

Malmö 2018 Special Track: Youth and Sport

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Children's Transition from Participation in Modified Sport Programs to Club Sport Competition - A Longitudinal Study of Patterns and Determinants

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Aim

The aim of this study was to investigate longitudinally, over 4 years, the patterns and demographic predictors (age, socio-economic status and region) of female children's transition from modified sport programs to club sport competition.

Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Participation in organised sport is very popular for young children (Eime, Harvey, Charity, Casey, et al., 2016). Many children participate in entry-level modified sports programs. These programs are modified from the 'adult' version of the sport to match the developmental capacity of young children and are aimed at development of fundamental motor skills and sport-specific skills, rather than competition. There has been limited research on the longitudinal tracking of children in these programs and into club-based competition at later age. The research suggests that the majority of children drop-out of the sport and do not transition into club-based competition (Eime, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2016). Whilst participation in sport is popular for children, there is extensive research showing that participation dramatically decreases during adolescence (Eime, Harvey, Charity, Casey, et al., 2016; Eime, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2016; Howie, Mcveigh, Smith, & Straker, 2016; Olds, Dollman, & Maher, 2009). One recent study of over 520,000 participants, reported that from a peak through ages 10-14 (28% of all participants), participation declined dramatically during ages 15-19 years (15% of all participants) (Eime, Harvey, Charity, Casey, et al., 2016). Furthermore, more females than males drop-out of sport. The aim of this study is to investigate longitudinally, the patterns and demographic predictors (age, sex and region) of children's transition from modified sport programs to club sport competition for females.

Research Design and Data Analysis

This study analysed sport participation for females in a popular Australia sport. Data for this study were collected as part of the Sport and Recreation Spatial project (www.sportandrecreationspatial.com.au). This study drew participants from a female-dominated club-based team sport in the Australian state of Victoria between 2012 and 2016. Players of the modified sports program were followed over four years to determine their pattern of transition: transition to junior player status, withdraw from the sport, or continue in the modified program. Pattern of transition was compared across age (4-10), geographical region (metropolitan/non-metropolitan) and socio-economic status (SES). Logistic regression was used to model the effect of the three factors on the likelihood of transition.

Results

A total of 13,760 children participated in the modified sport in the first year. The majority (59%) transitioned from the modified sport program and into club competition. However the rate of transition varied with age, residential location and socio-economic status, and there was an interaction between region and SES, with SES having a significant influence on transition in the metropolitan region but not in the non-metropolitan region.

The peak sport entry age with the highest rates of transition was 8-9 years.

Of participants in the metropolitan region 66% transitioned, compared to 52% of those in the non-metropolitan region. However, more participants within non-metropolitan regions continued participation compared to metropolitan participants. Furthermore, a higher proportion of non-metropolitan participants withdrew (40%) compared to 31% of metropolitan participants.

SES had a significant effect on the likelihood of transitioning in metropolitan areas, but not in non-metropolitan areas. Those living in metropolitan areas with higher SEIFA values were significantly more likely to transition than those in the lowest tertile. The likelihood of transitioning increased with each SEIFA tertile. In non-metropolitan areas, likelihood of transitioning was similar, in all three SEIFA tertiles, to that of the lowest metropolitan tertile.

Conclusions and Implications

In conclusion, this study has demonstrated that whilst the majority of female participants continued participation and transitioned from the modified sport program and into club competition, the rate of transition was dependent on age of commencement, residential location and socio-economic status. The strongest determinant of transition was age of entry into the modified program. It is recommended that, in order to maximise continued participation, sport policy and strategic developments should target children to enter organised modified sport from around 8-9 years, and not target the very young.

References

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