

Swedish study shows greatly reduced negative behaviours from sports parents'

GOTHENBURG, SWEDEN, August 20, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- INTRO Negative parental behaviour poses a major challenge in children's and youth sport. Now, a new study conducted at Umeå University, presented of [Youth Sport Research](#), shows that a brief digital parent-education programme substantially reduced negative behaviour towards both club leaders and young referees.

Swedish Hockey League club Frölunda Hockey was one of the participating clubs. Among its parents, negative behaviour towards young referees fell by 40 per cent after just one year. "We have noticed a major difference in how the parents in our club behave since completing the training," says Mikael Ström, Development Manager at Frölunda Hockey.

"I'm proud that the Gothenburg Ice Hockey Association is helping to increase understanding of how we can improve the parental climate surrounding children and young people. It is important



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This study shows that we now have a new way of addressing negative behaviour among parents in youth sport”

Niklas Lovefall

that young people stay involved in sport for as long as possible, and that we retain more young referees for longer than we do today,” says Henrik Pihlblad, Project Manager at the Gothenburg Ice Hockey Association.

BACKGROUND

Negative parental behaviour is a recurring problem in children's and youth sport. Conflicts surrounding matches, hostility towards young referees and pressure placed on

children can affect young athletes' experiences of sport and their willingness to continue participating.

Christian Augustsson's dissertation on young athletes' experiences of parental pressure showed as early as 2007 that 31 per cent of the children surveyed had, at some point, found it difficult or very difficult to have their parents present at matches or training sessions. The study also found that 19 per cent of the children experienced high levels of parental pressure. International research published over the past 15 years supports this picture.

Although sports clubs, national sports federations and the Swedish Sports Confederation have worked with educational and informational initiatives for many years, the problem remains. Against this background, the results of a new study conducted at Umeå University are particularly noteworthy.

RESULTS

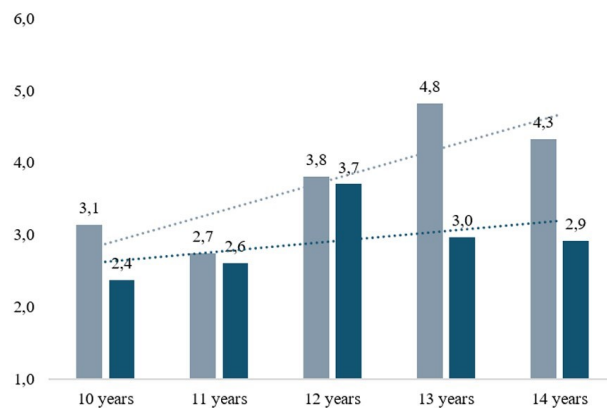
The study, "How to change parental climate in youth sport: evaluating a digital education intervention", examined how parental behaviour changed following a digital training initiative delivered on three occasions over a two-year period, with each parent completing the training individually.

After just one year, statistically significant reductions were observed in negative parental behaviour towards young referees. After two years, similar reductions were found in negative behaviour surrounding the teams and towards club leaders.

In addition, as the chart shows, the relationship between the children's age and the prevalence of negative behaviour weakened following the training. Before the training, negative behaviour became more prevalent as the children grew older.

This is the first study, nationally or internationally, to demonstrate an improvement in parental behaviour over time following an educational intervention aimed at parents in youth sport. These results were achieved through a relatively limited intervention: a digital training programme that takes approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Negative behavior prevalence —
before vs. after two years of training



The relationship between the children's age and the prevalence of negative behaviour weakened following the training



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“The programme uses a different methodology and pedagogical approach from those used in existing educational initiatives, and this likely contributed to the results. The findings raise the question of whether educational interventions need to be as resource- and time-intensive as they often are today,” says Niklas Lovefall, author of the study.

SPORTS CLUBS ALSO NOTICED THE CHANGE

The change was not only evident in the survey results; it was also noticed by the participating sports clubs. In a follow-up evaluation, 12 of the 13 clubs reported that they observed a positive change in parents’ behaviour around the teams and towards young referees. Six of the clubs described the change as large or very large.

“This study shows that we now have a concrete way of addressing negative behaviour among parents in youth sport—not merely by talking about the problem, but by offering training that has been shown to change behaviour for the better,” concludes Niklas Lovefall.

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