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The Family as a Community Setting for Children's and Adolescents' Sustained Participation in Organized Sport and Well-Being: A Narrative Review of International Evidence with Perspectives from Selected Southeast European Contexts

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The Family as a Community Setting for Children's and Adolescents' Sustained Participation in Organized Sport and Well-Being: A Narrative Review of International Evidence with Perspectives from Selected Southeast European Contexts

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Highlights

Public health relevance—How does this work relate to a public health issue?

- Participation in organized sport is associated with psychological and social benefits, while family practices may facilitate access and continued involvement.
- Cost, transport and information barriers may restrict access to community sport, particularly for children from low-income families.

Public health significance—Why is this work of significance to public health?

- The review proposes a family-climate framework for interpreting how emotional, informational, instrumental, and autonomy support may be experienced together.
- Direct regional family–sport evidence is limited; the transferability of international findings to the selected Southeast European contexts requires investigation.

Public health implications—What are the key implications or messages for practitioners, policy makers and/or researchers in public health?

- Programs could assess how involvement is experienced alongside its frequency, and evaluate participation and well-being separately.
- Club costs, information practices and assistance procedures may affect families' capacity to support participation and are relevant targets for public health action.

Abstract

Background: Organized sport provides opportunities for children's and adolescents' psychological and social well-being, while family practices may facilitate participation and shape its meaning. Methods: This narrative review cites 40 sources, including empirical research, reviews, theoretical and contextual material, and integrates international literature on family support and organized youth sport with supplementary physical activity research and contextual evidence from selected Southeast European settings. Results: Emotional, informational, instrumental and autonomy support provide an organizing framework for interpreting parental involvement. Their interaction within a family climate is proposed as a conceptual synthesis rather than an empirically validated configuration. Practical resources and family–club relationships may facilitate access and continued participation. Regional evidence is limited and unevenly distributed, and contextual sources do not directly establish family–sport mechanisms. Conclusions: A relational, setting-based perspective may inform family-oriented sport promotion. Findings require interpretation according to study design, outcome and context; causal pathways and regional transferability remain questions for future research.

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Keywords: family environment; parental support; community sport; organized sport; children; well-being; sustained participation; Southeast Europe

1. Introduction

Organized sport is a subset of physical activity involving shared rules, regular participation and social relationships. A systematic review of research with populations whose mean ages were 5–17 years reported generally favorable associations between sport participation and psychological and social outcomes [1]. Much of the underlying evidence was observational. Self-perceptions, social connections and support were considered possible mediating processes rather than universally established mechanisms. An adult population review provides supplementary background [2]; it does not establish child-specific effects.

The WHO settings approach considers health within everyday places and social contexts where personal, organizational and environmental influences interact [3]. Here, family refers to the relational network organizing care, decisions and resources; home refers to a physical environment. The family system and ecological perspectives emphasize relationships and interacting contexts, while a settings perspective additionally directs attention to everyday practices and links with community provision. Community setting is used here as an interpretive extension to the family's connections with clubs, schools and local services, not as an established classification or evaluated intervention.

A settings perspective directs attention to everyday relationships and practical arrangements as well as individual behavior. In youth sport, families may facilitate entry and attendance and help young people interpret their experiences [4–9]. Treating these practices together is the conceptual focus of this review; it does not imply that families alone determine participation or well-being.

Parental support in youth sport is commonly examined as multidimensional. The Youth Sport Parental Support Questionnaire distinguishes autonomy, emotional, informational and instrumental support, with validation analyses relating perceived support to enjoyment and perceived competence [4]. A systematic review identified autonomy-supportive practices, positive parent–child relationships and task-oriented climates among factors associated with motivation [5]. Parental support also appears among correlates of persistent participation [6]. Parent-education findings are promising but heterogeneous and do not establish sustained-participation effects across programs [7].

Two limitations of this body of work motivate the present review.

Parental practices are usually measured separately, although encouragement, advice, practical assistance and choices can co-occur in everyday relationships. This review proposes that their meaning may depend on the wider relational context. Family-oriented and home-based physical activity interventions show variable outcomes [10,11], but those reviews do not establish that an unmeasured family climate explains the variation.

Second, the evidence base is geographically uneven. Evidence on family support in the selected Southeast European contexts remains limited, and contextual sources address different populations and outcomes. Possible influences of care networks, household resources and local provision should therefore be investigated country by country rather than presumed to characterize the region. This review uses the regional material to identify questions about transferability and future research.

Accordingly, this review has three aims: (i) to synthesize contemporary evidence on the dimensions of family support associated with children's sustained participation in organized sport and with their psychological and social well-being; (ii) to examine the conditions under which parental involvement shifts from support to pressure; and (iii) to

consider what is currently known, and what remains unknown, about these processes in Southeast European family contexts, and to identify implications for community sport organizations, schools and family-oriented public health programs.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Review Design

This paper is a narrative review intended to integrate heterogeneous evidence and develop a conceptual interpretation of family support in organized youth sport. It is not a systematic review and does not claim exhaustive coverage. Direct evidence about family factors in organized sport is distinguished from supplementary physical activity evidence and theoretical or regional contextual sources. These bodies of literature serve different purposes and are not treated as interchangeable evidence of family–sport mechanisms.

2.2. Search Strategy

The review draws on selected literature, supplemented on 8 October 2026 by web searches restricted to the domains of PubMed, ERIC, Hrčak, CEEOL, SCIndeks and DOAJ, and by searches for relevant publisher-hosted articles. These searches were not direct searches through the database interfaces. Scopus, Web of Science Core Collection, SPORTDiscus, and PsycINFO were not directly searched. DOAJ is an international open-access directory; Hrčak and SCIndeks provide regional access, while CEEOL covers Central and Eastern European scholarship.

Supplementary web searches used combinations of sport-related terms (organized sport, youth sport, community sport), family terms (parental support, parental involvement, family), and outcome terms (motivation, enjoyment, participation, dropout, well-being). These were web-search queries rather than field-specific Boolean searches within each database.

Regional web searches also used Serbian and Croatian terms, including roditelji, sport, motivacija, mladi and roditeljski pritisak. Searches were exploratory, and their scope does not support a claim of exhaustive regional coverage.

2.3. Evidence Scope and Source Roles

The core synthesis concerns children and adolescents of approximately school age through late adolescence (about 5–19 years), family-related factors in organized or community sport, and outcomes concerning participation, motivation, enjoyment, or psychological and social well-being. The age scope was clarified during revision to accommodate the source reviews [5,6] and youth-athlete measurement research [4], which extend beyond 17 years. Findings are interpreted within each source's reported age range; age-specific effects cannot be inferred from pooled review findings. General physical activity interventions and studies of adults are supplementary or contextual sources, not direct evidence for youth organized sport.

These criteria define the intended core evidence on family support and youth participation. Studies of general physical activity, school physical education, or adult populations are used only as supplementary or contextual material when relevant; they do not establish relationships specific to organized youth sport. Foundational theory, policy documents and regional contextual sources are distinguished from core empirical evidence.

For the intended contemporary core synthesis, sources concerning exclusively elite or professional pathways, school physical education alone, or no family-related variable were outside scope. Conference abstracts, editorials, and unavailable theses were not intended as core evidence. These scope rules are not a reconstructed record of exclusions; relevant out-of-scope material is retained only with an explicitly supplementary or contextual role.

The main contemporary evidence window is January 2015 to August 2026. Earlier references, including regional material from 2012, are retained for explicitly identified historical or contextual purposes rather than counted as contemporary core studies. Supplementary searches during revision are dated separately. Scarcity of regional evidence does not remove the need to describe methodological limitations or justify each source's role.

2.4. Source Audit and Narrative Synthesis

The synthesis is interpretive and was prepared by a single author. No quantitative pooling, formal risk-of-bias assessment or assessment of inter-rater agreement was undertaken. Claims are distinguished according to whether they concern direct sport evidence, supplementary physical activity evidence, or contextual interpretation. Cross-sectional associations are not interpreted as establishing directionality; longitudinal and intervention findings are considered within their own design limitations. Regional contextual observations are used to generate hypotheses rather than generalize family mechanisms to an entire region. Evidence is interpreted according to design and relevance: reviews summarize broader patterns while retaining the limitations of their component studies; observational studies support associations; and qualitative studies inform experiences and processes. Contextual sources motivate hypotheses. No numerical quality weights or formal certainty grades were assigned, and review-level evidence may overlap with individual studies. A retrospective audit of the final bibliography on 8 October 2026 identified 40 distinct cited sources, with no duplicate bibliographic entries. Classification by primary use yielded 13 sport-related synthesis/background sources [1,4–9,12–17], five supplementary physical activity or psychological sources [10,11,18–20], 20 contextual, historical, policy or measurement sources [2,21–39], and two foundational theoretical/settings sources [3,40]. These categories describe citation roles, not 40 eligible empirical studies; the sport-related group also includes reviews, measurement research and background evidence. Studies summarized within published reviews were not separately counted. A complete source-by-source register accompanies the revision as Supplementary Material S1. Original search yields, screening totals and exclusion counts were not retained and cannot be reconstructed reliably; they are therefore reported as unavailable rather than inferred from the reference count. The audit is not an exhaustive search or a retrospective full-text screening flow.

Table 1 presents an illustrative subset of nine cited sport-related sources selected for their relevance to the main themes of the narrative: support measurement, motivation, continued participation, pressure and quality of life, practical facilitation, and parent education. It includes reviews, quantitative and qualitative studies, and a Croatian study relevant to the regional discussion. The subset is intended to illustrate these themes and differences in evidence type; it is neither an exhaustive inventory nor a ranking of study quality. Supplementary Material S1 records the roles of all 40 cited sources.

In interpreting the evidence, participation denotes involvement in sport, whereas sustained participation denotes continued involvement over time. Intention to continue is a motivational indicator and is not equivalent to observed retention; enjoyment, psychological well-being and social well-being are treated as separate outcomes. Findings from general physical activity or school physical education are not assumed to apply directly to organized sport.

Parental involvement denotes parents' participation in sport-related activities and decisions. Parental support denotes practices intended or perceived to help the child, while family support includes contributions from other caregivers and relatives. Family environment is the broader relational and material context. Family climate is the author-proposed interpretation of how support practices are experienced within that context.

Table 1. Selected evidence on family support, motivation, sustained sport participation and well-being.

Source	Population and Context	Design and Family-Related Variable	Outcome	Finding and Limitation
Gao et al. (2024) [5]	Young athletes; studies across multiple countries	Systematic review of 29 studies Family variable: Parental support and motivational climate	Motivation	Autonomy support and positive parent–child relationships were among favorable factors; most studies were cross-sectional.
Glibo and Barić (2017) [17]	100 young athletes (mean age 12.4) and 71 non-athletes (mean age 12.5); Croatia	Cross-sectional empirical study Family variable: Parental criticism and expectations	Quality of life	Parental criticism was negatively associated with quality of life; expectations were not significantly associated. Directionality cannot be established.
Zhang et al. (2022) [6]	International youth sport; eligible ages 5–19 years	Systematic review/meta-analysis: 21 studies; 9 cross-sectional and 12 longitudinal Family variable: Parental support	Intention to continue and observed continuation	Parental support was among associated factors. Intention and behavior were analyzed separately; observational findings do not establish causality.
van Leeuwen et al. (2022) [8]	Low-income families; Netherlands; 24 parent interviews	Qualitative semi-structured interviews Family variable: Practical parental facilitation	Facilitation of club sport participation	Practical demands and available resources did not always align. Describes experiences, not causal effects or retention rates.
van Leeuwen et al. (2023) [9]	Low-income parents, professionals and an expert by experience; Netherlands	Participatory action research; four co-creation sessions and a parent group interview Family variable: Seeking financial assistance	Social safety when seeking financial assistance	Explores safer assistance processes. Does not establish an effect on children's sustained participation.
Burke et al. (2024) [4]	Youth athletes; exploratory $n = 318$ and confirmatory $n = 319$ samples	Multi-study instrument development and validation Family variable: Autonomy, emotional, instrumental and informational support	Perceived parental support	Four-factor 18-item measure supported. Validates support dimensions, not the proposed family-climate construct.
Burke et al. (2024) [7]	Parent-education programs in youth sport; multiple study settings	Systematic review of 12 articles Family variable: Psychosocial parental support	Parental knowledge, skills and relationships	Reported improvements varied by design and outcome. Sport-specific evaluation measures were lacking; retention effects are not established.

Table 1. *Cont.*

Source	Population and Context	Design and Family-Related Variable	Outcome	Finding and Limitation
Berasteguí-Martínez et al. (2026) [15]	Spain; 304 water polo players, aged 12–18	Cross-sectional model; parental and coach pressure	Competitive anxiety; emotional intelligence; self-confidence	Pressure–anxiety associations varied by source of pressure and outcome. No temporal or causal mediation established.
Pisaniello et al. (2024) [16]	Italy; 6783 students, aged 8–13 (reported methods sample)	Cross-sectional questionnaire; family support and activity context	Reported sport dropout and reasons	Describes reasons and family context. Recruitment and inconsistent participant reporting limit interpretation; no causal dropout effect established.

3. Dimensions of Family Support in Children's Organized Sport

3.1. From Discrete Behaviors to a Multidimensional Construct

The Youth Sport Parental Support Questionnaire distinguishes four support dimensions and reports associations with enjoyment and perceived competence [4]. These dimensions provide an organizing framework for the synthesis. Their possible interaction in everyday family life is interpreted conceptually; the questionnaire does not validate a combined family-climate construct.

Self-determination theory provides a theoretical account of how autonomy, competence and relatedness may connect support practices with motivation and well-being [40]. The four support dimensions are interpreted through this account, rather than assumed to represent empirically isolated causal pathways.

3.2. Emotional Support

Emotional support includes encouragement, care, acceptance irrespective of performance and availability after disappointment. Within self-determination theory, such practices are interpreted as potentially supporting relatedness [40]. Youth sport reviews and measurement research associate supportive parental practices with favorable motivational experiences [4,5]. Qualitative research adds accounts of young players' experiences of parental encouragement and performance-focused involvement [14].

Encouragement may be experienced differently when tied to performance than when communicated irrespective of the result. The implications of this distinction for the proposed family-climate framework require direct investigation.

3.3. Informational Support

Informational support includes advice, feedback, guidance on training and competition, and the interpretation of experience. Its primary pathway is competence. Positive, informational feedback from the social environment is held within self-determination theory to enhance intrinsic motivation, whereas feedback experienced as evaluative or controlling can undermine it [40]. The distinction is not in the content of the information but in its function: the same observation about a child's performance may be delivered as usable guidance or as judgment.

Qualitative accounts describe how parental sport experience may inform advice and create tensions within the coach–athlete–parent relationship [14]. These findings suggest questions about credibility, boundaries and communication rather than a uniform effect of parents' sporting biographies.

3.4. Instrumental Support

Instrumental support includes fees, equipment, transport and the coordination of schedules. Qualitative research with low-income families identifies practical mismatches between these demands and available resources [8,9].

Interviews with low-income parents identified mismatches involving money, time, transport, information and assistance [8]. Participatory research on financial support described socially safer procedures and clearer information as priorities for parents and professionals [9].

Together, these accounts suggest that practical support depends partly on interactions between households and sport clubs [8,9].

3.5. Autonomy Support

Autonomy support consists of acknowledging the child's perspective, offering age-appropriate choice, using non-controlling language, providing meaningful rationales for requests, and supporting self-initiated engagement [40]. It is frequently misunderstood as parental withdrawal; it is not. An autonomy-supportive parent may be highly involved, but the involvement is organized around the child's developing agency rather than around the parent's objectives.

Outside sport, a cross-sectional study of Chinese adolescents associated parental autonomy support with higher life satisfaction and fewer emotional symptoms, with self-esteem included in statistical mediation models [19]. The same article examined an emerging-adult sample; neither analysis establishes directionality. In youth sport, review evidence identifies autonomy support among practices associated with motivation [5]. A review of interventions with physical-education teachers and sport coaches found that autonomy-supportive behavior could be improved, but this evidence does not directly evaluate parental support or child retention [20].

Parental expectations may be experienced differently depending on their content and communication. General physical activity research [18] offers supplementary insight into psychological needs and motivation.

3.6. Interdependence of the Dimensions

A practical act may carry more than one meaning: transport can be interpreted as care, and advice may be experienced as either guidance or control. Qualitative findings describe variation in how involvement is experienced [14]. These examples inform the conceptual interpretation developed below.

The setting-level interpretation proposed here considers how distinct support practices may acquire meaning within everyday relationships. In this review, family climate denotes an author-proposed organizing framework for the relational experience of emotional, informational, instrumental and autonomy support; it is not presented as a validated higher-order construct composed of these four dimensions. The possibility that such configurations help explain variation in intervention outcomes remains a hypothesis, rather than a finding established by the intervention reviews [10,11]. Figure 1 summarizes this conceptual proposal.

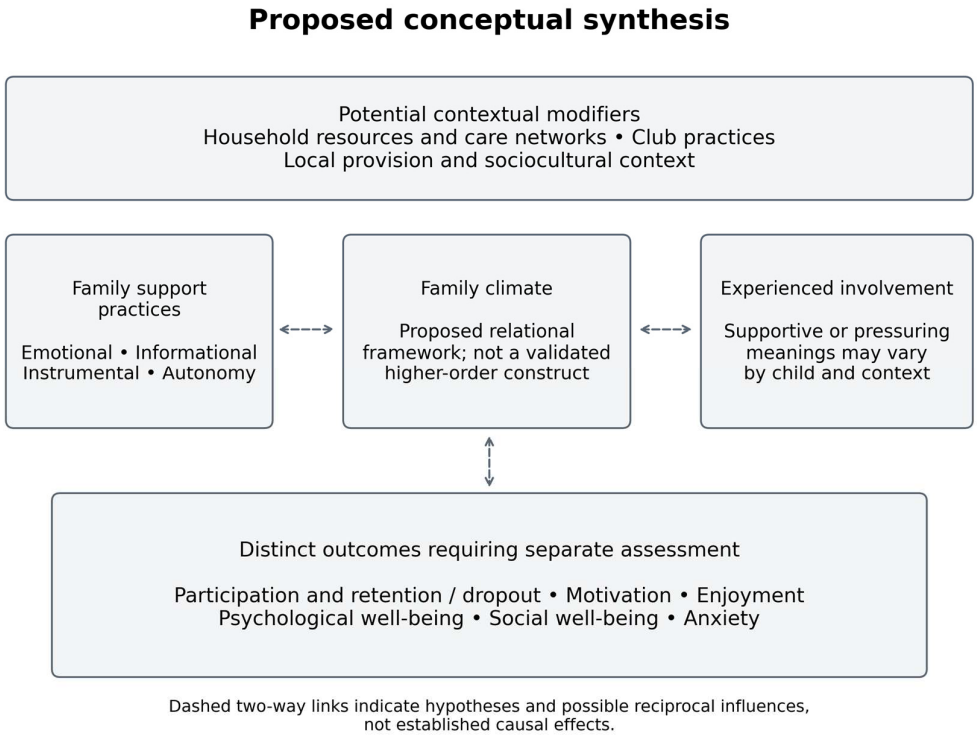


Figure 1. Author-proposed conceptual synthesis of family support in organized youth sport. Emotional, informational, instrumental, and autonomy support are considered together within a family climate that may shape how involvement is experienced as support or pressure. The arrows indicate hypothesized relationships, not established causal pathways. Reciprocal influences between young people's sport experiences and family practices are possible. Club practices, household resources and sociocultural conditions may modify these relationships. The four-dimensional family-climate configuration has not been empirically validated as a higher-order construct.

4. From Support to Pressure: Expectations, Reinforcement and the Motivational Climate

4.1. The Boundary Between Involvement and Control

The reviewed literature associates supportive parental practices with favorable motivational experiences, while involvement may also be experienced as pressure [5,14]. The quantity of involvement alone does not capture these differences.

The theoretical basis for this non-linearity is straightforward within self-determination theory. Behaviors that satisfy the need for relatedness and competence while respecting autonomy sustain intrinsic motivation; the same behaviors delivered in a controlling manner thwart autonomy and shift motivation toward externally regulated forms [40]. The observable act—attending, advising, rewarding—is therefore an unreliable indicator of its psychological function.

4.2. Parental Expectations

In a survey of Chinese adolescents, parental expectations were positively associated with self-reported physical activity, and statistical models included psychological needs and exercise motivation [18]. These findings concern general activity and do not establish temporal mediation, organized-sport retention, or the effects of particular ways of communicating expectations. Distinguishing expectations about effort, choice and performance is a conceptual direction for further research.

A cross-sectional study of Spanish adolescent water polo players examined parental and coach pressure in relation to competitive anxiety [15]. Its findings are considered specifically in relation to that outcome.

4.3. Rewards and Punitive Practices

Reinforcement practices are theoretically well specified but empirically difficult to interpret in cross-sectional data. Within self-determination theory, tangible rewards contingent on performance carry a controlling functional significance and can undermine intrinsic motivation, whereas feedback that is informational in function supports perceived competence [40]. Whether a given reward is experienced as recognition or as payment depends on the relational context in which it is delivered.

Responses to performance and subsequent experiences may influence one another, making reinforcement practices difficult to interpret in cross-sectional research.

4.4. Consequences of Pressure

Parental and coach pressure has been examined in relation to competitive anxiety [15]. Anxiety, enjoyment, motivation and withdrawal are distinct outcomes, and evidence about one should not be treated as demonstrating effects on the others. Pressure may contribute to an adverse sport experience, but the evidence reviewed here does not establish a uniform causal pathway from pressure to dropout.

Parent-focused interventions should assess both participation and children's experiences, rather than assume that increased involvement produces favorable outcomes.

5. Communication and Family Climate in Relation to Well-Being

5.1. Parent–Child Communication About Sport

Communication is the process through which the other support dimensions are transmitted and interpreted. Children in organized sport encounter difficulties concerning performance, selection, competition, training demands, relationships with coaches and teammates, and the reconciliation of sport with schooling and family obligations. Whether these difficulties are discussed at home may shape whether emotional and informational support reaches the child at the point of need.

Supportive communication is interpreted here as a practice that may connect several support dimensions [4]. Reciprocal communication could help parents understand how sport is experienced.

5.2. Participatory Family Decision Making

Children's involvement in household decisions may offer opportunities for choice and acknowledgment of their perspective. This is conceptually consistent with autonomy support [40], but the identity of the decision maker alone does not measure whether the interaction is autonomy-supportive.

Regional family-structure research provides contextual information about decision making and sport achievement [21]. Structural indicators should not be equated with validated measures of psychological autonomy support, and achievement should not be treated as evidence of well-being or retention.

5.3. The Family Climate as a Configuration

Family climate is used here as a proposed framework for considering communication, decision-making, emotional availability, and expectations together. The reviewed studies do not validate these characteristics as a single higher-order construct. Associations between parental autonomy support and mental health outside sport [19] provide supplementary

evidence about family relationships; they do not directly test this proposed configuration or its effects within organized sport.

This framing suggests that family-oriented physical activity interventions could assess relational outcomes alongside participation. Whether changes in family relationships explain intervention effects remains a hypothesis for future evaluation [10,11].

6. The Family and the Sustainability of Participation

6.1. Correlates of Continued Participation

The systematic review and meta-analysis [6] distinguishes intention to continue from observed participation over time and identifies parental support among associated factors. Motivation, enjoyment, competence, and psychological needs are relevant correlates, but are not interchangeable with retention or well-being. The cross-sectional dropout study [16] provides additional descriptive evidence.

Family support is one of several relevant influences alongside coaches, peers and individual experiences [6]. Its contribution should be assessed in relation to the particular outcome rather than assumed to be dominant.

6.2. The Socioeconomic Gradient

A survey associated lower family affluence with lower physical activity and sport participation and reported practical barriers [12]. Norwegian research described social differences in young people's reasons for leaving organized sport [13]. Together, these studies describe socioeconomic patterns relevant to participation.

Qualitative studies suggest that practical barriers involve both household circumstances and community provision [8,9]. They identify potential intervention points involving information, assistance and participation arrangements.

6.3. The Club–Family Interface

The qualitative evidence [8,9] suggests that club procedures and family resources interact in arranging participation. Costs, schedules, information, and assistance practices can facilitate or constrain practical support. The proposed family–club interface may also involve informational support through parent–coach communication, emotional support through the handling of concerns, and autonomy support through opportunities for children to express preferences. These cross-dimensional links are a conceptual extension, not a tested configuration or an estimate of how much support is produced by clubs.

7. A Southeast European Perspective

The regional discussion concerns selected Southeast European contexts represented in the cited literature, principally North Macedonia, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Kosovo, with additional contextual references to neighboring settings. This is an evidence-based delimitation of the discussion, not a comprehensive definition or representative assessment of Southeast Europe. Western Balkans and Central and Eastern Europe retain the scope of the specific sources using those terms and are not used as synonyms for Southeast Europe.

7.1. The State of the Regional Evidence

The selected regional sources differ in population and purpose. The North Macedonian school-environment study surveyed representatives of 111 primary schools [22]; the childhood overweight/obesity study assessed family socioeconomic indicators but reported no significant differences in overweight or obesity across those indicators [23]. These sources inform physical activity and health context, not family support in organized

sport. The descriptive-analytical study [24] concerns 316 second- and third-year medical students and is cited as young-adult physical activity context; its findings are not treated as evidence for organized youth sport. The Serbian policy report surveyed 1500 people aged 15–30 years [25], not an exclusively child population. Adolescent physical activity/academic research [26] and national activity indicators [27] provide further context. None establishes family-support mechanisms in organized youth sport.

The selected sport-related regional material comprises a historical Serbian doctoral study of parents as agents of sport socialization [28], Croatian research on parental pressure and quality of life [17], and a Serbian validation of the Sport Motivation Scale-II in 365 athletes aged 12–16 [29].

The regional sources serve different purposes. The Serbian dissertation [28] is historical contextual material outside the contemporary publication window; it illustrates possible parent–child reporting differences but cannot establish a regional pattern. The Croatian study [17] supplies direct cross-sectional evidence on parental pressure and quality of life in young athletes. The Serbian validation study [29] concerns measurement of sport motivation rather than family support or observed dropout. School–parent cooperation [30] provides educational context and is not evidence about organized sport. These distinctions limit the conclusions that can be drawn from the regional literature.

7.2. Structural Features That Warrant Attention

The following sources provide contextual information about care arrangements, gender equality, physical activity and educational provision. They are not included as direct tests of family support in organized youth sport. Their relevance to the proposed framework is interpretive and requires further investigation.

Comparative European research documents variation in grandparental childcare across countries and geographical groupings [31]. Childcare involvement cannot be assumed to imply involvement in sport. A possible implication for future research is to assess whether grandparents or other relatives provide transport, encouragement or care around sport, rather than restricting measurement to parents. This remains a hypothesis about support networks.

The Gender Equality Index report concerns the Western Balkans within its own geographical scope [32]. Such indicators provide policy context but do not directly measure household decisions about children's sport or psychological autonomy support. Whether gender norms influence access, choice, or family communication in particular countries requires direct study; a participation gap alone [25] does not establish a family-level mechanism.

Studies in North Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo examine urban–rural differences in fitness, anthropometric characteristics or physical activity [33–35]. These outcomes should not be equated with organized sport participation or retention, and residence is not a direct measure of access to sport facilities. The studies motivate questions about geographical opportunity, but do not establish that access is the principal constraint on family support across the region.

The comparative curriculum study covers physical education in 40 European countries and uses its own regional classification [36]. It supplies educational context. Whether opportunities for choice in school physical education interact with family practices is a question for future research.

Club affordability, staffing and assistance arrangements may influence families' practical support. Their prevalence and effects in the selected countries have not been established by the sources reviewed here. International low-income studies [8,9] identify processes

worth examining locally; they do not demonstrate that Southeast European clubs share a particular organizational model.

7.3. What Should Not Be Assumed to Transfer

Three questions follow for research in the selected contexts: who provides support within the wider family network; how costs, transport and local opportunities constrain participation; and how children experience parental choice, guidance and expectations. The answers may vary within and between countries. Existing evidence does not justify presuming either a uniform regional family model or a different meaning of autonomy support throughout Southeast Europe.

None of this implies that the international findings are inapplicable. It implies that their boundary conditions are unknown in this region, and that establishing them is a research priority rather than a matter of extrapolation.

8. Implications for Practice and Policy

8.1. Sport Clubs and Community Organizations

Clubs could examine affordability, scheduling, accessible information, and respectful assistance procedures as potential ways to facilitate family support [8,9]. Clear parent–coach communication and opportunities to hear children's preferences may also be useful [14]. These proposals require evaluation in practice.

8.2. Schools

Schools offer a potential route for reaching families, including where club sport involves fees. A review of school-based family-oriented interventions reported variable physical activity findings [10], supporting further consideration of school–family links.

A comparative study of primary teachers in Slovakia and North Macedonia examined preparedness within different tandem-teaching arrangements [37]. It supplies educational context on physical-education delivery. Possible links with school–family communication warrant separate research.

8.3. Parent Education

Parent-education programs have reported improvements in parental knowledge, practices and relationships, with heterogeneous methods and outcomes [7]. The present synthesis proposes attention to supportive communication, responses to performance and young people's preferences. These are directions for program development and evaluation, not an established package for improving retention or well-being.

A program developed in Bulgaria and North Macedonia proposed improving relationships between young people, parents and coaches through taekwondo [38]. Its description provides a regional example of program development; it is not treated here as an evaluated intervention demonstrating relational or retention effects.

8.4. Municipal and National Policy

Socioeconomic participation patterns and qualitative accounts of practical barriers suggest potential policy targets [8,12]. Subsidized fees, equipment, transport and accessible provision could be evaluated for their effects on access and continued participation. Their relevance and effectiveness in the selected countries should be investigated rather than inferred from urban–rural fitness patterns.

A cross-sectional study of 1222 women aged 17–40 across five Balkan cities examined associations between built-environment characteristics, physical activity and mental well-being [39]. It provides environmental context, not direct evidence about family support or

child sport retention. Its mixed student and employed samples and cross-sectional design further limit generalization. Any application to children's community sport is a proposal requiring separate evaluation.

9. Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations should frame interpretation. This is a narrative synthesis of selected literature, not an exhaustive systematic review. Supplementary domain-restricted web searches do not constitute direct database searches and may omit relevant records. Original identification, deduplication, and screening counts cannot be reliably reconstructed from the available records. No formal risk-of-bias assessment or quantitative pooling was undertaken. Single-author synthesis introduces selection and interpretation risks. Language coverage and the small, geographically uneven regional evidence base limit regional generalization. Contextual studies of education, family structure and adult physical activity inform interpretation but do not directly test family processes in organized youth sport.

The underlying literature carries its own constraints. Much of it is cross-sectional, so that directionality cannot be established: favorable sport experiences may elicit parental interest and communication as readily as the reverse. Many family constructs are measured with single items rather than validated multidimensional instruments. Outcome measures are heterogeneous, and studies using achievement or performance as the outcome are not directly comparable with those measuring well-being, enjoyment or need satisfaction.

Four priorities follow for future research: longitudinal designs examining reciprocal influences; validation of support measures across cultural contexts; assessment of wider care networks where relevant; and joint study of family and club practices. The last priority draws on qualitative accounts of participation arrangements [8,9].

10. Conclusions

This review brings together evidence on family support in organized youth sport and proposes a relational interpretation of how support practices may be experienced. Findings about individual support dimensions inform this interpretation, while the combined family-climate framework remains to be empirically tested.

Practical support may facilitate access, and supportive relationships are associated with favorable motivational experiences. The evidence does not establish that increasing parental involvement alone improves sustained participation or well-being. Club affordability, communication, and assistance procedures offer potential points for intervention, whose effects require evaluation.

Evidence from the selected Southeast European contexts remains sparse and uneven. Extended-family participation, household decision-making, and access to club provision are possible contextual influences rather than demonstrated characteristics shared across the region. Country-specific longitudinal and intervention studies are needed before generalizing the proposed mechanisms.

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