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## Exploration of Parent, 4-H Volunteer Advisor, and Sports Coach Support and Pressure on Youth Involved in 4-H and/or School Sports

### Abstract

A correlation and descriptive research study was conducted surveying over 400 youth in three western Ohio schools exploring youth perceptions of adult pressure and support of 4-H and/or school sports involvement. Findings provide an opportunity to evaluate the nature of adult influence on youth involvement in these respective activities. Results are useful as a tool to educate local volunteers and parents who are active in youth extracurricular activities.

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## Introduction

Seven million youth across the United States are involved in 4-H youth development experiences (National 4-H Council, 2003). Over 60% of high school-aged youth are involved in school athletic programs (Child Trends Data Bank, 2003). Research has found that greater parental influence is associated with higher levels of involvement in sports for both boys and girls (Brustad, 1993). Parents, and other adults who work with youth, are socializing agents for young people, and they are major influencers of youth self-perception and interest in extracurricular activities (Harter, 1978; Brustad, 1993; McCullagh, Matxkanin, Shaw, & Maldonado, 1993). Parents have far-reaching effects upon youth in terms of their enjoyment of extra-curricular activities and their related self esteem (Harter, 1978; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986; Leff & Hoyle, 1995).

The study described here explored the nature of parent, sports coach, and 4-H volunteer support and pressure on youth involved in school sports and/or 4-H activities. Support was defined as: "a positive feeling of encouragement provided by parents, volunteer advisors, and coaches in terms of their performance expectations of an involved child." Support variables were created by summing five Likert-style questions. Pressure was defined as: "a negative feeling of overly high expectations held by parents, 4-H volunteer advisors (leaders), and coaches in terms of the performance expectations of an involved child."

This information may be useful to assist Extension professionals as they work with youth, parents, coaches, and 4-H volunteer advisors in these areas of concern. Extension professionals can use this information to provide education for coaches, parents, and 4-H volunteer leaders.

## Methods and Procedures

A descriptive and correlation study was conducted to assess youth perceptions of parental, coach, and/or advisor support or pressure related to their involvement in school sports and/or 4-H programs. Three cooperating schools were chosen by the researcher representing three different counties in western Ohio. A written questionnaire consisting of three sections (one section for youth involved in school sports activities, one section for youth involved in 4-H programs, and a section for all youth assessing demographic information) was developed.

This instrument was based on Scanlan and Lewthwaite's (1984, 1985, 1986) study of parental influence on youth sports. Designed originally for youth wrestlers, the instrument was revised to

suit a variety of sports, to add comparison questions for 4-H-involved youth, and to obtain specific demographic information needed to answer the research questions of this study.

The instrument used in this research is revised from Scanlan and Lewthwaite's "Factors of Adult Influences Scale" (1984). Validity was ascertained by instrument review of experts assessing face and criterion validity. Ohio Extension educators served as reviewers for this instrument. The reliability of the summated variables was computed using Cronbach's Alpha. The reliability coefficient for volunteer advisor support was .76, and volunteer advisor pressure was .77. The coefficient for coach support was .74, and coach pressure was .77. Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for enjoyment of 4-H and sports involvement were .92 and .83, respectively.

The research was reviewed and accepted by the OSU Human Subjects Review Board of the Ohio State University. Written parental permission was obtained for each participant who took part in the study. Anonymity and confidentiality of participants and their individual responses were maintained throughout the study. The researcher administered the survey at the three participating schools over a 1-month period in the spring of 2004 arranged when suitable for the respective schools.

A total of 433 youth in the eighth and ninth grades completed the instrument. Summated variables were created to analyze parent, coach, and/or advisor pressure and support on youth involvement in 4-H and/or school sports. This study used descriptive statistics, correlational statistics, and t-tests to explore research questions of this study.

Research questions included:

1. Is there a difference in the levels of support or pressure perceived by youth from their coaches and/or volunteer advisors for those involved in 4-H and/or sports?
2. Is there a relationship between the perceived support or pressure felt by teens involved in the 4-H or sports activity and their enjoyment of their sports or 4-H activities?
3. Is there a relationship between the perceived support or pressure felt by teens involved in the 4-H or sports activity and the likelihood of their continued involvement in sports or 4-H competitive events?

## Results

### **1. Is there a difference in the levels of support or pressure perceived by youth from their coaches and/or advisors for those involved in 4-H and/or sports?**

When evaluating the level of support or pressure perceived by youth from their 4-H volunteer advisors and/or sports coaches, a significant difference was found (Table 1), indicating that youth involved in 4-H perceived lower levels of pressure from 4-H volunteer advisors than youth in sports perceived from their coaches ( $z=2.01$   $p<.05$ ). However, there was no significant difference found between volunteer advisor and coach support perceptions held by youth ( $p<.05$ ).

**Table 1.**  
Volunteer Advisor and Coach Pressure and Support Comparison of 4-H and/or Sports Involvement ( $p<.05$ )

<b>Adult Influence</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD Means</b>	<b>St Score (z)</b>
<b>Volunteer Advisor Support</b>	76	2.39	.36	.26
<b>Coach Support</b>	346	2.49		
<b>Volunteer Advisor Pressure</b>	76	.58	.32	<b>2.00</b>
<b>Coach Pressure</b>	346	1.23		

*Note: Bold type indicates significant findings.*

### **2. Is there a relationship between the perceived support or pressure felt by youth involved in the 4-H or sports activity and their enjoyment of their sports or 4-H activities?**

When evaluating the relationship of parental and/or volunteer advisor pressure and support to the 4-H enjoyment level reported by youth involved in 4-H, there were significant positive correlations found for volunteer advisor support ( $r=.39$ ,  $p<.05$ ), paternal support ( $r=.36$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and maternal support ( $r=.32$ ,  $p<.05$ ). A negative correlation was found between volunteer advisor pressure ( $r=-.25$ ,  $p<.05$ ) and enjoyment of 4-H activities. These correlations are reported in Table 2. Maternal support and paternal support of 4-H were positively correlated ( $r=.82$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Maternal pressure and paternal pressure of 4-H were also positively correlated ( $r=.84$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

When evaluating the relationship of parental and/or coach pressure and support to the sports enjoyment level reported by youth involved in sports, there were significant positive correlations found for coach support ( $r=.33$ ,  $p<.05$ ), paternal support ( $r=.29$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and maternal support ( $r=.31$ ,  $p<.05$ ). These findings, reported in Table 3, reinforce the work of Brustad (1988), Scanlan & Lewthwaite (1986) and Leff & Hoyle (1995), which found positive adult relations related to sports involvement is correlated to higher levels of youth sports enjoyment reported by youth participants.

A significant correlation was also found in this study between parents in relation to perceived levels of support and pressure reported by youth involved in sports. Maternal support and paternal support of sports were positively correlated ( $r=.71$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Maternal pressure and paternal pressure of sports were negatively correlated ( $r=-.29$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Bartz (1999) suggests correlations of .6 or higher to be a benchmark for strong correlations.

**Table 2.**  
Correlation of 4-H Enjoyment and Support and Pressure of Significant Adults

		<b>4-H Enjoy</b>	<b>Pat Sup 4-H</b>	<b>Pat Press 4-H</b>	<b>Mat Sup 4-H</b>	<b>Mat Press 4-H</b>
<b>4-H Enjoyment</b>	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Significance (2-tailed)	-				
	N	73				
<b>Volunteer Advisor Support 4-H</b>	Pearson Correlation	<b>.39</b>				
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.00</b>				
	N	<b>73</b>				
<b>Volunteer Advisor Pressure 4-H</b>	Pearson Correlation	<b>-.25</b>				
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.03</b>				
	N	<b>73</b>				
<b>Paternal Support 4-H</b>	Pearson Correlation	<b>.36</b>			<b>.82</b>	
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.00</b>			<b>.00</b>	

	N	<b>73</b>			<b>76</b>	
<b>Paternal Pressure 4-H</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.17				<b>.84</b>
	Significance (2-tailed)	.16				<b>.00</b>
	N	73				<b>76</b>
<b>Maternal Support 4-H</b>	Pearson Correlation	<b>.32</b>	<b>.82</b>			
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.01</b>	<b>.00</b>			
	N	<b>73</b>	<b>76</b>			
<b>Maternal Pressure 4-H</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.11		<b>.84</b>		
	Significance (2-tailed)	.36		<b>.00</b>		
	N	73		<b>76</b>		

*Note: Bold type indicates significant findings ( $p < .05$ ).*

**Table 3.**  
Correlation of Sports Enjoyment and Support and Pressure of Significant Adults

		<b>Sport Enjoy</b>	<b>Pat Supp Sport</b>	<b>Pat Press Sport</b>	<b>Mat Supp Sport</b>	<b>Mat Press Sport</b>
<b>Sports Enjoyment</b>	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Significance (2-tailed)	-				
	N	335				
<b>Coach Support Sports</b>	Pearson Correlation	<b>.33</b>				
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.00</b>				
	N	<b>335</b>				
	Pearson					

<b>Coach Pressure Sports</b>	Correlation	-.09				
	Significance (2-tailed)	.12				
	N	335				
<b>Paternal Support Sports</b>	Pearson Correlation	<b>.29</b>			<b>.71</b>	
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.00</b>			<b>.00</b>	
	N	<b>333</b>			<b>344</b>	
<b>Paternal Pressure Sports</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.05				<b>-.29</b>
	Significance (2-tailed)	.40				<b>.00</b>
	N	333				<b>345</b>
<b>Maternal Support Sports</b>	Pearson Correlation	<b>.31</b>	<b>.71</b>			
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.00</b>	<b>.00</b>			
	N	<b>334</b>	<b>344</b>			
<b>Maternal Pressure Sports</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.05		<b>.69</b>		
	Significance (2-tailed)	.362		<b>.00</b>		
	N	335		<b>345</b>		

*Note: Bold type indicates significant findings (p<.05).*

### 3. Is there a relationship between the perceived support or pressure felt by youth involved in the 4-H or sports activity and the likelihood of their continued involvement in sports or 4-H competitive events?

A final component of the research was an analysis of the relationship of support or pressure perceived by youth and their likelihood of continued involvement with that particular activity. An analysis of likely continued involvement in 4-H found low, negative correlations with volunteer advisor pressure ( $r=-.35$ ,  $p<.05$ ), paternal pressure ( $r=-.30$ ,  $p<.05$ ), and maternal pressure ( $r=-.25$ ,  $p<.05$ ). These results are reported in Table 4. When evaluating the likelihood of their continued involvement in sports, positive correlations were found for coach support ( $r=.22$ ,  $p<.01$ ), paternal support ( $r=.18$ ,  $p<.01$ ), and maternal support ( $r=.18$ ,  $p<.01$ ). Negative correlations were found between likely continued involvement in sports and coach pressure ( $r=.12$ ,  $p<.01$ ). The correlations between significant adult influence and likelihood of continued involvement in sports are reported in Table 5. While none of these correlations were above the general benchmark of .6

or higher (Bartz, 1999), they do indicate low, significant correlations.

**Table 4.**  
Correlation Between Significant Adult Pressure and Support and Likely Continued Involvement in 4-H

		<b>Likely Continued Involve. 4-H</b>
Likely Continued Involve. 4-H	Kendall's tau b Correlation	1
	Significance (2-tailed)	-
	N	76
Advisor Support 4-H	Kendall's tau b Correlation	.14
	Significance (2-tailed)	.14
	N	76
Advisor Pressure 4-H	Kendall's tau b Correlation	<b>-.35</b>
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.00</b>
	N	<b>76</b>
Paternal Support 4-H	Kendall's tau b Correlation	.11
	Significance (2-tailed)	.25
	N	76
Paternal Pressure 4-H	Kendall's tau b Correlation	<b>-.30</b>
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.00</b>
	N	<b>76</b>
Maternal Support 4-H	Kendall's tau b Correlation	.07
	Significance (2-tailed)	.44
	N	76
Maternal Pressure 4-H	Correlation	<b>-.25</b>
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.01</b>

	N	<b>76</b>
<i>Note: Bold type indicates significant findings (p&lt;.05)</i>		

**Table 5.**  
Correlation Between Significant Adult Pressure and Support and Likely Continued Involvement in Sports

		<b>Likely Cont. Involve. Sports</b>
Likely Continued Involve.Sports	Kendall's tau b Correlation	1
	Significance (2-tailed)	-
	N	344
Coach Support Sports	Kendall's tau b Correlation	<b>.22</b>
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.00</b>
	N	<b>344</b>
Coach Pressure Sports	Kendall's tau b Correlation	<b>-.12</b>
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.01</b>
	N	<b>344</b>
Paternal Support Sports	Kendall's tau b Correlation	<b>.18</b>
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.00</b>
	N	<b>342</b>
Paternal Pressure Sports	Kendall's tau b Correlation	.03
	Significance (2-tailed)	.47
	N	342
Maternal Support Sports	Kendall's tau b Correlation	<b>.18</b>
	Significance (2-tailed)	<b>.00</b>
	N	<b>343</b>
	Kendall's tau b Correlation	-.02



Maternal Pressure Sports	Significance (2-tailed)	.59
	N	344
Note: Bold type indicates significant findings ( $p < .05$ ).		

## Summary

- Youth reported higher levels of pressure from school sports coaches than 4-H volunteer advisors ( $z=2.00$ ,  $p < .05$ ).
- Maternal support and paternal support of 4-H were correlated ( $r=.82$   $p < .05$ ). Maternal pressure and paternal pressure of 4-H were also very highly correlated ( $r=.84$   $p < .05$ ).
- Maternal support and paternal support of sports were positively correlated ( $r=.71$   $p < .05$ ). Maternal pressure and paternal pressure of sports were negatively correlated ( $r=-.29$   $p < .05$ ).
- Significant positive correlations were found between 4-H enjoyment and volunteer advisor support ( $r=.39$ ), paternal support ( $r=.36$ ), and maternal support ( $r=.32$ ). A negative correlation was found between 4-H enjoyment and volunteer advisor pressure ( $r=-.25$ ).
- Significant positive correlations were found between sports enjoyment and coach support ( $r=.33$ ), paternal support ( $r=.29$ ), and maternal support ( $r=.31$ ).
- The likely continued involvement of youth in 4-H was negatively related to volunteer advisor pressure ( $r=-.35$ ), paternal pressure ( $r=-.30$ ), and maternal pressure ( $r=-.25$ ).
- The likely continued involvement of youth in sports was positively correlated to coach support ( $r=.22$ ), paternal support ( $r=.18$ ), and maternal support ( $r=.18$ ). A negative correlation was found between coach pressure ( $r=-.12$ ) and likely continued involvement in youth sports.

## Discussion

The findings of this research indicate that youth involved in 4-H activities report lower levels of perceived pressure from 4-H volunteer advisors than youth involved in school sports report from coaches. The structure of the 4-H system may explain this difference. Many 4-H activities are focused on youth development and personal achievement rather than competition. This focus may be somewhat different than that of the school sports program that may be highly focused on the final score or win-loss record.

Also, the competitive activities offered by 4-H programs are often just one component of the 4-H experience. Most 4-H youth participate in community service and other personal development experiences within the club offering a broader perspective to evaluate the involvement of the significant adult (4-H volunteer advisor versus school sports coach).

This research did find that the youth report significant positive correlations between maternal and paternal support and pressure of both 4-H and sports involvement. Youth tend to report similar levels of support and pressure from both parents. Parents may be acting in tandem with similar values and parenting styles, and their children are interpreting the level of pressure and support of sports involvement similarly.

When evaluating the relationship between enjoyment and the support and pressure perceived by youth involved in 4-H and/or school sports, multiple relationships were found. 4-H enjoyment is positively correlated with volunteer advisor support, paternal support, and maternal support. 4-H enjoyment is negatively correlated with volunteer advisor pressure. When evaluating sports involvement and the correlation of sports enjoyment with support and pressure factors, multiple relationships were found. Sport enjoyment is positively correlated to coach support, paternal support, and maternal support for sports. These findings reaffirm earlier research conducted by Leff and Hoyle (1995), which found parental support positively correlated to sports enjoyment and youth self esteem.

This research also evaluated the relationship between "likely continued involvement" of youth in 4-H and school sports with parent, volunteer advisor, and school sports coach support and pressure. Volunteer advisor pressure, paternal pressure, and maternal pressure all had significant negative correlations to "likely continued involvement" in 4-H. The data suggests that significant adult (parent and 4-H volunteer advisor) pressure can have a detrimental effect on continued 4-H involvement. The relationship between "likely continued involvement in sports", coach support, maternal support, and paternal support were all significant and positive.

Youth in this sample have indicated that significant adult (parents and coaches) support can have a positive impact on the prospect of youth remaining involved in sports. Negative correlations were

found between coach pressure and "likely continued involvement" in school sports. Respondents indicate that excess sport coach pressure can decrease their future plans to remain involved in sports.

## Recommendations

- Some community sports and youth development organizations have recognized the need for parent education as key component of a positive youth experience in youth extracurricular activities. 4-H programs may need to analyze the value of parent education as a contributing factor for enhancing youth experiences in 4-H. A "Welcome to 4-H" meeting could be offered to new 4-H parents highlighting positive youth development and healthy competition.
- Training offered to 4-H volunteer advisors (leaders) should focus on positive relationships with youth. This research found correlations between support from parents and volunteer advisors and the level of 4-H enjoyment youth reported. Extension should highlight the need to support youth in extra-curricular activities such as 4-H. Although the results of this study indicated positive relationships between adults working with youth, additional work can be done to improve the nature of support for 4-H involved youth. Volunteers can also be trained to build positive relationships between parents and youth participating in 4-H competitive events.
- 4-H Extension Agents can play a role educating sports coaches working with youth in organized sports. Our experience training 4-H volunteers can provide a framework to begin offering positive youth development training for youth sports coaches. Many volunteer sports coaches receive little, if any, training on the topic of working with youth beyond the technical aspects of their sport.
- Extension Agents can collaborate with other organizations (sports, community leagues, Y's, etc.) to develop educational programs targeted towards preparing parents to support youth involved in extracurricular activities in a positive manner.
- 4-H Extension Agents can support community recognition of the positive youth development aspects of involvement in extracurricular activities - beyond the win-loss record. Our visible role in the community can provide a mechanism to open a conversation about healthy competition and positive youth-adult relationships.

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