

The Overall Perceived Availability and Quality of Social Support among the Youth Membership of Four Galway City Juvenile Sports' Clubs

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ABSTRACT

By participating in sports, many young people in Ireland gain great benefits. Although many of the obvious benefits can involve physical health and fitness, there are other social advantages for these youth too. In Ireland, the most popular sports are its native Gaelic games which are followed by both young men and young women. Often, young Irish people are involved in these games and as a result spend a lot of time socialising through this involvement. This paper established the overall perceived availability and quality of social support among the youth membership of four Galway City juvenile sports' clubs. It discovered that in general the research participants are happy to be involved in their respective clubs and that they gain benefits from them too. The results show that many of the 130 young people in the study perceived they have good social relationships with acceptance, happiness, trust, and respect being considered to be valuable traits for them. Another outcome of this paper has shown that many of the research respondents feel they have strong family networks. All of these results are discussed within this paper that illustrates the strength of the perceived social support by young participants of these sports' clubs in the west of Ireland.

KEYWORDS: native Gaelic games, sports club, social support.

1. Introduction

In Ireland the most popular sports are its native Gaelic games ([Hussey, 2021](#)). For young males the most well-liked of these games to partake in are hurling and Gaelic football. Young females also play the female gender equivalent sports of camogie and ladies Gaelic football which are run by other organizations.

This study concentrates on the perceptions of 130 adolescents from four different sporting clubs of Galway city. All of the clubs are situated on the east side of the city, and the participants were researched throughout a single playing seasons. Despite their being distinct similarities in these clubs, all of the clubs are unique in their own right not least due to the various primary and post primary schools which their members were or are a part of.

Two of the clubs under the St. James name are Gaelic football clubs, different only by being separated by their female and male gendered members. The other two clubs

come from the Castlegar area of the city and are mainly dissimilar for the same reason. Although both games that they partake in originate from the ancient Irish game of hurling, the female version of this game is instead referred to as camogie.

Within the study the young people's perceptions of social support, friendship, and empathy, were examined. The clearest comparisons throughout the study are that the clubs differ in having either female or male participants and there is an array of age groups involved also.

Theoretically, the study focuses on the characteristics of Positive Youth Development (PYD) which supports the need for young people require and that they must have positive outcomes throughout their life (Shek, Dou, Zhu, Chai, 2019).

Fundamental to this article's strength is that within the setting of any community, sport is a good context for personal development to occur (Coakley, 2016). As competence, confidence, caring, and compassion, are the basis of PYD the author believes that when a positive connection exists between a Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) club and its young people positive traits are magnified in their lives (Lerner, et al; 2015). By pursuing these traits as progressive outcomes of being involved in the GAA, it overcomes any other potential disadvantages that may be present for young people from the same involvement and so as a result, a greater overall personal development occurs for young club members.

Outside of formal schooling, young people experience various forms of youth work where social support of some kind has been present in Ireland for decades (De Roiste, 2009). However, in the most recent decade social media and technological advancements have also impacted the social development of young people. This can be either a determinant or an enhancement to a young person's perception of their well being and this results from how this media is being used (Smith, Leonis, and Anandavalli, 2021).

For young people adolescence is a time of development and it is important that any time spent by them out of formal schooling will develop them holistically as this is a time of life that illuminates vulnerability as well as young potential (Erikson, 1968, p.96).

Although young people receive wisdom to enhance their self knowledge from formal schooling (Socrates, 2019) non formal education can heighten a young people's motivation (Puspitarini, and Hanif, 2019). Instead of concentrating on a formal organised structure, non formal education allows for skill, knowledge, and activity to be carried out in a differently organised way (Europe, 2018). Much of this involves forms of leadership that include that of coaching, mentoring, and a well being awareness.

Coaching enables individuals to be counselled as they attempt to achieve their goals (Psychology Today, 2023). Formally accredited by the International Coaching Federation (ICF) which originated in 1992, life coaching finds out a person's current reality and attempts to project them to more positive future outcome. Similarly, mentoring tries to allow a more junior mentee avail of a sounding board of a more senior role model within their industry (Association for Talent Development, 2023). Mentoring can transform a person's character and guide them through good

leadership. Ideally, good leadership influences another person positively (Martin, 2017).

In the case of this study, the research came from the voluntary adult leadership who participated in a type of youth work involvement. Like those adults, the youth who were researched were cognisant that they could stop participating in their sports' clubs involvement if they so wished and they could choose to cease being part of the research project at any time also.

In this paper we establish the overall perceived availability and quality of social support among the youth membership of four Galway city GAA juvenile sports' clubs. We begin by utilising the quantitative data collected using the Social Network Questionnaire (SNQ) and the Social Provision Scale (SPS) and then focus on the observations collected which were drawn from the usage of the Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule. Finally, qualitative data collected using semi structured interviews of were included also.

2. Methods:

Being emotionally supportive and leading with a loving behaviour in a social community gives members of that network what authors Bowlby (1969) and Weiss (1974) state in Veieland Baumann (2014) a type of essential human need.

In order to establish how that human need was perceived by the youth of these four sports' clubs it was important to employ the best possible methodology available.

The data for this paper came from a comprehensive study entitled 'An exploration of the perceived friendship, social support, and understanding of empathy among the membership of four Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) Juvenile Clubs'. Respondents from that study were recruited via the availability of the young people in the sporting clubs of Galway city throughout that period. In all this comprised of 177 potential research respondents, and of them, 130 young people decided to take part in the research project. The field work began in early 2018 and was completed at the end of that year and the analysis and writing up of the thesis occurred in 2019 and in 2020. Owing to the fact that the Covid-19 pandemic occurred in the early half of 2020 (Suka, Yamauchi, and Yanagisawa, 2021) and many universities' educational services were compromised, there was a delay in publishing this paper for peer review up until now.

Respondents were recruited by being sent self-addressed envelopes with a prepaid stamp on them which had letters of invitation and information sheets for them to read. Within there were also letters for their parents/ guardians and consent forms for the young peoples' parents and for themselves. Everyone had to fill out these forms before any young person could partake in the research. Following this an information session was hosted for all young people and their parents and guardians who were also interested. Finally, as this was a study on young people the author went through a rigours ethical assessment of his work before an expert ethics committee.

Once the letters of consent were received from the parents/ guardians and the young people who wanted to partake in the research, and the ethics committee were pleased with the study's design, objectives, and procedure, 130 young people filled out the SNQ, the SPS, and the Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule. From there the researcher observed 64 young people spread evenly across all four sports' clubs and then interviewed 20 young people with an even break down of semi- structured interviews from all four clubs as well.

In order to establish the overall perceived availability and quality of social support among the youth membership of four Galway City GAA juvenile sports' clubs the tools used to measure the quantitative data were decided upon as they aligned with this objective in the most ideal manner.

Throughout the study, the SNQ discovered who was in the young person's social network. Designed in 1987, the Social Provision Scale (SPS) measures the availability of social and emotional support as well as the social integration for those that fill out the scale. For the purposes of this paper, the final quantitative data was collected using the Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule. The schedule was reduced and adapted for the young people being researched. Finally, qualitative data utilised semi-structured interviews of research respondents.

Table 1 Showing the total of people who participated in this research study

Total Number of Research Participants:	Survey: (Comprising of the Social Network Questionnaire and the Social Provision Scale)	Observations: (the Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule created by Tony Attwood, 1999)	Interviews: (Semi-Structured)
130 (n=130)	130 (n=130)	64	20

3. Results:

Establishing the overall perceived availability and quality of social support among the youth membership of four Galway city juvenile sports' clubs firstly involved discovering quantitative survey results. This came from using the SNQ, the SPS, and the Indices of Friendship Observation Schedule. Once that was addressed, the qualitative results were collected which involved a series of semi-structured interviews within the four different sports' clubs.

The quantitative results found that most of the research respondents had more than two people in their social network and in relation to these people, they described their friendships as being good. Just under half (46%, n=60) of all those researched perceived that they had three to five close confidante friends who they referred to as being close to them and people who they could confide in. A vast majority (83.8% , n= 109) replied that they had 'friends they could turn to 'if they required that type of support'. Also, there were more males than females who perceived that those they referred to as their friends were more than willing to help them if and when help was needed by them,

The younger respondents of the study felt more confident than the older ones that

they would be aided by those in their life's social network. Acceptance and happiness was a common theme of three quarters of the respondents when they reflected upon what they got from their interactions with others. Feeling that they could depend on their brothers or sisters in their network was the response of two thirds of those surveyed and a vast majority of respondents thought they had strong family networks also.

Overall, the traits of trust and respect were how most of the respondents defined what good friendship represented to them. In summarising what positively affected their friendships, they reported that socialising (or real life talking), self awareness, and good leadership qualities were to the foremost.

4. Discussion:

It's clear that while trying to explore the overall perceived availability and quality of social support among the youth membership of four Galway city juvenile sports' clubs there are five main outcomes that are important to discuss at this stage.

They are that the respondents feel they have strong family networks and they have good quality friendships with people they deem to be close and confidante friends.

Added to that, fewer females than males perceive they have an availability of help from their friends and the respondents viewed that acceptance and happiness was in existence if required from their supporters. Lastly they believed that, leadership and real life socialising, trust, and self awareness influenced good quality friendship.

As a result of these findings the implications for the GAA, the Ladies Gaelic Football Association (LGFA), the Camogie Association, other juvenile sporting organisations and other out of school agencies are that young people who partake in these clubs want to have their views heard.

At the end of this study it was clear that by allowing the young people to give their views it verified what PYD believes which states that if you give a young person the opportunity they will confidently speak their mind. The outcomes of the research also evidently showed that the young people in the study were aware of the other principles of PYD. This was seen when they realised what the difference between what good friends were in comparison to other people in their social network. In so doing, they illustrated that they understood what caring is and the importance of compassion between people stands for. By the sporting associations and other out of school agencies that these young people partake in not only listening to but also seeking out the opinions of young people it will improve their organisations. It will allow more people to grow up as more responsible and independent adults who are better equipped to reach their individual potential than those who are not partaking in organisations like this.

As the vast majority of both female and male research respondents from all of the four clubs perceive they are supported by their parents therefore these young people's experiences of being supported should provide a concrete basis of helpful knowledge for which the individual sports' club officials can reproduce and it will guide other young people in their clubs in the future. Also, as young people want to

air their views they are more likely to feel appreciated by their clubs and so possibly more open to becoming future volunteers that will help others young people in their club in time too.

These results show that in spite of their being many blended families present in Irish society at present, the traditional family unit is still in existence within these four sports clubs.

As there is an inter-relationship of friendly values within and across these four clubs as well it important for all sporting organisations and out of school agencies to understand exactly what each young person perceives as 'family' for them individually. In doing so, it promotes an overall family feeling within clubs and organisations so that each individual young person feels properly part of their club. In so doing, this maximizes their learning opportunities whilst they participate in clubs, organisations, and agencies.

Young people go through adolescence and often experience frequent changes so it was good to see that they felt they have at least two constant friends in their social network who do not reside within their family homes. Due to their being so many changes in that period of life a positive feature of this study showed they have a good external support structure outside of their family units. Having these people also means that they have a greater chance of meeting other people in their support network. This can be done through their perceived friendships and will only broaden their perspectives of other types of people too.

All sporting clubs and out of school agencies need to know the amount and value of influence that their young members are being exposed to within their homes and throughout a typical week. This will enable them to provide a more holistically developed atmosphere for their young club participants.

Sporting clubs such as these in the study present two or more close and confidante friends for their young members and this proves the positive socialisation that their clubs give. By other clubs, associations, and agencies putting more emphasis on developing relationships within their organisations they give rise to co- networking opportunities for all. This will only increase the likelihood of their clubs membership growth and ties into deeper links with other community projects.

For devolving males who often spend less time with their families it's important for all organisations that welcome them to take account of their feelings of what a 'good' friendship is. From there 'trust' can be deepened which gives the opportunity for male leaders that will be more all rounded in their relationship skills for the future.

When the outdoor sports season finishes this deepening of trust will continue for all clubs and organisations who provide indoor alternatives for this form of positive male bonding to develop. This will enable them to become better communicators with their peers and to experience the outcome of these trusting relationships sooner and as they grow.

When the off season is over this will only heighten team relationships within clubs and competitive agencies too which will stave off the ever growing research that

communicates many mental health issues with young males (Gonzales, et. Al. 2022). As the adolescents in the study reported that awareness was an important trait for them, it is imperative for sporting clubs and out of school agencies to give tools and education to deepen young people's awareness. Activities that allow for the opening of the mind and body such as yoga, tai chi, and mindfulness approaches are growing in popularity (Lavretsky, 2019). By making them a central cog in young peoples out of school education is will benefit their development too.

Youth clubs within sporting clubs that avoid focusing on sport but more so on the socialisation of its members will enable young people to participate in natural and specialised activities without the pressure of competing and this will eventually mature their members to be better competitors in the future.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, as this article sought to explore the overall perceived availability and quality of social support among the youth membership of four Galway city GAA juvenile sports' clubs, it's clear to see that as young people sense good quality friendships and have close confidante friends, and most respondents appreciate and feel that acceptance and happiness exists in their friendships that there is a very good availability of social support according to the young people researched.

Parallel to this is that less females than males perceive they would be helped by their friends yet most of both genders perceive that trust, self awareness, real life socialising, and leadership are good facets of friendships. This proves that in general, there is a good quality of social support for participants of sports' clubs that cater for young members of the GAA, LGFA, and the Camogie Association in Ireland. It must be noted that although this study has positive outcomes, it only shows four sporting clubs in one major city in Ireland and is only reprehensive of the specific sports that are being studied and so further research into more sports clubs are recommended to establish if all sports give the same positive outcomes for young people too.

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