



Children's participation in organized sport clubs: the role of parents' support and pressure

Participación de los niños en clubes deportivos organizados: el papel del apoyo y la presión de los padres

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Abstract

Introduction: Parents occupy a central role in youth sport, yet their supportive and pressuring behaviors are rarely examined simultaneously within the same family context in relation to children's intention for continued participation.

Objective: The primary aim was to determine whether parental support and pressure, as perceived by both parents and children, predict the child's intention for continued sport participation. A secondary aim was to examine whether parents and children differ in their perceptions of supportive and pressuring parental behaviors.

Methodology: A total of 305 parent-child pairs were recruited from football, basketball, and volleyball academies and clubs in Greece. Both parents and children completed structured questionnaires measuring perceived parental support and pressure on 7-point Likert scales, as well as a single-item measure of intention for continued sports participation.

Results: Multiple regression analyses revealed that parental support was a strong and significant predictor of intention for continued participation in both the parent model ($\beta = .670$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .439$) and the children model ($\beta = .656$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .470$), while parental pressure was not a significant predictor in either model. Paired-samples t-tests indicated that parents rated their own supportive behaviors significantly higher than their children perceived them.

Discussion: These findings are consistent with prior research highlighting the central role of parental support in sustaining youth sport participation, while the non-significant effect of pressure may reflect the relatively low-pressure levels in the sample.

Conclusions: Parental support is the primary driver of participation intentions. Parent-education programs aimed at increasing awareness of supportive behaviors and reducing the perception gap may contribute to improved youth sport retention.

Keywords

Parental support; parental pressure; youth sport participation; intention; parent-child perceptions; sports academies.

Resumen

Introducción: Los padres desempeñan un papel central en el deporte juvenil, sin embargo, sus comportamientos de apoyo y presión rara vez se examinan simultáneamente dentro del mismo contexto familiar en relación con la intención de los niños de continuar participando.

Objetivo: El objetivo principal fue determinar si el apoyo y la presión parental, percibidos tanto por los padres como por los hijos, predicen la intención del niño de continuar participando en el deporte. Un objetivo secundario fue examinar si los padres y los hijos difieren en sus percepciones de los comportamientos parentales de apoyo y presión.

Metodología: Se reclutaron 305 pares padre-hijo de academias y clubes de fútbol, baloncesto y voleibol en Grecia. Tanto los padres como los hijos completaron cuestionarios estructurados que medían el apoyo y la presión parental percibidos en escalas Likert de 7 puntos, así como una medida de un solo ítem sobre la intención de continuar la participación deportiva.

Resultados: Los análisis de regresión múltiple revelaron que el apoyo parental fue un predictor fuerte y significativo de la intención de continuar participando tanto en el modelo de padres ($\beta = .670$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .439$) como en el modelo de hijos ($\beta = .656$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .470$), mientras que la presión parental no fue un predictor significativo en ninguno de los modelos.

Discusión: Estos hallazgos son consistentes con investigaciones previas que destacan el papel central del apoyo parental en el mantenimiento de la participación deportiva juvenil, mientras que el efecto no significativo de la presión puede reflejar los niveles relativamente bajos de presión en la muestra.

Conclusiones: El apoyo parental es el principal impulsor de las intenciones de participación. Los programas de educación para padres dirigidos a aumentar la conciencia sobre los comportamientos de apoyo y reducir la brecha de percepción pueden contribuir a mejorar la retención en el deporte juvenil.

Palabras clave

Apoyo parental; presión parental; participación deportiva juvenil; intención; percepciones padre-hijo; academias deportivas.

Introduction

Organized youth sports provide children and adolescents with opportunities for physical, psychological, and social development (Moulds et al., 2024). Among the various social agents present in youth sport settings, parents occupy a particularly influential position. Their behaviors, attitudes, and expectations shape the sporting experience of young athletes from the earliest stages of participation. Promoting an active and healthy lifestyle among children and teenagers is a key objective. When children are young, parents play a vital role by encouraging their children to adopt these habits early on (Laguna-García et al., 2025). Research interest in the parent-athlete relationship has expanded considerably over the past decades, as documented in a scoping review of parental involvement in organized youth sport (Dorsch et al., 2021). Systematic evidence has further confirmed that parents play a central role in sustaining or undermining young athletes' motivation across different sport contexts (Gao et al., 2024). Parental involvement spans a wide spectrum of actions, from emotional and logistical support to directive and pressuring behaviors. The nature and intensity of these behaviors can influence not only the child's sport enjoyment but also broader developmental trajectories. Understanding the distinction between supportive and pressuring conduct is therefore central to explaining variation in youth sport outcomes. Structured parent-education programs have been proposed as a means to promote positive involvement, though the evidence base for their effectiveness remains under development (Burke et al., 2024). 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 (Sentie et al. 2025).

Parental support has been consistently associated with positive motivational and developmental outcomes in young athletes. Supportive behaviors, such as encouragement, emotional availability, and acknowledgment of effort, strengthen intrinsic motivation and sport enjoyment. Athletes who perceive higher levels of parental support report greater satisfaction with their sport experience and stronger intentions to continue participating (Moraes, 2022). The positive influence of support extends beyond the motivational domain to outcomes such as self-confidence, emotional regulation, and athletic development. In team sport environments, parents also interact with coaches, and the quality of these relationships can indirectly shape the athlete's experience and sense of belonging (O'Donnell et al., 2022). At the same time, parents' awareness of sport-related issues such as early specialization and injury prevention appears limited, suggesting that well-intentioned support may sometimes lack informed direction (Bell et al., 2020). These findings indicate that parental support functions as a protective factor for sustained engagement when it is perceived positively by the young athlete. The distinction between intended and perceived parental support has therefore received increasing attention in the research literature.

In contrast to support, parental pressure has been linked to negative psychological outcomes and reduced sport enjoyment among young athletes. Excessive expectations, controlling feedback, and conditional regard can undermine autonomous motivation and elevate performance anxiety (BR, 2024). The impact of pressure appears to vary depending on the specific behavioral profile that parents exhibit. Research adopting a person-centered approach has identified distinct profiles of parental motivating and demotivating behaviors, with certain combinations of pressure and control being particularly harmful to the athlete's well-being (Morbée et al., 2023). Parental pressure affects not only the immediate quality of sport participation but also the athlete's longer-term engagement trajectory. Adolescents who perceive high levels of directive or pressuring parental conduct are more likely to devalue their sport and ultimately withdraw from organized activities (Jaf et al., 2023). These patterns are especially concerning during adolescence, a period when autonomy needs intensify and sensitivity to external control increases. Despite the recognized importance of both supportive and pressuring parental behaviors, their simultaneous examination within the same family context remains insufficiently explored in relation to the child's intention for continued sport participation.

Dropout from organized youth sport is a widely recognized concern among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers. Systematic reviews and meta-analyses indicate that dropout rates increase substantially during adolescence, with individual, social, and contextual factors contributing to this trend (Back et al., 2022). Late adolescence represents a particularly vulnerable period, during which

motivational decline and competing life demands accelerate withdrawal from sport (Zhang et al., 2024). The Process-Person-Context-Time model provides a framework for understanding dropout as a multidimensional phenomenon that unfolds across developmental stages (Moulds et al., 2024). Within this framework, discrepancies between parents' and children's perceptions of parental involvement have emerged as a relevant factor. Parents tend to evaluate their own involvement more favorably than their children perceive it, and these perceptual gaps may generate misunderstandings that erode the quality of the sport experience (Hernandez et al., 2020). Studies comparing perceived and desired parental behavior have revealed a consistent pattern, with young athletes reporting a preference for less directive involvement than they actually receive (Bonavolontà et al., 2021; Mastroilli & Greco, 2020). Such discrepancies highlight the importance of assessing both perspectives when studying the influence of parents on youth sport participation.

Despite the growing body of research on parental influence in youth sport, several gaps persist in the existing literature. Most studies have been conducted with Western European or North American populations, and evidence from Southern European countries, including Greece, remains limited (Dorsch et al., 2021). Few investigations have simultaneously examined both parental support and pressure as predictors of future participation intention while also comparing the perceptions of parents and children within the same sample. Research spanning multiple team sports and including participants from different developmental stages is equally scarce. The present study addresses these limitations by examining perceived parental support and pressure among children and adolescents aged 9 to 15 years who participate in organized team sports. We collected data from 305 parent-child pairs involved in football, basketball, and volleyball clubs across Greece. The primary aim was to determine whether parental support and pressure, as perceived by both parents and children, predict the child's intention for continued sport participation. A secondary aim was to examine whether parents and children differ in their perceptions of supportive and pressuring parental behaviors.

Method

Participants

The sample consisted of 305 parent-child pairs recruited from organized sports academies and clubs in Greece. Children ranged in age from 9 to 15 years ($M = 11.58$, $SD = 1.84$), with the majority being boys ($n = 231$, 75.7%) and the remaining being girls ($n = 73$, 23.9%). Participants were drawn from three team sports: football ($n = 130$, 42.6%), basketball ($n = 94$, 30.8%), and volleyball ($n = 58$, 19.0%), while 22 children (7.2%) reported participation in more than one of these sports. Regarding the parent completing the questionnaire, 114 responses (37.4%) were provided by mothers only, 78 (25.6%) by fathers only, and 112 (36.7%) by both parents jointly. The selection of participants followed a convenience sampling approach. All participants provided informed consent before data collection, and parental consent was obtained for children under the age of 18. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional review board.

Instruments

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered to both parents and their children. The questionnaire was organized into distinct sections measuring parental behaviors and intentions for continued sports participation.

Parental support. Perceptions of parental support were assessed using a 6-item (e.g. When my child says that he/she wants to enroll in a sports activity or a class, I believe it is a good idea/ I try to make sure that I buy whatever my child needs in order to participate in sports activities, such as a uniform or equipment) subscale for each parent (father and mother) as proposed by Anderson et al (2003). Items were rated on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Both a parent version and a child version of the subscale were administered, allowing for comparisons between the support that parents reported providing and the support that children perceived receiving. Higher scores indicated greater perceived parental support.

Parental pressure. Perceptions of parental pressure were measured using a 10-item subscale for each parent (e.g. I pressure my child to enroll in sports activities or classes that I am not sure he/she actually

wants / When it comes to my child's activities, I have high expectations), as proposed by Anderson et al. (2003). Items were rated on the same 7-point Likert scale. As with the support subscale, both parent and child versions were administered. Higher scores reflected greater perceived parental pressure.

Intention for continued participation. Intention to continue sports participation was assessed using a single item rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (very unlikely) to 7 (very likely). Both parents and children responded to this item independently. The parent version specifically referred to the intention for their child to continue participating in organized sports.

Demographic information. The questionnaire also collected demographic data from both parents (age, education level, occupation, marital status, number of children) and children (age, gender, sport, years of participation). Additional contextual information included the cost of sport participation and the distance from home to the training facility.

Procedure

Questionnaires were distributed to six public and private academies and clubs, both in paper and electronic form. They were administered to parent-child pairs in order to compare their opinions. Parents and children completed their questionnaires independently to minimize response bias. The parent questionnaire assessed self-reported supportive and pressuring behaviors toward their child's sports participation, while the child questionnaire measured the child's perception of the same parental behaviors. Parents' intention to send their children to the same activity again the following year was also investigated, in comparison with their child's desire. Data collection took place during regular training sessions, and participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. All responses were recorded and organized in a spreadsheet for subsequent analysis.

Data analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using Python (version 3.x) with the pandas, scipy, and statsmodels libraries. The analytical procedure followed five sequential steps. First, internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha for each subscale (support and pressure) across all four respondent conditions: parent-reported father support, parent-reported mother support, child-perceived father support, and child-perceived mother support, as well as the corresponding pressure subscales. Values above .70 were considered acceptable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

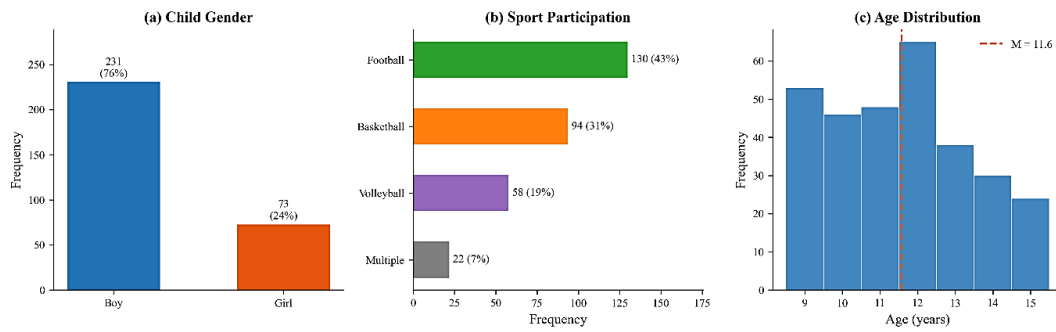
Second, descriptive statistics were computed for all measured variables, including means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values, skewness, and kurtosis. Third, multiple linear regression analyses were conducted separately for parents and children, with intention for continued participation as the dependent variable and the combined support and pressure scores as independent variables. The combined support score was calculated as the mean of the father and mother support subscale scores, and the combined pressure score was computed in the same manner. Fourth, paired-samples t-tests were performed to compare parent and child perceptions of support and pressure for each parent separately (father and mother) and for the combined scores. Effect sizes were reported using Cohen's *d*, with values of .20, .50, and .80 interpreted as small, medium, and large effects, respectively (Cohen, 1988). All tests were evaluated at the .05 significance level.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The final sample included 305 parent-child pairs. The distribution of children by gender, sport, and age is presented in Figure 1. The sample was predominantly male (75.7%), reflecting the higher enrollment of boys in the selected team sports in the Greek context. Football was the most common sport (42.6%), followed by basketball (30.8%) and volleyball (19.0%). The age distribution showed that the largest group of participants was 12 years old (21.3%), with a mean age of 11.58 years (*SD* = 1.84). In terms of parent respondents, mothers comprised 37.4% of respondents, both parents jointly 36.7%, and fathers 25.6%.

Figure 1. Distribution of children by (a) gender, (b) sport participation, and (c) age.



Internal Consistency Reliability

Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all subscales are presented in Table 1 and illustrated in Figure 2a. All subscales demonstrated acceptable to excellent internal consistency. The support subscales showed very high reliability, with alpha values ranging from .965 to .971 across both parent and child versions. The pressure subscales yielded somewhat lower but still acceptable values, ranging from .769 to .821. These findings confirm that the measurement instruments produced reliable scores in the present sample.

Table 1. Internal Consistency Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha) for All Subscales

Subscale	Items	N	α
Parent Support (F)	6	304	.965
Parent Support (M)	6	304	.968
Parent Pressure (F)	10	304	.769
Parent Pressure (M)	10	304	.798
Child Support (F)	6	304	.969
Child Support (M)	6	304	.971
Child Pressure (F)	10	304	.808
Child Pressure (M)	10	304	.821

Notes. F = Father; M = Mother; Values above .70 indicate acceptable internal consistency

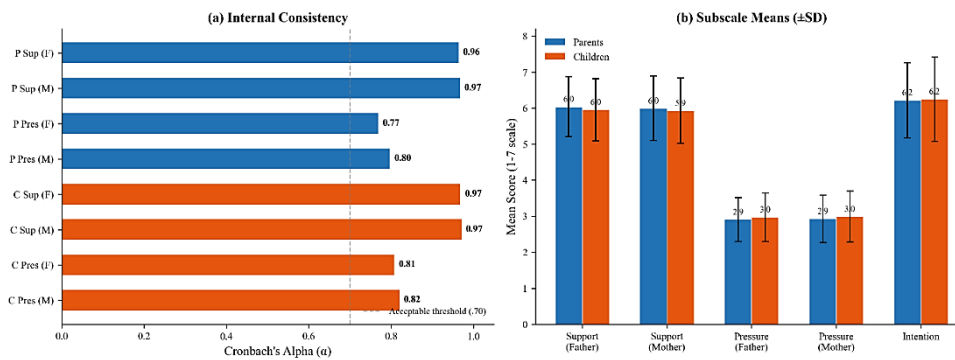
Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics for all measured variables are presented in Table 2 and visualized in Figure 2b. Parents reported high levels of support for both fathers (M = 6.04, SD = 0.84) and mothers (M = 5.99, SD = 0.90) on a 7-point scale. In contrast, pressure scores were relatively low for both fathers (M = 2.90, SD = 0.61) and mothers (M = 2.93, SD = 0.66). A similar pattern emerged from the children's responses, with high perceived support (father: M = 5.95, SD = 0.86; mother: M = 5.92, SD = 0.91) and low perceived pressure (father: M = 2.97, SD = 0.67; mother: M = 2.99, SD = 0.70). Intention for continued participation was high for both parents (M = 6.22, SD = 1.04) and children (M = 6.25, SD = 1.17). The support subscales showed negative skewness, indicating a ceiling effect, while the pressure subscales were approximately normally distributed.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for All Measured Variables

Variable	N	M	SD	Min	Max	Skew	Kurt
P. Support (F)	304	6.04	0.84	1.0	7.0	-1.78	7.58
P. Support (M)	304	5.99	0.90	1.0	7.0	-1.68	5.67
P. Pressure (F)	304	2.90	0.61	1.0	5.0	-0.03	0.79
P. Pressure (M)	304	2.93	0.66	1.0	5.2	0.21	0.76
Parent Intention	301	6.22	1.04	1.0	7.0	-1.89	5.18
C. Support (F)	304	5.95	0.86	1.0	7.0	-1.52	5.97
C. Support (M)	304	5.92	0.91	1.0	7.0	-1.46	4.86
C. Pressure (F)	304	2.97	0.67	1.0	5.4	0.25	1.03
C. Pressure (M)	304	2.99	0.70	1.0	5.5	0.34	0.96
Child Intention	300	6.25	1.17	2.0	7.0	-1.52	1.39

Figure 2. Internal consistency coefficients (a) and mean subscale scores with standard deviations (b) for parents and children.



Notes: P. = Parent-reported; F = Father; M = Mother; C. = Child-reported. All subscales are measured on a 1-7 scale.

Regression Analysis

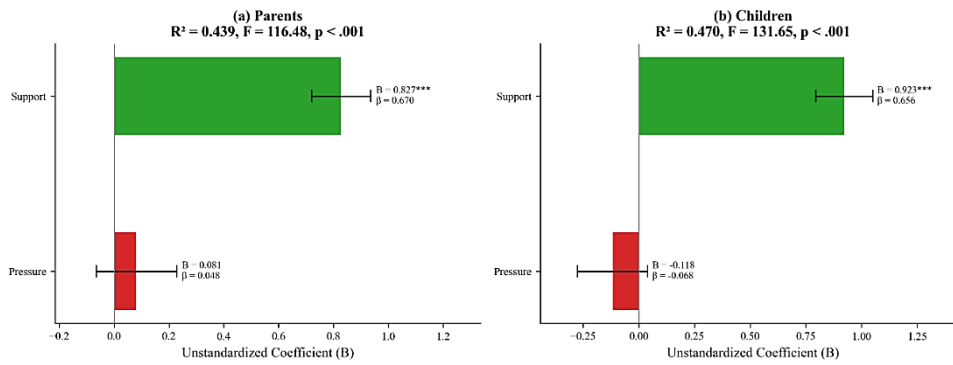
Two separate multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to examine whether parental support and pressure predicted intention for continued sports participation. In each model, the combined support score and the combined pressure score served as independent variables, and intention served as the dependent variable. The results are presented in Table 3 and illustrated in Figure 3. For the parent model, the regression was statistically significant, $F(2, 298) = 116.48, p < .001$, with the two predictors explaining 43.9% of the variance in parent intention ($R^2 = .439$, Adjusted $R^2 = .435$). Support was the only significant predictor ($\beta = .670, p < .001$), indicating that higher levels of self-reported parental support were strongly associated with higher intentions for their child to continue in organized sports. Pressure did not significantly predict parent intention ($\beta = .048, p = .276$).

For the children model, the regression was also significant, $F(2, 297) = 131.65, p < .001$, accounting for 47.0% of the variance in child intention ($R^2 = .470$, Adjusted $R^2 = .466$). Again, perceived support was the only significant predictor ($\beta = .656, p < .001$), while perceived pressure was not significant ($\beta = -.068, p = .143$). The direction of the pressure coefficient in the children's model was negative, suggesting a weak and non-significant trend toward lower intentions when children perceived more pressure.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analyses Predicting Intention for Continued Participation

Parents Model						
Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
(Constant)	0.998	0.428	—	2.33	.020	[0.16, 1.84]
Support	0.827	0.055	.670	15.17	< .001	[0.72, 0.94]
Pressure	0.081	0.074	.048	1.09	.276	[-0.07, 0.23]
$R^2 = .439$, Adjusted $R^2 = .435$, $F(2, 298) = 116.48, p < .001$						
Children Model						
Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
(Constant)	1.100	0.531	—	2.07	.039	[0.06, 2.14]
Support	0.923	0.065	.656	14.24	< .001	[0.80, 1.05]
Pressure	-0.118	0.080	-.068	-1.47	.143	[-0.28, 0.04]
$R^2 = .470$, Adjusted $R^2 = .466$, $F(2, 297) = 131.65, p < .001$						

Figure 3. Regression coefficients for the parent model (a) and the children model (b). Green bars represent support; red bars represent pressure. Error bars indicate 95% confidence intervals.



Parent-Child Perception Comparisons

Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to compare parent self-reported behaviors with child-perceived behaviors on the support and pressure subscales. The results are presented in Table 4 and illustrated in Figure 4.

For support, parents rated their own supportive behaviors significantly higher than their children did. The difference was significant for both the father subscale (parent M = 6.04, child M = 5.95, $t(303) = 2.75, p = .006, d = 0.158$) and the mother subscale (parent M = 5.99, child M = 5.92, $t(303) = 2.42, p = .016, d = 0.139$). Although statistically significant, the effect sizes were small according to Cohen's conventions.

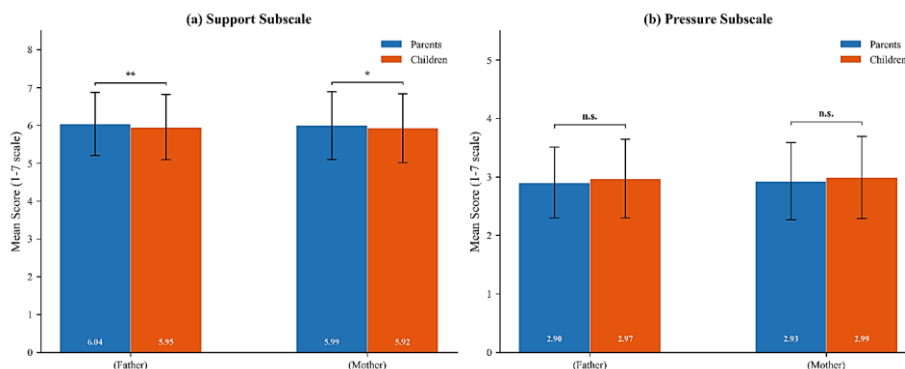
For pressure, children reported slightly higher levels of perceived pressure compared to what parents reported exerting. However, these differences did not reach statistical significance for either the father subscale (parent M = 2.90, child M = 2.97, $t(303) = -1.87, p = .062$) or the mother subscale (parent M = 2.93, child M = 2.99, $t(303) = -1.82, p = .069$). The combined pressure comparison also failed to reach significance ($p = .061$). These results suggest that parents and children largely agree on the levels of pressure, while a small but consistent gap exists in the perception of support.

Table 4. Paired-Samples t-Tests Comparing Parent and Child Perceptions

Subscale	Parent M(SD)	Child M(SD)	ΔM	t	df	p	d
Support (F)	6.04(.84)	5.95(.86)	+0.08	2.75	303	.006**	.158
Support (M)	5.99(.90)	5.92(.91)	+0.07	2.42	303	.016*	.139
Support (C)	6.01(.85)	5.94(.88)	+0.08	2.67	303	.008**	.153
Pressure (F)	2.90(.61)	2.97(.67)	-0.07	-1.87	303	.062	-.107
Pressure (M)	2.93(.66)	2.99(.70)	-0.06	-1.82	303	.069	-.105
Pressure (C)	2.91(.62)	2.98(.68)	-0.07	-1.88	303	.061	-.108

Note. F = Father; M = Mother; C = Combined. Cohen's d: small $\approx .20$, medium $\approx .50$, large $\approx .80$. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Figure 4. Parent versus child mean scores on the support subscale (a) and the pressure subscale (b). Error bars represent standard deviations. Significance indicators: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, n.s. = not significant.



Discussion

The present study examined the role of parental support and pressure in shaping children's and adolescents' intention for continued participation in organized team sports. Data from 305 parent-child pairs were analyzed to determine whether self-reported and perceived parental behaviors predicted the intention to continue in sports academies and clubs, and whether parents and children differed in their perceptions of these behaviors. The findings revealed three main patterns. First, parental support emerged as a strong and significant predictor of intention for continued participation in both the parent and children's models, explaining approximately 44% and 47% of the variance, respectively. Second, parental pressure was not a significant predictor of intention in either model. Third, parents rated their own supportive behaviors significantly higher than their children perceived them, while perceptions of pressure did not differ significantly between parents and children.

Parental Support and Intention for Continued Participation

The finding that parental support was the strongest predictor of children's intention to continue in organized sports is consistent with a growing body of evidence linking supportive parental behaviors to positive motivational outcomes in youth athletes. Gao et al. (2024), in their systematic review of the role of parents in the motivation of young athletes, concluded that parental support functions as one of the most consistent predictors of intrinsic motivation and sustained engagement across different sports and age groups. Similarly, Silva et al. (2022) argued that it is necessary to promote supportive parental behaviors, while parents involved in their children's sports context should express guiding behaviors, without an emphasis on winning, competition, or pressure in training, and encouraging rivalry. The present results align with this conclusion, as the standardized regression coefficients for support were substantial in both the parent model ($\beta = .670$) and the children model ($\beta = .656$). Sentie et al. (2025) similarly reported that parental support was positively associated with athletic development and continued engagement among youth athletes, reinforcing the idea that encouragement, emotional availability, and logistical assistance from parents contribute meaningfully to young athletes' desire to remain in sports. Moraes (2022), working with both individual and team sport athletes, also found that perceived parental support was significantly related to self-determined motivation, a construct closely linked to the intention to persist in sport. The consistency of these findings across different cultural contexts, sports, and methodological approaches strengthens the position that parental support represents a stable and robust influence on youth sport participation.

From a practical standpoint, the strength of the relationship between support and intention highlights the value of actively cultivating supportive parental behaviors in youth sport settings. Burke et al. (2024), in their systematic review of parent-education programs in youth sport, found that structured interventions can effectively increase supportive behaviors among sport parents, including praise, encouragement, and emotional responsiveness. The present findings provide empirical support for the implementation of such programs in Greek sports academies and clubs, where formalized parent education initiatives remain limited. Dorsch et al. (2021), in their historical scoping review of parent involvement in organized youth sport, argued that the field has evolved from viewing parents as passive spectators to recognizing them as active agents who shape the quality of the youth sport experience. The present results are in line with this perspective, as the strength of the support-intention link suggests that parents are not merely present in their children's sporting lives but actively influence whether children choose to continue.

Parental Pressure and Participation Intention

Contrary to expectations, parental pressure did not significantly predict intention for continued participation in either the parent or children model. In the children model, the coefficient for pressure was negative ($\beta = -.068$) but did not reach statistical significance ($p = .143$), suggesting only a weak and unreliable tendency for higher perceived pressure to be associated with lower intentions. This finding warrants careful interpretation, particularly because the pressure scores in the present sample were relatively low ($M = 2.90$ to 2.99 on a 7-point scale), which may have restricted the range of variance available to detect meaningful effects. BR (2024) examined the impact of parental pressure and involvement on youth sport participation and reported that moderate levels of pressure were not necessarily detrimental to participation, while only extreme or persistent pressure was associated with

negative outcomes. The present sample may reflect a context in which pressure levels were too low to exert a measurable influence on intention.

The non-significant effect of pressure should not be interpreted as evidence that pressure is irrelevant to youth sport participation. Several studies have documented the negative consequences of excessive parental pressure on related outcomes such as sport enjoyment, anxiety, and burnout, which may eventually lead to dropout. Back et al. (2022), in their systematic review and meta-analysis of dropout from team sport among adolescents, identified parental pressure as a contributing factor in the decision to discontinue participation, particularly when combined with other negative social influences. Jaf et al. (2023) found that the interplay between parental behaviors and adolescents' sports-related values was central to understanding dropout, with controlling parental behaviors undermining the internalization of positive sport values. The present study measured pressure and intention at a single time point, which may not capture the cumulative effects of pressure over time. Pressure may influence dropout through indirect pathways, such as reduced enjoyment or increased anxiety, rather than directly affecting stated intentions. Future longitudinal research would be needed to test such mediating mechanisms.

Moulds et al. (2024), in their systematic review of youth sport dropout using the Process-Person-Context-Time model, emphasized that dropout is a complex, multifactorial process that unfolds over time and is influenced by interactions between personal characteristics, social agents, and contextual factors. The present findings are consistent with this view, as pressure alone did not account for variance in intention when support was already in the model. Zhang et al. (2024) reported similar conclusions in their systematic review of why students drop out of regular sport in late adolescence, noting that the interplay of motivational, social, and contextual factors produces dropout outcomes that cannot be attributed to a single predictor. Together, these results suggest that in the present sample, the protective effect of high support may have overshadowed any negative influence of the relatively low-pressure levels.

Differences Between Parent and Child Perceptions

The paired samples t-tests revealed a small but statistically significant discrepancy between parent and child perceptions of support. Parents rated their own supportive behaviors higher than their children reported perceiving, with significant differences found for both the father support subscale ($p = .006$, $d = 0.158$) and the mother support subscale ($p = .016$, $d = 0.139$). Although the effect sizes were small, the consistent direction of this gap across both parental figures suggests a systematic tendency for parents to overestimate the extent of their supportive behaviors relative to how children experience them. Bonavolontà et al. (2021), studying perceived and desired parental behavior among male soccer players aged 11 to 14, reported a similar pattern in which children perceived lower levels of praise and emotional support than what parents believed they were providing. Hernandez et al. (2020) also documented divergent perceptions between parents and children regarding factors influencing sport participation, with parents tending to view their own involvement more favorably than their children did. These converging findings point to a perception gap that, while modest in magnitude, may have practical implications for the quality of the parent-child relationship within the sport context.

The perception gap in support is consistent with the multi-informant approach advocated by Morbée et al. (2023), who identified distinct profiles of parental (de)motivating behaviors that differed depending on whether parents or children served as the source of information. Their findings emphasize that relying solely on parental self-reports can produce an inflated picture of supportive behavior, as parents may lack awareness of how their actions are perceived by their children. Mastrorilli and Greco (2020) reached a comparable conclusion, reporting that children's ratings of parental involvement were systematically lower than parents' self-reports, particularly in dimensions related to emotional support and praise. O'Donnell et al. (2022), in their qualitative study of parent and coach relationships in youth sport, described how parents often held positive self-assessments of their involvement that were not fully shared by the young athletes or their coaches. The present results add quantitative evidence from a Greek sample to this growing body of multi-informant research, reinforcing the importance of assessing both perspectives when studying parental influence in youth sport.

For pressure, children reported slightly higher levels than what parents acknowledged exerting, but these differences did not reach statistical significance (father: $p = .062$; mother: $p = .069$). The direction of this trend is noteworthy, as it suggests that children may be somewhat more attuned to pressuring

behaviors than parents are willing to recognize. However, the lack of statistical significance prevents strong conclusions. Bell et al. (2020) found that parents were often unaware of the extent to which their behavior could be perceived as pressuring, particularly in contexts involving early sport specialization. The near-significant results in the present study suggest that a larger sample or more sensitive measurement instruments might reveal significant differences in pressure perceptions as well. From a practical perspective, even non-significant trends in pressure perception deserve attention, as small discrepancies may accumulate over time and contribute to the gradual erosion of sport enjoyment.

Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the present findings. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inferences about the relationship between parental behaviors and participation intentions. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in support, pressure, and intention over time would provide stronger evidence for directional effects. Second, the sample was drawn from three team sports (football, basketball, volleyball) in the Greek context, which limits the generalizability of the findings to individual sports, other cultural settings, or different age groups. Third, the relatively high support scores and low-pressure scores suggest possible social desirability bias, particularly among parents, who may have reported more favorably on their own behaviors than was warranted. Fourth, intention for continued participation was assessed using a single item, which limits measurement reliability and may not capture the full complexity of the decision to persist in or withdraw from organized sport. Fifth, the sample was predominantly male (75.7%), reflecting enrollment patterns in the selected sports but limiting the ability to examine gender-specific effects. Sixth, the study did not assess potential mediating variables such as sport enjoyment, self-determined motivation, or athlete burnout, which may help explain the mechanisms through which support influences intention.

Implications and Future Directions

Despite these limitations, the present study contributes to the understanding of parental influence in youth team sports in several ways. The finding that support, rather than pressure, drives participation intentions has direct implications for how sports academies and clubs engage with parents. Programs that help parents recognize and increase their supportive behaviors, while maintaining awareness of how their actions are perceived by their children, could strengthen young athletes' commitment to continued participation. Burke et al. (2024) have shown that parent-education interventions can achieve these goals when properly designed and implemented. The perception gap identified in this study further underscores the need for structured feedback mechanisms that allow parents to understand how their behaviors are experienced by their children. Sports organizations could implement brief, standardized assessments of both parent and child perceptions at regular intervals, enabling early identification of misalignments that might otherwise go unnoticed.

Future research should adopt longitudinal and multi-wave designs to examine how changes in parental support and pressure relate to changes in participation intention and actual dropout behavior over developmental periods. The inclusion of mediating variables, such as sport enjoyment, autonomy, and competence perceptions, would help clarify the pathways through which parental behaviors influence youth sport outcomes. Studies should also extend to individual sports and to more diverse cultural samples, as the dynamics of parental influence may differ across sport types and sociocultural contexts. Gao et al. (2024) have called for increased attention to culturally specific patterns of parental influence, and the present Greek sample represents a step in that direction. Finally, intervention research that tests specific parent-education curricula in Greek youth sport settings would provide evidence on whether the associations documented here can be translated into practical improvements in the youth sport experience.

Conclusions

The present study investigated the influence of parental support and pressure on children's and adolescents' intention for continued participation in organized team sports, using matched parent-child data from 305 pairs in Greek football, basketball, and volleyball academies. The results provide clear evidence that parental support is the primary driver of participation intentions for both parents and children, explaining a substantial proportion of the variance in both models. Parental pressure, in

contrast, did not significantly predict intention in either model, although this finding should be interpreted in light of the relatively low-pressure levels reported in the sample.

From a research perspective, the study contributes to the existing literature by providing evidence from a Greek sample, addressing the call for research in diverse cultural contexts. The use of matched parent-child data strengthens the findings by enabling direct comparisons between self-reported and perceived parental behaviors. However, the cross-sectional design, the reliance on self-report measures, and the single-item assessment of intention represent limitations that future research should address. Longitudinal designs, the inclusion of mediating variables such as sport enjoyment and perceived competence, and the extension to individual sports and broader age ranges would enhance the understanding of how parental behaviors shape youth sport trajectories over time.

In summary, parental support matters more than parental pressure in predicting whether young athletes intend to continue in organized team sports. Parents and children do not always agree on the level of support provided, and this gap deserves attention from both researchers and practitioners. Investing in parent awareness and education may represent a meaningful strategy for improving youth sport retention and the quality of the youth sport experience.

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