



# An exploratory qualitative investigation of psychosocial determinants of parental decisions to support sport participation for youth with a mobility impairment



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 20 February 2015

Received in revised form 15 July 2015

Accepted 3 August 2015

Available online 27 August 2015

### Keywords:

Health Action Process Approach

Mobility impairment

Parents

Sport

Youth

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Parents of youth with a mobility impairment (MI) have an important influence on their children's sport participation. The current study consists of an exploratory qualitative investigation of the relevance of HAPA for understanding parental support behaviours for youth with MI's sport participation.

**Methods:** Parents of youth athletes (Mage = 11.10; SD = 2.77) and non-athletes (Mage = 11.50; SD = 3.84) participated in semi-structured interviews with question development guided by the Health Action Process Approach (HAPA).

**Results:** Constructs from HAPA were expressed as relevant to parental decisions, with differing subthemes emerging based upon parental group (i.e. parents of non-athletes or parents of athletes). Other constructs that emerged included barriers, facilitators, and resources.

**Discussion:** Constructs from the motivational phase of HAPA were relevant for parents of athletes and non-athletes, while the volitional phase demonstrated utility for understanding the views of parents of athletes. Differences between the patterns of responses of both groups were apparent in how the constructs were expressed. Findings identify key areas for research, as well as practical applications. For example, future programs can target parental positions on specific HAPA constructs (e.g. risk perceptions) where differences were found between both groups of parents in order to promote parental decisions that support their children's sport participation.

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## What this paper adds?

The purpose of this paper is to determine the utility of the Health Action Process Approach (HAPA) for understanding parental support for youth with a mobility impairment's (MI) sport participation. Through its methodology and results the paper provides a novel contribution to the existing literature on sport for youth with MI. Beginning with the methodology, to our knowledge, this is the first study to use a behavioural theory to examine the parental support behaviours for sport

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participation of youth with MI. This study also included all HAPA constructs rather than select constructs. This decision results in two key benefits: (1) the findings improve knowledge of an entire theory and not just certain constructs; and (2) the inclusion of constructs that have yet to be examined among parents of youth with MI such as planning and different types of self-efficacy. A second novel aspect of the methodology is the inclusion of the perspective of parents of non-athletes and not just parents of athletes. It is those parents who have not yet involved their children in sport that must be targeted in order to improve the sport participation rates of youth with MI. Therefore, the inclusion of their perspective is essential for the literature. Finally, when considering the findings of this study, they provide indications of where parents of athletes and parents of non-athletes have similar or different perspectives. This information provides clear direction about which constructs researchers and practitioners must target for future research.

## 1. Introduction

Compared to able-bodied youth, youth with a mobility impairment (MI; limitations to musculoskeletal and/or neurological body systems influencing functional abilities, WHO, 2001) are more likely to be physically inactive (Murphy and Carbone, CCD, 2008). This trend must be rectified. Parental commitment to the activities of youth with an impairment, which includes youth with MI, is linked to a three-fold increase in sport participation (Kowalchuk & Crompton, 2009). Current models exist that conceptualize determinants of sport participation among youth with and without MI (Côté, 1999; Fredericks & Eccles, 2004; Horn & Horn, 2007; King et al., 2006; King et al., 2003). Within these models, parents are indicated as a key source of influence affecting youth participation in sport. These models do not, however, identify the factors associated with parents' decision to support their children's sport participation. In the absence of this knowledge, it is unclear how to affect change in parents' decisions to support (or not support) sport participation. A comprehensive exploration of the factors that enable or hinder parents from supporting youth with MI to engage in sport is essential (King et al., 2006; Rimmer, 2013; Rimmer & Rowland, 2008).

Conceptual models or theories provide a useful foundation for exploratory research by directing investigators' attention to potentially important determinants of behaviour (Creswell, 2014). Accordingly, studies examining determinants of parental support of able-bodied youth's physical activity (including sport) participation are guided by behaviour change theory (Rhodes et al., 2013; Rhodes & Quinlan, 2014; Yao & Rhodes, 2015). In these studies, factors such as parental attitudes about support, and parents' perceived control over support emerge as important determinants of parental support behaviours (Rhodes et al., 2013). Taking a similar theory-based approach, the current study is guided by the Health Action Process Approach (HAPA).

According to HAPA, parental support for sport participation involves a motivational and a volitional phase (Schwarzer, Lippke, & Luszczynska, 2011). The motivational phase is especially relevant for parents that lack motivation to support their child's sport participation but can also be useful in understanding the decision-making process of parents of athletes who have successfully traversed this phase. During this first phase, parents move from having no intention of supporting their child's sport participation to beginning to set intentions for supporting participation. Several constructs are important in aiding this transition towards intentions: outcome expectations (i.e. parents' beliefs in the benefits of their child's sport participation), risk perceptions (i.e. views of their child's severity or susceptibility to risk should they support sport participation), and task self-efficacy (i.e. parents' confidence in their own ability to support their children's sporting behaviour). In order to set intentions and move from the motivational phase into the volitional phase, parents are expected to have high positive outcome expectations, low risk perceptions, and high task self-efficacy.

In the volitional phase, parents go beyond setting intentions and involve their children in sport, making this phase relevant to researchers aiming to understand the decision-making process of parents of athletes (i.e. those who have already involved their children in sport). To move from intention to action in this phase, parents must set action plans (i.e. detailed plans on how they will support their child's sport participation), and coping plans (i.e. plans that determine how they will deal with barriers that may arise during plan execution). Once parents have succeeded in moving through this phase, other key constructs include two types of self-efficacy: maintenance self-efficacy (i.e. parents' confidence in their ability to continue supporting their children's involvement in the face of barriers to their child's sport participation) and recovery self-efficacy (i.e. parents' confidence in their ability to support their children in returning to sport after a period during which their child has withdrawn from participation). Beyond these constructs, HAPA recognizes that barriers and facilitators, including social support, may impact individuals at each phase (Schwarzer et al., 2011).

HAPA includes many of the constructs identified as key determinants of parental physical activity support behaviours for able-bodied children (Rhodes et al., 2013). In the limited research describing factors associated with parents' decision to support sport participation for youth with MI, the factors that do emerge align with HAPA constructs. For example, parental attitudes and parents' perceived control over support could be linked to HAPA constructs of outcome expectations and self-efficacy. However, this research was focused on only a few HAPA constructs leaving other constructs and the comprehensive model unexplored in the context of parental support of sport participation for youth with MI. A comprehensive, exploratory study informed by HAPA will expand knowledge of factors associated with parents' decision to support sport participation for youth with MI. Consequently, the current study is a qualitative exploration aiming to determine the relevance of HAPA constructs for understanding parental support behaviours for youth with MI's sport participation. To achieve this aim we conducted interviews with parents of athletes (i.e. parents whose children were currently involved in organized sport and thus had completed the motivational phase and were currently in the volitional phase) and parents of non-athletes with MI

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