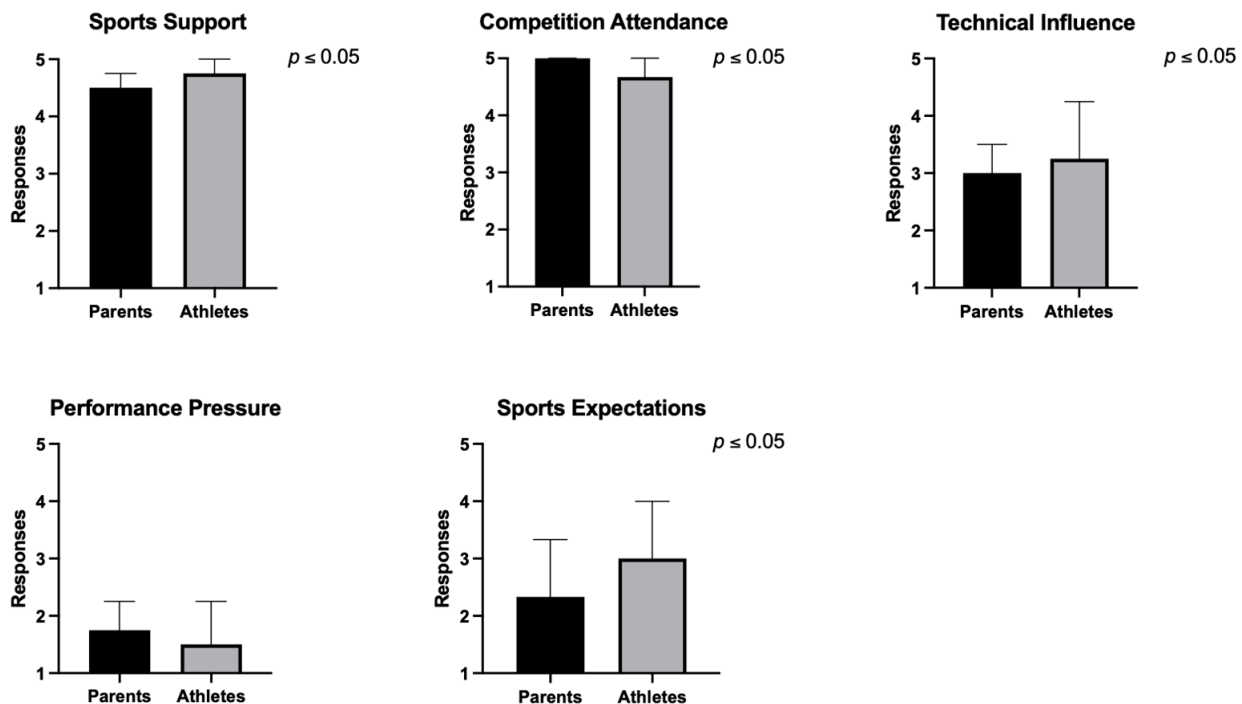


Figure 4. Comparison between parents' and athletes' responses.

4. Discussion

This study analyzed athletes' and parents' perceptions of parental involvement practices in youth basketball based on athletes' age and parents' previous sports experience. Based on the results, no statistically significant differences were observed in the PBSP dimensions based on parents' previous sports experiences. Overall, no statistically significant differences were observed in parents' scores based on the age category. However, the same analysis within the athletes' group showed that the U18 group achieved significantly lower competition attendance than their younger peers. In contrast, the U12 group showed considerably higher sports expectations than the older groups. Moreover, significant statistical differences emerged in all the PBSP dimensions except for performance pressure when comparing parents' and athletes' overall perceptions of parental behaviors.

In the literature, several studies have examined parental involvement in youth sports. Research has described a positive association between parents' high level and degree of involvement and the enjoyable experiences of the child [6]. In contrast, the parents' stress levels have been positively associated with parental directive behavior and pressure [21], which can lead to decreased enjoyment and potential dropout [26]. Although a wide range of methods and objectives have been employed in previous research, it is clear that parental involvement impacts the child [6,21,26].

Besides physical and mental health benefits, sports participation is also associated with developing personal and social skills, such as work ethics, self-control, problem-solving, decision-making, cooperation, and communication [27]. Thus, sports experiences have been described as valuable for preparing individuals for the demands and challenges of everyday life [28]. Therefore, parents' involvement in youth sports might differ based on their previous sports experiences. In an earlier study, prior experience as a sports parent and overall knowledge and experience of sports were described as factors influencing the type of parental involvement [17]. In the present study, significant, but small, correlations were seen

between parents' years of sports experience, performance pressure, and sports expectations, suggesting that parents with a previous sport involvement tend to underestimate these dimensions. According to the PBSP, performance pressure refers to the negative behaviors that emerge from poor performance levels or unfavorable results during the competition. On the other hand, sports expectations describe the positive expectations regarding the child's sports future [24]. Overall, parents with a sport past seem less focused on the children's competition results and their sporting future, probably by recognizing the process and benefits of youth sports participation.

The literature has described that highly involved parents may be perceived as offering either appropriate encouragement and support or excessive pressure [29]. Pressure can be related to perfectionism, which translates to performance-related feedback/expectations to attain a specific performance standard [30]. Research on this topic has reported that parents' sideline behavior has been increasingly characterized by instruction instead of praise and encouragement, leading to increased pressure [31]. Consequently, children who perceived greater parental pressure tended to worry more about meeting their parents' expectations and experienced higher levels of anxiety [29,32].

When analyzing the scores given by parents based on age category, no statistically significant differences were found among PBSP dimensions. Parents with children in the U12, U14, and U18 age categories presented similar median values on technical influence. The trend of parents giving advice or suggestions regarding their children's technical competencies seems coherent, independently of age. In contrast, the highest median value for the sports expectations dimension was found in the U18 group. This suggests that parents might hold more positive expectations regarding their children's future when nearing adulthood. Curiously, according to the athletes' perspective, the U18 age category reported a significantly lower competition attendance than their younger peers. Although parents report higher sports expectations when children are older, it seems not to be reflected in their competition presence and support, according to the athletes' perceptions. In addition, when comparing athletes' responses on the sports expectations dimension, significant statistical differences emerged between the age groups, with the U12 showing the highest median score and the U14 presenting the lowest median score.

Indeed, when comparing athletes' and parents' perceptions, statistically significant differences emerged in most of the PSBP dimensions. It should be noted that athletes perceived lower competition attendance and higher sports support, technical influence, and sports expectations than parents. Although using different methods, the results are in line with previous research comparing the perspectives of athletes and parents regarding their youth sports experiences [33]. The same conclusion was reported when analyzing the perceptions of parental involvement based on the dyads of boys–fathers and girls–mothers [20]. In another study, the authors reported that parents tended to have more positive perceptions of themselves and their involvement than the children did [34]. Overall, a gap between parents' and athletes' perceptions seems to exist, reinforcing the need to establish dialogue and shared goals to avoid the adverse effects of parental involvement in youth sports.

The current study presents some limitations that should be recognized. First, the study included only Portuguese participants from the basketball context, which might limit the generalization of the present results to other countries and sports. Second, the analysis is based on cross-sectional data, and longitudinal characterization of parents–athletes' perceptions could lead to a more detailed investigation in future research. In addition, biases associated with self-reported data and variations according to gender, level of play, and parent–athlete relationship dynamic, which were not addressed in the current study, should also be considered as limitations. Nevertheless, the present study brings important

insights into a still underexplored topic. The results indicate that younger athletes reported the highest scores in sports expectations, while older athletes reported lower competition attendance by their parents. Although with a slight correlation, parents' previous sports experience seems to be negatively associated with performance pressure and sports expectations. Finally, a gap between parents' and athletes' perceptions emerged, emphasizing the need to promote dialogue and shared goals. Parental involvement practices undeniably impact children's sports motivation and engagement [9], and, therefore, it is urgent to raise awareness regarding children's perspectives. Parental educational programs within youth sports might play an important role in supporting children positively and non-invasively, fostering their enjoyment and long-term engagement in sports.

5. Conclusions

Based on the study, parents' previous sports experience does not significantly affect their parental involvement behaviors and practices. However, significant, but small, correlations were found between parents' years of previous sports experiences, performance pressure, and sports expectations. When considering age, older athletes reported significantly lower competition attendance, while younger athletes showed significantly higher sports expectations from their parents. On the other hand, a significant gap between parents' and athletes' perceptions of parental involvement practices was observed in most of the dimensions assessed, except for performance pressure. Athletes reported lower competition attendance than parents, while the opposite was observed in sports support, technical influence, and sports expectations. Overall, this study underlines the need to raise parents' awareness regarding children's perspectives on their involvement practices. Parental educational programs within youth sports might play an important role in supporting children in a positive and non-invasive way, fostering their enjoyment and long-term engagement in sports.

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Institutional Review Board Statement: This study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Madeira (Reference 137/CEUMA/2024, 16 July 2024).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent has been obtained from the participants to publish this paper.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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