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Examining the influence of relative age on leadership and sport experiences within female hockey: Phase 1

Laura Chittle

University of Windsor, chittlel@uwindsor.ca

Sean Horton

University of Windsor, hortons@uwindsor.ca

Jess C. Dixon

University of Windsor, jdixon@uwindsor.ca

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Examining the influence of relative age on leadership and sport experiences within female hockey: Phase 1

Study One: Examining the Role of Relative Age on Leadership Behaviours among Female Ice Hockey Players: An Exploratory Investigation

The aim of this study was to examine the influence of relative age on self-reported leadership behaviors among competitive female ice hockey players. Secondary purposes included examining whether a relative age effect (RAE) was present within the sample and if leadership behaviors differed according to leader status (i.e., formal versus informal leaders). Canadian female ice hockey players (ages 15-18 years) completed an online survey that contained the Leadership Scale for Sport along with additional demographic questions. Players were segmented into birth quartiles based upon Hockey Canada's selection date and classified by leadership status. The MANOVA suggested that the frequency of leadership behaviors displayed by these athletes did not differ across birth quartiles. Furthermore, although there was a RAE trend within this sample of competitive female ice hockey players, the differences relative to population distributions were not statistically significant. Finally, formal leaders (i.e., captains/alternate captains) reported higher levels of social support, positive feedback, democratic behavior, and training and instruction than informal leaders. It appears that relative age is not a discriminating factor with respect to leadership behaviors. Competitive female ice hockey may be an avenue for all players, regardless of their date of birth, to develop and demonstrate leadership.

Study Two: Youth Developmental Experiences among Female Ice Hockey Players: The Role of Relative Age

Relative age differences can lead to varying sport participation opportunities; however, scant research has focused on the impact of relative age on experiences within sport. This study explored the influence of relative age on developmental experiences among competitive female

ice hockey players. Players within Ontario ($n = 264$) completed an online survey that contained the Youth Experience Survey for Sport (YES-S) along with additional demographic questions. The YES-S measures five dimensions of positive (i.e., personal and social skills, cognitive skills, goal setting, and initiative) and negative developmental experiences in sport. The results of the MANOVA suggested that the developmental experiences reported by athletes did not differ across birth quartiles (Wilks' Lambda= 0.940, $F(15, 707.105) = 1.061$ $p = 0.390$).

Supplementary cluster analyses suggest that those who scored highest on the subscales of the YES-S tend to be relatively older. This includes relatively older athletes reporting more negative experiences in sport. Although there was a RAE trend within this sample of competitive female ice hockey players, the differences across birth quartiles were not statistically significant. It appears that relative age does not influence youths' positive and negative sporting experiences. Exploring the characteristics of sport environments (e.g., coaches, practices) and personality traits of competitive athletes to better understand how relatively younger athletes continue their participation in sport despite being at a relative disadvantage warrants further investigation.