

COMPARISON OF ASSESSMENTS OF PARENTS' AND COACHES' BEHAVIOUR BY MALE AND FEMALE TENNIS PLAYERS OF DIFFERENT AGES

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Tennis is clearly one of those sports games where success is influenced by one's psychological abilities. Throughout their sports careers tennis players are usually exposed to psychological pressure. The aim of the study was to investigate how young tennis players assess the behaviour (psychological pressure) and activity of their mother, father and tennis coach. The sample included 96 male and 96 female players distributed in three age categories who filled in three questionnaires of the closed type. Data were processed in accordance with the research goals.

Descriptive statistics parameters were calculated for all variables by gender: mean value, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, skewedness, kurtosis and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the assessments of behaviour of a player's father, mother and coach by gender and then between the three age categories (U12, U14, U16).

A comparison between the assessments of the father's, mother's and coach's behaviour in terms of gender only revealed statistically significant differences in the assessments of the father. When assessments of both parents' and the coach's behaviour were compared in terms of age category, statistically significant differences were again established only in the assessments of the father.

Keywords: Tennis, juniors, parental and coach pressure.

INTRODUCTION

Tennis is clearly one of those sports games where success is influenced by one's psychological abilities. The most important of these abilities include motivation, control of one's feelings, thoughts, attention, mental images, sensations and behaviour (ITF, 2002).

Although top male and female tennis players have been found to be well prepared for overcoming psychological pressures and are up to the requirements of the game, as reflected in their mental toughness, this is not always true of young male and female tennis players. The latter are exposed to a series of demands, pressures and even psychological violence.

Psychological violence is one of the most widespread forms of violence (Kuhar, Guzelj, Drolc, & Zabukovec, 1999). In the course of our lives we are all victims of this type of violence, as well as its initiators. Most often it takes the form of oral violence, with deliberate or thoughtless words, prejudices and stereotypes, offensive opinions and possibly even non-communication. Silence frequently has a similar effect as yelling at or hitting a person. Actual forms of psychological violence are the following: intentional or unintentional use of harsh words and opinions; yelling, insults, abusive words and

degradation; forming negative opinions about a person based on prejudices and stereotypes; quarrelling or disagreeing with one party abusing their physical, emotional, economic, hierarchic, institutional or other type of dominance; blackmail and threats (including through physical, economic or other sorts of violence).

The consequences of psychological pressure are also reflected in young male and female tennis players who react differently, and they sometimes lead to the end of a sports career. The reactions can be classified in four categories: distancing, uncontrolled emotional outburst, stiffness and "accepted challenge" (Šporn, 2002).

Distancing is the first emotional reaction of female and male tennis players. Female and male players devote less effort and energy to tennis as well as mentally distancing themselves from what they are doing and experiencing. In this way their self-image is threatened less.

An uncontrolled emotional outburst is a male or female player's very emotional, uncontrolled, often angry and furious response to a difficult situation. A male or female player thereby protects him/herself from the unpleasant and unacceptable reality of events. Through such uncontrolled outbursts the player lets the opponents, parents, coaches and spectators know that they are not in fact that bad, but rather that they are having a bad day.

Stiffness is a response when a male or female player experiences emotional and physical discomfort, tension and distrust of their own abilities. Many perceive this reaction as a sign of something very positive. On the way to mental toughness, stiffness is a more suitable response than distancing and an emotional outburst. If players become stiff, they are very focused on what they are doing. They take risks and are willing to expose their ego to criticism. For players who have already overcome the distancing and emotional outburst phase, stiffness is a sign of progress. The more opportunities a player has in order to deal with pressure constructively, the faster they will find success.

Accepted challenge is the last response on the way towards mental toughness. Male and female players who are capable of accepting a challenge work more intensely and play better if the game situation is tense. Players no longer see the problems they encounter in a game as threatening and unsolvable, but as a challenge to try harder and resolve their problems more easily.

The development of a young tennis player is the responsibility of parents, tennis and other coaches who guide and lead the player. Several research projects carried out in the past indicate that among young athletes parental support is associated with the greater enjoyment of sport (Left & Hoyle, 1995; Baxter-Jones & Maffulli, 2003), a more positive appraisal of performance outcomes (Smith, Zingale, & Coleman, 1978), and more positive appraisals of self-worth (Left & Hoyle, 1995). Parental support is defined as behaviours by parents perceived by their children as facilitating athletic participation and performance, while parental pressure is behaviour perceived by their children as indicating expectations of unlikely, even unattainable heights of accomplishment (Left & Hoyle, 1995) and has a high negative correlation with competitive trait anxiety as found in Saferstein (1990). Building on these findings, Hoyle and Left (1997) examined the association of parental involvement (support and parental pressure) with enjoyment, performance, self-esteem, and other characteristics of young tennis players. Male and female players provided information about the role their parents played in their tennis game, their own view of their game, their self-esteem, and their state, regional, and national rankings. Players who reported a high level of parental support tended to report their greater enjoyment of tennis, viewed tennis as a more important part of their lives, and dropped less in state rankings than players who reported a lower level of parental support. In addition, parental support appeared to mediate the relations between several player characteristics. The data provided no evidence that parental pressure is an important influence on the participation and performance of young tournament tennis players. Côté (1999) described patterns in the dynamics of families of tal-

ented athletes throughout their development in sport. Four families, including three families of elite rowers and one family of an elite tennis player, were examined. Fifteen in-depth individual interviews were conducted with each athlete, parent and sibling to explore how they dealt with three types of constraints such as motivation, effort and resources. The results permit three phases of participation to be identified from early childhood to late adolescence: the sampling years, the specialising years, and the investment years.

Kay (2000) examined the central role played by the family in the development of children's sports talent, with particular emphasis on the practical ways in which families support children's excellence in sport. Interviews with 20 families from three sports (swimming, tennis and rowing) were used to investigate how the family provides support to young performers, and how they are affected by so doing. The findings showed that, in addition to providing essential financial resources, families' abilities to accommodate the activity patterns required by a particular sport are critical to children's participation. It is shown that a number of these factors are also likely to affect families' abilities to support their children's sport talent. Harwood and Swain (2002) investigated the effects of a player, parent and coach intervention programme on the goal involvement responses, self-regulation, competition cognitions, and goal orientations of three junior tennis players. First, each player reported their goal involvement, self-regulation, self-efficacy, and perceptions of threat and challenge prior to three ego-involving match situations. Aligned with a matched control participant, each treatment player, along with their parents and coach, were engaged in educational sessions and cognitive-motivational tasks over a three month competition and training period. Postintervention, positive directional changes were reported in all players except the control participant. This study reinforces for applied researchers and practitioners the importance and practicability of social-cognitive and task-based interventions designed to facilitate optimal, motivational, and psychological states in high pressure competitive situations. Gould et al. (1996) examined burnout in competitive junior tennis players. Content analyses of the 10 respondents' interviews identified mental and physical characteristics of burnout, as well as the reasons for burning out. Recommendations for preventing burnout in players, parents and coaches were also gleaned. It is obvious that the success of the player parents tennis coach triangle influences the successful development and progress of a player. In such a triangle each plays their own role and this article poses the question: How do male and female players of different age categories assess the behaviour and actions of their fathers, mothers and tennis coaches? The results will no doubt attract the attention of all those who play

important roles in the game of tennis, namely parents, coaches and players.

In his research involving young tennis players, Šporn (2002) tried to find out whether parents and the tennis coach exerted any psychological pressure on players. He established that parents exerted greater psychological pressure on their sons than on their daughters, that fathers' psychological pressure on their children was stronger than that of mothers, and that 12 year old boys regarded the coach's behaviour as psychological pressure. In terms of age, it was established that 12 year old boys felt greater psychological pressure than girls, that 16 year old girls felt stronger psychological pressure from their father, mother and tennis coach, that 12 year old boys felt greater psychological pressure from their coach than 16 year old boys and that parents' psychological pressure is regarded as the strongest by 16 year old boys.

AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Do boys and girls assess their father's, mother's and tennis coach's behaviour differently?
2. Do boys and girls of different age categories assess their father's, mother's and tennis coach's behaviour differently?

METHODS

Subjects

The sample included 96 male and 96 female players classified in three age categories. The first age category (U12) consisted of 32 boys and 32 girls between 11 and 12 years of age. The second age category (U14) included 32 boys and 32 girls aged 13 and 14, while the third category (U16) was composed of 32 boys and 32 girls between 15 and 16 years old. They were all ranked on the national ranking list and practiced regularly. The period of training differed by age group, namely: boys U12 2.67 ± 1.01 years; girls U12 2.45 ± 1.21 years; boys U14 3.24 ± 1.82 years; girls U14 3.26 ± 1.96 years; boys U16 4.59 ± 1.69 years; girls U16 4.32 ± 1.87 years.

Procedure

All male and female players filled in three questionnaires of the closed type, which referred to assessments of their parents' and coaches' behaviour and/or indirectly to their perception of psychological pressure. The questionnaire was based on Loehr's and Kahn's questionnaire (1989) which was designed for estimating parents' behaviour. It was intended for the surveying of parents and for producing a quarterly parental (coach) report card. The questionnaire was translated into Slovenian and the terminology adapted to suit Slovenian male and female players. The source did not provide any information on the validity of the questionnaire. The parents' questionnaire (separate for father and mother) included 21 statements (variables: GF1-21; BF1-21 and GM1-21; BM1-21), while the coach was assessed based on a questionnaire containing 20 statements (variables: GC1-20 and BC1-20). The players selected answers using a 5 point Likert scale. A Likert scale measures the extent to which someone agrees or disagrees with a question. The most common scale is 1 to 5. Often the scale will be 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - not sure, 4 - agree and 5 - strongly agree. The final result of the questionnaire is the sum total of points assigned to each question separately for the father, mother and coach. The maximum score regarding the father and mother was 105 points and the minimum 21, while for the coach the maximum score was 100 and the minimum 20 points. Parents' behaviour is assessed on the basis of the total score. Those fathers and mothers achieving between 21 and 42 points are considered to be "adequate tennis parents" (i. e. performing well), those achieving between 43 and 63 are "slightly problematic" while those achieving between 64 and 105 points are "problematic parents".

First, descriptive statistics parameters were calculated for all variables by gender: mean value, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, skewedness, kurtosis and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare the assessments of the father's, mother's and coach's behaviour between genders and then the assessments of behaviour were compared between the three age categories (U12, U14, U16). The tables of results show the mean value, standard deviation, F coefficient and the level of F coefficient statistical significance.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

TABLE 1

Basic statistical parameters for boys

Age category	Variable	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewedness	Kurtosis	K-S	Sig. K-S
U12	B12E-FATHER	22	76	36.39	13.383	1.041	.942	.857	.413
	B12E-MOTHER	21	70	29.71	11.326	2.334	5.843	1.230	.083
	B12E-COACH	25	71	37.94	11.171	1.194	1.221	.846	.428
U14	B14E-FATHER	23	54	33.10	7.422	.714	.412	.529	.917
	B14E-MOTHER	21	47	27.94	6.449	1.312	1.664	.887	.371
	B14E-COACH	24	52	35.19	6.695	.313	-.188	.757	.570
U16	B16E-FATHER	24	71	38.00	10.000	1.271	3.162	.554	.887
	B16E-MOTHER	21	53	28.93	7.659	1.759	3.693	.876	.348
	B16E-COACH	23	54	35.57	8.487	.605	-.172	.536	.908

An analysis of the basic statistical parameters for boys reveals some deviations in certain variables of skewedness and kurtosis, namely: in mother's assessments in the U12 category (B12E-MOTHER), in mother's assessments in the U14 category (B14E-MOTHER), in father's assessments in the U16 category (B16E-FATHER)

and in mother's assessments in the U16 category (B16E-MOTHER). In all of the above stated variables the assessments showed the peak dispersion and an asymmetry to the left as well as the deviation of entities towards higher assessments. A test of the normality of distribution of individual variables showed the normal distribution of all variables.

TABLE 2

Basic statistical parameters for girls

Age category	Variable	Min	Max	Mean	Std. deviation	Skewedness	Kurtosis	K-S	Sig. K-S
U12	G12E-FATHER	21	44	29.43	5.224	.988	1.021	.911	.339
	G12E-MOTHER	21	34	25.37	3.634	.898	.180	.899	.355
	G12E-COACH	24	47	33.43	5.894	.410	-.498	.709	.650
U14	G14E-FATHER	21	71	32.39	9.820	2.013	6.513	.758	.568
	G14E-MOTHER	21	47	27.33	6.198	1.263	1.831	.881	.380
	G14E-COACH	25	52	35.79	7.288	.449	-.810	.879	.384
U16	G16E-FATHER	23	69	37.17	12.384	.935	.540	.619	.793
	G16E-MOTHER	22	60	31.54	8.723	1.518	3.604	.671	.708
	G16E-COACH	23	59	38.92	8.667	.346	-.102	.446	.978

An analysis of the basic statistical parameters for girls reveals some deviations in certain variables of skewedness and kurtosis, namely: in father's assessments in the U14 category (G14E-FATHER), in mother's assessments in the U14 category (G14E-MOTHER) and in mother's assessments in the U16 category (G16E-

MOTHER). In all of the above stated variables the assessments showed a peak dispersion and an asymmetry to the left as well as the deviation of entities towards higher assessments. A test of the normality of distribution of individual variables showed the normal distribution of all variables.

Comparison of assessments of fathers', mothers' and tennis coaches' behaviour by gender between all age categories

TABLE 3

Comparison of assessments of fathers', mothers' and tennis coaches' behaviour by gender between all age categories

Parent/Coach	Sex	Mean	Std. deviation	F	Sig.
E-FATHER	Boys	35.76	10.652	3.975	.048
	Girls	32.69	9.769		
E-MOTHER	Boys	28.86	8.695	.788	.376
	Girls	27.82	6.720		
E-COACH	Boys	36.26	8.975	.112	.738
	Girls	35.84	7.499		

First we were interested in whether boys and girls of all age categories assess their fathers', mothers' and tennis coaches' behaviour differently and whether they consider it to be psychological pressure. Based on the results of the analysis of variance it may be established that statistically significant differences in the assessments of parents' and tennis coaches' behaviour between boys and girls were only seen in fathers (TABLE 3).

Comparison of assessments of fathers', mothers' and tennis coaches' behaviour between age categories

TABLE 4

Comparison of assessments of fathers', mothers' and tennis coaches' behaviour between age categories

Parent/Coach	Age category	Mean	Std. deviation	F	Sig.
E-FATHER	U12	32.97	10.725		
	U14	32.73	8.680	4.068	.019
	U16	37.62	11.058		
E-MOTHER	U12	27.57	8.678		
	U14	27.63	6.278	1.970	.143
	U16	30.13	8.191		
E-COACH	U12	35.72	9.184		
	U14	35.50	6.958	.620	.539
	U16	37.12	8.652		

The assessments of fathers', mothers' and tennis coaches' behaviour were compared between the three age categories U12, U14, and U16. Based on the results of the analysis of variance it may be established that statistically significant differences in the assessments of fathers', mothers' and tennis coaches' behaviour between different age categories were again seen only in fathers (TABLE 4).

DISCUSSION

A comparison of the assessments of parents' and coaches' behaviour between genders on the basis of the results of the analysis of variance (TABLE 3) revealed statistically significant differences only in fathers. An analysis of players' individual answers showed that the reason for these differences lies in the father's inappropriate behaviour. Consequently, players do not feel at ease in terms of performing to their best abilities when their fathers are present at a match. The inappropriate behaviour of fathers may result in a player's poor performance that does not correspond to their actual abilities and skills. It may be concluded that players regard their fathers as people who do not support their children when they fail or face difficulties, attributing the highest importance to tennis and interfering too much in the game. Since it is relatively easy to recognise the above attitude during a match, one can only imagine what kind of pressure fathers exert outside the tennis court, reflected in constant talking about tennis, setting high performance criteria and ignoring other activities that are vital to a child's development (schooling, other activities, social life, etc.).

In our opinion such behaviour of fathers triggers various reactions in male and female players. Whether players regard their father's behaviour as psychological pressure depends primarily on the father's behaviour, namely, to what extent and in what way they express their views and requests related to tennis. As regards players' comprehension of behaviour or psychological pressure, it all depends on the player's mental maturity and ability to withstand psychological pressure.

As regards average assessments (TABLE 1 and 2) it may be established that boys of the U12 and U14 categories also assess their mothers' and tennis coaches' behaviour as disturbing since their respective total scores are higher than those of girls. Boys achieved higher values, thus leading to the conclusion that they also felt greater psychological pressure. We believe that the reasons for these differences between boys and girls also lie in the greater mental maturity of female players since, by the age of 14, they are ahead of boys because their puberty has started earlier. Both physical and mental maturity may offer a totally different perspective on parents' and coaches' behaviour and actions, which probably means that resistance to psychological pressure and negative effects in girls of this age is substantially higher. Šporn (2002) also established that parents exerted greater psychological pressure on their sons than daughters, that fathers' psychological pressure on their children was stronger than that of mothers and that 12 year old boys regarded their coach's behaviour as psychological pressure.

A comparison of assessments of parents' and coaches' behaviour between age categories on the basis of the results of the analysis of variance (TABLE 4) revealed statistically significant differences in fathers. It can again be established that the father is the person whose behaviour is comprehended differently by female and male players of different age categories. Why fathers were given such different assessments may be explained by the fact that female and male players of the U16 category predominantly saw their fathers' behaviour as problematic. This in itself does not have to be considered negatively because a comparison of the average values (TABLE 4) reveals that these values increase from the lower to higher age groups in all – fathers, mothers and coaches. A specific trend may thus be established, namely, psychological pressure from parents and tennis coaches on male and female players increases with age. This may mean that parents and tennis coaches who are involved in the process of developing male and female players take tennis increasingly seriously and, consequently, their criteria become stricter and their approach more serious and focused on competition results. Such an approach may – if adequately dosed and managed – positively affect and stimulate a player's development as it enables the exploiting of all potential needed for progress and success in tennis. The study by Šporn (2002) established that 12 year old boys felt greater psychological pressure than girls, that 16 year old girls felt stronger psychological pressure from both parents and their tennis coach, that 12 year old boys felt greater pressure from their coach than 16 year old boys and that parents' psychological pressure was regarded as the strongest by 16 year old boys.

CONCLUSIONS

Young male and female tennis players often perceive the actions and behaviour of their parents and coaches as negative and disturbing, a finding also made in the Saferstein research (1990). We were primarily interested in whether there are specific differences in the assessments of parents' and coaches' behaviour between genders and different age categories. This study did not reveal whether the parents' and coaches' behaviour should raise concern. Nevertheless, this area is exceptionally important and still insufficiently researched; it is difficult to provide unequivocal answers to the questions relating to parents' and coaches' influence on athletes' development – in our case, male and female tennis players.

It is recommended to pursue a joint action project: player parents tennis coach, which basically points to a potential solution to the problem of the inappropriate actions and behaviour of parents and tennis coaches

(Harwood & Swain, 2002). With the aim of ensuring more humane and child-friendly sports development, a programme for training tennis coaches would have to incorporate information related to the suitable treatment of male and female tennis players at a particular age, with an emphasis on the youngest, while the training and awareness-raising of parents about their importance and their roles in the development of young male and female tennis players will have to start being implemented through tennis clubs.

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APPENDIX 1

Questionnaire about the parents

- F1/M1 My father/mother only sees success in victory.
 F2/M2 My father/mother interferes with my tennis too much.
 F3/M3 Regarding tennis, my father/mother demands too much of me.
 F4/M4 When I fail, my father/mother speaks too much about the good points of the opponent.
 F5/M5 My father/mother is too critical of my tennis.
 F6/M6 My father/mother punishes me if I lose.
 F7/M7 My father/mother forces me to play tennis too much and does not consider my other interests.
 F8/M8 My father/mother does not get along well with other players' parents and disagrees with them.
 F9/M9 My father/mother does not support me when I fail.
 F10/M10 My father/mother is irritable if I do not play well.
 F11/M11 My father/mother does not communicate with the coach.
 F12/M12 My father's/mother's presence at a match disturbs me.
 F13/M13 My father/mother demands success too quickly.
 F14/M14 My father/mother leaves the court if I do not play well.
 F15/M15 My father/mother always talks about tennis.
 F16/M16 My father/mother gives priority to tennis over school work.
 F17/M17 My father/mother says tennis is the most important thing.
 F18/M18 During a match, my father/mother makes non sport like and loud comments.
 F19/M19 My father/mother insults me out loud when I make a bad move during a match.
 F20/M20 When I fail my father/mother reproaches me with how much they spend on my tennis.
 F21/M21 My father/mother praises me excessively in front of other parents.

Key: F - father
 M - mother

APPENDIX 2

Questionnaire about the tennis coach

- C1 My coach communicates too critically with my parents.
 C2 My coach devotes too much attention to a single player from our club (they are his/her "favourite").
 C3 My coach demands too much from me at practice.
 C4 My coach demands too much from me at a tournament.
 C5 My coach does not support me when I fail.
 C6 My coach's instructions during a match disturb me.
 C7 If I perform badly at practice my coach punishes me.
 C8 My coach is present at my tournaments.
 C9 My coach's presence at a tournament disturbs me.
 C10 My coach is convinced that they are the only one who contributed to my victory.
 C11 After the match my coach only analyses my bad points.
 C12 When I play badly my coach talks and behaves in an uncontrolled manner.
 C13 My coach often does not react to my victory or defeat.
 C14 My coach often says: "We are playing today", as if they were also on the court.
 C15 It bothers me if my coach records a match or makes notes during it.
 C16 My coach "dreams" of me becoming a professional player some day.
 C17 When I fail my coach speaks too much about the good points of the opponent.
 C18 My coach does not pay attention to me being tired because of my other obligations and activities.
 C19 My coach finds practice more important than my school obligations.
 C20 My coach does not consider my wishes during practice.

**SROVNÁNÍ HODNOCENÍ CHOVÁNÍ RODIČŮ
A TRENÉRŮ U TENISTŮ A TENISTEK
RŮZNÝCH VĚKOVÝCH SKUPIN**
(Souhrn anglického textu)

Tenis je určitě jednou z těch sportovních her, v nichž je úspěch ovlivňován psychologickými schopnostmi. Během celé své sportovní dráhy jsou obvykle tenisoví hráči vystaveni psychologickému tlaku. Cílem této studie bylo zjistit, jak mladí tenisoví hráči hodnotí chování (psychologický tlak) a aktivitu své matky, otce a tenisového trenéra. Vzorek zahrnoval 96 tenistů a 96 tenistek náležejících do třech věkových kategorií, kteří vyplňovali tři dotazníky uzavřeného typu. Údaje byly zpracovávány v souladu s výzkumnými cíli.

Pro všechny proměnné byly podle pohlaví vypočítávány popisné statistické parametry: střední hodnota, standardní odchylka, minimum, maximum, šikmost, špičatost a Kolmogorovův-Smirnovův test normality. Pro srovnávání hodnocení chování hráčova otce, matky a trenéra podle pohlaví a posléze pro srovnávání tří věkových kategorií (U12, U14, U16) byla použita analýza variance (ANOVA).

Srovnávání hodnocení chování otce, matky a trenéra podle pohlaví odhalilo statisticky významné rozdíly pouze u hodnocení otce. Při srovnávání hodnocení chování obou rodičů a trenéra podle věkových kategorií byly statisticky významné rozdíly stanoveny opět pouze u hodnocení otce.

Klíčová slova: tenis, junioři, tlak rodičů a trenéra.

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