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The Relationship between Career Decision-Making and Parental Support in Esports Players

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Abstract

Aims: This study examined the role of parental support in the career decision-making of professional and aspiring esports players.

Methods and Results: By comparing the professional esports players group (PPG) and aspiring professionals' group (APG), the role of parental support in the career development of esports players was elucidated. The study comprised 13 professional esports players and 9 aspiring professionals. Participants completed a Japanese-translated version of the Career-Related Parent Support Scale (CRPSS). There was not a significant difference on total score of CRPSS but among four major categories, PPG participants showed significantly lower scores than APG participants on the following items "Verbal Encouragement" and "Emotional Support." Conversely, no significant differences were found between the groups in instrumental support, such as "Instrumental Assistance" and "Career-Related Modeling."

Conclusion: Parents of aspiring esports professionals provide more emotional than instrumental support for their children's career development compared to parents of professional players. More structured support would increase self-efficacy in children's career development. This insight could inform more effective parental engagement in the career development of emerging esports professionals.

Keywords: Career, Parental support, Professional Sport, Self-efficacy

Highlights:

- The professional players scored significantly lower than aspiring professionals on emotional support measures.
- There were no differences between the professional players and aspiring professionals on parental instrumental support.
- Effective parental engagement is needed in the career development of esports players.

Introduction

Esports refers to “competitive video games played by teams or individuals” (Giakoni-Ramírez et al., 2022). The esports market has grown rapidly since the 1990s, driven by the advancement of digital technology and the growth of the computer game industry (Riatti & Thiel, 2021). Several studies have highlighted the impact of esports on society and individuals. A review of the social impact of esports tournaments revealed that hosting such events enhances the tourism value of the host location (Riatti & Thiel, 2021). Yin et al. (2023) found that spectators reported improved well-being after watching esports events, although the findings were based on self-report and do not establish causality. As such, esports are believed to have a significant influence on both society and individuals.

Although the environment is becoming more conducive to market expansion and social attention, there is still a strong element of uncertainty in the career development of esports players. Especially, esports careers tend to begin early, players are also often forced into early retirement (Kang & Kim, 2025). Esports players also face challenges related to social recognition, as they are sometimes seen simply as “gamers”, do not achieve high social status and lack appropriate organizational structures to support their careers (Czakó et al., 2023, Reitman et al., 2017, Smithies et al., 2020). There is also a high risk of burnout, which requires high mental toughness and resilience to avoid burnout (Poulus et al., 2024, Hong et al., 2023). Professional esports players are known to have coping skills techniques to deal with stress and have strong mental health (Poulus et al., 2020, Bányai et al. 2020). Strategic life balance, social support and sleep regulation can lead to wellbeing (Hong & Connelly, 2022). While such coping skills may be acquired in professional esports players who have achieved social status, it is unlikely that these resilience skills are acquired in young players who are still developing. For young players with inadequate social support, family understanding and support is considered essential.

In general, one of the major role parents play in their children's career development is the development of self-efficacy (Li et al. 2022, Yiming et al., 2024, Lent et al, 1994, Constantine et al. 2005). According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy refers to “the belief in one’s ability to successfully perform a given task”. Parental communication with adolescents is positively correlated with adolescents' self-efficacy, and parental involvement in extra-curricular activities and advice on career pathways can increase adolescents' academic self-efficacy (Lv et al., 2018, Givertz & Segrin, 2014, Fan & Williams, 2009) and have an effect on self-management in diabetes (Tuohy et al., 2025).

However, it is reported that parents of esports players are hesitate to support and not sufficiently supportive of their children (Svensson et al., 2024). This suggests that parents of aspiring professionals may not be doing so structurally in supporting their children's careers. In the current study, the differences in parental support between parents of professional esports players and developing aspiring professionals was compared, with the aim of clarifying the nature of parental support in career development. This study identifies differences in the types of parental support associated with esports career development, offering insight for educators and families navigating these emerging pathways.

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

This was a cross-sectional observational study conducted in Japan. The inclusion criteria were as follows: participants were required to be 16 years or older, belong to a professional team or aspire to become a professional player. The exclusion criteria included participants who had been diagnosed with mental health disorders by a physician and were unable to complete the survey. Recruitment of study participants was conducted by professional esports teams and esports colleges. No incentive was paid to participants, and their motivation for participating in the study was to contribute to the development of future esports players by shedding light on the importance of parental support for esports players regarding their career choices.

Participants were informed of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and withdrawal rights as part of that consent process. By confirming whether or not the applicant is a member of a professional esports team and by confirming the name of the team, the participants were divided to Professional Player Group (PPG) and Aspirant Professional Group (APG). The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Graduate School of Medicine, Kyoto University (R4574).

Questionnaire

The questionnaire collected basic information such as age, gender, years of experience in esports, competitive game names, ages of the mother and father, and whether the participant was affiliated with a professional team. The Career-Related Parent Support Scale (CRPSS) Japanese translation was used as a measure of parental support for career-related decisions (Tuner et al., 2003, Narita & Morita, 2015). The original (Tuner et al., 2003) and Japanese versions (Narita & Morita, 2015) CRPSS had been validated and verified for reliability. The CRPSS consists of four major categories: “Instrumental Assistance,” “Career-related Modeling,” “Verbal Encouragement,” and “Emotional Support.” “Instrumental Assistance” and “Career-related Modelling” are instrumental support, “Verbal Encouragement” and “Emotional Support” are positioned as emotional support (Narita & Morita, 2015). Each major category includes 5 to 7 questions, totaling 27 items. Each question is rated on a 5-point scale (e.g., 1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree), where higher scores indicate “adequate support” and lower scores indicate “inadequate support.”

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was conducted using JMP PRO 17 (SAS Institute Inc., Cary, NC, USA). The average values of 27 items, major categories, and total scores for PPG and APG were calculated. Next, the normality of each dataset was checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test. For data that followed a normal distribution, an independent t-test was conducted, while for non-normally distributed data, the Mann-Whitney U test was applied. Additionally, effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's d. The statistical significance level for this study was set at less than 5%.

Results

Demographic data

The participants consisted of 13 PPG and 9 APG (Table 1). Participants in the PPG were significantly older than those in the APG. Mothers of participants in the PPG were also significantly older than those in the APG. No significant differences were observed between the groups in gender distribution, athletic years, or fathers' age (Table 1).

Table 1 Demographics of Participants.

	PPG	APG	P value
Age (years)	23.69±4.97	18.44±2.71	0.0062*
Gender (male/female)	11/2	8/1	-
Athletic years (years)	4.57±3.61	2.56±0.67	0.0582
Mother's Age (years)	55.43±5.91	44.43±5.86	0.0044*
Father's Age (years)	59.00±16.37	46.67±9.71	0.1623

Mean ± standard deviation. *p<0.05.

PPG: Professional player group, APG: Aspirant professional group.

The distribution of competitive game titles differed between the groups (Table 2). VALORANT and APEX were played by participants in both groups, while several titles were played exclusively by the PPG. League of Legends was played only by the APG.

Table 2 Acquisition of Game Titles

	PPG	APG
Call of Duty	1	-
FC 25	1	-
VALORANT	3	4
PUBG	1	-
Rainbow Six Siege	1	-
Super Smash Bros.	1	-
Fortnite	1	1
Splatoon	1	-
APEX	3	2
League of Legends	-	2

PPG: Professional player group, APG: Aspirant professional group.

Comparisons of CRPSS scores between PPG and APG are shown in Table 3. For the item 'Encourages me to learn as much as I can at school,' Cohen's d = -1.09 indicates a large effect size, despite the small sample. There was not a significant difference between PPG and APG on total score of CRPSS. However, when comparing the four major categories, PPG participants reported significantly lower scores than APG participants on the following items "Verbal Encouragement" and "Emotional Support." Moreover, for the CRPSS item "Verbal Encouragement," the questions "My parents

encourage me to learn as much as possible at school” and “My parents say that they expect me to graduate properly from school” showed significantly lower values in the PPG compared to the APG. Furthermore, for the “Emotional Support” item, the questions “My parents talk with me about my concerns regarding my future career” and “My parents talk about what kind of job they want me to have in the future” showed significantly lower values in the PPG. There was not a significant difference in the “instrumental support” following category “Instrumental Assistance” and “Career-Related Modeling”.

Table 3 Comparisons of CRPSS scores between PPG and APG.

Questions		PPG	APG	P value	Cohen's d
Factor 1					
Instrumental Assistance		21.46±8.02	24.00±7.43	0.461	-0.33
1	<i>My parents talk to me about how what I am learning will be useful when I work in the future</i>	2.38±1.39	3.67±1.32	0.0507	-0.94
2	<i>My parents help me with my homework (or assignments)</i>	2.15±1.34	2.78± 1.72	0.4034	-0.41
3	<i>My parents teach me which classes or studies will be useful for my future career</i>	2.23±1.54	3.11±1.54	0.1967	-0.57
4	<i>My parents teach me things that will be useful when I work in the future</i>	3.46±1.61	3.44± 1.33	1.00	0.01
5	<i>My parents allow me to engage in activities where I can learn skills and knowledge useful for my future job</i>	4.00±1.58	3.78±1.30	0.6085	0.15
6	<i>My parents let me participate in extracurricular activities where I can learn skills and knowledge related to my future career</i>	3.54±1.66	3.44±1.13	0.70	0.06
7	<i>My parents help me take pride and gain confidence in the work I can do now</i>	3.69±1.65	3.77±1.56	0.8576	-0.05

Factor 2 Career-related Modeling		26.54±5.94	25.89±6.21	0.807	0.107
8	<i>My parents tell me about their job responsibilities</i>	4.38±1.12	3.67±1.22	0.0710	0.62
9	<i>My parents talk to me about what happens at their workplace</i>	3.85±1.21	4.11±1.17	0.5707	-0.22
10	<i>My parents have taken me to their workplace</i>	3.23±1.74	3.56±1.67	0.6987	-0.19
11	<i>My parents have introduced me to their colleagues</i>	3.08±1.61	3.22±1.39	0.8913	-0.09
12	<i>My parents show me what they do at work</i>	3.23±1.74	2.56±1.74	0.4021	0.39
13	<i>My parents talk to me about their work</i>	4.00±1.29	4.00±1.32	1.00	0.00
14	<i>My parents tell me where they work</i>	4.77±0.60	4.78±0.44	0.8036	-0.02
Factor 3 Verbal Encouragement		17.92 6.83	23.33 3.97	0.046*	-0.92
15	<i>My parents encourage me to learn as much as possible at school</i>	2.92±1.71	4.44±0.73	0.0367*	-1.09
16	<i>My parents encourage me to get good grades by saying supportive words like "You can do it!"</i>	3.38±1.71	3.67±1.41	0.8622	-0.18
17	<i>My parents encourage me to find a job or continue my studies after graduation</i>	3.69±1.44	4.44±0.88	0.2072	-0.60
18	<i>My parents tell me in words that I am doing well at school</i>	2.46±1.27	3.22±0.97	0.1531	-0.66
19	<i>My parents say that they expect me to graduate properly from school</i>	2.92±1.80	4.56±0.88	0.0257*	-1.09

20	<i>My parents acknowledge when I am studying hard</i>	2.54±1.45	3.00±1.41	0.4514	-0.32
Factor 4 Emotional Support		20.85±7.20	26.89±5.58	0.047*	-0.92
21	<i>My parents tell me that they are excited about my future career</i>	2.92±1.61	3.33±1.32	0.5839	-0.27
22	<i>My parents say encouraging words that make me happy when I am learning something useful for my future job</i>	3.69±1.25	3.78±0.83	0.944	-0.08
23	<i>My parents and I enjoy talking together about the wonderful job I might have in the future</i>	3.31±1.43	3.56±1.01	0.7526	-0.19
24	<i>My parents talk with me about my concerns regarding my future career</i>	2.69±1.65	4.11±1.17	0.0483*	-0.96
25	<i>My parents understand when I feel anxious about my future career path</i>	3.38±1.56	4.33±0.87	0.1609	-0.72
26	<i>My parents talk about what kind of job they want me to have in the future</i>	2.00±1.35	3.89±1.36	0.0095*	-1.39
27	<i>My parents praise me when I study skills or knowledge related to my future career</i>	3.23±1.59	3.89±0.93	0.4057	-0.48
Total Score		86.77±25.37	100.11±19.23	0.198	-0.58

Mean ± standard deviation. *p<0.05. CRPSS: Career-related parent support scale, PPG: Professional player group, APG: Aspirant professional group.

Discussion

This study surveyed esports players to explore how parental support influences career decisions in esports. The results showed that the PPG showed significantly lower values in major categories such as “Verbal Encouragement” and “Emotional Support,” as well as in multiple subcategories. These findings suggest that professional esports players may not have received sufficient parental support

for their career development compared to aspiring professionals. Possible reasons for this result are “increased social recognition of esports” and “diversity in the development of self-efficacy”.

The number of individuals aspiring to become professional esports players has been increasing in recent years, following the global expansion of the esports market (Funk et al., 2018). In terms of future market expansion, the market is expected to reach USD 1.97 billion in 2023 and USD 5.18 billion in 2029 (ResearchAndMarkets.com, 2025). These figures indicate that the number of professional esports players has been increasing each year, leading to a rise in the social status of esports (Riatti & Thiel, 2021). Furthermore, parents’ understanding of esports has also been improving over time. Compared to the parents of current professional players—who raised their children in an earlier era—the parents of aspiring professionals may now have a deeper understanding of esports as a viable career option. This may have led to esports professional parents being less supportive than parents of aspiring professionals, as a result of their greater understanding of their children and the independence of their children.

“Mastery experiences”, “Vicarious experiences”, “Verbal persuasion”, and “Emotional arousal” have been identified as important factors in the formation of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Artino, 2012). Many esports’ games employ ranking systems that categorize players into different tiers to measure skill proficiency (Mao, 2021). For example, *League of Legends* has a ranking system ranging from *Iron* to *Challenger*, while *Dota 2* classifies players into 36 levels from *Herald 1* to *Immortal* based on matchmaking rank scores (Mao, 2021). These ranking systems allow players to objectively track their progress, making it easier to accumulate “mastery experiences,” which are essential for building self-efficacy. Additionally, with the development of online gaming communities in recent years, players have become more connected than ever (Zakaria et al., 2022).

This environment facilitates relationships between professional players and aspiring professionals, making it easier for aspiring professionals to gain “vicarious experiences.” Given these circumstances, even without sufficient parental support, esports players may have been able to develop their self-efficacy through skill acquisition and community engagement, ultimately leading to their career formation as professional players. While the professional player group scored significantly lower in “providing words of encouragement” and “understanding concerns about future career paths,” there was no significant difference between the two groups in “providing advice and learning opportunities for career realization.” “Understanding concerns about future career paths” reflects a parent’s ability to empathize with and support their child’s worries and anxieties about career choices (Turner et al., 2003).

On the other hand, “providing advice and learning opportunities for career realization” refers to instrumental support, such as offering career-related information and securing learning opportunities (Turner et al., 2003). These results suggest that while parents of aspiring professionals actively provide emotional support, they may still lack sufficient knowledge and methods to offer concrete career guidance. Previous studies on parental support in children’s career development have shown that the more specific parental support is “such as assisting with application documents” the stronger a child’s motivation for career-related efforts becomes (Phillips et al., 2001, Phillips et al., 2002, Kracke & Noack, 2015).

Thus, parental involvement in supporting their children's careers has been structured in a number of areas and its effectiveness has been demonstrated. However, in the new area of esports, this is not always the case. Therefore, in the area of esports, the involvement of parents and family

members and the way they should be involved has begun to be examined in line with the characteristics of esports (Jenny, 2024, Meissner, 2024). In addition to families, career support is also provided by the Esports Player Foundation (Esports player foundation) and various communities, and there is a need to build structured support that includes families (Hong 2022).

Consideration

This study's limitations include cultural scope, questionnaire-based self-administered study design, and participant age range. Because all participants were Japanese, the findings may not generalize across cultural or regional contexts. To apply the results to individuals with different cultural backgrounds and nationalities, the research should include participants from more diverse regions. The cross-sectional study design of this study limits its ability to directly examine causal relationships. Longitudinal studies that track the impact of parental support on players' career choices over time are needed to gain a deeper understanding of causal relationships. Parental perceptions may evolve as players age and gain more experience in their careers. Because the current survey was conducted using standardized survey questionnaire, it did not reveal the specific impact of parental encouragement, but future surveys could include open-ended questions to better understand the nuances of the survey. Although the current survey focused on parental support, it would be meaningful to conduct a survey on the support that teams, social media, and other communities have recently been providing for esports careers and futures. The results from the current study suggest that parents of aspiring professionals need to encourage their children's career development by using social resources in addition to traditional structured support.

Conclusion

Parents of aspiring esports professionals provide more emotional support than instrumental support for their children's career development compared to parents of professional players. It is known that more structured emotional support and instrumental support can foster self-efficacy, and it is desirable to establish these education systems. This insight could inform more effective parental engagement in the career development of emerging esports professionals.

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Declaration of interest

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

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