



**Negative Parental Behaviour in Canadian Minor Hockey:
Insiders' Perceptions and Recommendations**

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Abstract

Recent media coverage and peer-reviewed research has called attention to Canadian minor hockey, highlighting problematic parent behaviours. The purpose of this study was to explore negative parental behaviour in Canadian minor hockey through the perspectives of 10 hockey insiders. Results revealed negative parent behaviours related to stakeholder abuse, excessive investments and rewards, over-stepping coaching lines, and encouragement of aggression. Participants provided insight into the motives behind these behaviours including the lure of professional sport, the hockey hierarchy, parents' return on hockey investments, and living vicariously through one's children. Participants also proposed potential solutions to prevent and manage these issues including effective parent education programs with targeted curricular content, and stronger systems for reporting and discipline. Findings are discussed through the lens of the what, why, and how of negative parental behaviours in youth sport, and contextualized within the current changing climate of minor hockey in Canada.

Keywords: youth sport; parents; qualitative; abuse

Résumé

Comportements négatifs de parents en hockey mineur au Canada :

Perceptions et recommandations des experts

La presse et des chercheurs ont récemment attiré l'attention sur la conduite problématique de parents dans le hockey mineur au Canada. Cette étude vise à faire la lumière sur ces comportements de la perspective de dix experts du hockey. Les résultats révèlent des comportements négatifs comme le harcèlement des intervenants, des investissements et des récompenses excessifs, l'empiètement sur l'autorité des entraîneurs et l'incitation à l'agression. Les participants (experts) expliquent ces comportements notamment par l'attrait du sport professionnel, la hiérarchie dans le hockey, le désir des parents d'obtenir un retour sur l'investissement et de vivre de façon vicariante à travers leurs enfants. Ils proposent des pistes de solutions pour prévenir et gérer ces problèmes, dont des programmes à contenu ciblé de sensibilisation des parents et le renforcement des mécanismes de signalement de cas et de sanction. Les conclusions sont abordées de la perspective du comportement négatif des parents en sport chez les jeunes, de ses manifestations et des motifs qui le sous-tendent dans le contexte actuel du hockey mineur au Canada.

Mots clés : sport chez les jeunes; parents; qualitative; abus.

Introduction

Ice hockey (hereafter referred to as ‘hockey’) has been considered an integral part of Canadian culture for over a century (Dawson, 2014; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; MacDonald, 2014). Currently, over 630,000 youth are registered in hockey within Canada (Hockey Canada, 2014a). Hockey also draws more spectators than any other sport in Canada (Government of Canada, 2014) with greatest viewership during the National Hockey League (NHL) playoffs and the Olympic Games. While some research has documented that the environment of youth sport is a context to facilitate positive psychosocial development of youth, with parents playing an important role in that process (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2005), recent media coverage and peer-reviewed research has called attention to Canadian minor hockey, highlighting violence, aggression, and problematic parent behaviours as key psychosocial concerns within the sport (Ackery, Tator, & Snider, 2012; Feschuk, 2011; Gillis, 2014; Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010). As such, this study explored negative parental behaviour in Canadian minor hockey.

Parents have been identified as one of the most influential sport socialization agents for their children (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Parents’ involvement in their children’s sport includes encouraging participation, providing models for observational learning, offering sport opportunities, and helping children interpret their sport experiences (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). In general, parents’ values, perceptions, and beliefs influence their children’s values, perceptions, and beliefs (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Horn & Horn, 2007). For example, Simpkins, Fredricks, and Eccles (2012) found that mothers’ positive beliefs about sports were related to children’s sport behaviours, self-concepts of ability, values around sport, and amount of time spent participating in sports. Parents also play a critical role in their child’s enjoyment of sport; youth experience heightened levels of enjoyment when they perceive greater parental satisfaction with their performance, decreased pressure and negative comments, coupled with positive support in the form of praise and understanding (Petlitchkoff, 1993; Scanlan & Lewthwaite, 1986). Generally, studies suggest that youth prefer a moderate level of involvement from parents in the form of general tangible, emotional, and informational support, as over-involvement has been associated with increased stress and sense of pressure among athletes (Stein, Raedeke, & Glenn, 1999; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005). Interestingly, one recent study showed youth hockey players are often dissatisfied with their parents’ level and type of involvement (e.g., in the form of directive behaviour), yet this dissatisfaction did not necessarily impact their enjoyment of the sport (Ede, Kamphoff, Mackey, & Armentrout, 2012).

Given that parents’ involvement and behaviour is often most visible at sporting events (e.g., as spectators), much of the ongoing media criticism and recent parental research has focused in this area. Although naturalistic observational studies of youth sporting events highlight much cheering, encouragement, and other positive behaviours, they also highlight the presence of negative behaviours, with negative or derogatory comments ranging from 5% to 37% of the observed and recorded behaviour within this study (e.g., Bowker, Boekhoven, Nolan, Bauhaus, Powell, & Taylor, 2009; Kidman, McKenzie, & McKenzie, 1999). Meân and Kassing (2007) found parents’ comments encouraged aggressive play, reinforced the importance of winning, and reprimanded children following mistakes. Further, Shields, Bredemeier, LaVoi, and Power (2005) found 14% of youth sport parents admitted to yelling at and/or arguing with referees and 13% suggested they criticized their child’s sport performance with anger, while 15% of youth said they had to deal with parental anger when they did not play well. Goldstein and

Iso-Ahola (2008) reported that the majority of sport parents experienced anger at their child's sport events, and responded with aggression. Parents have described their sources of anger to be at three types of offenses: (a) unjust (e.g., when referees or coaches are perceived to demonstrate a lack of fairness, or impartiality); (b) uncaring (e.g., when coaches, athletes, parent spectators are perceived to act without concern for others, care only about their own interests, or lack of consideration for what was best for everyone); and (c) incompetent (e.g., when referees, coaches are perceived to be incapable, inadequate, or lack qualification or ability to fulfill duties. (Omli & LaVoi, 2012).

Although the above studies provide insight into the prevalence and nature of parents' negative behaviours, they offer little understanding of athletes' perceptions and interpretations of these behaviours. Coakley and Donnelly (2009) reported that some youth athletes were embarrassed by their parents' behaviours at their games as they yelled inappropriate comments at them, the referees, the coaches, and other players. Petlitchkoff (1993) highlighted that negative parental behaviours at sport events are often the cause of inhibited performance, competitive stress, and subsequent sport dropout in youth athletes. Such behaviours are clearly a contradiction to athletes' preferred parental behaviours outlined by Knight et al. (2010), which included interacting positively with athletes throughout the game, maintaining control of emotions, not coaching, not arguing with the officials, and providing positive post-game feedback. Omli and Weise-Bjornstal's (2011) study concluded, "children of all ages want parents to act like supportive parents at youth sport events and avoid acting like demanding coaches or crazed fans" (p. 708).

Rationale and Purpose

Although hockey is often considered an integral component of Canadian culture (Dawson, 2014; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; MacDonald, 2014), parents' involvement and behaviour in youth hockey contexts is of growing concern, particularly at the representative level (Gillis, 2014; Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010; Thompson, 2010). The aforementioned research highlights that parents can become overly involved in their children's sports, put immense pressure on their children to succeed, and demonstrate negative behaviours such as abuse and aggression at their children's sporting events; all of which have the potential to negatively influence children's sport experiences and development. This sport parenting approach has become so evident in youth hockey arenas that the term *rink rage* was coined to describe the behaviour of parents (Deacon, McClelland, & Smart, 2001, p. 20). While it has been suggested that sport has the potential to contribute to youth's psychosocial and life skill development (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005), parents of youth playing hockey in Canada do not always appear to be optimally facilitating this process.

The purpose of this study was to explore negative parental behaviour in Canadian minor hockey through the perspectives of hockey insiders within the Canadian competitive minor hockey system. The study was part of a larger research project focused on understanding the role and influence of parents in Canadian minor hockey. As we used an inductive approach, negative perspectives emerged at the forefront of insiders' interviews, thereby framing the direction of the study. Our exploration of parents' negative behaviours facilitates not only a more in-depth understanding of these behaviours, but also sheds light on the motives behind, and possible solutions for curtailing these behaviours.

Method

Context and Participants

While many studies have acquired the perspective of youth athletes and parents themselves on this topic (Baxter-Jones & Maffuli, 2003; Coakley & Donnelly, 2009; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004; Leff, & Hoyle, 1995; Wiersma & Fifer, 2008), much less has been conducted on other key developmental agents within the minor hockey context. Further, past research suggests parents' perceptions of their involvement in their child's sport may not always be consistent with others' perceptions of their behaviours (Holt, Tamminen, Black, Sehn, & Wall, 2008). For these reasons, we chose to focus on the perceptions of hockey insiders. For the purpose of this study, a 'hockey insider' was operationally defined as an individual who had extensive experience both within the Canadian minor hockey league at the representative level, as well as experience at the most elite levels of Canadian hockey – either at professional (NHL), Canadian Hockey League, (CHL), and/or university level (National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division I; USA, Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS); Canada). We also aimed to recruit individuals with hockey experiences in diverse and multiple roles including athlete, parent, coach, official, and/or media. These criteria were based on the rationale that there are many active agents that influence athletes' development processes and it is important to examine the perspectives of these diverse agents to gain additional perspectives, knowledge, and understanding of parent behaviours in the Canadian minor hockey system (Maguire, 1999). Further, it was assumed these criteria would lead to participants with extensive years of experience in the Canadian minor hockey system, with primarily positive performance related outcomes (i.e., given their involvement at the elite level), allowing them to offer rich data from an 'insider' perspective.

Participants were recruited through a combination of purposeful and convenience sampling (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling was used first and foremost to obtain perspectives of individuals who met the criteria outlined above. Convenience sampling was also used as the researchers had various networks from which to draw upon in recruiting the participant sample. Table 1 outlines participants' demographic information and details on the diverse roles of each of the 10 participants within Canadian minor hockey and at more elite levels.

Table 1

Participants' Gender, Age, and Insider Roles (including their involvement in minor hockey and at the elite level)

Participant	Gender	Age	Current (or Recent) Minor Hockey Roles	Past (or Current) Elite Roles
Jason	Male	55	Coach Parent	Player - Major junior (CHL), - All-star, professional draft pick (NHL) Coach - Professional (NHL) - Major junior (CHL)
Mike	Male	22	Player (recent)	Player - University (NCAA, Div I) (current) - Major junior (CHL)
Chris	Male	24	Coach Player (recent)	Player - University (CIS) (current) - Major junior (CHL)
Matt	Male	24	Coach Player (recent)	Player - Major junior (CHL)
Dave	Male	45	Parent	Media - National personnel (NHL) (current)
Rob	Male	36	Parent	Player - Major junior (CHL) - Professional (NHL) Coach - University (CIS) (current)
Tony	Male	47	Official Parent	Official - Major junior (CHL) (current)
Karen	Female	48	Grandparent	Parent - Major junior (CHL) (current)
Mary	Female	65	Grandparent	Parent - two Professional players (NHL) (current)
Peter	Male	40	Uncle	Player - Major junior (CHL) - University (NCAA, Division I; CIS)

Note. CHL = Canadian Hockey League. NHL = National Hockey League. NCAA = National Collegiate Athletic Association. CIS = Canadian Inter-University Sport.

Although minor hockey in Canada includes both representative (competitive) and house league (recreational) leagues, participants in this study were recruited based on involvement in representative leagues, as 'rep' hockey been identified as experiencing particularly problematic parental behaviours (Feschuk, 2011; Gillis, 2014; Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010). Typically, in the Canadian system, representative hockey involves tryouts, and requires extensive travel throughout the season; teams tend to be on the ice practicing three to five times per week, and compete in weekend tournaments throughout the regular season, which runs from October to March or April. Minor representative hockey begins in Pre-Novice (5 and 6 years of age) and carries through to Juvenile (18 and 19 years of age; Hockey Canada, 2012). In contrast, house league hockey is made up of players from a range of skill and experience levels, teams are typically balanced for even league play and tend to be on-ice one or two times per week (one practice, one game) with no travel for games or tournaments.

Data Collection

Following ethical approval from the affiliated institution's Office of Research Ethics, initial telephone or email contact was made with each participant to inquire as to whether they would be interested in participating in a study focused on parental involvement in minor hockey

in Canada. A date for the interview was then arranged and informed consent was obtained. Interviews were conducted over the phone, lasting 30-60 minute in duration. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, as they allowed for flexibility, facilitation of rapport, and an ability to have in-depth discussions thereby producing rich data (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The interview guide was developed based on an extensive review of literature on parental involvement in youth sport, with a specific focus on hockey. In addition to drawing from academic literature (e.g., Bowker et al., 2009; Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010; Thompson, 2010), the interview guide was also framed through an awareness of minor hockey in popular media (e.g., CBC News, 2010; Journal of American Medical Association and Archives Journals, 2010; Toronto Sports Media, 2010). The interview guide was piloted through practice interviews with several individuals who were familiar with Canadian minor hockey, leading to several minor adjustments (e.g., re-phrasing, additions, deletions) to key and follow up-questions. Examples of interview questions included: “Based on your experiences, tell me a little bit about the involvement and behaviours of parents in minor hockey” and “Can you describe the general atmosphere among parent spectators at minor hockey games?” Given that negative parental involvement and behaviour was at the forefront of all 10 interviews, participants were given the opportunity to expand and offer additional insight on these issues. For example, follow-up and probing questions included: “What are your suggestions for promoting more positive parent behaviour in minor youth hockey?” and “In your opinion, what can be done to address some of these negative or concerning behaviour during minor hockey games?”

Data Analysis

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim, resulting in 170 pages of transcripts (12-point font, single spaced). Data were analyzed using an inductive content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Specifically, an iterative process was used. First, transcripts were read several times to become familiar with the data. Second, the researcher made notes in transcript margins where data related to the purpose of the study. Third transcripts were re-read and text was grouped based on similar features to create meaning units (MU; Tesch, 1990), leading to the emergence of 11 unique themes. Finally, the broad themes were classified into key categories and pertinent quotations were identified that supported each theme. Consistent with past recommendations (Sandelowski, 1994), researchers engaged in minor editing to participants’ verbatim transcripts in order to clearly and accurately represent the full and intended meaning of the participants’ communications (e.g., filler words such as ‘um’ were removed).

A number of measures were taken to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the data, which is important in evaluating the worth of a study, as trustworthiness involves establishing credibility, by giving confidence in the truth of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). First, prior to data collection all participants were reminded that participation in the study was voluntary and that their anonymity would be maintained (pseudonyms are assigned throughout) and signed a consent form ensuring accuracy of their data. Data triangulation was also employed within this study, as the perspectives of diverse participants (e.g., coach, athlete, parent, media personnel) were attained, providing in-depth accounts from multiple sources (Maxwell, 2005). Member checks were employed throughout the interviews as the interviewer regularly used paraphrasing and questioning to clarify participants’ points; participants were also given the opportunity to review their transcripts to confirm their communications were an accurate representation of their perspectives (Patton, 2002). Lastly, investigator triangulation was used, whereby three investigators initially analyzed transcripts separately, before utilizing a

collaborative approach throughout in subsequent analyses (Creswell, 2013). The primary researcher conducted the first round of analysis, followed by an additional two members of the research team verifying a random sample of the meaning units to assure meaning units were accurately represented by themes and categories. Discrepancies between researchers in the analysis process were further discussed until agreement was reached. Following the tenth interview, the research team agreed that saturation had been reached, as no new themes were emerging from the data (Morse, 1995).

Results

The results are organized in three main sections according to the main findings from the insider participants: (a) negative parent behaviour (the what; 54 MU); (b) perceived motives behind negative parental behaviour (the why; 21 MU); and (c) solutions for prevention and management of concerning issues (the how; 55 MU). Within each category, themes are outlined and discussed below (see table 2 for over an overview of findings).

Table 2
Results by Category and Theme (with meaning units)

Category	Theme
Negative Parent Behaviour	1. Stakeholder abuse (31) 2. Excessive investments and rewards (8) 3. Over-stepping the coaching line (8) 4. Encouraging aggression (7)
Motives Behind Negative Parental Behaviour	1. Lure of professional sport (12) 2. Hockey hierarchy (2) 3. Return on investments (3) 4. Vicarious experiences (4)
Solutions for Prevention and Management of Concerning Issues	1. Effective parent education programs (30) 2. Targeted parent curricular content (10) 3. Reporting and discipline (15)

Negative Parent Behaviour

Stakeholder abuse. Several participants recounted parents demonstrating physical and verbal abuse towards other parents, youth participants, and referees (31 MU). For example, Mike recalled his recent minor hockey experiences: “Some of the parents took it so seriously... We had fights in the stands between parents. You could hear the yelling and screaming on the ice and you know what? I don’t think anybody really enjoyed those weekends”. Mike went on to describe how parents from opposite teams would yell across the ice at each other: “The negative – you could hear that much more clearly – more of a yell across the ice, and it was pretty distinct.” Tony described how this type of incident often escalated:

As soon as the crowd gets involved, then the kids see what the crowd’s doing... and then it escalates. Maybe two people in the stands on either side of visiting or home team... they’re screaming at each other in the stands and the next thing you know they’re wanting to fight.

Many participants also discussed parents’ verbal and physical abuse towards players. As Matt said: “I’ve seen a parent grab a 12-year old kid and punch him after the game... to parents just

screaming at their kids at the games, to saying they're going to take them out of hockey...Just the mental abuse sometimes". Matt went on to explain:

I heard a lot of negative comments from opposing teams' parents insulting us or insulting me. One of our players had an issue with one of the players on the other team and the father went after him after the game and actually hit him. There was charges pressed, then dropped.

Jason also expressed frustration with this type of behaviour:

If you start yelling at your kid, that is without a doubt, the wrong thing to do. I don't care what that kid does out there - there's better ways to address things than to be yelling and screaming at your kid. I've had instances where kids were in tears because of their parents yelling at them. Why? It's a parent problem. It's not the way to handle it.

Parents' inappropriate behaviours towards officials were also noted, as Rob said: "The loudest thing I hear [at minor representative hockey games] is the abuse of young officials". Tony also reported: "The crowd definitely is the headache for a referee...a lot of verbal abuse towards any call. It doesn't really matter...some parents just go there to create havoc with the referee."

Excessive investments and rewards. Many participants suggested parents made excessive investments in their child's training (8 MU). As Rob explained, "I see a lot of the dads saying, 'I've got my kid down shooting pucks for an hour every night.'" Jason spoke specifically of parents' investment in children's off-ice training, "They have kids going to the gym at ten, which I think is so ludicrous – to be bigger and stronger. They think they'll get a leg up". He went on to explain how parents in turn provided their children with excessive rewards for optimal performance:

I was in [City] at a tournament with these 8 year olds, and [Child] pulls his wallet out and the wallet was like that thick [hand gestured 4-5 inches] and this was an 8 year old! I looked at it - I said, "What's all that?" He said, "Oh, it's all my money...My dad, he pays me for passes, for shots, for hits, for ice time. You know, all of it. Some games I can make \$30-40 dollars." This is an 8 year old. (Jason)

Over-stepping the coaching line. Participants discussed parents over-stepping boundaries from parenting to coaching (8 MU). Jason described a parent trying to coach his child from the sidelines with an intricate system of instruction:

I had a parent for example that would stand up in the stands - this is an 8 year old team - he'd stand up in the stands and he wouldn't sit with the rest of the parents because he had signals that he'd yell to his son, and one of his signals was "click" and when his son heard "click," that was the sign, the signal, to carry the puck. He'd come to the practice and he'd bring me practice drills, "Thought you might want to use these." He'd comment on every practice. Like, you'd get a critique. These are 8 year olds.

Mike also described parents offering very specific coach-like instructional comments during the games, suggesting players do not always appreciate such feedback:

If you're on the power play or something, [or] you're kind of holding onto the puck, trying to slow it down, and they're going, "Shoot! Shoot!" They don't know. They're not out there. They're not playing. You can certainly hear them and I really hate it to be honest... I think [instructional comments from spectators] actually confuse players more than it helps because you practice certain things and your coach tells you certain things and then you've got some guy in the crowd telling you to do something else.

Encouraging aggression. Participants discussed parents often encouraging their children to engage in aggressive behaviour on the ice (7 MU). For example, Jason discussed:

I think that a lot parents think that physical play - being tough - helps you get to the NHL level, and they encourage their kids. There are some parents that actually like to see another player hurt because of strong physical play. But chances are—it's dirty. The need to be aggressive, the need to go out and hurt people—that's wrong.

Peter suggested that parents do not fully understand what they are telling their children to do: "Some of these parents weren't players themselves, and then they tell their kids to be really aggressive." Chris' reflection on his recent experiences as a player provides some insight on how such feedback is interpreted: "People are telling you, 'You gotta hit hard' or 'You gotta hurt people'. I was kind of like, 'Okay, I get it, if that's gonna make me a good player.'"

Motives Behind Negative Parental Behaviour

Lure of professional sport. Participants suggested the lure of professional sport (e.g., the NHL) was likely a reason behind many of parents' concerning or inappropriate behaviours (12 MU), however unrealistic and misguided. As Tony stated: "everybody is trying to get to the NHL by the time they're 10 years old". Another participant further explained:

The biggest thing right now in hockey, with kids especially, is that they like playing hockey but they're misguided, in most cases, by their parents, who see the million dollar contracts in the NHL. I had to deal with a lot of parents and it's very sad because you just want to grab them and say, "Look - your kid's not going to make it!" You've got to get parents dropping the dream that their kid's going to play in the NHL. (Jason)

Mary, a parent of two professional players, was similarly frustrated by this singular focus: "I have never agreed with the hockey mindset. There was far too much emphasis on making it to the NHL and success...I felt the expectations were not well-balanced." Similarly, Matt highlighted the role of the specialized elite minor hockey system in contributing to parents' expectations:

[They think that] whether they get their kid on a certain team is gonna make their kid play in the NHL...to relate that to an 11, 12 year old kid...And kids notice that kind of thing. Not only do they notice it but it scares them...I've seen a lot of kids just stop playing.

Hockey hierarchy. Two participants also suggested the hierarchy in minor hockey contributed to parents' negative behaviours (2 MU): higher performance by children was associated with higher social status among parents. Rob described how this hierarchy was particularly evident among the highest level of minor hockey players (e.g., a 'AAA' team).

A friend asked me to do a clinic for a 'AAA' team...the boys were 9 or 10 - a young team. So as I was waiting there, a boy walked in, and I counted... He had the 'AAA' on, including his bag and everything - 11 times. Eleven 'AAA' things on him. I remember really thinking about it because it really shocked me...I started counting, and every boy was pretty much the same. They all had hats and shirts and shorts...And you know, it wasn't the kid's fault, it was the parents. It was so important to the parents...The hierarchy for parents between 'AAA' and 'AA' - that one letter - is a huge, huge thing for parents.

Return on investments. Participants also reflected on parents' need to see a return on their hockey investments (3 MU); parents invested financially, practically, and emotionally, spending hours each week at hockey arenas, driving youth to and from arenas, and living the

highs and lows of the sport. Karen discussed how children's ice time became a measure of return on investment, as in most representative minor hockey leagues ice-time is distributed at the discretion of the coach: "I'd say [ice-time] was the hugest conflict for parents that I ran into. I could hear them in the stands. They'd say, 'We pay our money! Why is he getting more ice time?' They thought that was totally unfair."

Vicarious experiences. Participants also attributed negative behaviours to parents living vicariously through their children (4 MU). As Peter outlined:

I think parents tend to identify to their children and sometimes that becomes a bit problematic if they're living their dream through you. Their sense of worth or identity may be tied up in how well [their child] performs and sometimes that's a lot of weight to carry for young people.

Solutions for Prevention and Management of Concerning Issues

Ideas for curtailing negative parental issues in minor hockey emerged in three themes: effective parent education programs, targeted parent curricular content, and reporting and discipline; however, it is important to note that some participants were not optimistic about parents changing their behaviours in Canadian minor hockey.

Honestly, if someone's such a moron that they think it's okay to go out and scream obscenities at young boys or girls playing hockey or referees, I'm not so sure that you or I or anybody is going to be able to talk sense into them. (Dave)

Effective parent education programs. All participants suggested a need for effective parent education programs (30 MU) – specifically mandatory standardized programs to be delivered at the commencement of every hockey season across all leagues, outlining clear expectations for involvement and conduct.

You have to have a formal education system on parenting in hockey. The [provincial minor hockey organization] is probably the group that should look into that aspect of it. There's so much room for seminars and discussions given by the right people. You've got to have a standardized format that can go across all hockey—that is approved. (Jason)

Jason went on to emphasize the importance of assessment and evaluation of these programs, outlining his concerns: "I've seen some [parent hockey education] seminars but they just - nothing happens – they're done. There's no follow up." Rob reiterated how these programs often fail to change parents' behaviours: "People are in arenas and guys are screaming...[You're thinking], 'So you did take it [the parent program], but obviously you didn't get the message!'"

Targeted curricular content. Participants emphasized that parent education programs should include targeted curricular content in very specific areas (10 MU). Matt emphasized the balance between children's optimal athletic and personal development: "[Parents] need to be educated on the psychological effects of being so harsh on their kids." Jason suggested a diverse team of experts be brought on board to develop the most appropriate curriculum:

You might need to hire psychologists to go over what's good for the kid because it's not just the fun and about winning—it's the development of you as a person...Whatever it takes—guys with coaching experience, playing years...ask the players.

Information to help parents understand and maintain realistic expectations for their children's hockey involvement was also recommended. Rob reinforced: "Everyone reads the statistics of the amount of players who start playing to who play one game in the NHL. If they really look around this room at all these kids—statistically none of you will play [in the NHL]". Further, participants consistently emphasized the importance of teaching parents to remain calm, control

their emotions, demonstrate caring support, cheer, be sincere, and talk to their child, suggesting that respect and caring at games were essential to creating a positive atmosphere.

Reporting and discipline. Finally, participants proposed the implementation of a league respect committee that allowed for anonymous reporting and strict standardized discipline (MU 15). Specifically, participants suggested that parents had a responsibility to report inappropriate parent behaviours. Matt stated: “I think relying on other parents— not to be whistle-blowers— but if parents see something that’s not right, to call out the other parents.” Rob suggested a similar system with more anonymity: “If [leagues] had a respect committee that had people who people could talk to...If there was a way that minor hockey could police the bullying and the bad apples.” In line with this, participants also suggested parents have clear substantive consequences for misconduct at minor hockey games. Peter stated: “If [parents] are acting inappropriately in the stands or towards officials, there’s got to be some sanctions where there’s a consequence to those actions.” Jason also noted: “They need to have a standardized ruling. The one parent that gets carried away...they’ve got to be disciplined stronger than they are.”

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore negative parental behaviour in Canadian minor hockey through the perspectives of hockey insiders within the Canadian competitive minor hockey system. This study is particularly timely and relevant, with findings emphasizing negative parent behaviours as a persistent concerning issue in Canadian minor hockey, advancing current understanding and knowledge in several ways. First, findings advance youth sport research focused on parent involvement and behaviours, with particular enrichment of knowledge related to parents within Canadian minor hockey. Second, findings support and offer additional credence and academic rigour to recent media reports that are sometimes perceived as sensationalized, by offering perceptions of hockey insiders, who have extensive experience, knowledge, and understanding of Canadian minor hockey from grassroots to the highest levels. Third, findings offer not only in-depth descriptive accounts of *what* is happening in the Canadian minor hockey environment related to parental misconduct, but also provide rich details on potential motives behind parents’ poor behaviour (the *why*), and potential solutions to address these issues (the *how*).

The What: Negative Parent Behaviour

Findings emerged highlighting negative parental behaviours involving parents’ abuse towards other parents, officials, coaches, and players, excessive investments and rewards, overstepping of the coaching boundary, and parents’ encouragement of aggression. Parental misconduct towards stakeholders has been of growing interest in youth sport literature (Goldstein & Iso-Ahola, 2008; Omli & LaVoi, 2012; Shields et al., 2005), with verbal and physical abuse found to be a consistent stressor among hockey officials (Dorsch & Paskevich, 2007). Abuse within the sport context has typically been defined pertaining to concern for youth athletes. For example, Stirling (2009) has defined abuse as a “pattern of physical, sexual, emotional, or negligent ill-treatment by a person in a caregiver capacity (e.g., parent, coach) resulting in actual or potential harm to the athlete” (as cited in Stirling, Bridges, Cruz, & Mountjoy, 2011, p. 2). For the purposes of this paper, this definition has been adopted and translated to not solely youth, but all stakeholders involved in the sport context, specifically as it pertains to physical and emotional harm.

Given that parents' beliefs and values have a significant influence on children's beliefs and values (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005; Horn & Horn, 2007), and parents have a well-developed understanding of their "ability to influence players through their actions" (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008, p. 523), it is essential that parents model appropriate behaviours, yet findings of this study suggest a concerning void in this area. It appears that some parents may be losing sight of the fundamental goals of youth sport: for youth to develop physical skills in a caring and supportive environment, as well as psychosocial skills such as confidence and self-esteem, while facilitating their overall healthy development (Côté & Fraser-Thomas, 2011; Danish, Forneris, Hodge, & Heke, 2004).

Findings also highlight parents' investments and rewards for optimal performance were often seen as excessive. Although these behaviours were likely well-intentioned, previous literature suggests children and youth may perceive these behaviours as pressuring, as they have been associated with lower levels of sport enjoyment, heightened stress and anxiety, and sport withdrawal (Fraser-Thomas, Côté, & Deakin, 2008; Wuerth, Lee, & Alfermann, 2004). The provision of tangible rewards for performance is a form of extrinsic motivation often associated with decreases in children's intrinsic motivation (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999). Further, when examining these findings through a psychosocial development lens, past literature shows children who perceive less parental pressure are less likely to 'trash talk', less fearful of losing, and more gracious towards opponents (LaVoi & Babkes Stellino, 2008).

Finding also emerged related to parents over-stepping coaching boundaries, and providing young athletes with too much advice before and during competitions. These behaviours may be related to hockey's firm entrenchment in Canadian culture (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), as parents may feel justified in their critiques, given their perceived familiarity with the game through personal experiences, or regular viewing of CBC's Hockey Night in Canada. Hellstedt (1987) highlighted the importance of coaches clearly communicating team philosophies, with specific suggestions for successful interactions with parents (e.g., articulating parents' roles at games and events, clarifying substitutions and playing time policies, assisting both parents and athletes in setting realistic goals). Past work also suggests adolescent athletes prefer that parents avoid providing technical and tactical advice during competitions (Knight et al., 2010; Wolfenden & Holt, 2005), as instructional comments can bombard and confuse children with too much information (Hellison, 1985). As such, it has been suggested that parents consider offering feedback in quiet or private (one-on-one) settings, away from the intensity of the game, while also reflecting on their child's developmental stage (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Knight et al., 2010).

Aggression has been defined as a verbal or physical act with the ability to cause psychological or physical harm to another individual (Silva, 1980; Stephens, 1998). Moreover Stephens (1998) outlined how specifically instrumental aggression is viewed as a response that serves as a mean to a particular goal, such as winning in the sport context. Findings regarding parents' encouragement of aggression reflect this and are also in line with past work suggesting that parents' aggressive discourses are often naturalized within the culture of minor hockey (Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010). Smith's (1979) seminal work on youth hockey players' perceptions of significant others' encouragement of fighting revealed a culture of minor hockey where "hitting" and 'taking the body' are widely appreciated and usually elicit shouts of approval. Making hard body contact seems to be a sign of 'desire'—of really being 'in the game' – and of character" (p.112). Robidoux and Bocksnick's (2010) study of minor hockey in Alberta, Canada supports this contention, as parents' cheering and encouraging comments were often

found to be in response to violent or aggressive plays. Findings are particularly concerning, showing parents' approval of aggression is linked to athletes' views about appropriate behaviour within sports (e.g., greater acceptance of injuring an opponent; Guivernau & Duda, 2002). Collectively, these findings speak to the cyclical nature of socially accepted norms, whereby parents may encourage aggression, as it has become an accepted behaviour in hockey.

The Why: Potential Motives Behind Concerning Parental Behaviour

In line with the above findings, participants identified potential motives behind parents' concerning behaviours within representative hockey including the lure of professional sport, the social hierarchy, parents' return on their investments, and parents living vicariously through their children. In a study that examined one's chances of making it to the NHL, Parcels (2002) tracked approximately 30,000 individuals born in 1975 who played within the minor hockey system in Ontario. Of them, 56 were drafted or signed by an NHL team, but only 32 had seen action in an NHL game, and only 15 had played more than one full NHL season. Evidently, the chances of making it to the NHL are minimal, yet the dream appears to be at the forefront of the minds of both parents and youth. It seems that what was created as "a domain to provide youth with the opportunity to develop and have fun in a safe environment has since been engulfed within the socialization of professional hockey establishing a well-deserved concern for youth playing minor hockey" (Bean, Forneris, & Robidoux, 2014, p. 7). In 1974, Vaz argued that youth are miniature professionals, mimicking the behaviour of elite athletes; it appears that the problem remains prominent today, perhaps centralized by the limelight of media sources. As Thompson (2010) suggested, hegemony and hierarchy appear to maintain a hold on competitive minor hockey families, as parents perpetuate the problematic hierarchy of status by reinforcing their own position within the hierarchy.

Given the lure of the NHL, coupled with the social hierarchy within the competitive youth hockey system, it follows that parents perceive their children's hockey involvement as an investment (financially, temporally, and emotionally), and subsequently, seek rewards. As Danish et al. (2004) highlighted:

Parents encourage their children to play sport at a younger and younger age, push them to join travel teams, and pressure coaches to give them starting positions, in part, because their athletic skills may lead to a college athletic scholarship offer. (p. 38)

Most often, participants described conflicts surrounding children's playing time, in a climate that seemed trapped between professional and youth sport philosophies. Parents' extensive investment may have, at times, been driven by their own missed experiences, as some participants noted parents seemed to be living vicariously through their children within the sporting environment. These findings are of concern given past research outlining parents' own lack of sporting opportunities in their childhood, in combination with subsequent pressure they place on their children, can contribute to the withdrawal from sport for highly-invested athletes (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008).

The How: Potential Solutions for Prevention and Management of Concerning Issues

In order to address the aforementioned issues present in Canadian minor hockey, participants highlighted the need for a nation-wide effective parent education program that integrates targeted curricular content, and system for reporting and disciplining inappropriate parent conduct. 'Respect in Sport' (2014), a one-hour online parent program focused on helping parents set reasonable expectations for their children in sport is mandatory or highly

recommended for parents in many minor hockey organizations across Canada (Canadian Press, 2012). While ‘Respect in Sport’ is an example of a program developed through extensive research and partnerships (e.g., PREVnet: Promoting Relationships and Eliminating Violence, a federally funded research organization, and the Canadian Red Cross), indicating progressive steps in hockey parent education, little research has been done to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of such programs on the minor hockey environment. Further, findings from this research highlight the need for such a program to not only have a consistent curriculum across provincial or even national governing bodies of hockey within Canada, but also to be mandatory for parents and/or guardians of youth athletes at the beginning of every season. Although Hockey Canada presents many expectations and guidelines for appropriate parent behaviours, a formal, nationwide policy for disciplining inappropriate parent behaviours is not currently utilized (Hockey Canada, 2014b; Ontario Minor Hockey Association, 2014). While most study participants appeared optimistic about the potential effectiveness of a reporting and disciplining penalty-based system, some participants echoed Robidoux and Bocksnick’s (2010) conclusions following their year-long examination of parent/spectator behaviour in Peewee hockey games:

The various policies that have been implemented to correct problematic behaviours at youth hockey games will continue to be ineffective until behaviours currently deemed acceptable and appropriate in minor hockey arenas are properly recognized as the detrimental and damaging behaviour that they are. (p. 45)

Therefore, while further examination of an anonymous reporting system may eventually contribute to a more positive parent culture in minor representative hockey, findings suggest a multi-faceted approach is clearly needed in addressing and overcoming these complex issues. Moreover, the need for such an approach would not be useful without the use of monitoring. Recently, Cook and Dorsch (2014) conducted a study that examined coach behaviour within the youth sport in which the authors highlighted the usefulness of positive surveillance, monitoring, and evaluation, and called for a need for further monitoring of youth sports in order to produce, inform, and evaluate policy that protects youth within the sport environment. While not discussed by participants, the use of monitoring would aid in utilizing a system for reporting and disciplining inappropriate parent conduct towards all stakeholders involved in the minor hockey context.

Future Directions and Practical Implications

This study explored negative parental behaviours in minor hockey through the perspectives of 10 hockey insiders, who had extensive firsthand experience in Canadian minor hockey in multiple and diverse roles, from the most grassroots minor hockey to the high performing elite levels. Findings collectively offer understanding of key issues, while exploring potential motives and offering possible solutions for these issues. Although findings are not generalizable to all Canadian minor hockey environments, they offer additional insight into the representative minor hockey culture, through the perspectives of purposefully sampled individuals with extensive knowledge and understanding of the minor hockey system. Future research should continue to advance understanding of parental involvement by examining the specific, and perhaps at times differing perspectives of minor hockey coaches, players, referees, and parents. Sport programmers’ and policy makers’ perceptions are also worthy of further understanding so that effective research may collectively contribute to future effective practical applications. Moreover, as minor hockey includes athletes from the ages of 5 to 19, it would be

valuable to understand negative and positive parental involvement across children's development at not only the competitive (representative) level, but at the recreational (house league) level as well, while also examining potential differences in male and female minor hockey leagues. Changing social landscape must be considered when studying parenting in Canadian minor hockey, given a gradual shift in 'traditional' family structures, marked by increases in lone parenting, same-sex parents, and reconstituted households (Fraser-Thomas & Beesley, 2015). It is also necessary to explore the influence of sport, culture, and nationality in parental behaviours, to better contextualize this research within broader youth sport literature.

Study findings are of particular interest from a practical perspective. While past research suggests that sport has the potential to contribute to youths' psychosocial development (Danish et al., 2004; Fraser-Thomas, et al., 2005), findings of this study, coupled with additional literature (Feschuk, 2011; Robidoux & Bocksnick, 2010) suggest parents of youth playing hockey in Canada are not always optimally facilitating this process, which should be concerning for all stakeholders (e.g., governing organizations, coaches, parent, referees, athletes). Participants within this study highlighted important suggestions for the prevention and management of parental issues, yet Robidoux and Bocksnick's (2010) call for a more systemic and cultural change within the sport cannot be overlooked. As such, it is important that future initiatives, interventions, programs, and research aimed to curb negative parental behaviours consider all levels of influence in children's development, from family influences, through to programs (e.g., leagues), systems (e.g., Hockey Canada), and societal and cultural influences (e.g., NHL). Ideally, future researchers would partner with minor hockey league stakeholders (e.g., system and league administrators, executives, coaches) to engage in diverse research methodologies (e.g., action, intervention) to monitor, assess, evaluate, and implement new and existing proposed solutions with the ultimate goal of creating a mandatory parent education program across the country. Moreover, while guidelines and expectations are in place by Hockey Canada, the creation of a national policy for disciplining inappropriate parent behaviours is warranted. A worthwhile first step would be to conduct a pilot intervention initializing the implementation of respect committee within one hockey organization that enabled opportunities for anonymous reporting and strict standardized discipline based on Hockey Canada's current guidelines. From this, evaluation research can be conducted and expanded to a larger hockey context, with the goal of creating a national policy and disciplinary system for such behaviour.

Although future research and practical suggestions may initially seem lofty or unfeasible given the stronghold of hockey in Canadian culture (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993), it is important to note that these suggestions are made within the context of what has been called a 'tipping point' in Canadian minor hockey (Maki, 2013, n.p.), as Hockey Canada is being faced with declining enrolment and retention, while making significant changes to how the game is played (e.g., increasing the minimum age for body checking). As recently stated by an executive director of a Canadian provincial hockey organization: "We have this massive system and that's part of the challenge. It's a system that's been put together in a very traditional way and we need to look at things differently now" (Litwinski, as cited in Maki, 2013, n.p.). Acknowledgement and recognition of negative parental behaviours, coupled with a willingness to re-examine the culture of the sport, may lay the foundation for more positive, facilitative, and developmentally appropriate parental behaviours.

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