



Examine the differences in player drop-out in rural and urban areas



Alastair Clerkin
Ciaran Devlin
Joanne O'Neill
Kirsty-Leigh McGee
Marc McCracken

June 2012

This report is the intellectual property of Cumann Naomh Eoin Bosco. No part of this report can be copied, distributed or used in any way without the express permission of Joe Ryan Cathaoirleach Naomh Eoin Bosco.

Introduction

This research has been carried out by a group of Business Management students at QUB in an attempt to find out the reasons for players either continuing/discontinuing in GAA sports. It also shows a clear comparison between urban and rural clubs and draws on the differences AND similarities between the two.

Researchers:

- **Joanne O'Neill**
- **Kirsty-Leigh Mc Gee**
- **Alastair Clerkin**
- **Marc Mc Cracken**
- **Ciaran Devlin**

The research project follows up some research already carried out by another group of QUB students a year ago. The research is a further investigation into the reasons for player drop-out . It focuses on drop-out in GAA sports and emphasises some key differences between the urban and rural clubs throughout Ireland. From an epistemological point of view we determined the best ways to gain information on the GAA and used these to help us determine the reasons for player drop-out.

The report will refer to two key clubs which helped define our research. Brackaville Owen Roes and Cumann Naomh Eoin Bosco. However a focus on only two clubs provided limitations to the research and therefore the researchers have taken an approach which helps consider a much more vast set of data and helps solidify the facts. These findings will be of use to the small clubs from which key information was gained, but also the GAA as a whole whom helped shape this research. Further, it will be of use

to sport in a more general sense. Recommendations will also be provided at the end of the research in order to help clubs overcome the problem and identify the key reasons which determine why people of all ages drift from GAA sports.

Executive Summary

Following last years' investigation for St. John Bosco club into the reasons why there is a drop in team membership around the age of 18, we as a group decided to research further and identify reasons for drop out within the GAA in both rural and urban clubs. We worked closely with St John Bosco an urban club and Brackaville Owen Roes a rural club. Both clubs have some difficulty retaining players after the age of 18 so we hoped to find reasons for this and wish to identify various recommendations in order to retain players.

From our research we determined the main reason for drop out between the two clubs was that of injury/health reasons and the main reason for players continuing to play GAA was identified as self-fulfillment. In order to improve player retention within the GAA we found that with better coaching/mentoring and more emphasis on senior reserve teams there would be increased participation within the sport.

With regards to the key clubs St. John Bosco and Brackaville Owen Roes; we identified only a small difference in the reason for dropout between rural and urban locations. This was based on employment. We believe that this is due to job prospects being much lower within rural areas. It is likely that people will have to travel to urban areas where job prospects are greater, meaning less time for sporting participation in their rural clubs.

We decided to further our research by researching outside the two initial clubs. We used these clubs as a foundation to build upon in order to receive as much feedback as possible. Prior to our research, from the evaluation of last year results we believed that the majority of players removed themselves from the GAA due to work commitment, university life and loss of interest. We were however greatly surprised by the number affected with emigration. It has only been within the past year that emigration has begun to have an impact on participation within the GAA.

To conclude, we feel that with so many different personalities and characters involved within the GAA this is what results in a wide range of reasons for dropout. We feel that through various and targeted training and support services the GAA could assist coaches, players, administrators, referees and all those involved as they promote the playing of the games and the co-ordinating of skills development, particularly among young players. This in turn will support the retention of all players.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people and groups who helped us complete this research project:

- Paul McCormick
- Connor Mortimor
- Peter Canavan
- Andrew Gillen
- James Forester
- Joanne Murphy
- QUB Science Shop
- Emma McKenna
- St. John Bosco's GAC
- Owen Roe's Brackaville GAC
- Steelstown GAC
- Everyone who completed our survey.

Literature Review

The topic of player drop out in the GAA remains considerably under researched. Many differing reasons have emerged for player drop out in the association. A similar study has been carried out by a group of final year students at Queens University on player drop out in the GAA for 16-18 year olds. However, we intend to expand on this valuable research and look at some areas which have not been studied in any great detail.

We intend to research the differences between those players from clubs in rural areas and those from city/town clubs, and whether or not this has an effect on player-drop-out/participation. The previous research carried out by the Queen's students did not address the differences between female and male drop out from the sport. This is something we want to focus on. They also eliminated the effect mentors have on players continued involvement in the sport, and we feel this is key to our study. We will be carrying out research into this area.

Although considerable cross-sectional research on withdrawal from children's and youths' competitive sport programs has been conducted, longitudinal studies are needed (Ewing & Seefeldt, 1996, Petlichkoff, 1996 Roberts & Treasure, 1992; Weiss & Petlichkoff, 1989).

Weiss and Williams (2004) have emphasized the importance of conducting qualitative research to understand how physical and psychosocial factors interact to influence youths' dropout decisions.

Gould (1987), Lindner et al. (1991) and Weiss and Petlichkoff (1989) have provided reviews of the extensive research regarding reasons for drop out. Gould (1987) concluded that "conflicts of interest and interest in other activities have been found to be the most consistently cited motives for sport withdrawal, while negative motives such as lack of playing time, overemphasis on competition, boredom, competitive stress, dislike of the coach, and no fun have been rated as major motives by a smaller number of former participants".

In spite of the many studies on reasons for "dropping out" of sports, Weiss and Petlichkoff (1989) identified two categories of "missing links" in the withdrawal

literature, namely contextual factors including type of program and type of sport, and intrapersonal factors including the child's developmental level and intensity of sport involvement.

The understanding of withdrawal reasons can be further enhanced by knowledge of what motivates children and adolescents to participate in sports. Weiss (2000) highlights three major motives for participation:

- The desire to develop and demonstrate physical competence.
- Gaining social acceptance and support from peers and significant adults, including parents.
- Fun/enjoyment.

For too long the practice in sport has been to identify and cultivate talented players and elite teams at younger and younger ages. There is a tendency to nurture the perceived best and neglect the rest. This has contributed to adult training and playing conditions being imposed on young players. Training and competition is geared for outcome and not for the process of development. For juvenile games, coaches must reassess the balance between the need to win games and cups versus the need to develop players and recognise the importance of fair play i.e. provide full participation within an environment where participants are encouraged to achieve their full potential. (Dr Niall Moyna, Head of Sport Science and Health at Dublin City University, DCU).

Susanj, D. & Stewart, C. (2002) Specialization in sport: How early..... How necessary. International Society of Biomechanics in Sport, Coach Information Service looks at the pressures on young basketball players in the USA to succeed and specialise in their sport. This brings up numerous issues eg. Injury which may be of good use to this study. The increase of youth participating in organized sport has been accompanied by many of the same practices as seen in adult sports, that is, more hours practicing and specialising in a single sport (Cahill & Pearl, 1993). With the apparent increase in specialization have come numerous problems. One of the most visible effects of sport specialization is the rising incidence of injury due to overuse. Dalton (1992) stated that 30% to 50% of all sports injuries are due to overuse.

The occurrence of injuries and the added pressure to succeed may be good reason for a young adult to drop out of GAA. Something the GAA was doing to take the competitive element out of underage play to keep the enjoyment in the games was the Go Games initiative. While the go games initiative is one designed for children up to the age of 12, the reasons for drop out may parallel the reasons for drop-out in young adults (age 18). (<http://www.dublingaagamesdevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/gogamesarticle.pdf>)

Traditionally in Gaelic games, there has been a tendency to nurture the perceived best and to the neglect of the rest. This has arisen from the adult training and adult conditions that we expose our young players to. It has led to a situation where many players who develop at a different rate to their peers - for a variety of reasons - drop out of Gaelic games due to a lack of confidence in their ability, a lack of playing time and lack of fun.

The behaviours and attitudes of coaches/ mentors have an important influence on the attitude and mental growth of young athletes and numerous studies clearly show the great significance of the relationship between the athlete and his or her coach for premature ending of continuing a competitive sport career (Martin et al. 2001).

Perkins et al (2004) carried out a study in the US to determine the relationship of childhood and adolescent physical activity with that of adult physical activity.

“Young adult males were twice as likely to take part in sports as females, regardless of level of participation...” (Perkins et al, 2004)

The following are just a few of the conclusions they made following their study.

- Individuals are not likely to begin participating in sports if they had not participated in the past.
- Gender plays a significant role in young adulthood participation in sport, but not in fitness activities.
- Education level has a significant role in young adults' fitness activities, but not sports participation.

- Childhood participation in sports was found to be a significant predictor of young adulthood participation in sports and physical fitness when adolescent sports participation was removed from the equation.

(Perkins, D Jacobs, JE, Barber, BL and Eccles, JS (2004).

Reasons for participation/ drop-out in sport vary among age groups and gender. However many of these reasons overlap. A study which has been carried out on the participation of both children and adults in sport highlights this. It also addresses key issues such as the importance of the type of sport and how differing sports will have differing motivating factors.

“For example, Smith [36] interviewed members of a running club and found a distinction between ‘runners’ and ‘joggers’. Runners were elite members of the club and were motivated by intense competition and winning. Conversely, joggers did not consider themselves competitive in races but aimed to better their own previous best time. Joggers were more motivated by the health benefits of running and the increased status afforded to them by non-exercisers who saw them as fit and healthy.” (Allender S, Cowburn G, Foster C, 2006).

O’Frarell et al 2010 state that the drinking culture within Ireland and the GAA is one that goes hand in hand however there have not been many who have looked at this as a reason why people in this country would quit playing GAA or other sport. A study was carried out as to the effects of alcohol consumption on amateur sportsmen in Ireland. The GAA was used as has 8% of all males playing Gaelic or Hurling. Over half (53.1%) reported having their first alcoholic drink aged 15 years or younger, with just one tenth (10.6%) having their first alcoholic drink aged 18 years or over. A worrying statistic when you consider that once these young people were at the age of 18 they would be drinking regularly which could be a reason for them not playing the sport anymore. The conclusion of the study was that these male amateur sportsmen reported high rates of alcohol consumption and alcohol-related harm.

With the current economic climate there has also been an increase in young players leaving this country to go to Australia or USA to get work. The GAA structure in those two countries has also improved to cater for these players coming in. Looking at two separate news paper articles. The Irish News 21st Oct, pg16 had an article in it about players from Co. Down GAA club Leitrim and how they had an exodus of 10 players from their senior panel leaving for Australia. The promise of work and a booming GAA club network in Australia to entice them away. More evidence which points towards players leaving for Australia came from the Australian based paper The Irish Echo states that 'With an estimated 250 GAA players being lost to clubs around Ireland every month due to emigration, there's no doubting the Gaelic fields of Ireland will be quieter this year. In contrast, GAA clubs around Australia are abuzz with new members as the influx sparks a big rise in the numbers participating.' As we can see though it is not just the underachieving players who are leaving as in this article it states that 'Clare hurler Brian O'Connell, Louth All-Star nominee John O'Brien and Limerick footballers Pádraig Browne and Conor Ranahan are all reported to have made the decision to emigrate to Australia.'

Methodology

Research Design

Research design is ‘the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study’s initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions’ (Yin, 2009). It is used to structure the research, to show how all of the major parts of the research project work together to try to address the central research questions.

For this piece of research we implemented a Pragmatism philosophy, as we believe “that the most important determinant of the research philosophy adopted is the research question, arguing that it is possible to work within both positivist and interpretivist positions. It applies a practical approach, integrating different perspectives to help collect and interpret data” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill; 2009).

We took an inductive approach to this piece of research, according to Saunders et al, 2007, ‘this is a research approach involving the development of a theory as a result of the observation of empirical data.’ We developed this theory by using a comparative research design, so we could compare the differing reasons for player drop-out in rural and urban areas. We used the same methods to research both areas, and then made a comparison between them.

Our research has taken the form of a case study; this is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life natural context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used.” (Yin, 2009). We thought a case study would be useful as it can effectively capture the emergent and changing features of life in organisations, such as the GAA. We were able to gather a large amount of data, and thus make a reliably informed decision. “Yin (2009) suggests this is akin to that of the detective who must sift evidence (some of it relevant and some of it not) to build inferences about what has happened, why and in what circumstances.” (Harley, 2004).

Gable, 2004, states that qualitative and quantitative methods should be regarded as, “complements rather than competitors,” so we are used both for our research using a cross-sectional design so we could study this particular phenomenon at this moment in time. This took the form of semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. We interviewed (“a purposeful discussion between two or more people” (Kahn and Cannell, 1957)) senior members of clubs in a rural area, a town, and a city, and we also interviewed a member of the GAA Ulster Council’s Development Committee, and two high profile players in order to get rich data about the subject from people with a lot of knowledge on the area.

The interviews helped us uncover different perspectives on the subject that we had not previously thought of, or that did not come up in the surveys. We aim got a sample of over 270 players, and ex-players to complete a questionnaire (“a general term to include all techniques of data collection in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order.” (DeVaus, 2002)) regarding reasons for player drop-out so we can gather evidence to help us come to a conclusion about the problem.

Research Population

We have defined our research population as ‘individuals who have been or currently are members of GAA clubs in urban and rural locations ’

In order to collect external data for our main focus, we decided to use a popular GAA discussion boards, <http://www.gaaboard.com> in order to gain extra information from individuals who have been or currently are associated with all other city, town and rural GAA clubs within Ulster. First we need to explain what forums actually are. Most people should be familiar with them but might not have heard the term 'forum' before. Forums are just another name for discussion boards and message boards. They enable the users of both websites to interact with each other by discussing hot topics related to the websites theme, and in this case, both are related to the GAA. These discussion boards made it possible for members to write their own opinions on the topic we have chosen and also will allow members of these boards to follow a link to our survey, which is created, on <http://www.surveymonkey.com>

Data Collection Methods

Method is “the techniques and procedures used to obtain and analyse research data, including for example questionnaires, observation, interviews, and statistical and non-statistical techniques” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill; 2009).

In order to obtain and analyse research data effectively, the research group have opted for a multiple methods approach to our research. Saunders et al (2009) mentions that this is the general term for the *'use of more than one data collection technique and analysis procedures'* We believe that this will be the most suited approach to our research as we will need both qualitative and quantitative data in order to effectively answer our research question. Also using multiple data collection methods will provide us with better opportunities to answer our research question and to evaluate the extent to which our findings may be trusted and so that we can make more informed conclusions on our research.

The data collection methods we used are surveys and semi-structured interviews. This is to ensure that we could get a vast amount of information from a good sample within GAA community to ensure it is relevant to the sport as a whole.

Surveys were used to collect data from our research population within each of the three GAA clubs that we are focusing on as a central tenet for our research. Within the questionnaire we asked each individual the exact same series of questions that are abundantly linked to our research topic. Our survey contains a series of open and closed questions with the aim of getting as many individual opinions as possible. The purpose of our survey was to:

- identify the main reasons for individuals opting to quit, in relation to respondents who no longer play in the GAA
- identify the reasons that individuals who continue to play in a GAA club
- introduce possible solutions to reduce the decline in participation of GAA

We also decided to create an online version of our questionnaire, via <http://www.surveymonkey.com>

Although questionnaires may be used as the only data collection method, it may be better to link them with other methods in the multiple methods research design we have chosen.

We have chosen to use semi-structured interviews as another data collection method. Although the interviewer in this technique will have some established general topics for investigation, this method allows for the exploration of emergent themes and ideas rather than relying only on concepts and questions defined in advance of the interview.'

We interviewed 5 people. These people are regarded as senior representatives from each of the 3 clubs, and we also interviewed representatives from the GAA Ulster Council.

Data Analysis

After we had collected all of our data, we took some time to carefully review all of the data that we collected from our research. We asked ourselves various questions such as 'Did we get the results we had expected? What did we find out from our research?'

It was very evident from the results, what the answer was going to be for our research question, however we needed to analyse this data to ensure reliability and validity.

We used these charts and graphs to illustrate the answers we received for the closed questions of the questionnaire and for the open ended questions we decided to create response categories and identified certain themes that were evident from our questionnaire. When we had completed this, we coded all of the responses and fitted them into the categories and analysed them.

Limitations of the research design

The main limitation we encountered with our research design is the time constraints set upon us by the university, as this research has to be completed inside 12 weeks. If we had more time we could collect more data which would make our findings more reliable, also we could have found out if there are any trends in other sports such as soccer or rugby.

Another constraint we experienced was that of money; if we had have had more money available to us we would have been able to send out a more detailed questionnaire on www.surveymonkey.com, and we could have conducted more in depth research that would make the results more reliable.

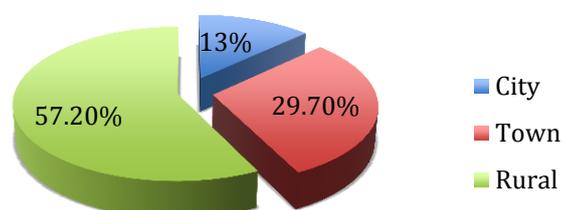
Other data collection methods such as focus groups would have been advantageous, however due to the nature of the research, many people no longer playing the sport would not be willing to take part so it would be very hard to organise an effective focus group.

As we used questionnaires for quantitative research, we have to deal with the limitation that people may not have answered with responses that matched their actual behaviours, but we hope to have a large enough sample of honest answers that this won't be a big issue.

Results and Discussion of Findings

We will look at the overall results of our findings from the 276 people who took part in the survey, and within our discussion; we will refer to the specific data that relates to rural and urban areas. Within the main report we have included analysis of the specific question related to our research question, all other information is within our appendices.

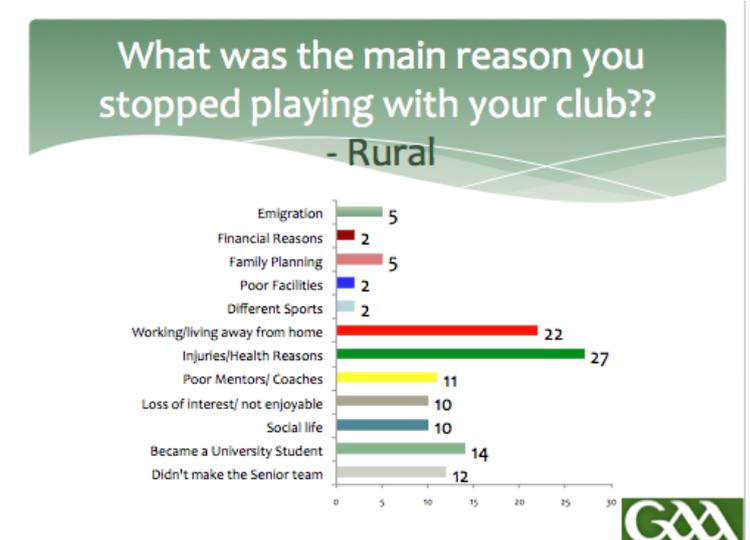
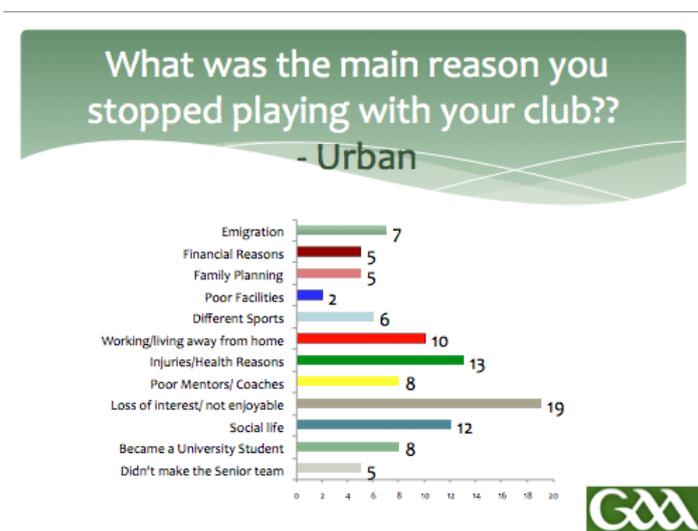
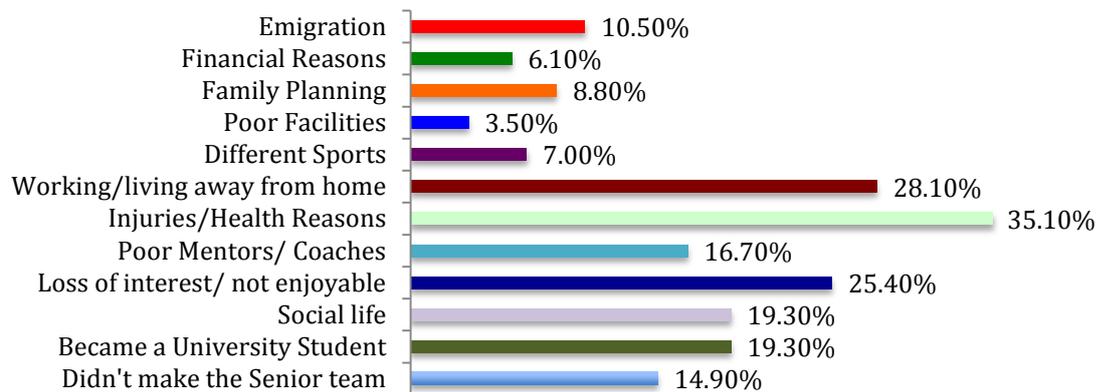
Location of Clubs



This question was asked to form the basis of our research, to examine the decline in participation within the GAA in regards to Rural and Urban areas. Within the question we asked people if they came from rural GAA background, town GAA background or city GAA background. We combined the town and city figures to illustrate the Urban side of our research.

Although we had tried to get results that were closely matched and had equilibrium across the board with regard to location of the GAA clubs, in order to make our judgements fair, we found this impossible. However within our research we found that mostly rural area clubs form the GAA and they take up a large proportion of clubs. We do still believe that our results have shown a wide enough sample, in order to come to firm conclusions about the decline in participation within the GAA.

Reasons for Player's Dropping out



Now we are going to analyse the reasons why people stopped playing with their respective clubs with regards to their clubs location i.e. rural or urban. Above you can see the main reasons as to why people gave up their participation within the GAA. Respondents had the option to choose a combination of these answers, as it may be the case that a few of these may be the reason as to why people dropout.

As you can see, the reason why most people chose to quit the sport was due to **'injuries and health reasons'** with 35.1% of respondents giving this answer. Injuries seemed to be more relevant to rural clubs than urban. Out of 40 people, 27 from rural clubs responded with this answer and 13 from urban clubs. We believe that rural clubs might not have the same standard of health facilities, such as physiotherapists, than urban clubs might have, due to more funding available for the bigger clubs, meaning they can spend their funds in this area, so that players can be kept as fit as possible.

The second most common reason for player drop-out was **'working and living away from home'** with 28.1% of the respondents giving this answer. Working and living away from home seemed to be more relevant to rural areas than to urban. Of the 32 people that responded with this answer 22 are from rural areas. With job prospects being much lower within rural areas, people will have to go to urban areas where job prospects are greater, meaning drop-out from their rural clubs.

Another area we have focused on is **'became a university student' and 'social life'**. Obviously students would have to travel to and from training and matches, therefore spending vast amounts of money to travel, and with respect some students just don't have the money to budget for this. Becoming a university student for some, means going out socialising to bars and clubs and therefore the responses we got aimed towards the idea that some students were more interested in the prospect of socialising than playing for their clubs. In respect to rural and urban analysis, it would be evident that people from rural areas will have to live closer to the university campus and so moving further away from their GAA club and resulting in a decrease in participation rates.

Emigration was another issue that was brought to our attention, as to why people stopped playing for their clubs. 12 out of 114 that answered the question said that they had to stop play with their club, due to emigration. Initially we had thought this might not have been the case but from reading an article in the Irish News, we found that a club in Leitrim Co. Down 'has lost 10 of its players to emigration in just two years as economic hardship sees young talent continue to drain out of Ireland'. With the current economic climate we are facing, many young people with trade qualifications such as plumbing, electrical engineering and joinery, are finding it extremely difficult to find any source of work in Ireland and so they are resorted to emigration to Australia and the likes, as there is vast amounts of work

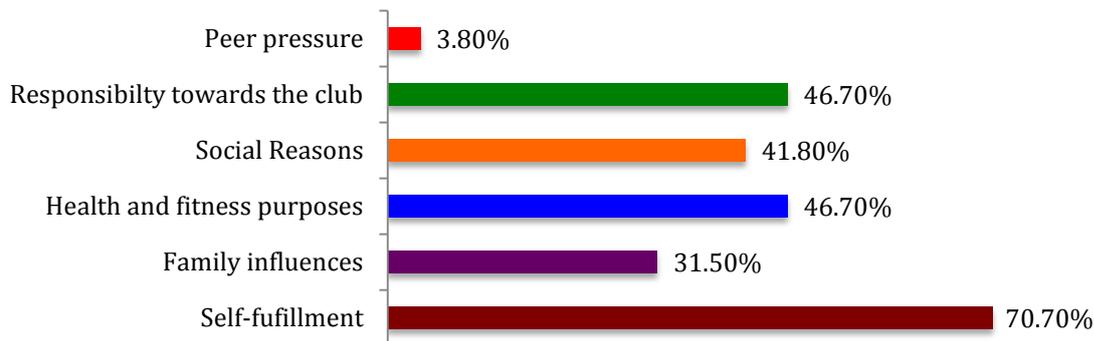
Poor Mentoring and coaching is another key issue as to why people don't participate in GAA games. From our research we found that 16.7% of respondents who said that they stopped participating in GAA, quit due to the poor mentoring and coaching within their respective clubs. This factor seemed more relative to rural areas than urban.

Of the 19 people who used this answer, 11 came from rural club background and 8 came from urban club background. *“The coach has a central role in the development of the GAA player. Coaches assist players in developing to their potential - whatever that maybe. The challenge for the coach is to create the right conditions for learning to happen and to empower the player to develop him/herself to reach their potential”* – GAA.ie (2011)

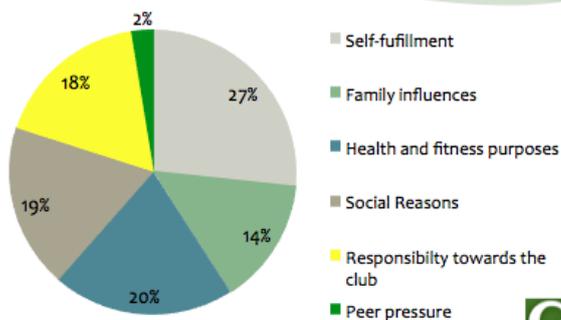
Some of our respondents took the time to give us some interesting facts about their club, and the reasons as to why people had stopped playing.

A lady, from a rural club told us that there was a *‘lack of support from the club for the ladies football team, i.e., wouldn’t supply equipment, and our training times were second to the boys and men’s training’* This shows us that some clubs put their men’s football before other ongoing activities, such as the ladies football, and so some of those may get very frustrated and angry that they do not get the chance to train or practice their game, and so they leave their clubs for this reason.

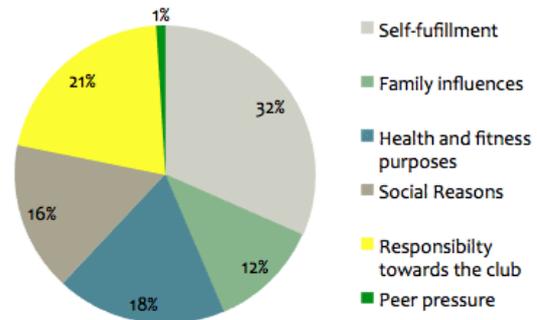
Reasons for Player's Continued Participation



What was the main reason you continued to be a playing member of your club? - Urban



What was the main reason you continued to be a playing member of your club? - Rural



We can see that the main reason people continued playing within their GAA was for **Self-fulfillment**. Almost all of the people who responded with this answer gave reason such as *'the sport is completely enjoyable and I desire to win senior championships year after year'*. Another respondent said *'I love the beautiful game and want to achieve as much as I possibly can'*. These comments show that people are really passionate about the GAA and want to fulfil their targets and goals within the club, and ultimately this is why they continued to play. Rural/urban differences were apparent from the results. Respondents from rural GAA clubs, had 74 responses for this question, were as people from urban GAA clubs had only 56 responses. People who live in rural areas, seem to be more steeped into their respective clubs and giving more time to their clubs in order to self-fulfil their personal targets and goals.

Health and Fitness was another area we would give consideration to. Many people may just be playing the sport to keep themselves fit and healthy. As the GAA is not a professional sport, anyone can join and play with different clubs. Therefore in regards to health and fitness, what is stopping anyone from attending training sessions for 'free' fitness. 86 responses were received giving this answer. This was divided equally between Rural and urban areas with 43 from each location.

Responsibility towards club

Some respondents felt as if they had a duty to give something back to the club for the dedication the club has played in their lives. A respondent said *'I felt it was my duty to keep playing and pushing younger lads on'*. Another respondent noted *'its not about what your club can do for you, but what can you do for your club'*

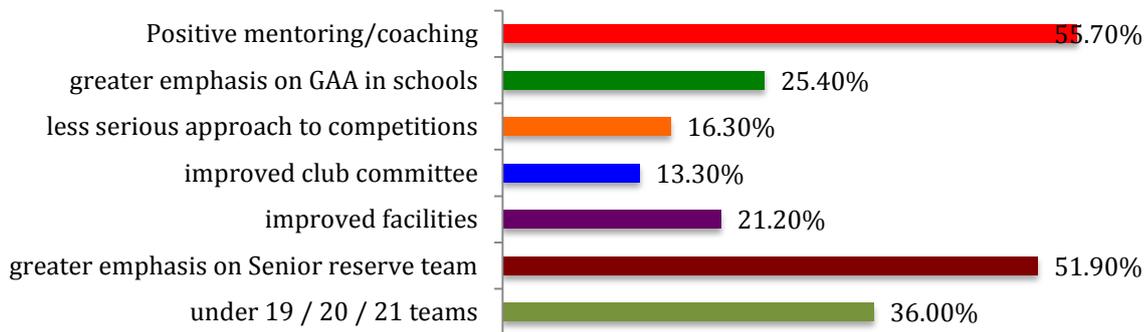
People may also feel pressurised into not leaving their clubs. In regards to rural GAA clubs, this received 49 counts and with urban GAA clubs, it received 37 counts. This tells us that more rural club members believe they have a responsibility towards the club and may feel pressurised and not been able to quit.

Family influences

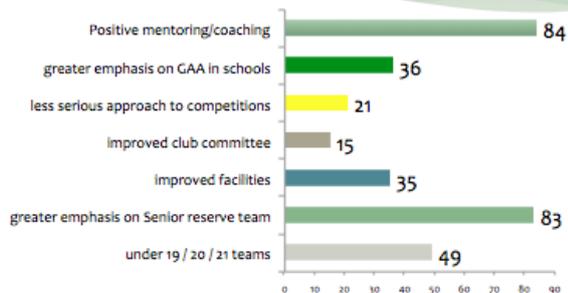
GAA is a very family centred sport, and so this is a huge area of discussion. Many clubs are based on large families that make up the teams, especially in smaller rural areas such as Owen Roe's Brackaville. If your family is deeply involved with a club then you have basically no other choice but to play. Respondents gave us mixed views on this issue. One respondent said *'My family history is steeped in the club so even through injuries I felt a pressure (internal) to play on'*. This shows us that he could show no mercy and not 'cop out' of the participating. A lady respondent mentioned *'Coming from a small village in Armagh, I have big family connections and ties with my club, other than that I wouldn't have even considered playing with my club or any club!'*

From the chart we can see that 31.5% ie 58 respondents that answered the question used family influences as an answer, in terms of rural and urban, Rural had the highest count with 44 and urban with just 14.

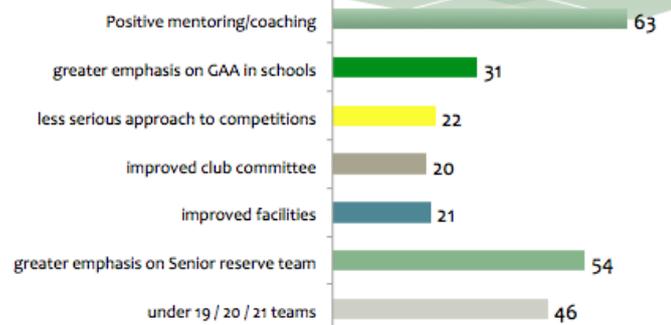
Encouragement of Players to continue to Participate in GAA



In your view, what do you think would be the most effective approach to encourage more players to continue to actively participate in your club - RURAL



In your view, what do you think would be the most effective approach to encourage more players to continue to actively participate in your club - URBAN



We can see from the about bar charts that from both urban and rural areas, Positive mentoring/coaching would be the most appropriate and effective approach to encourage more players to continue to actively participate in the GAA with 55.7% of people all participants agreeing.

Also we can see that a high volume of participants would like a greater emphasis on Senior reserve teams within both rural and urban clubs, in order to retain players

Recommendations

We have a huge dataset, and from that data many people have made various suggestions to help alleviate the problem. Through looking at the core reasons for player drop-out we have also been able to make our own recommendations that we think will improve player retention within the GAA.

More “coaching for the coaches”

In our survey, as well as in the interviews we conducted, we found that one of the main underlying reasons for player drop-out was due to poor mentoring. Better mentoring / coaching was ranked number 1 in factors that people who completed the survey thought would help improve player retention. In our interviews, we found that there was a direct correlation in the standard of mentoring / coaching, and the number of players in those age groups. Therefore, we propose that mentors / coaches are better equipped to train these players to a higher standard through training or coaching for the coaches, in the hope that more players will continue to be involved in the GAA as their mentors / coaches will have more of a positive impact on them.

Greater emphasis on senior reserve teams

A factor we found that was contributing to player drop-out was not getting to play enough football games. Young players over the age of 18 found that if they were not making their senior team, they were getting very little game time for the senior reserve team, as this level is not taken seriously enough. This is a particular problem at more successful senior teams, in which young players with lots of potential cannot break into, and thus quit the GAA because they are not getting enough game time. Too many reserve league games are abandoned / left un-played, meaning players don't get a lot of football, and the reserve championship is often played off at the end of the season at an undesirable time, meaning a lot of players drop out. We propose that more emphasis should be placed on these competitions, with, for example, fines being proposed for teams that do not fulfil fixtures.

Greater emphasis on under-21 competitions

The GAA introduced the under-21 competition as a way of trying to reduce player drop-out, however we have found in the surveys and interviews that many clubs and players don't find the competition effective in doing this, as it is held at the end of the season in November when many players are not interested in playing, and most senior teams have stopped training for the season, meaning the under-21's don't train as it is hard to get the numbers at this time of the year. Many teams don't train for the competition, and are put out in the early stages, meaning the competition is useless. We suggest holding the competition during spring or summer, when there is more likely to be better conditions for playing football, and there will be an increased number of players attending training. Some sort of under-21 league would also be useful as it would guarantee clubs more than one game at this level, although this may be hard to implement in an already congested fixture calendar.

Collective training sessions near university's / cities

Working away from home, and becoming a university student both ranked highly in the survey when participants were asked why they dropped out. A lengthily journey home for training takes a lot of time and money, putting players off training during the week. So we suggest that clubs can work together to arrange some sort of collective training in major cities like Belfast and Dublin, or near the main universities in the country, where players can train during the week with players from other clubs who experience the same problem, and travel home at the weekend for games whilst still maintaining a high level of fitness.

Improved provision for injured players

Injuries / health reasons was the number 1 reason for players dropping out of the GAA. Therefore, we suggest that it is imperative that the GAA improve provision for their injured players. This can include increased access to physiotherapists or other medical staff, with the GAA covering the costs as this can be very expensive; greater access to gyms, swimming pools, therapy centres or other means of rehabilitation from injuries or health problems; and fundraisers for injured players who cannot work so they are still financially stable;

Greater links with GAA clubs abroad

Surprisingly, we found that emigration rated highly as a factor why players dropped out of the organisation, this was also a theme that came up in our interviews. This is quite a recent emerging trend, as emigration currently is largely associated with the current economic conditions. We suggest that the GAA in Ireland forge greater links with GAA clubs abroad; for example many players are moving to places like London and Australia in search of employment, so it would be useful if there were good relations between clubs so that players can continue playing for a club abroad. This would also help GAA players find work, make friends, and settle in better in a new location, and if they player returns home again they will be able to slot back into their home club and continue playing for the GAA.

Conclusion

The main purpose of our research was to define the main reasons for people quitting the GAA, to define the reasons for why people have continued to play in a GAA club and to come up with possible solutions to the drop in participation of GAA clubs within Urban and Rural Areas.

We feel we have addressed these points adequately within our research. As we opted for a multiple methods approach to our research in order to collect our data effectively, we believe we have received an exceptional response rate from our participants with 276 people participating in our research. The various research methods we used were extremely useful, allowing us to summarise our data very efficiently, with the required detail.

The main reasons why players decided to leave the GAA within Urban areas is due to the fact that people lose interest or find the sport not enjoyable. Also quite a few people said that they had to stop playing in the GAA due to injuries and health reasons. However Injuries seemed to be more relevant to rural clubs than urban and so the main reasons why players decided to leave the GAA within Rural areas is because of injuries or health reasons. Also working and living away from home seemed to be more relevant to rural areas than to urban, as people will have to go to urban areas where job prospects are greater.

The main reasons why players in urban and rural clubs have continued to participate in the GAA is for 'self-fulfillment' and also some respondents felt as if they had a duty to give something back to the club for the dedication the club has played in their lives. From both urban and rural areas, Positive mentoring/coaching would be the most appropriate and effective approach to encourage more players to continue to actively participate in the GAA.

Also a high volume of participants would like a greater emphasis placed on Senior reserve teams within both rural and urban clubs, in order to retain players.

Limitations:

During our report we came across several limitations that we had to deal with, such as:

- Access to Secondary Data – There has been little previous research conducted in this area, so it was hard for us to get useful secondary data in order to back up our findings, and aid us in our research.
- Time Constraints – Although we had a full semester in which to complete this research task, we thought that if we had more time we could have collected more data and compared it over time, and seen if any trends have developed.
- Low response rate from non-playing members – It was difficult to get respondents from non-playing members, as they weren't interested in the research, we think if we had an increased response rate from this group our results would have been more reliable.
- Word Limit – Our report was limited to 6000 words, which meant that we could not go into as much detail as we would have liked in terms of analysing the data.
- Lower response rate from urban clubs – The response rate from urban clubs was much lower than rural clubs, meaning we did not have as much data from this group to compare. We felt our findings would be more valid if we had a greater number of urban responses.

Bibliography

Journals:

Butcher J, Koenraad J. Lindner, David P. Johns(2002) 'Withdrawal from Competitive Youth Sport: A Retrospective Ten-Year Study', *Journal of Sport Behavior*, Vol 25.

Cote J, Deakin J, Thomas J (2008) 'Examining Adolescent Sport Dropout and Prolonged Engagement from a Developmental Perspective', *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, Vol 20, pp318-333.

Dalton (1992) Overuse Injuries in Adolescent Athletes, *Journal of Sports Medicine*, Vol 1, pp 58-70.

De Vaus, da (1996) *Surveys in Social Research*, London: UCL Press

Engagement from a Developmental Perspective', *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, Vol 20, pp318-333.

Gould D, Hedstrom R (2004), *Research in Youth Sports; Critical Issues status*, *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Vol 3, pp21-34.

Hartley, Jean (2004). Case study research. In Catherine Cassell & Gillian Symon (Eds.), *Essential guide to qualitative methods in organizational research* (pp.323-333). London: Sage.

Kahn, R. and Cannell, C. (1957) *The Dynamics of Interviewing*. New York and Chichester: Wiley.

Lindner et al (1991) 'Withdrawal Predictors among Physical and Performance Characteristics of Female Competitive Gymnasts', *Journal of Sports Sciences*, Volume 9, Issue 3, pp 259-272

Njorora W, Simiyu (2010) 'Individual and institutional challenges facing student athletes on U.S. college campuses', *Journal of Physical Education and Sports Management*, Vol 1(2), pp 16-24.

O'Farrell, A M, Allwright, S, Kenny S C, Roddy, G, Eldin, N (2010) *BMC Research Notes Alcohol use among amateur sportsmen in Ireland*. 3:313

Perkins et al (2004) 'Childhood and Adolescent Sports Participation as Predictors of Participation in Sports and Physical Fitness Activities During Young Adulthood', *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, Vol 35, pp 495-520.

Weiss R, Petlichkoff L, (1989) 'Children's Motivation for Participation in and withdrawal from sport, Identifying the Missing Links', Human Kinetics Journals, Volume 1, Issue 3, pp 195-211.

Yin, R.K. (2009); 'Case Study Research: Design and Methods', 4th Edition, Sage Publications, London.

Books:

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2007); 'Business Research Methods', 2nd Edition, Oxford University Press (Chapter 2)

Cahill B, Pearl A (1993) Intensive Participation in Children's Sports ,First Edition, London: Human Kinetics .

Tenebaum G, Eklund R (2007) Handbook of Sport Psychology, third edition, New JERSEY: John Wiley & Sons.

Saunders, M.N.K., Lewis, P and Thornhill, A. (2009); 'Research Methods for Business Students', 5th Edition, FT Prentice Hall. (chapter 5)

Websites:

"Aussie GAA Club Benefit from Irish Exodus" The Irish Echo:

<http://www.irishecho.com.au/2011/03/01/aussie-gaa-clubs-to-benefit-from-irish-player-exodus/7455>

(Accessed on 14th November 2011)

Daly,P (2011)Dublin Gaa Games Development,

Available at:

<http://www.dublingaagamesdevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/gogamesarticle.pdf>

Accessed on (3.11.11)

Frankl,D (2011) Youth Sports: Innocence Lost

Available at:

www.sports-media.org/newpedimension (Accessed on 18.11.11)

Go Games Article GAA games development

<http://www.dublingaagamesdevelopment.ie/wp-content/uploads/gogamesarticle.pdf>

(Accessed 14th Nov 2011)

APPENDICES