

The Pressure Female Youth Club Volleyball Players Encounter in the Season

Joseph Kwame Mintah¹, Leslie Ann Flores², Prosper Narteh Ogum³

University of Cape Coast, College of Education Studies, Faculty of Science and Technology Education, Department of Health, Physical Education and Recreation

Abstract: *This study purports to find out the pressure female club volleyball players experience during the season. A total of 47 female club volleyball players between ages 12-18 years participated in the study. Findings showed that players worry over having fun in playing volleyball. They also experience academic pressure as they combine club volleyball with school work. As players mature in age and get closer to moving on to college or university, they experience the pressure of securing academic scholarship. These alongside high expectations from parents and coaches place the female club volleyball player at risk of experiencing worry, stress and anxiety during the season.*

Keywords: pressure, youth female, volleyball players

1. Introduction

Historically, youth sports were brought on to allow children to apply social and motor skills, physical fitness, and most importantly for enjoyment. This has changed over the years from enhancing movement and physical development to single sport specialization (Malina, 2000; Fredrick, & Ryan, 1993). Although many athletes enjoy the socialization that occurs with sports, most youth play sports to receive college scholarships (Koehler, 1995; Wiersma, 2000). The intent of earning a scholarship to college or university by playing sport has increased the pressure on youth athletes. Thus, today's youth is bombarded with single-sport specialization, serious practices regiments, and year round training (Bach, & Shilling, 2008; Feeley, Agel, & Laprade, 2016). And, the more involved our youth becomes the more pressure they receive to become great. The situation is worse for female volleyball club players' who experience extreme amount of pressure during the season (Storch, Storch, Killiany, & Roberti, 2005).

Athletes at all levels--club, high school, college, professional, and Olympic--experience pressure. Mike Spracklen, an Olympic rower, stated "You get a lot of pressure as Olympians, from people around you, your friends, relations, the press, the government, you feel responsible for them" (Rutherford, 2008, p. 1). Despite the personal and imposed pressures (worry, stress, and anxiety) associated with sports, athletes at all levels enjoy participation in sport because it is fun and physically rewarding (Margenau, 1990). Pressure from participating in sports could be personal or imposed. They both include stress, worry, and anxiety. Personal pressure is brought on by the individual whereas imposed pressure is induced from others such as parents, coaches and team mates. In this study, personal pressure will be looked at by responses to the amount of fun an athlete had, the level of pressure they felt to receive a college scholarship and the amount of pressure felt academically.

Athletic pressure

With all sports there are stressors (Wiersma, 2000). Smith, Smoll, and Smith (1989) discuss high levels of stress that

can go along within little league baseball. When both female and male athletes were studied cognitive anxiety was found in both but it was significantly higher for females (Alexander, & Krane, 1996). In the study wellness among first year collegiate female athletes, LaFontaine (2007) found that both female athletes and non-athletes had similar levels of stress. But as the athletes rated their stress high and linked it to sports, the non-athletes associated their stress to body image and love. The conclusion was that athletes must deal with the constant demands of extensive practice and competition schedules, performance, and physical skill along with the need to academically perform. Hanton, O'Brien and Mellalieu in 2003 also reported on the anxiety levels of both elite athletes and non-elite athletes. They concluded that elite athletes have greater cognitive anxiety symptoms. Although Hudd et al. (2000) agree that athletes do stress out; their study shows that 80% non-athletes feel like they are under high amounts of stress in comparison to the 39.1% of college athletes. To them, sports may indeed help alleviate stress levels. All athletes have some type of stressors. But, for high school and club athletes, their stress might be obtaining a scholarship so they can continue to compete in college rather than having to retire before they are ready to.

Scholarship Pressure

The view on female sports has drastically changed over the years. Just before Title IX was instated in June of 1972, there was a major taboo on female athletes. Poindexter and Mushier (1973, p. 27) wrote "it seems a highly questionable practice to award grants-in-aid or scholarships to the female collegiate athlete". But, times have drastically changed and that the perception of women seeing themselves as athletes has altered drastically even since the 80's. The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) has 580 institutions which offer scholarships to females in volleyball alone (311 Division I, 269 Division II). The progression of women's sports is remarkable but with this comes more dedication and a burden of trying to obtain these scholarships. And, as these females compete with males to earn the scholarships, they find creative ways of enhancing their opportunities which increase the pressure.

Today, there are creative on-line sites, hounding profile builders, and harassing coaches. These are all tough to handle when in need of receiving a college or university sports scholarship. Since thousands of kids would love to play sports past high school, they subject themselves to all these including practice schedules and hours of private lessons (Hecimovich, 2004; Truman, 2003). For girls' volleyball, the practice is to join a club team on top of the high school season to better expose themselves to college and university coaches. This pressure is significant for not only the players but also the parents.

Parent pressure

Fliess (2006) recommends that parents discuss the value of sports in the family before any member envisions a full athletic scholarship. Parents can put pressure on their children unknowingly. It is important for a parent to find out how good their child-athlete really is (Smith, Smoll, Smith, 1989); Understanding how their child-athlete perceives the future is also important. If an athlete does not want to pursue a scholarship why should the parents. Athletes also feel the stress that a sport may put on their parents budget, or parents relationship. Donnelly (1993) discusses that though many athletes reported a good relationship with their parents many had more problems than the norm.

Today's parents are visible at every youth and interscholastic sporting event. Collins and Barber (2005) study on female athletes' perception of parental influences found that the child with more parental pressure exhibits greater levels of confidence, which is a positive trait in sport. Conversely, children that did receive more pressure from parents also had higher levels of anxiety. Thus, parental pressure in their study exhibited both negative and positive results depending on how the youth athlete internalizes it. Similarly, Leff and Hoyle (1995) found that male tennis players receive more pressure from their fathers whereas females receive equal pressure from both parents. In general, parents understand that they place some pressure on children as they play a pivotal part of their child's athletic success along with a good coach; but believe the pressure they contribute is significantly less than what their children actually perceive (Kanters, Bocarro, & Casper, 2008).

Coach Pressure

Most players would announce that behaviours from every component of the team could drastically change the mood of the team. For example, anxiety levels can increase as one or more individuals grasp the emotional anxiety of others especially in situations where coaches are highly stressed (Cratty, & Hanin, 1980; Friesen et al., 2013). But, one must remember that a coach is a character builder and needs to role model the appropriate behaviours along with helping the athlete develop into an adult (Coakley 1993; Lazurus, 2000; Vallee, & Bloom, 2005). Unfortunately, some coaches damage this opportunity by driving more pressure than an athlete is fit to carry leading to anxiety and unnecessary pressure on the athlete. Such pressure situations from a coach can make or unmake a season for a young athlete.

Peer Pressure

Sports teams are hard to integrate on to as a new member. Most elite teams carry the same girls or boys, dropping and

picking up one to three new players a season. Pressure can arise as a new player try to fit in with ten others (Cratty, & Hanin, 1980; Lazurus, 2000; Ruiz, Hanin, & Robazza, 2016). Steiner, Plye, Brassington, Matheson and King (2003) researched into pressures facing college athletes at Stanford University using 518 student athletes. Findings showed that athletes receive most pressure from their teammates, and the second most from their peers. These evidences show that at a high level of play, peer influence can cause an alarming rate of pressure on an athlete. A similar study by Holt and Mandigo (2004) found that players have social concerns about making mistakes. Most believed that they would be blamed or insulted for making a bad play. They also found that teammate support needed to be shown in order to get over the pressure of making a mistake and players felt it helped if they receive positive comments from other teammates. Although peers place an ample amount of pressure on an athlete, the athlete also places loads of pressure on themselves in trying to strike a balance between sport participation and school.

Academic Pressure

Sports can be a distraction for some students, but research shows that athletes have a greater grade point average than their non-athlete counterparts (Griffin, 1998). By participating in sports, athletes are taught to value accomplishment, pursue high expectations, work harder to achieve, and always accomplish a task; these skills taught in sport carry over into academics for most athletes. Though sports' is a major contributing factor to excellence in ones academics, it can also be a major stressor.

One stressor for high school athletes looking forth to participate in college could in fact be National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) instituted proposition 48. This proposition requires a senior in high school to have a 2.0 grade point average or better along with a 700 SAT score or 17 on ACT in order to be a candidate for a scholarship in college (Griffin, 1998). It is therefore important to let kids know that scholarships are slim and they go to about one in every 100 athlete despite the pressure that it may impose on them (Koehler, 1995).

Although many athletes enjoy the socialization that occurs with athletics, others have an underlining motive for playing sports including gaining a college or university scholarship (Koehler, 1995). It is a strong desire of a parent to see a child accomplish something in sports (Rodts, 2008). A parent's support can really push a child to maximize their talents (Lum, 2008) besides pushing the child in sports to have a legacy (Rodts, 2008). As parents push their children to get them fully participate in sports, they impose considerably amounts of pressure (Cerin, 2003; Donohue, Miller, Crammer, Cross, & Covassin, 2007). To reduce the amount of pressure parents impose on their children who participate in sports, Lailey (2007) advised parents to separate themselves from their children sports, but motivate them to play sport for enjoyment and satisfaction.

Also, the more coaches work with athletes the more likely they are to develop expectations of how great an athlete should develop (Solomom, Golden, Ciapponi, & Martin, 1998). When looking at volleyball players and coaches,

Leslie-Toogood and Martin (2003) found that the players and coaches agreed on very little. Nevertheless coaches reported high levels of confidence in their players. All these expectations unknowingly place a lot of pressure on the youth athlete especially among female volleyball players (Hebert, 2013). Thus, the intent of this study was to find out the pressures that young female volleyball players face at the club level.

2. Method

Participants' Characteristics

Participants in this study were 47 female club volleyball players that ranged in age from 12-18 ($M = 14.62$, $SD = 1.71$). There were 22 Caucasian, five African American, five Hispanic, three mixed African American and Caucasian, two mixed Caucasian and Hispanic, one player was a mixed African American and Hispanic, and nine were none of the above ethnicities. The majority of the players 37 (78.7%) attended public schools and 10 (21.3%) attended private school. In addition, 43 (91.5%) of the participants reported that their parents paid for their club volleyball fees. Also 36 (76.6%) participants reported that their parents would attend all their club volleyball tournaments and 11 (23.4%) reported their parents would only attend some but not all tournaments. Most of the participants in this study started playing volleyball at the age of 12.

Instrument

In this study, a survey consisting of 28 questions was used to collect data. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section one asked for the players' demographic information such as age, ethnicity, school, current volleyball team and parent involvement. Section two consisted of 18 questions. All questions under section two applied to pressure received during the club volleyball season. For these 18 questions, the players rated their responses on a one to five scale based on their perception of the statements. Questions 11, 17, and 23 applied to club volleyball in a non-strenuous and fun manner. Questions 12, 18, and 24 applied to club volleyball as always stressful because of the anxiety to receive a college scholarship. Questions 13, 19, and 25 ask about pressure received from parents of these players. Questions 14, 20, and 26 pertain to coaches' influence and pressure to play club volleyball. Questions 15, 21, and 27 relate to teammate induced stress. And, questions 16, 22, and 28 investigated pressures felt by club volleyball players' academic life during the club season.

Procedure

Institutional Review Board approved the research protocol. Team coaches were contacted for permission to survey their players. The volleyball teams were met twice. The first meeting was 20 minutes before the team practice. This meeting was to give the players permission slips for their parents to sign. The parent permission slip asked for permission to survey their daughter. In the second meeting, the teams handed back their parent permission slips, and in turn was given a survey. The surveys were handed out 20 minutes before practice. It took about 12 minutes to complete the survey. After completing the survey, the players dropped it in a box. Next to the survey drop off box was a bite size candy bars for the participants' cooperation.

3. Results and Discussion

To investigate female volleyball players' perceptions about what causes the most pressure during the club volleyball season, a One-Sample t -test was calculated. A test value of nine was set as the cut off point. The results of the One-Sample t -test showed that fun ($M = 11.49$, $SD = 2.23$) was the major contributing factor in terms of club volleyball pressure. Also, the analysis showed that academics ($M = 9.55$, $SD = 2.68$) and college scholarships ($M = 9.21$, $SD = 3.05$) contributed to the amount of the pressure felt during the club volleyball season.

Further statistical analysis was conducted to investigate age differences and the type of pressure impacting each age division in club volleyball. Results of Independent Sample t -tests revealed a statistical significant difference between participants age and the pressure induced by coaches, $t(45) = -2.50$, $p < .05$. The data indicated players between ages 15-18 perceived that coaches induce more pressure on them than participants age 12-14 years old. In addition, an Independent Sample t -test analysis showed a statistical significant difference between age and college scholarship, $t(44) = -3.49$, $p < .05$. Thus, as players get older they perceive college scholarships as a significant pressure during the club volleyball season. Further statically significant difference was found between participants age and the level of fun they have playing club volleyball, $t(41) = 3.20$, $p < .05$. The data showed that the younger aged players perceived having fun as one of the more important pressures in club volleyball (see table 1 for data).

Table 1

		Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Age by Pressure						
		Pressure						
		Academic	Peer	Coach	Parent	Scholarship	Fun	
Age	12 to 14	<i>M</i>	9.27	7.09	4.05*	4.37	7.72*	12.5*
		<i>SD</i>	2.6	2.72	1.7	1.92	2.75	2.18
		<i>N</i>	22	22	22	22	22	22
	15 to 18	<i>M</i>	9.8	8	5.5*	5.76	10.52*	10.6*
		<i>SD</i>	2.7	2.25	2.14	3.03	2.73	1.89
		<i>N</i>	25	25	25	25	25	25

* $p < .05$

To investigate if participants' ethnicity makes a difference in terms of how they perceive pressure in club volleyball,

separate One-way ANOVAs were calculated. The results of the analysis showed no statistical significant difference

between players' ethnicity and pressure, all $p > .05$. In this study, all participants despite their ethnicity did not perceive pressure differently. Further Spearman's rho correlation analysis showed a positive moderate correlation between coaches and parents ($r = .5$) and parent and college

scholarship ($r = .5$). Low correlation was found between academics and parent, and academic and scholarship. No correlation was found between academic and scholarship (see table 2).

Table 2: Correlation among Academic, Peer, Coach, Parent, Scholarship, and Fun

	Academic	Peer	Coach	Parent	Scholarship	Fun
Academic	1	.31	.16	.35	.30	-.13
Peer		1	.30	.23	.26	-.18
Coach			1	.52	.43	.33
Parent				1	.51	-.24
Scholarship					1	-.2
Fun						1

4. Summary and Conclusion

Pressure is seen at all levels of sports including Olympic, collegiate, high school, club teams and youth sports. Pressure placed on a player directly includes worry over the fun in sports, academics, or scholarships. Other pressure is imposed on athletes from parents, coaches, and or peers. As children grow into their teens and slowly mature in a sport, they tend to put pressure on themselves to get academic scholarships. For example, findings in this study revealed that participants age 15-18 felt significantly more pressured about scholarships than the 12-14 year old age group. As these players age, they tend to be bombarded with on-line sites, profile builders all to create an image to a college coach. These coupled with the need to maintain a 2.0 grade point average in order to be eligible for college or university scholarship place a lot of pressure on female volleyball players.

Though academics are worrisome, other influences such as teammates and peers can also create tension. Steiner et al. (2003) found that teammates placed the most pressure on a player, followed by their peers. The findings from this study are not different as Spearman's rho correlations found pressure between peer and academics along with peer and coaches to be moderately related. Coaches were also significant part of pressure felt. Coaches make or break a child's season. Some coaches set too high of goals or expectations on children causing them to experience a negative athletic season if the goals are not met. In this study coaches and parents create a positive influence on players, but players between 15-18 year age group received significantly more pressure from coaches than the younger age group of 12-14 years. While coaches may indeed place pressure on players, there is also substantive pressure coming from parents. This study finding suggests that coaches and parents encourage girls to play volleyball for fun and enjoyment and not necessarily for the pursuit of college or university sport scholarship. Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that coaches and parents encourage their girls to play volleyball for fun and enjoyment and not necessarily for the pursuit of academic scholarship.

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