

Student-Athletes' Parent Demographics and Student Athletic Achievement Expectations

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Question

How do parental characteristics, including age, education level and gender, affect parent expectations for their children's athletic achievement?

Hypothesis

The demographic factors, parental age, gender, and education level, are predicted to influence parents' expectations of their children's level of athletic achievement. For this research, athletic achievement is defined as the highest level of school sport at which a student performs (i.e. junior varsity, varsity, or college).

Introduction

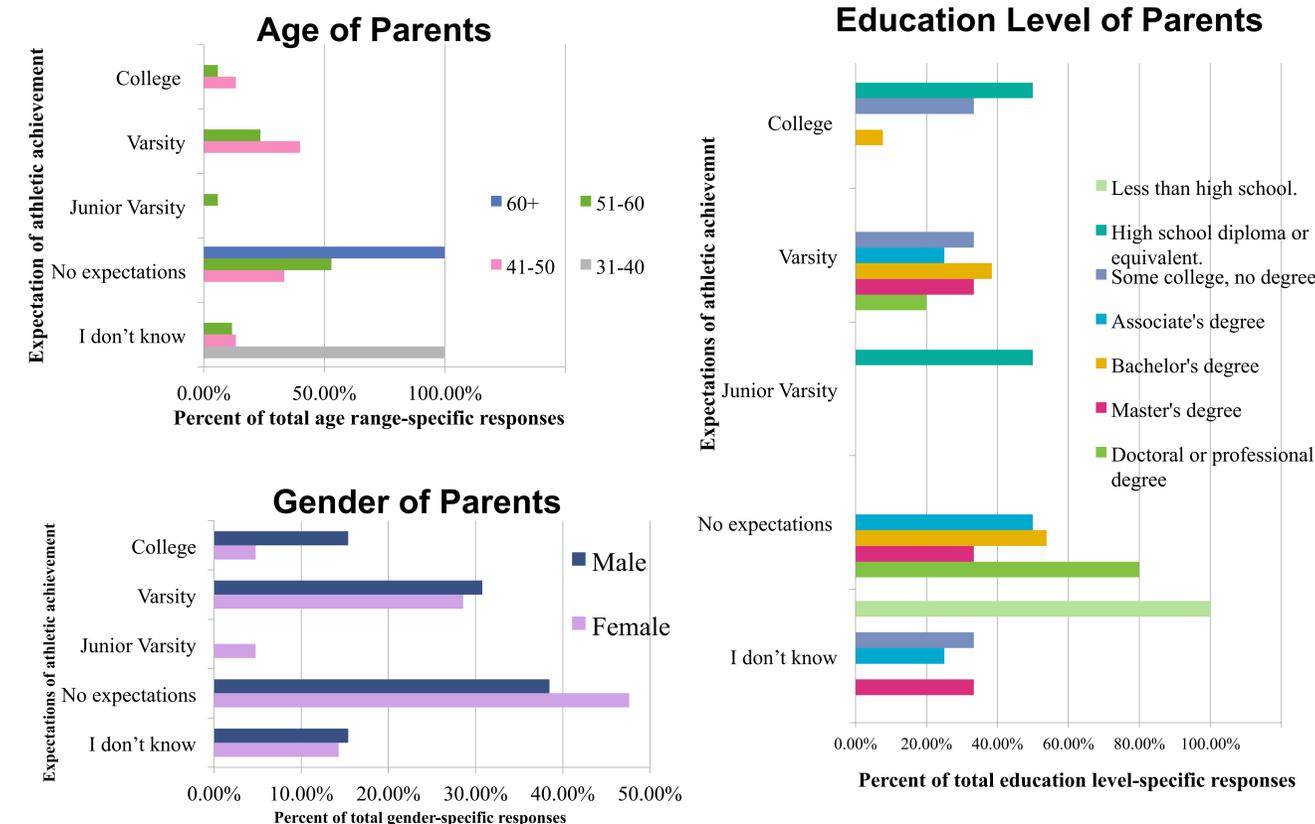
According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, almost 7.8 million high school students in America played high school sports in 2014. In the research presented here, I looked at how parental demographic factors may affect the parents' expectations of their children's athletic performance. Specifically, I'm focusing on the highest sport team level parents of student-athletes would like their children to reach.

This is part of a larger study examining the impact of parental expectations and behaviours on actual student athletic achievement (to be presented in a written report). As sport is a prominent factor in students' lives, it is important to recognize and understand what drives high school student-athletes to perform. Many studies in sports psychology use the Expectancy-Value Model, which demonstrates that parents tend to place emphasis on activities they value, and children are influenced by what their parents value and deem successful. The model shows how parental values and expectations may impact a child's choice of activities and the child's persistence and continuation with those activities.

Literature Review

In the study "The influence of family in the development of talent in sports," researcher Jean Côté found that children with high levels of sport performance often had parents who expected high levels of sport performance from them, but assisted the progression rather than directing it (Côté, J. (1999). *The Sport Psychologist*, 13(4), 395-417). A study written in 2008 by Marlene Dixon of Troy University, "More than just letting them play: Parental influence on women's lifetime sport involvement," Dixon found that many of their participants' family members played sports, regularly attended the sports games, frequently drove and transported the student-athletes to practice, encouraged participation without pressure, and emphasized sport through childhood (Dixon, M. A. (2008). *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 25(4), 538-559).

Results



Methods

There were 47 student respondents and 33 parent responses, totalling in 80 participants in the survey overall. The student-athlete group and parent group were given separate surveys after receiving informed parental consent and student-athlete assent. The parent questionnaires asked the respondents questions detailing their prior involvement with high school sports, their value of academics versus high school sports, and their expectations for their students in sports, including their expectations about their student-athlete's final sport team level.

Discussion

Results from this study demonstrate that parental age, gender, and education level did influence parent expectations for student-athletes' achievement. Results indicate that parents 60+ years of age were more likely to have no expectations for their student's athletic achievement than other age ranges. This contrasted with parents in the 51-60 and 41-50 age ranges who showed a greater tendency to want their children to perform at the the varsity or college level. Young parents (31-40 years old) were less certain on how they wanted their children to perform than other age groups. This may be due to less experience with students' progression in high school sports. When analyzing trends in gender data, male parents had higher expectations of student athletic achievement than female parents, and female parents were more likely to not have any expectations for their children's achievement level. Lower parent education levels (less than high school; high school diploma/equivalent; some college, no degree; associate's degree) picked all expectation options equally with a slight inclination towards selecting 'no expectations.' The intermediate parent education level (bachelor's degree) appears equally inclined to have no expectations for their children in sport or to expect the varsity team level. All parents with a doctoral/professional degree selected 'no expectations,' demonstrating a less concerned approach to athletic achievement. Yet, it is clear that the trends in these data encourage future studies on this topic with a larger sample size and inclusion of additional demographic factors such as ethnicity to discover more definitive results.

Conclusion

Older and better educated parents tended to be less concerned with their children's high school athletic performance than their younger and less educated counterparts. Further, female parents appeared less likely to value student athletic performance than male parents.