

SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT

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The Impact of Primary Socialisation on the Choice of the Ultimate Sport of Choice by Players of the First-League Legia Warsaw Football Club

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Abstract:

Introduction. Socialisation, including primary socialisation, is a focus of interest for social scientists, sociologists in particular. Empirical findings indicate that primary socialisation which people go through in the early years of their lives plays a fundamental role in preparing them for living within a society. The reason is that primary socialisation takes place in the emotional environment of a family and children live in microcosms defined by their parents, microcosms to which there is no alternative. It is interesting to find out whether this process also affects the area of sport. The aim of this study is to examine the influence of primary socialisation on the choice of football as the ultimate sport of choice by players of Poland's best first-league football team in the 2012/13 season.

Material and methods. The study involved a survey conducted between April 1st and 30th, 2013, on a purposive sample of N = 25 football players of the first-league Legia Warsaw football club. The diagnostic poll method was used in the study and an original, categorised poll was the research tool. The surveying technique was an auditorium questionnaire. **Results.** After analysis, empirical data obtained from the survey shows that a person's involvement in sport is affected by primary socialisation. Family members of most of the surveyed players have a certain degree of experience with practicing a sport. The players' fathers were usually the ones who provided practical and financial support to facilitate their sons' sports participation. The study has also found that the players' families did not devote very much time to organising sport activities and the parents did not spend excessive funds on such activities. A valid conclusion, then, is that primary socialisation had a significant impact on the career choices made by the surveyed football players. This confirms the important role of primary socialisation into sport and conforms with social science theories and paradigms in a broader sense that applies to primary socialisation into society and culture.

Introduction

Studies of sociological literature on socialisation indicate that socialisation has an enormous impact on preparing a child for living within in society. This major impact of primary socialisation stems from the fact that the process occurs in an emotional environment where children form strong emotional bonds with their parents, siblings and, less often, other relatives and family members in the traditional meaning of the term. Family members are significant others to who there are no alternatives. As a result, a child identifies with

his or her parents and automatically assumes their point of view, their values, life patterns, norms and behaviours. The internalised world of primary socialisation is rooted in a child's consciousness far more deeply than the worlds the child encounters at later stages of its social development [Berger, Luckmann 1983; Sztompka 2005: 389-433; Harris 1995: 458-489; Hurrelmann 2009; Graham 1977; Duranti *et al.* 2011].

The findings of empirical investigations confirm that primary socialisation plays an important role in how a child learns the ABCs of social life, that is, values, norms, attitudes and behaviour patterns.

Socialisation moulds a child's personality and identity and these eventually determine the child's social life. Socialisation within family takes place at the early stage of a person's life, but the effects of socialisation are lifelong and surface even during old age [MacPhail *et al.* 2003: 251-267; MacPhail, Kirk 2006: 57-74; Dziubiński 2011: 15-31; Coakley 1993a: 169-200; Coakley 2004b].

Taking into account the above findings about the role primary socialisation plays in people's lives and further development, the authors of this study wanted to check if primary socialisation played an equally important role in preparing a person for sports participation and more specifically, for embracing football as the ultimate sport of choice. An empirical study was undertaken aiming to investigate the correlation between primary socialisation and the choice of football as the sport of choice. The other objective was to characterise this kind of socialisation and distinguish the status of individual family members in it. The study was intended to verify the dominant theory in sociology and psychology, according to which primary socialisation affects people's social lives and the choices they make later in their lives. In this case, the authors decided to check if such dependence also occurred in the lives of outstanding football players, members of the Legia Warsaw first-league football club.

With the research problem outlined as above, this study employs theories of socialisation that prevail in sociology and psychology. In the light of these theories, primary socialisation, which takes place in childhood, causes children to acquire the competences of members of society. The process

occurs in an emotional environment and in the course of it, children learn a set of values, norms, basic behaviour patterns and social roles. The process also gives shape to a child's personality and identity, laying the foundations for the child's future social life and choices [Holland 1970: 415-427; Long, Hadden 1985: 39-49; Grusec, Hastings 2006; Grusec 2011].

In order to conceptualise the notion of socialisation into the ultimate sport of choice, football in this case, the notion has been defined to enable a quantified measurement. The following social variables have been accepted as those which affect children's socialisation into playing football: 1) the sports experiences of family members, 2) practical support from family members, 3) financial support from family members [Babbie 2007:139-151].

Material and methods

The survey was conducted in April 2013 on a purposive sample of 25 players (out of the club's all 27 players) of the first senior team of the Legia Warsaw football club, which competes in Poland's first league. For professional footballers, the respondents are advanced in years, as 44% of them are 28 and more years old, 12% are aged between 25-27 and 46% are under 24 years of age. Eighteen percent of the respondents have secondary-level education, 20% have vocational education and lower and 8% have university degrees.

Football is the sole occupation for 64% of the respondents, whereas 28% of them attend universities or other schools. Most of the

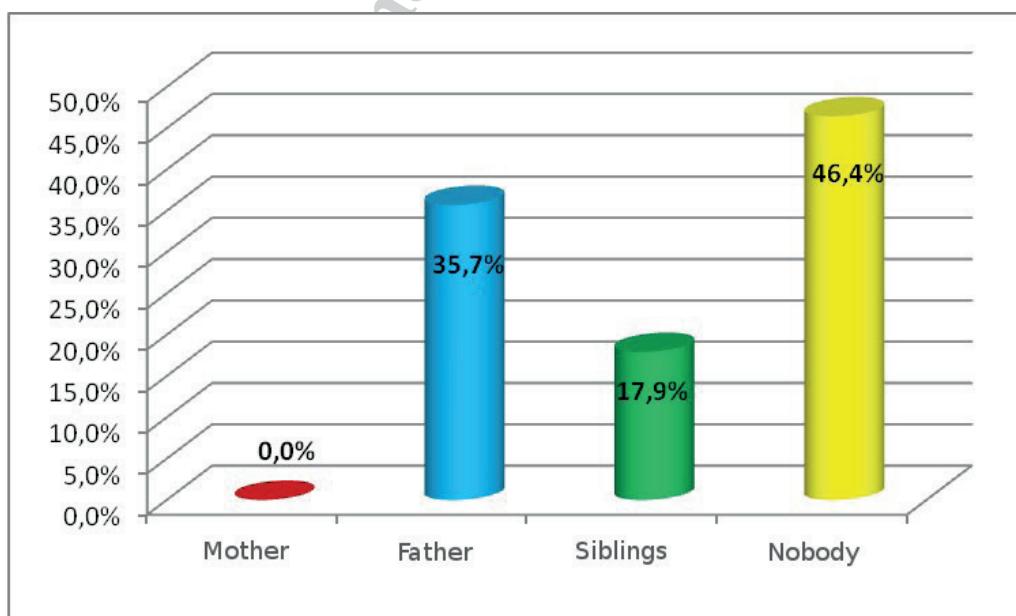


Figure 1. Respondents by family members who played football

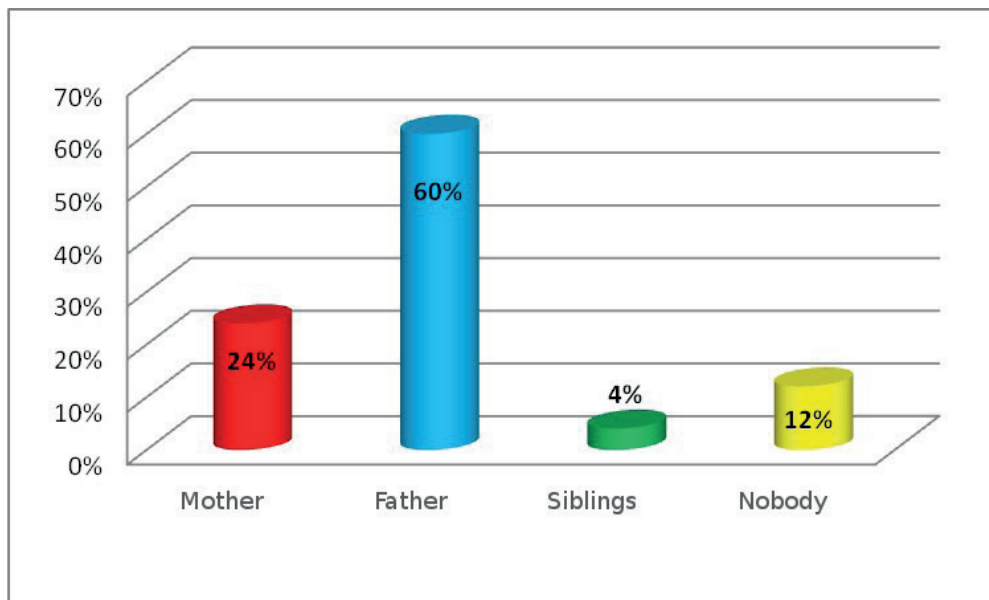


Figure 2. Respondents by family members who provided them with practical support for playing football

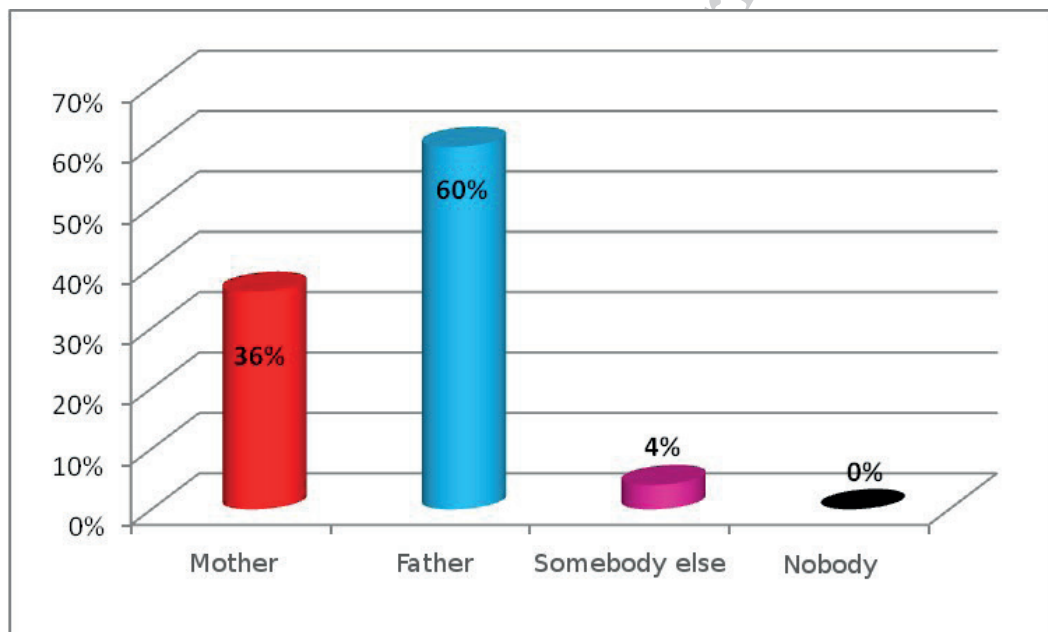


Figure 3. Respondents by family members who provided them with financial support for playing football

respondents declared themselves as coming from a working class background (72%) and the rest come from an educated background (28%). None of the players said he came from a farming background. The highest percentage of the respondents (84%) said they came from neither rich nor poor families, 12% described their families as poor and only 4% said they were from a well-off family.

Most of the surveyed footballers play in their countries' national teams, both junior and senior teams (16 are from Poland, 1 from Ukraine, 2 from Slovenia, 1 from Georgia).

The survey was conducted at the Legia Warsaw football club, one of the most renowned and award-

winning football clubs in Poland. Legia Warsaw is also the most successful Polish football club internationally: it became a finalist in the 1969/70 European Champion Clubs' Cup and the 1990/91 European Cup Winners' Cup and also played in the 1995/96 Champions League quarterfinals. In the 2012/13 season, the Legia Warsaw team won the championship and the Cup of Poland.

The survey mainly involved the diagnostic poll method, while the research tool was an original questionnaire consisting of 17 categorised, close-ended questions, including 5 so-called certificate questions. An auditorium questionnaire was adopted as the survey technique. Additionally, the survey

made use of the inductive and deductive methods to describe the process investigated in this study and to explain the process by identifying regularities which occurred in it [Nowak 2007: 351-394].

Results

The order in which the findings of this study are presented is determined by the social variables listed above. That way, the role and significance of primary socialisation in how football players decide what will become their ultimate sport of choice can be listed in a quantified form. The social variables adopted for the purpose of this study are as follows: the sports experiences of family members, practical support from family members and financial support from family members. The empirical data obtained from the survey is presented below in the order described above.

Family history of sports experiences and its effect on football-playing sons/brothers

A little more than a half of the respondents (60%) said that somebody in their family had practised a sport in the past. The remaining 40% of respondents said their families had no history of doing a sport. In most cases, the family members who had practised a sport were the fathers (36.1%) followed by siblings (30.6%) and the mothers at 8.3% of responses. In 25% of cases, nobody in the respondents' families had practised any kind of sport.

After analysis, the empirical data obtained in the survey shows that in nobody in the families of 60% of the respondents had had any success at sport. Less than a quarter of the respondents (24%) said the father had been the most successful athlete in the family.

The empirical data shows that in a majority of cases (46.4%), nobody in the respondents' families played football. Of those who did, 35.7% percent were the players' fathers and 17.9% were the players' siblings.

Practical support from families and its effect on football-playing sons/brothers

Almost one half of the respondents (47.1%) named their fathers as the family members who had used to take their sons to competitions, games and training facilities. Mothers and siblings were mentioned by 20.6% percent of the respondents each.

Almost one half of the respondents (48%) said that sport activities in their families had only been organised occasionally. Approximately one

respondent in four said that such activities had taken place very often.

Nobody in the families of almost one-third (32%) of the surveyed footballers encouraged them to play football. More than a quarter of the respondents (28%) said, in turn, that they had been encouraged by everybody in their families. Just as many (28%) respondents had been encouraged to play football by their fathers, whereas only a small percentage of them had been encouraged by their mothers (8%) and siblings (4%).

According to 60 percent of the respondents, their fathers were the family members who had gone to the greatest lengths to make sure their sons could play football—they encouraged their sons to attend trainings, kept track of training schedules and drove their sons to training facilities. The role had been played by the respondents' mothers in a much smaller number of instances (24%) and only one player (4%) said he had been aided by his siblings. More than one respondent in ten (12%) said that none of his family members had taken any efforts of this kind.

Financial support from families and its effect on football-playing sons/brothers

Almost all the respondents (92%) said they had needed financial support from their families to be able to carry on playing football. Nearly one-third (32%) said their future careers had necessitated very high outlays, for less than three-thirds (60%) of the respondents the outlays had been small and only a few respondents (8%) said they had needed no financial support whatsoever to play football.

The family member who most often met the financial costs of support was the father. More than a third of the respondents (36%) said the role had been played by the mother and in 4% of cases, it was somebody else. No respondent said that nobody had met the financial costs of support for their football activities.

Almost one half of the respondents (48%) believe that their playing football was “neither important nor unimportant” to their families. According to more than a quarter (28%) of the respondents, their playing football was important to their families and one respondent in five (20%) said it had been very important. Only one respondent (4%) said that his football-related needs had been the last to be attended to at home.

Discussion

After the empirical data from the survey has been analysed, it is possible to carry out one of the final

research procedures and confront the findings of the empirical research with those obtained by other researchers who have investigated this area, and with academic theories which pertain to the question asked earlier in this paper, namely, what the correlation is between primary socialisation (by family) and people's decisions concerning the ultimate sport of choice.

Collected and analysed, the empirical data allows for the conclusion that in over one half of the respondents' families, at least one member practised a sport in the past. Nobody did, in turn, in the families of less than a half of the respondents. In more than a third of cases, it was the father that practised a sport in the past and was also the most successful athlete in the family. Nobody was active in sport in every fourth family. Fathers played football in more than a third of the families. In almost 50% of cases, nobody played football at all.

A large body of empirical research and theories derived from it confirm that attitudes that parents and older siblings have towards sport influence the sports participation of children and, later on, their choice of sport which they pursue as a career. The research and the theories indicate that in a high percentage of cases, the sports participation of family members is reproduced in the next generation [Fredrics, Eccles 2004: 145-164; Wolger, Power 1993: 171-189; MacPhail *et al.* 2003: 251-267].

The empirical data shows that in almost one half of the respondents' families, it was the father that took his son to competitions, games and training facilities. In the families of almost one half of the respondents, sports activities were organised occasionally, whereas in more than a quarter of families, they were organised very frequently. Almost a third of the respondents said that nobody had encouraged them to play football. A quarter, in turn, said that everybody in the family had and according to every fourth respondent, the family member to do so was the father. In more than 60% of cases, fathers were the family members that went to the greatest lengths to ensure that their sons could play football: they encouraged their sons to attend trainings, kept track of training schedules and drove their sons to training facilities. Many researchers highlight the importance of the practical support which children receive from their families as they pursue their sports interests and, consequently, decide what becomes their ultimate sport of choice. Such support is often the prerequisite for a child's sports participation, because left to their own devices, children are unable to overcome all the obstacles they might encounter on the way. Researchers also remark on the special role played by the father, who

in most cases is the family member that assumes responsibility for providing practical support to help his child develop and pursue sports interests. Some researchers also remark that family support is also influenced by such social and demographic variables as education, social class, affluence and cultural capital possessed by a given family [Weiss, Knoppers 1982: 267-279; Bourdieu 1978: 819-840; Grusec 2011].

Almost all the respondents said that they needed financial support from their families to be able to play football. However, two-thirds of the respondents described the support they had received as small. According to more than a third of the respondents, in most cases their fathers were the family members who met the costs of support for their football-related needs. The families of nearly one half of the respondents did not consider it very important to attend to their sons' football-related needs. Many researchers highlight the importance of the support that children receive from their families in pursuing their passions. Family support, according to the researchers, also influences what children eventually decide is their favourite sport. An important role here is played by financial support, without which it would be often impossible to stimulate a child's interest in sport and enable the child to pursue the interest. The researchers also remark on the dominant role of fathers in the process. According to many authors, family members play a key role when children choose so-called prestigious sports that necessitate considerable expenses [Bourdieu 1999: 15-21; Williams, Lester 2000: 86-95; Holland 1970: 415-427; Coakley 1993a: 169-200; Snyder, Spreitzer 1973: 249-253].

Conclusions

In a summary, primary socialisation does affect the choice of the ultimate sport of choice, football in this case. The respondents took sports participation patterns after their families. The families also provided the respondents with practical and financial support. The main role in the process was played by fathers.

It needs to be said that the primary socialisation of players of the first-league Legia Warsaw football club played an important role in their decisions to embrace football as the sport of choice. This study thus confirms the important role that primary socialisation plays in sport. This conforms with social science theories and paradigms in a broader sense that applies to primary socialisation into society and culture.

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Wpływ socjalizacji pierwotnej na wybór sportu życia przez piłkarzy ekstraklasowego klubu „Legia” Warszawa

Słowa kluczowe: socjalizacja pierwotna, sport życia, Legia Warszawa, piłkarze

Streszczenie

Problematyka socjalizacji, w tym socjalizacji pierwotnej, znajduje się w centrum zainteresowania nauk społecznych, a szczególnie socjologii. Z ustaleń empirycznych wynika, że socjalizacja pierwotna, którą człowiek przechodzi w początkowych latach swego życia, odgrywa fundamentalną rolę w procesie przygotowania do życia w społeczeństwie. Dzieje się tak dlatego, że socjalizacja pierwotna przebiega w klimacie nasączonym uczuciami rodzinnymi i dziecko żyje w bezalternatywnym świecie zdefiniowanym przez rodziców. Zatem interesujące jest, czy stwierdzona prawidłowość dotyczy również dziedziny sportu. Celem badań było poznanie wpływu socjalizacji pierwotnej na wybór sportu życia przez piłkarzy najlepszej drużyny polskiej ekstraklasy w sezonie 2012/13.

Materiał and metody. Badania przeprowadzono w okresie 1-30 kwietnia 2013 roku na celowej próbie N = 25 piłkarzy ekstraklasowego klubu sportowego „Legia” Warszawa. Wykorzystana została metoda sondażu diagnostycznego. Narzędziem badawczym był autorski skategoryzowany kwestionariusz ankiety, zaś techniką - ankietowanie audytoryjne.

Wyniki. Z analizy zebranych danych empirycznych wynika, że socjalizacja pierwotna ma wpływ na uczestnictwo w sporcie. W większości członkowie rodzin badanych zawodników posiadają pewne doświadczenie w uprawianiu sportu. Wsparcie organizacyjne jak i finansowe w dużej części skupiało się na ojcu. Badania ujawniły również, że czas poświęcony na organizację zajęć sportowych w rodzinie, jak i ponoszone nakłady finansowe przez rodziców nie były zbyt duże. Można zatem stwierdzić, że wpływ socjalizacji pierwotnej na wybór sportu życia przez badanych piłkarzy był znaczący. Zatem potwierdzona została ważna rola socjalizacji pierwotnej do sportu, co jest zgodne z teoriami i paradygmatami w naukach społecznych w rozumieniu bardziej ogólnym, a mianowicie w odniesieniu do socjalizacji pierwotnej - do społeczeństwa i kultury.