

Sports activities as primary prevention of youth deviant behaviours: an educational intervention research

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Abstract:

To improve the well-being of young people in the province of Taranto (Italy), intervention research was performed to study the effects of sport and its fundamental role in the prevention of juvenile deviance. A questionnaire was administered to 174 subjects (aged 7 and 11), and data were collected that investigated the main areas of influence in the process of growth and harmonious development of the minors' personality structure in relation to sports practice. Sport is widely recognized as a means of disseminating and transmitting positive values such as solidarity, loyalty, respect for people and the rules; in addition, sport can create a suitable environment for promoting ease and well-being in youth. The obtained results showed that the presence of and intervention by experienced and trained figures in the sports field, such as sports science graduates, is essential. The performed research showed a significant change in the organization and function of the family and sports associations because they must respond to new educational needs arising from the current phase of social culture. Both have an enormous responsibility in the prevention of youth discomfort. The performed research indicates that in addition to the family, there is a growing need for institutional figures who are trained and well-prepared such as coaches and managers of sports associations. These figures, better if they have a degree in sports sciences, have a pedagogical and strategic value for the minors because they can positively influence the conditions of growth, evolution, and harmonious development, and contrast and prevent deviant behaviours in youth.

Key Words: educational research; juvenile deviance; sport pedagogy; youth discomfort; sports association; sports science graduate.

Introduction

Juvenile deviance is a social and individual phenomenon that affects the person in his relational, psychological, and contextual variables. Juvenile crime is much more widespread than police, judicial and youth welfare statistics (Kaiser, 1985); therefore, official statistics do not offer a reliable picture of real crime (Bandini & Gatti, 1987; Bandini, Gatti, Marugo, & Verde, 1991). This does not mean that young people commit more crimes than adults, but it allows us to affirm that delinquency, in its legal and social definition, affects above all the age of minors (Bandini et al., 2003). Young people must therefore be approached, met, discovered, understood, and not justified or legitimized, before the processes of marginalization and exclusion come to an end, in that intermediate space between school, sport, family, work, free time, deviant behaviour, where the minor is sometimes alone with his thoughts, his fears, his suffering. It is a question of activating "virtuous circles" that may be able to ensure a good outcome to large-scale preventive interventions, as well as triggering significant trend reversals in the cases of young people at risk. The best way to address the problem of minors, from the perspective of social promotion, is to work on seemingly distant terrains of their specific condition, such as sports, placing them in the background as a social group.

Sport can transmit positive values, such as tolerance to frustration and fatigue to achieve goals, learning patterns of conduct aimed at respecting the rules, and the stimulation of skills to successfully overcome obstacles; the sports "gym" also becomes a useful gym for the assumption of adult roles and the stimulation of socialization skills (Nascimbene, 2014). In this regard, there is a vast literature, with numerous experiences of intervention, training, and research, which highlights how sports activity is a valid and effective tool to prevent juvenile deviance (Amerio et al., 2005; Cavallo, 2002; Ceccarini et al., 2015; Nichols, 1997). In addition, sports practice can be functional to enhance the qualities of minors and create an environment suitable for promoting

the ease and well-being of young people (Frattini, Melica, & Salvetti, 2011; Greco & De Ronzi, 2020; Pinto-Escalona et al., 2021). The presence and intervention of well-trained sports instructors with sports science degrees could effectively counteract the tendency of children and adolescents to be confused, lacking direction and/or aspirations (Isidori & Aranda, 2012). Furthermore, instructors should avoid primarily pursuing purely technical aspects or seeking short-term results and aim to achieve formative-educational results that are the best prerequisite for achieving strictly "sporting" results (Isidori & Aranda, 2012).

Institutional figures for the formation of youth values

Williams and McShane (2002) have identified educational and family factors as determining factors for the development of the ability to resist temptation and internal self-control which, in turn, perform functions in contrasting deviant tendencies in adolescents. Therefore, the figures who contribute to the formation of the rules are parents and other figures who play an institutional role in the contexts in which children develop, such as coaches and managers of sports associations, peers, the mass media, etc. These figures play a decisive role in the development of prosocial behaviours, but also for the development of behavioural problems in adolescence, such as drug use and delinquency; longitudinal research on a sample of 198 subjects has shown how family and peer groups influence the learning processes of unconventional values (Garnier & Stein, 2002).

Therefore, there is a need to carry out educational interventions from the earliest stages of development to promote the formation of values that lead to legal behaviour and respect for the rules; thus, depowering the deviant culture of values by combating the phenomenon of illegality. It is essential to help young people to build rules and rediscover values rather than offering them already pre-packaged (Greco, Curci & Grattagliano, 2009; Paolicchi, 1990).

Youth discomfort and deviance

Discomfort represents a condition of suffering and inconsistency between the reality experienced by an individual and the ideal to which he aspires. The manifestations of discomfort can be different: behaviours of social passivity, dominant attitudes, private behaviours (insomnia, somatizations) and socially evident behaviours (aggressive behaviours, vandalism, consumption of soft drugs). Discomfort could, at times, favour the onset of deviance. According to Donati (1998), the risk of deviance would be evident in all those situations in which the subject is unable to establish meaningful and adequate relationships and to meet his basic needs. Risk factors for deviance in adolescence can be static (age, gender, race, and historical circumstances) or dynamic (availability of weapons, substance use, peer group influence, psychiatric disorders, and current circumstances) and are organized along several axes (individual, family, school, peer group, and environmental factors).

The family and the peer group play a decisive role and influence each other: family relationships with components of conflictual dependence, reciprocity, psychological and behavioural control, play a controlling function on the adolescent's acceptance of the peer's risky habits, and therefore mediate the level of acceptance of the group's deviant habits (Kerr et al., 2003; Mostardi et al., 2006).

About school, risk factors appear to be poor academic performance, dropping out of school, and not attending school, along with continual school changes (Hinshaw, 1992). As protective factors, in addition to school attendance and academic results, there is the attendance of extracurricular activities, such as sports (Cataldi et al., 2021; Greco, Cataldi, & Fischetti, 2019), which act both on the adolescent's sense of self-realization and simply by occupying his free time that would otherwise be potentially dedicated to antisocial behaviour. It has been found that upstream of de-motivation and school dropout there are failures in the establishment of social relationships that in turn imply communication difficulties (Frattini et al., 2011): in these dynamics a coach who, in sports, knows how to play an educational role can certainly provide constructive support.

Prevention: primary intervention strategies

In this research, primary intervention strategies have been considered that aim to prevent violence from being implemented and focus on identifying the subjects who could, more likely, act violently. Differently, but not in contrast to the secondary strategies, this level of approach is based on working with a target group of at-risk individuals, not at the individual level, but understood as a group or community, and therefore relies on a multi-axis intervention: family, school, and community. Furthermore, it is necessary to keep in mind the current changes in the structure and functions of the family, from which effects that strongly affect the behaviour of individuals derive (Gualco, Ruocco, & Rensi, 2010); there is a growing diffusion of deviant and criminal behaviours among children of the middle and / or upper-middle classes (Bossi & Fedrigotti, 2011).

Prevention and intervention programs are effective on both adolescents in general and adolescents at high risk for deviance (Fagan Tyler, 2005; Hinshaw, 1992). However, as part of primary prevention, it is critical to intervene early before the process of antisocial behaviour is triggered (Kupersmidt & DeRosier, 2004). Studies have shown that school violence can be prevented or reduced through well-designed and implemented interventions. Tapp and Levine (1974) and Wilson, Lipsey, and Derzon (2003) verified in a meta-analysis of 221 school-based violence interventions with a target population of approximately 56,000 students that with well-structured, organized, and led projects, the number of physical assaults within a school year can be cut in half.

Outlining of an educational model to support well-being in young people

In the current historical moment, the phase of cultural transition is affecting, above all, the social and educational roles within the family, with important consequences that have repercussions on the ability of the family itself to fulfil its functions with its youngest members. The family is recognized as the main nucleus of support and affective gratification as well as the place of realization of the first processes of identification of minors (Ponti & Merzagora, 2008). The new social condition of women and their greater access to the world of work does not always correspond to similar changes in the distribution of organizational tasks in the family and at home (Pietralunga et al., 1999), and in the management and care of children.

The improvement in the quality of life and cultural level of the population has also caused a greater demand for sports activities by the general population and, above all, by young people. As a result, a new educational role required of sports associations has emerged, different from the traditional one of the past that was predominantly or even exclusively focused on competition and competitive/sporting performance. Sport, as a personal choice, represents a real gymnasium of life, a place to meet, to grow, to search for one's identity, a place of unquestionable importance in the evolutionary process of the child (Contini, 2010).

It is important to monitor the changes affecting the contexts in which the minor's growth pathways are carried out, including sports associations, which, today, are subject to a much greater demand both in terms of the number of subjects who request to carry out these pathways and in terms of the investment of time to carry out these activities; the latter is also correlated to its functionality in responding to the organizational needs of the family in terms of care and education of minors (Galli, 2000). This care and education of minors takes on greater importance and becomes fundamental in light of the data regarding the incidence of various forms of emotional and behavioural discomfort in adolescents; this age group is becoming progressively more vulnerable, 75% of psychiatric disorders are symptomatically evident by the age of 25 (Patel et al., 2007), and 50% between the ages of 12 and 25. In addition, bulimia, depression, anorexia, conduct disorders, and very early-onset psychosis under the age of 12 are increasingly common disorders (Latino, Greco, Fischetti, & Cataldi, 2019). In recent years, there is a growing need for intervention with adolescents who are experiencing alcohol and substance abuse (Crabbe, 2000; Fischetti, Cataldi, Di Terlizzi, & Greco, 2020), bullying, cyberbullying (Greco, 2021; Greco, Cataldi & Fischetti, 2019) and different forms of peer violence, gambling, risky sexual behaviour, self-harm, and suicide attempts; in Italy, suicide is the second leading cause of death in young people under 20 (Pietralunga et al., 2016). Therefore, the purpose of this intervention study was to investigate both the dynamics that take place in the places where sports activities are carried out in the territory analysed (province of Taranto, Italy) and the quality of time spent by young people in these contexts; the aim is to outline an educational model fit to provide real support for the well-being of young people in the performance of sports activities.

Materials & Methods

Research design

To contribute to the improvement of the living conditions of young people in the environment to which they belong, intervention research was carried out firstly through the detection of the characteristics of the territory of the Province of Taranto (Italy), of its specific resources but also of its limits and dysfunctional factors. Specific attention was also paid to the sports sector, which currently plays an increasingly important role in influencing the conditions of growth and development of young people (Cortese, 2012), both in terms of the quality of the living environment of minors and in terms of the increasing amount of time they now invest in these activities. Sport can be both a vehicle of well-being and social integration and an antagonistic and competitive dimension. According to Winnicott (1999), play is a crucial element for psychic development, for the understanding of the world and inter-human exchange. Also, sport as a game recalls the group dynamic, that is, a series of fundamental elements for the development of children: rivalry, competition, solidarity, imitation, prevarication, protection, persecution, punishment, expiation, victory, defeat, evasion, unexpected, drives and relationships.

Based on a preliminary analysis of the context, we wanted to lay the foundations for a primary prevention intervention in the area through an educational model aimed at promoting the ease and well-being of young people who play sports. The research was developed through the collection, administration of a questionnaire and data useful for the knowledge of the main areas of influence in the process of growth and harmonious development of the structure of the personality of the child in the territory under consideration, with specific regard to the conduct of sports activities. Therefore, the following data were collected: the structure and the relational and educational climate of the family; the attitude of parents towards and in support of sports activities; the relational and educational climate within sports associations, both concerning relationships with the peer group and with the responsible figures; the perception of children towards the specific figure of the coach; the relationship between school and sports commitment; the presence and incidence of excessive anxiety conditions; the presence of prevarication and bullying behaviours; information about doping, etc.

Participants and procedures

The research was carried out through the administration of questionnaires to a sample of 174 participants, in the territory of the Province of Taranto, in two crucial moments of development (four second

grade classes with 90 students and four middle school classes with 84 students). These are developmental stages in which individual psychological needs emerge (i.e., to receive adequate emotional support and gratification), as well as the need to find, in the social, educational, and environmental context, favourable conditions to consolidate the processes of socialization, identification and self-expression. Moreover, these are two age groups in which, in the first case, the minor's access to the world of sport has just been structured and, in the second case, the first significant critical review of the choice of the sport made up to that moment and of the degree of satisfaction that has resulted from it takes place.

The questionnaire was structured to detect the perceptions of the participants in the study on the dynamics related to the most significant contexts for the growth of the child: family, school, peer group and places where sports activities take place. The questionnaire was filled in anonymously, in the presence of the researcher; it consists of fifty-two questions (items) for the sample attending the second classes of the elementary school, and fifty-nine items for the sample attending the first classes of the middle school: the latter were asked additional questions, related to bullying phenomena, the problem of doping, the possible interruption of previous sports practices. The questionnaire included open-ended and closed-ended questions: the latter consisted of structured questions (with multiple-choice or dichotomous answers), and semi-structured questions (with predefined answers that could be expanded upon by the subject in an open-ended manner).

All participants and their parents received a complete explanation in advance about the purpose of the intervention research and the parents provided written consent to the study. The procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible institutional committee on human experimentation and with the Helsinki Declaration. The study was conducted in October 2021.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the research project was carried out independently from the researcher, with the future aim of sensitizing local political authorities, through the scientific evidence obtained from the intervention research to greater attention and interest in sports activities as an effective educational model of primary prevention of youth discomfort in the area and promotion of ease and well-being.

Statistical analysis

The data collected through the questionnaires were processed using SAS JMP® Statistics (Version <16.0>, SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, USA, 2021). Univariate and bivariate analyses were performed, acting on multiple variables to investigate the various subgroups of interest. The verification of the statistical significance of the observed differences was carried out through tests on the proportions or tests of conformity in the univariate analyses and tests of independence of the chi-square in the contingency tables (bivariate analysis) together with other statistics associated (Kendall's tau-b, Cramér's V, gamma index).

Results and Discussion

The results showed a marked change taking place in the organization and function of both sports associations and the family; both are called upon to respond to new needs and new complex educational tasks of great importance in the prevention of youth discomfort, but also burdened by difficulties, uncertainties and obstacles specifically related to the current phase of transition of social culture. In addition, a positive relationship has been highlighted between the performance of sports activities by young people and the improvement of the quality of life in the social group, and the change in functions and structure that affects the family and should lead to a new educational role required of sports associations compared to the past (Mutz & Baur, 2009; Sandford, Duncombe, & Armour, 2008).

The results confirm the initial hypothesis, i.e., that the practice of sports activities by minors (both in childhood and early adolescence) is no longer just the expression of an individual's inclination and choice but is also a response to new family needs and new ways of organizing family life, now often characterized by full-time work for both parents. The hours spent in the contexts in which sports activities are carried out constitute the instrument to respond to the current needs of the family, of the management of the child in the hours of the day in which both parents are busy at work: the results show how sports activities are carried out by most of the subjects of the sample (70.1% of the total sample, 49.1% of elementary school and 50.9% of middle school) and as the majority of those who do sport declare that their mother works at least part-time (65.1% of subjects who do sport vs. 34.9% of subjects who do not do sport, $p < 0.01$). This fully confirms the new and more relevant role that today sports associations are called upon to play as true educational agencies, in which an increasing number of young people spend significant amounts of their free time, and this is also in response to the new needs and new ways of functioning of the family, analysed by the literature (Pietralunga et al., 1999).

The autonomy of the child in the choice of sport correlated in a statistically significant way ($p < 0.001$) with the subject's belonging to the highest age group of the sample: the choice of sports activity was made personally by 75.4% of middle school students, compared to only 43.1% of elementary school children. 76.1% of the students who chose sport independently never thought about quitting, compared to 23.9% of the students who did not personally choose sport; this indicates that the autonomy of the young person's choice of sport could have a significant impact on his or her satisfaction with the practice of sport.

The results of the research confirm the function of sport as an effective vehicle for socialization: 94.9% of the subjects in the sample formed new friendships following the start of sporting activity and, even more

importantly, these are stable interpersonal relationships and forms of socialization, experienced even outside the time dedicated to sporting activity (67.4% of the subjects). In this regard, the results of the research confirm, however, in the sample examined, the persistence of rigid ways of living these friendship relationships on the part of the boys, relationships in which there is the persistence of a certain degree of influence of the roles that, within the group, are correlated to competitive performance; in fact, the new friendships were developed in 66.7% of cases with subjects at their same level of skill in the sport practised, while in 19.2% of the sample with subjects who were better than them, and only in 14.1% of the sample with subjects who were less good. This data provides important information for the managers of sports associations and allows them to identify a relevant work direction for coaches about the new educational role that today falls on them. The relevance of this aspect is further supported by the following observation that - in general - the results of the research indicate that for the subjects of the sample, the prevailing factor of satisfaction in carrying out the sporting activity is the expectation of playing with friends, and this is found above all in training (76.3%) but also in competitions (56.5%); in the competition situation, however, there is a consistent increase in narcissism/aggressiveness (the answer "I have fun because I am the best" is given by 26.4% of the subjects about the competition situation and only 10.2% of the sample about the training situation). In the light of these data, a stereotype that was generally well established until the recent past, according to which participation in sports activities responded an important measure to the achievement of personal performance and success, is overturned.

It is worth recalling what has already been observed about the importance of the peer group for the construction of the minor's personality structure and about the fact that, in such contexts, the absence of members of the family network is expressly framed by the literature as a "constitutive trait" (Tonolo, 1999); in this regard, the literature also points out how, in the group, adolescents imitate each other and tend to conform both about the external appearance and to the attitude, activating mechanisms of adaptation to the role expectations of the other members of the group that can, in certain conditions, play a role of facilitation also about the activation of deviant or antisocial behaviours (Speltini, 2016). It should also be noted that it is the same condition of adolescents that is correlated with the need for rebellion, for establishing group relationships, for "getting high" with others (Pietropolli Charmet, 2008). Vice versa, we recall what has already been saying about the existence of a vast literature and of numerous experiences of intervention, training, and research, aimed at highlighting the great importance of sports activities as a particularly effective tool for preventing juvenile deviance (Amerio et al., 2005; Bailey, 2005; Cavallo, 2002; Ceccarini et al., 2015).

Accordingly, if the new purpose of young people in sports is to cultivate and increase interpersonal and friendly relationships, sports associations need to know that, according to the results of the research, the minor's autonomy in choosing a sporting activity has a decidedly positive influence in facilitating the establishment of a friendly climate among the members of the sports group (79.1% compared to 20.9% of those who did not personally choose sports). The data is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Equally evidently, the personal choice of sport affects the positive perception, by the subjects of the sample, also of the quality of friendships within the sports group: as many as 79.1% of those who have chosen sport independently exclude that in the group only the best are friends with each other, while this evaluation is provided only by 20.9% of the subjects who did not choose independently ($p < 0.05$). Therefore, attention to the spontaneity of the minor in the choice of sport can and must also become a constructive area of intervention for the coach and the managers of sports associations.

On the other hand, the results of the research allow us to rethink, in the area surveyed, a rather well-established stereotype about the difficulty of reconciling sports and school commitments: in fact, the entire sample is characterized by judging that sports and school commitments are compatible (74.1% of subjects). The results showed ($p < 0.05$), moreover, that this judgment is correlated to the factor of the autonomous choice of sports activity by the interviewee (84.1% of subjects who made a personal choice, compared to 59.3% of those who did not make an autonomous choice). Regarding this compatibility, the data obtained from the research also show a slight increase in the perception of difficulties among elementary school students (these difficulties are found by 28.3% of the sample subjects who attend elementary school compared to 19.7% of those in middle school).

A characterizing datum of the sample is the widespread perception of fairness of the treatment received by the students from the coach: as many as 91.2% of the subjects reported receiving equal treatment from the instructor to that of the other students in the group, while only 2.1 % of subjects state that others are treated better; only 3.4% report that the best young people receive better treatment and, again, 3.3% of subjects stated that they are being treated better because they are better than the others. The results of the research document a substantially similar trend about the equity of the coach in allowing the participation of the students in the competition situations: the subjects of the sample declare that all participants in the competitions in 82.9% of cases; in few cases (2.8%, and 2.5% and 3.8%) the subjects declared, respectively, that the team does not make competitions, that only the others participate because he is too small and that only some participate because there are too many in the team. Vice versa, the competition situation registers a slight increase in a competitive climate compared to the training situation since the indication that "only the best play" rises to 8.0%.

The sample analysed is characterized by a prevalent perception of sympathy for the coach (92.3% of the subjects), a perception that is equally distributed within the two age groups (95.8% of elementary school children and 93.1% of middle school children).

By the previous data, almost all the subjects examined declared that they felt understood by their coach (91.1% of cases). The two previous data, however, take on a completely different meaning in light of the research results relating to the indicators of the existence of real knowledge and real confidence between the young people and the coach; in this regard, there is a radically opposite situation (and a clear reversal of the trend), since as many as 68.3% of the sample declares that they have never turned to the coach to talk to him about their problems, and an even greater percentage of subjects declare that they have never talked to the coach about their school problems (83.2% of cases).

The judgement of sympathy expressed towards the figure of the coach- who, as we have seen, according to the research data, is completely prevalent within the sample - does not show substantial differences in distribution within the different categories of sports practised by the subjects, whether individual sports, team sports or oriental disciplines; it should, however, be noted the predominance of liking of this figure that is found in the context of oriental sports, in which the appreciation of the coach reaches 100% (compared to percentages of liking however very high expressed by the other two categories: 95.2% of the subjects in individual sports and 91.5% in team sports).

In accordance with these data, the declaration that they feel understood by their coach, expressed by almost all of the subjects in the sample, is found in almost overlapping percentages within the different types of sports (individual, team and oriental); however, it may be worth highlighting how, about the specific aspect of feeling understood by this figure, the highest percentage of subjects who do not feel understood can be found within the subjects who practice oriental sports (which indicate this condition in 12.9% of cases, compared to 10.7% of those who practice team sports and 8.4% of those who practice individual sports). The data seems to be in contrast with the declaration of appreciation expressed towards the figure of the coach who, in the context of oriental sports, is appreciated by 100% of the subjects.

Even the results of the research documenting the lack of real knowledge and confidence between the boys and the coach (and nevertheless the indications, absolutely prevalent in the sample, to judge the coach as sympathetic and to feel understood by him) indicate a distribution in almost overlapping percentages within the different types of sports (individual, team and oriental): in fact, 71.6% of subjects who practice individual sports say they have never talked to the coach about their problems, 67.5% of subjects who practice team sports and 66.9% of those who practice oriental sports. Similarly, 77.1% of subjects practicing individual sports, 83.2% of subjects practicing team sports and 91.2% of those practicing oriental sports, state that they never talked to the coach about their school problems. In this regard, it should be highlighted how, once again, the lowest level of real openness towards the trainer concerning a relevant aspect for the subjects in this age group such as school problems, can be found especially in the subjects that practise Oriental sports among which, as it has been highlighted, the appreciation towards the trainer is expressed even by the totality of the sample, without exceptions (100% of the subjects).

The perception of the friendliness of the coach by the subjects of the sample is correlated, with a critical or borderline statistical significance ($p = 0.059$), with his concrete accessibility by their parents (86.6% of cases), i.e., with the availability, he shows in meeting the parents of the children and listening to their observations and requests.

The results of the research highlight the heavyweight covered, in the performance of sporting activities by the subjects of the sample, by the family component and, in particular, by the parents and this, first of all, in terms of material support: in 69.5 % of the cases the parents are the ones who accompany and fetch the children. However, the results confirm the priority role played by the family also in terms of emotional support for the child's sports activity: in 91.1% of cases the parents are the "biggest fans" of the subjects in the sample. These results provide significant indications about the presence, in the sample, of aspects of concrete relevance relating to the climate and the conditions of growth of minors, since the literature highlights the influence of the family both in the positive development of the individual's personality and, vice versa, in the genesis of conditions of discomfort and deviance, and this both about the general family climate and, in particular, to the influence of the maternal figure (Bandini & Gatti, 1987) or the father figure, with specific regard, in this last case, in the presence of conflicting relationships between father and son (De Leo, 2015).

Specific phenomena within the middle classes have been reported on a scientific level, which may concern parents who are too self-centred and not willing to follow their children in their development. In such cases, dysfunctional relationships between parents and children are highlighted, based on an excessive attachment of the adult to his own needs to the detriment of those of the child (D'Isa, 2009), which can be linked to the delegation to strangers of the education of children due to the need to satisfy their personal needs, the excessive tendency of young people to take as reference older children or celebrities from the world of entertainment and sport, or an excessive permissiveness, due to the scarcity of time devoted to children. Similarly, the problems deriving from a lack of attention and supervision for the activities carried out by the children cannot be neglected, exposing them to excessive use of electronic games or multimedia communication tools, which can correspond to a relevant exposure to the culture of violence, proposed through representations of situations of fights, war, etc., in which there is the risk for the child of overlap and confusion between the real and virtual world (Arciuli, 2008; Cavallo, 2002). Excessive exposure to the information offered by the mass media, however, can involve especially for minors the risk of being influenced by hidden forms of advertising,

which facilitate the passive absorption of violent, deviant or tout court ethically reprehensible cultural models, aimed at pursuing the achievement of power or money at all costs (Baldry & Sorrentino, 2013; De Leo, 2015). In this regard, the literature indicates that the highest levels of risk of uncritical absorption by the recipients of media information primarily concern younger subjects (Ponti, & Merzagora, 2008).

However, it is also interesting to note the substantial confirmation that comes from the results of the research regarding what has been observed in the literature about the persistence, in family systems, of cultural settings as a result of which the greater participation of fathers in the process of growth and education of children it takes place on a relational and playful level, without this corresponding to an equal sharing on the level of the division of domestic tasks (Mendes et al., 2001); in the sample, the role of accompanying sports activity is played by the mother alone in 34.2% of cases, by the father alone in 14.9% of cases or by both parents in 25.0% of cases. As further confirmation of the above-mentioned theoretical premises, in the field of the support that more properly concerns the interpersonal and play relationship, the distribution of the roles between the two parents results decidedly more equal (the subjects of the sample indicate as their greatest "fan" the father in 32.7% of the cases, the mother in 38.3% of the cases or both parents in 22.4% of the cases) with a very modest component of subjects for whom such a role is played by friends, grandparents, or brothers (3.5%, 3.4% and 5% of the cases, respectively). In this regard, it should be emphasized that the importance of the paternal role on the growth and construction of the personality structure of the children is such that it has been the subject of consolidated and specific reflection in the literature, focused both on the constitutive characteristics of paternal participation (Lamb et al., 1985), and its influence on the family system in a systemic perspective (Gigli, 2007). Currently, attention to the paternal role has also turned to its analysis within the different family structures that exist today (Contini, 2010), and to its different and more nuanced boundaries for the maternal role (Bertozzi & Hamon, 2005), without underestimating the risk of overlap and merger of the two roles (Pollo, 2004).

Conclusions

In summary, the results provide indications confirming a significant change in the organisation and function of the family, as well as the reduced capacity and possibility of its members to exercise their roles autonomously. The high percentage of the subjects in the sample who play sports and the significant percentage of mothers who work full-time in the groups of children and young people who play sports seem to decisively indicate ways of organising family life that translate, if not necessarily into a delegation, at least into a sharing of the time and space for the growth and education of children with other social agencies such as, first and foremost, the sports associations in which so many young people now spend their free time.

This sharing of educational functions between family and sports associations cannot and must not go unnoticed for social policy strategies and the reflections of literature and pedagogical research. The results of the research have allowed the construction of an educational model for Youth and Sport tailored to the specific characteristics that have been detected in the analysed territory, in a perspective of primary prevention intervention in which communication between the subjects that intervene in the child's growth path in carrying out sports activities has been increased and enhanced.

Certainly, the well-being of minors depends on the awareness of the cultural changes taking place and the ability to take them into account to carry out a constructive educational intervention by all those who, in the current organisation of the social group, and therefore not only the family but also bodies such as sports associations, are today called upon to perform care, growth and education roles towards young people that are progressively more and more extended both in terms of numbers and time, and therefore increasingly important in terms of the quality of the educational relationship and positive conditions for the growth of young people. In this sense, it is particularly important today to train the institutional figures (e.g., such as sports science graduates), who work with young people in these contexts, figures who must be aware of and prepared for the new role they are called upon to play, alongside and in ever closer cooperation with families.

Findings provide constructive indications also in this regard, as they raise concrete questions about the possibility that, in the current state of affairs, these new contexts in which the growth of young people takes place can fully contribute to this process of education and serene and harmonious development of the child: to date the research data seem to indicate in the minors a stereotypical perception of the figure of the coach, and their ability to use at least limited and partial of his educational role. In the examined sample it has been observed an prevailing perception, almost totalitarian, of the coach's sympathy (92.3% of the subjects), to which it is added the even more eloquent data about the perception expressed almost by the totality of the examined subjects who declare to feel understood by their coach (91.1% of the cases); however, radically opposite indications are contrasted - and a clear inversion of the trend - on the level of the real quality of such interpersonal and educational relationship. In fact, 68.3% of the sample declares to have never spoken to the coach about his problems, and an even higher percentage of subjects declares to have never spoken to the coach about his school problems (83.2% of cases). Problems, the latter, that - it is necessary to reiterate - in the age groups of the subjects examined by the research, constitute a central and absorbing part of their commitments and objectives.

In this regard, it must therefore be observed that the aforementioned general appreciation of the personal relationship established by the subject with the figure of the coach is placed in contrast with the data

deriving from the more penetrating questions concerning more personal aspects of the relationship with the coach, much more significant in terms of the pedagogical value that this institutional figure can have towards the young person, and which certainly have more relevant repercussions on the educational level, of his growth and harmonious development.

In conclusion, the results require a deep reflection on the level of pedagogical analysis, since the data in question seem to attest the difficulty, firstly on the part of the minors interviewed - but also, in return, on the part of their families and coaches - to "transition" from a somewhat "facade" and stereotypical perception of satisfaction with the objectives of sporting activity and the well-being that derives from it to a greater and more penetrating awareness of the real results in terms of personal growth and fulfilment that can and should derive from the practice of sport. These data converge, moreover, with the findings of the literature (Garnier & Stein, 2002; Mostardi, Scardaccione, & Petrosino, 2006) about the problems that arise from the inconsistency between the models that are proposed to young people and the concrete behaviour of the figures who intervene in their growth path, highlighting the substantial gap between the role expectations by the minors and the role managed by the coaches. These findings also appear to be corroborated by research data relating to the incidence of current family organization methods (in which both parents very often work full-time) on minors' access to sports, both by data that seem to confirm the reflections of the literature on the partiality and superficiality of the cultural change in progress regarding family roles, within which the organization and distribution of household burdens are not always egalitarian; social policy strategies must be appropriately linked to this which, in moments of crisis of the welfare state such as the current one, make the driving role of research in the pedagogical and social fields, in promoting well-being and ease, even more appropriate and relevant, and in the correlative prevention of discomfort and deviance towards young people, such an important part of the social group.

Authors' contributions

Gianpiero Greco contributed to the intervention research design and conception, statistical analysis, data interpretation, critical review of the manuscript, and wrote the manuscript. Ottavio Andriani contributed to the intervention research design, collected, and interpreted the data, and revised the manuscript. Elena D'Arcangelo contributed to the intervention research design, collected, and interpreted the data, and revised the manuscript. Roberto De Ronzi contributed to the intervention research design and critical review of the manuscript. The authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

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