

Perceptions and experiences of youth footballers registered in nurseries (age13-15)

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Background

- Research on youth footballers has predominantly focused on elite youth football (Sieghartsleitner et al, 2019)
- Experiences of youth footballers with their coaches during the sessions as they progress over the years need to be told by youth footballers (Reeves et al, 2009)
- The Developmental Model of Sport Participation is popular in youth nurseries and informs the processes, pathways, and outcomes associated with sport development throughout childhood and adolescence (Côté and Vierimaa 2015).
- The Long-Term Athlete Development model (Balyi et al. 2013) is planned, systematic, and progressive. The late specialisation phase of this model is essentially a coach-driven, athlete-centred training programme, often used in youth settings.

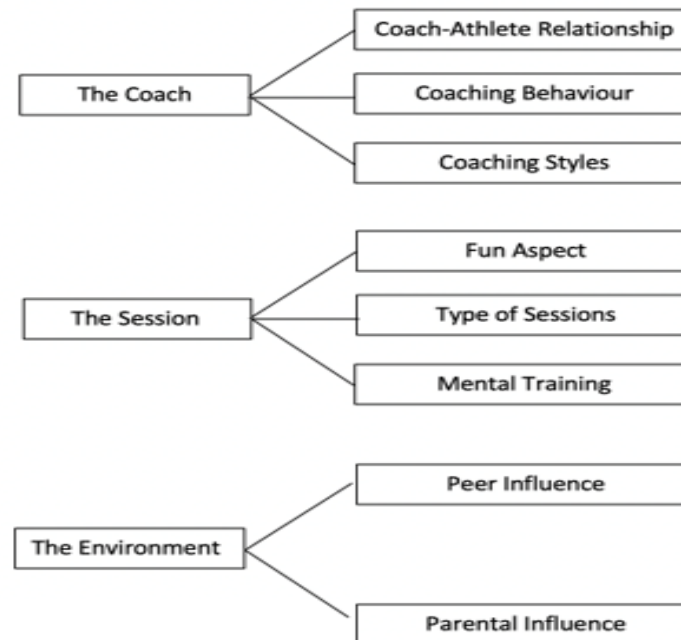
Research Questions

- What are the experiences of youth footballers during the sessions?
- What are the perceptions and experiences of youth footballers regarding their relationships with the coach and peers?

Methodology

- A stratified random sample of six nurseries (participants 13-15 years of age) from the 14 top division football clubs in Malta.
- Six focus groups with 42 youth footballers from six nurseries who volunteered to participate. All were boys.
- Focus groups offered 'deeper' understanding of social phenomena through dynamic group in-depth conversations and deliberation of thoughts, beliefs, and perspectives.

Focus Groups – Themes



Findings

- Footballers want caches that are fair, remain calm, are caring, do not shout and encourage all participants.
- The coaching style impacted resilience, motivation, mental-wellbeing, and decisions for dropouts.
- Most youth footballers preferred to play and enjoy themselves, rather than win every game and not play.
- All participants shared the believe that success and the development of game strategy were important, however, a focus on winning was perceived important to some of the youth footballers.
- When individual youth footballers are bullied, or feel excluded by their peers, coaches have a role to play to prevent and eradicate adverse experiences in youth football.
- Peer relationships were positive, but subgroups and micro aggressions contributed to self-esteem issues.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Youth footballers enjoyed the training and games sessions. Nursery programmes should signpost transitions of continued participation at recreational or elite levels of performance.
- Training for coaches to manage peer and coach relationships; and coaching strategies is desirable as part of the ongoing continuous development of coaches.
- A similar study for girls' youth football is timely.

References:

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