



Benefits and challenges associated with sport participation by children and parents from low-income families

Key Details

KEY WORDS

youth sport, developmental benefits, financial barriers, low socio economic status, physical activity, accessibility

POPULATION GROUP

Youth living in poverty

STEPPING UP THEMES

Health and Wellness

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Canada

SOURCE

Academic

“By creating appropriate systemic conditions/ relations we can capitalize on the concept of relative plasticity and promote PYD. Sport systems may be poised to have a powerful impact on PYD for children from low-income families if there is adequate provision of funding in the future” (pg. 497).

1. What is the research about?

When designed and delivered in an appropriate manner sports programs are generally regarded to promote healthy development in youth. Recent research indicates that less than 10% of Canadian six -19 year olds get the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity six days per week. Overall participation in youth sports has declined over the last 20 years. Participation is correlated with income. Low income family often face barriers to participation because of the large financial commitment it requires, a commitment they may be unable to make. This research is an exploration of the perception of both parents and children in low-income families on the benefits of, and barriers to, youth participation in sport.

This research adds to the body of literature on the positive outcomes of youth participating in sport. This study is of special importance as it focuses on the experiences of low-income families, a group which has been largely absent from the research.

2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place in Edmonton, Alberta.

3. Who is this research about?

This study is an exploration of how low-income parents and children perceive the benefits and barriers of participation in youth sport. Low-income for the purposes of this study refers to families who live below the Low Income Cut Off Measure as determined by Statistics Canada.

4. How was the research done?

This research is an exploratory study qualitative study. The researchers use grounded inquiry to try to understand how social forces influence and inform their experiences. Seventeen low-income families participated in the research, which consisted of one-on-one interviews, guided by a semi-structured guide. Youth and their parents were asked a series of questions to determine what they feel are the benefits of participating in sports, and parents were asked to identify barriers to sports participation for their child or children.

Participants were referred to the research through their involvement in a non-profit located in Edmonton that provides financial assistance to low-income families so that they can participate in organized sports. Participants were given a \$40 gift certificate to a grocery store of their choice for participating.

5. What are the key findings?

Both the youth and their parents reported a direct link between sport and benefits in their lives. Research found that there are two main categories of benefits: social and personal. Social benefits included positive relationships with their coaches, making new friends, and development and improvement of teamwork and social skills. Personal benefits included increased emotional control, increased confidence, more discipline, increased academic performance, weight management, as well as “keeping busy.” Parents and youth also reported that these benefits were not solely observable in reference to sports, rather, they transferred to other areas of the youths’ lives.

Parents identified a number of barriers to participating in sports, including constraints on time, and financial barriers. Both the youth and parents identified possible solutions to address these barriers. Parents reported making compromises and prioritizing sport over other activities as important. They also identified alternatives that would allow their children to play sports, such as volunteering for sporting organizations, or engaging in individual fundraising to raise the funds necessary to finance their child’s sport participation.

Parents also reported a desire to become more aware of funding opportunities and programs geared towards eliminating barriers to participation in sport.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Sports have the potential to promote healthy development, yet low-income youth face a significant barrier to participating in organized sports. This research provides suggestions for improving access to sport participation, thus potentially improving health and positive development outcomes for youth with the lowest socio-economic status.

Sustained involvement in sport is associated with better outcomes, therefore it is important to provide low income youth not only with the means necessary to participate in sport, but the on-going support to continue in their endeavors.

Programs do exist to assist low-income families with the costs associated with sports. However, the respondents in this study report were unaware of many of the programs. Parents and families would benefit from increased visibility of programs that provide address barriers to youth sport participation. Additionally, funding should be increased to non-profits that assist low-income families in their ability to participate in sport.



Holt, N., Kingsley, B., Tink, L., Scherer, J. (2011). Benefits and challenges associated with sport participation by children and parents from low-income families. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*. Vol. 12. 490-499.