

AN EXAMINATION OF THE PERCEIVED RISK POSED BY PEDOPHILIC OR VIOLENT COACHES TO YOUTH SPORT

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Abstract

Background

Millions of children participate in youth sports. In the United States it is estimated that more than 44 million children play organized sports (National Council of Youth Sports, 2008). The majority of these children are coached by volunteer and/or unscreened adult males (Peterson, 2004). The lack of screening on the part of youth sport organizations coupled with the access that they provide to large numbers of children create a ready-made resource pool for unfit coaches. In a youth sport setting, the term "unfit" can be used to describe coaches and officials with a propensity towards pedophilia or other violent conduct. It is estimated that one in three girls and one in seven boys in the U.S. are sexually molested before the age of 18 (Earl-Hubbard, 1996). These numbers do not represent the true extent of sexual abuse because it is estimated that only 10 to 35 percent of incidents are ever reported (Peterson, 2004). Although no one has ever studied the number of child athletes who have been harmed by sexual abuse, it is believed that unfit coaches pose a real threat to youth sports across the globe.

Baker, Connaughton & Zhang (2011) conducted a review of literature and case study on the threat posed by unfit coaches on youth sport. The results revealed that youth sport participants are at their most vulnerable when they are left in the care of unfit coaches without the supervision of parents or other youth sport officials or administrators. The research also revealed that sport is susceptible to a type of pedophile called the seducer; one who tries to win over parents and children to earn trust. Youth sport organizations are vulnerable to the seducer type of pedophile because the coach-athlete relationship naturally provides an avenue for trust. Parents regularly tell their children to respect and obey coaches. Further, successful coaches may earn the respect and admiration of parents,

who in turn give the coach more access to children than what would typically be provided through sport participation. However, the questions remain; (a) how severe is the threat posed by pedophilic coaches to youth sports? (b) Can severity of the threat be assessed via research? The absence of an instrument that measures the severity of the threat posed by pedophilic coaches may account for the lack of attention for this line of research.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study will be to develop a scale to measure the parental perception of the threats posed by unfit coaches to youth sports. This is an exploratory study conducted with the goal of working towards filling the void that exists in this domain and to provide youth sport organizations with data that they can use in implementing policies and procedures directed at protecting participants from unfit coaches.

Methods

We adopted Churchill's (1979) scale development procedures that included the following six steps: (a) specify domain of construct, (b) generate sample items, (c) collect data, (d) purify measure, (e) assess reliability, and (f) assess validity. First, a preliminary scale on perceived risk and the threat of unfit coaches on youth sport was formulated through the review of literature and the Delphi technique. The Delphi panel consisted of eight individuals with expertise in youth sport who were asked to review items for clarity and relevance. Based on 80 percent agreement among the experts, items were retained or added to the scale.

Items were developed based on two dimensions derived from the review of literature: (a) how participants perceive the threat of unfit coaches to youth sport (Risk Perception), and (b) how that perception influences behavior (Behavioral Intention). The survey was administered to 200 parents of former youth sport participants. The study is currently in the final stages of data collection. Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, reliability tests, item to total correlations, and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). To assess the appropriateness of the scale items, item to total correlation will be employed and item correlation less than .2 will be eliminated from the scale. The internal consistency, measured by Cronbach's alpha, will be calculated for the scores of the scales. Items with low reliability (i.e., less than .70) will be evaluated for possible deletion from the scale. Test of construct validity will be assessed via EFA. In the EFA, principal component extraction will be applied, followed by varimax rotation to identify factors.

Results and Discussion

Will be made available on the poster once the study is completed.

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