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Title:

Pathways to participation in gymnastics: Understanding the experiences of families of children with disability.

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Authors

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Title: Pathways to participation in gymnastics: understanding the experiences of families of children with disability

Background/Objective:

Modifying environments can break down barriers to community participation for children and young people with disability and their families. Gymnastics is a popular community-based sport for young people in Australia with physical, social, and psychological benefits for children including those with disability. The aim of this study was to understand the experiences of families of children with disability with getting involved in, and participating in, gymnastics, to inform how more supportive gymnastics environments can be created.

Study design:

Sequential explanatory mixed-methods study

Study participants and setting:

Eligible participants were parents or carers of children / young people with disability (any type, up to 25 years of age) who currently participate in, had participated in, or had attempted to participate in gymnastics in Victoria, Australia, in the last 3 years.

Methods:

This study was led by researchers in collaboration with a project advisory group including two parents of children with disability and staff from the peak organisation for gymnastics in Victoria. Participants were invited to complete an online survey, with selected participants purposively invited to undertake a semi-structured interview via videoconference. Quantitative survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics with preliminary findings informing the invitation of interview participants and further refinement of the interview questions. Qualitative survey and interview data were analysed using inductive thematic analysis to create themes. All data were then mixed to create a conceptual framework. Themes and the framework underwent member checking with the parent advisors and interview participants.

Results:

Sixty-eight parents or carers provided survey responses, and eight interviews were conducted. The three most reported factors considered when selecting a gymnastics club were 1) coaches' knowledge of disability (median importance score = 84/100, interquartile range (74-99)), 2) convenient location (80 (68-94)) and, 3) inclusive programs offered (80 (63-94)). Five key themes emerged: 1) Tailored, accessible and supportive facilities and programs make a difference, 2) An explicitly inclusive club culture helps young people get involved and stay involved, 3) Coach knowledge about engaging children with disability is valued, 4) Enjoyment and recognition of achievement are key facilitators of ongoing participation and, 5) Gymnastics has psychological and social benefits too. The conceptual framework integrated themes into stages along the participation pathway.

Conclusions/significance:

Many participation-related interventions target children with disability and their families. Conversely, these findings provide guidance to gymnastics clubs on how to become more inclusive and supportive environments at each stage of participation.

397 words