

# RELATIONSHIP PERCEPTIONS

Relationship Perceptions between Coaches, Athletes, and Parents in Irish Underage Football

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### **Abstract**

Underage football in Ireland has changed over the last few years. The emergence of League of Ireland (LOI) underage sections that compete in regionalised leagues have seen a shift in young boys and girls leave local leagues and play at a higher level designed to have the best players training and playing together and against one another. The relationships between the coaches, athletes, and parents in these new structures are key to this process being successful. This study examines the perceptions of the interpersonal relationships between coaches, athletes, and parents at this level using an 11-item measure. The Positive and Negative Processes Coaches, Athletes, and Parent's questionnaire (PNPCAP) is a valid brief measure for assessing interpersonal relationships among coaches, athletes, and parents (CAP). 282 participants, 120 parents of players in the LOI Under 14 (N=27) Under 15 (N=27) Under 17 (N=42 male) Under 17 WNL (N=24 female), plus the athletes themselves from seven LOI clubs and 42 coaches operating at the higher levels of underage football agreed to take part in the study. Results indicated that coaches were less satisfied with the interpersonal relationships than either athletes or parents. Athletes also scored lower on negative group processes than parents, which indicates they are less satisfied with the interpersonal relationships. Future research is needed to examine these relationships, with the aim of providing interventions or adaptations to coach and parent education.

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## Literature Review

This literature review will focus on the relationship between young athletes, their parental support structures, and the relationship with their coaches. The parent/athlete relationship has been studied extensively over the last 30 years (Sheridan et al., 2014), examining both positive and negative support structures. Parents are tasked with encouraging their child to participate in sports and making it accessible to them. This can lead to the child/athlete having an enjoyable and rewarding experience that will remain with them over the course of their lifetime. However, the opposite is also true, if a pressuring or stressful experience must be endured while taking part in sports. These negative interactions can lead to early drop out, unfulfilled potential, and, in some cases, health issues (Ommundsen et al., 2004). Although the relationship between coaches, athletes, and parents has been studied to some degree, until recently there has been very little research that examines the relationship between all three constructs of these relationships (Danioni et al., 2017 ; Sommerfield & Tsz, 2020).

Several research studies will be discussed, along with their relevance in providing interventions to enhance enjoyment and provide education and a positive learning environment for young athletes so that they may develop into young adults. Interventions can also be applied to support parents in their understanding of how their children learn, as well as their involvement in assisting this process to enable the most enjoyable learning environment for their child. Coaches will also be better equipped to design practises which create the appropriate learning climate, allowing their athletes to progress in a development pathway and which encourages autonomy and creativity.

Most of the focus has been on the relationship between the athletes and the support structures required to enable positive development. Dropout rates of young players in Ireland are on the increase and, in one sport alone, this was represented by over 19% of participants between the ages of 12 and 16 years leaving organised sport (Lavelle et al., 2019). The importance of young children becoming involved in sports activities outside of the school setting is the responsibility of the parent/guardian (Ommundsen et al., 2006). Indeed, parents who understand the psychosocial and academic benefits that sports have to offer young children will pursue activities that they themselves enjoyed or that their child shows an appetite for (Ommundsen et al., 2006). As such, the parent-athlete relationship is the main support at this age, as transport, finance, logistical, and emotional support are heavily relied upon by the athlete.

A common theme running through the research is the belief/ value system and how parents' values and beliefs are transmitted to their child. Values are defined by Schwartz's (1992) theory of basic human values, as trans-situational goals which guide people's behaviours across contexts and time. Lee, Whitehead, Ntoumanis, & Hatzigeorgiadis, (2008) classification of sport values as moral values is described as contract maintenance of the relationship and obeying the rules laid down in order to structure the relationship. Competence values are described as achievement in skill acquisition and displaying skills on the pitch. The status values describe how the athletes' public image is viewed and the significance placed on winning. The relationships between parents' values, their child's values, and how that relates to the motivational climate created for the child can impact upon the development and enjoyment experience (Lee, et.al, 2008). Indeed, Babkes & Weiss (1999) found a strong relationship between a child and parents' own and perceived competence, status, and moral values in a sports setting. This study found that, how a child

perceives a parent's values in sport, will predict the values they hold in competence and motivation (Babkes & Weiss 1999). Other studies have found a relationship between parents' beliefs and their child's own perception values in sports ability. McCullagh et al. (1993) also found that the relationship between a parent's perceptions of their children's ability playing football will impact how young players rate their own ability. Babkes and Weiss (1999) found similar results, but also added that children's positive perceptions of their parent's beliefs in their ability and competence also increased the child's enjoyment and intrinsic motivation to continue playing and achieve more from their sport, lessening their risk of early drop out and increasing the opportunities of reaching their potential.

A study that compared the opinions of children and their parent's involvement found that children believed that their parent was a lot more involved than the parent realised (Goodman & James, 2017). Indeed, the study of Goodman & James (2017) found that parents' over-involvement was due to directive behaviour before, during, and after games and training. The three biggest items that related to this were the children being advised 'what they needed to work on', 'what led to them playing poorly in a game', and 'how to improve their techniques' (Goodman & James, 2017). While feedback from parents has been seen as positive for children, the delivery of said feedback can make all the difference. Although this study, by Goodman & James (2017) found more positive feedback than negative, the structuring of the parental feedback changes the nature of how criticism is perceived by each child. As such, a compliment can often be followed up with instructions on how to proceed next, thus leaving a negative connotation (Goodman & James, 2017). By investigating this area further and improving the knowledge around parental involvement, a more enjoyable sports experience can be achieved by children and their parents.

Modern coaches working with young players are now expected to have a much wider range of skills, knowledge, and expertise in order to develop players to reach their potential. Technical, tactical, and physical conditioning are no longer enough to deliver the outcomes expected at the highest levels (Goodman & James, 2017). Wylleman (2000) identified the need to investigate the interpersonal relationships that ultimately define the development process for young players. This study discovered very little research had been published to understand or measure the Coach-Athlete-Parent triad of relationships (Wylleman, 2000). Since then, there has been an increase in research in both the relationships and measurements, Ommundsen et al. (2006) found coaches are now tasked with creating specific motivational climates, communicating with parents and players around individual development strategies, providing feedback, and developing a holistic approach to the long-term athletic development plan for the player. In a review of social support in youth sport, Sheridan, Coffee, & Lavallee (2014) and Greendorfer (2002) found that coaches play a critical role in how they can influence the development of young players. For instance, if a player believes a coach has faith in their ability, then they will perform better; however, if they believe their coach does not trust their ability, then that will impact their development negatively. Coaches that can offer the support and appropriate development structure to their players – which involves knowing more about their players lives than just their football experiences and aspirations – will have the opportunity to form stronger bonds with the player (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). This support has been shown to impact enjoyment, intrinsic motivation, and the development of key competencies (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2007; Ortín et al., 2016). Camiré et al. (2012) also found coaches' behaviours, attitudes, and values are imitated by their players, not only in sports settings, but in other contexts of players' lives too. Thus, coaches can create a suitable environment that promotes the development of athletes' life skills that

are transferrable into other areas such as forming other relationships and workplace environments (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007).

Two theories of how young athletes can be better developed, which include interaction between coaches, athletes, and parents, are: Self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2000) and Coach created motivational climate (Duda & Balaguer, 2007), which have its foundations in (AGT) Achievement goal theory (Nicholls, 1989). Self-determination theory supports the concept that there are three basic needs for athletes to stay involved in sport. The first need is autonomy - having your own choice and a voice to be heard when expressing that voice. The second is competence - having the belief that you are good enough to complete a task and will not be criticised for making mistakes while trying. The third is relatedness - the sense of belonging that comes with feeling part of a team and the people around you care for your wellbeing. Coaches and parents that can create this type of environment will have athletes that value learning over winning and the intrinsic motivation to continue when tasks are tough, knowing they are supported. Research (Ntoumanis, 2001; Ommundsen, 2006; Duda & Balaguer, 2007) shows that coaches and parents who recognize these factors and who can work together will play a key role in their athletes reaching their full potential (Sommerfield & Tsz, 2020). Indeed, autonomy support from coaches and parents has been shown to lead to higher levels of intrinsic motivation in young athletes and better relationships within sport (Sommerfield & Tsz, 2020). The relationship between the coach and the athlete has been recognized as an important factor in creating positive educational sports experience for athletes that will carry over into adulthood. However, it is important to note that coaches in Camiré et al.'s (2012) study did not specifically report how other relationships (e.g., parents, siblings, teammates, and peers) influence how they coach

life skills through sport. As a result, going forward, more studies are needed to explore how other elements of athletes' pre-existing relationships influence the coaching of life skills.

In examining difficulties that might arise in coach-athlete interpersonal relationships, Lisinskiene (2018) recruited ten highly qualified and experienced coaches who had spent an average of twelve years' coaching adolescent athletes between the ages of 12-17 years old. Through structured interviews, it was found that the most important issues/themes for coaches, and the difficulties they faced in coach-athlete interpersonal relationship:

1. the need for psychological skills,
2. the need of educational skills,
3. the need for social skills (Lisinskiene, 2018).

An educational programme was created from the results which combined psychological, educational, and social skills into their coaching sessions. The results of the study showed a positive impact on coach-athlete interpersonal relationships, recognising that behavioural, cognitive, emotional, and social changes had occurred. Indeed, the coaches reported the quality of their interactions had changed positively in the following areas: trust, communication, cooperation, encouragement, and a connection between athletes and the coaches (Lisinskiene, 2018).

This current study may have similar implications for coach education and lead to improved outcomes for coaches and young players by implementing interventions appropriate to the needs of young players and how coaches can create that structure.

The roles played by parents and coaches will significantly affect the development of young players. Enjoyment, participation, longevity, and overall affinity to sport will remain

with them and be carried well into adulthood (Ommundsen et al., 2006). When parents and coaches are perceived to be overly critical of performances, and value winning and giving more attention to the best players, young players report less belief in their football capabilities and spend more time stressing about their performance, as a result (Ommundsen et al., 2006). Quantifying how the C-A-P relationships can be accurately described and calculated has been a source of debate for many researchers (Jowett & Ntoumanis, 2003), with qualitative case studies and relevant literature used to generate items for an instrument that measures affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of the coach–athlete relationship. Lisinskiene et al. (2019) recognized that evaluating these interpersonal relationships was a factor in understanding how these relationships functioned. Indeed, a study examining these relationships will have benefits for coaches, athletes, and parents by informing each of the constructs of how the perception of their relationships are seen by the other members. Educating coaches on how understanding each athlete and their parent and how their relationship operates can give a coach a better insight into interacting with both in order to achieve a more enjoyable experience for all, which can lead to more fulfilling relationships. Parents who are aware of how their behaviour and advice impacts their child’s enjoyment may realise that a coach’s role is different to their role, and trust the coach to do their job, as a result. Conversely, parents who are educated in how to best support their child, while knowing their involvement is valued, may also be encouraged to engage more with the C-A-P relationship. In addition, an athlete that benefits from interventions based on placing more emphasis on effort and achievement may have a more enjoyable and fulfilling sport experience where potential can be reached (Sommerfield & Tsz, 2020). The PNPCAP Lisinskiene et al. (2019) was developed as a brief measure to examine the positive and negative processes involved in the C-A-P relationships. Assessing these relationship perceptions and how they might be adapted to create the best development environment for

young players in Ireland may create more opportunities for positive outcomes for players, parents, and coaches. Increasing the likelihood of continued sport involvement into adulthood for players, parents who are educated in how to support the child and coach will enjoy a better relationship with their child and feel valued by the coach. Furthermore, coaches who gain more knowledge in how best to provide a positive learning environment for their players will become more sought after and enjoy a more fulfilling environment to operate in.

### **The Current Study**

The research question I am asking in this study is as follows:

*“How are the relationship between Coach, Athlete and Parents’ perceived and evaluated by all three members?”*

The aim of this research is to investigate how the interpersonal relationships between coach, athlete, and parent operate in Ireland. By evaluating these relationships, we can understand where adaptations may be required or support strategies needed, that provide assistance for coaches and parents in providing a more enjoyable experience for young players, leading to a lifelong association with football.

Previous studies in this area have analysed player development from the coaches-athletes’ perspective (Allen & Hodge, 2006; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007), and the parents-athletes’ perspective (Babkes & Weiss, 1999; Averill & Power, 1995). These studies have shown that the interpersonal relationships are complex and difficult to understand.

Only one previous study has combined all three C-A-P elements in a single quantitative study (Lisinskiene et al., 2019). The positive and negative processes in the Coach-Athlete-Parent Questionnaire (PNPCAP) was developed to evaluate positive and negative group

processes in an 11- item measure. The two sub scales include trust and support on the positive C-A-P items and over-involvement on the C-A-P negative items. Acquiring this information will guide further examinations of these relationships and encourage future research in Ireland. This is important, as very little is currently known regarding this. Parental support and pressure have been identified as a factor in young athletes' competency perceptions, whereby coaches can influence young athletes in continuing on in sport or dropping out early (Ommundsen et al., 2006). This study aims to describe these relationship perceptions for coaches, athletes, and parents operating at the higher levels of underage football in Ireland.

From the above, the following research questions and hypotheses are developed:

1. **Research Question 1:** Is the relationship perception different for coaches, athletes, and parents?
  - a. **First Hypothesis:** The perception of C-A-P relationships will be different for coaches than parents or players.
2. **Research Question 2:** Will coaches have a more negative view of their relationship with parents?
  - a. **Second Hypothesis:** Coaches will report less satisfaction with their relationships with parents than parents will.

## Methods

### Participants

The research sample for the current study consisted of 30 coaches, 120 athletes, and 120 parents from the following LOI age groups: U14 boys (N=27), U15 boys (N=27), U17 boys (N=42), and U17 WNL (N=24), from seven LOI clubs.

Due to GDPR legislation, parents and athletes could only be contacted through the authors personal contacts within the League of Ireland (LOI) clubs. This was due to the author conducting independent research and not as part of an FAI study. This setback severely reduced the number of participants contacted in the time required. Parents and athletes were contacted through the LOI club they were registered to and provided with the survey information sheet (see appendix C and D) explaining the survey aims and directions to the participation link. These were athletes holding a current registration with the LOI club in the season 2020 and 2021. The parent most involved with their child's football participation was asked to complete the questionnaire (see appendix A), and to comply with ethical considerations, parents were asked to confirm consent before the athlete could access their questionnaire. Parents and athletes from the LOI U14-U15-U17 boys and U17 Women's National League (WNL) were asked to participate. The head coach from each of the age groups, as registered with the LOI club, were also invited to participate. The FAI Coach Education department sent out the questionnaire to all participants currently undertaking their UEFA license courses, which included UEFA A, UEFA Elite Youth A, and UEFA B license courses. To comply with ethical considerations, all coaches were given an information sheet (see appendix B) with the study aims, purpose of the study, and their involvement criteria, as well as the link to the online questionnaire.

## Measures

The 11-item PNPCAP inventory Questionnaire was used in this study. Psychometric evaluation of the PNPCAP revealed that the scale had good internal consistency, as well as a satisfactory construct and predictive validity, Cronbach alpha being reported .87(Lisinskiene, et.al, 2020) in this current study Cronbach Alpha coefficient is .54. The low Cronbach alpha may be explained by this study examining not just athletes scores as in the previous study but the athletes, coaches and parents scores as well. Each participant completed either a coach, athlete, or parent edition of the questionnaire. All questions were answered using a 5-point Likert scale system, with the answers ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The PNPCAP has two subscales, one is a positive scale to represent values such as trust and support, while the other subscale represents negative values such as being too demanding and over involvement. The PNPCAP developed by Lisinskiene et al. (2019b) has been used to assess 12-18-year-old adolescent athletes, their coaches and parent in similar youth sport settings.

## Design and Analyses

In this current study, I used a cross-sectional research design with data relating to a specific point in time, collected by way of a Google forms survey. A one way between groups ANOVA was conducted to determine the total positive scores being the criterion variable in participants (CV). The predictor variables in this instance were : (PV) Group 1, Coaches N=30, (PV) Group 2, Athletes N=60, (PV) Group 3, Parents N=60, (PV) (group 3 parents were unrelated to the athletes in group 1). The same procedure was then carried out with the CV being total negative score to produce a total score for both subscales. A new data set was recorded and a one way between groups ANOVA was conducted to examine if parents at

different age groups (PV) Group 1, U14 N=27,(PV) Group 2, U15 N=27, (PV)Group 3 U17 N=66, had significantly different (CV) positive and (CV) negative scores as they moved through the age groups. . A G\*Power application power analyses, with the accepted minimum level of significance ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05 and the expected power ( $1-\beta$ ) of 0.80 a medium effect size of 0.05, indicated 45 participants would be required.

### **Procedure**

Parents, athletes, and coaches were contacted from the authors personal contacts at LOI clubs and through the FAI coach education department. An information sheet setting out the aims and objectives of the study, the criteria for their involvement, the time it would take, and their participation requirements was explained in this communication. Participants were informed that their involvement was completely voluntary and their right to not take part or withdraw at any time is optional. The potential risk or discomfort to participants was outlined and the steps to be taken if any discomfort was felt were also explained in the information sheet. Contact details for support services were provided on the information sheet should they be required. As noted, the 11-item PNPCAP inventory Questionnaire (Lisinskiene et al., 2019b) was used in this study. All questions will be answered by using a 5-point Likert scale system. The answers will range from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Participants will be sent instructions to access the online study questionnaire with completion details and timelines. Parents must consent to their child's participation by ticking the consent prior to accessing the questionnaire. They will then complete the questionnaire before the players can access their survey. Coaches will receive the same instructions to access their section of the online questionnaire before submitting it online.

A reminder was sent out to all participants one week before the deadline. Any questions regarding the questionnaire or the process involved were addressed at this time.

LOI clubs were sent a reminder three days before the deadline and asked to communicate this to their parents and players. After the deadline, all responses were downloaded from Google forms in excel format and then transferred to SPSS for analysis. The responses were then then grouped to separate parent and unrelated athlete responses. The coach's responses were compiled to take out all coach's responses that related to the parent or athlete responses. This procedure was employed to comply with observation of independence rules so that no response from coach, athlete or parent were related to each other. The PNPCAP was then scored by adding the scores for each question in the subscale, seven questions in the positive subscale and four questions in the negative subscale to create overall scores for both. all participants received a feedback sheet (see appendix E) with contact details for support services or any follow up questions or issues that might arise. All questions regarding the results from the study were addressed at this time.

## Results

### Descriptive statistics

The current data is taken from a sample of 150 participants ( $n = 150$ ). This consisted of 20% coaches ( $n = 30$ ) and 40% athletes ( $n = 60$ ) and 40% parents ( $n = 60$ ). All athletes and parents were registered to 7 LOI clubs around the country. Coaches were selected from attending UEFA license coaching courses in Ireland. The breakdown of athletes and parents are divided into the age groups they are registered to or a had a child playing at that age group. There are three categorical variables including coaches, athletes and parents. The number (N) Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD), Standard Error (SE), Minimum and Maximum scores are displayed in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: descriptive statistics for all coaches, athletes and parents and total scores in CAP.**

Variable	N	M	SD	SE	95% CI		min	max
					Lower	Upper		
Coaches	30	38.47	4.67	0.85	[36.72-40.21]		27	51
U14 Athletes	20	38.45	6.00	1.34	[ 35.64-41.26]		17	47
U15 Athletes	7	41.57	3.64	1.38	[38.20-44.94]		35	45
U17 Athletes	19	38.00	2.88	0.66	[36.90-39.76]		28	41

U17 Girls	14	37.64	2.37	0.64	[36.27-39.40]	32	40
Athletes Overall	60	38.48	4.26	0.55	[37.38-39.58]	17	47
U14 Parents	10	37.70	5.75	1.81	[ 33.58-41.81]	29	51
U15 Parents	19	39.95	2.50	0.57	[ 38.74-41.15]	36	47
U17 Parents	31	38.00	5.01	0.90	[ 36.16-39.84]	22	43
Parents Overall	60	38.56	4.54	0.59	[ 37.39-39.74]	22	51
Total	150	38.52	4.43	0.36	[ 37.79-39.23]	17	51

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### Inferential Statistics

A one way between groups analysis of variance was conducted to explore the perception of relationships and positive processes scores, as measured on the positive and negative coach, athlete, parent questionnaire (PNPCAP). Participants were divided into three groups: coaches, athletes, and parents. The athletes and parent groups were selected by separating athletes and parents that were related, excluding one element from each athlete-parent relationship. Coaches were selected from UEFA licence courses being currently run by the FAI coach education department. There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < .001$  level in PNPCAP positive processes scores for coaches ( $N=30$ ), athletes ( $N=60$ ), and parents ( $N=60$ ) groups. A Bonferroni adjustment due to six ANOVA tests being carried out to reduce the chances of a type 1 error ( $.05/6$ ) has  $p < .0083$ :  $F(2, 147) = .32$ ,  $p = .001$ . Eta

squared can be defined as the proportion of variance associated with each of the main effects, and interactions, in an ANOVA test (see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001, pp. 54-55), the effect size in this study will show the interaction between coaches, athletes, and parents and positive/negative scores. A small effect size = .01, medium effect = .06, large effect = .14.

While there was a significant difference between mean scores with the effect size calculated using eta squared, showed a large effect (eta squared = .11). Post hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for coaches, Mean (M) and Standard deviation (SD) (M = 28.33, SD = 4.74) was significantly lower than parents (M = 32.56, SD = 4.37). The athletes, group (M = 32.01, SD = 4.56) did not significantly differ from the parents' group but was significantly different to the coaches' group (see Graph 1) . These results support the first hypothesis that the perception of the relationship will be different for coaches than athletes or parents with coaches scores showing less satisfaction with these relationships.

A one way between groups analysis of variance was also conducted to explore the perception of relationships and negative processes scores, as measured on the positive and negative coach, athlete, parent questionnaire (PNPCAP). Participants were divided into three groups: coaches, athletes, and parents. The same criteria for dividing the groups was applied here also. The Bonferroni adjustment was (.05/6)  $p < .0083$ . There was a statistically significant difference at the  $p < .001$  level in PNPCAP negative processes scores for coaches, athletes, and parents' groups:  $F(2, 147) = .000$ ,  $p = .001$ . The homogeneity of variance indicated .000, A robust tests of equality on means indicated Welsh = 14.76 and Browne-Forsythe = 21.08 as displayed in Table 2. While there was a significant difference between mean scores with the effect size calculated using, showed a large effect (eta squared = .27). Post hoc analysis using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for coaches (M =

11.50, SD = 5.19) was significantly different from the parents (M = 6.01, SD = 2.66) and the athlete's group (M = 6.40, SD = 3.97) (see graph 2). The results indicated there was also no significant difference between male (M = 38.00, SD = 2.88) and female (M = 37.64, SD = 2.37) athletes scores Under 17 age group. These results also support the second hypothesis that coaches will report less satisfaction than parents will. These results show that coaches and athletes' perceptions of their relationship are also different, with coaches reporting less satisfaction than athletes.

A one way between groups ANOVA was conducted with the parent's groups (N=120) U14 (N=27), U15(N=27, and U17 (N=66), and the same procedure was carried out with the athletes, groups (N=120) U14 (N=27), U15 (N=27), and U17 ( N=66, Female 24 and Male 42), with no statistically significant difference in positive group processes or negative group processes within either the parent's group or the athletes group. The positive group scores for the parents' group were  $F(2, 117) = .75, p = .40$ . The effect size indicated a very small effect (eta squared = .01). The parent's group's negative group processes scores reported  $F(2,117) = 1.19, p = .3$  (eta squared = .02). The athlete's group's positive group processes scores were  $F(2,117) = .79, p = .36$ . The effect size indicated a very small effect (eta squared = .01). The athlete's group's negative group processes scores reported  $F(2,117) = 1.06, p = .34$  (eta squared = .01). Total scores for all athletes are displayed in graph 3.

Table 2

*Robust Tests of Equality of Means*

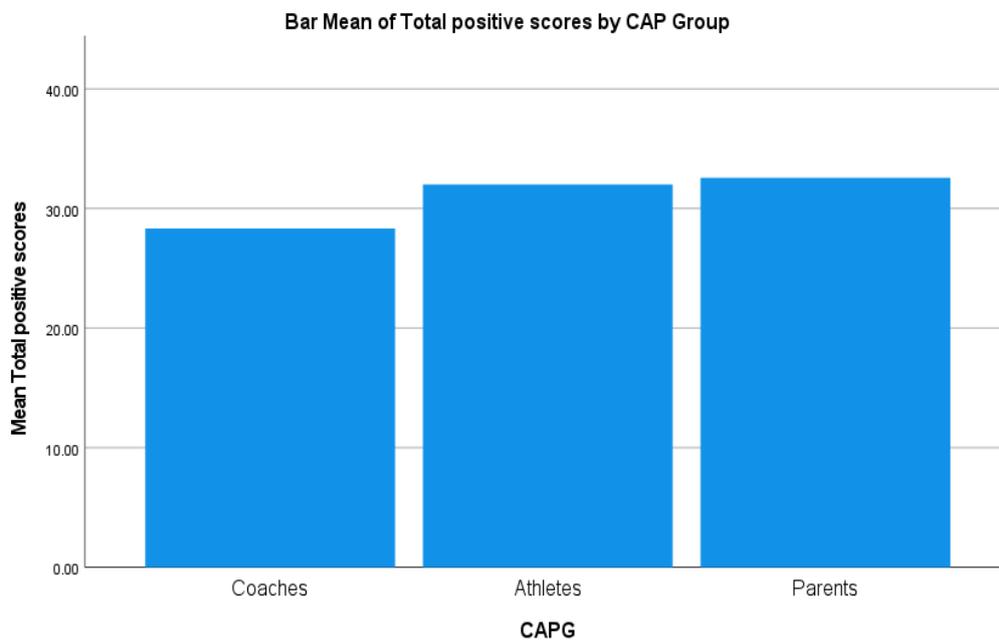
Statistic <i>a</i>	<i>df1</i>	<i>df2</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
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Welsh	14.76	2	67.22	.000
Brown-Forsythe	21.08	2	60.56	.000

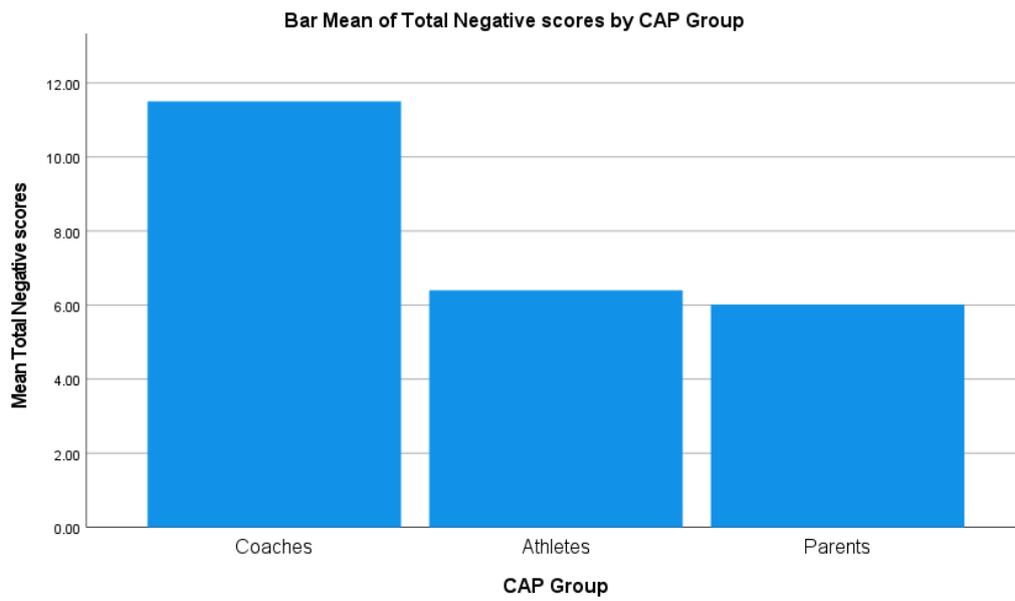
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**Graph 1: Means of total positive CAP scores.**



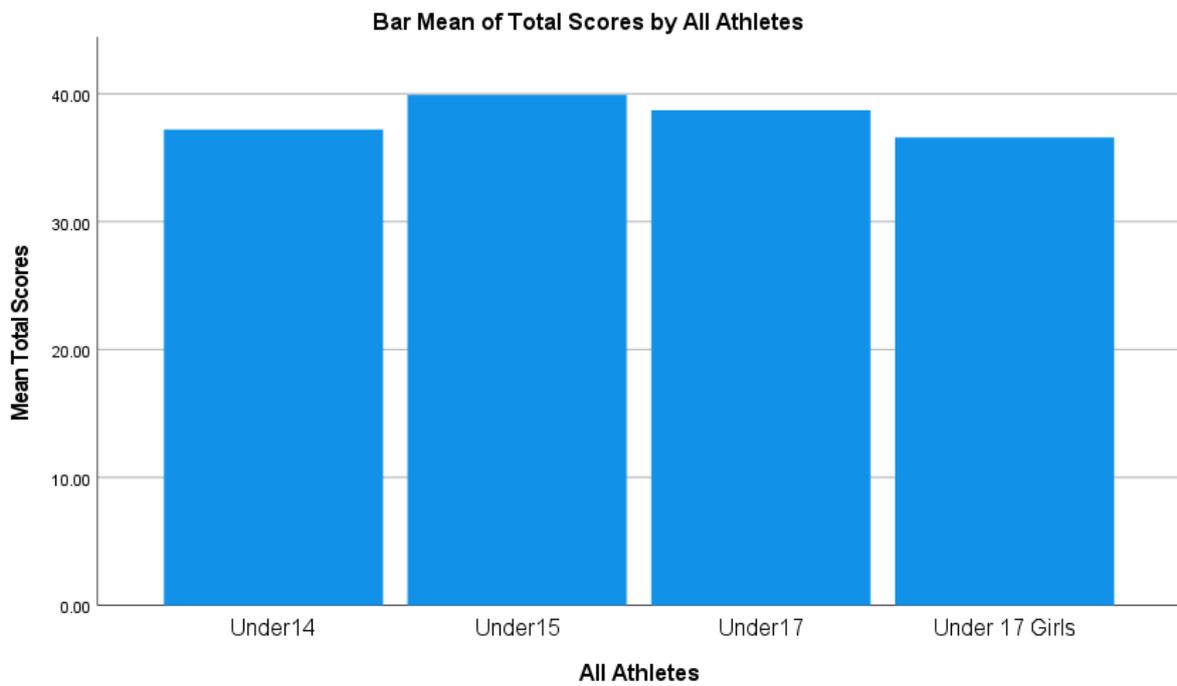
Graph 1. N = 150 (30 = coaches), (60 = athletes), (60 = parents).

**Graph 2: Means of total negative CAP scores.**



N = 150 (30 = coaches), (60 = athletes), (60 = parents).

**Graph 3 : Means of total athlete scores.**



N=120, U14 (N=27), U15(N=27, and U17(N=42), U17 Girls (N=24)

## Discussion

This study aimed to examine the relationship perception between coaches, athletes, and parents at the higher levels of underage football in Ireland. To the authors knowledge, no other study has gathered such information across this cohort of athletes and their support structures in Ireland. Coaches operating at the higher levels of underage football in Ireland will spend years becoming qualified to a level where they are acknowledged as meeting the minimum requirement to do so.

The results in this study have suggested that coaches are less satisfied with these relationships, scoring lower in the positive sub scale and also recording significantly higher scores than both athletes and parents on the negative subscale. The positive subscale included items relating to respect (Q5 Mutual respect characterises my C-A-P), support (Q2 In my C-A-P we are a team), and teamwork (Q 4 In my C-A-P everyone works together), which are important factors to build relationships on in a football development environment. If one element of these relationships' reports being less respected or supported, in this study the coaches, then it will reflect on the level of development that relationships can have (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). As a result, the player may not get the opportunity to reach their full potential. Previous studies Lisinskiene et al., (2020) measured athlete responses with the PNPCAP as well as collecting responses from the perceptions of success questionnaire (POSQ) Roberts et al., (1998), the self-determination scale (SDS) Sheldon & Deci, (1996), and the sports climate questionnaire as reported in Zanatta et al., (2018). The purpose of this study was to verify the discriminant validity of the positive and negative group processes in the PNPCAP by comparing the results with the other measures. The results indicated that the PNPCAP has discriminant validity based on the two subscales of positive and negative group

processes being correlated to adaptive motivations and coaching support in the positive group processes and negative group processes were correlated to negatively to adaptive motivations and coaching support. These results compared positively with the other measures used in Lisinskiene et al., (2020) and strong correlations were found with task orientation, self-determined awareness, perceived choice, and perceived autonomy support. The present study cannot be compared to Lisinskiene et al., (2020) because the only measure employed in this study was the PNPCAP. This current study also measured coaches and parents' responses and as such is the first study to do so.

When a member of these groups reports higher negative scores in the negative groups' subscale, what we are seeing is the same element (coaches), not only feeling not supported or respected, but also having an element within the relationship who may be over involved (Q9. In my C-A-P at least one member oversteps the boundaries) or be too demanding (Q8. In my C-A-P at least one member expects too much) in their expectations. Although this sample of coaches is small (N=30), compared to the parents' group (N=60) and the athletes' group (N=60), the population of coaches that work at this level is quite small at the higher levels of underage football. Coaches working at the clubs where parents and athletes were surveyed were not included in this study, to comply with observation of independence rules. However, these coaches also completed the survey, with the results being similar, coaches (related to the clubs in the study) N=12 positive score (M=29.08, SD 3.42) and coaches (independent sample) N=30 (M=28.33, SD=4.74). Coaches (related to the clubs in the study) N=12 negative score (M=12.83, SD 3.97) and coaches (independent sample) N=30 negative score (M=11.50, SD= 0.94). This would indicate that these scores were not unusual across the sample of coaches working with athletes and parents at this level.

The coaches and athletes negative scores were significantly different, although the effect size was small; this also reflects a dissatisfaction between these two important relationships. Coach athlete relationships have been widely studied (Allen & Hodge, 2006; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007; Ortin et al., 2016; Rhind & Jowett, 2010) and research suggests there are a number of factors that can affect the quality of this relationship. Jowett & Poczwardowski, (2007) examines these relationships by describing the outcomes or goals for achievement and how complementary they are. If an athlete or coach believes winning trophies or providing a task orientated environment is an indication of success and these goals do not match up, then the relationship will not perform to either elements satisfaction. Relating these factors back to this study's findings might provide an insight into why coaches are less satisfied with the CAP relationships reported. Both of these type of relationships can be described as successful or unsuccessful by either winning trophies or not, and by creating an environment that values effort or failing to create this environment despite the coaches or athletes striving to do so (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Personal growth is also described as an important factor of this relationship, both coach and athlete will have ideas on how they want to improve and develop over time and this relationship between coach and athlete will greatly depend on the ability to work together to achieve this (Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007). Other factors that affect these relationships are closeness which is defined as trust, respect, liking, and appreciation of each other roles. Commitment to the relationship where development strategies can be applied to maximise outcomes, and where this study focuses is on co-orientation, where the perception of the relationships are balanced and positive with all members working towards the same goal of developing the athlete over time (Jowett, 2017). These factors may explain some of the dissatisfaction by the coaches in this study.

Coach created motivational climate (Duda & Balaguer, 2007) works off the assumption that how the coach interacts with the athletes, how they present training practices, and their attitude to competitive games, will construct the motivational climate the athletes operate in. As in AGT, task and ego criteria are used to measure competence by athletes, and this is driven by the coach. A task-orientated climate will promote effort, where learning new tasks, improvement, and making mistakes will be viewed as part of this process. An ego orientated climate will encourage winning at all costs, team rivalry, punishable mistakes, and personal success over another teammate (Newton et al., 2000). The Perceived Motivational Climate in Sport Questionnaire-2 (PMSCQ-2) Newton et al., (2000) was designed to measure which motivational climate operates in team sport settings. This 33-item questionnaire measures the empowering or disempowering climate created by the coach and concludes that the task orientated climate is highly beneficial to athlete development while reducing the negative effects of ego orientated environments (Duda & Balaguer, 2007). Coaches reporting lower positive scores and higher negative scores on the PNPCAP may need to assess these relationships and find how improvements can be made. The three basic needs recognised in SDT, autonomy, competence, and relatedness creates an environment where the value of effort over winning is encouraged. Coaches and parents that can implement this environment will develop athletes who can cope with difficult periods while knowing that they are being valued for the effort. The intrinsic motivation to seek ways to overcome these difficulties allows the athlete to grow and become more autonomous as they develop through the long term development pathway. These strategies can be taught to coaches, athletes, and parents at the younger age groups of development (Lisinskiene et al., 2018 ; Davis et al., 2019). This would allow a stepped approach to educating each element of the CAP to operate with confidence that as issues arise then an all-encompassing approach can be employed to create the environment that places the welfare and development of the athlete firmly at the heart of

each discussion. The knowledge, skill, and expertise of the coach will be enhanced by learning to best use their expertise including creating the right environment for athletes to reach their full potential. Parents can be educated to understand long term development strategies and what part of this process includes them. They can also be supported to understand the process of creating the right motivational climate and self-determination for their child/athlete to have the optimal opportunity to progress in football. While being responsible for the development of young players in underage football, coaches will learn that being qualified to coach at this level is no indicator that they will be successful at it or will find it an enjoyable experience. Parental expectations also have to be managed, and athlete expectations need to be assessed openly and honestly, with long-term player development needing to take precedence over the winning of games. These factors cannot be achieved without understanding what motivates the athletes and their parents, what their perceptions about their ability are, and how committed and realistic they are to achieving the goals they set for themselves or others perceive they can achieve.

### **Implications**

The findings in this study suggest that there are different levels of satisfaction in the perceived interpersonal relationships between coaches, athletes, and parents. This study has discussed the importance of examining these relationships (Duda & Balaguer, 2007 ; Jowett & Poczwardowski, 2007) as they are the development pathways for our best young players. By identifying any imbalance, it should be possible to pursue the cause of the issues and by doing so create a better environment for all to operate in. An example of this may be focusing on psychological training for coaches, similar to Lisinskiene et al. (2018), where an education

programme consisting of social skills training, psychological, and educational training with professional coaches shows increased levels of trust, cooperation, communication, and a better connection between the coaches and athletes.

Another example may be involving parents more closely in the development process, by doing this, coaches may be also employing an ally who has a lot more access to the athletes than they do. Parents may need to be educated in the importance of creating a task orientated goal for their child. Research (Sommerfield & Tsz, 2020) has found that by encouraging their child to set their own goals, choose their own improvement strategy, and learn the benefits of self-determination, they will see these skills carry over into other areas of the athlete's life. Coaches must also realise that parents, in most cases are going through this process for the first time and are uneducated about the process of developing young athletes. As such, LOI clubs, coach education and coaches should see this as an opportunity to communicate, educate and support the parents while building stronger relationships with them. Tailoring different educational programmes aimed at the different groups based on the findings in this study may provide avenues for future research.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

This study is the first of its kind to examine the perceived relationships between coaches, athletes, and parents of underage players in an Irish environment. The PNPCAP is a brief measure that has discriminant validity, examining athlete responses only. As this study is the first to examine all members of the triad in the same sample the CAP discriminant, validity cannot thus be assumed. This is a new instrument of measure and has only been used previously with a Lithuanian sample. Thus, as this study was a cross sectional design, no causal relationships can be inferred in the findings.

## **Conclusion**

This study provides an insight into how perception of the interpersonal relationships at the higher levels of underage football in Ireland operate between coaches, athletes, and parents. This knowledge can lead to further examination of the environment, by taking these findings and exploring them further, examining why coaches report lower positive scores and higher negative scores. Although previous studies have analysed athletes' scores only, this current study went a step further by analysing coaches, parents, and athletes scores. By adding to the knowledge that already exists, this study expands the scope of where the PNPCAP may be engaged, by analysing all members and relating the findings back to educational resources for coaches and parents, with the aim of creating a better environment for all to operate in. This may lead to improved athlete development structures in higher levels of underage football. Future studies in this area may look to expand the sample of participants and involve more clubs from the LOI underage section. Another instrument of measure, to accompany the PNPCAP, could provide a more in-depth understanding of how each element perceives the operational climate in their respective relationships, such as CARMQ (Rhind & Jowett, 2012) and PMSCQ-2 (Newton et al., 2000). While GDPR restrictions hampered the study, participant numbers anticipated did not materialise, but the participant numbers exceeded acceptable minimum levels for this research, out of the fourteen LOI clubs contacted and who received the questionnaire only seven clubs responded to this study.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Coach-Athlete-Parent Questionnaire (Lisinskiene et al., 2019)

**Table 4.** Final version of the Positive and Negative Processes in the Coach–Athlete–Parent Questionnaire (PNPCAP) interpersonal relationships of the C–A–P.

Item Description	Totally Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree, Neither Disagree	Agree	Totally Agree
1. My C–A–P relationship is reliable during hardship (P-Support) *	1	2	3	4	5
2. In my C–A–P, we are a team (P-Support) *	1	2	3	4	5
3. My C–A–P is positive (P-Support) *	1	2	3	4	5
4. In my C–A–P, everyone works together (P-Teamwork) *	1	2	3	4	5
5. Mutual respect characterizes my C–A–P (P-Respect) *	1	2	3	4	5
6. My C–A–P is supportive (P-Support) *	1	2	3	4	5
7. Everyone in my C–A–P listens to each other's point of view (P-Communication) *	1	2	3	4	5
8. In my C–A–P, at least one member expects too much (N-Over-involved) **	1	2	3	4	5
9. In my C–A–P, at least one member oversteps boundaries (N-Over-involved) **	1	2	3	4	5
10. At least one member in my C–A–P is too demanding (N-Over-involved) **	1	2	3	4	5
11. At least one member is over-involved (N-Over-involved) **	1	2	3	4	5

**Note.** The explanation of the item distribution in two higher order factors: \* (P-subscale)—Positive group processes; \*\* (N-subscale)—Negative group processes.

**Appendix B: Information Sheet for Coaches and Clubs**

Dear Coach,

We are inviting the participation of players, aged 14-18 years, and the parent who is most involved in their sport to participate in a research study into the similarities between the sport relationships of coaches, players and their parents the degree to which players accurately perceive such relationships.

What is the aim of the project ?

The aim for this study is to investigate the relationships between coaches, athletes, and parents. These relationships form the development experience of young athletes in Ireland. By analysing these relationships this study would be able to understand how players can be developed more appropriately. In expanding the knowledge in this area educational interventions can be applied to player development pathways for coaches, athletes, and parents. Definitive interventions can be designed to educate each member of the C-A-P to better operate in the interests of the athlete and create an experience that encompasses a whole person philosophy. Young players development experience are influenced by their parents and coaches' beliefs and value systems and this is reflected in the motivational climate provided by coaches and parents. Previous studies have shown that by creating a task orientated climate, competence, moral and status values can be developed and improve athletic performance over time. Your support in this is very much appreciated,

What type of clubs, coaches and players are needed?

We are asking boys and girls from LOI U14-15-17 clubs and ROI U15-16-17 , aged 14 -18 years as registered with a LOI club during the 2020 season or was selected for an international squad

during the same season and their parent/guardian who is most involved with their sons football. Head coaches at U15-17 LOI level at each club are also requested to take part and ROI Head coaches at U15-16-17.

What will Participants be asked to do?

We will ask the coach to fill out some details about yourselves, gender, nationality and information regarding sport involvement. Then you will fill out a simple questionnaire about the relationships between athletes, coaches and parents by selecting an answer on a 5-point scale example below, there are 11 questions in total

Totally disagree	disagree	Neither agree or disagree	agree	totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

This should take approximately 5 minutes and will be the end of your involvement in this study.

Please be aware that you may decide not to take part in the project without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind.

Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?

You may withdraw from participation in the project at any time and without any disadvantage to yourself of any kind. You may also request that any information collected from you be destroyed or deleted and not used either now or in the future.

What use will be made of the data?

All information obtained will be entered stored on computer in coded form. The questionnaires will then be deleted but the computerised raw data will be retained securely for a period of seven

years from collection. The computerised raw data will be analysed to help us what is important to children when they do sport and how this is influenced by their parent/guardian.

No names are requested on the questionnaire so you and your child will not be identified individually, and your confidentiality is assured. Results of this study may be published but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant. You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

What data or information will be collected and what use will be made of it?

We will ask the coach, player, and parent to fill out some details about themselves, such as date of birth, gender, nationality, and information regarding sport involvement. Then they will complete a questionnaire about their relationships in football. This will be the end of their involvement in this study. All information obtained will be entered and stored on a computer in coded form and individual results will be confidential to the participant and the research team. Results of this study may be published but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant. If the coach, parent, child, or club have any further queries regarding the above study please do not hesitate to contact me on the details provided below.

Name Jimmy Mowlds

Number 0876655267

Email [jimmy.mowlds@fai.ie](mailto:jimmy.mowlds@fai.ie)

**Appendix C: Information Sheet for Parents/Guardians**

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

We are inviting the participation of boys, aged 14-18 years and their parent who is most involved with their sport to participate in a research study on C-A-P relationships. Please read this information sheet carefully before deciding whether to participate or not. If you decide to participate or if you decide not to take part, there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the purpose of the study ?

I am a final year student in the BA in Psychology programme at National College of Ireland. As part of our degree we must carry out an independent research project. Athlete relationships with coaches and parents can guide an individual's goals, perceptions, and behaviours. Exploring these relationships allows us to understand more about the underlying motivations that can have an impact on football participation, enjoyment, and development. Parents are hugely influential in the development of their children, but exactly to what extent this is also true for sport involvement has yet to be identified. This research will be the first step in building our knowledge of what factors influence the transmission and development of youth sport values as we look to improve youth football development and participation.

What Type of Participants are Needed ?

We are asking boys from LOI U15-17 clubs and ROI U15-16-17 , aged 14 -18 years as registered with a LOI club during the 2020 season or was part of an international squad during the same season and their parent/guardian who is most involved with their sons football.

### What will Participants Be Asked to Do?

We will ask you and your child to fill out some details about yourselves, gender, nationality and information regarding sport involvement. Then you and your child will fill out a simple questionnaire about the relationships between athletes, coaches and parents by selecting an answer on a 5-point scale example below, there are 11 questions in total

Totally disagree	disagree	Neither agree or disagree	agree	totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

This should take approximately 5 minutes and will then be the end of you and your child's involvement in this study.

Participation in this research is voluntary; you do not have to take part, and a decision not to take part will have no consequences for you. If you do decide to take part, you can withdraw from participation at any time by contacting me at the number below

### Can Participants Change their Mind and Withdraw from the Project?

Participation in this research is voluntary; you do not have to take part, and a decision not to take part will have no consequences for you or your child. If you do decide to take part, you can withdraw from participation at any time by contacting me at the number below.

### What use will be made of the data?

All information obtained will be entered stored on computer in coded form. The questionnaires will then be deleted but the computerised raw data will be retained securely for a period of seven years from collection. The computerised raw data will be analysed to

help us discover what is important to children when they are involved in football and how this is influenced by their parent/guardian and coach. No names are requested on the questionnaire so you and your child will not be identified individually, and your confidentiality is assured. Results of this study may be published but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant. You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

What if Participants have any Questions?

If you, or your child, have any further queries regarding the above study please do not hesitate to contact us on the details provided below.

Contact name Jimmy Mowlds

Number 0876655267

Email [jimmy.mowlds@fai.ie](mailto:jimmy.mowlds@fai.ie)

**Appendix D: Information Sheet for Players**

Thank you for showing an interest in taking part in this study. This sheet will tell you a bit more about the study and what we would like you to do. Please read it carefully before you decide whether you would like to take part. If you have any questions about the study or would like more information, please just ask. If you decide to participate or if you decide not to take part, there will be no disadvantage to you of any kind and we thank you for considering our request.

What is the project about?

I am a final year student in the BA in Psychology programme at National College of Ireland. As part of our degree we must carry out an independent research project. We are interested in investigating what is important to children when they are involved in football and see if this is related to what their parent and coaches finds important when they are involved. We also want to see if this is related to the kind of involvement your parent and coach has in your sport.

Who can take part?

We are asking boys from LOI U15-17 clubs and ROI U15-16-17 , aged 14 -18 years as registered with a LOI club during the 2020 season or was selected for an international squad during the same season and their parent/guardian who is most involved with their sons football.

What will you have to do?

We will ask you to fill out some details about yourselves, gender, nationality, and information regarding sport involvement. Then you will fill out a simple questionnaire about the relationships between athletes, coaches, and parents by selecting an answer on a 5 point scale example below, there are 11 questions in total.

Totally disagree	disagree	Neither agree or disagree	agree	totally agree
1	2	3	4	5

This should take approximately 5 minutes and will be the end of your involvement in this study.

Can I change my mind?

You can stop the study at any time without having to give a reason. You may also request that any information collected from you to date be destroyed or deleted and not used either now or in the future.

What will we do with the information?

All the information collected will be entered and stored on a computer and the results will be confidential to the University research team. The questionnaires will then be deleted but the computerised raw data will be retained securely for a period of seven years. The computerised raw data will be analysed to help us access what is important to children when they do sport and how this is influenced by their parent/guardian and coach.

No names are requested on the questionnaire so you will not be identified individually.

Results of this project may be published but any data included will in no way be linked to any

specific participants. You are most welcome to request a copy of the results of the project should you wish.

What if I have any questions?

If you have any questions then please feel free to ask before, during or after the research. The contact number is provided below.

What do I have to do next?

If you have read and understood everything that we would like you to do and are happy to take part, please give your parent or legal guardian permission to confirm they are happy for you and them to take part. You can then complete the questionnaire. If you feel any distress while participating please stop, you are free to discontinue participation and exit the questionnaire.

Contact details

Name Jimmy Mowlds

Number 0876655267

Email jimmy.mowlds@fai.ie

FAI Child Welfare dept 018999100 childwelfare@fai.ie Jigsaw Young Peoples Mental Health

<https://www.jigsaw.ie/need-help/find-a-jigsaw/>

<https://www.jigsaw.ie/need-help/organisations/>

**Appendix E: Athlete and Parent Debrief Form**

Dear Parent/ Guardian,

Thank you for participating in our study. The aim for this study is to investigate the relationships between coaches, athletes, and parents. These relationships form the development experience of young athletes in Ireland. By analyzing these relationships this study would be able to understand how players can be developed more appropriately. In expanding the knowledge in this area educational interventions can be applied to player development pathways for coaches, athletes, and parents. Definitive interventions can be designed to educate each member of the C-A-P to better operate in the interests of the athlete and create an experience that encompasses a whole person philosophy. Young players development experience are influenced by their parents and coaches' beliefs and value systems and this is reflected in the motivational climate provided by coaches and parents. Previous studies have shown that by creating a task orientated climate, competence, moral and status values can be developed and improve athletic performance over time. Your support in this is very much appreciated,

The questionnaire you have just completed will be analysed by statistical software. All information obtained will be stored on computer in coded form and individual results will be confidential to the participant and the research team. Results of this study may be published but any data included will in no way be linked to any specific participant. It is important to note that you may withdraw you or your child's participation in the study at any time without any disadvantage to you of any kind.

If you, or your child, have any further queries regarding the above study or this study has raised any issues for you or your child, please do not hesitate to contact us or any of the services on the details provided below.

Thank you again for your participation and involvement in this research.

Name Jimmy Mowlds

Number 0876655267

Email jimmy.mowlds@fai.ie

FAI Child Welfare dept 018999100

childwelfare@fai.ie

Jigsaw Young Peoples Mental Health

<https://www.jigsaw.ie/need-help/find-a-jigsaw>

<https://www.jigsaw.ie/need-help/organisations/>

For Parental Support

<https://www.parentline.ie/>

<http://www.fsn.ie/>