TRANSITION FROM INITIATION TO DEVELOPMENT IN ICE-HOCKEY; PLAYERS, COACHES AND PARENTS’ PERSPECTIVES

**Sammanfattning**


Nyckelord: Avhopp, ishockey, karriärövergång, ungdomar
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate what factors facilitate young ice hockey players’ continuation or dropout from sport. The study considers active players’, dropout player’s, coaches’ and parents’ perspectives. The main model that is used in the study is push/pull/anti-push/anti-pull framework (Fernandez, Stephan & Fouquereau, 2006). Other models used in the study are the developmental model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and the career transition model (Stambulova, 2003). The interviews were conducted with eight participants including three active players, one dropout player, two coaches, one parent to an active player and one parent to a dropout player. Semi-structured interview guides based on Athletes Retirement Decision Inventory (ARDI) (Fernandez et al, 2006) were used. The results showed that friends and fellowship in the team were the biggest factors that facilitate for a player to continue in ice-hockey. Underlying factors that can influence a player to dropout are high amount of hard training and a lack of organization in the club. Factors outside ice-hockey that can influence a player to dropout is his will to focus more on school and socializing with friends outside the sport.

Keywords: Adolescence, career transition, dropout, ice-hockey.
Introduction

Every year over 47 million people participate in sport all over the world (Ewing & Seefeldt, 2002). Over one third of all participants between ages 10 to 17 years withdraw from sport every year (Lidner, Johns & Butcher, 1991; Weiss & Ferrer-Caja, 2002). The reasons why young athletes withdraw from sport are many. Early researches have found that career transitions can be one of the reasons. When a young athlete goes through the transition from initiation to development the demands gets higher and hobbies outside the sport increases (Wylleman, De Knop, Ewing & Cumming, 2000). To decrease drop-outs in an organization it is important to be aware of different factors that can facilitate a player to drop-out. This study will focus on career transition among ice-hockey players.

Definition of key terms

Athletic career

An athlete’s career extends from the beginning of sport participant to retirement from the sport. It contents many different stages that are critical for the athlete’s development. According to Wylleman and Lavallee (2004), an athletic career is defined as “a succession of stages and transitions that includes the athletes initiation into and continued participation in organized competitive sport and that is terminated by the athletes voluntary or involuntary discontinuation of participation in organized competitive sport” (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004, p 505).

Career transition

A transition defined by Schlossberg (1981, p 5) is “an event or non-event which results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in ones behaviour and relationships”.

Career termination

Career termination occurs when the athletes consider themselves retired from sport and are no longer participating in competitions. The athlete can still practice sport but without a competitive outcome (Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).

Theoretical frameworks

The theoretical frameworks that will be described in the following text are push/pull/anti-push/anti-pull framework (Fernandez, Stephan & Fouquereau, 2006), the developmental model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and the career transition model (Stambulova, 1994; 2003).

Push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull model (Fernandez et al., 2006)

Despite all the research no theoretical framework have been develop to explain and understand the retirement decisions process for athletes. However, there is such model for the general population and it could be used to study how athlete end athletic career. The model considers push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors that influence the decision to retire (figure 1). Push factors are the negative considerations that push the athlete to retirement, e.g., poor health or injury. Pull factors are positive consideration that pull the athlete to retirement, e.g., spend more time with family. The anti-push and anti-pull factors relates to factors that maintain the athlete sport active. Anti push-factors can be when the athlete has a desire to continue with the sport because of the social context or still feeling able to perform. Anti-pull factors are when the athlete feels uncertain to the post-sport life, unable to succeed in a new professional situation and afraid to feel useless without sport.
The developmental model of transition faced by athletes (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004)
The developmental model consists of four layers and presents “a whole person” perspective. 
The model describes the development, interaction and normative transitions at different levels 
such as athletic, psychological, psychosocial and academic. The model shows how the 
transitions in the sport and in the other spheres of athlete’s life overlap and interact with each 
other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>20</th>
<th>25</th>
<th>30</th>
<th>35</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Athletic level</td>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Mastery</td>
<td>Discontinuation</td>
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<td>Psychological level</td>
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<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Adulthood</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychosocial level</td>
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<td>Siblings</td>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Coach</td>
<td>Partner</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Coach)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic/Professional Level</td>
<td>Primary Edu.</td>
<td>Secondary education</td>
<td>Higher Education/University</td>
<td>Professional training</td>
<td>Professional occupation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. A schematic sketch on push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors influence on 
decision making in sport.

Figure 2. Developmental model on transition faced by athletes at athletic, psychological, 
psychosocial and academic level. The dotted line specifies at which age the transition 
generally take place (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004)

The top level (athletic level) consists of the stages in the athletic development. In this level the 
athlete will go through four different transitions. The important transition for this study is 
when the athlete goes from initiation to development. The specific transition takes place when 
the athlete is about 12-13 years old and the training level increases. The athlete gets more 
dedicated and attends more focus to the sport. The practice gets more structured and the coach 
helps the athletes to set sport-specific goals. Support from parent’s increases and more monies 
invested in the athletes sport involvement. The athlete physical skills increase, practice takes 
more energy and they start to participate in more competition. It gets more difficult to 
combine sport with studies and therefore the athlete often has to sacrifice other activities 
(Alfermann & Stambulova, 2007).
The second layer of the model (figure 2) predicts the normative transitions at a psychological level. It contains three different stages, childhood, adolescence and adulthood. An athlete are on the childhood stage up to 12 years of age, then a transition to adolescence stage occurs (13 to 18 years) and the last transition to the adulthood stage happens (19 years of age forwards). In the third layer the athlete’s psychosocial development is in focus. It is related to the development in different areas of the psychosocial context, e.g. important relationships to parents, coaches, siblings and partner which are changing over time.

The fourth and last layer consist the development and transitions at academic level (figure 2). It reveals when the academic transitions occurs and the first transition, primary education, take place at the age of 6-7 years following by the secondary education (12-13 years old). The third transition occurs at the age of 18-19, when the athlete goes into higher education/university. The last stage is the transition into professional employment.

*Career transition model (Stambulova, 2003)*

This model sees career transition as a process and not a single event. For the athlete to perceive their athletic ability and go trough transition successfully they need to cope with specific demands or challenges. The developmental conflicts between “what the athlete is” and “what he/she wants or ought to be” in the transition stimulates the athlete to mobilise resources to cope with the conflict. How effective the coping is depend on the balance between transitions resources and barriers. The barriers can be internal or external factors that interfere with an effective coping, for examples, a lack of knowledge, individual conflicts or a lack of economic support. The resources are things that make the coping process easier, for examples, individual traits, motivation, social and financial support.
The higher part of the model describes the demands to cope with and the factors influencing coping. The lower part describes two possible outcomes and consequences of the transition. The outcomes could be a positive transition and a crisis-transition. A positive transition occurs when the athlete copes effectively and is able to mobilise the resources and overcome his/her barriers. A crisis transition occurs when the athlete is unable to cope with the demands effectively on his/her own. The reasons why an athlete not is capable to cope with career transitions are many. Low awareness of demands, many barriers to cope with and failure to make proper decision are some of the reasons. To be able to change ineffective coping the athlete need psychological help. If the psychological help is effective the athlete makes a successful delayed transition and if it is ineffective the athlete experiences negative consequences or cost of not coping with the transitions. Cost or consequences are for examples, injury, overtraining, psycho-somatic illness and premature drop outs. The model (figure 3) suggests three different interventions that can be applied in career transitions. These are crisis-prevention interventions, psychological crisis-coping interventions and psychotherapeutic interventions. The crisis preventions intend to prepare the athlete to cope with the transition demands and develop resources for effective coping, such as goal setting, mental skills training and support from the team/organization. Psychological crisis coping are important when the athlete is in a crisis and aimed to help the athlete to analyze the situation.

*Figure 3. The athletic career transition model (Stambulova, 2003)*
and find good strategies to cope with it. The last intervention is used when the athlete experiences one or several of earlier mentioned costs of not coping with the crisis transitions.

Research findings on career transitions

Previous studies have focused on causes and consequences of sport career termination, (Alfermann, 2000), the role of sport organizations in the career transitions (Sinclair & Hackfort, 2000) and symptoms of a crisis-transition (Stambulova, 2003).

Stambulova (1994) did a study on Russian athlete’s career transitions. The intention of her study was to investigate why some athlete could have a good and joyful transitions and why other athletes go through transitions with pain and unpleasantness. The purpose was also to present theoretical models for career transitions and to review the history of developmental career transitions in Russian psychology. In the results of the study Stambulova describe six predictable crises in an elite career development and their characteristics. These are the beginning of the sport specialization, transitions to intense training, transitions to high-achievement and adult sports, transition from amateur to professional, transition from culmination to the end of sport career and the end of sport career. These six transitions were named as the Analytical Sport Career Model (Stambulova, 1994). The second transition, transition to more intense training, is similar to the second transition at the four levels in the developing model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004).

Transition from initiation to development/intensive training

Each transition has a potential to be a crisis, relief or a mixture of both depending on the individual perception of the situation. All types of transitions, even if the timing is uncertain, are an event of career change and a transition at young age may engender identity crisis and coping difficulties (Sinclair & Hackfort, 2000). Both negative and positive factors impact the transition process. Negative factors can be unplanned, forced out, poor performance, lack of options and lack of coping resources. Positive factors are planned, voluntary, achieved goals, balance and options, support and coping resources (Sinclair & Hackfort, 2000).

The transition to more intensive training or development stage occurs when the athlete and coach decide specific sport goal and focus on achievement. At this time the training load increases to 3-5 times per week and focus more on competitive exercises in the specific sport. The sport begins to take up a lot more time and energy than before (Stambulova 1994, 2009).

The transition into an intense level of training confronts youngsters with the need to cope with new demands (Wylleman, De Knop, Ewing & Cumming, 2000). New demands such as higher training load, increased psychological needs, higher expectations from others and consequences of higher training. Psychosocial skills affect the athlete’s development and can help the athlete to find an optimal balance between sport and studies (Stambulova 1994; 2009; Wylleman et al, 2000). Many athletes experience fear and difficulties with the new training system and intense training load. They often perceived difficulties to recover between practice and competition. At the same time their motivation level to achieve the goals is high. This makes the pressure of self-expectations and expectation of others very high. At this transition many athletes experience their first serious injury or overtraining. Declining in self-confidence when entering a higher level is very common at this transition. The athletes often feel that the physical, technical and tactical level of their opponents is much higher than those they have previously met. To be able to cope with the transition the athlete needs to have strong belief in the coaches’ competence, good social support and fellowship in the sports
group (Stambulova 1994; 2009). The social support is especially important. The lack of self-confidence can be compensated by the belief in the coach and sport group/team.

Wuerth, Lee & Alfermann (2004) investigated the parental involvement and athletic career in youth sport. The results showed that the athlete perceived low levels of pressure from their parent during their athletic career. Athletes with a successful transition from initiation to development report higher amount of parental involvement than athlete with no transition. Parents play an important but different role in an athlete’s career development. Mothers to young athletes reported that they gave more positive support and are more actively involved in athletes sport activity than the fathers. Fathers reported higher in the directive behaviours than the mothers, meaning fathers gave more sport specific guidance to their children. The involvement from both parent are biggest in the initiation phase (Figure 2). Independent of the career stage the positive support and encouragement are the most important factors to young athletes. Successful athletes get more understanding from the beginning of sport participation and more directive behaviour from their parents than less successful athletes. Positive support and encouragement are in need before and after the transition from junior to senior. Successful career transitions follow by specific behavioural pattern of parents. The parents show their children how to improve, push them to train harder, put a certain amount of pressure on them, listening to their children’s problems and give them tenderness and understanding. If the parents get too involved in their child’s athletic career and take responsibility for the training it can put to much pressure on their child and a dropout from sport could happen. Young athlete should therefore not have parents as coaches (Wuerth et al, 2004).

In the transition from initiation to development it is important that parents try to support the young athletes’ attempts to improve their sport skills. At the same time as the transitions from initiation to development takes place the athlete also experiences a developmental transition. The youngsters enter a phase in which they will strive towards more independence from their parents (psychosocial level, figure 2) (Wylleman et al, 2000). This transition overlaps with transitions in other spheres of life and making it more difficult to cope with the demands (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). This independence phase may create an imbalance between athletes’ need for autonomy and also for support. This could lead to conflicts in the relationship between the athlete and parents. At the same time the athletes’ coach often gets more important to the athlete. To make the transition period effective parents and coaches need to develop an open relationship. This may provide the athlete with a better psychological situation to cope with the demands during this transition (Wylleman et al, 2000). Young athletes want to succeed in the transition from junior to senior but they often become more anxious, worried and sensitive to social influences. The athletes that have demonstrated a faster athletic progress than their sports friends often find the transition from initiation to development particularly difficult.

Career termination
To be able to understand why young athletes withdrawal from sport it is important to be aware of what motivates children to be physical active. The three major factors for participations are desire to develop physical competence, gaining social acceptance from the environment such as parents, friends or coach and to have fun (Butcher, Lindner & Johns, 2002).
Nowadays athletes leave their athletic career earlier than last generation. The interests in the reasons why athletes leave sport have increased (Fernandez et al, 2006). A way to understand dropout among athletes is to use the push/pull/anti-push/anti-pull model. The first step to develop the push/pull/anti-push and anti-pull model for athletes was made by Reitzes, Mutran & Fernandez (1998). They had the intention to investigate married fulltime workers’ retirement and distinguished married workers retirement from those who have continued to work. The results showed four factors that influence the retirement. A married worker that were engaged in retirement planning was more likely to retire, a worker who was satisfied with the work was less likely to retire, a working spouse increased the likelihood to retire and women were more expected to retire in the two years interval than men. The study also indicates a difference between adults and adolescents retirement. Adults are more active involved in the retirement, e.g. preparing for the next stage while still in an earlier one. The retirement begins with plans of retirement before it actually occurs. People who plan the retirement reduce some of the anxiety and pursue the transition in a good way. Workers that have positive reason (i.e. pull factors), may be more receptive to the retirement than workers that must retire because of negative reasons (i.e. push factors). Workers who were pushed to retire created negative impressions of retirement (Reitzes et al, 1998).

A study made by Koukouris (1991) examined the disengagement process of Greek male athletes. Result showed 38 causes including poor economic support from the club, lack of success, too much time-consuming and injuries. Lavallee, Grove and Gordon (1997) found that work/study devotion, lack of motivation, reduce in performance, economics and lack of enjoyment were the major reasons for retirement. The most important reasons for withdrawal are lack of enjoyment followed by other activities and other sport activities. One of the most motivating factors for young athletes to be physically active is to have fun and enjoyment. Therefore there are not surprising that the most common reason for withdrawal from sport is lack of enjoyment (Butcher et al, 2002). It has also been shown that professional athletes and short time participations have different reasons to drop out. Professional athlete’s withdrawal from sport because of too much pressure to perform well and injuries. The short time participants drop-out because of a lack of enjoyment and competence. To keep a child in sport it is important to focus on maintained the enjoyment and increasing their athletic competence (Butcher et al, 2002).

In the ISSP position stand (Stambulova, Alfermann, Statler & Coté, 2009) there are different guidelines and recommendations for good transitions. Some of them are:

1. “...athletes are recommended to search for a balance between current demands and anticipated future demands in their athletic career. Parents, coaches, and sport psychology consultants must help them to make decision for, or even, “from the future”, through increasing their awareness of forthcoming demands and the resources/strategies necessary to cope with them.”
2. “...athletes are recommended to search for a balance between demands in sport and outside sport, to prioritize in their lifestyles and to emphasize transferable competencies (e.g., goal setting, planning, time/stress/energy management) which can work as resources in coping with transition both in and outside sport.”
3. “As shown in the research, the transition from junior to senior sports is critical for the athletes who want to reach the elite level in sport... Therefore, career planning, balancing lifestyle, stress/time/energy management, and effective recovery, as well as continuing in coaching and support from significant others, are recommended to facilitate athletes’ coping with this transition.”
4. “…athletes are recommended to prepare in advance for their athletic career termination. Coaches and managers are recommended to talk to athletes about their retirement in advance, when they are still active in sport.”

(Stambulova et al, 2009, p 25-26)

**Purpose**
The purpose of this study is to examine factors facilitating young ice hockey players continuation or dropout from sport considering perspectives of active players, dropout player, coaches and parents.

**Method**

**Participants**
In the beginning when the project was planned we had intentions to interview three active players, four dropped out players, two coaches and three parents. When it was time for the interviews three of the dropped out players and one parent withdrew from the study. There were different reasons why the participants withdrew. One parent to a dropout player told us that his son did not want to participant because he was angry at the ice-hockey club.

In the study eight people participated. Three athletes that play hockey, one dropout player, two coaches to the active players, one mother to an active player and one father to a player who dropped out. The players were in the age range between 12-15 years old. The coaches were 39 and 46 years old. The parent to the active player was 41 years old and the parent to the dropout player was 46 years old. All participants are or have been a part of the same ice-hockey club.

**Instrument**
This study adopted a qualitative methodology. Four semi-structured interview guides were created based on six main questions. The interview guides was made out from a quantitative measurement called Athletes Retirement Decision Inventory (ARDI) (Fernandez, Stephan & Fouquereau, 2006). The parts from ARDI that were used to develop the interview guides were the push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors, defined as follows:

Push factors are all negative factors inside the team or club that can push a player out from the sport.

Pull factors are all positive factors outside the sport that can stimulate a player to dropout from the sport.

Anti-push are all positive factors that keep the player in the sport and make him doubtful about the decision to quit playing.

Anti-pull factors are all negative factors the player might experience if he quit playing.

*Active players interview guide*
Appendix 1 presents the interview guide for the active players. It consists of three parts. Part one includes background questions about age, how long they have played hockey and why they started to play. In the second part four questions are presented in following order: anti-push, push, pull and anti-pull. The third part contains a question about what the participant thought could be done in the team/club to avoid players’ dropout.
**Dropped out player interview guide**
Appendix 2 presents the interview guide for the dropout player. It consists of three parts. Part one includes background questions about age, how long they have played ice-hockey, why they started to play, when they dropped out and how they felt about their decision. In the second part four questions are presented in following order: push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull. The third part contains a question about what the participant thought could be done in the team/club to avoid players to dropout.

**Coachers interview guide**
Appendix 3 presents the interview guide for the coaches. It consists of three parts. Part one includes background questions about their age, experience in ice-hockey, how long they have been coaching ice-hockey, if they have any coaching education in ice-hockey and why they thought the players once started to play ice-hockey. In the second part four questions are presented in following order: anti-push, pull, anti-pull and push. The third part contains a question about what the participant thought could be done in the team/club to avoid players to dropout.

**Parents interview guide**
Appendix 4 presents the interview guide for the parents. It consists of three parts. Part one includes background questions regarding the parents age, their son’s age, how long their son had been playing ice-hockey and why they started to play. The parent to the dropped out player were also asked how long ago his son dropped out. In the second part four questions are presented in following order: anti-push, pull, anti-pull and push. The third part contains a question about what the participant thought could be done in the team/club to avoid players to dropout.

**Procedure**
From an earlier cooperation with the ice-hockey club the coaches were contacted and asked if they had some subject they required to investigate. The coaches mentioned that they had problems in the club with players who dropped out, especially in the age of 12-16. A meeting with four coaches from one team and a person who was in charge for the youth organisation in the club was arranged. In the beginning of the meeting a decision was made that the purpose of the study was going to be investigating why players dropout. During the meeting the procedure for the study was planned together. The coaches then emailed all the parents in the team and informed them about the study and asked if there were any volunteers to participate. Also some other coaches from other teams helped us with contact information, especially to the once who dropped out. We contacted all the participants by phone and came up with a time and place for the interview. Most of the interviews were then done in the ice hockey arena before or after the practice. The interviews were made in the same environment for all the participants that were interviewed at the ice-hockey arena. It was made in the same quiet room where they could feel calm and satisfied. Even the two interviews that were made outside the arena were held in a quiet environment and the participant decided individually where the interview would take place. Extra time was set for the interviews which gave the participants time to think through their answer and not feel stressed.

Before the interviews were conducted the participants were informed about the ethical aspects, such as voluntary participation, the right to interrupt the interview at any time and that the data would be treated with confidentiality. The interviews lasted between 18-82 minutes and were recorded on a dictaphone.
**Data analyses**
Step 1 was to listen the recorded data and then transcribe it verbatim in Swedish. The transcripts were coded to keep the data confidential and then read several times by the authors to become familiar with the texts.

Step 2 included reducing the data and triangulation. Each author separately read the interview texts and marked the raw data units and the irrelevant information was sorted out. A discussion between the two authors took place and eight individual profiles were created.

Step 3 dealt with creating four profiles summarizing push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors based on interviews with active players, dropout players, coaches and parents.

Step 4 was to summarize all the data into themes and make one integrated profile.

**Results**

*Active player’s perspective on factors stimulating them to continue in ice-hockey*

The participants started to play ice-hockey in the age range between 5-12 years old and had been playing between 1-7 years in the same club. The reasons why they started to play were because of friends, the fun in the game, having something to do, or family members that played.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present situation</th>
<th>Perceived future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anti-push factors:</td>
<td>Anti-push factors:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The friends in the team (66%)</td>
<td>Play the game (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice to have a hobby (17%)</td>
<td>The fellowship in the team (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The game itself (17%)</td>
<td>Going to tournaments (17%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Push factors:</td>
<td>Pull factors:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot and hard training (45%)</td>
<td>Do other sports (40%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t get any playtime (22%)</td>
<td>Spend time with friends outside the sport (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can not cope with the demands in the team (11%)</td>
<td>Drive their moped (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tired of ice-hockey (11%)</td>
<td>Spend more time on school (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes of coaches (11%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 4.* Factors facilitating continuation or dropout from an active player’s perspective.

Figure 4 presents the results from the active players’ perspective on push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors influencing the players’ involvement in ice-hockey.

It appears in the results (figure 4) that the most important factors for an active player to stay active in ice-hockey are the friends in the team, to play the game and the fellowship in the team.
To avoid players to dropout in the future the participants suggested making the ice-hockey and the physical training more individualized, make A and B teams, so everybody gets to play.

_Dropout player’s perspective on factors influenced his termination in ice-hockey_
This participant started to play ice-hockey when he was eight years old and played for six years. The reason he started to play ice-hockey was that he thought it was a fun game after watching it on TV since he was little.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present situation</th>
<th>Perceived future</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Push factors:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pull factors:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It took too much time (100%)</td>
<td>Do other sports (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play guitar (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on school (33%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-push factors:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Anti-pull factors:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fellowship in the team (50%)</td>
<td>The fellowship in the team (100%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The friends in the team (50%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Figure 5._ Factors facilitating continuation or dropout from a dropout player perspective.

Figure 5 presents the result from the dropout player perspective on push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors influencing a player’s involvement and decision in ice-hockey.

It appears in the results (figure 5) for a dropout player that ice-hockey takes a lot of time and the interest in other sports, playing guitar and the importance to focus on school led them to dropout.
Parents’ perspective on push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors experienced by their kids

One of the participants had experience of being in charge of the equipment in his son’s ice-hockey team. The other one had no experience at all in ice-hockey. The reason they thought the players started with ice-hockey were siblings, friends, idols, Olympics, dreams about become a professional ice-hockey player, the toughness, it is a masculine sport and try a new sport.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present situation</th>
<th>Perceived future</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-push factors:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Anti-pull factors:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The friends in the team (100%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Push factors:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pull factors:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A lot and hard training (66%)</td>
<td>Focus more on school (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the player become teenager and goes through puberty a lot of other things become more interesting (34%)</td>
<td>Friends outside the sport (50%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Factors facilitating continuation or dropout from a parent to an active player perspective.

Figure 6 presents the results of the parent to an active player perspective on push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors influencing a player’s involvement and decision in ice-hockey.

In the results from the parent’s perspective to an active player (figure 6) it appears that the friends in the team stimulate the player to stay active in ice-hockey.

To avoid players to dropout the parents suggested that the coaches should talk more with the players to understand what they feel and think, make the workouts more individualized, keep track of the players who already dropout and ask why they left the team, make sure the players feel special and needed, education for parents and leaders, improve the organization and pay more attention to the players in the club and avoid to bring in players from other clubs.
**Present situation** | **Perceived future**
---|---
**Push factors:**
Lack of the organization in form of poor treatment from coaches, poor communication and jealousy in the club (54%)
A lot and hard training (15%)
Hard competition and little playtime (15%)
That the older team in the club invites players from other teams instead of using their own (8%)
High demands (8%)

**Pull factors:**
Focus more on school (33.3%)
Friends outside the sport (33.3%)
Meet girls (33.3%)

**Anti-push factors:**
The friends in the team (33%)
The fellowship in the team (50%)
The fun in the game (17%)

**Anti-pull factors:**
Going to tournaments (25%)
The social network and fellowship in the team (75%)

Figure 7. Factors facilitating continuation or dropout from a parent to a dropout player perspective.

Figure 7 presents the results of the parent to a dropout player perspective on push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors influencing a player’s involvement and decision in ice-hockey.

In the result from a parent’s perspective to a dropout player (figure 7) it appears that the lack in the organization, a lot and hard training and hard competition in the team are the major factors to stimulate a player to drop out. It is also the friends outside the sport, interest in girls and school that influence a player to the decision to dropout.

To avoid player to dropout in the future the parent suggested that frequent conversations should be held by coaches to be aware of the players’ feelings and thoughts. They should also give more positive feedback to the players that make them feel needed. If the organization wants to be a youth organization they need to put in more time and effort on the younger players and not only on the best team in the organization.
**Coaches’ perspective on push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors for young ice-hockey players**

The participants had been coaching ice-hockey in the same club for 5-11 years. Both of them have been coaching the same team for the last five years. They had the same educations which were children and youth 1 and 2, physical education 1 and ice practice. Both of them had also played when they were younger. The reason they thought the players once started with ice-hockey were the speed in the sport, it is a big sport in Sweden, the success for the national team, friends who played, medias influence and family members.

**Present situation** | **Perceived future**
--- | ---
**Push factors:**  
Higher demands in the team (29%)  
Conflicts between the players (29%)  
Parents negative view on ice-hockey and their lack of interest in the sport (21%)  
When the player becomes a teenager and goes through puberty a lot of other things become more interesting (14%)  
Changes of coaches (7%)

**Pull factors:**  
Go to party and disco (29%)  
Meet girls (29%)  
Friends outside the sport (14%)  
Other interests (14%)  
Do other sports (14%)

**Anti-push factors:**  
The social atmosphere (33%)  
The friends in the team (33%)  
The fun in the team (23%)  
The status of playing ice-hockey around friends (11%)

**Anti-pull factors:**  
Going to tournaments (40%)  
Friends in the team (40%)  
Relationship with the coaches (20%)

**Figure 8.** Factors facilitating continuation or dropout from coaches’ perspective.

Figure 8 presents the result from the coaches’ perspective on push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors influencing a player’s involvement and decision in ice-hockey.

In the result from the coaches’ perspective (figure 8) it appears that the factors stimulating a player to continue in ice-hockey are the social atmosphere, the friends in the team, and going to tournaments.

To avoid players to dropout in the future the coaches suggested to give more education to the leaders, have the organization built by knowledge people, obligatory parental education in the club, include parents in the decisions and make sure they read the clubs youth policy. Mix the team in different ages, have level customized workouts and bring in outside help. They also
thought it is important for the players to get more positive, treat each other with respect, talk more openly in the team and have more developmental conversations with the coaches.
### Summary of push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors stimulating young ice-hockey players to continue or dropout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Present situation</th>
<th>Perceived future</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Push factors:</strong> In the case of quitting underlying factors in the team or club could be:</td>
<td><strong>Pull factors:</strong> In the case of quitting in ice-hockey it will be more time and possibilities to:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Perceived future</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summary of facilitating to continue in ice-hockey</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Anti-push factors:</strong> In the case of considering quitting ice-hockey factors that could make the player doubtful are:</td>
<td><strong>Anti-pull factors:</strong> In the case of quitting with ice-hockey the player would miss being a part of:</td>
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<tr>
<td>(All)</td>
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<td><strong>Anti-pull factors:</strong> In the case of quitting with ice-hockey the player would miss being a part of:</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summary of facilitating to dropout from ice-hockey</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Summary of facilitating to continue in ice-hockey</strong></td>
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**Figure 9.** Summary of factors facilitating continuation or dropout of ice-hockey

**Abbreviations:**
- All = All participants
- Ap = Active player
- Dp = Dropout player
- PA = Parent to an active player
Figure 9 presents the integrated results in themes from all the participants on push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull factors influencing a player's involvement and decision in ice-hockey.

In the results from the integrated profile (figure 9) it appears that the biggest underlying factors in team or club for an ice-hockey player to dropout are the hard and high amount of training and lack in the organization. Outside the sport are their girls, parties and friends that stimulate a player to dropout. The factor that makes a player doubtful in his decision is the friends in the team and the fellowship in the locker room. If a player have dropped out the result shows that he will miss the social atmosphere in the team and going to tournaments.

Discussion
The purpose of this study is to examine factors facilitating young ice hockey players’ continuation or dropout from sport considering perspectives of active players, dropout player, coaches and parents.

The push/pull/anti-push/anti-pull framework (Fernandez et al, 2006) was chosen in the study because it shows in an easy way what factors facilitate a player’s decision to continue or dropout of sport. The developmental model (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) and career transition model (Stambulova, 1994; 2003) have been used as a compliment to the push/pull/anti-push/anti-pull framework (Fernandez et al, 2006).

Active players
In the results from the active players (figure 4) it appears that some of the most important anti-push and anti-pull factors that facilitate a player to continue with ice-hockey are the friends in the team, the game itself and the fellowship in the team. The reasons why it appears that the friends in the team are most important can be many. One of them can be that the friends in the team appear as a resource for the player. If the player can combine fellowship and a sport it probably facilitate his decision to continue. Earlier studies and the explanation of the anti-push factor describes that the social context is important for a player to continue in sport (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004; Fernandez et al, 2006). Therefore it was no surprise that friends appeared as the most important factor to facilitate a player’s decision to continue in ice-hockey. Another important factor for the active players was to be able to play the game. Ice-hockey is a physically tough sport and has high status among teenaged boys. It also includes a lot of different features like skating, dribbling with the puck and tackling each other. Since there are a lot of different features in ice-hockey the players may not get as tired of the sport as if they were just learning how to skate.

Push factors that could appear as a barrier in the sport for an ice-hockey player is the amount of hard training. Teenagers that play ice-hockey must practice almost up to 5 times a week. With that amount of training it can be hard for them to keep up with school and have time for other activities (Butcher et al, 2002). Pull factors that appear as barriers in the sport for an active player are other sports, spend time with friends outside the sport, have time for hobbies and be able to focus more on school (figure 4). If a player decides that he wants to focus on school and have time for friends or do another sport his choice is often to quit ice-hockey.

Dropout player
The biggest push factor for the dropout player was the amount of time it took to play ice-hockey (figure 5). Earlier studies have shown that high amount of training facilitate a player to dropout (Lidner et al, 1991; Wylleman et al, 2000). The dropout player had other interest such as other sport, hobbies and he wanted to focus on school, therefore he felt he had to
dropout. Anti-push and anti-pull factors such as friends and the fellowship in the team made his decision to dropout difficult. In the transition from initiation to development friends appears to be important to an athlete (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). Therefore it was no surprise that friends and the fellowship in the team appeared as the only anti-push and anti-pull factor in his result (figure 5). When the player felt that he had to choose the push and the pull factors influenced him more then the anti-push and anti-pull factors, which facilitate him to dropout. Other studies have showed that other activities and other sport activities often facilitate a player to dropout (Koukouris, 1991; Lavallee et al, 1997).

Parent to an active player
The parent to the active player felt that the questions in the interview were hard to answer. She had never thought about why her son played ice-hockey. The only anti-push factor she could think facilitated her son to play ice-hockey was his friends in the team (figure 6). It was surprising she only had one answer, but at the same time all the other participants in the study answered the same thing.

She had more thoughts about pull and push factors which seemed a little strange since her son is still active in ice-hockey. According to her the push factors were a lot and hard training and the fact that the players go through puberty. A lot of hard training was a barrier her son had mentioned several times.

From a psychological point of view the players are in the transition from childhood to adolescence (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004) which includes puberty. During puberty a lot of other things outside the sport become more interesting which appears as pull factor. The parent to an active player thought that focus on school and friends outside the sport were the pull factors that could appear as barriers in the sport for a player to stay active.

Parent to a dropout player
In the results from the interview with the parent of a dropout player (figure 7) it appeared that a lack of the organization and poor treatment from the coaches, poor communication and jealousy in the club were the major factors that influenced a player to dropout. Earlier researchers confirm that one of the main reasons for dropout can be negative aspects on the coach (Lidner et al, 1991). It is interesting that no other participants mentioned something similar as a push factor since it was the main push factor for the dropout parent. Lack in an organization is probably common but not a thing that players or members in a club talk about. It can lead to decreased motivation and enjoyment for the game which can facilitate a decision to dropout (Stambulova, 2003).

A lot and hard training also appeared as a push factor in the results (figure 7) but not in the same frequency as in the other participant’s reflections. From the parents to a dropout player perspective the amount of hard training wasn’t as important as the other push factors. Instead the lack in the organization took over and the amount of training appeared as a small factor to dropout. Pull factors that can stimulate a player to dropout are things like spend more time on school, friends and girls. Those factors are probably connected with the player’s age range.

Anti-push and anti-pull factors such as the friends and the fellowship in the team, the fun in the game and going to tournaments appeared as resources in the team that can make it hard for a player to dropout. Those three factors also appeared in earlier research as important factors to why children chose to be physically active (Butcher et al, 2002).
Coaches
From the coaches’ perspective there are many push and pull factors that can stimulate a player to dropout (figure 8). As older the player gets the higher demands in the team he should meet. A lot of players can have problems to cope with new demands which force them to quit. It is not only in ice-hockey that the demands increase. New and higher demands are general and significant for all sports in the transition from initiation to development (Wylleman et al, 2000; Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). If a player can not cope with the demands they can have problems to take a spot in the team and not get playtime. Players who don’t get to play usually choose to dropout (Lidner et al, 1991). Another push factor is conflicts between players in the team (figure 8). If conflicts appear between players and they are hard to solve, it will probably impact the joy in the sport and the social network in the club. Since joy and social network are two important anti-pull factors to participate in sport (Butcher et al, 2002) the odds to dropout increase if they reduce. The coaches also talked a lot about the parents influence on the player’s attitude to the sport (figure 8). Parents do play an important role in an athlete’s career development (Wuerth et al, 2004). In this case the parents’ negative view on ice-hockey became one of the important push factors that the coaches thought could influence a player to dropout. To get a successful transition between initiation and development stage the athlete require positive support and encouragement from their parents (Wuerth et al, 2004). Therefore parents’ negative view on ice-hockey may influence their children negatively and cause dropout. The parents’ role was important from the coaches’ view in the study but even if there have been a lot of earlier researches on parents’ impact on a player no one else in the study mentioned it as a push or pull factor.

The coaches also thought that if a player dropped out he would spend more time going to parties and discos as well as spending time on meeting girls and friends outside the sport (figure 8). The reasons behind those pull factors can be that the players are in early teenage years and their interest for parties, girls and friends become stronger in the developmental athletic career stage than in the initiation stage.

Anti-pull and anti-push factors that keep the player active from the coaches’ perspective are the friends in the team, fun in the game and social atmosphere especially when they go to tournaments. The coaches’ results also strengthen by earlier research (Butcher et al, 2002) and emphasize rather common anti-push/anti-pull factors for teenage athletes.

Integrated profile
All the participants in the study mentioned that a lot and hard training is one of the biggest push factors that influence a player to dropout. In the transition from initiation to development a lot of new demands are coming, especially hard training. To be able to cope with the new demands and the transition the player need to have strong belief in himself, good social support and be satisfied with the sports group (Stambulova, 1994; 2009). Effectiveness of coping depends on a balance between coping recourses and barriers. If the recourses in the sport and team become stronger than the barriers the player will continue in sport. If the barriers become stronger it can facilitate the player to dropout.

It is very important that the organization and coaches are aware of what resources and barriers might appear when a transition occurs. If a player is in need for help the organization must have time, money and knowledge to be able to help the player. An organization without that should not be surprised if they have a big amount of dropouts since the barriers then can become stronger and facilitate the decision to dropout. This type of lack in an organization is
probably very common. As shown in the results (figure 9) the second biggest factor for dropout is lack in the organization. The participant that mentioned lack in the organization most frequency was the parent to a dropout player.

Another factor that is really important to analyze is that little playtime was frequently mentioned in the study as a push factor. Depending on the policy in the club this push factor can be discussed from two different angles. If the clubs policy is to allow only the best players to play it is not surprising that the factor appeared. If that is the case there is nothing to do about it since it is the club’s policy. On the other hand if the clubs policy is to let everyone to be involved and get playtime there is a lack in the organization. Since that push factor appeared, apparently not all the players feel that they get enough playtime. Therefore it is something for the club and coaches to be aware of and do something about before it becomes a strong barrier for the players. Earlier researchers have found that negative aspects on the club and to be dissatisfied with the sport group are major factors that facilitate a player to dropout (Linder et al, 1991; Stambulova, 1994; 2009).

When an athlete goes from childhood to adolescence a lot of things happen. They become more sensitive to the environment and people around them often have a huge influence on them. They go through a psychological development and sometimes become rebellion. At the same time as the parents have a huge impact on the player he want to become independent from his parents (Wylleman & Lavallee, 2004). In the results (figure 9) parent’s negative view of ice-hockey and lack of interest appeared as a push factor. It is important for the parent to be aware of how much they actually influence their children and try to find a balance in their relationship. Too much pressure from a parent can influence the player negatively at the same time as too much parental support make the player become rebellion against the parents’ opinion. If a parent gets too involved in a child’s sport participations and put too much pressure on the player it can lead to premature dropout (Wuerth et al, 2004).

When it comes to a young athlete that becomes an adolescent it is very important to be adjustable to the player’s interests outside the sport. Things like parties and girls become more interesting and something they want to investigate. If the sport prevents them from doing that the sport becomes a barrier in their social life and can facilitate a dropout. The friends outside the sport are also important and not just the friends inside the sport. To do other sports and focus on school are also two pull factors that are important for the players when they are teenagers. Therefore it is important to make sure that the players feel like they have time for doing such things.

To keep a child in sport it is important to focus on maintenance of the enjoyment in the sport (Butcher et al, 2002). As shown in the result (figure 9), the most important anti-push factor to make the sport fun is the friends in the team, fellowship in the locker room and going to tournaments. All those factors are different types of social influence and as shown in earlier research gaining social acceptance is a major factor for a child to participate in sport (Butcher et al, 2002).

**Future directions for the club**

All the participants in the study had at least one suggestion about what could be done in the team or club to avoid dropouts in the future. A common suggestion was to individualize the practice and workouts. The reasons behind that suggestion were that the players want to feel that they contribute with something to the team. They want to learn new skills, but since the team involves over at least 15 players on different levels some of them feel that they can’t
keep up with the best ones. Even making A and B teams for tournaments was a suggestion to make more playtime for all the players.

More individualized conversations should be held between the coaches and players. If that could be done coaches can be more frequently updated about the players’ thoughts and feelings. If a coach is updated it is easier for him to be able to help a player in need. Conversations with dropout players should also be fulfilled. This can make the organization and the coaches more aware of what influence a player to his decision to dropout and get more knowledge. A conversation can also make the player who left the team to feel important which may increase the chances for him to comeback. In that conversation it is also important for the coaches to make sure that the player knows that he always is welcome back.

More education and knowledge among the organization, coaches and parents should be something to focus on. If the parents and coaches get education about the sport, how teenagers think and the organizations youth policy less misunderstandings would appear and the organization will be more functional.

Since friends and the social network seems to be a very important part in the organization it is central to make sure that there will be time to do things that improve the fellowship among the players. It is also important to promote the organizations own players and emphasize their success.

Method discussion
Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are good in different ways. The quantitative approach is often used when the intention is to investigate more general causes to the chosen subject and is easier to generalize to the population. The qualitative approach is more detailed and is often used when the purpose is to investigate a subject more deeply. The result becomes more individual and is harder to generalize to the population.

To achieve the purpose of the study a qualitative approach was chosen. The club asked for help to investigate why their players dropout. To get a deeper knowledge around the problem interviews were chosen. The idea from Athletes Retirement Decision Inventory (ARDI) (Reitzes et al, 1998; Fernandez et al, 2006) were used but changed into semi-structured interview guides.

When researchers developed the Athletes Retirement Decision Inventory (ARDI) they used a two-step procedure. The first step was to create a list of items leading to a preliminary version of ARDI and the second step, after testing the preliminary version, was to structure and select final items of ARDI (Reitzes et al, 1998; Fernandez et al, 2006). ARDI is a relatively new quantitative measurement created from the push/pull/anti-push/anti-pull framework. The four big main factors (push, pull, anti-push and anti-pull) were helpful when structuring qualitative semi-structured interview guides. The reason why a quantitative instrument (ARDI) was chosen and transformed into a qualitative instrument was because the measurement was easy to apply on both active athletes and dropouts. By using the measurement the coaches, parents and other social support in the athlete’s environment can clearly see through the result what different factors influence a player to stay active or dropout. The interview guide is semi-structured with six main questions, background questions, one question on each factor and one question about further directions for the club. The guide will also be easy to modify for athletes and their significant others in other sports.
There are some limitations with the instrument. It is a relatively new measurement and the interview guides have never been used before. Therefore it can not be compared with earlier studies. Since the interview guides never have been used before a lot of time was spent on the questions to make sure it would be a useful measurement but still it could have been more developed. Two questions on each factor instead of one could be used. Some of the questions are very similar and the participant sometimes repeated the answers which made it hard to get a wide view. The follow up questions could help the participant to “think outside the box” and develop their answers. There could be one other explanation to why some of the participants’ answers were repeated. If the participant found that one answer was absolutely the most important there is no surprise it was repeated.

Another limitation of the study was the amount of participants. To find dropout players and parents to dropout players who were willing to participate was hard. If more participants were participated in the study the result could have been more generalized to the population at least within ice-hockey.

Future directions
Many interesting studies have already been done but yet there is more to study. It would be interesting to continue studying more different transitions in different sports, both team and individual sports, and make a comparison between the results. Investigations in coaches’ perspective and what the coaches can do to help athlete through the different transitions would be of interest. Results from a coach study can be helpful to develop the sport organization and coaching education. Continuing research on youth withdrawals in sport and the different factors influencing would be interesting.

A study with only dropout players from one specific club would be interesting. In a study like that the result can maybe show if it is the club itself or other factors that lead to dropout. This type of study might help organizations to prevent dropout.

A comparison between different sports, for example, sport with high dropout and a sport with low dropouts would make the difference visible and the sports can learn from each other. There is also an interest of knowing how parents and coaches react and support dropouts in relationship to active athletes.

A study with repeated measurement could be interesting. To compare multiple results from one individual would increase the knowledge about an athlete’s development through the different age stages. To start a study with young athletes and follow them up to the teenage years even if they dropout from sport would be interesting. The purpose would be to see what stimulate some athletes to continue in sport while some maybe dropout. The reason why the study should continue on the dropout players is to see what other things they are doing instead of sport.
References


Appendix list

Appendix 1: Interview guide for the active players
Appendix 2: Interview guide for the dropout athletes
Appendix 3: Interview guide for the coaches
Appendix 4: Interview guide for parents
Appendix 1

Interview guide for the active players

Background information

1. How old are you?
2. For how long have you been playing ice hockey?
3. What made you start playing ice hockey?

Interview questions

Anti push
• What are the main reasons that make you play ice-hockey?

Push
• What factors within your team or club could make you quit playing ice-hockey?

Pull
• Imagine that you quit playing ice-hockey and have more free time, how you would use it, what other things would you do instead?

Anti-pull
• What factors would you miss out on if you quit playing ice-hockey?

Further directions
What could improve, do you think, within your team and club so that less people will dropout?
Appendix 2  
Interview guide for the dropout athletes

Background information

1. How old are you?
2. For how long have you been playing ice hockey in this club?
3. What made you start playing ice hockey?
4. When did you quit playing ice hockey?
4. What are your appraisals today about your decision to quit play ice-hockey?

*Push*
- What were (negative) factors in your ice-hockey team or club that stimulated you to quit playing?

*Pull*
- Was there anything outside the sport that stimulated your decision to quit playing?

*Anti push*
- Was there anything that made you doubtful about your decision to quit playing?

*Anti pull*
- When you decided to quit, did you ever think about that you would miss out some things related to the team/club?

*Further directions*
Do you have any suggestions that could be done within the team or club so that other kids will not drop out?
Appendix 3

Interview guide for the coaches

Background information

1. How old are you?
2. What experience do you have in ice-hockey?
3. For how long have you been coaching ice hockey in this particular team?
4. Do you have any coaching education in ice-hockey?
5. Why do you think young kids start playing ice-hockey?

Interview questions

Anti push
- What do you think are factors that keep a player in the sport and make him doubtful about the decision to quit playing?

Pull
- What factors outside the sport do you think can stimulate a player to dropout from the sport?

Anti-pull
- What factors do you think a player would feel he miss out on if he quit playing?

Push
- What factors inside the team or club do you think can push a player out from the sport?

Further directions
What could improve, do you think, within your team and club so that less people will dropout?
Appendix 4

Interview guide for parents

Background information

1. How old are you?
2. How old is your son?
3. How long have/did your son played ice-hockey?
4. Why did they once start to play?
5. How long ago did your son dropout from ice-hockey? (Question only for the parent to a dropout player)

Interview questions

Anti push
• What do you think are factors that keep a player in the sport and make him doubtful about the decision to quit playing?

Pull
• What factors outside the sport do you think can stimulate a player to dropout from the sport?

Anti-pull
• What factors do you think a player would feel he miss out on if he quit playing?

Push
• What factors inside the team or club do you think can push a player out from the sport?

Further directions
What could improve, do you think, within your team and club so that less people will dropout?