



The role of parental support and pressure on athletic success: an exploratory study on youth athletes' development

El papel del apoyo y la presión parental en el éxito deportivo: un estudio exploratorio sobre el desarrollo de los jóvenes deportistas

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Received: 13-04-25
Accepted: 30-06-25

How to cite in APA

Sentie, WA, Chekle, B. y Asgedom, T. (2025). El rol del apoyo y la presión parental en el éxito atlético: Un estudio exploratorio sobre el desarrollo de jóvenes atletas. *Retos*, 73, 861-872. <https://doi.org/10.47197/retos.v70.115289>

Abstract

Introduction: Parental involvement plays a pivotal role in shaping the athletic development and psychological well-being of young athletes. While support can enhance motivation and performance, excessive pressure may lead to anxiety and emotional distress. Understanding this dynamic is essential in promoting healthy youth sports experiences. **Objectives:** This study aimed to explore the dual impact of parental support and pressure on the performance and psychological state of young athletes, with particular attention to differences across gender and socioeconomic status. **Methodology:** A mixed-method approach employed, combining quantitative data collected from 100 young athletes through validated Likert-scale questionnaires, and qualitative insights gathered via semi-structured interviews. Statistical analyses included independent T-tests and ANOVA to examine group differences, while thematic content analysis conducted on interview responses to identify recurring emotional and cognitive themes. **Discussion:** Quantitative findings revealed significant differences in perceptions of parental support and pressure across gender and income groups. Male athletes reported higher levels of perceived support, while female athletes expressed greater emotional strain. Qualitative analysis identified key themes such as emotional reinforcement, conditional approval, and performance-related anxiety. Many athletes noted that genuine encouragement from parents increased resilience, whereas conditional praise and high expectations contributed to anxiety and decreased motivation.

Conclusion: The study highlights the complex interplay between parental behavior and youth athlete development. While supportive parenting fosters confidence and persistence, perceived pressure can lead to psychological burdens. These insights underscore the need for parent education programs that promote balanced involvement, particularly in socioeconomically diverse and high-pressure athletic environments.

Keywords

Athlete development, parental pressure, parental support, performance, youth football.

Resumen

Introducción: La participación parental desempeña un papel fundamental en el desarrollo deportivo y el bienestar psicológico de los jóvenes atletas. Si bien el apoyo puede mejorar la motivación y el rendimiento, la presión excesiva puede provocar ansiedad y angustia emocional. Comprender esta dinámica es esencial para promover experiencias deportivas saludables en jóvenes atletas. **Objetivos:** Este estudio tuvo como objetivo explorar el doble impacto del apoyo y la presión parental en el rendimiento y el estado psicológico de los jóvenes atletas, prestando especial atención a las diferencias según el género y el nivel socioeconómico.

Metodología: Se empleó un enfoque mixto, combinando datos cuantitativos recopilados de 100 jóvenes atletas mediante cuestionarios validados de escala Likert, e información cualitativa obtenida mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas. Los análisis estadísticos incluyeron pruebas T independientes y ANOVA para examinar las diferencias entre los grupos, mientras que se realizó un análisis de contenido temático de las respuestas de las entrevistas para identificar temas emocionales y cognitivos recurrentes. **Discusión:** Los hallazgos cuantitativos revelaron diferencias significativas en la percepción del apoyo y la presión parental según el género y el nivel socioeconómico. Los atletas masculinos reportaron mayores niveles de apoyo percibido, mientras que las atletas femeninas expresaron mayor tensión emocional. El análisis cualitativo identificó temas clave como el refuerzo emocional, la aprobación condicional y la ansiedad relacionada con el rendimiento. Muchos atletas observaron que el apoyo genuino de los padres aumentaba la resiliencia, mientras que los elogios condicionales y las altas expectativas contribuían a la ansiedad y reducían la motivación. **Conclusión:** El estudio destaca la compleja interacción entre el comportamiento parental y el desarrollo de los jóvenes atletas. Si bien la crianza con apoyo fomenta la confianza y la perseverancia, la presión percibida puede generar cargas psicológicas. Estos hallazgos subrayan la necesidad de programas de educación parental que promuevan una participación equilibrada, especialmente en entornos deportivos socioeconómicamente diversos y de alta presión.

Palabras clave

Desarrollo del atleta, presión parental, apoyo parental, rendimiento, fútbol juvenil.



Introduction

The development of young athletes is shaped by a multitude of factors, among which parental involvement plays a pivotal role. Parental influence can take many forms, ranging from emotional and financial support to direct involvement in training and competitions. Research has consistently highlighted that parental support can be a critical determinant of athletic success, fostering an environment in which athletes feel motivated, confident, and secure (Jowett & Cockerill, 2003; Gould, 2010). However, while positive parental involvement has shown benefits for the psychological and physical development of athletes, excessive parental pressure has been identified as a significant factor contributing to burnout, anxiety, and decreased performance (Gustafsson et al., 2017; Davis et al., 2020).

In recent years, studies have sought to better understand the delicate balance between support and pressure, as the impact of both extremes on youth athletes is profound. On one hand, supportive parents contribute to an athlete's sense of well-being, helping to build resilience and coping skills, which are essential for success in competitive sports (Wylleman & Lavalée, 2004). Parents who actively encourage their child's athletic endeavors by attending competitions, providing resources, and offering emotional validation can enhance the athlete's self-esteem and motivation (Ravizza, 2015).

On the other hand, the issue of parental pressure, often characterized by high expectations, a desire for success, or the imposition of their own athletic ambitions on their children, has been associated with adverse psychological outcomes such as stress, anxiety, and in some cases, withdrawal from sports altogether (Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1984; Barnett et al., 2018). Research by Hodge and Lonsdale (2017) suggests that athletes who experience high levels of parental pressure are more likely to suffer from performance anxiety, which may negatively affect their athletic performance and lead to early burnout. Parenting practices that include emotional, logistical, and motivational support are consistently linked with greater success and continued sport participation in adolescents (Bois et al., 2009). Furthermore, in cases where parents are overly involved in their child's sporting career, athletes may struggle with autonomy, which is critical for self-motivation and long-term engagement in sport (Gould et al., 2006).

Recent literature has also highlighted the varying effects of parental influence based on the type of sport, the age of the athlete, and even the gender of the athlete (Becker & Wrisberg, 2008). Different studies have suggested that parents' expectations and support may differ for male and female athletes due to societal expectations and gender norms (Lindner et al., 2019). Moreover, the competitive nature of team sports like football and individual sports like tennis may require different forms of parental involvement, influencing both the type and intensity of support or pressure experienced by young athletes (Knight et al., 2016).

Despite this growing body of research, there remains a gap in understanding the nuanced ways in which parental support and pressure interact to affect not only short-term performance but also long-term athletic development and mental health. This study seeks to build upon existing research by investigating the specific roles that different forms of parental involvement play in the development of youth athletes, with particular emphasis on the balance between support and pressure. Through a combination of qualitative and quantitative research, this study aims to provide deeper insight into how parental behaviors influence the psychological and performance outcomes of young athletes, and ultimately, how these factors shape their future success or failure in sports.

Statement of the Problem

The development of youth athletes is influenced by various factors, with parental involvement being one of the most significant and complex. While parental support is widely recognized for its positive impact on the emotional and psychological well-being of young athletes, excessive parental pressure has been linked to negative outcomes, including performance anxiety, burnout, and even early dropout from sports. The challenge lies in understanding how different forms of parental involvement which both supportive and pressuring affect not only immediate athletic performance but also long-term development, mental health, and overall success in sports.

Despite the growing body of research on parental influence, the relationship between parental support and pressure remains underexplored in certain contexts, such as youth team sports or in specific cultural and socioeconomic settings. While some studies suggest that high levels of parental support can

enhance motivation, confidence, and resilience (Wylleman & Lavalée, 2004; Gould, 2010; Farooqui et al., 2025), others point out that when parents impose unrealistic expectations or become over-involved, they may unintentionally hinder their child's enjoyment and success in sports (Gustafsson et al., 2017). This complex dynamic is not fully understood, and there is a need for more research to identify how parents can optimally support their child's athletic development without exerting harmful pressure.

Furthermore, existing literature has predominantly focused on individual sports or elite athletes, leaving a gap in understanding how parental support and pressure influence athletes in youth team sports like football, where social dynamics and group expectations may play a distinct role. There is also a lack of insight into how parental behaviours differ based on gender, age, and sport-specific demands, which may further complicate the impact of parental involvement.

This study aims to address this gap by examining how various forms of parental support and pressure influence the athletic success, mental health, and motivation of youth athletes. By investigating the delicate balance between positive encouragement and excessive pressure, the study will offer practical recommendations for coaches, parents, and sports organizations to foster an environment that supports young athletes' growth, well-being, and long-term success in sports.

Method

This study used a mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research. A cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data at a single point in time, allowing for the examination of relationships between variables (Sentie et al., 2024). Additionally, qualitative interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into the lived experiences of young athletes regarding their parental influences.

Participants

The study targeted youth football athletes aged 12 to 18 years, actively participating in football training programs across different academies. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across different age groups, years of experience, and socioeconomic backgrounds. A total of 100 participants were selected, consisting of 82 males and 18 females. Ethical approval was obtained from the Bahir Dar University institutional review board (numbered: BDU/IRB24/2024). Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and given the right to withdraw at any time. Data were anonymized, and consent was obtained before participation.

Procedure

The study utilized both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the influence of parental support and pressure on youth football players' performance. A structured questionnaire was designed to measure the levels of Parental Support, Parental Pressure, and Performance Impact, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The survey included multiple sections to gather relevant information. The demographic section collected data on age, gender, years of involvement, type of sport, and socioeconomic background. The Parental Support Scale measured the extent of encouragement, emotional backing, and financial investment that parents provided to their children. The Parental Pressure Scale assessed the level of expectations, pressure to win, and negative feedback imposed by parents. Lastly, the Performance Impact Scale captured self-reported measures of confidence, motivation, and skill development among young athletes.

In addition to the survey, semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 10 selected participants from the survey sample. These interviews aimed to gain deeper insights into athletes' personal experiences with parental support and pressure, their perceptions of how these factors influenced their performance, and their emotional responses to parental expectations. The qualitative data provided a more nuanced understanding of the underlying psychological and emotional effects of parental involvement in youth sports.

Data analysis

The quantitative data from the surveys were analyzed using SPSS (Version 28) to identify trends, relationships, and significant differences among variables. Descriptive statistics, including mean, standard deviation, and frequency distributions, were used to summarize the responses and provide an overview of participants' perceptions. Correlation analysis was performed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to examine the relationships between Parental Support, Parental Pressure, and Performance Impact. Furthermore, independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare differences in perceptions of parental support, pressure, and performance impact based on gender and socioeconomic status. Additionally, ANOVA was employed to assess differences across multiple age groups and years of involvement. To determine the predictive relationship between parental factors and performance outcomes, a multiple regression model was applied.

For the qualitative data, interview responses were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved identifying recurring patterns and categorizing them into themes related to emotional support, financial backing, pressure to perform, and psychological stress. The qualitative findings were then compared with the quantitative results to assess alignment or divergence, providing a richer interpretation of the data.

Results

The demographic characteristics of the respondents provide valuable insights into the composition of the study sample. The majority of participants were male (82%), reflecting the higher participation rates of boys in competitive youth football, while female athletes accounted for 18% of the sample. This distribution highlights the existing gender gap in football participation, though female involvement is gradually increasing.

In terms of age, the majority of respondents fell within the 15–16 age group (40%), followed by 12–14 years (35%) and 17–18 years (25%). This indicates that most participants are in their mid-teen years, a crucial stage for athletic development and exposure to competitive football. Additionally, the years of involvement in the sport varied, with 45% of respondents having 4–6 years of experience, while 30% had 1–3 years, and 25% had been playing for more than 7 years. This suggests that a significant portion of the sample has substantial experience in football, which could influence their perceptions of parental support and pressure.

All respondents were engaged in football, making the findings specific to this sport. Regarding socioeconomic status, 40% of participants came from middle-income families, while 35% were from low-income households, and 25% belonged to high-income families. This distribution reflects financial diversity among young athletes, which may affect access to training resources, coaching quality, and overall participation in football.

Table 1. The demographic characteristics of the respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (N=100)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	82	82%
	Female	18	18%
Age (Years)	12–14	35	35%
	15–16	40	40%
	17–18	25	25%
Years of Involvement	1–3 Years	30	30%
	4–6 Years	45	45%
	7+ Years	25	25%
Type of Sport	Football	100	100%
Socioeconomic Status	Low-income	35	35%
	Middle-income	40	40%
	High-income	25	25%

The descriptive statistics presented in Table 2 provide insight into the role of parental involvement in youth football. The mean score of 4.1 indicates that, on average, parents are generally supportive of their children's involvement in football. The standard deviation of 0.7 suggests that there is some variation in



the level of support perceived by athletes. The mean score of 2.8 suggests moderate pressure from parents on their children. The 0.9 standard deviation indicates that there is considerable variation in the perceived level of pressure. With a mean score of 3.7, youth athletes perceive parental support and pressure to have a moderate to high impact on their performance. The standard deviation of 0.8 shows variability in how athletes assess the influence of their parents.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics (n=100)

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Parental Support	4.1	0.7
Parental Pressure	2.8	0.9
Performance Impact	3.7	0.8

Table 3 displays the inter-correlations among questions. All variables were subjected to reliability tests using Cronbach's alpha. Every variable demonstrated that they offered accurate and trustworthy answers. Consequently, Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient table above shows a value of 0.7, indicating strong internal consistency based on the average inter-item correlation. While the constructs used in this study to assess parental support and pressure align with previously validated frameworks of parental involvement in sport (Teques et al., 2018).

Table 3. Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
Parental Support	0.85
Parental Pressure	0.82
Performance Impact	0.88
Overall	0.7

The correlation analysis reveals significant relationships between parental involvement and youth football performance. A moderate positive correlation of $r = 0.62$ ($p < 0.01$) between parental support and performance indicates that greater parental support is associated with better performance outcomes. This suggests that athletes who perceive strong encouragement and involvement from their parents are more likely to report improved performance, highlighting the beneficial role of emotional and motivational support in youth sports.

In contrast, parental pressure shows a moderate negative correlation with performance, with $r = -0.45$ ($p < 0.01$). This finding suggests that excessive parental pressure negatively impacts athletes, potentially leading to stress, anxiety, and reduced performance. When young players feel overwhelming expectations from their parents, they may struggle to focus on skill development and enjoyment, ultimately hindering their ability to perform at their best.

Additionally, there is a small negative correlation of $r = -0.22$ between parental support and parental pressure, indicating a weak inverse relationship. This suggests that parents who provide high levels of support tend to apply less pressure, although the connection is not strong. While some parents successfully balance encouragement without exerting excessive demands, others may struggle to differentiate between support and pressure, leading to varying impacts on their children's performance and psychological well-being. These findings emphasise the importance of fostering a supportive environment while minimizing undue pressure to optimize young athletes' development and success in football.

Table 4. Correlation analysis

Variables	Parental Support	Parental Pressure	Performance Impact
Parental Support	1.00		
Parental Pressure	-0.22	1.00	
Performance Impact	0.62**	-0.45**	1.00

The independent T-test examined differences in Parental Support, Parental Pressure, and Performance Impact between male ($N = 82$) and female ($N = 18$) athletes. Results revealed that male athletes reported significantly higher parental support ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.6$) compared to female athletes ($M = 3.9$, $SD = 0.8$),

with a t-value of 2.31 and a p-value of 0.02. This suggests that male athletes receive more encouragement, financial backing, and involvement from their parents, which may be influenced by societal norms that prioritize male participation in competitive sports.

The gender disparity in parental support could reflect differences in parental expectations, where boys are more often encouraged to pursue sports at a higher level, while girls may receive less direct support due to fewer professional opportunities in football. Additionally, female athletes may perceive lower parental investment due to societal biases or limited female representation in football. This finding highlights the need for greater parental encouragement and support for female athletes to bridge the gender gap in youth sports participation.

Table 5. Gender Differences in Parental Support, Pressure, and Performance (T-Test Analysis) Independent Samples T-Test (Gender Comparison)

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	df	p-value
Male Athletes	82	4.3	0.6	2.31	98	0.02
Female Athletes	18	3.9	0.8			

Table 6 shows a statistical significant difference in Parental Support and Performance Impact between athletes from low-income and high-income backgrounds. Athletes from high-income families reported greater parental support ($M = 4.0$) and a higher performance impact ($M = 3.5$) compared to those from low-income families ($t = -2.30$, $p = 0.02$). These results suggest that financial stability may provide greater access to training, coaching, and sports-related resources, enabling parents to offer better support. Conversely, lower parental support in low-income groups could be due to financial constraints or a lack of time available for active involvement in their children's sports activities. This finding emphasizes the importance of addressing financial barriers in youth sports to promote equal opportunities for all athletes.

Table 6. Independent Samples T-Test

Variable	Group Comparison	Mean (Parental Support)	Mean (Parental Pressure)	Mean (Performance Impact)	t-value	p-value
Gender	Male vs Female	4.2	2.9	3.8	1.89	0.05
Socioeconomic Status	Low vs High Income	4.0	2.6	3.5	-2.30	0.02

The analysis of ANOVA identified a statistically significant difference in Parental Support, Parental Pressure, and Performance Impact across distinct age groups (12–14, 15–16, and 17–18), with an F-value of 4.22 and a p-value of 0.01. This suggests that parental dynamics and their effects on athletic performance vary meaningfully as players age, potentially reflecting developmental or social shifts during adolescence. Similarly, significant differences emerged in perceptions of Parental Support and Performance Impact among participants with varying years of involvement in football, supported by an F-value of 3.58 and a p-value of 0.02. These results imply that prolonged engagement in the sport may shape how athletes perceive parental roles and performance outcomes. Additionally, socioeconomic background significantly influenced Parental Support and Performance Impact, with a robust F-value of 5.12 and a p-value of 0.003, highlighting the critical role of economic factors in shaping both familial support structures and their tangible effects on athletic achievement.

Table 7. ANOVA results

Variable	Group Comparison	Mean (Parental Support)	Mean (Parental Pressure)	Mean (Performance Impact)	F-value	p-value
Age	12–14 vs 15–16 vs 17–18	4.1	2.7	3.6	4.22	0.01
Years of Involvement	1–3 Years vs 4–6 Years vs 7+ Years	4.0	2.8	3.7	3.58	0.02
Socioeconomic Status	Low-income vs Middle-income vs High-income	4.1	2.9	3.8	5.12	0.003

The regression analysis shows that the model is statistically significant ($F(2, 97) = 14.72$, $p < 0.01$) and explains 22% of the variance in performance impact ($R^2 = 0.22$). This suggests that parental support and pressure together play a meaningful role in influencing young athletes' performance outcomes. Parental support emerges as a significant positive predictor of performance impact ($B = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$),



indicating that for every unit increase in perceived support, performance improves by 0.45 units. This finding highlights the critical role of encouragement, motivation, and emotional backing in enhancing an athlete's confidence and ability to perform well.

Conversely, parental pressure is identified as a significant negative predictor of performance impact ($B = -0.32$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that for every unit increase in perceived parental pressure, performance impact decreases by 0.32 units. This result reinforces the notion that excessive expectations and pressure from parents can lead to stress, anxiety, and diminished performance among young athletes. These findings underscore the importance of maintaining a balanced parental approach, where support is maximized while undue pressure is minimized, to create an optimal environment for youth football players to develop and perform at their best.

Table 8. Multiple Regression Analysis (Predicting Performance Impact)

Predictor Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t-value	p-value
Parental Support	0.45	0.12	0.42	3.75	<0.01
Parental Pressure	-0.32	0.09	-0.38	-3.56	<0.01
R ²	0.22				
F-value	14.72				<0.01

Qualitative analysis

To complement the quantitative findings, a thematic analysis of interview data was conducted. This analysis revealed deeper emotional and cognitive responses to parental behaviors, particularly regarding how support and pressure were perceived by young athletes. Three dominant themes emerged: emotional reinforcement, conditional approval, and performance-related anxiety.

"Even when I lose badly, my mom hugs me and says, 'You did your best.' That makes me feel like I'm more than just my results." – Female athlete, age 14

"My dad tells me he's proud no matter what. I think that's why I don't feel scared to take risks during games." – Male athlete, age 16

These responses reinforce the theme of emotional reinforcement as a protective factor. When parents communicated affection and encouragement independently of performance outcomes, young athletes felt emotionally secure. This type of unconditional support allowed them to experiment, take risks, and develop resilience. It nurtured a positive sport identity and reduced fear of failure, which is critical during formative athletic years.

"If I win, my parents post it online and tell everyone. If I don't, they don't say much or even look at me after the match." – Male athlete, age 15

"My performance feels like a test. Like I have to prove myself every time to get their attention." – Female athlete, age 17

"When I don't perform well, they get quiet. That silence feels worse than them yelling." – Female athlete, age 16

Such quotes illustrate the theme of conditional approval, where the athlete's sense of acceptance is based on success. Several participants described how their parents' acknowledgment, praise, or even presence was noticeably tied to their performance. This conditional feedback model contributed to identity tension, where athletes began to tie their self-worth to outcomes, rather than effort, skill development, or enjoyment. This fosters perfectionism and performance-based anxiety, particularly damaging during adolescence.

"I start sweating before the game even starts, just thinking about how my dad will react if I mess up." – Male athlete, age 13

"I like soccer, but sometimes I dread game day because I feel like I'm being judged by my family." – Female athlete, age 14

"Once I heard my dad shouting from the stands after I missed a shot. I cried the whole way home." – Male athlete, age 12



These responses vividly capture performance anxiety triggered by parental pressure. For many young athletes, the psychological burden of not meeting expectations manifested physically and emotionally nervousness, fear of judgment, avoidance behaviors, and in some cases, withdrawal from sport. The perceived surveillance from parents during competitions magnified internal stress, often turning participation into a source of dread instead of joy.

Discussion

Parental support has consistently shows to play a significant role in enhancing the athletic performance of youth athletes. In this study, we found a moderate positive correlation between parental support and performance impact ($r = 0.62$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that athletes who perceive more support from their parents tend to perform better in their sport. This result aligns with the work of Harwood, Cumming, and Fletcher (2004), who found that athletes who receive emotional and practical support from their parents experience better performance outcomes. The positive relationship observed here further supports the idea that when parents create an environment that encourages their child's athletic endeavors whether through encouragement, financial support, or emotional backing athletes feel more confident, motivated, and ready to tackle the challenges that come with sports. Cumming et al. (2018) also emphasized the importance of parental support in helping athletes navigate difficulties, boosting their self-confidence and psychological resilience, ultimately leading to better performance. The findings of this study suggest that supportive parenting plays a critical role in ensuring that young athletes feel empowered and motivated, which directly contributes to their overall success.

On the other hand, parental pressure found to have a detrimental impact on youth athletes' performance in this study. The moderate negative correlation between parental pressure and performance impact ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.01$) suggests that excessive pressure from parents tends to negatively affect the performance of young football players. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown a detrimental effect of parental pressure on youth athletes. Gould, Lauer, Rolo, and Jannes (2016) demonstrated that when parents exert high pressure, it often leads to anxiety, burnout, and reduced performance. Likewise, Barlow and McCarthy (2016) pointed out that youth athletes who are subjected to constant pressure from parents tend to experience lower levels of enjoyment in sports, which further affects their performance (Harwood & Knight, 2009). The negative correlation in this study underscores the fact that when parents focus too heavily on outcomes such as winning or achieving high levels of performance, athletes may feel stressed and overwhelmed. This can lead to feelings of anxiety or fear of failure, which ultimately hampers their ability to perform well. Excessive parental pressure may thus create an environment where athletes are not free to express themselves or enjoy the sport, leading to reduced performance and a greater risk of burnout.

An interesting finding from this study was the gender difference observed in the level of parental support, with male athletes reporting significantly higher levels of support compared to female athletes. Male athletes reported a mean score of 4.3, while female athletes reported a mean score of 3.9, with a significant difference ($p = 0.02$) found between the two groups. This finding contrast with some previous studies, such as those by Barlow and McCarthy (2016), which suggested that female athletes often experience greater parental support due to the historical underrepresentation of women in sports, leading parents to be more supportive of their daughters' athletic pursuits. However, our results align more closely with other studies that indicate male athletes are more likely to receive greater parental involvement. Cumming et al. (2018) found that male athletes tend to experience more direct and active involvement from their parents, likely due to the social value placed on male sports in many cultures. The higher level of parental support in male athletes observed here could therefore reflect the greater societal and familial investment in the success of male athletes.

The relationship between parental support and parental pressure also deserves attention. In this study, we found a small negative correlation ($r = -0.22$) between the two variables, suggesting that parents who are highly supportive tend to exert less pressure on their children. This finding aligns with the perspective put forth by Harwood et al. (2004), who noted that supportive parenting tends to be associated with a developmentally focused approach, whereas pressure often reflects a more outcome-driven mentality. In contrast, parents who focus on achieving external success, such as winning trophies or accolades, may place greater pressure on their child, which could undermine the supportive nature

of the relationship. This reinforces the idea that there is a fine balance between offering support and avoiding overwhelming pressure. When parents support their child's participation in sports and allow for natural development, the child is likely to thrive, but when too much focus is in place on performance outcomes, it can lead to negative consequences.

Finally, the regression analysis in this study highlighted the significant effects of both parental support and parental pressure on performance impact. The positive influence of parental support ($B = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and the negative influence of parental pressure ($B = -0.32$, $p < 0.01$) further emphasize the role that parents play in shaping the performance of their children. These findings are consistent with previous research by Gould et al. (2016), who found that parental behaviors significantly influence the psychological well-being and performance of athletes. Supportive behaviors lead to higher self-esteem, motivation, and confidence, while excessive pressure leads to anxiety and burnout.

The qualitative data provides valuable insights into how youth football players perceive parental support and pressure. Key themes include emotional and financial support, parental pressure, psychological stress, and cultural influences on parental involvement.

Emotional support, such as encouragement and active involvement, found to boost confidence and motivation. Many participants reported feeling more resilient and less stressed when parents provided reassurance without excessive expectations. This aligns with Harwood et al. (2004) and Sentie et al. (2025) who emphasized the role of emotional support in enhancing psychological well-being and performance. Financial support also recognizes as important, particularly in accessing quality training and facilities, but it was not as impactful as emotional encouragement in motivating young athletes (Cumming et al., 2018). Some athletes also described emotional distance or conflict with their parents, especially when performance expectations clashed with their own goals, consistent with findings by Tamminen et al. (2017).

Parental pressure, on the other hand, had negative consequences. Many athletes described feeling anxious or fearing failure due to high expectations, leading to stress and reduced enjoyment. This supports findings by Gould et al. (2016), who linked excessive parental pressure to burnout and dropout. Some athletes focused more on meeting parental expectations than developing a genuine love for the sport, while those with lower pressure reported greater enthusiasm and resilience (Barlow & McCarthy, 2016).

Psychological stress from parental expectations was a common concern, particularly when parents projected their own unfulfilled ambitions onto their children. This stress often resulted in self-doubt and disengagement from the sport. The dynamics between the athlete, parent, and coach can also lead to tension, especially when roles become blurred or expectations misalign (Hellstedt, 1987). Cultural differences also played a role, with athletes from collectivist societies feeling a stronger obligation to meet parental expectations, whereas those from individualistic cultures perceived parental support as more focused on personal development (Cumming et al., 2018).

Some athletes reported a balanced approach from their parents, where they felt encouraged without excessive pressure. Harwood et al. (2004) and Wolfenden & Holt (2005) suggest that the best parental approach is one that fosters motivation and enjoyment rather than focusing solely on performance outcomes. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of balancing support and expectations to create a positive sporting experience for young athletes.

The qualitative content analysis revealed important insights into how young athletes perceive and internalize parental behaviors, highlighting the complex psychological dynamics underlying parental support and pressure. Consistent with previous research, emotional reinforcement emerged as a crucial factor fostering resilience and motivation among athletes. When parents offered unconditional support and encouragement, athletes reported feeling more confident and willing to take risks without fear of failure. This aligns with studies by Urena and Del (2023), which emphasize that positive parental involvement strengthens self-efficacy and enjoyment in sport participation. Emotional reassurance appeared to act as a psychological buffer, enabling young athletes to maintain persistence through setbacks and challenges inherent in competitive sports.

Conversely, the analysis underscored the detrimental effects of conditional approval and excessive parental expectations. Several athletes expressed feelings of anxiety, stress, and diminished self-worth

linked to the perception that parental acceptance was contingent on winning or achieving specific outcomes. This conditionality often led to heightened performance anxiety and even avoidance behaviors, such as feigning illness to escape competition. These findings support the work of Martinez et al. (2024), who identified that pressure-focused parental behaviors contribute to psychological distress and burn-out in youth athletes. The emotional toll described by participants reflects how parental pressure can undermine intrinsic motivation and negatively impact long-term athletic development. Collectively, the results emphasize the need for parents to balance high expectations with supportive communication strategies, fostering an environment where young athletes can thrive emotionally and athletically.

Conclusions

This study sought to explore the impact of parental support and parental pressure on the athletic performance of youth football players. Through both quantitative and qualitative analyses, the findings highlight the significant influence that parental behaviors have on the development and performance outcomes of young athletes.

Parental support, particularly in the form of emotional encouragement and practical involvement, found to have a positive and significant effect on athletes' confidence, motivation, and overall performance. These findings align with previous studies that emphasize the importance of a supportive environment in fostering resilience, self-esteem, and a strong psychological foundation, which in turn enhances athletic success. Athletes who reported higher levels of parental support were more likely to exhibit higher performance levels, as they felt empowered, motivated, and confident in their abilities.

Conversely, parental pressure shown to have a negative impact on performance, contributing to stress, anxiety, burnout, and even dropout in some cases. This finding supports existing literature that warns against the detrimental effects of excessive pressure on young athletes, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach to parental involvement. The study revealed that athletes who perceived their parents as overly focused on outcomes and achievement often experienced a decrease in enjoyment and motivation, ultimately affecting their performance. The negative psychological effects of parental pressure, such as fear of failure and performance anxiety, highlight the importance of creating an environment where athletes allowed thriving without the constant burden of high expectations.

Additionally, the study uncovered a gender difference in the levels of parental support, with male athletes reporting higher levels of support than their female counterparts do. This suggests that cultural and societal factors may shape the way in which parents engage with their children in sports, which could influence the overall experience and performance of youth athletes.

The qualitative data also revealed that the cultural context in which the athletes raised had a considerable influence on the way parental support and pressure expressed. Cultural expectations and values shaped parental behaviors and, in turn, affected how athletes experienced their sport. Understanding these cultural nuances can provide deeper insights into how parents from different backgrounds interact with their children in sports, further emphasizing the need for tailored approaches in fostering positive parental involvement.

In conclusion, this study reinforces the importance of parental support in promoting positive athletic development, while cautioning against the negative consequences of excessive parental pressure. It calls for a balanced approach where parents are encouraged to be supportive and engaged, while respecting the child's autonomy and fostering a love for the sport. Future research should continue to explore the complexities of parental involvement, with particular attention to cultural differences, gendered experiences, and the long-term effects of these behaviors on the well-being and success of youth athletes. By cultivating environments that focus on holistic development and emotional support, we can help young athletes reach their full potential both on and off the field.

Practical Implications

The study highlights the need for youth sports organizations to integrate parental education programs that promote a supportive sports environment. Coaches and academies should implement workshops that teach parents about the impact of emotional encouragement and the dangers of excessive pressure.



Psychological support services, such as counseling for young athletes experiencing stress due to parental expectations, should be made available within training centers. Furthermore, policymakers should consider initiatives to make financial support more accessible, ensuring that young athletes from diverse economic backgrounds have equal opportunities for development. These measures will help create a more balanced and sustainable approach to youth sports training, enhancing both performance and well-being.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully extends sincere appreciation to the youth athletes and their parents who generously contributed their time and insights to this study. Appreciation also extended to the coaches and academy staff who facilitated data collection.

Financing

This research has received a financial grant from the African Union Commission through the Pan African University Life and Earth Sciences Institute (including Health and Agriculture), Ibadan, Nigeria.

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