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RESEARCH ARTICLE

ATHLETE'S PATH TO EXCELLENCE: THE ROLE OF MOTHER'S SACRIFICE.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study has been to determine the negative impact on mothers while providing support for their child to become a top athlete. The negative impact associated with this support from mothers is called 'emotional investment.' We applied a qualitative, inductive and interpretative methodology following the procedures and techniques of grounded theory. The research involved interviews with 17 mothers and their 20 top athletes sons and daughters. At the end of it, we formulated a theory which we call Mothers' Negative Emotional Investment in their Children's Sporting Excellence. Our theory relies on three main themes: 1. Pain, fear, and anxiety of the mother, 2. Negative impact on the family, 3. Sacrifice, renunciations, and effort on the part of the mother. i. These three themes are not only interrelated and hierarchically arranged, but also show a dynamic evolution along with the child's athletic and personal development.

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Introduction:-

The enormous demands of competitive sport and the constant training sessions of young athletes require a great deal from the family and have a considerable impact on normal family life (Bloom, 1985; Coakley, 2006; Côté, 1999; Gould, Lauer, Rolo, Jannes and Pennisi, 2008; Holt and Dunn, 2004). Parents have different levels of commitment to their children's road to excellence which involve sacrifice, effort, fear and apprehension (Wolfenden and Holt, 2005; Wurth, Lee and Alferman, 2004). While a lot of attention has been paid to the support given by families to young athletes in the literature, very little attention has been focused on the impact of that support on the family itself. As we will see, the burden on the family increases along with the age and level of the sporting activity of the child (Kay, 2000).

For a family, participation in sport of one of the children entails a series of economic, psychological and emotional resources. These resources and the corresponding time consumed have important consequences on the cohesion and development of family life, both on and away from the sports field (Trussell, 2009). The highly demanding and multi-faceted support given by parents to their children involved in sport is frequently accompanied by negative consequences for the whole family (Thompson, 1999). The literature has shown various negative issues concerning the focus on top athletes, this includes sacrifice of time, impact of finances, and the role of emotions.

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Sacrifice of time:-

The commitment in time to the sporting activities of one of the children can be a heavy burden on the family, both physically and emotionally. There are many mothers who dedicate 20 hours a week to their child's sporting activity (Trussell and Shaw, 2007) and comment on how this time negatively affects the daily, weekly and annual family cycles (Kay, 2000). There is no doubt that it is the mothers who are usually in charge of all the coordination involved in the changeable timetable (Arandell, 2001; Daly, 2001, 2002).

A study in Australia of the mothers of tennis players revealed that the sporting activity of the children had a deep and sometimes constraining impact on the everyday life of the mother. Not only were mothers constantly at the call of their children but in most cases it was they alone who were in charge of the transport of the children, and everything related to the tennis activity (Thompson, 1999). The study concluded that it was difficult, if not impossible, for a young tennis player to take part in tennis tournaments and reach a high level without the support of their mother, particularly for transport. This logistic support had a negative impact on the mothers' daily routines (Thompson, 1999).

The child's sport practice can demand so much time that leisure activities or free time together as a whole family, even eating together, can be compromised (Dunn, Kinney and Hofferth, 2003; Townsend and Murphy, 2001). Family holidays and even parents' work schedules can be altered as a result (Kay, 2000). Likewise, the physical activities of the parents can be significantly reduced or eliminated. In particular, it is particularly the mothers who put their children's sports practice before their own leisure time (Cutrona and Russell, 1990; Dunn, Kinney and Hofferth, 2003; Thompson, 1999).

Economic sacrifices:-

The child's sports activities also require significant economic expenditure, and the costs increase along with the performance level of the player (Townsend and Murphy, 2001). Direct sports costs such as training fees, tournaments, material, sports equipment, or indirect costs such as transport, hotels or health care can lead to an economic sacrifice for the family (Chafetz and Kotarba, 1995; Trussell, 2009). In a family budget the sport activities of a gifted child can become the third highest financial allocation, after mortgage payments and the expenses of the car (Brooke, 2006).

Psychological and emotional sacrifices:-

From an emotional point of view, the child's sports activities can be exhausting for the family. Parents may become stressed, even frustrated, when confronted with the time and commitment required by their child's sports activity (Kay, 2000). This can cause tensions and conflict between the parents (Trussell and Shaw, 2007). Many mothers complain that the whole family cannot spend much time together or that they cannot spend time alone with their husbands because of the child's sports activity (Brooke, 2006).

Siblings are another reason for emotional exhaustion. Parents try to minimize the impact of their children's sports activities on the siblings and make a great effort to treat them all the same, particularly if they are younger (Kay, 2000). Families with several children practising different sports and engaged in tournaments have unusual physical, psychological and emotional commitments (Brooke, 2006).

Most studies dealing with the impact of top-level sports activities of children on family life fail to reveal the true cultural and ideological structures related to gender roles. They tend to assume that the part played by mothers and fathers is equal, with a similar impact for both of them (Thompson, 1999). Not surprisingly, most of the scientific literature does not differentiate between the effects the children's sports activities have on mothers and fathers. Therefore, the purpose of this study has been to determine the negative impact on mothers while providing support for their child to become a top athlete.

Method:-

This study was conducted from a qualitative perspective. The procedures and techniques applied for the determination of the negative emotional investment, made by the mothers in the development of their children's sporting excellence, are those from an interpretative analysis. Within this interpretative analysis, our approach stresses theory construction or Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

Participants:

In our study we interviewed 20 athletes and 17 mothers, all of them Spanish nationals resulting in 37 interviews. Table 1. shows the social and sporting details of the participants. As can be seen, the study concentrates on participants who are competing at top levels. At the time of the interviews, the participants met the following requirements legal age, a member of a national team for at least three years or has been a finalist in the Spanish Championships at the senior level in team sports, or to have been a member of a top level national team.

Procedure:

As is usual in this kind of methodology, the procedure carried out was flexible, changing, and spontaneous (Charmaz, 2006). To collect the data, we performed open (Patton, 1990) and semi-structured interviews (Denzin, 1970). Data analysis began immediately after the first interview. The procedure consisted of the following steps: interviewing, verbatim transcription of the interview, submittal of the interview transcript together with our general interpretations to the participants and data analysis. Once the first interview had been analysed, we performed the next interview. The analysis previously made served as a guideline for the subsequent data collection and is known as theoretical sampling. This data collection process, simultaneously with the analysis, ended when the interviews produced no new data or theoretical saturation (Charmaz, 2006).

Data analysis:

Data analysis was performed basically using two techniques: coding and memoing. Coding consisted of different stages, overlapping in time. Initial coding began with an overall reading of the document in order to have a general idea of the interview. Subsequently, the document was segmented into smaller units, and those units with analytical significance for the aims and questions of the study were selected. Afterwards, the selected segments were coded line by line. This operation consisted in ascribing a word or short description to the unit which served as a summary and interpretation (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

The second kind of coding was focussed coding involving different tasks, such as the fusion or renaming of codes in order to adapt them grammatically for use in the theory. Codes with similar characteristics were grouped together into similar units or 'families.' These were monitored and studied in order to determine which of them were eligible for becoming categories on account of their analytical power (Charmaz, 2006).

Axial coding consisted of an exhaustive analysis of categories. This involved the determination of the internal dynamics, hierarchical levels, process and evolution over time of the category (Strauss, 1987). Finally, the theoretical coding analysed the relationships between categories and determined the so-called core category (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Memoing is a tool which runs parallel to coding and to the analysis where the ideas emerging in the mind of the researcher in connection with codes and categories are captured, both in the conceptual and in the substantive process (Holton, 2007). This tool is applied in all the stages of the analysis and eventually takes the form of memos, that is, informal notes concerning the analytical process (Charmaz, 2006).

Results:-

From the analysis of the data there emerged a theory which we called the Mothers' Negative Emotional Investment. The theory provides a description of the negative impact associated with the help provided by mothers throughout their children's top level sports career. This is displayed in Figure 1. The theory relies on three main categories: 1. Pain, Fear and Anxiety of the Mother; 2. Negative Impact on the Family; and 3. Sacrifice, and Effort of the Mother.

Pain, fear and anxiety of the mother:-

This category refers to the negative feelings associated with the sporting activities of the child. These feelings are the mother's sadness, bitterness, suffering, anxiety or distress as a result of the sporting activity of her child and the consequences for her of that activity. The category is made up of five parameters: these include the child, injuries and health, sport, future and education, and the negative impact on the family.

Child. The pain, fear or anxiety for the child is a negative feeling of variable magnitude and related to the child's physical and psychological well-being. Mothers want their children to be happy and not to suffer and they worry about the sacrifices their children have to make. The sub parameters Injuries and Health belong to this parameter.

One child said:

My mother used to put pressure on me when she thought that I was not completely happy with what I was doing, just to see if I would give up. Well, not exactly pressure. Sometimes she used to say to me, 'Why don't you just give up swimming?' (18:28 A11).

Another participant stated: "My mother always says, 'My greatest regret to do with my daughter's sporting success has been to see her suffer.'" (5:9 A3).

Injuries and health. This is the distress, fear or anxiety about the health and injuries of the young athlete. Mothers are afraid that their children will be injured or fall ill as a result of the great demands made on them as top athlete.

One athlete reflected: "When I had my last injury my mother had a terrible time. Obviously, I am the one who suffers most, but she also has a bad time and feels for me from the bottom of her heart." (1:42 A1).

Another team member stated:

I remember that my mother was always worried because I ate very little. I have never eaten a lot but at that point I was eating really very little and during my training programmes away from home she was worried about how I was eating and I remember she used to buy me little tins of nuts and raisins because she knew I liked them so that I would eat better. (8:13 A5).

Sport. Another fear of mothers has to do with the competition day or a specific sporting events and the type of sport. It is, for example, the distress of the mother when her child is insulted in a football stadium or her anxiety about the result and the performance of her child's team. These and other fears make mothers feel anxious when they attend their children's sporting events. Clearly sometimes the mother's anxiety is intensified by the roughness of the particular sport. In short, this parameter comprises all the negative aspects related to the choice of a particular sport.

One team member explained: My mother has always supported me. She has always come to watch me compete. Well, sometimes she went to the competitions but she couldn't bear to watch because she got very anxious and looked the other way and it was only when she heard all the noise at the end of the race that she turned around to see what had happened and how I had done. (3:9 A2).

Another participant retorted:

In the end my mother gave up going to watch me play. You know what football matches are like in the first division anyway, and to see me being insulted by all the football fans in the stadium, well, she just couldn't stand it. (7:24 A4.)

Future and education. Both parameters are related because education is very important for future prospects. The level of anxiety of mothers can range from mere concern to severe worry and distress about the future of their child. Many mothers experienced fear due to the uncertainty about the future of their children after their retirement from top-level sport. Mothers are concerned about their children's future career, place of residence, psychological balance after they retire from sport, and future physical ramifications from their engagement in a top-level sport. These anxieties and fears only disappear when uncertainty disappears and their children find a job, form a family unit or fully accept their new life as former athletes. These fears are always there with mothers with children still engaged in top-level sports.

One mother stated:

When you are in something as uncertain as sport where you depend on results, well it may not be what a mother would really like, she'd like her child to have a regular job and a steady life,... Anyway, despite all that she has always supported me and I've been very lucky. (3:15 A2).

Another mom relayed:

They are 28 year-old men you have to help with everything, because they don't have a settled future. It's a pity, my son finishes his sporting career and that's it, he has nothing. That's a big worry for me, I mean, his future. When he finishes his sporting career, it is all so uncertain. (11:31 M6).

The parameter Future includes the mothers' distress as a result of the physical problems that their children have undergone throughout their top-level sports career. This concern is only recognized by mothers of athletes who are no longer engaged in a top level sport or by athletes no longer engaged in top-level sport. The mothers and the athletes still engaged in a sport are often unaware of the physical consequences that engaging in top-level sport can have.

The mother's concern about the future careers of their children engaged in top-level sport are heavily dependent on the academic qualifications of their children. All the mothers admitted to being worried about the job future of their children. However, their anxiety decreases as the academic qualifications of the children increase.

One mother explained:

My daughter was a good student and when she finished COU [12th grade/last year of secondary school] she enrolled in a high performance sports centre. She continued at university because trainers like their sportswomen to study at university, but really it doesn't work like that. She failed the first year at university and dropped out of university. I was very worried about that, her father less so. He was so proud that his daughter was at a high performance sports centre. (33:14 M18).

Negative Impact on the Family:-

This second category refers to the negative emotional impact of the sport activities of the child on the family. This impact is made up of two parameters: General Negative Impact on the Family and Specific Negative Impact on the Family. This last one refers to the impact of the child's sport activities on specific members of the family. Here we distinguish three variants: father and mother, parents and the athlete, and siblings.

Father - Mother. The sport activities of the child can cause matrimonial problems because the father and mother may not agree about the way the situation should be managed. Sometimes mothers find it hard to accept that their young children are going to leave home and this can make them sad and anxious. The father, on the other hand, usually has no problem with the idea of his child going to a High Performance Sport Center (HPSC). This situation frequently causes problem within the marriage.

One mother explained:

For me, my daughter leaving home at the age of 12 [to go to an HPSC] was almost unbearable. [...] I took it really, really hard. [...] My husband did not mind so much. I cried and said to him, "It's all your fault that our daughter has gone." Because my husband backed her up. It was very important for me to have my daughter home, but not for him, it didn't worry him. (19:22 M11).

Parents – Athlete. Sometimes conflicts arise when the ideas of the parents and those of the children are different. Occasionally, both parents agree that the child should not make certain decisions, particularly at a very early age, when the parents' decisions are often the last word. This tends to happen when the child's sport career is in the beginning stage of their athletic development, when it is the parents who make all the decisions. These conflicts occur when the child wants to specialise at a very early age and his/her parents are against the idea. Looking back, young sport participants think that their parents did not want them to tire of sport too early and to ensure that they would go on to the next level of athletic development, where parents usually accept a greater specialization in order to attain top-level performance. Conflicts between the parents, usually, the father, with the mother as a mediator and their young children frequently take place when the trainer is the father.

One mom stated:

She went professional relatively late, because, well, she always wanted to, she always loved sport, but we always insisted that she had to study, first to finish COU [12th grade/last year of secondary school] and university, we insisted just like any parent would. And then she started out on her own, she paid for everything herself, without our help. That's how she started. (32:1 M12).

Siblings. Young sport members are usually unaware of the impact of their sport activity on their siblings, but mothers are aware of this and are concerned. Mothers try to treat all their children alike, but the young sportsman or woman often has special needs, and they demand commitment and attention on the part of the parents. As a result, most of the siblings of young sports people are jealous or, at least, they admit that the sporting activity of the sibling affected their own lives.

Another mom explained:

I think that the whole thing also had an effect on her sisters. Because the talk was all about her and less about her sisters, but... not only you yourself, you know, we live in a small town and that was what it was like every day, "This is the athlete's sister, this is the athlete's house, this is the athlete's mother..." (9:18 M5).

And, one of the athletes said:

The most obvious example is the case of my sister. When my mother took me to my training sessions my sister went to my aunt's or my grandmother's. You can imagine. Of course she was jealous. Oh yes, she loved me very much and was very proud of me, but to lose your mother every afternoon... (16:20 A9).

General Negative Impact on the Family. This impact refers to the negative influence of the child's sport activity on the whole family. As happens with the siblings, the young athlete is usually unaware of any negative impact of his/her sport activities on his/her family. This general negative impact on the family can cause a degree of alienation from the family.

She always took me. Sometimes we had a match on a Saturday and then afterwards we would go up to ski, because my father and my brother were already there because they had gone up on Friday. (27:5 A16).

The Sacrifices, and Effort of the Mother:-

This category refers to negative situations in relation to the sport activity of the child. Effort entails cost, if one wants to achieve a goal the cost can be emotional, physical or material, a renunciation is not voluntary. In this context, a sacrifice is not doing something to achieve something else. This category is made up of nine parameters.

Leisure. The sacrifice in connection with leisure time refers to the reduction and, in many cases, complete suppression of free time activities carried out by mothers. Prior to the sport career of their children, many mothers participated in various sports, or went on weekends away or out for a meal with friends. The sports activity of their children significantly reduces or eliminates all these activities.

One athlete said:

Oh yes, she has given up a lot of things for me. For example, when she came to watch my races, she probably wanted to go somewhere else. Sometimes she had to stay at home in the summer and didn't go away on holiday so she could be with me. (3:29 A2).

Another competitor relayed:

"She has sacrificed going out days out, seeing her sister, going for a walk or doing exercise..." (16:16 A9).

One mother explained:

I have sacrificed going skiing. Anyway, going with my son to his sports activity was just as fun or more so than going skiing. Besides, I thought: I can always go skiing later on in my life if I want to. But this moment in my son's life and this moment in his sports career, that's something I can only have now. (28:7 M16).

Economic. The financial and economic effort as well as economic deprivation refers to the economic expenditure of the sports activity of the child. All the families and all the athletes mention the economic costs of top-level sports activity. However, the impact of these costs varies significantly depending on the sport, the size of the family, and the socioeconomic class of the young athletes. We found two different levels of economic sacrifices: 1. Economic effort, that the expenditure of the sports activity of the child has no relevant impact on the family; 2. Economic deprivation, that the expenditure of the sports activity of the child has a direct impact on the mother's budget or, more generally, on the family budget, since a considerable proportion of the household budget is given over to the sports activity of the young athlete.

One mother stated:

It was the journeys, us going to see her, taking her here and there. We paid for the school, the hall of residence and all that is an economic sacrifice. Besides, we lived some way away and we were always going to see her. (9:26 M5).

Time. The effort or relinquishment in relation to time refers to the time that the mother loses. The mother detrimentally loses not only leisure time or free time for herself, but also time for her professional career, for being with her other children or just to relax. One athlete said: "My mother has sacrificed her time. She has given up a lot

of things and has devoted that time to me.” (16:15 A9). Another related: “My mother has sacrificed her own life so that I could have mine, so that I could devote myself to this. She no longer had any time for herself.” (22:14 A12).

Child. In this category we refer to the sacrifice of missing the presence of one's child at home such as family gatherings because he/she is at an HPSC. Mothers frequently complain that they have not seen their sporting children grow up and that the whole family has spent less time with them because of their sport activity.

One athlete explained:

Really, she has given up everything for me, to see me leave home at the age of 12, well, that was very hard for her. From her point of view, my mother has given up everything: seeing me at home every day until the normal sort of age when one leaves home, seeing me return home. Because I left home when I was only 12, and until I retired I lived in a hall of residence. (18:19 A11).

Another sportsman said, “My mother did not see me grow up. I think that was really awful for her.” (29:26 A17). And another related, “For example, to give up her son in the sense that she could not spend as much time with him as she wanted to. (7:25 A4).”

Familiar. This refers to sacrifices or renunciations which affect the whole family. One mother described her situation:

If there was a christening or a wedding or a family gathering, my daughter wasn't always there. At Christmas we have always given the presents on the night of 31st December. We did it like this because on 2nd January my daughter had to go off again. Obviously, it's very sad for everyone in the family when your daughter is not there at all the family occasions. (19:29 M11).

Job-related. Job-related sacrifices can be of two kinds: 1. The mother must work harder because of the extra-expenditure caused by her child's sports activity, or because the father accompanies the child to his/her training sessions and sporting events and it is the mother who has to look after the family business. 2. The mother sacrifices her job in order to spend time helping her child resulting in an ensuing detriment to her professional career.

One Mother said:

I have sacrificed a lot of things in my job. At that time I worked for a tax consultancy firm and my job had to take second place because I was taking my children to and fro (26:15 M15).

Another mother explained: “When my son goes to a competition I have to do longer hours in the business, because ours is a family business.” (11:30 M6).

Energy. The effort or relinquishment in relation to energy refers to how the mother loses physical vigour or energy as a result of the constant support of her child's sports activity. Sometimes it is the transport of the child, other times it is food preparation or washing the clothes.

A mother described her situation:

When my son goes away for 15 or 20 days, that's a double workload for me. I must work harder, stay longer at the gym. It's an almost unbearable physical sacrifice. (11:32 M6).

Psychological well-being. The sport activity of the child usually reduces the mother's psychological well-being, since it is more difficult for her to relax, and her life is more vulnerable to frightening experiences and anxiety in connection with her child's activity. Mothers are concerned for their children's physical integrity, health and happiness. The peculiar uncertainties for the top-level sports performance of her child are also a matter of concern for the mother. The mother sacrifices her peace of mind because of all these various anxieties such as constant trips, possible injuries, the uncertainty of not knowing which team her child will be playing in the following year, or if he/she will be chosen for the national team in the Olympic Games.

One mother stated: “When you see your child suffering, when you see your child sometimes losing and having a bad time of it, you suffer a lot as well. (5:29 A3).” Another mom related: “The sports activity of my child has not only taken up a lot of my time, it has also meant I have been very stressed. I was never relaxed and free of worry. (2:22 M1).”

Time schedules. Sacrifices and efforts in relation to time schedules refer to how the mothers or the family have to adapt their meal times, their outings and holidays to the sports activity of the child. One athlete stated:

My mother has sacrificed a lot for me. [...] She had to prepare my meals at a given time because I had to compete at four o'clock and therefore eat at twelve; she had to understand me and respect my schedule, for example, I had to go to bed early, to rest properly in order to train hard the next day... (27:7 A16).

Other considerations. In objective terms, mothers can make enormous sacrifices for their children, regardless of the performance of their child. These renunciations refer to a set of sacrifices in connection with the sport activity of their children. These sacrifices affect the economy, time, energy, job and leisure activities of the mother. They affect all aspects of her life in different ways and at different times.

Mothers mention different levels of effort and sacrifice according to the above parameters. The type of sport, the size of the family, the socioeconomic class of the family, the mother's age, even her ideology, all these factors play a role in the level of the sacrifices made. Athletes are frequently unaware of these sacrifices made by their mothers, but sometimes it is the mothers themselves who are unaware of their own renunciations, because they tend to see it as their duty to make these sacrifices.

Discussion:-

The aim of this study was to determine what a mother's commitment to the top-level sports activity of her child means for her. In order to do that, we tried to find the answers to questions overlooked in other previous theories and concepts. These include the following: What does it mean for a woman to be the mother of a top-level athlete?, How are fathers and mothers affected by having a child engaged in a top level sport?

Through a multiple-perspective approach of mothers and athletes, we tried to determine the emotional investment of mothers. Our aim was to analyse what sacrifices or renunciations the mothers have to make so that their children can attain athletic excellence, and what are the fears and anxieties associated with the road to sport excellence.

The economic sacrifices, in time and energy, that mothers must make, particularly at the beginning, have been confirmed by numerous research papers (Brooke, 2006; Cote, 1999; Gould, Dieffenback and Moffet, 2002; Holt and Dunn, 2004; Thompson, 1999). Similar to our findings, all these papers recognise that having a child in the family aiming at becoming a top-level athlete entails many sacrifices for the family, but they do not go into these sacrifices in detail.

The few studies which do itemize the family's sacrifices by parental gender similar to our study, show that it is the mothers who sacrifice their own social life in order to help their children towards a successful sports career (Wolfenden and Holt, 2005). In addition we saw how mothers give up a great deal of their leisure time in the interest of the sports activity of their children, whereas the fathers' commitment is much less (Coakley, 2006).

The male character of sport, traditional ideologies concerning sport, and the need and predisposition of mothers to care for their children, regardless of whether they are aiming at being top-level athletes, help us answer this question (Brooke, 2006; Thompson, 1999). However, the literature deals little with the sacrifices made by families for the sake of their children's sports activities. There is still a serious lack of evidence concerning the concepts, which have emerged in this research, such as job-related sacrifices or psychological well being.

In relation to the sacrifice of psychological well-being, our study concurred that parents of professional football players discuss how hard it has been for them to be in the stadium and hear a football crowd directing insults or catcalls toward their child (Rodríguez, 2011). In addition, studies conducted by Lauer, Gould, Roman and Pierce (2010) and Key (2000) mention the sacrifice at job level for the families: the child's sports activities have an impact not only on the time taken from the job but also on the regular work schedules.

Research has also revealed other negative impacts on the family because of children's sports activity when they reach high level standards. Not only does that activity change the time schedule of family meals and sleep, it also affects when housework is done and the social life of each of the members of the family (Brooke, 2006; Haufler, 1978; Thompson, 1999), in line with the sacrifices which emerged from our participants. Likewise Haufler (1978)

revealed that the sports activity of the children may have a negative impact on the family and cause a breach between the father and the mother, or between the parents and the young athlete, but it may also have a positive impact and become a reason for family cohesion.

We saw from our interview that although top-level sport and the road to excellence may provoke conflicts in the family, it is usually the mothers who make the greatest contribution to the positive effect of the experience and work hard to reduce the negative effects. Mothers of top Spanish athletes explain how they did not let their children leave home at an early age to live in a hall of residence and that not to have done that would have had very negative effects on the whole family (Rodríguez, 2011, p. 58).

Scientific literature has paid little attention to our third category, Pain, Fear and Anxiety of the Mother. Popular literature has concentrated on the apprehension and concern mothers have in connection with their children's education. Biographies and comments by athletes in interviews show how the families, particularly the mothers of top-level athletes are anxious about their education, apart from the sports activity (Alguersuari, 2012; Nadal and Carlin, 2011). It is very noticeable that the three negative aspects included in the negative emotional investment are exclusive to mothers. The suffering, fears, sacrifices, renunciations, and their efforts to minimize the impact of the sports activity on their family, loom very large in the lives of these women. By contrast, fathers do not show such a degree of concern. What is the reason for the different attitude of fathers and mothers towards with the sports activity of their children?

Mother's Negative Emotional Investment

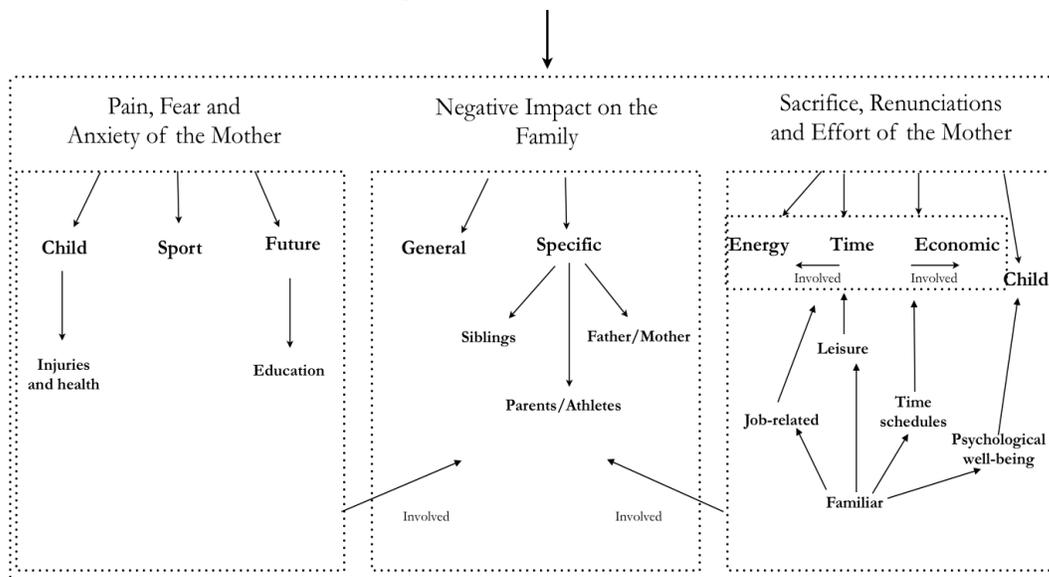


Figure 1:-Theory: Mothers' Negative Emotional Investment in their Children's Sporting Excellence

Limitations, Implications for practice and Conclusions:-

Limitations:

The limitations of this study are centred on the sample chosen for it. The participants are limited to one country, Spain, and it is overly emphasizing the negative aspect of the mother's role. A complimentary study would include the positive aspects of parenting a top-level athlete.

Further, this research has focused on the high level in the sport field, however, it should be necessary to study what would happens in other excellence fields as a music, intellectual or arts.

Implications for practice:

This paper is the begging of a long path in the study of the family and specifically the mother of expert athletes. So that, there are some implications for practice that include several suggestions for sport clubs.

First there should be more emphasis on support for the parent of the athlete, especially the mother, by meetings, conferences or talking with trainers or psychologists. It could be helpful to create and write some guides for parents in which it would be underlie how family can help their children in achieving the excellence or at least enjoying through the sport.

Sex	Age	Active/ Retired	Individual/team sport	Schedule practicinghours	OlympicGames	European	World	Spanishchampionships
11 men 9 women	Averageage: 35 years Range 25 - 50	7 active 13 retired	13 individual sports 7 teamsports	Average: 11,693 hours	6 gold 2 silver 2 bronze	7 medals	12 medals	158 SpanishChampionships

Table 1:- Social and sporting data

Second, each professional sports team should know about the mother role. Only highlighting the support that mothers do, the sport could lose the masculinity view.

Conclusions:-

As a result of this study we can conclude several points. First mothers are primarily responsible for carrying for the athlete. Second, the mother bears the greatest amount of the sacrifice. Although, seemingly negative, this unique part of one's life, draws the mother and the child closer. It would be helpful to understand why are the renunciations made by fathers and mothers for the sake of their children so different?

Conflict of interest:-

There is no conflict of interests among the three authors

Our use of gender expressions, such as nouns, adjectives and pronouns, has no discriminatory or sexist intention. Quotes from athletes, whatever the sex, are given the letter A and those from mothers the letter M.

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