Investigating motives that influence Australia's Rugby League retention rates

Players' experiences and the impact on retention rates

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Acronyms and abbreviations

Term	Meaning
ACL	anterior cruciate ligament
AM	amotivation
ASC	Australian Sporting Commission
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
BRL	Brisbane Rugby League
EM	extrinsic motivation
IM	intrinsic motivation
NRL	National Rugby League
NSWCRL	NSW Country Rugby League
NSWRL	NSW Rugby League
QRL	QLD Rugby League
RL	Rugby League
SD	Standard deviation
SES	Socio-Economic Status
SIT	Social / Symbolic Interactionist Theory
SMS	Sport Motivation Scale
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
TAFE	Technical And Further Education

1.0   Executive summary

The aim of this research was to determine the extent to which a player's (N = 2310) decision (retention motivations[1]) to not return to RL in 2017, was influenced by four main experiences, being: *coaching*, *playing*, *club* and *socialisation*. A mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach was employed to investigate possible associations. Findings from this study provides a comprehensive 'snapshot' of the current RL landscape, linking Junior (n = 1804) and Senior (n = 506) players' experiences (2016) to retention rates (2017). A summary of results and potential recommendations are presented in this report, with the aim to draw attention to some of the more important patterns of associations between the four measurable experiences (*coaching*, *playing*, *club* and *socialisation*) and players' retention motivations.

Overall, participants generally demonstrated positive, similar responses, concerning the four experiences and retention motivations. However, evidence from this research has identified that there was a substantial number of players (40%, n = 917 / 2310) who consistently indicated that their main reason/s, for not returning in 2017, was due to 'a negative experience' (21%, n = 496) or 'injury / fear of injury' (18%, n = 421). These responses slightly differed in priority depending on the player's group (Junior versus Senior). Junior players (n = 1804) were more inclined to indicate that 1) a negative experience (25%, n = 451), 2) injury / fear of injury (15%, n = 270) and 3) losing interest (13%, n = 234) were the top three main reasons for not returning in 2017. Whilst senior players (n = 506) were more inclined to indicate that 1) injury / fear of injury (30%, n = 151), 2) other commitments (17%, n = 85) and 3) a negative experience (9%, n = 45) as the top three main reasons.

It was further identified, that participants (N = 2310) agreed most strongly on two main negative experiences, these being, 'player selection not fair' (21%, n = 485 / 2310) and felt as if their 'contribution was not valued' (17%, n = 393 / 2310). Significantly[2], players across both groups, were mostly similar in their responses concerning these two and other identified retention motivations. In particular, the analyses reported that the Junior and Senior groups did not differ appreciably between regions (NSWRL, NSWCRL, QRL) concerning these retention motivations. However, slight differences did exist between governing bodies, where NSWRL (Juniors) and NSWCRL (Seniors) were noted as being more critical (negative) about their overall experiences.

There were a number of noted patterns of differences between groups associated with experiences which influenced players' decisions. Of importance, was the variance between groups concerning the item related to 'level of competitiveness was too high', with Junior RL players identifying a significantly higher negative response rate compared to that of Senior RL players. Another significant pattern of difference, found to exist between groups, was associated with Juniors, males and participants with more years of RL player experience, being that they were overall more critical (higher negative agreement levels) of the game when compared to others. There were also further differences that presented themselves, associated with Junior versus Senior negative experiences, associated with 'fun and enjoyment' (Junior) and 'limited support' (Senior).

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[1] Retention Motivations is a term used to describe the 'experiences' that influenced a NRL player's decision to either return or not return to the game in 2017.

[2] Significance is based on determining levels of 1) variable relationships (e.g. rs = 0.20*– 0.40**), 2) p values (e.g. p < 0.05–p < 0.000), 3) Mean (M) and 4) percentages (%). Only the highest levels of these measures / scales are used to represent significance.

Such a pattern of responses would seem plausible, given the context of each group's intrinsic and extrinsic motivational needs.

Reoccurring themes from across the qualitative (player commentaries) data sets were associated strongly with *favouritism* (discouragement), *weight difference* (fear and injury) and *injury* (retirement). Interestingly, the thematic patterning from the qualitative data went to re-enforce (mirror) the quantitative data uniformity across groups.

From such findings, it is possible to discern patterns of associations between specific items related to the four experiences (*coaching*, *playing*, *club*, and *socialisation*).

A summary of main findings, can be identified as being:

Experiences (2016)—positive experiences (Mean & p<0.05 – p<0.001)

A high degree of positive agreement associated with:

1. Coaches have an excellent knowledge of the game and training techniques,
2. Games scheduling are being well co-ordinated,
3. Club's level of commitment to training and competition,
4. Club's level of competitiveness during game (Senior RL players only),
5. Look forward to game day.

Retention Motivations (2016)—negative experiences (Mean & p<0.05 – p<0.001)

A high degree of negative agreement associated with:

1. Player selection fair and equitable,
2. Levels of fun and enjoyment,
3. Contribution valued,
4. Degree of support for players,
5. Club's level of competitiveness during game (Junior RL players only),
6. Player safety,
7. Rewards and incentives for players,
8. General communication and organisation.

Thematic Categories (qualitative data)

A high degree of agreement associated with:

1. *Favouritism* concerning the player selection process (discouragement),
2. *Weight differences* (fear and injury),
3. *Injuries* (causing retirement from the game).

Similarities and differences between groups (Junior versus Senior), concerning the top three main reasons (from 12 categories) which influenced their decision to not return in 2017 are presented as being are shown in Table 1.1 and Table 1.2.

Table 1.1   **Three main reasons influencing Junior RL players to not return (*n* = 1804)**

Reasons	Number (*n*)	Percentage (%)
a negative experience	451	25
injury, fear of injury	270	15
losing interest in playing	234	13

Table 1.2   **Three main reasons influencing Senior RL players to not return (*n* = 506)**

Reasons	Number (*n*)	Percentage (%)
injury, fear of injury	151	30
other commitments	85	17
a negative experience	45	9

Similarities and differences between groups (Junior versus Senior), concerning the top three main negative experiences which influenced their decision to not return in 2017 are presented as in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3   **Top three main negative experiences (Junior & Senior)**

Cohort	Experiences	Number (*n*)	Percentage (%)
Junior *n* = 1804	player selection was not fair and equitable	396	22
	contribution not valued	318	18
	low levels of fun and enjoyment	314	17
Senior *n* = 506	player selection was not fair and equitable	89	18
	limited support	80	16
	contribution not valued	75	15

*Based on high positive agreement levels for all items: *agree* to *strongly agree*

To a large extent, this report and its findings are supported by the identified theoretical basis of claims, ascertaining that a player's decision to not return to play RL (2017) is largely influenced and based on such retention motivations as fairness, social interaction, fun, being valued, a sense of belonging and differing intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Based on these findings, it would be reasonable to suggest that RL needs to invest in a more concentrated effort around aspects of the game, that are more focused on social engagement and cater to individual motivations (especially in Junior groups), rather than solely aimed at ensuring high level of competition and game results. The latter approach will not encourage or sustain player retention at the grassroots, nor, given the increased competitive market, ensure future player recruitment and growth into the 21st century.

It is envisaged, that the findings from this report, will provide a valuable 'foothold' into the world of the RL player and as such, promote the future design and implementation of strategies aimed at addressing retention motivations in RL. This report presents findings from individual groups (Junior and Senior), combined (Junior and Senior) and individual governing bodies (i.e., NSWRL, NSWCRL, QRL and Affiliated States). Such a thorough approach has provided a burden of evidence, concerning elements of the RL culture, which impact and influence player retention motivations. It is also important to note, that whilst there are a number of immediate strategies RL can commence with to address retention motivations, there are certain facets of the game and data findings that will be

out of the control and reach of the sport (i.e., individual player transitional life phases—relocations, heightened and fluctuating study, work and family commitments). Subsequently, from the findings, this report provides eleven recommendations that the NRL may give consideration to, in an attempt to address the identified areas of concern.

1.1.1. Infographic - Executive Summary

Figure 1.1 Infographic—Executive summary

1.2. Summary of results and approach

1.2.1. Summary

This study hypothesised that a player's decision (retention motivations) to *not return* to RL in 2017, was strongly influenced by and associated with four main experiences, being: *coaching*, *playing*, *club* and *socialisation*. Findings from this study found significant[3] ($p < 0.000$)[4], patterns of associations, between experiences, that go to support / prove this hypothesis. A mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach was employed to investigate these associations. The online survey was designed to capture participants' (Combined ($N = 2310$) - Junior (n = 1804) + Senior (n = 506)) responses to:

- their general experiences in 2016, and
- why they did not return (retention motivations) to the game in 2017.

It has been identified that a player's retention motivations arise from links (or interactions) between the *individual characteristics of the player* (e.g., age, division, experience, number of years played and negatives associated with four experiences), the *social identity* they derive from the game (e.g., prestige, status, rewards), and the *social setting* in which they act (e.g., socialisation, club organizational characteristics, sense of community and team spirit). What is more, the breadth and depth to which these experiences (variables) impact on an individual player's retention motivations is dependent on his / her age, personal expectations (social and / or playing), gender and number of years involved in RL.

In summary, retention is mediated by the player's motivations and the ways the player is socialized into the game and RL's individual club subcultures. Importantly, retention is dependent on the commitment[5] a RL player develops to the club's subculture and / or to the RL organization. Specifically, investigating retention motivations requires a concerted multifaceted approach and needs to be focused on a number of important player motivational elements, these being:

1. **Individual characteristics**—related to age, gender, life transitional phases,
2. **Performance factors** —coaching and player experiences,
3. **Social identity**—prestige and social status,
4. **Social setting** —socialisation experiences, club setting and characteristics.

This research report gives consideration to the relative level of agreement (*strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*), for sets of items related to two particular aspect of a player's experiences, that is, 1) positive and negative aspects of the *coaching*, *playing*, *club* and *socialisation* experiences and 2) why they did not return (retention motivations) to the game in 2017. Consideration was given to a specific number of subscales / variables, being: Junior vs. Senior, gender, number of years of RL experience and the subset of four specific ethnic identities. These subsets / variables were measured as to the level of their independent influence on the two aforementioned aspects of a player's experience in 2016. When a relationship[6] between subsets / variables (e.g., male vs female, Junior vs Senior, Junior against item) was statistically significant[7], this was indicated as well as the

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[3] An α of 0.05 indicates that the risk of concluding that a correlation exists, when actually no correlation exists, is 5%. *P* value ≤ α —the correlation is statistically significant.

[4] *P* value (e.g. p<0.000) A smaller *p* value means that there is stronger evidence in favour of the hypothesis (alternative).

[5] Commitment refers to the level of engagement with the game and / or club.

[6] A relationship (rs) between variables indicates if one variable effects the other in any significant manner. As one moves (+ or -) in direction so to does the other variable.

[7] See # 9 below reference to significant levels - (e.g., p < 0.000)

strength and direction of that relationship[8]. With these two points in mind, it would seem that the strength of relationship (r_s) between items, on average, has demonstrated a moderate level of correlation (relationship). Additionally, only highly significant [9] positive, negative and differences have been reported. Means[10] (*M*) were also provided to give ranking of each item based on the central tendency. To give further context to the rankings, data was extracted from participants' levels of agreement (*agree* to *strongly agree*) for each item. Such an approach provides a detailed ranking of participants' top main reason/s associated with:

- their general experiences in 2016, and
- why they did not return (retention motivations) to the game in 2017.

It has been identified that there are significant patterns of associations exhibiting uniformities, across the four experiences and the level of influence these have had on a player's decision to not return (retention motivations) in 2017. The main areas of difference appeared in relation to: Junior vs. Senior league players, female vs. male players, and for players with differing years of RL experience. Importantly, there were no recorded differences found across and between the individual governing bodies (i.e., NSWRL, NSWCRL, QRL and Affiliated States) in relation to the overall patterns of associations between items and resulting uniformities.

Whilst a number of 'direct' reasons have been identified, the findings also present several 'indirect' reasons. The reason/s why individuals discontinue playing sport is multifaceted and in many circumstances interrelated. In relation to RL, there were a number of personal and specific experiences that influenced players' decision/s as to whether or not to continue their engagement with the game. By presenting a more 'wholistic' picture of the player experience/s, this report is better positioned to provide a more wide-ranging, 'big picture' view of the current situation concerning influences that impact on RL's retention rates. However, as is often the case, with research, there are many more new questions that spring forth from the undertaking.

Of importance, RL has noted that a key challenge is to reverse a two percent national[11] decline in total male participation, with the particular problems in keeping the 13 to 18-year-old age groups. With this said, evidence from this research has identified that there was a substantial number of players who consistently indicated that their main reason/s for not returning in 2017 was due to 'a negative experience' (25%, *n* = 496) or an 'injury / fear of injury' (18%, *n* = 421)—a number of which are characteristics[12] of the game delivery which can be addressed and rectified. It is also important to note that whilst there are a number of immediate strategies RL can commence with to address retention motivations, there are certain facets of the game and data findings that will be out of the control and reach of the NRL (i.e., individual player transitional life phases: relocations; heightened and fluctuating study, work, and family commitments).

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[8] Relationships between variables can be indicated as being either positive or negative (e.g., rs = .353** or rs = -.353**)
[9] Reference can be taken from the below probability statements:
   For significance levels, the smaller the decimal fraction, the higher the level of significance.
   - .05 = five in hundred probability of achieving this outcome by chance.
   - .01 = one in hundred probability of achieving this outcome by chance.
   - .001 = one in thousand probability of achieving this outcome by chance.
   - .000 = less than one in thousand probability of achieving this outcome by chance.
[10] Statistical mean (*M*) is a measure of central tendency and gives a good idea about where the data seems to cluster around. Means are only used as a ranking of items for the identified player and negative experiences.
[11] Total national player registration (2017) = 170,947. There were approximately 50,000 players who did not return in 2017.
[12] Representations made on participants' responses being either *strongly agree* to *agree* for each item.

From the following summaries, data analysis and elaborations, a combined Conceptual Model (Figure 1.2) has been designed which represents the direct and indirect reasons, levels of agreement, positive and negative representations, differences between groups and main thematic codes can be presented. Of importance, is the need to understand that the model identifies within each of the four experiences, specific variables which have either positively or negatively impacted on a player. Only the most highly significant ($p < 0.000$) associations, agreement levels, Means and thematic codes have been identified.

From the participants' (N = 2310) responses, it can be summarised, that whilst the majority of the players who did NOT return to play in the NRL 2017 session were happy with the greater part of the game's delivery and subsequently the players' EXPERIENCES[13], there was a significant number of players who left the game due to negative aspects associated with the four experiences under investigation—influencing RETENTION[14].

EXPERIENCES
High degree of positive agreement
Four Experiences
Mean & $p < 0.000$

RETENTION
High degree of negative agreement
Why DID NOT return to play RL
Mean & $p < 0.000$

COACHING EXPERIENCE
+ Excellent knowledge of training and game

COACHING EXPERIENCE
- Player selection fair and equitable
- Rewards and incentives for players
^ FAVOURITISM = discouraged

PLAYING EXPERIENCE
+ Game scheduling / draw was fair

Why DID NOT return to play RL
Junior (n = 1804)
1. A negative exp. 25%
2. Injury / fear of injury 15%
3. Losing interest 13%
Senior (n = 506)
1. Injury / fear of injury 30%
2. Other commitments 17%
3. A negative exp. 9%

PLAYING EXPERIENCE
- High degree of support
- Fun and enjoyment
- Player safety
^ WEIGHT DIFFERENCES = fear and injury
^ INJURIES = retirement

+ Commitment to training and competition
+ Competitiveness during the game (Senior)

- Approach to general organisation
- Competitiveness during the game (Junior)
- Communication with players

CLUB EXPERIENCE

CLUB EXPERIENCE

+ Looking forward to training and game days

- Strong sense of team spirit and belonging
- Contribution valued

SOCIALISATION EXPERIENCE

SOCIALISATION EXPERIENCE

Figure 1.2 Conceptual Model—combined (Junior and Senior)—levels of agreement against four experiences (left sphere) and why players did not return to play RL in 2017 (right sphere)

Note. Combined (N = 2310) Junior (n = 1804) and Senior (n = 506), representing a significant ($p < 0.000$) association with high level of agreement and high (+) / low (-) Mean. + indicates positively associates with agreement level (positive or negative) ^ Main themes

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[13] Survey asked questions to participants about their individual experiences throughout 2016 session.
[14] Survey asked questions to participants about why they did NOT return to play in 2017.

1.2.2. Approach

In a diagrammatical sense, the approach to this research can be presented as depicted in Figure 1.3. Figure 1.3 highlights how the approach was 'sharpened', over a series of progressive stages, so as to give focus to the research questions (hypothesis) and associated aims.

This study hypothesised that a player's decision (retention motivations) to not return to RL in 2017, was strongly influenced by and associated with four main experiences, being: 1) coaching, 2) playing, 3) club and 4) socialisation).

Online survey to collect participants' (n = 2310) responses investigating their individual experiences in 2016 and why they did NOT return to play RL in 2017

What were the general experiences of 2016 RL players who decided NOT to return in 2017?
What were the direct and indirect reasons for why RL players did NOT return in 2017?

Investigate player's main reasons for NOT returning in 2017 to play RL.
Junior (n = 1804) Senior (n = 506) Combined (N = 2310)

What were the main 'negative experiences' that influenced a player's decisions to NOT return to play RL in 2017?

Identifying patterns of associations
(%, M, p < 0.000)

What were the types of 'negative experiences' that influenced a player's decisions to NOT return to play RL in 2017?

What level of influence did 'negative experiences' have on a player's decision to NOT return to play RL in 2017?

Figure 1.3   **Diagrammatical representation of study approach**

1.3.   Demographic Breakdown

Table 1.4   **Demographic breakdown**

Characteristic	Junior	Senior
Participants	There were 1804 full responses.	There were 506 full responses.
Gender	More than 90% were male (90.8%).	More than 80% were male (80.1%).
Age	Ranged in age from 6–18 years of age, with an average of 13 years.	Ranged in age from 18 to 60, with average of 27 years.
Socio-Economic Status	Forty-eight percent (48%) in the 1-5 range, about 15% in the two lowest brackets (1-2) and 19.6% in the two highest brackets (9-10).	Fifty percent (49.6%) in the 1-5 range, about 19.7% in the two lowest brackets (1-2) and 17.4% in the two highest brackets (9-10).
Ethnicity	Ten percent (10%) identified as Aboriginal and 5% as either Torres Strait islanders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders or Australian South Sea Islanders.	Twelve percent (12.3%) identified as Aboriginal and about 3.8% as Torres Strait islanders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders or Australian South Sea Islanders.
Home	Seventy-two percent (72%) reported living with both parents, 22.6% reported living with a single parent, and about 1.2% reported living with relatives.	Forty percent (47%) reported living with a partner, another 27.9% reported living with parents. About 20% reported living either with friends (10.5%) or alone (9.1%). Six percent (6%) indicated living alone.
Relationship	Not applicable	Forty percent (40.1%) reported being single, another 37.2% reported being in couple relationships, and 22.1% reported being married. Only three players reported being divorced. Thirty percent (37.4%) reported dependents.
Studying / Work	Ninety-four percent (94%) reported being at school, with the remaining 6% of responses fairly evenly distributed across another six options (at university, at TAFE, unemployed, casual work, part-time work, full-time work).	Sixty percent (61.5%) reported being in full-time work. The remaining 20% of participants reported being either self-employed (7.3%), casual work (8.7%), part-time work (5.9%), being unemployed (3.8%), or in the case of one person, being retired.
Grade / level played	Fifty-nine percent (58.8%) played in the lower grades/divisions, with 29.2% reporting playing in Regional teams. Of the remaining 12%, almost 9% reported playing in Premier Grade or A grade and another 3% in State competitions.	Fifty seven percent (57.1%) played in reserve grade or in Local A grade competitions (36.2%). Of the remaining 6.8%, roughly equal numbers reported playing in State competitions (3.3%) or the Ron Massey Cup, Sydney Shield, or BRL (3.5%).
Years played	Sixty – six percent (66%, n = 1196 / 1804) had played either 1-2 years (41%, n = 741) or 3-4 years (25%, n = 455). Only about 10% had played official club rugby league for more than eight years.	Thirty percent (30%) had played either 1-2 years or 3-4 years, and about 60% had played official club rugby league for 1-10 years. Almost 40% (39.7%) had played NRL for more than 10 years.
Return to play	Fifty percent (50.3%) were undecided, with the remaining 49.7% divided between not returning (36.8%) or returning (12.9%).	Thirty percent (30%) indicated that they would return, and 40% reported that they would not be returning.

1.3.1. Infographic—Demographic breakdown A

Participant demographic breakdown

Junior 1804 — 91%

Senior 506 — 80%

home (Junior)
- both parents 72%
- one parent 23%
- other 5%

home (Senior)
- partner 47%
- parents 28%
- friends 11%
- alone 9%
- other 5%

Junior players' study & work
- school 94%
- other 6%

Senior players' study & work
- uni 11%
- unemployed 4%
- TAFE 2%
- work: full-time 61%, casual 9%, self-employed 7%, part-time 6%

Junior players' ages

0 2 4 6 8 10%
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18 years

Senior players' ages

years	> 20	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60 +
	10.5%	33.2%	25.1%	17.4%	7.1%	3.8%	1.4%	1.0%	0.0%	0.2%

Senior players' relationships
- dependants 37%
- single 40%
- couple 37%
- married 22%
- divorced 1%

Figure 1.4 Infographic—Demographic breakdown A

1.3.2. Infographic—Demographic breakdown B

Grade / level played

Junior
1804

Premier/A Grade
State competitions
Regional Teams
Lower Grades

Other
State competitions
Local A Grade
Reserve Grade

Senior
506

Years played

| | 1 to 2 years | 3 to 4 years | 5 to 6 years | 7 to 8 years | 9 to 10 years | 10 + years |

Not returning

Undecided

Returning

Junior

50%
40
30
20
10
0

Senior

50%
40
30
20
10
0
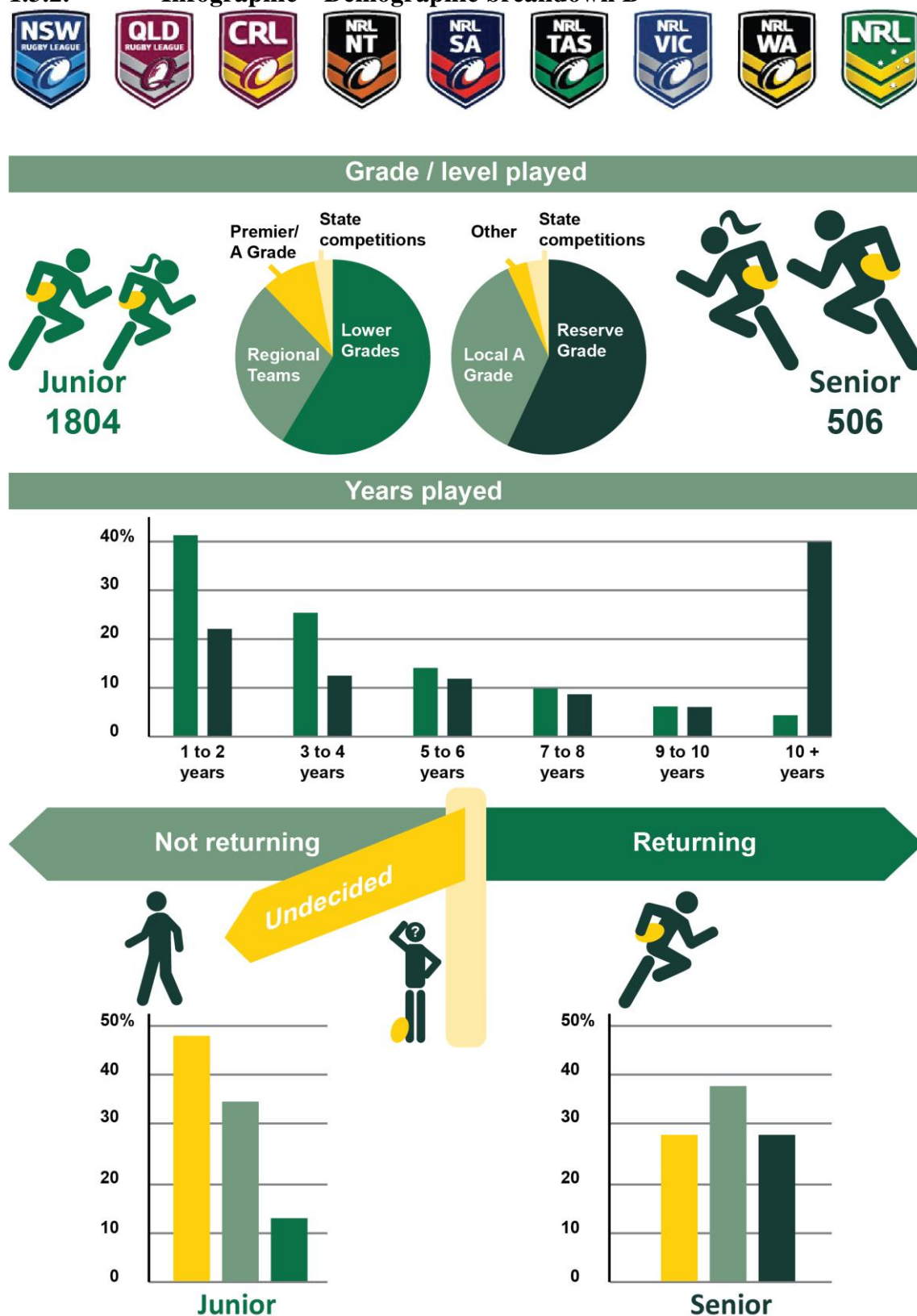
Figure 1.5   Infographic—Demographic breakdown B

2.0   Introduction

2.1.   National Rugby League—Vision, Mission and Key Priority

Australian sport, in the early 21st century, is a consumer-driven industry, and highly competitive. Therefore, individual sporting organisations need to be strategic, with the ability to draw on rich data and theory to inform future decisions and practices. What is more, sporting organisations need to have a clear Vision and Mission Statement, that are, above all else, measurable, logical and ultimately achievable. The National Rugby League (NRL) has a Vision to become, "The Greatest Game of All", a Mission and Key Priority,

To bring people together for the best sports and entertainment experience

To this end, the NRL has a three-pillared approach to improving the game and fulfilling its Vision, Mission and Key Priority. This is heightened by recognising that player: *recruitment*, *transition* and *retention* are decisive elements to understand and consolidate, so as to ensure that RL remains highly competitive and attractive. With this in mind, it is a strategic aim of the NRL to implement critical research that will produce findings that will go towards informing future practices associated with the NRL's three major initiatives (2017), with these being:

1. **Unite** – more players across ages, segments and markets.
2. **Excite** – more fans watching and engaging.
3. **Inspire** – be the most inspirational game.

Of importance, it is envisaged that this research will inform key stakeholders, policy makers and guide future strategic planning throughout the NRL's Key Priority, initiatives and player development framework.

3.0   Background

3.1.   Australia's Sport Development—external influences and RL's alignment

Sport development is "a process whereby effective opportunities, processes, systems, and structures are set up to enable people, in all or particular groups and areas, to take part in sport and recreation, or to improve their performance to whatever level they desire" (Eady, 1993). More specifically, sport development systems have two main objectives: 1) to increase the number of participants actively engaged in sport and 2) to enhance the quality of performances in sport. Accordingly, the Australian Sporting Commission[15] (ASC) has outlined a number of important ambitions for sport development and participation in Australia. At the national level, the ASC advocates to see more Australians, particularly youth, participating more broadly and that individual National Sporting Organisations (NSO), such as the NRL, achieve continual and sustained, year-on-year membership growth and positive and sustained retention rates. To achieve such an aim, "the ASC highly regard sporting bodies that reflect effective organisational qualities, that is, well-governed, strategic, embracing of commercial opportunities, adopting new technologies and delivering user-friendly sports opportunities that cater to all Australians, by way of age, gender, culture and individual sporting aspirations. The ASC wants sports to be sufficiently agile to ensure what they offer is what Australians want, while at the same time staying true to what makes an individual sport unique and great. The ASC currently recognises more than 90 different sports in Australia, each vying for their share of participants, funding and infrastructure allocation" (ASC, 2017). This count is not taking into consideration the innumerable other leisure pursuits outside of sport. Australian sporting organisations that fail to recognise or accept the changing landscape, risk losing relevance and ground to other sports and leisure activities, that are willing and able to adapt to changing societal dynamics, unique life transitional phases and evolving customer demands.

Currently, there are three identified organisational components that the ASC has indicated that Australian sporting organisations need to recognise as part of their wider strategic approach (i.e., player recruitment, transition and retention). The NRL has committed and invested considerable resources (both financially and human) so as to ensure that their player development framework addresses 1) organisational requirements 2) meets players' differing personal levels of skill acquisition, and 3) acknowledges and caters to individual players' differing levels and types of motivational (intrinsic / extrinsic) and participation needs. The NRL is committed to implementing a cyclic research and evaluation process, by which, strategies are examined, refined and re-introduced, with the aim to build sustainable and positive environments for all players, irrespective of their age, gender, culture and individual sporting aspirations. In order for RL to maintain successful sport development programs, there is a need to know more about the interrelationships and interactions that exits between recruitment processes, transitional phases and retention rates.

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[15] Acknowledgement – reference, throughout section 3.1, taken from 'The Australian Sports Commission's participation game play' ausport.gov.au/play.sport.australia.

With this said, the RL player development framework recognises that there is an interplay between three elements, these being:

1. *Player Recruitment*

Recruitment requires the assistance of significant others, as well as the proliferation of many smaller, local-level RL club / school / community programs committed to sustain and maintain current positive player satisfaction levels, whilst implementing initiatives that heighten avenues for recruiting new player prospects (see Appendix A). In its simplest form, recruitment is the manner by which a club enlists new members and players. Once the member or player has been introduced to RL's club subculture, the processes by which individuals are retained or lost begins.

2. *Player Transition*

Transition requires that RL programs (both at a club and organisational level) be linked vertically and horizontally so that players be aided in processes of relocating and socializing into new levels of involvement (e.g., novice to elite, coaching, refereeing, executive positions). Internal RL programs must be designed to optimize individual members' and players' ambitions, promote commitment, and sustain and communicate potential transitional pathways throughout the RL landscape.

3. *Player Retention*

Retention is mediated by the player's motivation and the ways the player is socialized into the game and RL's individual club subcultures. What is more, retention is dependent on the commitment a RL player develops to the club's subculture and/or to the organization. Commitment refers to the level of engagement with the game and/or club. Specifically, and in relation to this research, improving retention rates requires a concerted multifaceted approach and will focus on a number of important player motivational elements, these being:

1. **Individual characteristics**—related to age, gender, life transitional phases,
2. **Performance factors**—coaching and player experiences,
3. **Social identity**—prestige and social status,
4. **Social setting**—socialisation, setting and characteristics.

In its simplest form....to understand retention rates, there are two questions to address, these being:

- What influences players to remain in the game, and
- What influences players to leave the game?

Once such questions are understood, RL will be in a better, more informed position, to tailor future strategies to support and address individual retention rates.

Given that 'retention' is an important aspect of the strategic plan and development, this research is concerned with investigating retention trends across Junior and Senior cohorts (2016–17), with specific attention directed towards understanding patterns of associations between retention trends and the aforementioned player motivational elements. To assist in such a research undertaking, the motivational elements are identified and enveloped into four key player experiences, these being: *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation*.

3.2. Understanding the nexus between 'socialisation' and 'motivation' for increased sport participation

Research concerning motivations for why players return or leave a sport is difficult to characterize, with the theoretical and methodological approaches used to investigate the phenomenon divided. It is further noted, that the concept itself, used to describe socialization out of sport, has been confusing. References have been made to retention rates as being dropping out, alienation, attrition, disengagement, desocialisation, withdrawal, nonparticipation, burnout, transitions, retirement, and involuntary retirement (i.e., being ''cut'' or denied access to participation opportunities). In any case, and specific to this study, clarity will be given to such questions by investigating how the social system of the game and culture is related to three motivational factors, these being: 1) a player's abilities and characteristics, (2) the influence of significant others, including parents, siblings, coaches, and peers, and (3) the availability of opportunities to play and experience success in the game. Understanding factors that motivate players to continue participation in sport, can help key stakeholders cultivate an environment that fosters long-term participation and positive retention rates (Talpey *et al*., 2017).

For the sake of this research, 'motivation' can be defined as the reasons (experiences) people give to explain why they do or don't continue to participate in a sport, with an assumption that this motivation arises from links they derive from the experiences (or interactions) between the characteristics of the individual (e.g., age, gender and life transitions), performance factors (coaching and playing), the social identity (e.g., prestige, status, fitness level), and the social setting in which they participate (e.g., club characteristics, sense of community, socialisation) (Kellett & Warner, 2011). Measuring a player's individual motivation levels requires attention given to determining, to what degree, players differ depending on independent levels associated with; 1) intrinsic motivation (IM), 2) extrinsic motivation (EM), and 3) amotivation (AM). What is more, a player's motivation to return to the game is linked to the Social / Symbolic Interactionist Theory (SIT)[16] which describes how people react toward things or events based on what they think that particular situation means to them. When positioned to investigate sporting cultures, the SIT approach focuses on how players experience sports and how identities are related to sport participation and sport cultures. Retention levels, are intrinsically connected to 'motivation' and have a number of questions which refers to each player's choice to continue with a club.

Specifically, in terms of the multiple motives for Junior participation and retention trends, it is suggested that RL programs focus on fun, social interaction, fitness, skill development, and play, particularly when those programs are targeted at Junior RL grassroots level. Interestingly, in a recent study, children cite 'fun' as the primary reason for participation in organized sport and its absence as the number one reason for youth sport attrition (Visek et al., 2015). This research report goes to present similar findings. Therefore, to be competitive and successful in the current climate, RL needs to be agile in meeting customer demand and implement programs that cater to a range of markets rather than to just one subdivision of the environment. This suggests the need for a range of programs, and more importantly, a range of approaches and implementations. It is argued that modified sport programs (e.g., non-competitive, child-centred programs) can

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[16] Acknowledgement – reference, throughout section 3.2 – 4.3, taken from: Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F (1989) Social identity theory and the organization: Academy of management review 14 (1), 20-39

reach parents who would otherwise choose not to return or register their child into RL (see Appendix A). The need to cater appropriately to different market segments is well understood in marketing, but the implications of benefit segmentation for sport program planning and implementation have been inadequately examined. Indeed, one source of player retention problems might be the failure to offer a sufficient assortment of program variations to cater to a diverse and changing array of participant motivations (Kellett & Warner, 2011). This 'attraction process', as set out by Sotiriadou et al., (2008) advocates that the funds, programs and strategic direction offered by Australia's sporting organisations need to focus on increasing mass participation, and place an emphasis on Junior development and retention.

4.0　　Theory

4.1.　　Theoretical basis of claim and approach

There are a number of theoretical approaches and models that underpin this research undertaking. Foremost, is the theoretically basis of claim that goes to support the research aim, in so much as to understand RL's Junior and Senior retention rates. With this in mind, the overarching theoretical lens derives from an Interactionist Perspective[17]. In relation to the NRL and retention rates, this approach will be used to give meaning to how individuals experience the game of RL in Australia and how such experiences impact on player retention rates. By employing interpretive research methods, this research will shed light onto the processes and reasons associated with why RL players become involved, stay involved, and what are the multidimensional experiences that impact on (positively or negatively) and determine a players' short and long-term involvement, engagement and the transitional pathways. More specifically, this research approach will give reference and draw from a number of frameworks, to give interpretation to data and provide a foundation to give meaning and understanding to the phenomenon under investigation. Such theories and models are elaborated on in the ensuing sections and are identified as: *The Social / Symbolic Interactionist Theory (SIT)*, *The Sport Motivation Scale* (SMS) and the *Pyramid Model*.

The reliability characteristics of the survey instrument were based on the adoption of both the SIT and SMS theoretical frameworks, to which heightened both the validity and reliability of the instrument. This approach was modified for the needs of this research undertaking, that is, specific reference was taken from both the SIT and SMS theoretical frameworks, so as to give direction and legitimacy for the selection and design of the survey questions. The aim of the survey questions was to investigate the experiences (2016) and the impact (influence) these had on a player's decision to not return to the game in 2017. By adopting a theoretical approach to the survey design and question selection, it placed the analysis in a better position to give meaning and interpretation to the collected data. In short, the SIT and SMS theories, associated with understanding sport participation, were used as a theoretical lens for data analysis.

4.2.　　The Social / Symbolic Interactionist Theory (SIT)

The Social / Symbolic Interactionist Theory (SIT) is a term used to describe how people react toward things or events based on what they think that particular situation means to them. "Symbolic interactionism is a micro-level theoretical perspective in sociology that addresses the manner in which individuals create and maintain society through face-to-face, repeated, meaningful interactions" (Carter et al., p. 1. 2015). When positioned to investigate sporting cultures, the SIT approach focuses on how people experience sports and how identities are related to sport participation and sport cultures. Broadly, using SIT as a theoretical lens in sport, identifies how individuals develop and maintain identities as players in RL, how players give meaning to the game and the characteristics of RL's subcultures, change sports to match the perspectives and identities of those who play them and importantly, makes sport organizations more democratic, less autocratic, and less

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[17] Interactionism is a theoretical perspective that derives social processes (such as conflict, cooperation, identity formation) from human interaction. In relation to this study, investigation will be aimed at understanding how individual players shape NRL culture and are themselves shaped by the culture. This relationship is through understanding the meaning that arises in social interactions.

hierarchically organised. Of particular importance and relevance to this study, is the premise that such an approach, allows for the interpretation of how players are socialised into the game, through the game and out of game.

4.3.   The Sport Motivation Scale (SMS)

The SMS[18] consist of a of number sub-scales, that measure three types of motivations for sport participation. This scale consists of questions related to measuring a participant's intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic motivation (EM), and amotivation (AM).

4.3.1.   Intrinsic Motivation
There are three types of IM - identified as *IM to Know*, *IM to Accomplish Things*, and *IM to Experience Stimulation.*

- Players are IM to 'Know' when they try to discover new training techniques for the sheer pleasure they experience while learning something new.

- Players are IM to 'Accomplish' when they try to master certain difficult training techniques in order to experience personal satisfaction represents an example of intrinsic motivation to accomplish things in the sport domain.

- Players are IM to 'Experience Stimulation' when they engage in an activity in order to experience stimulating sensations (e.g., sensory pleasure, aesthetic experiences, as well as fun and excitement) derived from one's engagement in the activity. Players who participate in their sport in order to live exciting experiences are intrinsically motivated to experience stimulation.

4.3.2.   Extrinsic Motivation
There are three types of EM that have been identified as *external regulation*, *introjection*, and *identification*.

- Players are EM to 'External Regulation' when they participate in sport in order to receive praise from their coach or because they feel urged to do so by their parents are motivated by external regulation. In this case, the sport is performed not for fun but to obtain rewards (e.g., praise) or to avoid negative consequences (e.g., criticisms from parents).

- Players are EM to 'Introjection' when they participate in sports because they feel pressure to be in good shape for aesthetic reasons, and feel embarrassed or ashamed when they are not in best form.

- Players are EM to 'Identification' who participate in sport because they feel their involvement contributes to a part of their growth and development as a person.

4.3.3.   Amotivation
- Players are AM when they are neither intrinsically motivated nor extrinsically motivated. When players are in such a state, they no longer identify any good reasons for why they continue to train. Eventually they may even decide to stop practicing their sport.

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[18] Acknowledgement – reference, throughout section 4.3, taken from: Pelletier et al. (1995) Toward a New Measure of Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and Amotivation in Sports: The Sport Motivation Scale (SMS).

4.4. Pyramid approach and integrity to improving retention rates in RL

The pyramid model of sport development assumes that a broad base of participation is required to produce players willing and able to progress to sequentially higher levels of competition. In order to obtain this base of competition, players must first be recruited (or sponsored) into RL. This, in turn, requires a proliferation of school / community-based programs (see Appendix A) catering to multiple motives and market segments. Program design must provide recruits with opportunities to learn about and to come to value both social and task rewards associated with participation. This includes opportunities to undertake new and significant roles, as well as training in goal planning. In order to enhance the articulation between task and social benefits of participation, 'social support systems' [19] need to be designed into the program. Mere provision of programs is inadequate. Sport programs are social systems with their own internal dynamics, they are embedded in a broader system of social relations (Green, 2005). Adequate program design and implementation require meticulous planning and continuous evaluation of the internal social system, as well as its articulation with the wider social fabric within which it is embedded.

Closely linked to the Pyramid Model, and further impacting on player retention rates, is the ASC's[20] promotion of 'integrity'[21], as seen as an integral component of a successful sporting / club experience. As part of RL's general player development approach, there is a need to continue practices that reflect internal integrity to the highest quality, being honest and genuine in its dealings, championing good sportsmanship, providing safe, fair, play by the rules and inclusive environments for all involved. Such an ethos will go towards sustaining and heightening community confidence, trust and support behind them. "Integrity in sport can lead to: increased participation, loyalty of members, the attraction of new members and players who want to be associated with a healthy, successful brand. Activities and behaviours that define sport as lacking integrity include: creating an unfair advantage or the manipulation of results through performance enhancing drugs, match fixing or tanking. Anti-social behaviours demonstrated by parents, spectators, coaches and players are also a significant integrity issue for sport. Such behaviours may include bullying, harassment, discrimination and child abuse. The integrity of a sport will be judged by its participants, spectators, sponsors, the general public and more often than not, the media" (ASC, 2017). The survival of a sport therefore relies on ensuring that 'the sport is the same on the outside as it is on the inside' and remains true to its values, principles and rules.

Although the research literature suggests the broad outlines required for such planning and considerations (Green, 2005), added research is needed, particularly to identify the benefits players perceive in association with RL, how they come to value particular benefits (and not others), how and why those values change, and how levels of 'integrity' and expectancies are affected by variations in program design and implementation. Of importance, is that RL programs must be designed to optimize player recruitment, sustain player transitions, promote player commitment, which will ultimately impact on player

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[19] Social support system refers to the organisation of people within a web of social relationships – how players are linked to each other and how the organisation supports players' internal and external motivations / needs.

[20] Acknowledgement – reference taken from 'The Australian Sports Commission's participation game play' ausport.gov.au/play.sport.australia.

[21] Integrity can be trusted because organisation never veers from inner values, even when it might be expeditious to do so. A key to integrity, therefore, is consistency of actions that are viewed as honest and truthful to inner values (ASC, 2017).

retention rates. The findings and subsequent recommendations outlined in this report, suggests that each RL club and team should examine their own individual situation, so as to better understand and identify their positions related to: 1) specific player experiences, 2) retention motivations, rates and associated trends, 3) barriers to progression and transition, and 4) opportunities to identify and create 'smooth' pathways for players at differing junctions, abilities and interest levels. Such strategies will assist the club to create an increased awareness of the issues of retaining players (Junior, Senior and transitioning) and motivate clubs to think of possible short and long-term strategies and solutions.

5.0   Purpose

5.1.   Aim of research

The aim of this research was to understand why individual players (Junior and Senior) chose not to return to play in the 2017 Rugby League competitions. Specifically, investigations were aimed at determining to what level 2016 players' experiences, (linked to: *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation*), influenced their motivation to not return to play in 2017. In an attempt to investigate the levels of influence / associations between a player's experiences and RL retention rates, participants were seen as 'acting agents' in narratives of their personal experiences. It is to be noted, such an approach is only one subjective model of approaching the phenomena of retention rates in RL. However, it is envisaged that findings will go towards informing current and future decision makers as to what aspects of retention are realistically within the control of RL decision makers and which patterns and trends are out of their scope and influence for promoting sustainable change. This will allow resources to be better directed towards aspects of player retention that can be practically resolved through strategic development and planning. What is more, this research undertaking aligns itself with the ASC's three key areas of concern, in terms of insight into:

1. changing participation trends,
2. driving demands for lifelong participation and
3. aspects for building sports' capacity.

Specifically, this research will provide evidential base line data that will go towards better understanding what is influencing player retention rates in RL, and inform current and future policies, program design and practices that will create lifelong participation within and throughout the game itself.

5.2.   Primary research questions

To achieve such a stated research aim, a number of primary research questions were proposed, these being:

1. What retention motivations influence a Junior or Senior player to not return to play in the RL?
2. To what level does a player's experiences (linked to: *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation*) associate with positive or negative retention rates?
3. What kinds of motivations (external / internal) ensure continued involvement?
4. How can RL facilitate the processes by which a player develops long term commitment to his or her club?
5. What critical themes emerge from the data that represents the current position of RL and player retention motivations?
6. What critical themes emerge from the data that represents potential solutions to improving and sustaining RL player retention motivations?

5.2.1.　　　　Secondary research questions

To support the primary research questions, a number of secondary research questions were proposed, these being:

1. What experiences contribute to an individual's motivation to enter into and remain active in RL? A player's experiences (linked to: *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation*).

2. Do these experiences differ between those who are considered novice entry-level versus experienced players or, alternately, grassroots versus elite players?

3. Do these experiences differ between the characteristics of the players (e.g., age, gender and life transitions)?

4. Do these experiences differ between the characteristics of the players' performance factors (coaching and playing)?

5. Do these experiences differ between the characteristics of the players' social identity they derive from the experiences (e.g., prestige, status, fitness level)?

6. Do these experiences differ between the characteristics of the players' social setting in which they participate (e.g., club characteristics, sense of community, socialisation)?

7. Do these experiences differ between urban and rural settings (SES settings)?

5.2.2.　　　　Quantitative data collection

1. To what level of significance ($p < 0.05$*, $p < 0.01$**) does RL's Junior players' experiences (across coach, playing and socialisation) associate with retention motivations (negative or positive)?

2. To what level of significance ($p < 0.05$*, $p < 0.01$**) does RL's Senior players' experiences (across coach, playing and socialisation) associate with retention motivations (negative or positive)?

3. How significant (positive or negatively - $p < 0.05$*, $p < 0.01$**) are RL players' experiences (across coach, playing and socialisation) in determining if they return to play RL?

4. What is the most significant experience (positive or negatively - $p < 0.05$*, $p < 0.01$**) (across coach, playing and socialisation) that causes negative retention motivations?

5.2.3.　　　　Qualitative data collection

1. How can RL's Junior players' experiences be improved in order to increase retention motivations?

2. How can RL's Senior players' experiences be improved in order to increase retention motivations?

3. What are the most evident reasons for RL Junior and Senior players for not returning to the game?

4. What is identified as possibly the most important reason for why Junior and Senior RL players return to the game?

5.2.4.   Sub-questions

1. What is the relationship / association between RL's Junior players' experiences (across coach, playing and socialisation) and retention motivations?

2. What is the relationship / association between RL's Senior players' experiences (across coach, playing and socialisation) and retention motivations?

3. What is the significance between a RL's Junior players' experiences (across coach, playing and socialisation) in determining if they return to play RL?

4. What is the significance between a RL's Senior players' experiences (across coach, playing and socialisation) in determining if they return to play RL?

5. What is the main RL experience (across coach, playing and socialisation) for Junior players which significantly impacts on their retention motivations?

6. What is the main RL experience (across coach, playing and socialisation) for Senior players which significantly impacts on their retention motivations?

6.0   Methodology

6.1.   Ethical approval

This study received ethical approval from Griffith University Ethics Committee. It was deemed that due to participants' data being de-identified, this research was exempt from a full ethics review.

6.2.   Survey design and construction

Most research concerning the study of player retention rates in sport have utilized quantitative methods and presented correlational analyses. However, this approach has provided little informative data which goes towards describing and giving attention to the social processes and contexts in which players make concerning participation decisions and retention motivations. With this said, a mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) approach was employed to investigate possible patterns of associations, between player's experiences (2016) and reasons for not returning to the game in 2017. Quantitative data provided the 'foothold' and was concerned with gaining knowledge using a scientific method of inquiry, whilst the qualitative data provided further rich insights. Positioned within an interpretivist paradigm and methodology, the qualitative data were sorted using Creswell's (2008) frames for coding and was analysed using Merriam's (2002, 2009) thematic analysis techniques. By combining both quantitative (Mean, %, correlations, p values) and qualitative (player commentaries) methods of inquiry, the results from this study can be better aligned with comparing and contrasting past research indicating that sport participation is grounded in decision making processes based on the theoretical basis of claim involving self esteem, social support, social inclusion and social acceptance.

This report and its findings draws upon Social / Symbolic Interactionism as a theoretical perspective to interpret meaning from the data and investigates sport's social processes and impacts from human interaction. In relation to this study, the survey design will be aimed at tailoring question items so as to better understand how individual players shape RL's culture and are themselves shaped by the culture. This relationship is through understanding the meaning that arises in social interactions.

The survey instrument was designed and approved in consultation with all independent key stakeholders and RL's individual State governing bodies, with these being: NSW Rugby League (NSWRL), NSW Country Rugby League (NSWCRL), QLD Rugby League (QRL) and Affiliated States—NT, SA, Tas., Vic., WA. Survey questions supported a mixed methods approach, consisting of both quantitative and qualitative responses. Questions throughout the survey were constructed with the intent to address the research questions (hypothesis) and aim, that is: to understand why individual players (Junior and Senior) chose not to return to play in the 2017 RL season. Specifically, investigations were aimed at determining to what level 2016 players' experiences, (linked to: *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation*), impacted on their retention motivations to not return to play in 2017. Each of the four player experience domains had a number of self-reflecting questions, resulting in detailed participant profiling. An initial pilot test ($N = 25$) was undertaken of the survey to ensure questions were understood and that

participants could understand survey requirements. A 5-point Likert scale for agreement was used (*Strongly disagree* = 1, *Neutral* = 3, to *Strongly agree* = 5).

6.3.   Participant sample and recruitment

The sample was drawn from across both Junior ($n = 1804$) and Senior ($n = 506$) players who did not return to play RL at club level in 2017 (from the 2016 session). Initial sampling was done by combining participants numbers, resulting in a cumulative participation recruitment number of 2310. The combined numbers were then separated to include individual reports for Junior and Senior groups, with further separate reports for each of the identified State governing bodies and Affiliated States. Participants were recruited with the assistance of the National Rugby League's Participation Strategy and Project Manager, as well as from the Coaching and Education Programs Coordinators (QLD). An email invitation, containing a direct hyperlink to the survey instrument, was circulated to the membership list of those players (Junior and Senior) who did not return to play to play RL 2017. Junior players were categorised as being under the age of 18 at time of survey. It was encouraged that parental assistance was undertaken for Junior players (< 15 years of age) completing the survey.

6.4.   Data collection process

Data collection took place over a five-week period, beginning in August 2017 and extending to early September 2017. A number of follow up email reminders were sent during this five-week period. Data were gathered using a web-based approach on the Survey Monkey platform. Participants were asked to respond to a number of formalized questions and open-ended questions. To increase the level of reliability and validity associated with this survey questioning framework, a number of data collection instruments and approaches were modified for this data collection undertaking (see 4.1 Theoretical basis of claim and approach, page 16 for elaboration). Each approach, to data collection, was aimed at understanding player's personal experiences associated with the four key variables, these being: *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation* and how influential these were in their decision to not return to the game in 2017. From such a process a specific player and retention profiling was made possible.

6.4.1.   Demographics

Descriptive statistics were drawn from measuring questions pertaining to participants' gender, postcode, date of birth, ATSI identification, home situation, education / employment status, and previous player experience (e.g., years of experience playing RL) and level of competition.

6.4.2.   Quantitative questions—closed questions

Participants were asked to complete a series of close question associated with addressing the research aim. Each question was self-reflecting and required to indicate their personal level of agreement (*Strongly disagree = 1, Neutral = 3 to Strongly agree = 5*). Questions were designed to measure a player's experiences and the level of influence these experiences had on their decisions to not return to the game in 2017. An example of this latter response question was presented as being:

- *Please indicate how influential the various socialisation aspects listed below were to your family's (player's) decision not to return in 2017.*

Furthermore, questions were developed to investigate specific topics / issues associated with the four key experiences. These are outlined below as being:

1. **Coaching**—the coach / coaching team and appropriate knowledge about the game (rules, positioning & tactics), fair player selection, rewards / incentives for the player,

2. **Playing**—support, fun and enjoyment, game scheduling / draw was fair,

3. **Club**—general organisation, communication,

4. **Socialisation**—team spirit and belonging, valued.

As a guiding framework and to add reliability to the measurement instrument, a number of scales were utilised and modified for this research. The questions for this research were framed with reference to The Social / Symbolic Interactionist Theory (SIT) and the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS). Each scale and subscales provide legitimacy as to the design and development of the survey questions in relation to investigating retention rates and motivations to return to the game in 2017.

6.4.3. Qualitative questions—open-ended

This research was interested in how players' experiences (linked to *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation*) influenced their decision to not to return to play in 2017. Primarily, the adoption of a qualitative approach, was to examine more deeply the social processes associated with a player's decisions. Participants were asked to respond in writing to a series of open-ended questions (selected examples below) that focused on:

1. *Please feel free to elaborate further on the players' social experience throughout 2016 (Positive or Negative).*

2. *Were there any other factors relating to the players' socialising experience that contributed to them not returning?*

3. *Is there anything that could have been done to improve the players' playing experience that may have encouraged them to return in 2017?*

When participants completed their responses, they were asked to indicate their willingness to be contacted by a member of the research team. Those who were willing provided their name and contact information. These follow up conversations allowed the investigators to add clarity to responses received or to gather additional information pertaining to particular responses.

7.0   Data analysis

7.1.1.   Quantitative analysis

Quantitative data analysis was undertaken using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) (PASW20). Data preparation involved the development of one SPSS file to incorporate all responses from the final survey undertaken. The initial data analysis used Frequencies to provide a profile of respondents by personal variables (demographics). The mean (*M*) was calculated using SPSS to allow comparison across groups. The general approach to rating scale analysis was to consider the relative level of agreement, regardless of level of RL, for sets of items related to a particular aspect of player experience, that is, positive and negative aspects of the coaching experience, the club experience, the playing experience and the socialisation experience. After considering a specific subscale, nonparametric correlational analyses (Spearman's rho) considered the extent to which level of experience (Junior vs. Senior); gender, number of years of NRL experience, SES, and the subset of four specific ethnic identities influenced these ratings. Age was excluded both because it aligned to a large extent with Junior vs. Senior League membership. Spearman's rho correlation (r_s) matrix was used to examine the strength of the association between personal variables, *p* values indicated statistically significant associations, at the one and two tail ($p < 0.05*$ and $p < 0.01**$) and Optimal scaling was used to further explore associations between the four key player experiences (linked to: *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation*) and their associations to their decision to not to return to play RL in 2017.

Initial quantitative data analysis was focused on measuring the overall nation-wide responses rather than by individual player's level of competition or state representation. The individual Junior and Senior reports and states and affiliations were later analysed to ensure consistency across groups were established.

7.1.2.   Qualitative analysis

Once the key results of the quantitative analysis were completed, the qualitative data were scanned in an effort to find explicit commentary pertaining to the statistically significant findings. In order to do this, the textual information gathered from the open-ended questions was downloaded from the Survey Monkey platform into MS Word documents. From there, the qualitative data were independently reviewed by researcher and summarized. Qualitative data were analysed using content analysis to reveal the most frequently occurring concepts and themes. Participants were asked to complete an online survey, consisting of a number of open ended questions. These responses were collated in a single Word file, with an extra paragraph return between successive responses to indicate changes of speaker. Through this analysis, key themes and concepts associated with the open-ended question were identified. This type of analysis revealed the themes or concepts that were associated with the questions. Specifically, data presentation and analysis will link to the four key player experiences. Participants were asked to share their experiences (lived or witnessed) concerning their *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation* experiences. They were further encouraged to provide possible solutions and recommendations for improving retention rates across RL.

Qualitative data analysis procedures provided an important tool to understand hidden information, build a profile of the participants' expectations and what possible strategies could be further implemented. Overall, the qualitative data analysis was generally used to obtain a greater level of information and evidence about the research aims and

subsequent findings. To further assist in the thematic categorisation, this study is based on undertaking thematic analysis using Creswell's (2008) *Visual Model of the Coding Process in Qualitative Research* (Figure 7.1). Within this study, the analysis of the interview data is what Creswell (2008) describes as 'hand analysis of qualitative data' (p. 246). That is, the researcher read the data obtained from participant survey responses, mark it by hand, and divide it into parts. The data were systematically coded and placed into common themes and matched against the four experiences and why players did not return to play RL in 2017. Creswell (2008) steps, range from the initial exploring of the data through to the organisation of the data. This process is defined by Creswell (2008) as, "the process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data" (p. 251).

A visual model of the coding process in qualitative research

Initially read through text data	Divide the text into segments of information	Label the segments of information with codes	Reduce overlap and redundancy of codes	Collapse code into themes
Many pages of text	Many segments of text	30-40 codes	Codes reduced to 20	Codes reduced to 5-7 themes
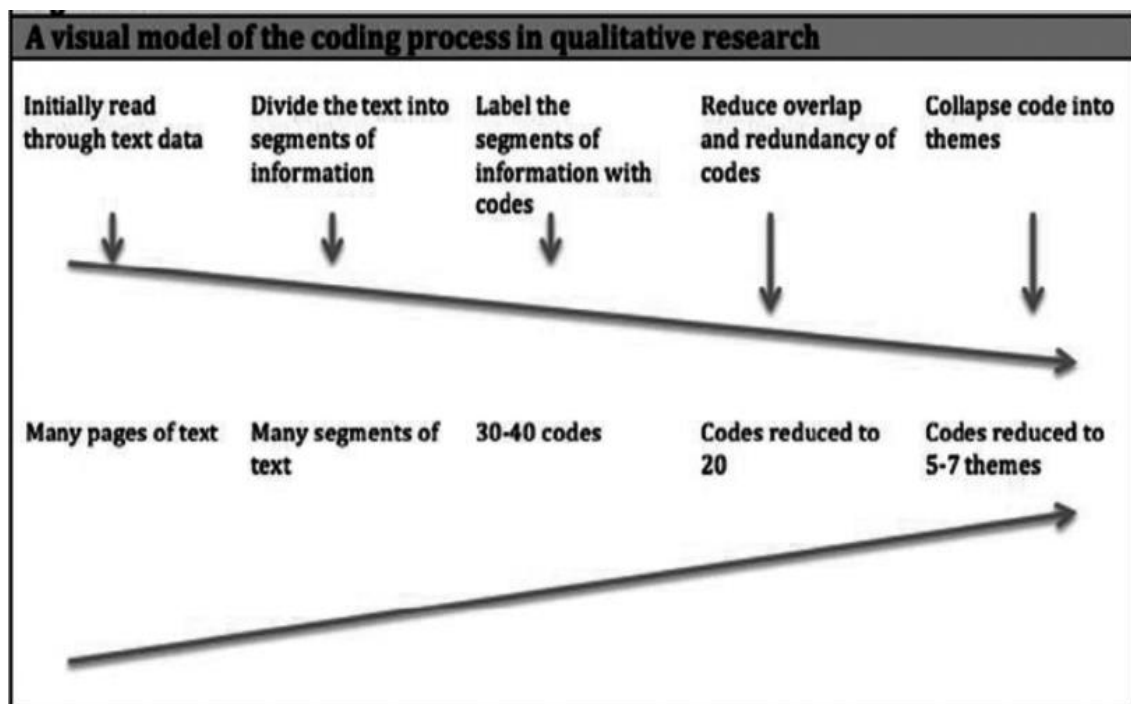
Figure 7.1 Visual Model of the Coding Process in Qualitative Research (Creswell, 2008)

8.0   Results

8.1.   Quantitative—data analysis outcomes

8.1.1.   Rating scale responses

The general approach was to consider the relative level of agreement, regardless of the level of RL, for sets of items related to a particular aspect of a player's experience, that is, positive and negative aspects associated with four themes: *coaching*, *playing*, *club* and *socialisation* experiences. Both Junior and Senior responses were combined ($N = 2310$) for analysis to provide a more representative sampling across the four experiences.

After considering a specific subscale, specific analyses examined the extent to which level of experience (Junior vs. Senior); gender, SES, specific ethnic identities (any of the four options), and number of years of RL experience influenced these ratings. Group differences that proved to be significant were further examined. This correlational study is non-experimental study, requiring the researcher to explore relationships without manipulating or randomly selecting the subjects of the research. The correlation study is investigating strength of relationships and significance of associations between variables. Examples of research questions for this correlational study are:

8.1.2.   Hypothesis (alternative) and aim:
- *A player's decision (retention motivations) to not return to play RL in 2017 was strongly influenced by four main experiences, being: coaching, club, playing and socialisation.*

8.1.3.   Focus questions
- *What are the players' coaching, club, playing and socialisation experiences throughout the 2016 RL season?*

- *What is the relationship (level of influence) between Junior and Senior players' four experiences and their decisions to not return to play RL in 2017?*

**Ethnic identity was excluded because it amounted no more than about 10% of players, and any analytic outcome was thus likely to be unreliable and not significant to outcomes. Likewise, reference to SES was excluded due to findings indicating a limited significance across groups and impact on outcomes. Also, to reduce complexity, a common set of words was used to express items that appeared in both Junior and Senior RL surveys. Finally, where significance was examined, only highly significant positive, negative and differences ($p < .05$ - $p < .000$) were reported. For significance levels, the smaller the decimal fraction, the higher the level of significance. Reference can be taken from the below probability statements:

- .05 = five in hundred probability of achieving this outcome by chance.
- .01 = one in hundred probability of achieving this outcome by chance.
- .001 = one in thousand probability of achieving this outcome by chance.
- .000 = less than one in thousand probability of achieving this outcome by chance.

8.2.   Junior RL Demographic profile

After excluding participants who had only completed a small portion of the survey, a total of 1804 participant responses were included in this survey, of which, more than 80% were assisted by a guardian (or parent).

More than 90% of these participants were male (90.8%). The ages of participants reporting themselves to be less than 6 years of age were manually adjusted to equal 6 years of age. Forty-five percent (45%) of Junior RL participants reported themselves to be 14 years of age and older, and almost 20% reporting themselves to be 16 years of age or older. However, fewer than 2% reported themselves to be more than 18 years of age, so ages beyond this point were manually adjusted to equal to 18 years of age. Based on the above, after adjustment of extreme responses, these participants ranged in age from 6–18 years of age, with an average of 13 years of age (Figure 8.1).
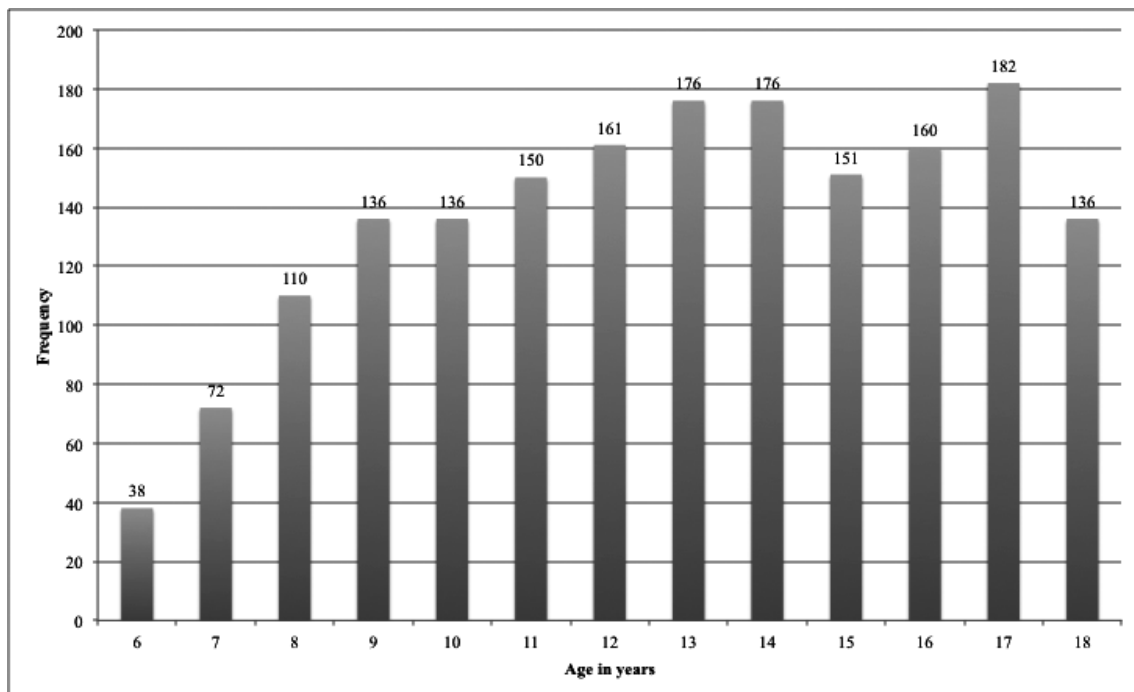
Figure 8.1   **Junior RL: Participant ages in years**

As illustrated in Figure 8.2, participants were asked to indicate their home situation based on four options. Seventy-two percent (72%) reported living with both parents, another 22.6% reported living with a single parent, and about 1.2% reported living with relatives. Beyond that, another 3.6% reported other home situations.
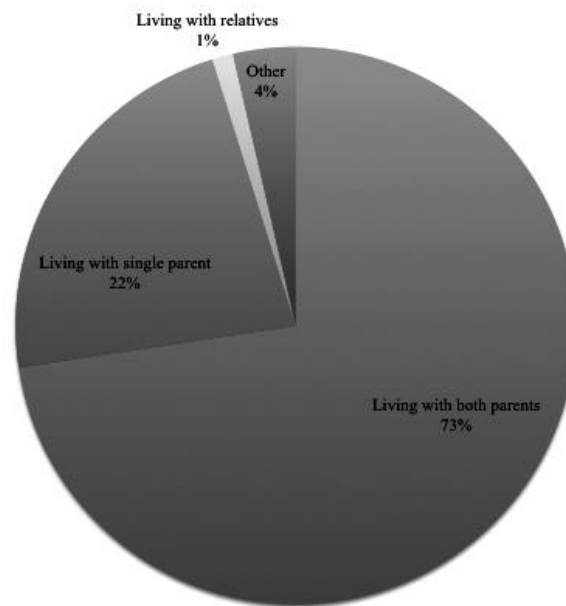
Figure 8.2   **Junior RL: Home situation options reported as percentages**

Participants were asked to indicate whether they were studying or working and if so at what level. Of the 1804 participants, 94% reported being at school, with the remaining 6% of responses fairly evenly distributed across another six options (at university, at TAFE, unemployed, casual work, part-time work, full-time work).

In Figure 8.3, participants were asked to indicate the level or grade of rugby league played in 2016. Of the 1804 that responded, the largest group (58.8%) reported playing in the Lower grades/divisions, with the next largest group (29.2%) reporting playing in Regional teams. Of the remaining 12%, almost 9% reported playing in Premier Grade or A grade and another 3% in State competitions.
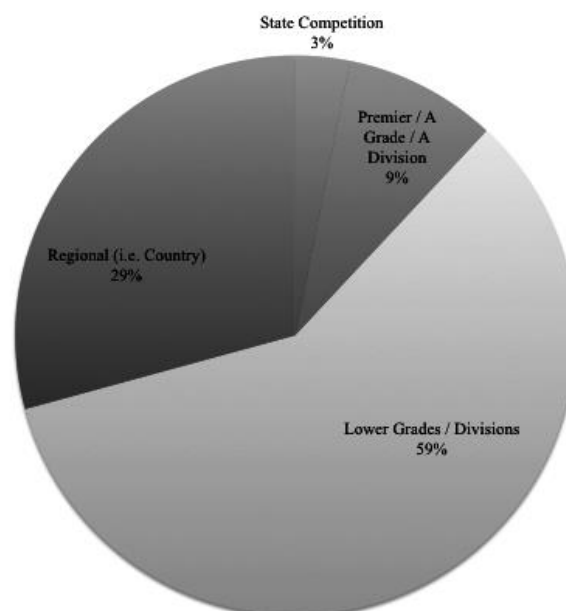
Figure 8.3   **Junior RL: Level or grade played in 2016, reported as percentages**

When asked to use one of 10 categories to indicate why they did not return to RL in 2017, a majority of participants were most likely to report a negative experience (25%), injury, fear of injury or illness (15%), losing interest in playing (13%) joining another sporting club (11%) or other commitments (10.4%). Beyond this, participants reported other reasons, evenly distributed, across relocating and not being able to play with friends. Such lower levels of agreement to the item, 'not being able to play with friends' was interesting. Traditionally, there has been a commonly held belief, that Junior RL players left the game due to this item being a major negative experience, and subsequently influencing their retention motivations. The findings from this study would prove otherwise and that such an item was not a significance influence on Junior players' decisions to not return to the game in 2017.

As illustrated in Figure 8.4, participants were asked about the number of years they had played official club rugby league. Of the 1804 participants, two thirds had played either 1–2 years or 3–4 years, and only about 10% had played official club rugby league for more than eight years. Finally, participants were asked if they would return to playing rugby league in the future. Fifty percent (50.3%) were undecided, with the remaining 49.7% divided between not returning (36.8%) or returning (12.9%). Given the large percentage of 'undecided' players (50.3%), the NRL should view this as an opportunity, to seek out avenues to follow up and encourage further commitment from this group in 2018 RL season.
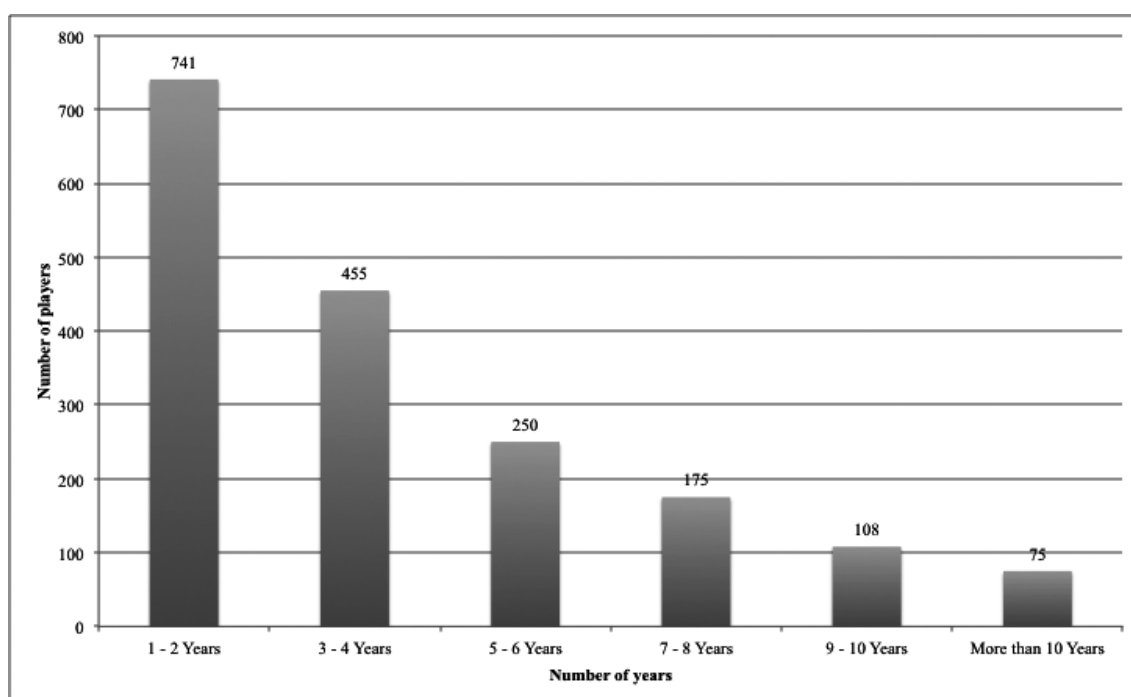
Figure 8.4 **Junior RL: Number of years playing**

8.3. Junior RL players' main top reasons for not returning to play RL in 2017

When asked to use one of 12 categories to indicate why they did not return to Junior RL in 2017, a majority of Junior participants were most likely to report a combination of 'a negative experience' (25%, $n = 451$), 'injury / fear of injury' (15%, $n = 270$) and 'losing interest in playing' (13%, $n = 234$). Beyond this, participants reported other reasons, evenly distributed, across not being able to play with friends, relocating and unlisted. The below three top reasons make up 53% (955 / 1804) of responses.
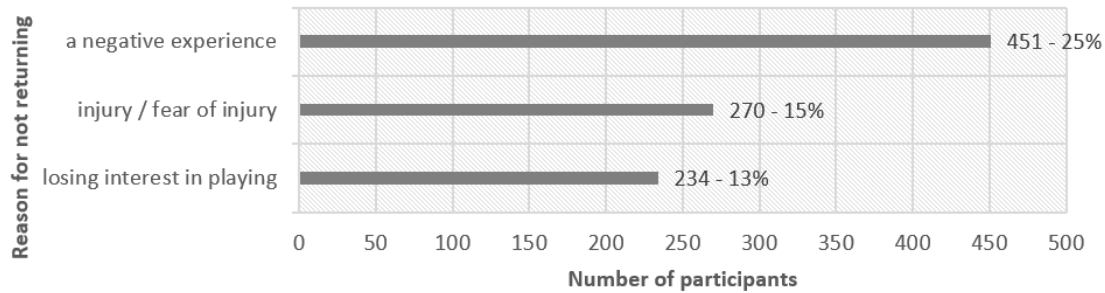
Figure 8.5   Junior RL: Top 3 reasons influencing Junior player's decision to NOT return in 2017

8.3.1. Junior RL players' negative responses—why they did not return

8.3.1.1. *Rating scale responses*

The general approach here was to consider the relative level of agreement, for sets of items related to a particular aspect of a player's experience, that is, negative aspects of the coaching experience, the club experience, the playing experience and the socialisation experience. Means (*M*) were also provided to give ranking of each item based on the central tendency. To give further context to the rankings, data was extracted from participants' levels of agreement (agree – strongly agree) for each item. Such an approach provides a detailed ranking of participants' top main reason/s associated with:

- their general experiences in 2016, and
- why they did not return (retention motivations) to the game in 2017.

8.3.1.2. *Coaching experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.6, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the coaching experience most highly in terms of the coach not ensuring that 'player selection was fair and equitable' (22%, $n = 396$, *strongly agree* to *agree*) and 'not enough rewards and incentives' (15%, $n = 270$, *strongly agree* to *agree*). They were least likely to give high ratings to the level of competitiveness being too low or the coach lacking appropriate knowledge about the game.
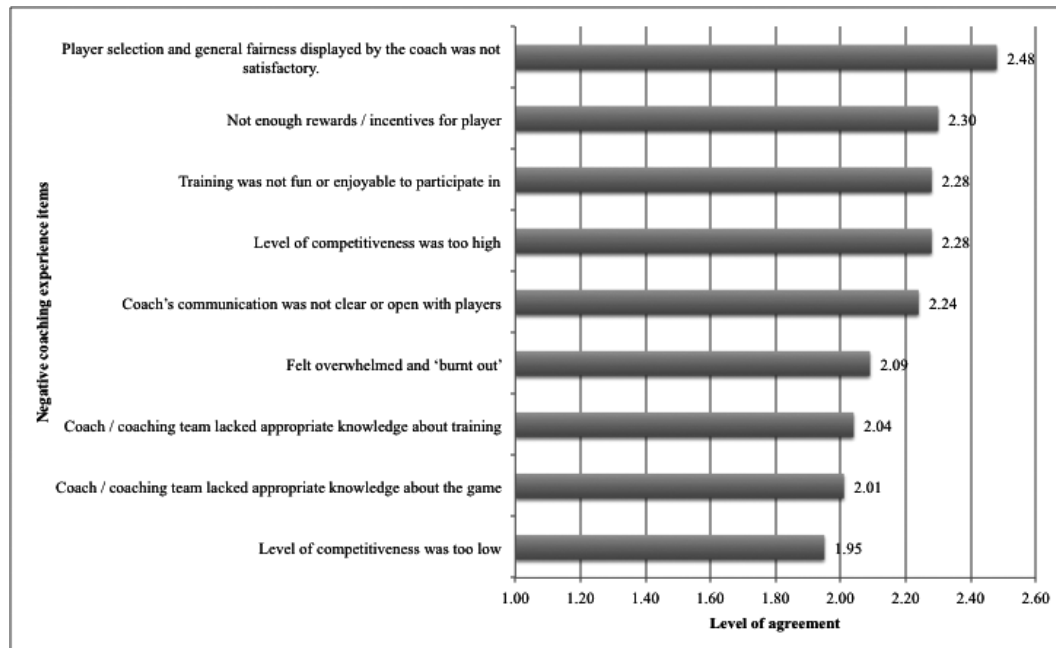
Figure 8.6   Junior RL: Level of agreement for negative coaching experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.3.1.3.   *Club experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.7, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the club experience most highly in terms of the approach to 'communication with players' (13%, *n* = 233, *strongly agree* to *agree*) and its approach to 'general organisation' (12.6%, *n* = 226, *strongly agree* to *agree*). They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the club experience highly in terms of its approach to commitment to training sessions.
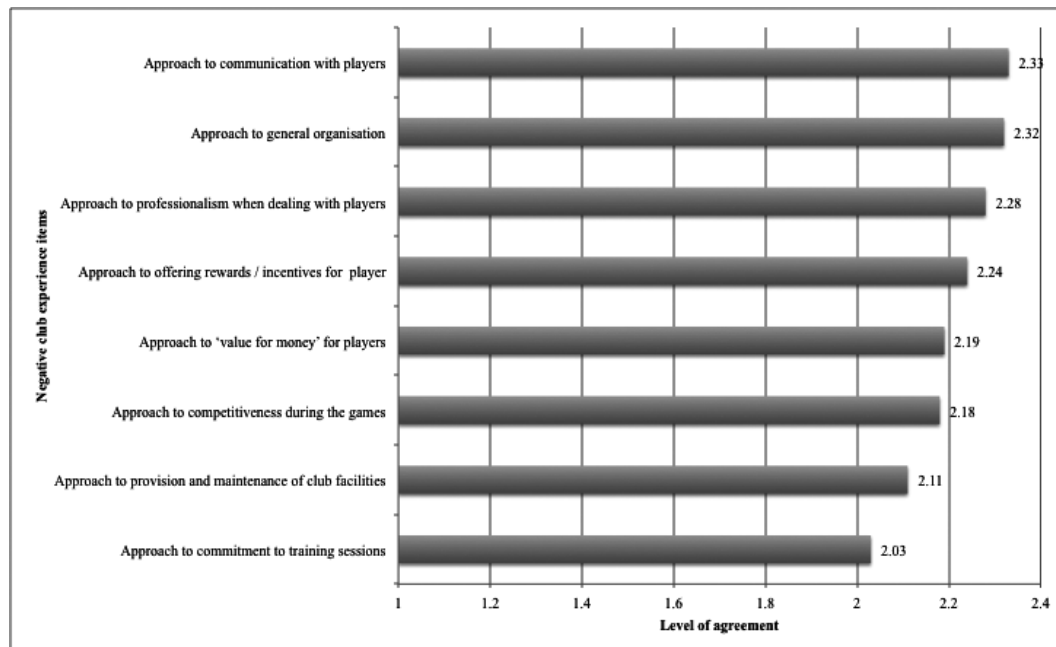
Figure 8.7   Junior RL: Level of agreement for negative club experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.3.1.4.   *Playing experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.8, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the playing experience most highly in terms of the approach to 'fun and enjoyment of the game' (18%, *n* = 314, *strongly agree* to *agree*), and the 'limited support' (15%, *n* = 269, *strongly*

agree to *agree*). They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the playing experience highly in terms of the approach to game scheduling and the approach to results.
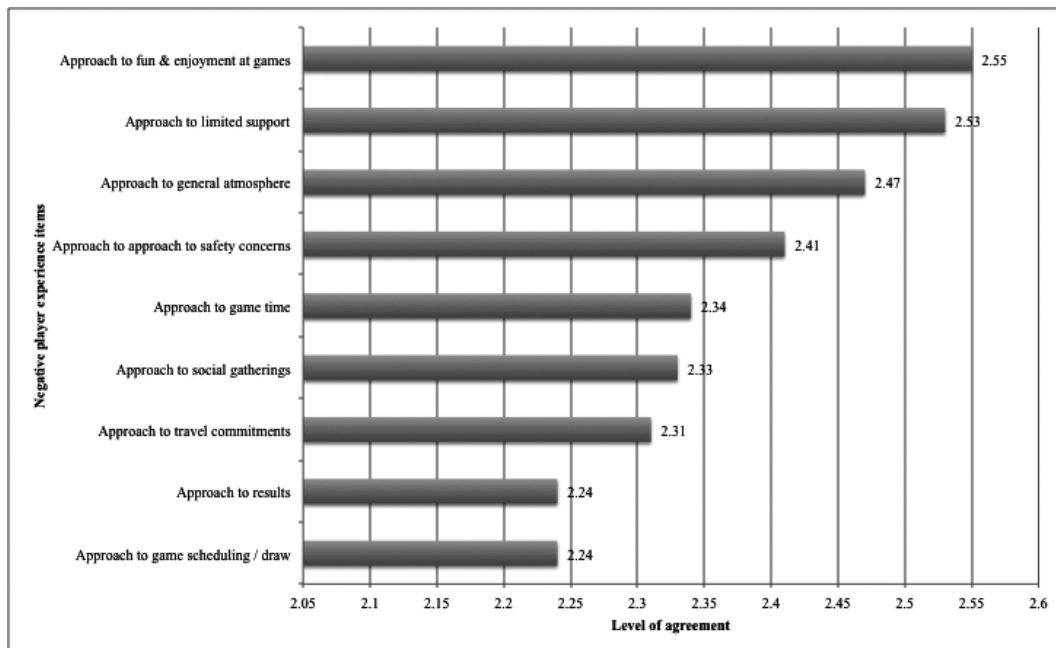
Figure 8.8   **Junior RL: Level of agreement for negative playing experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.3.1.5. *Socialisation experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.9, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the socialisation experience most highly in terms of feeling that their 'contribution was not valued' (18%, $n = 318$, *strongly agree* to *agree*), and feeling that 'no strong sense of team spirit and belonging' (16%, $n = 290$, *strongly agree* to *agree*). Participants rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience least highly in terms of feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.
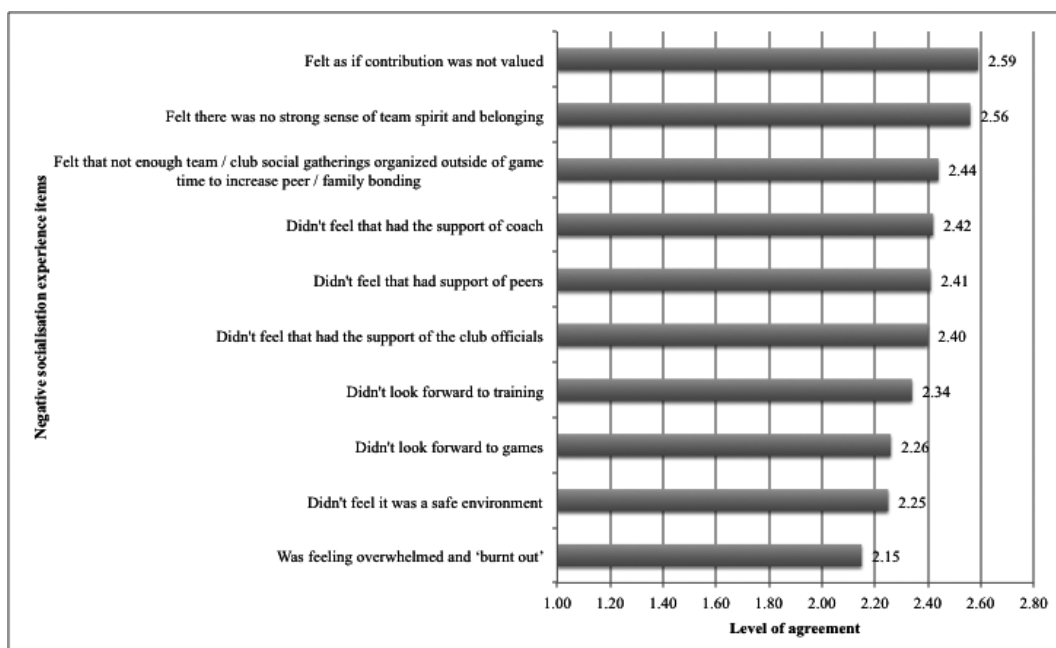
Figure 8.9   **Junior RL: Level of agreement for negative socialisation experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.3.2. Junior RL players' level of agreement associated with negative experiences

As illustrated in Table 8.1, Junior players agreed most strongly around 'player selection was not fair', felt that their 'contribution was not valued' and 'low levels of fun'. These were the top three negative experiences which influenced their decision to not return to play in 2017. Based on player responses number and % for each item.

Table 8.1   Rank order of Junior players' negative experiences – levels of agreement (agree – strongly agree) (*n* = 1804)

Experience	Number (*n*)	Percentage (%)
player selection was not fair and equitable	396	22
contribution not valued	318	18
low levels of fun and enjoyment	314	17
no strong sense of team spirit and belonging	290	16
limited rewards and incentives	270	15
limited player support	269	15
level of competition was too high	260	14
limited communication with players	233	13
low general organisation	226	12

*Based on levels of highest agreement levels for each item (n, %, agree - strongly agree)

As illustrated in Figure 8.10, Junior players agreed most strongly around 'player selection was not fair', felt that their 'contribution was not valued' and that there were 'low levels of fun and enjoyment'. These were the top three negative experiences which influenced their decision to not return to play in 2017. Based on player responses – mean and percentage for each item as being number of participants agreeing to strongly agreeing to items.
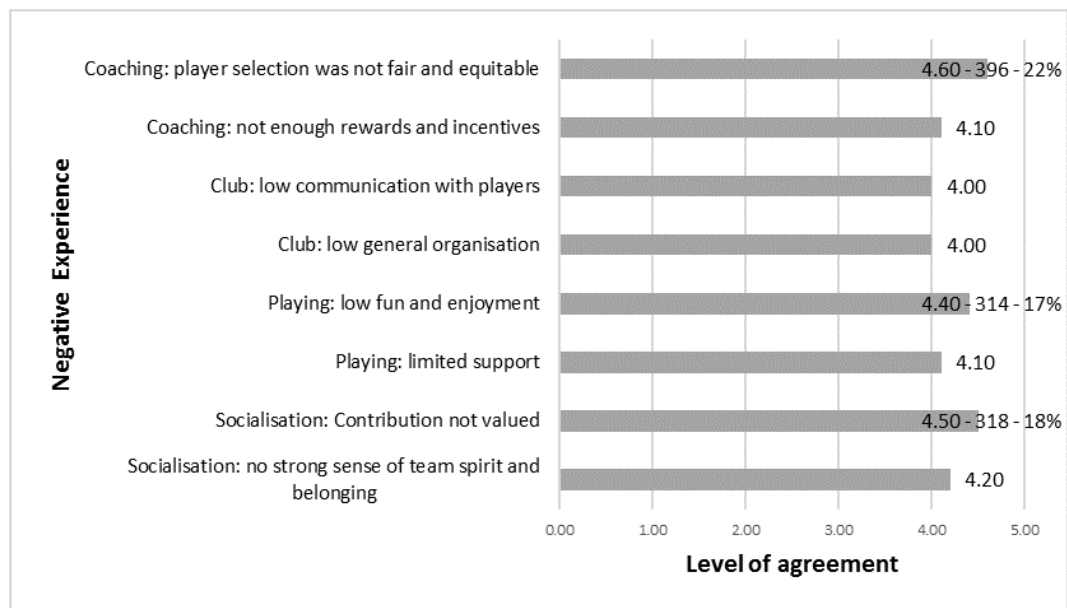
Figure 8.10   Junior RL players' negative experiences and level of agreement (Mean, %, Agree – Strongly Agree) * (n = 1804)

8.3.3. Combined Junior RL players' correlation matrix analyses

Based on correlation matrix analyses—Spearman's rho ($r_s = 0.2* - 0.4**$) and p values ($p < 0.05$–$p < 0.000$):

- Junior male RL players were significantly more likely to be critical (negative) about the coaching experience items.

- Junior RL players who had played official club RL for more years were also more likely to be critical (negative) that training was not fun or enjoyable to participate in, there were not enough rewards/incentives for players and coach communication was not clear or open with players.

- The one item where Junior males and females did not differ significantly was that they believed that the level of competitiveness was not too low.

- Younger (< 15 years of age) Junior male RL players, who were in the game for < 1 - 2 years were significantly more likely to agree that they felt as if their contribution was not valued; there was no strong sense of team spirit and belonging, competition was to high, didn't feel it was a safe environment, didn't feel they had the support of the coach, didn't look forward to training, didn't look forward to the games and didn't feel they had the support of club officials,

- Younger (< 15 years of age) Junior RL players, who were in the game for < 1 - 2 years, were more likely to feel that they didn't have the support of peers, didn't look forward to games, and didn't feel that enough team/club social gatherings organised outside of game time to increase peer/family bonding.

8.4. Junior RL players' individual reports—NSWRL, NSWCRL and QRL

Table 8.2   **Numbers of participants per State (Junior)**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	NSWRL	960	53.2	53.3	53.3
	NSWCRL	140	7.8	7.8	61.1
	QRL	608	33.7	33.8	94.8
	The Affiliated States	93	5.2	5.2	100.0
	Total	**1801**	**99.8**	**100.0**	
Missing	System	3	.2		
Total		**1804**	**100.0**		

Patterns (percentages and means (M)) which have emerged from the Junior data (NSWRL, NSWCRL and QRL) representing a player profile for those who did not return in 2017

(*Junior n = 1708):

Common (%) demographics

- The average age is 13 years.
- Majority (70%) have played between 1–4 years.
- Majority (60%) in Lower Grades.
- Majority (75%) live with both parents.
- Majority (95%) at school.
- Even distribution between lower 1–5 and upper 6–10 SES.

Common (%) top reasons for not returning to play NRL in 2017

- A negative experience (22%, n = 430).
- Fear of injury / injury (14%, n = 235).
- Loss of interest (12%, n = 203).
- Top three reasons make up 51% (n = 868 / 1708) of participants' responses.

Common (M) main reasons (negative experiences) for not returning in 2017

Coaching experience:

- **Player selection not fair.**
- Not enough incentives and rewards.

Playing experience:

- **Low level of fun.**
- Low levels of support.

Club experience:

- Low communication with players.
- Low general organisation.

Socialisation experience:

- **Contribution not valued.**
- Low team spirit and belonging.

* Average scores (mean M) provide an indication about the strength of agreement on that 1-5 scale for each item reported. Provides a central tendency of responses around an item of interest.

*Numbers for the Affiliated States (5%, n = 93) have not been included in this report. However, given the recurring patterns / trends, it would be reasonable to suggest that similar trends would replicate themselves.

Figure 8.11   **Player profile for Juniors based on States**

8.4.1. NSWRL Junior

8.4.1.1. Demographic profile

A total of 960 participant responses were included in this survey. More than 90% of the 960 participants were male (90.6%). As illustrated in Figure 8.12, these participants ranged in age from 6-18 years of age, with an average of 13 years of age.
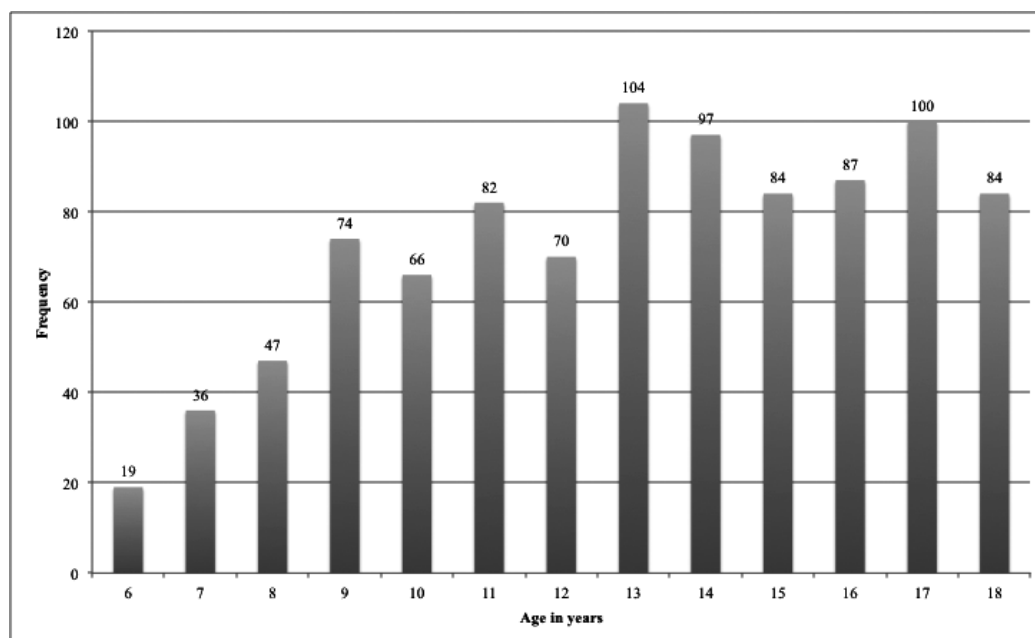
Figure 8.12   **NSWRL Junior player ages in years**

As illustrated in Figure 8.13, about 73% reported living with both parents, and another 22% reported living with a single parent, while the remainder reported living with relatives or in other home situations. Participants were asked to indicate whether they were studying or working and if so at what level. Of the 960 participants, almost 94% reported being at school, with the remaining 6% of responses fairly evenly distributed across another six options (at university, at TAFE, unemployed, casual work, part-time work, full-time work).
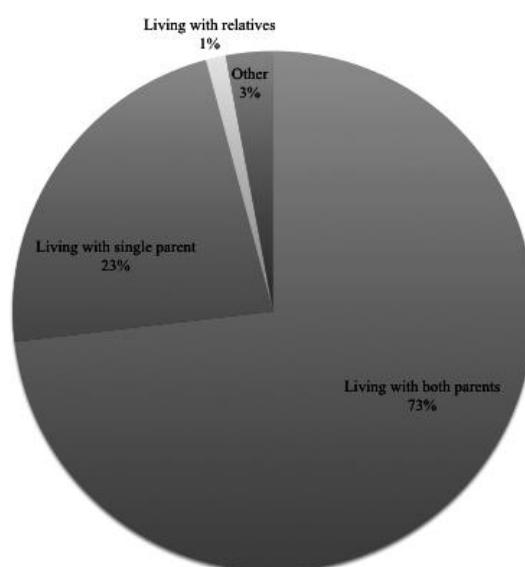
Figure 8.13   **NSWRL Junior: Home situation options reported as percentages**

As illustrated in Figure 8.14, participants were asked to indicate the level or grade of rugby league played in 2016. Of the 960 that responded, the largest group (58%) reported playing in the Lower grades/divisions, with the next largest group (30%) reporting playing in Regional teams. The remaining 12% reported playing in Premier Grade or A grade and in State competitions.
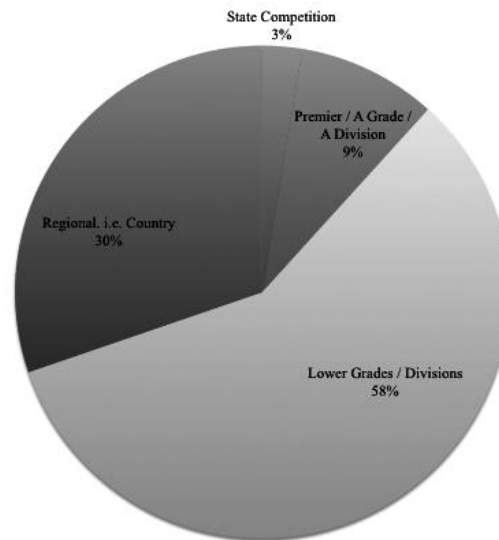
Figure 8.14   NSWRL Junior: Level or grade played in 2016, with responses reported as percentages

As illustrated in Figure 8.15, participants were asked about the number of years they had played official club rugby league. Of the 960 participants, about two thirds had played either 1-4 years (1 – 2 years, 39%, $n = 372$) (3 – 4 years, 24%, $n = 235$), and only about 12% had played official club rugby league for more than eight years. Finally, participants were asked if they would return to playing rugby league in the future. Of the 960 that responded, about half (40%) were undecided, with the remainder divided between not returning (45%) or returning (15%).
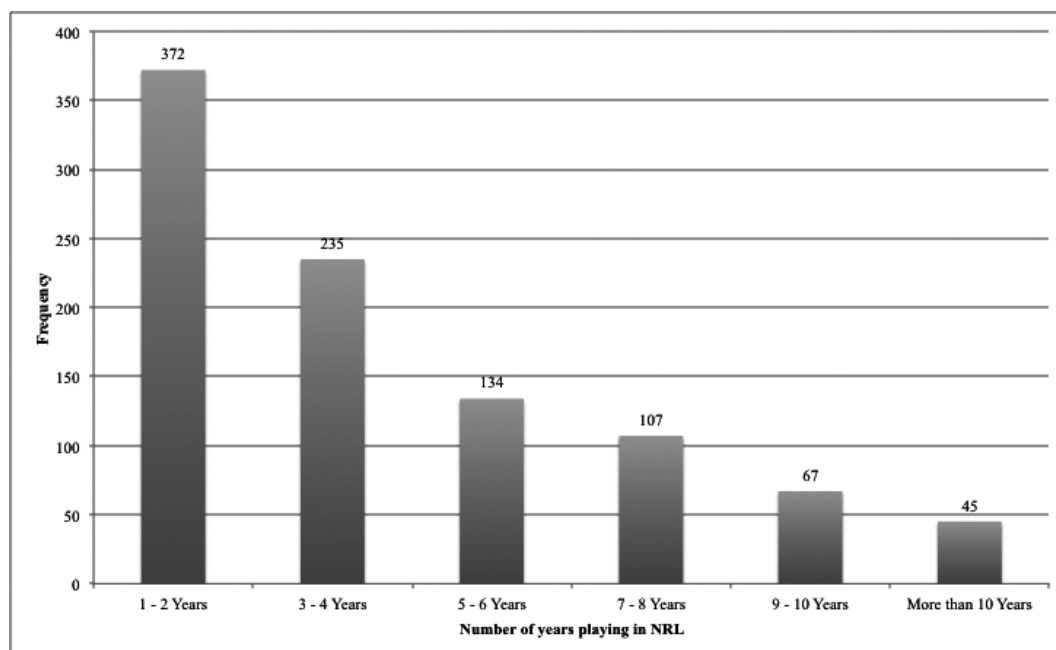
Figure 8.15   NSWRL Junior: Number of years had played official club rugby league, reported as frequencies

8.4.1.2. *Main top reasons for not returning to play RL in 2017*

When asked why they did not return to rugby league in 2017, participants were most likely to report a 'negative experience' (27%, $n = 260$), 'injury / fear of injury' (13%, $n = 120$) and 'loss of interest in playing' (11%, $n = 110$). The top three reasons accounted for 51% ($n = 490 / 960$) of participants' responses.

8.4.1.3. *NSWRL Junior Players' negative responses—why they did not return*

8.4.1.4. *Rating scale responses*

The general approach here was to consider the relative level of agreement, for sets of items related to a particular aspect of player experience, that is, negative aspects of the coaching experience, the club experience, the playing experience and the socialisation experience. Means (*M*) were also provided to give ranking of each item based on the central tendency. To give further context to the rankings, data was extracted from participants' levels of agreement (*agree* to *strongly agree*) for each item. Such an approach provides a detailed ranking of participants' top main reason/s associated with

- their general experiences in 2016, and
- why they did not return (retention motivations) to the game in 2017.

8.4.1.5. *Coaching experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.16, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the coaching experience most highly in terms of the coach not ensuring that player selection was fair and equitable and that the level of competitiveness was to high. They were least likely to give high ratings to the level of competitiveness being too low or the coach lacking appropriate knowledge about the game.
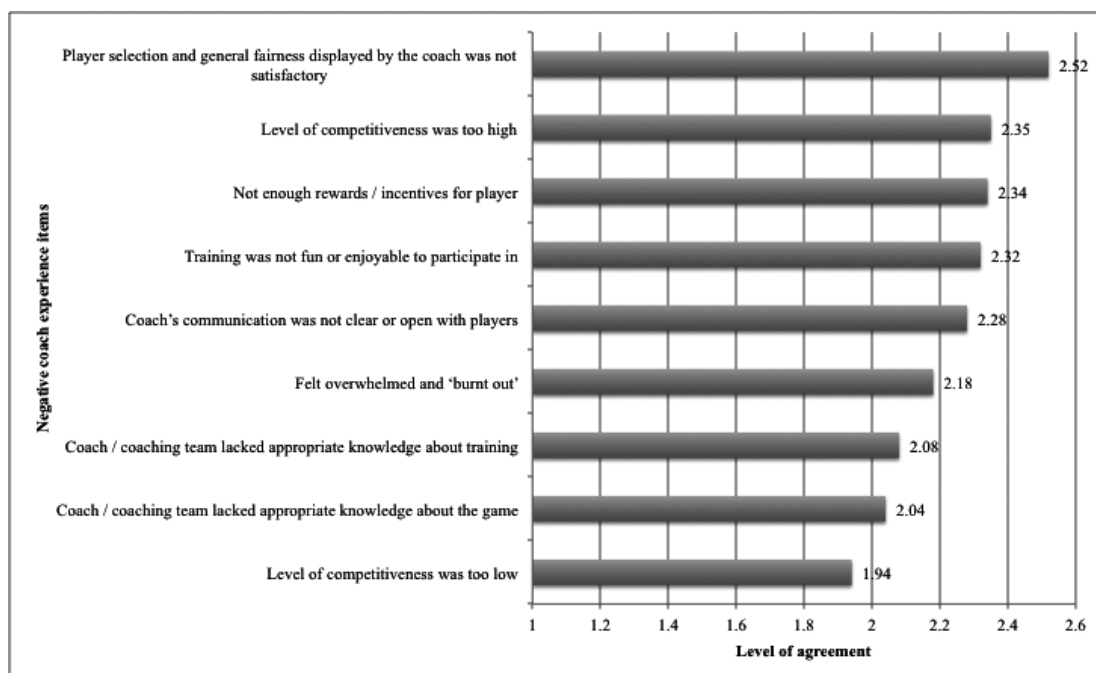
Figure 8.16   NSWRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative coaching experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.4.1.6. Club experience

As illustrated in Figure 8.17, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the club experience most highly in terms of the approach to communication with players and its approach to general organisation. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the club experience highly in terms of its approach to commitment to training sessions.
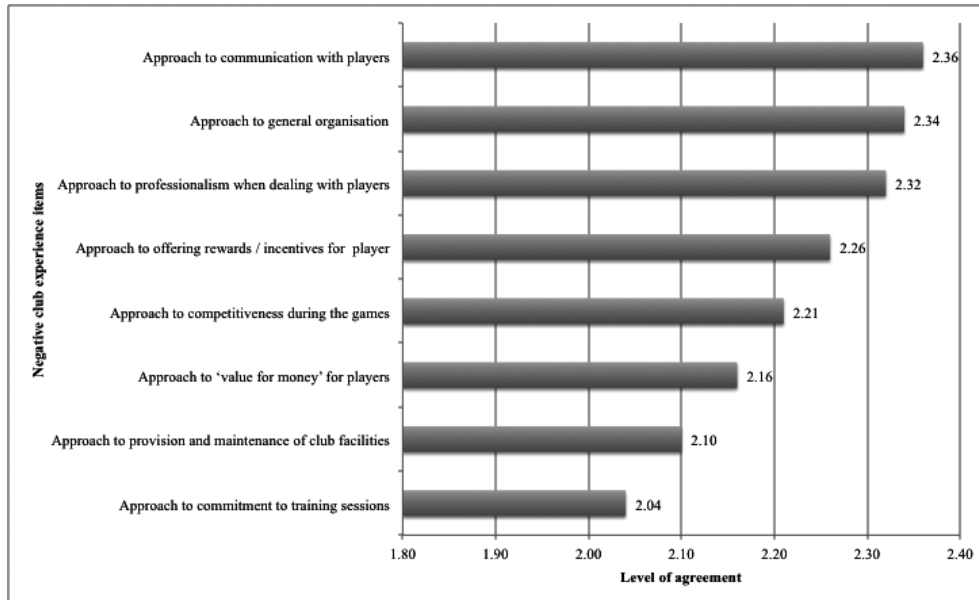
Figure 8.17   **NSWRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative club experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.4.1.7. Playing experience

As illustrated in Figure 8.18, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the playing experience most highly in terms of the approach to fun and enjoyment of the game and approach to player safety. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the playing experience highly in terms of the approach to game scheduling.
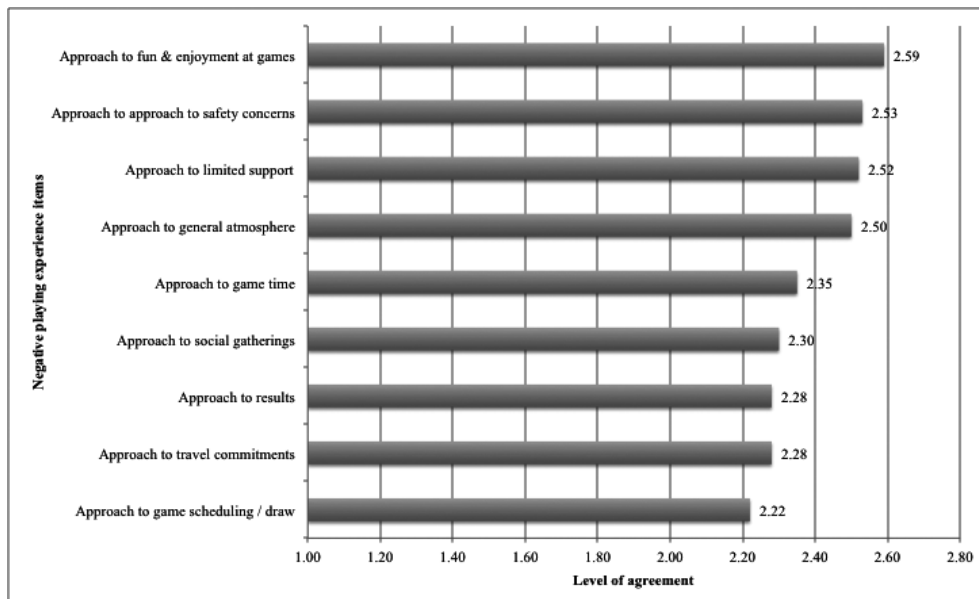
Figure 8.18   **NSWRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative playing experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.4.1.8. *Socialisation experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.19, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the socialisation experience most highly in terms of feeling that their contribution was not valued, and feeling that there was no strong sense of team spirit and belonging. Participants rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience least highly in terms of feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.
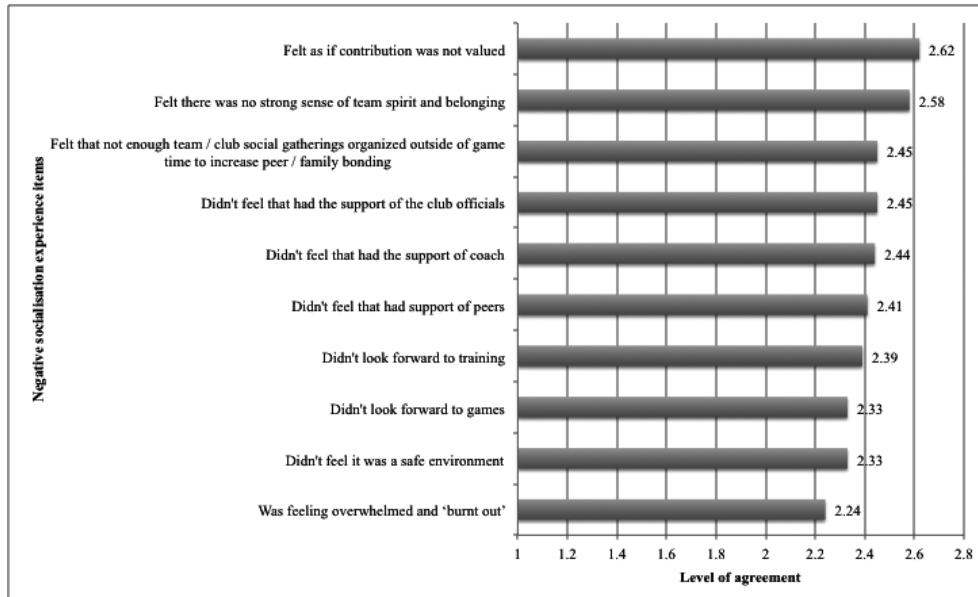
Figure 8.19   **NSWRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative socialisation experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.4.2.   NSWCRL Junior

8.4.2.1.   *Demographic profile*

A total of 140 participant responses were included in this survey. More than 90% of the 140 participants were male (92.9%). As illustrated in Figure 8.20, these participants ranged in age from 6–18 years of age, with an average of 12 years of age.
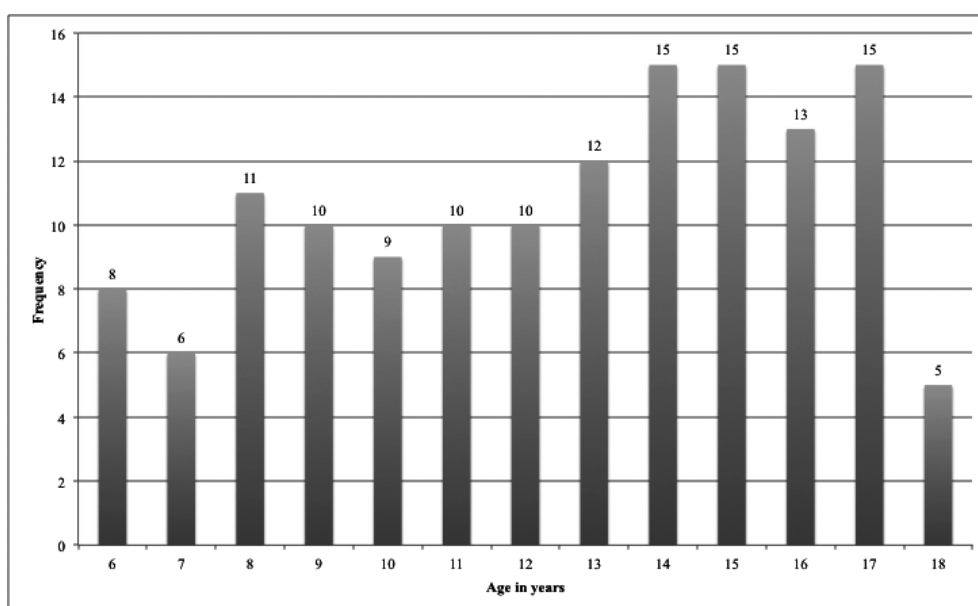
Figure 8.20   **NSWCRL Junior player ages in years**

As illustrated in Figure 8.21, about 73% reported living with both parents, and another 22% reported living with a single parent, while the remainder reported living with relatives or in other home situations. Participants were asked to indicate whether they were studying or working and if so at what level. Of the 140 participants, almost 96% reported being at school, with the remaining 4% of responses fairly evenly distributed across another four options (TAFE, unemployed, part-time work, full-time work).
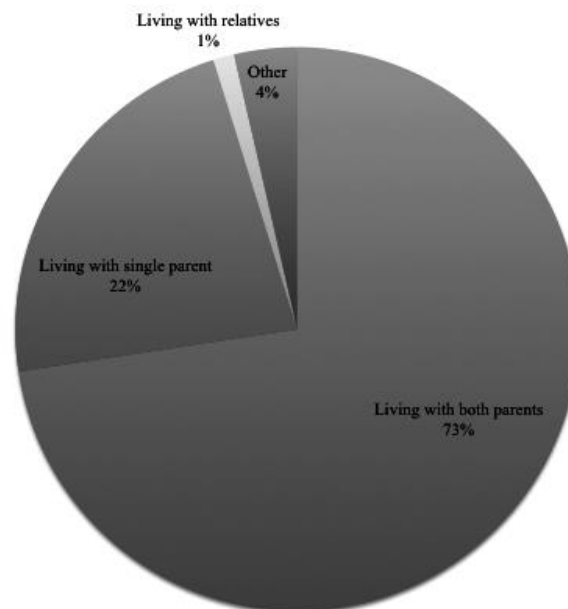
Figure 8.21   NSWCRL Junior: Home situation options reported as percentages

As illustrated in Figure 8.22, participants were asked to indicate the level or grade of RL played in 2016. Of the 140 that responded, the largest group (48%) reported playing in the Lower grades/divisions, with the next largest group (41%) reporting playing in Regional teams. The remaining 11% reported playing in Premier Grade or A grade and in State competitions.
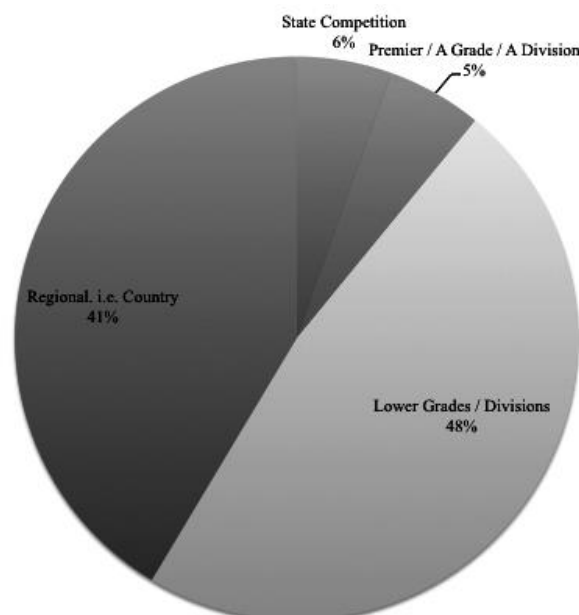
Figure 8.22   NSWCRL Junior: Level or grade of NRL played in 2016, with responses reported as percentages

As illustrated in Figure 8.23, participants were asked about the number of years they had played official club RL. Of the 140 participants, about two thirds had played either 1–4 years, (1 – 2 years, 42%, *n* = 59) (3 – 4 years, 22%, *n* = 31) and less than 10% had played official club RL for more than eight years. Finally, participants were asked if they would return to playing rugby league in the future. Of the 140 that responded, more than half (56.8%) indicated that they would not return.
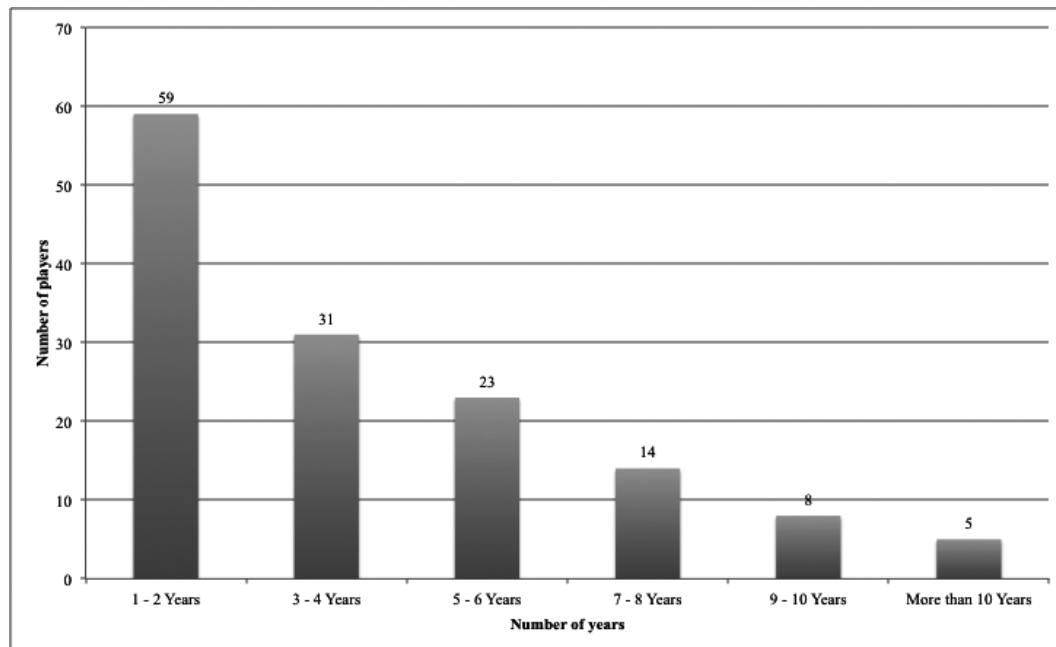
Figure 8.23   NSWCRL Junior: Number of years had played official club rugby league, reported as frequencies

8.4.2.2.   *Main top reasons for not returning to play RL in 2017*

When participants were asked why they did not return to RL in 2017, participants were most likely to report a 'negative experience' (28%, *n* = 40), 'injury / fear of injury' (11%, *n* = 15) and 'loss of interest in playing' (9%, *n* = 13). The top three reasons accounted for 48% (*n* = 68 / 140) of participants' responses.

8.4.2.3.   *NSWCRL Junior Player's negative responses – why they did not return*

8.4.2.4.   *Rating scale responses*

The general approach was to consider the relative level of agreement, for sets of items related to a particular aspect of player experience, that is, negative aspects of the coaching experience, the club experience, the playing experience and the socialisation experience. Means (M) were also provided to give ranking of each item based on the central tendency. To give further context to the rankings, data was extracted from participants' levels of agreement (agree – strongly agree) for each item. Such an approach provides a detailed ranking of participants' top main reason/s associated with

- their general experiences in 2016, and
- why they did not return (retention rates) to the game in 2017.

8.4.2.5.   *Coaching experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.24, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the coaching experience most highly in terms of the coach not ensuring that player selection

was fair and equitable and not enough rewards and incentives. They were least likely to give high ratings to the level of competitiveness being too low or the coach lacking appropriate knowledge about the game.
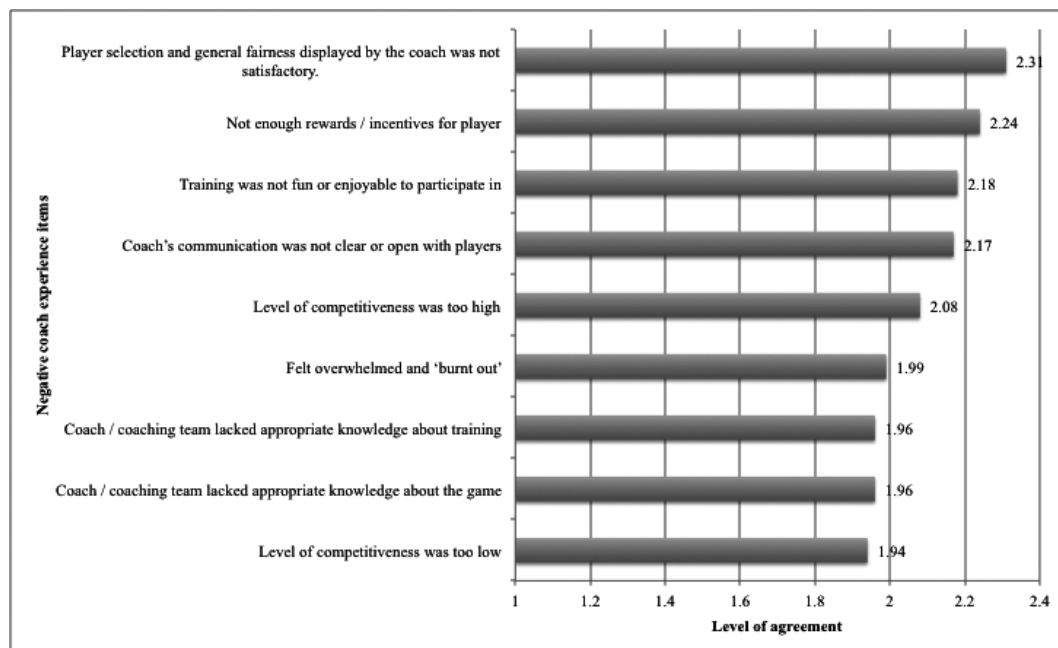
Figure 8.24   NSWCRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative coaching experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.4.2.6.   *Club experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.25, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the club experience most highly in terms of the approach to communication with players and its approach to general organisation. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the club experience highly in terms of its approach to commitment to training sessions.
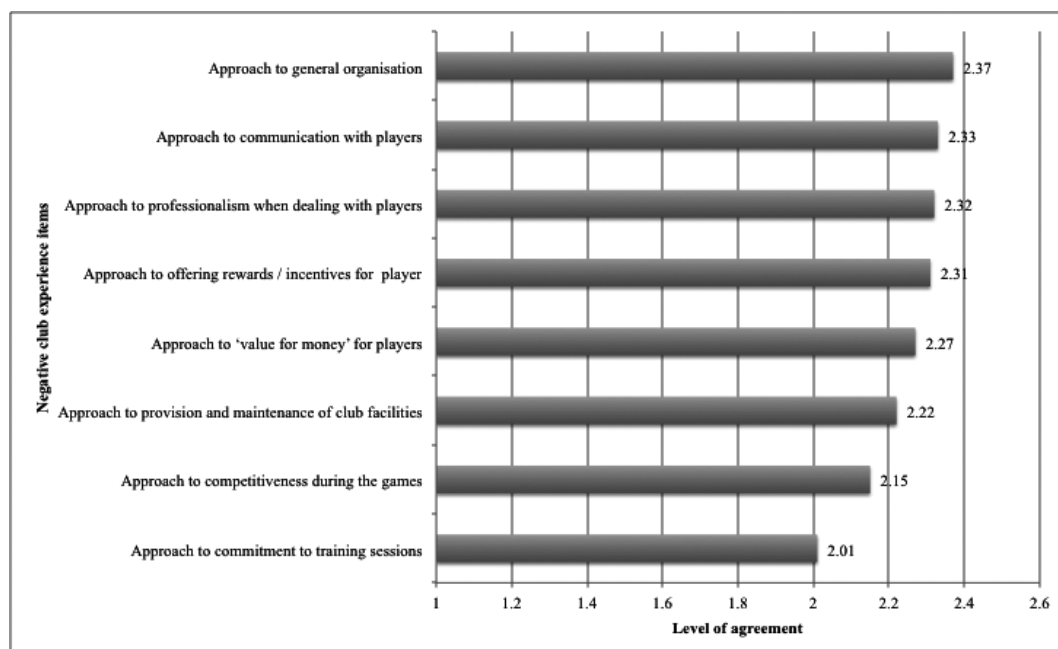
Figure 8.25   NSWCRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative club experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.4.2.7. Playing experience

As illustrated in Figure 8.26, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the playing experience most highly in terms of the approach to fun and enjoyment of the game and travel commitments. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the playing experience highly in terms of the approach to results.
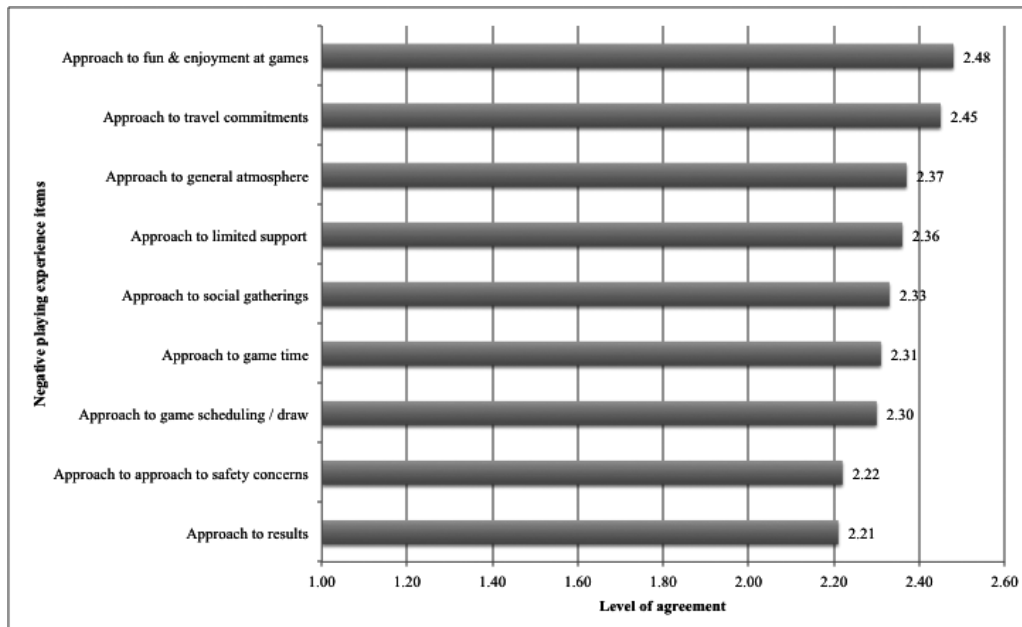
Figure 8.26   **NSWCRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative playing xperience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.4.2.8. Socialisation experience

As illustrated in Figure 8.27, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the socialisation experience most highly in terms of feeling that their contribution was not valued, and feeling that there was no strong sense of team spirit and belonging. Participants rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience least highly in terms of feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.
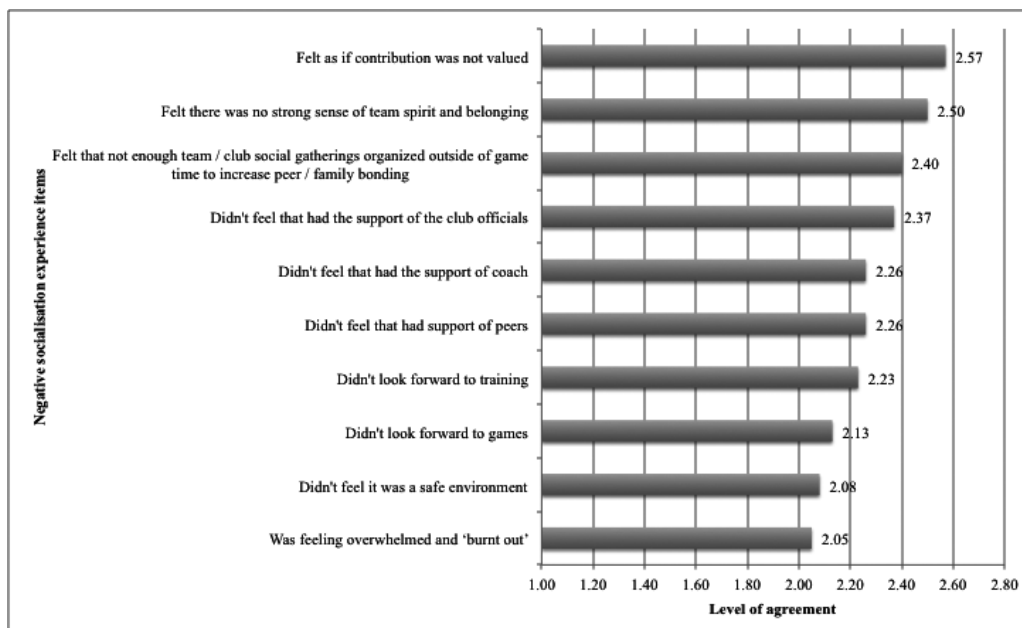
Figure 8.27   **NSWCRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative socialisation experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.4.3. QRL Junior

8.4.3.1. Demographic profile

A total of 608 participant responses were included in this survey. More than 90% of the 608 participants were male (91.4%). As illustrated in Figure 8.28, these participants ranged in age from 6–18 years of age, with an average of 13 years of age.
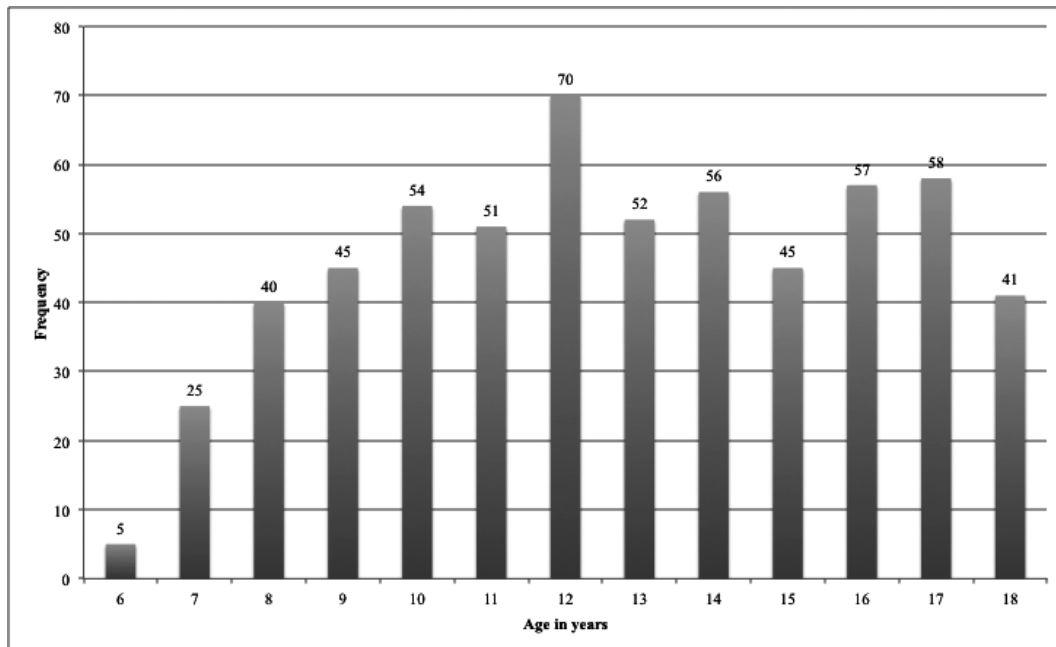
Figure 8.28   QRL Junior player ages in years

As illustrated in Figure 8.29, about 71% reported living with both parents, and another 23% reported living with a single parent, while the remainder reported living with relatives or in other home situations. Participants were asked to indicate whether they were studying or working and if so at what level. Of the 608 participants, 93.4% reported being at school, with the remaining 5.6% of responses fairly evenly distributed across another six options (University, TAFE, unemployed, casual, part-time work, full-time work).
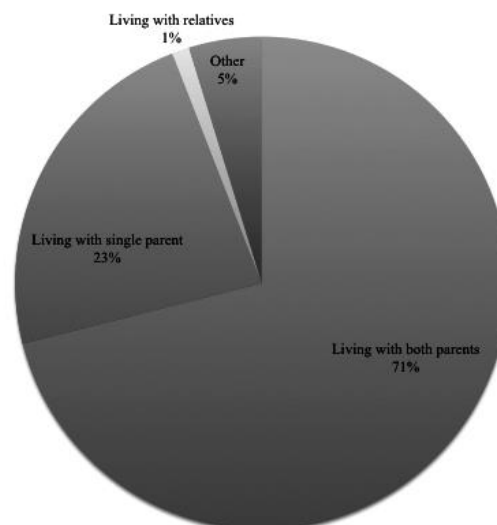
Figure 8.29   QRL Junior: Home situation options reported as percentages

As illustrated in Figure 8.30, participants were asked to indicate the level or grade of RL played in 2016. Of the 608 that responded, the largest group (62%) reported playing in the Lower grades/divisions, with the next largest group (25%) reporting playing in Regional teams. The remaining 13% reported playing in Premier Grade or A grade and in State competitions.
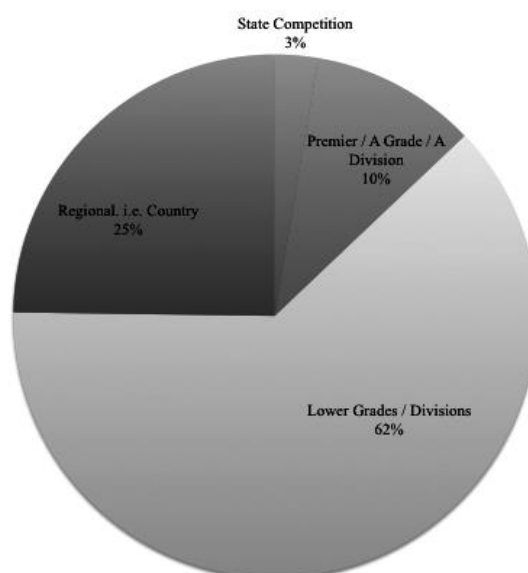
Figure 8.30   **QRL Junior: Level or grade of NRL played in 2016, with responses reported as percentages**

As illustrated in Figure 8.31, participants were asked about the number of years they had played official club rugby league. Of the 608 participants, about two thirds had played either 1–4 years, (1 – 2 years, 41%, n = 247) (3 – 4 years, 28%, n = 171) and less than 10% had played official club RL for more than eight years. Finally, participants were asked if they would return to playing rugby league in the future. Of the 608 that responded, about half (50.2%) were undecided, with the remainder more indicating they would not return (30.2%) and would (19.6%).
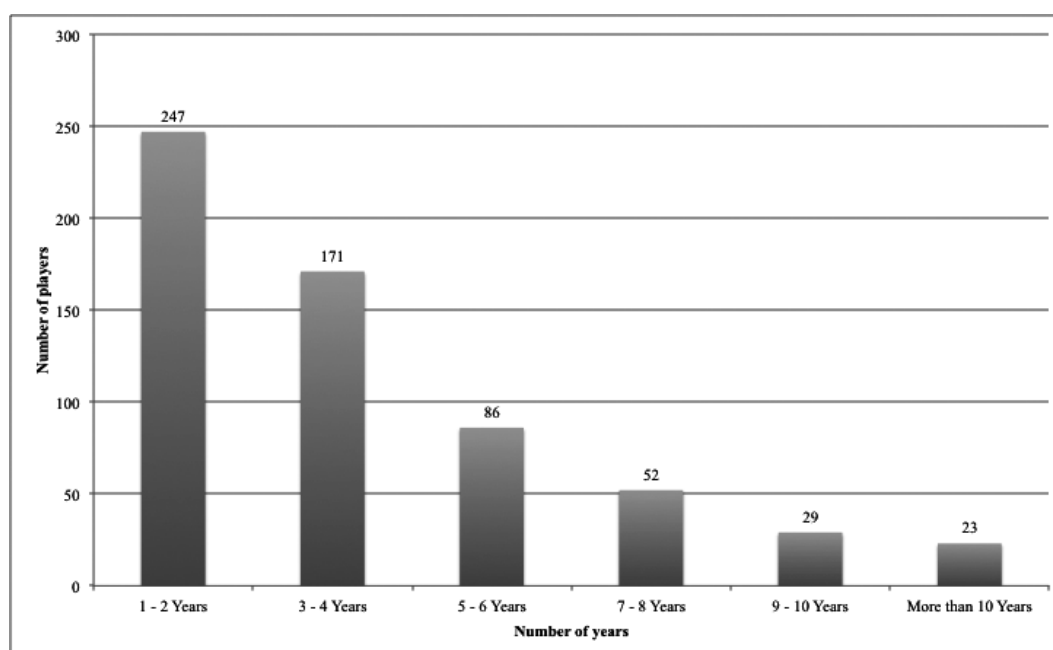
Figure 8.31   **QRL Junior: Number of years had played official club rugby league, reported as frequencies**

8.4.3.2. *Main top reasons for not returning to play RL in 2017*

When asked why they did not return to RL in 2017, participants were most likely to report a 'negative experience' (21%, $n = 130$), 'injury / fear of injury' (16%, $n = 100$) and 'loss of interest in playing' (13%, $n = 80$). The top three reasons accounted for 50% ($n = 310$ / 608) of participants' responses.

8.4.3.3. *QRL Junior Players' negative responses—why they did not return*

Rating scale responses

The general approach here was to consider the relative level of agreement, for sets of items related to a particular aspect of player experience, that is, negative aspects of the coaching experience, the club experience, the playing experience and the socialisation experience. Means (*M*) were also provided to give ranking of each item based on the central tendency. To give further context to the rankings, data was extracted from participants' levels of agreement (agree – strongly agree) for each item. Such an approach provides a detailed ranking of participants' top main reason/s associated with

- their general experiences in 2016, and
- why they did not return (retention motivations) to the game in 2017.

8.4.3.4. *Coaching experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.32, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the coaching experience most highly in terms of the coach not ensuring that player selection was fair and equitable and that training was not fun and enjoyable. They were least likely to give high ratings to the level of competitiveness being too low or the coach lacking appropriate knowledge about the game.

Figure 8.32   QRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative coaching experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.4.3.5. *Club experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.33, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the club experience most highly in terms of the approach to communication with players and its

approach to general organisation. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the club experience highly in terms of its approach to commitment to training sessions.

Figure 8.33   QRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative club experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.4.3.6.   *Playing experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.34, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the playing experience most highly in terms of the limited support and approach to fun and enjoyment at games. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the playing experience highly in terms of the approach to results.

Figure 8.34   QRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative playing experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.4.3.7. Socialisation experience

As illustrated in Figure 8.35, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the socialisation experience most highly in terms of feeling that there was no strong sense of team spirit and belonging and that their contribution was not valued. Participants rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience least highly in terms of feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.
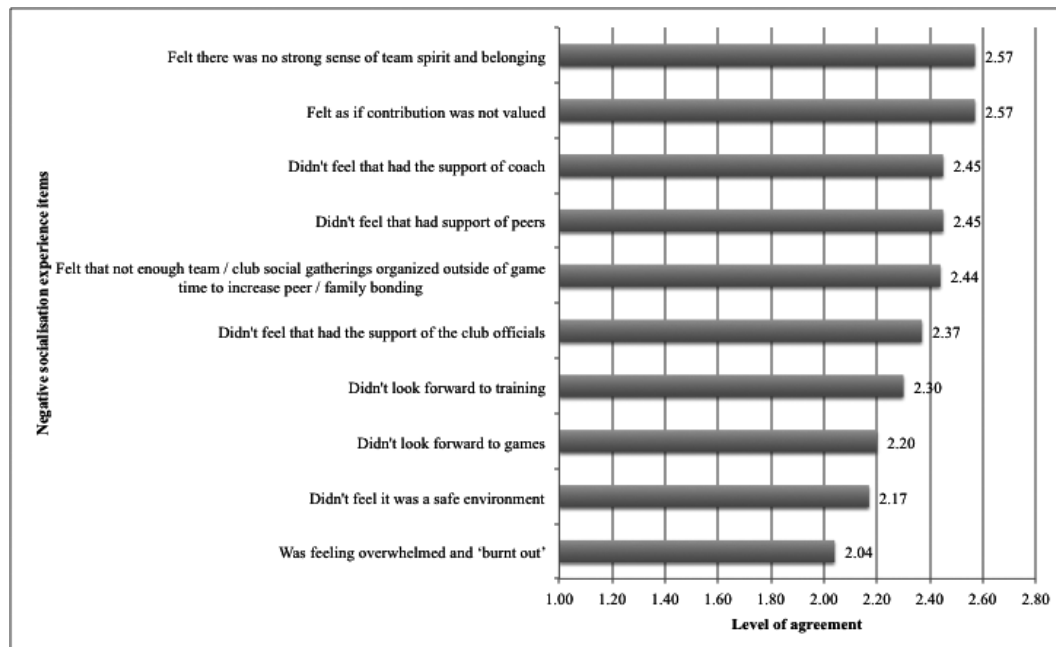
Figure 8.35   QRL Junior: Level of agreement for negative socialisation experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.4.4. Individual Junior RL players' negative experiences—NSWRL, NSWCRL, QRL

As illustrated in Table 8.3 and Figure 8.40, on average, the top three common negative experiences, that influenced Junior RL player's decisions to not return in 2017, were associated with: *coaches' player selection not fair*, *contribution not valued* and *low levels of fun*. Negative experiences were predominately uniformed across the three governing RL bodies. Figure 8.40 indicates that NSW Junior RL players tend to agree with the majority of these negative experiences more strongly than do NSWCRL or QRL.

Table 8.3   **Common main negative experiences for not returning in 2017 (Juniors – NSW, NSWC, QRL)**

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2" rowspan="2">Four experiences</th><th>NSWRL</th><th>NSWCRL</th><th>QRL</th></tr>
<tr></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">COACH</td><td>player selection</td><td>player selection</td><td>player selection</td></tr>
<tr><td>competitiveness too high</td><td>rewards and incentives</td><td>fun and enjoyment</td></tr>
<tr><td>rewards and incentives</td><td>fun and enjoyment</td><td>rewards and incentives</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">CLUB</td><td>communication with players</td><td>general organisation</td><td>general organisation</td></tr>
<tr><td>general organisation</td><td>communication with players</td><td>communication with players</td></tr>
<tr><td>professionalism</td><td>professionalism</td><td>professionalism</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">PLAYING</td><td>fun and enjoyment</td><td>fun and enjoyment</td><td>support</td></tr>
<tr><td>player safety</td><td>travel</td><td>fun and enjoyment</td></tr>
<tr><td>limited support</td><td>general atmosphere</td><td>general atmosphere</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">SOCIAL</td><td>contribution not valued</td><td>contribution not valued</td><td>contribution not valued</td></tr>
<tr><td>team spirit</td><td>team spirit</td><td>team spirit</td></tr>
<tr><td>support</td><td>support</td><td>support</td></tr>
</table>

*Based on Means for each item.

* The above experiences (retention motivations) should be read as negative in context or low levels. For example, where it indicates 'player selection', it should be taken in the context of 'unfair player selection' or 'poor general organisation', unless otherwise stated.

8.4.4.1. Combined coaching
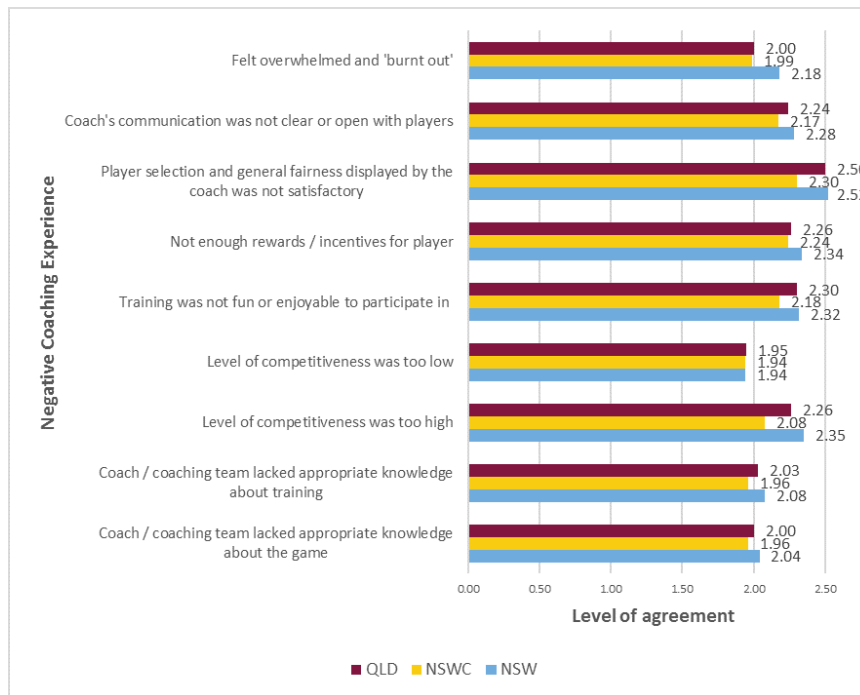
Figure 8.36   **Comparison of regional responses to negative coaching experience items (Junior RL)**

8.4.4.2. Combined club
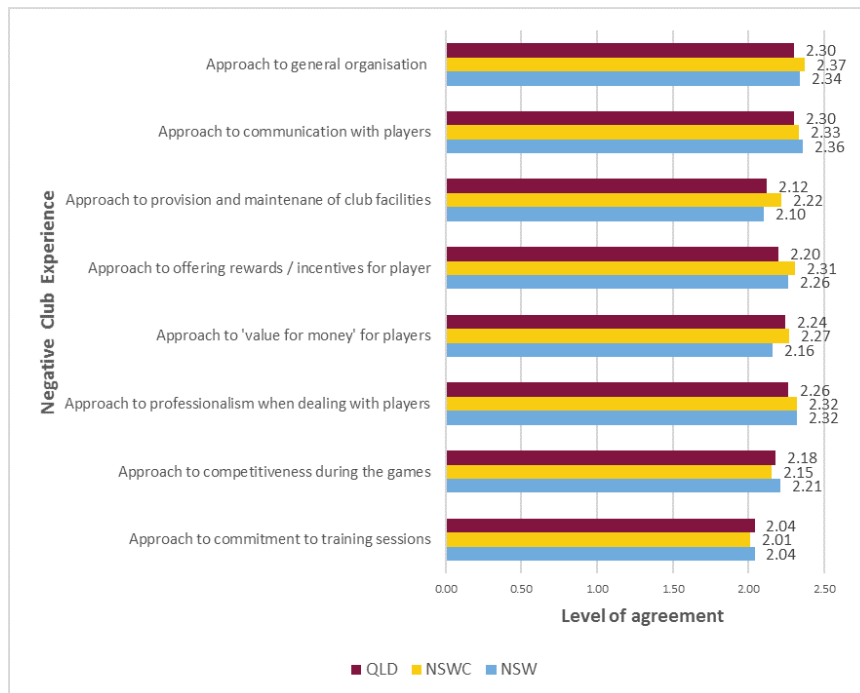
Figure 8.37   **Comparison of regional responses to negative club experience items (Junior RL)**

8.4.4.3.   Combined playing
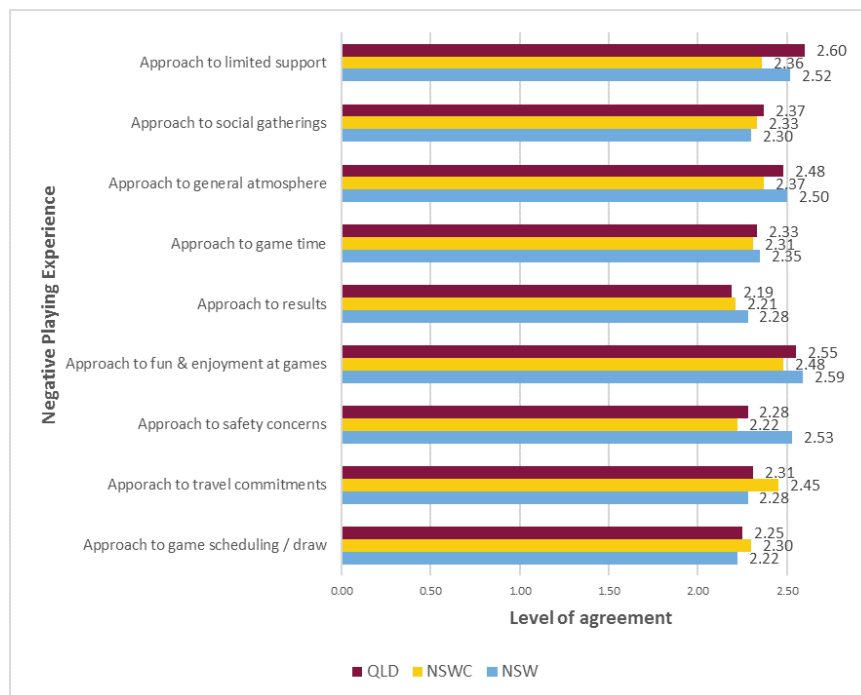
Figure 8.38   Comparison of regional responses to negative playing experience items (Junior RL)

8.4.4.4.   Combined social
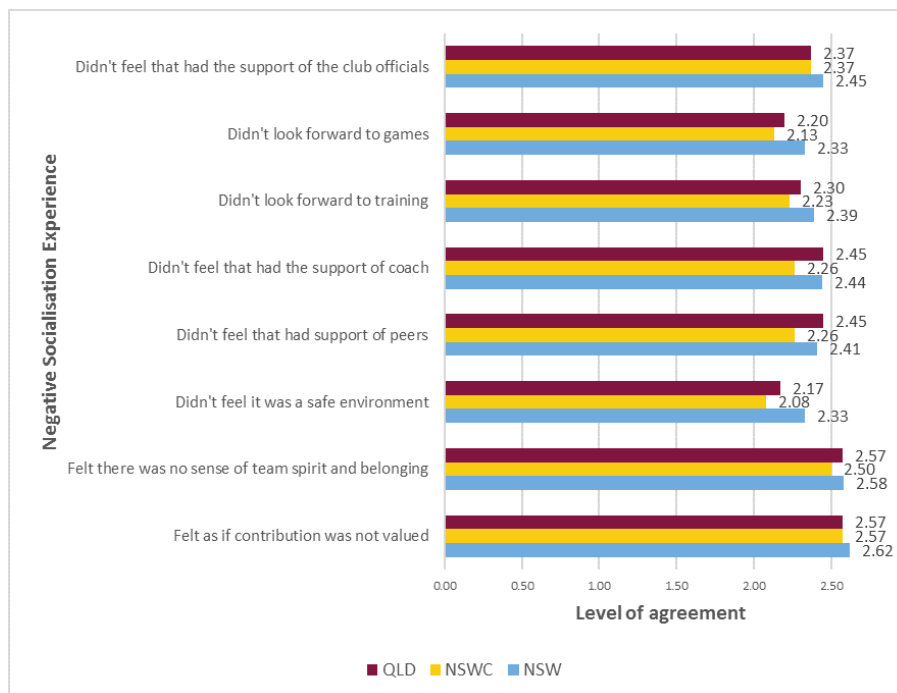
Figure 8.39   Comparison of regional responses to negative socialisation experience items (Junior RL)
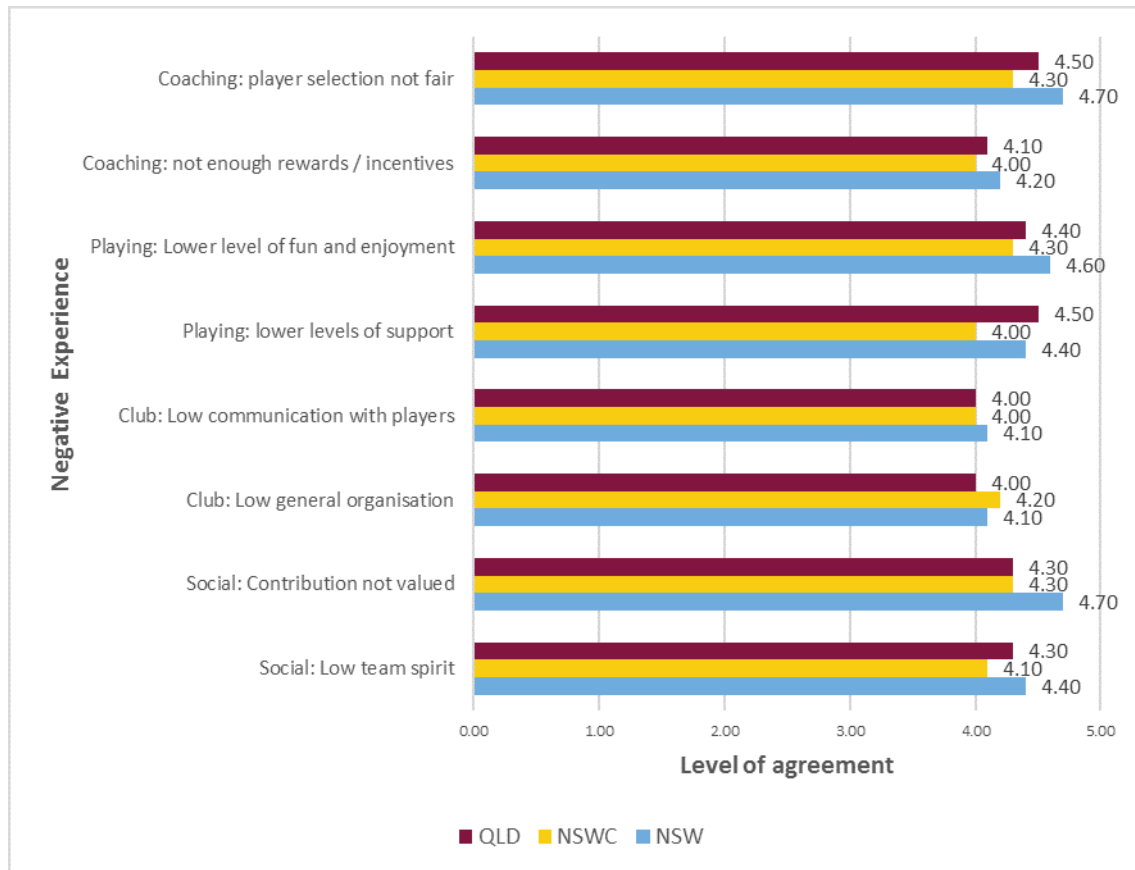
Figure 8.40   **Common main negative reason for not returning in 2017 (Juniors – NSWRL, NSWCRL, QRL) (Mean – distribution across *agree* to *strongly agree*)**

8.5.   Senior RL Demographic profile

A total of 506 participant responses were included in this survey. Approximately 80% of these participants were male (79.8%). Based on reported birth dates and playing in the Senior division, participants ranged in age from 18 to 60 years of age (Figure 8.41). Senior RL players' average age distribution ranged from 18–36 years of age. Based on the above, after adjustment of extreme responses, these participants, who indicated they played in the Senior divisions, ranged in age from 18–60 years of age, with an average of 27 years of age.
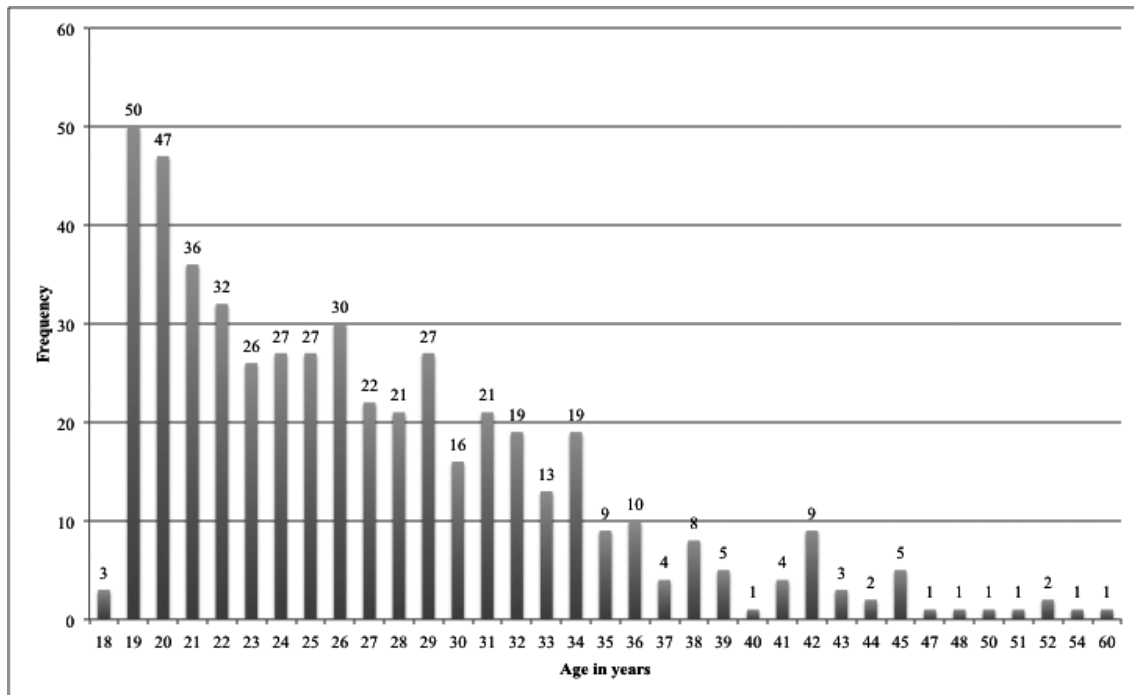
Figure 8.41   **Senior RL: participant ages in years**

In Figure 8.42, participants were asked to indicate their home situation based on five options. About 47% reported living with a partner, another 27.9% reported living with parents. About 20% reported living either with friends (10.5%) or alone. (9.1%) Finally, 5.5% reported living with relatives.
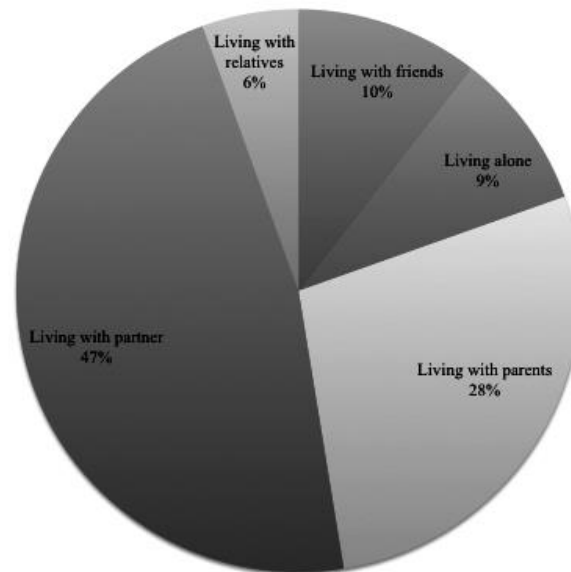
Figure 8.42   **Senior RL: Home situation options reported as percentages**

In Figure 8.43, participants were also asked to indicate their relationship status. Of the 506 participants, the largest group (40.1%) reported being single, another 37.2% reported being in couple relationships, and 22.1% reported being married. Only three players reported being divorced. They were also asked if they had any dependents. Of the 495 that responded, 37.4% reported dependents.
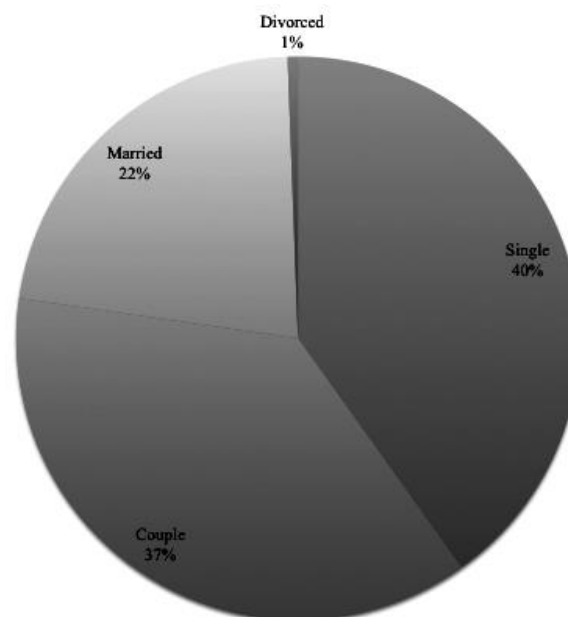
Figure 8.43   **Senior RL: Relationship status options reported as percentages**

Participants were asked to indicate whether they were studying or working and if so at what level. Of the 506 participants, a total of two reported being at school, 10.5% reported being at University, and another nine reported being at TAFE. Of those reported work situations, the majority (61.5%) reported being in full-time work. The remaining 20% of participants reported being either self-employed (7.3%), casual work (8.7%), part-time work (5.9%), being unemployed (3.8%), or in the case of one person, being retired (Figure 8.44).
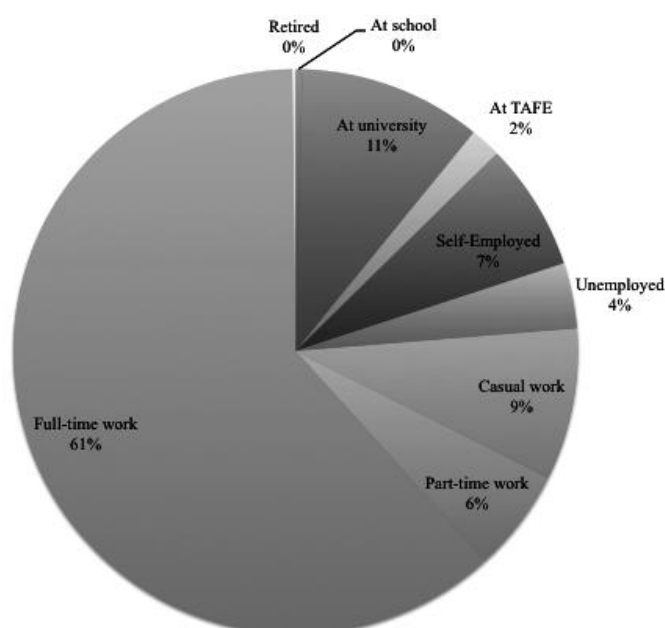
Figure 8.44 **Senior RL: Study/work status options reported as percentages**

Participants were asked to indicate the level or grade of rugby league played in 2016. Of the 506 that responded, more than 93% reported either playing in the recreational, reserve grade/ age division (57.1%) or in Local A grade competitions (36.2%). Of the remaining 6.8%, roughly equal numbers reported playing in State competitions (3.3%) or the Ron Massey Cup, Sydney Shield, or BRL (3.5%) (Figure 8.45)

Figure 8.45 **Senior RL: Level or grade of RL played in 2016, reported as percentages**

In Figure 8.46, participants were asked about the number of years they had played official club RL. Of the 506 participants, about 1/3 had played either 1–2 years or 3–4 years, and about 60% had played official club RL for 1–10 years. Almost 40% (39.7%) had played RL for more than 10 years. Finally, participants were asked if they would return to playing rugby league in the future. Thirty percent (30%) indicated that they would return, and 40% reported that they would not be returning.
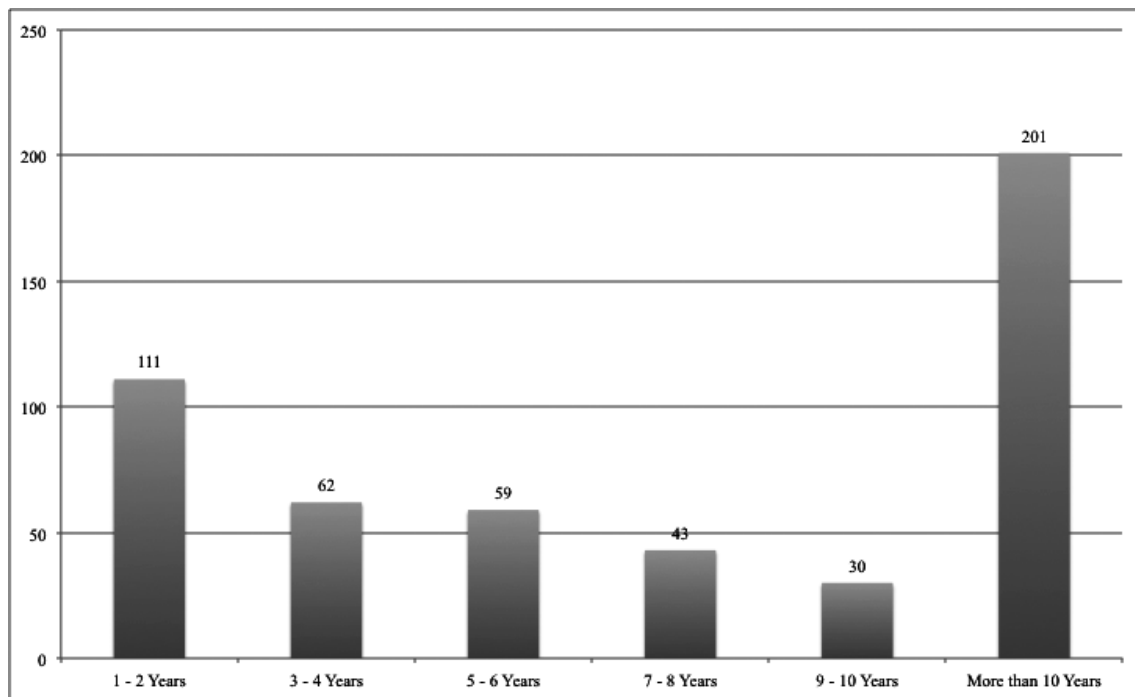
Figure 8.46   **Senior RL: Number of years played official RL, reported as frequencies**

8.6.   Senior RL players' main top reasons for not returning to play RL in 2017

Figure 8.47 indicates top reasons for not returning to play in 2017. When asked to use one of 12 categories to indicate why they did not return to rugby league in 2017, participants reported 'injury / fear of injury' (30%, n = 151), or 'other commitments' (17%, n = 85) or a 'negative experience' (9%, n = 45). Least identified were relocation (8%) and fees being too high (8%). Responses for the remaining seasons were spread fairly evenly across another four categories (couldn't play with friends, lost interest in playing, joined another sporting club).
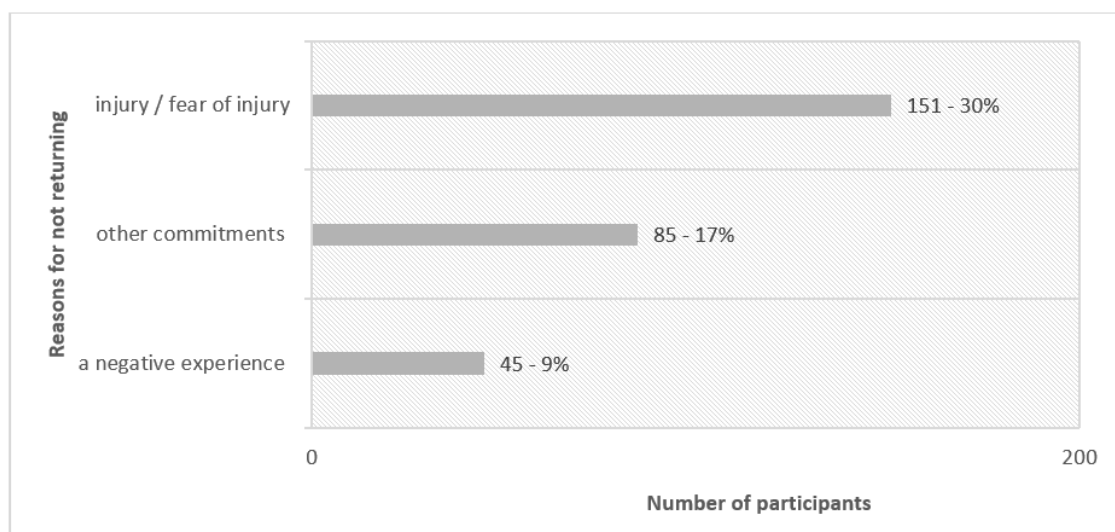
Figure 8.47   **Top 3 reasons influencing Senior RL player's decision to NOT return in 2017 (n = 506)**

8.6.1. Senior RL players' negative responses—why they did not return

8.6.1.1. Rating scale responses

The general approach here was to consider the relative level of agreement, for sets of items related to a particular aspect of player experience, that is, negative aspects of the coaching experience, the club experience, the playing experience and the socialisation experience. Means (*M*) were also provided to give ranking of each item based on the central tendency. To give further context to the rankings, data was extracted from participants' levels of agreement (*agree* to *strongly agree*) for each item. Such an approach provides a detailed ranking of participants' top main reason/s associated with

- their general experiences in 2016, and
- why they did not return (retention motivations) to the game in 2017.

8.6.1.2. Coaching experience

As illustrated in Figure 8.48, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the coaching experience most highly in terms of the coach not ensuring that 'player selection was fair and equitable' (18%, *n* = 89, *strongly agree – agree*) and 'not enough rewards and incentives' (13%, *n* = 65, *strongly agree – agree*). They were least likely to give high ratings to the level of competitiveness being too high or the coach lacking appropriate knowledge about the game.
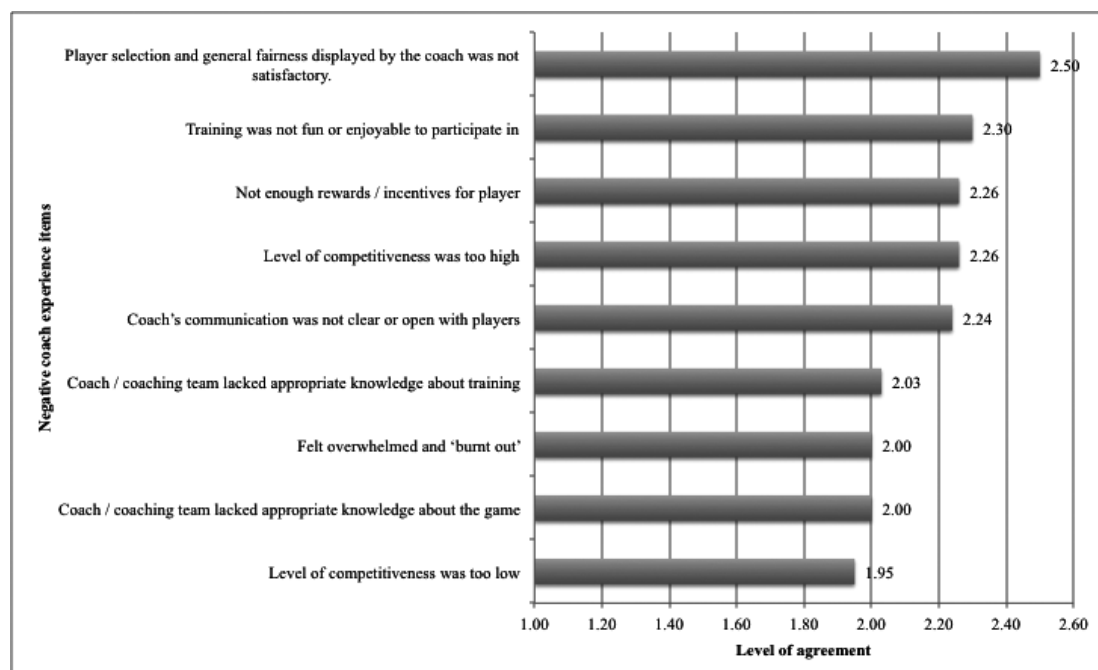

Figure 8.48 Senior RL: Level of agreement for negative coaching experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.6.1.3. Club experience

As illustrated in Figure 8.49, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the club experience most highly in terms of the approach to 'communication with players' (14%, *n* = 70, *strongly agree* to *agree*) and its approach to 'player payments' (13%, *n* = 65, *strongly agree* to *agree*). They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the club experience highly in terms of its approach to competitiveness during the games.
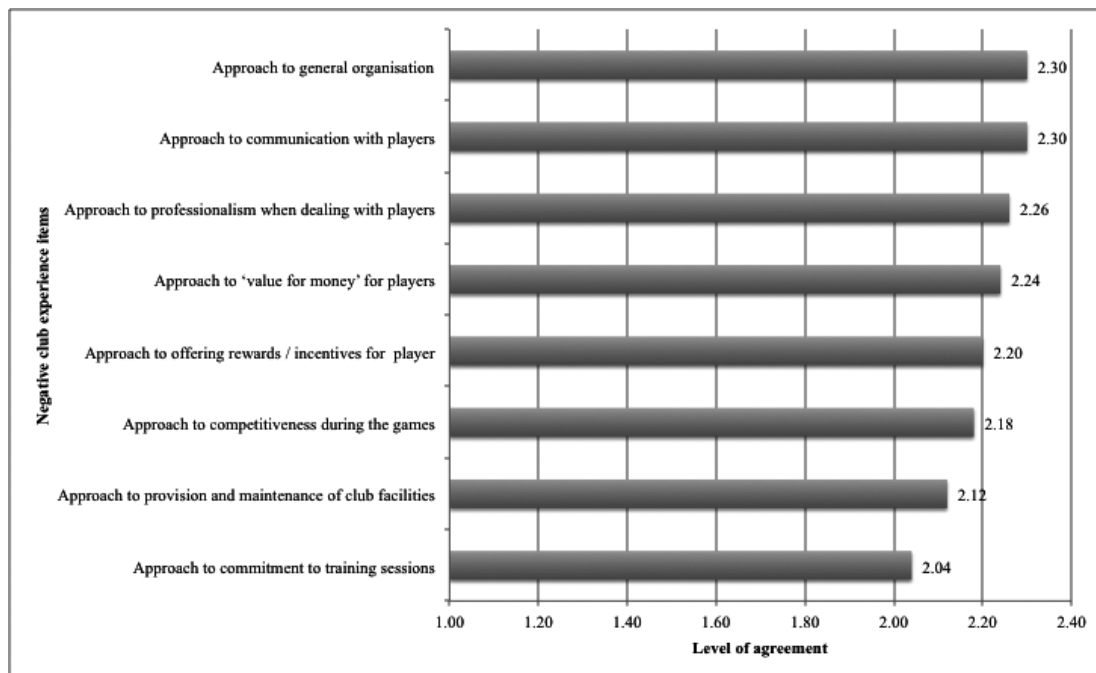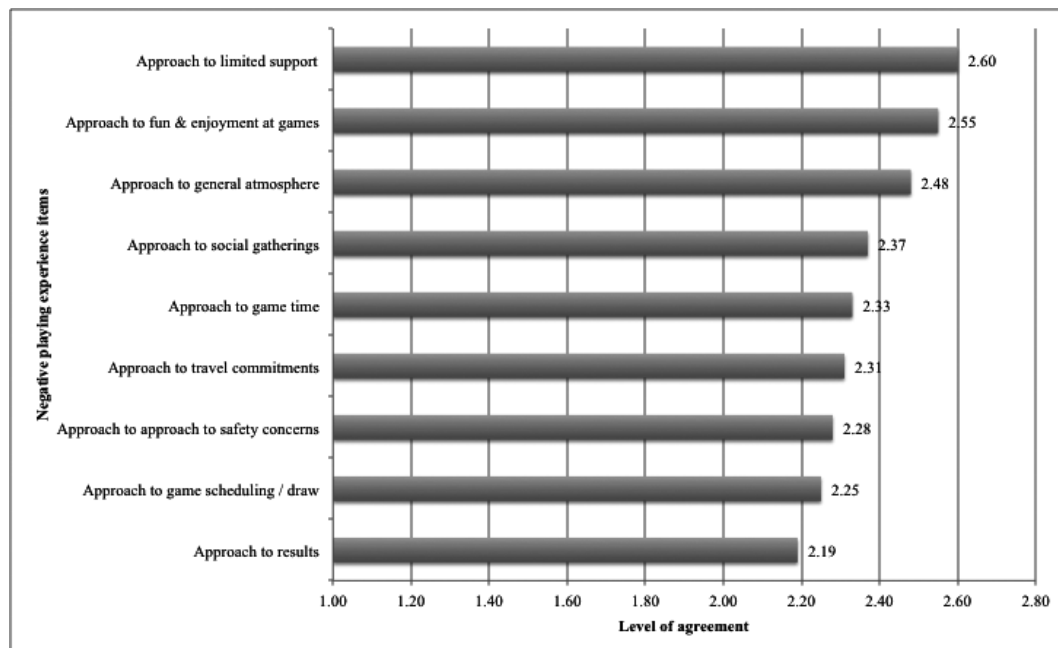
Figure 8.49   Senior RL: Level of agreement for negative club experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.6.1.4.   *Playing experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.50, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the playing experience most highly in terms of the 'limited support' (16%, *n* = 80, *strongly agree* to *agree*) and 'approach to safety' (10%, *n* = 50, *strongly agree* to *agree*). They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the playing experience highly in terms of the approach to game scheduling and the approach to results.

Figure 8.50   Senior RL: Level of agreement for negative playing experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.6.1.5. *Socialisation experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.51, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the socialisation experience most highly in terms of feeling that 'contribution was not valued' (15%, *n* = 75, *strongly agree* to *agree*) and 'feeling that no strong sense of team spirit and belonging' (14%, *n* = 70, *strongly agree* to *agree*). Participants rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience least highly in terms of not looking forward to the game, and not feeling it was a safe environment.

Figure 8.51   Senior RL: Level of agreement for negative socialisation experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.6.2. Senior RL players' level of agreement (negative experiences and retention)

As illustrated in Table 8.4, Senior players agreed most strongly around 'player selection was not fair', felt that there was 'limited support' and that their 'contribution was not valued'. These were the top 3 negative experiences which influenced their decision to not return to play in 2017.

Table 8.4   Rank order of Seniors RL negative experiences – levels of agreement (*agree – strongly agree*) (*n* = 506)

Experience	Number (*n*)	Percentage (%)
player selection was not fair and equitable	89	18
limited support	80	16
contribution not valued	75	15
low levels of communication with players	70	14
no strong sense of team spirit and belonging	70	14
not enough rewards and incentives	65	13
low player payments	65	13
approach to safety	50	10

As illustrated in Figure 8.52, Senior RL players agreed most strongly around 'player selection was not fair', felt that there was 'limited support' and that their 'contribution was not valued'. These were the top three negative experiences which influenced their decision to not return to play in 2017. Based on player responses – mean and percentage indicating agree to strongly agree for each item.
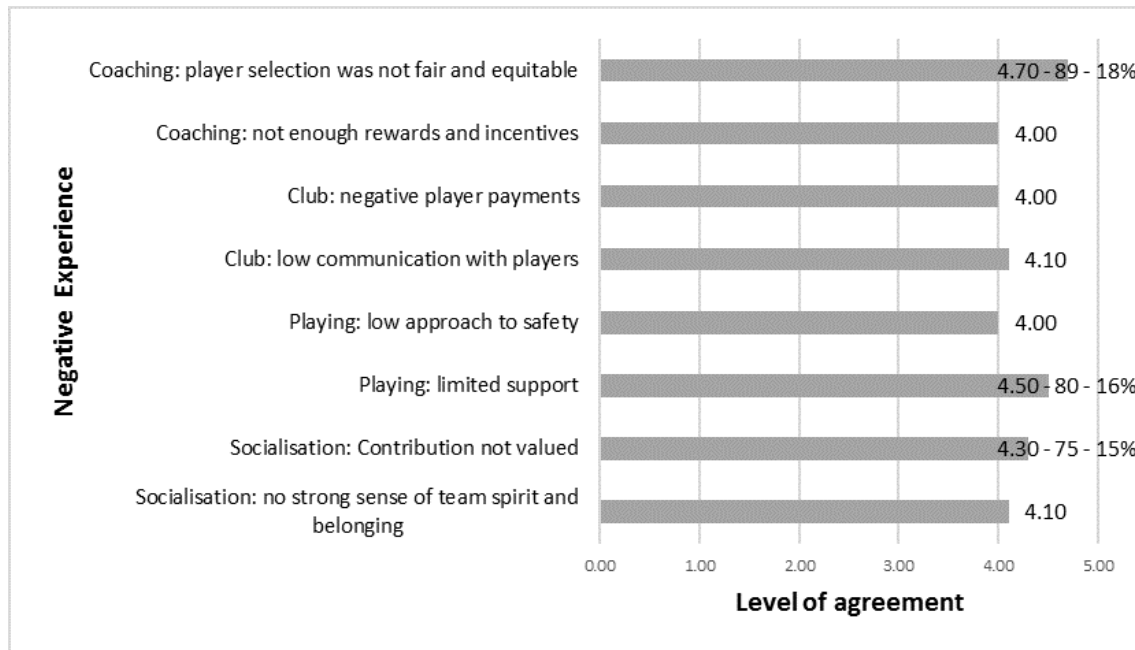
Figure 8.52   **Senior negative experiences and level of agreement (Mean - Agree – Strongly Agree) (n = 506)**

*Based on levels of highest negative positive agreements for each item (n, %, agree - strongly agree)

8.6.3.   Combined Senior RL players' correlation matrix analyses

Based on correlation matrix analyses - Spearman's rho ($r_s = 0.20* - 0.40**$) and p values ($p < 0.05$–$p < 0.000$):

- Senior RL males were more likely to be critical (negative) about player selection, player support and not having their contribution valued.

- Senior RL players who had played official club RL for fewer years were more likely to be critical (negative) that they didn't have the support of the coach.

8.7. Senior players' individual reports—NSWRL, NSWCRL and QRL

Table 8.5   **Numbers of participants per State (Senior)**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
NSWRL	263	52.0	52.0	52.0
NSWCRL	44	8.7	8.7	60.7
QRL	153	30.2	30.2	90.9
The Affiliated States	46	9.1	9.1	100.0
Total	**506**	**100.0**	**100.0**	

Patterns (percentages and means (*M*)) which have emerged from the Senior data (NSWRL, NSWCRL and QRL) are:
(*Senior *n* = 460)

Common (%) demographics

- The average age is 27 years.
- Majority (40%) played > 10 years.
- Majority (57%) played in Recreational / Reserve Grade.
- Majority (47%) live with partner.
- Majority (60%) have full time work.
- Even distribution between lower 1 – 5 and upper 6 – 10 SES.

Common (%) top reasons for not returning to play RL in 2017

- Fear of injury / injury (29%, *n* = 146).
- Other commitments (16%, *n* = 83).
- A negative experience (8%, *n* = 41).
- Top three reasons make up 59 % (*n* = 270 / 460) of participants' responses.

Common (M) main reasons (negative experiences) for not returning in 2017

Coaching experience:

- **Player selection not fair.**
- Not enough incentives and rewards.

Playing experience:

- **Limited support.**
- Low approach to player safety.

Club experience:

- Player payment
- Low communication with players.
- Negative player payments.

Socialisation experience:

- **Contribution not valued.**
- Low team spirit and belonging.

* Average scores (mean - M) provide an indication about the strength of agreement on that 1-5 scale for each item reported. Provides a central tendency of responses around an item of interest.

*Numbers for the Affiliated States (9%, *n* = 46) have not been included in this report. However, given the recurring patterns / trends, it would be reasonable to suggest that similar trends would replicate themselves.

Figure 8.53   Player profile for Senior RL based on States

8.7.1. NSWRL Senior

8.7.1.1. Demographic profile

A total of 263 participant responses were included in this survey. Almost 80% (78.3%) of the 263 participants were male. As illustrated in Figure 8.54, these participants ranged in age from 18–60 years of age, with an average age of 26.19 years.
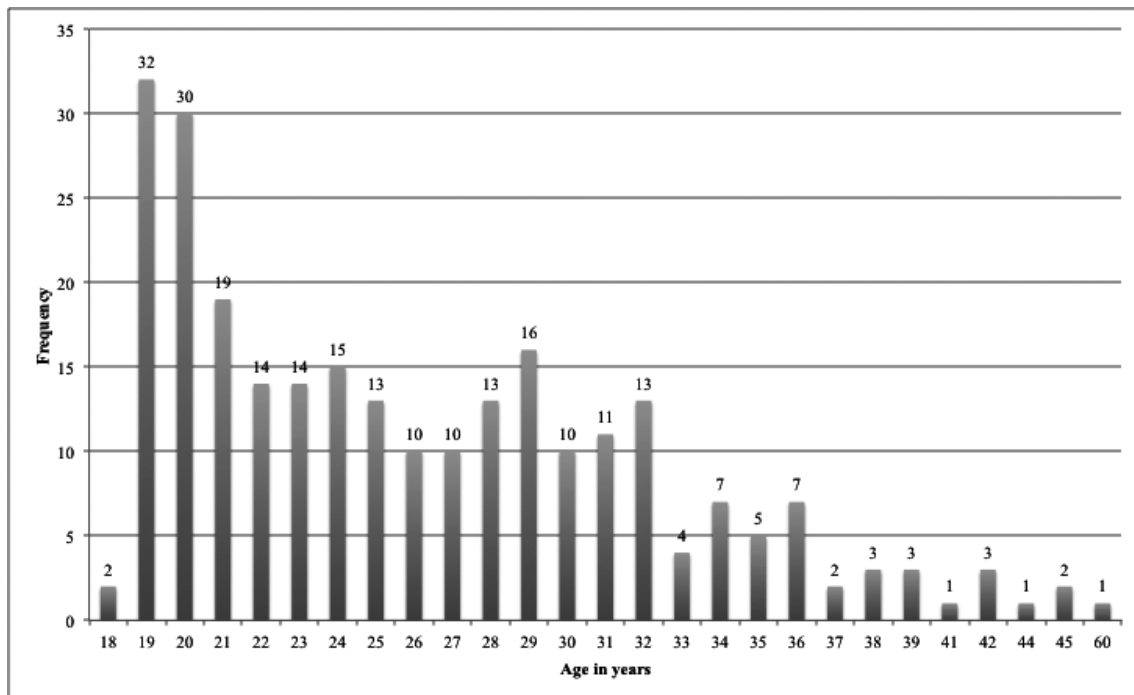
Figure 8.54   NSWRL Senior player ages in years

As illustrated in Figure 8.55, about 33% reported living with parents, and another 42% reported living with partner. Another quarter reported living with friends, relatives or living alone.
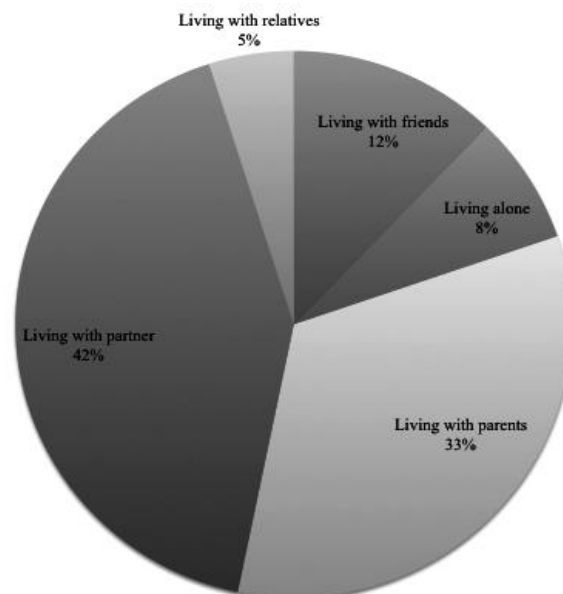
Figure 8.55   NSWRL Senior: Home situation options reported as percentages

As illustrated in Figure 8.56, participants were most likely to report being single (44%) or being part of a couple (39%) or being married (17%). Almost 1/3 (32.7%) reported having a dependent.

Figure 8.56   NSWRL Senior: Relationship status options reported as percentages

Participants were asked to indicate whether they were studying or working and if so at what level. As illustrated in Figure 8.57, almost 90% of the 263 participants reported being in full-time work (60%), in casual work (9%), self-employed (9%) or at university (11%).
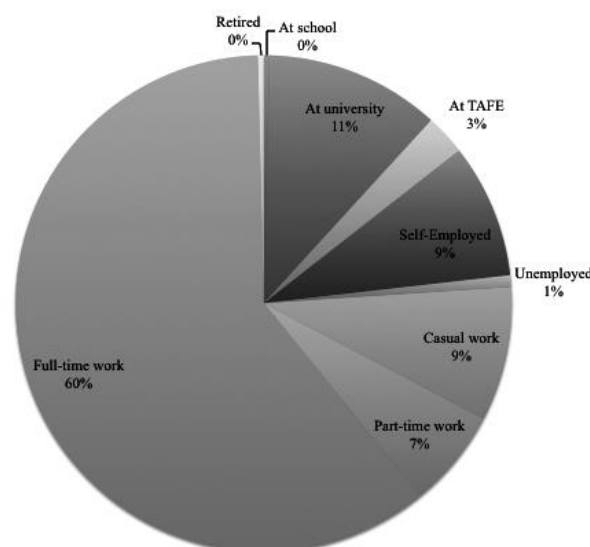
Figure 8.57   NSWRL Senior: Study/work options reported as percentages

As illustrated in Figure 8.58, participants were asked to indicate the level or grade of rugby league played in 2016. Of the 263 players, the largest two groups reported playing in the Recreational/Reserve Grade/Age Division (56%) or in Local A Grade competitions (36%).
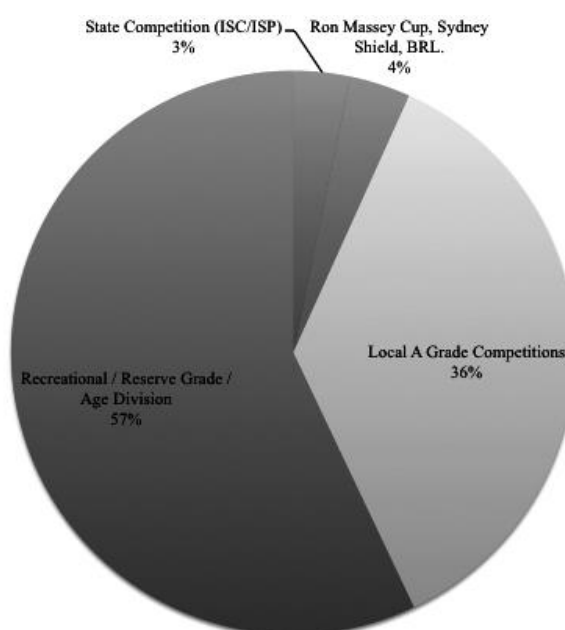
Figure 8.58   **NSWRL Senior: Level or grade of RL played in 2016, reported as percentages**

As illustrated in Figure 8.59, participants were asked about the number of years they had played official club RL. Of the 263 participants, about 30% had played 1-4 years, and almost 30% had played official club RL 5-9 years. The remaining 40% had played official club RL for more than 10 years.

Figure 8.59   **NSWRL Senior: Number of years playing Senior RL, reported as frequencies**

8.7.1.2.   *Main top reasons for not returning to play RL in 2017*

When asked why they did not return to RL in 2017, participants were most likely to report injury, fear of injury (29%, *n* = 76), other commitments (16%, *n* = 43) or a negative experience (8%, *n* = 20). The top three reasons accounted for 53 % (*n* = 139 / 263) of participants' responses.

8.7.1.3. NSWRL Senior Player's negative responses – why they did not return

8.7.1.4. Rating scale responses

The general approach was to consider the relative level of agreement, for sets of items related to a particular aspect of player experience, that is, negative aspects of the coaching experience, the club experience, the playing experience and the socialisation experience. Means (M) were also provided to give ranking of each item based on the central tendency. To give further context to the rankings, data was extracted from participants' levels of agreement (agree – strongly agree) for each item. Such an approach provides a detailed ranking of participants' top main reason/s associated with

- their general experiences in 2016, and
- why they did not return (retention motivations) to the game in 2017.

8.7.1.5. Coaching experience

As illustrated in Figure 8.60, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the coaching experience most highly in terms of not enough rewards/incentives for players. They were least likely to give high ratings to the level of competitiveness being too high.

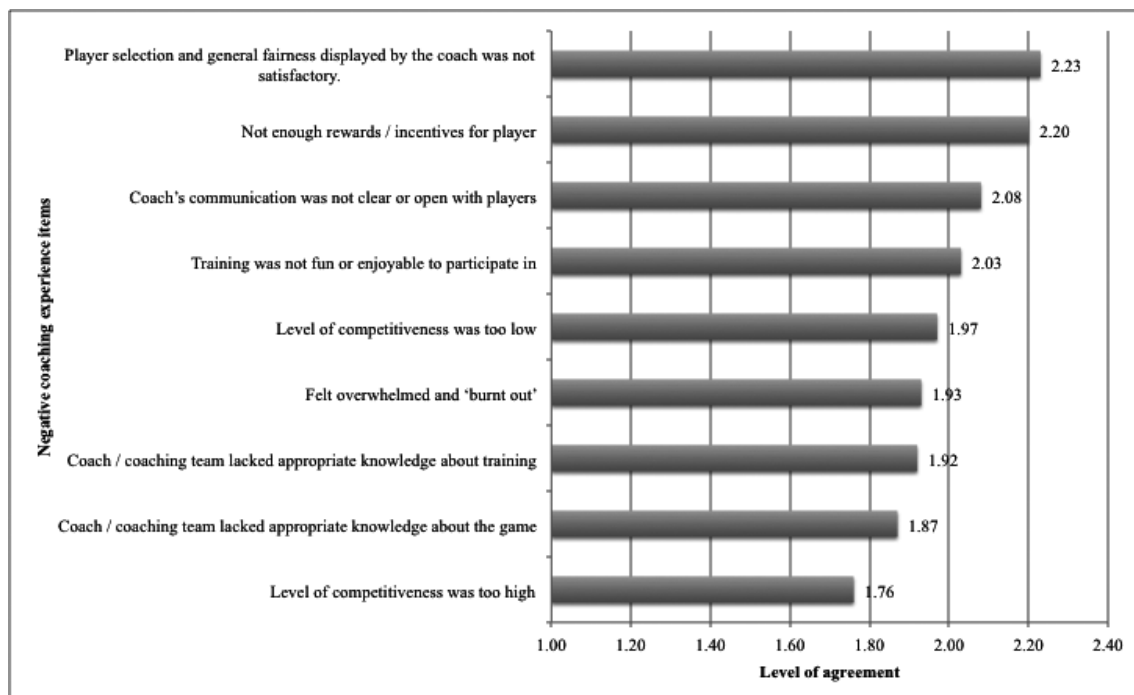**Figure 8.60**   **NSWRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative coaching experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.7.1.6. Club environment

As illustrated in Figure 8.61, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the club environment most highly in terms of the approach to communication with players and its approach to offering rewards/incentives for players. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the club environment highly in terms of its approach to the provision and maintenance of club facilities, and it approach to competitiveness during games.
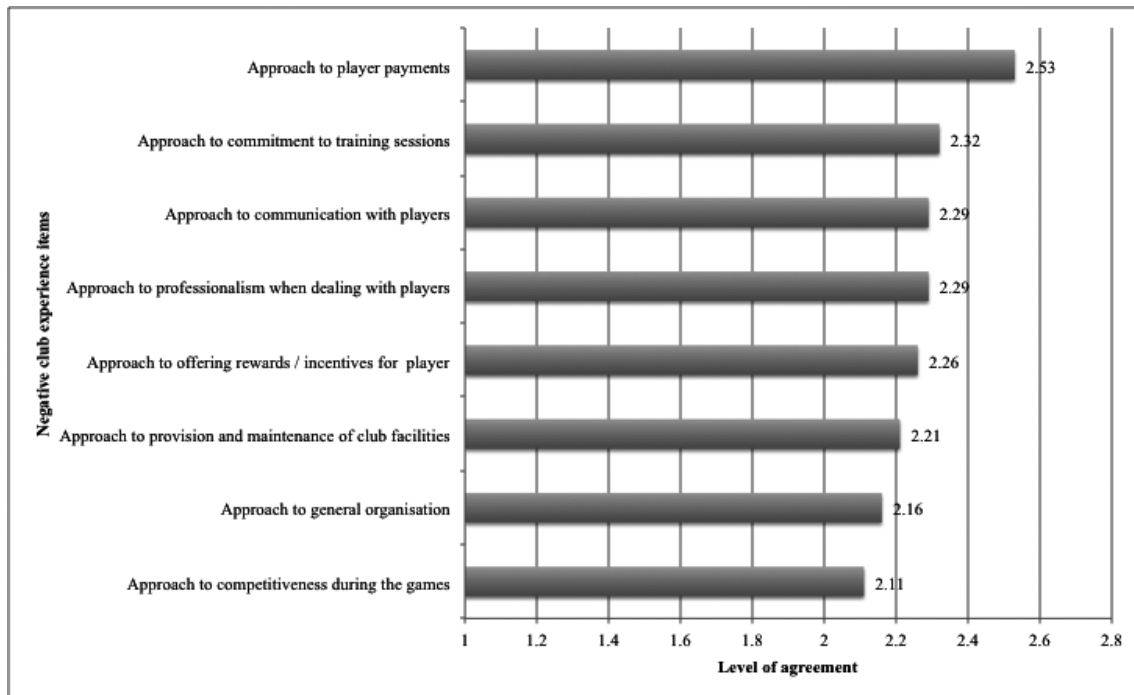
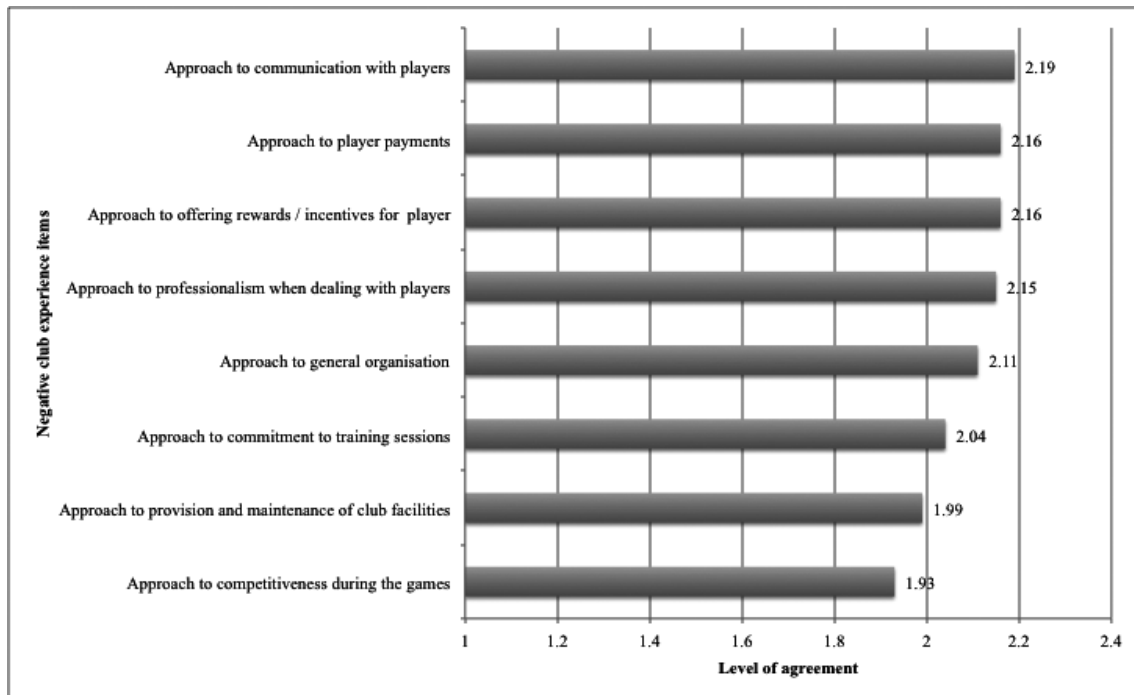**Figure 8.61**   NSWRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative club experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.7.1.7. *Playing experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.62, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the playing experience most highly in terms of the approach to limited support. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the playing experience highly in terms of the approach to results, game time, and social gatherings.
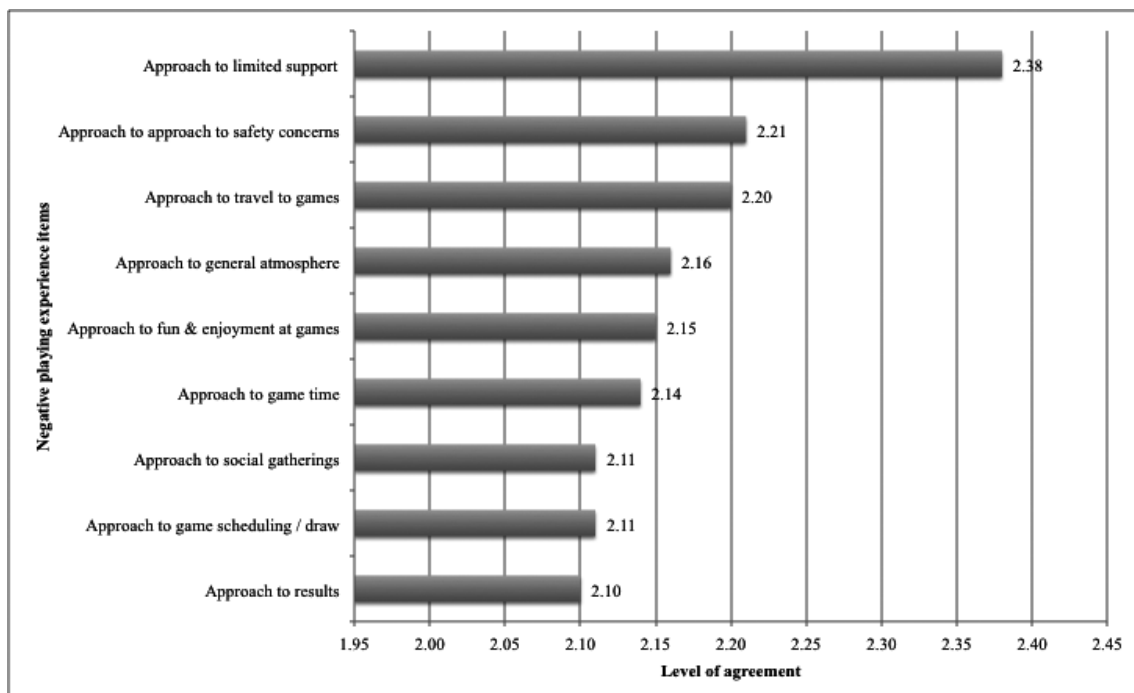

Figure 8.62   NSWRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative playing experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.7.1.8. *Socialisation experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.63, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the socialisation experience most highly in terms of feeling that their contribution was not valued. Participants rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience least highly in terms of not feeling it was a safe environment, and not looking forward to the game.

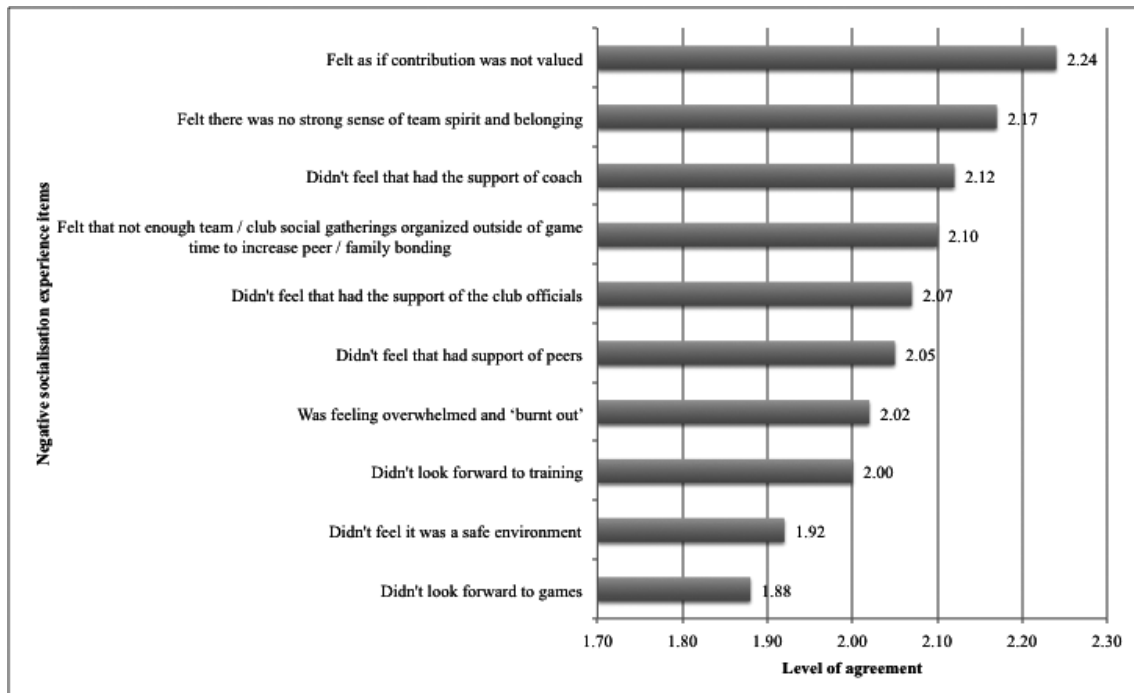

Figure 8.63   **NSWRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative socialisation experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.7.2. NSWCRL Senior

8.7.2.1. Demographic profile

A total of 65 participant responses[22] were included in this survey. Almost 2/3 (65.9%) of the 44 participants were male. As illustrated in Figure 8.64, these participants ranged in age from 19-52 years of age with an average of 27.66 years of age.
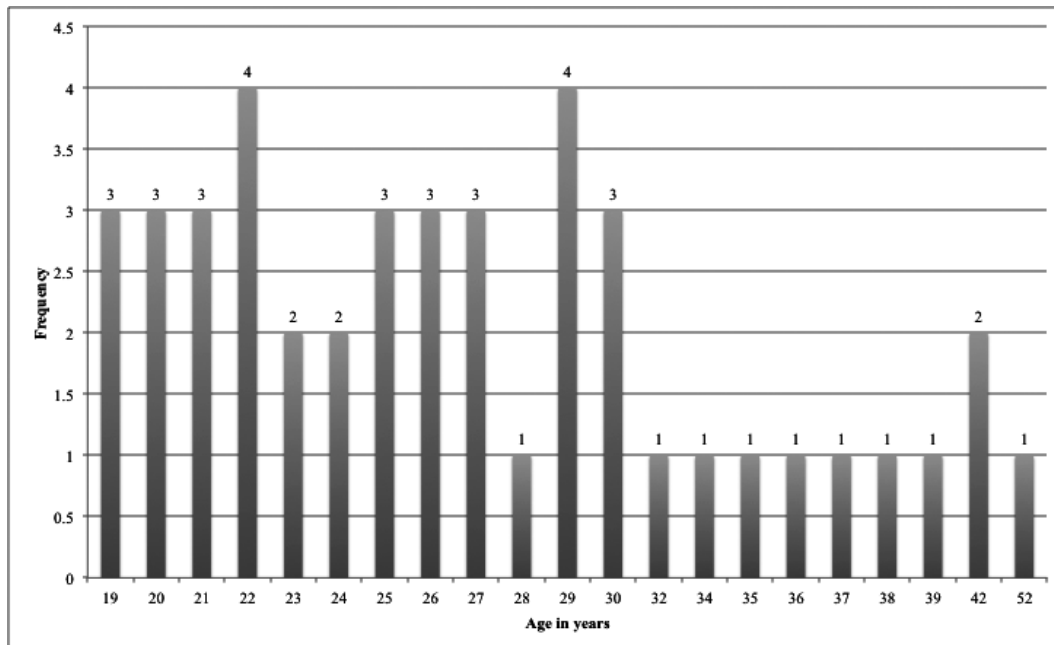
Figure 8.64   NSWCRL Senior player ages in years

As illustrated in Figure 8.65, more than 80% of the 44 participants reported living with either parents (23%), partners (48%) or relatives (11%).
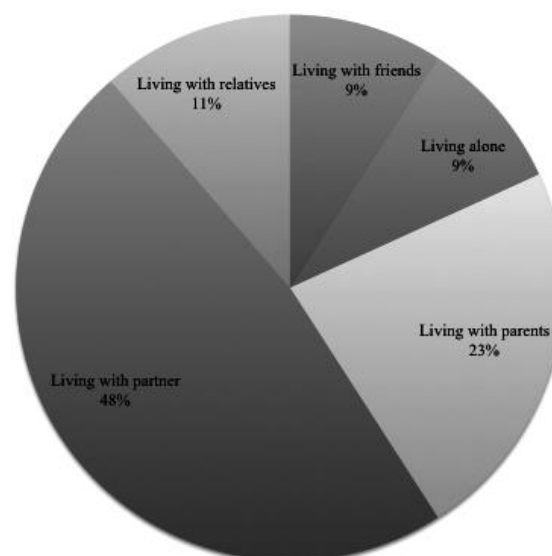
Figure 8.65   NSWCRL Senior: Home situation options reported as percentages

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[22] Whilst the participation rate was low, the data from this cohort mirrored other data and patterns of associations found throughout the wider context.

As illustrated in Figure 8.66, participants were most likely to report being part of a couple (45%) or single (30%), with most the remaining 25% reporting being married (23%). About 1/3 (34.5%) reported a dependent.
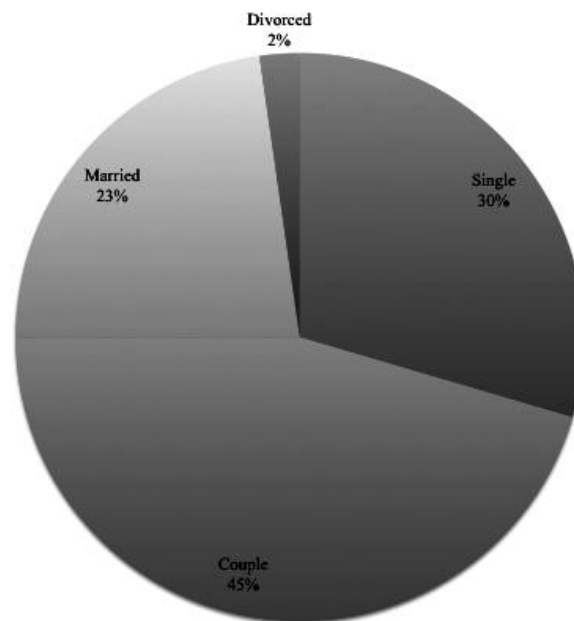
Figure 8.66   NSWCRL Senior: Relationship status options reported as percentages

Participants were asked to indicate whether they were studying or working and if so at what level. As illustrated in Figure 8.67, more than 80% of the 65 participants reported being in full-time work (64%), being unemployed (9%) or at university (9%).
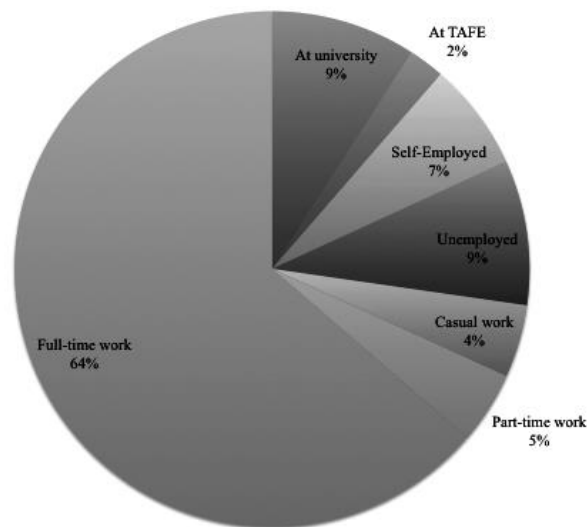
Figure 8.67   NSWCRL Senior: Study/work options reported as percentages

As illustrated in Figure 8.68, participants were asked to indicate the level or grade of rugby league played in 2016. Of the 65 players, more than 90% reported playing in the Recreational/Reserve Grade/Age Division (47%) or in Local A Grade competitions (44%).
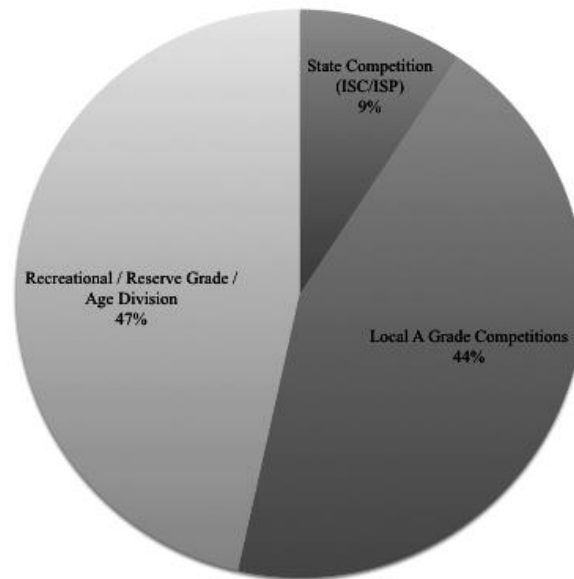
Figure 8.68   **NSWCRL Senior: Level or grade of RL played in 2016, reported as percentages**

As illustrated in Figure 8.69, participants were asked about the number of years they had played official club rugby league. Of the 65 participants, about 50% had played 1-4 years, and another 14% had played official club rugby league 5-10 years. The remaining 36% had played official club rugby league for more than 10 years.
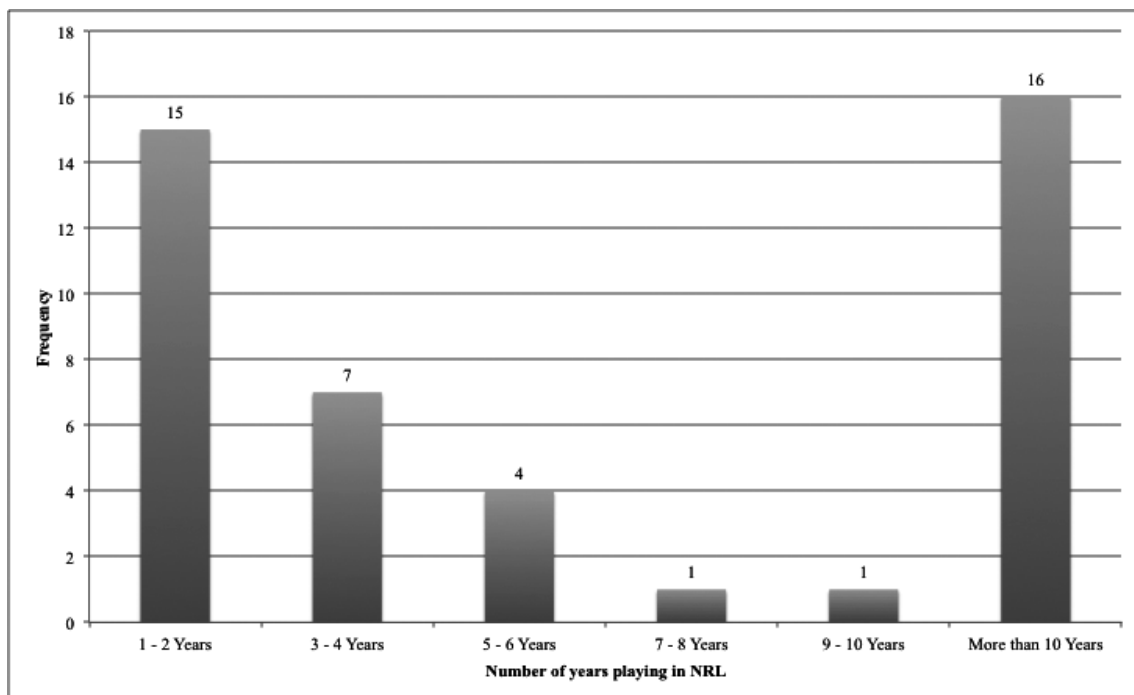
Figure 8.69   **NSWCRL Senior: Number of years playing RL, reported as frequencies**

When asked why they did not return to rugby league in 2017, participants were most likely to report injury, fear of injury or illness (28%, $n = 18$), other commitments (15%, $n = 10$) or negative experience (12%, $n = 8$). The top three reasons accounted for 55 % ($n = 36 / 65$) of participants' responses.

8.7.2.2. NSWCRL Senior Player's negative responses – why they did not return

Rating scale responses

The general approach was to consider the relative level of agreement, for sets of items related to a particular aspect of player experience, that is, negative aspects of the coaching experience, the club experience, the playing experience and the socialisation experience. Means (M) were also provided to give ranking of each item based on the central tendency. To give further context to the rankings, data was extracted from participants' levels of agreement (agree – strongly agree) for each item. Such an approach provides a detailed ranking of participants' top main reason/s associated with

- their general experiences in 2016, and
- why they did not return (retention motivations) to the game in 2017.

8.7.2.3. Coaching experience

As illustrated in Figure 8.70, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the coaching experience most highly in terms of not enough rewards/incentives for players or player selection and general fairness displayed by the coach not being satisfactory. They were least likely to give high ratings to the level of competitiveness being too high or feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.
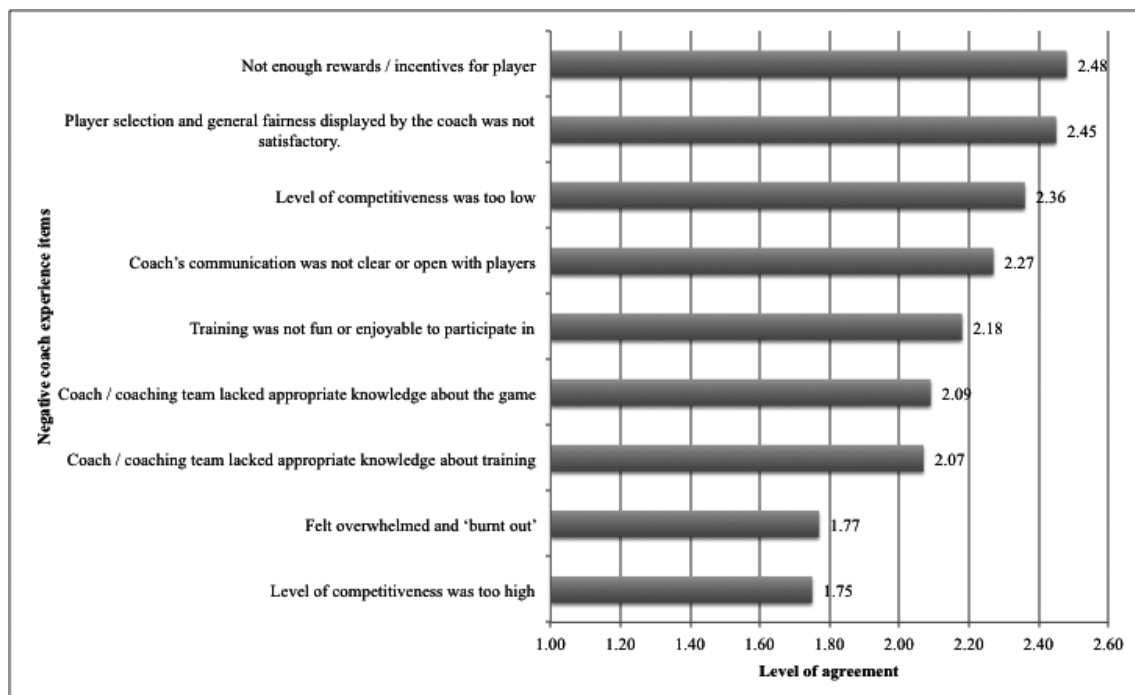
Figure 8.70 NSWCRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative coaching experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.7.2.4. Club environment

As illustrated in Figure 8.71, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the club environment most highly in terms of the approach to player payments. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the club environment highly in terms of its approach to competitiveness during games.
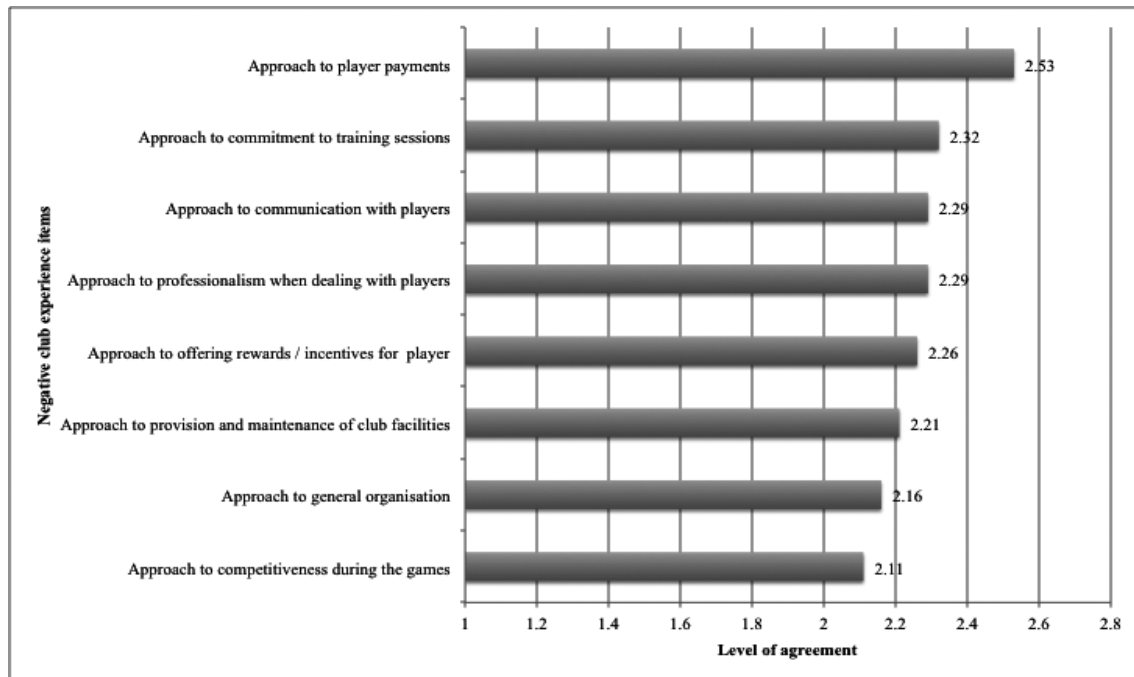
Figure 8.71   NSWCRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative club experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.7.2.5.   *Playing experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.72, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the playing experience most highly in terms of the approach to limited support. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the playing experience highly in terms of the approach to game scheduling/draw and game time.
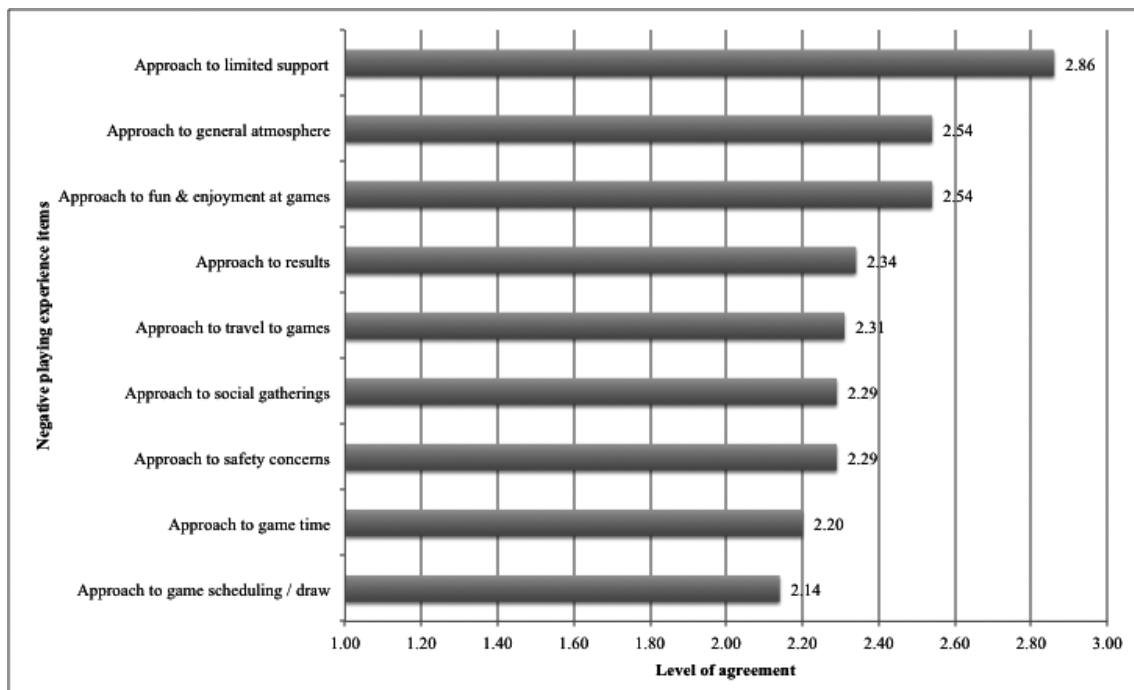
Figure 8.72   NSWCRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative playing experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.7.2.6. *Socialisation experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.73, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the socialisation experience most highly in terms of feeling that their contribution was not valued. Participants rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience least highly in terms of feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.
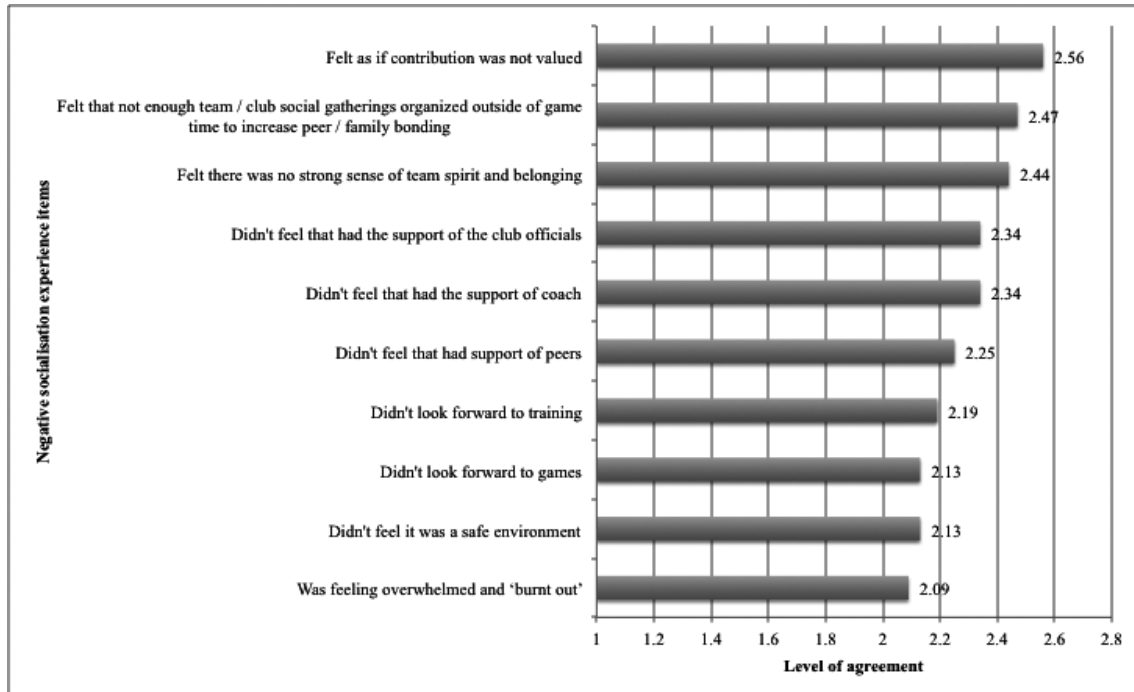
Figure 8.73   **NSWCRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative socialisation experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.7.3. QRL Senior

8.7.3.1. Demographic profile

A total of 153 participant responses[23] were included in this survey.

About 85% of the 153 participants were male. As illustrated in Figure 8.74, these participants ranged in age from 19-54 years of age, with an average age of 27 years.
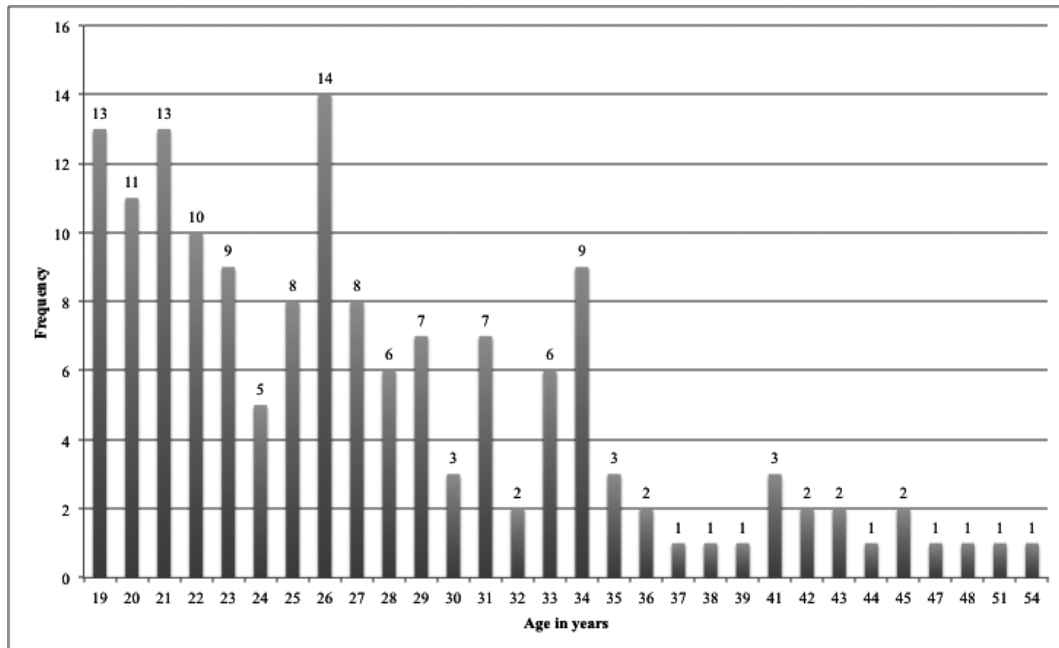
Figure 8.74　　　**QRL Senior player ages in years**

As illustrated in Figure 8.75, more than 80% of the 153 participants reported living with parents (24%), partners (50%) or alone (12%).
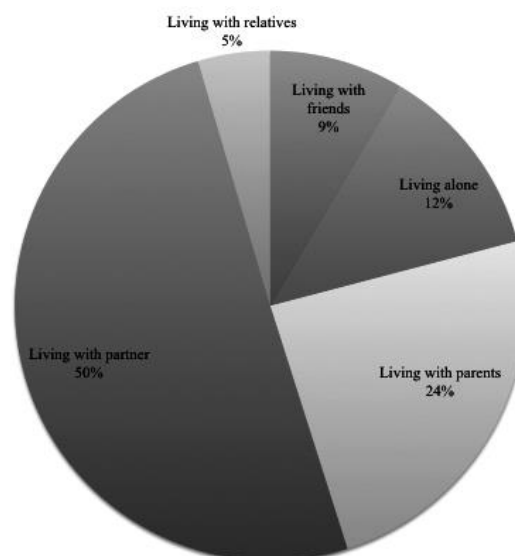
Figure 8.75　　　**QRL Senior: Home situation options reported as percentages**

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[23] Whilst the participation rate was low, the data from this cohort mirrored other data and patterns of associations found throughout the wider context.

As illustrated in Figure 8.76, participants were most likely to report being single (41%) and about equally likely to report being in a couple relationship (29%) or married (29%). About 45% reported having a dependent.
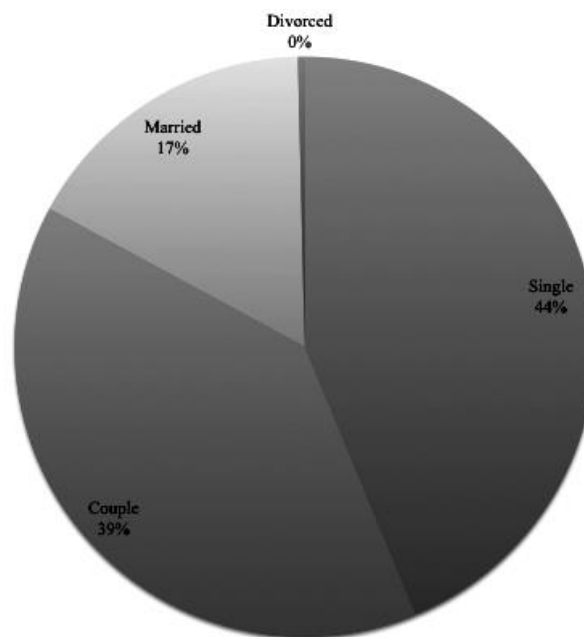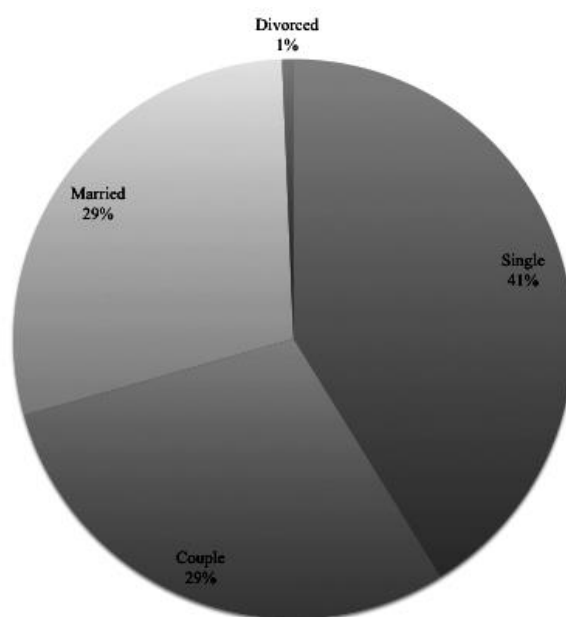

Figure 8.76   **QRL Senior: Relationship status options reported as percentages**

Participants were asked to indicate whether they were studying or working and if so at what level. As illustrated in Figure 8.77, about 3/4 of the 153 participants reported being in full-time work (62%) or at university (12%).
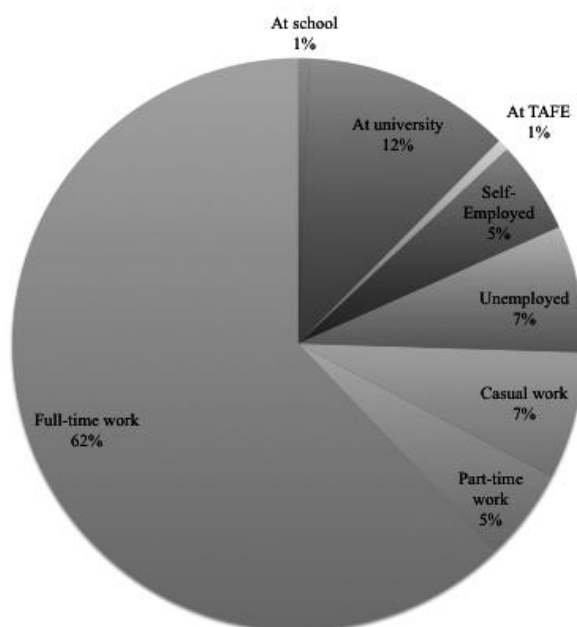
Figure 8.77   **QRL Senior: Study/work options reported as percentages**

As illustrated in Figure 8.78, participants were asked to indicate the level or grade of RL played in 2016. Of the 153 players, more than 90% reported playing in the Recreational/Reserve Grade/Age Division (64%) or in Local A Grade competitions (31%).
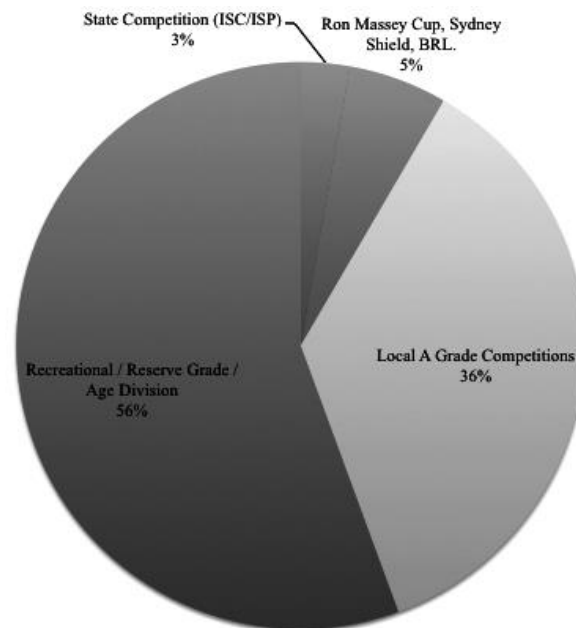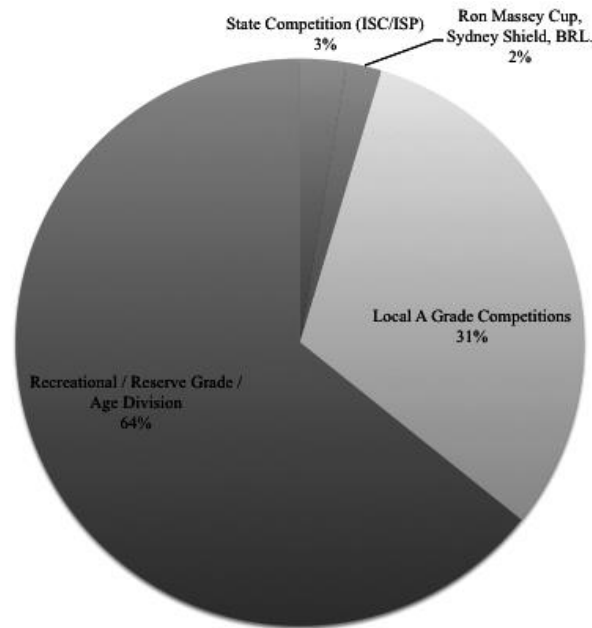
Figure 8.78   **QRL Seniors: Level or grade of NRL played in 2016, reported as percentages**

As illustrated in Figure 8.79, participants were asked about the number of years they had played official club rugby league. Of the 153 participants, about 32% had played 1-4 years, and another 25% had played official club rugby league 5-10 years. The remaining 43% had played official club RL for more than 10 years.
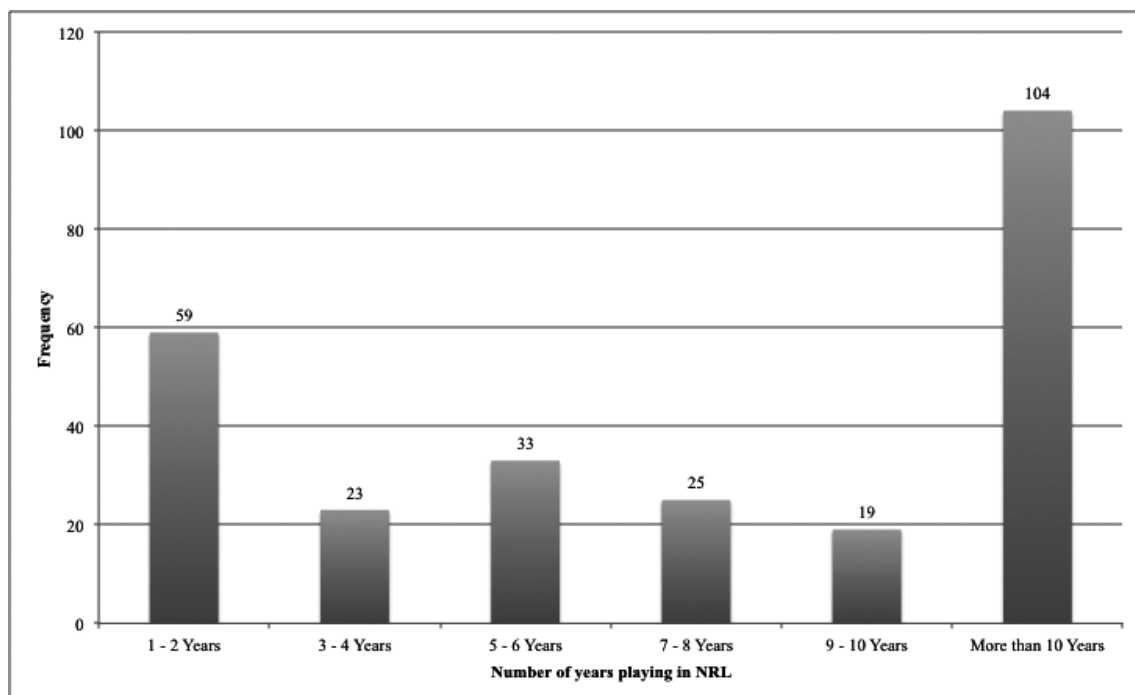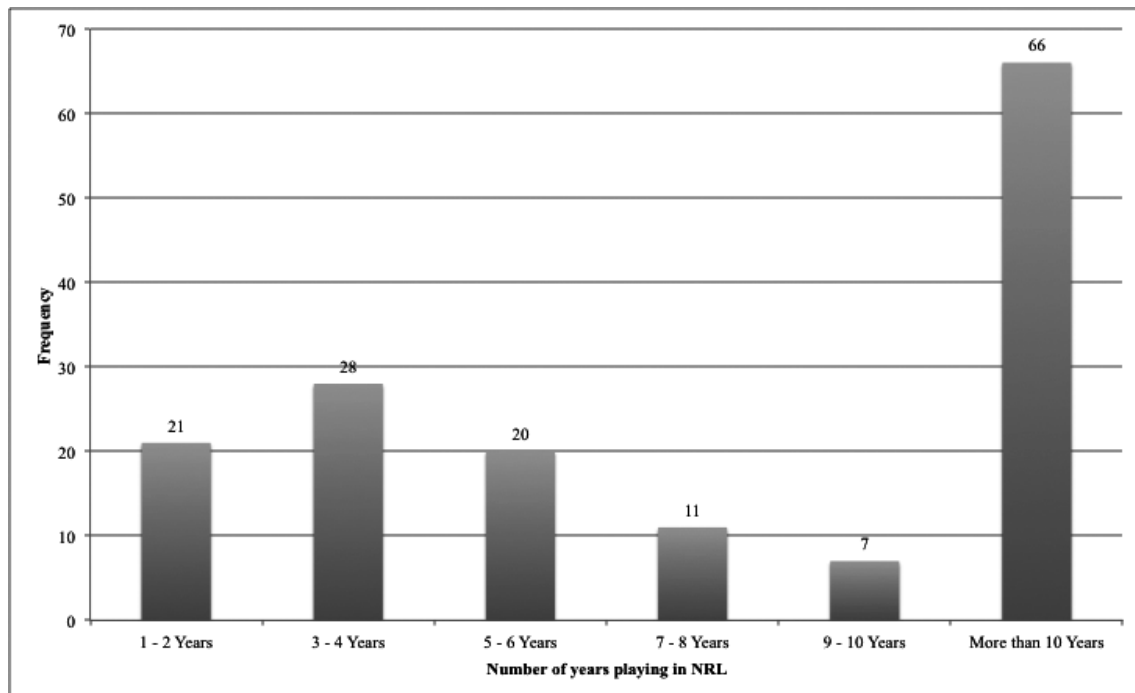

Figure 8.79   **QRL Seniors: Number of years playing RL, reported as frequencies**

8.7.3.2.   *Main top reasons QRL Seniors for not returning to play RL in 2017*

When asked why they did not return to rugby league in 2017, participants were most likely to report injury, fear of injury or illness (34%, $n = 52$), other commitments (17%, $n = 30$) or a negative experience (8%, $n = 13$). The top three reasons accounted for 62 % ($n = 95 / 153$) of participants' responses.

8.7.3.3.   *QRL Senior Player's negative responses – why they did not return*

8.7.3.4.   *Rating scale responses*

The general approach was to consider the relative level of agreement, for sets of items related to a particular aspect of player experience, that is, negative aspects of the coaching experience, the club experience, the playing experience and the socialisation experience. Means (M) were also provided to give ranking of each item based on the central tendency. To give further context to the rankings, data was extracted from participants' levels of agreement (agree – strongly agree) for each item. Such an approach provides a detailed ranking of participants' top main reason/s associated with

- their general experiences in 2016, and
- why they did not return (retention motivations) to the game in 2017.

8.7.3.5.   *Coaching experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.80, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the coaching experience most highly in terms of player selection and general fairness displayed by the coach not being satisfactory. They were least likely to give high ratings to the level of competitiveness being too high.
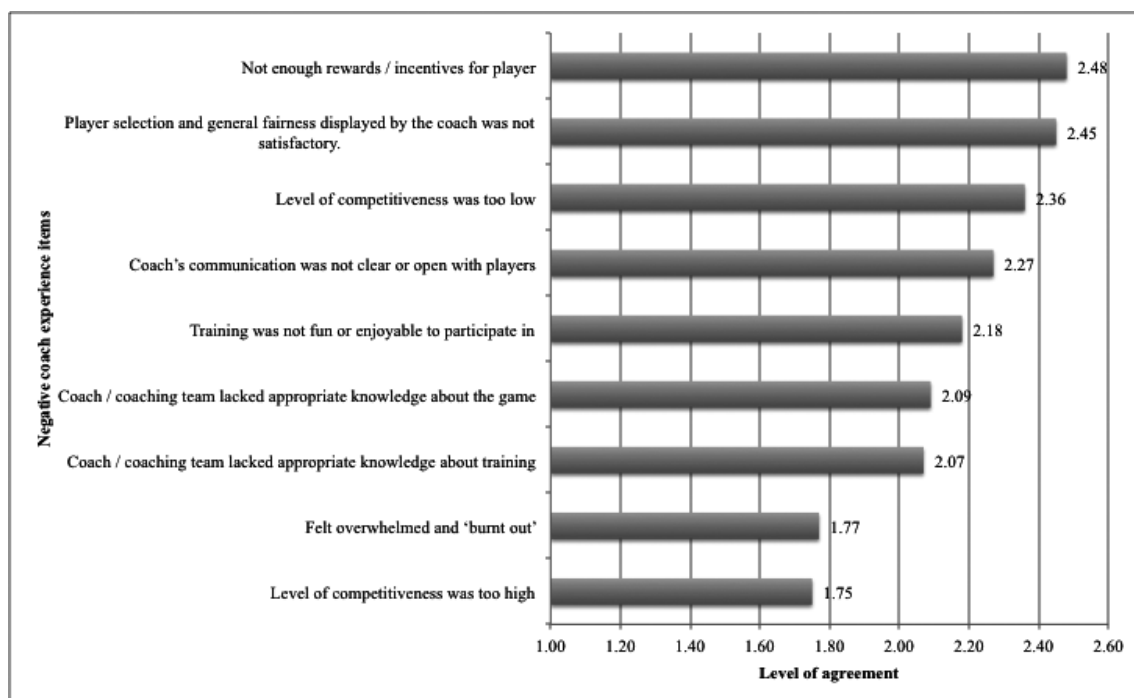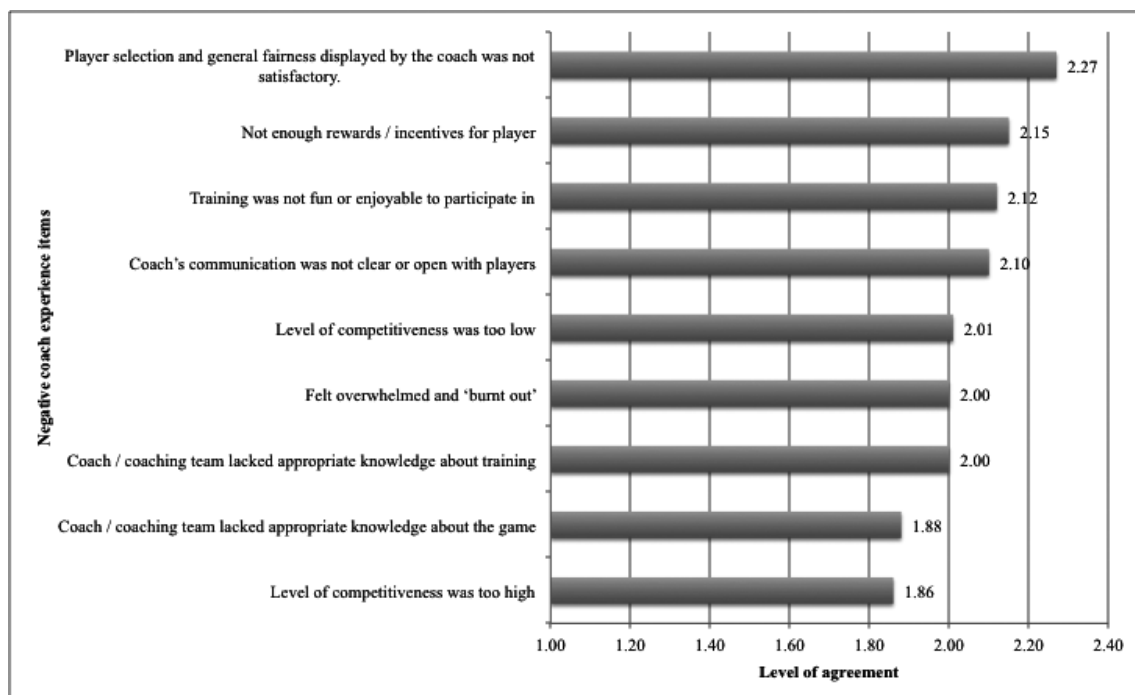
Figure 8.80   **QRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative coaching experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.7.3.6. Club environment

As illustrated in Figure 8.81, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the club environment most highly in terms of the approach to player payments. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the club environment highly in terms of its approach to competitiveness during the games.
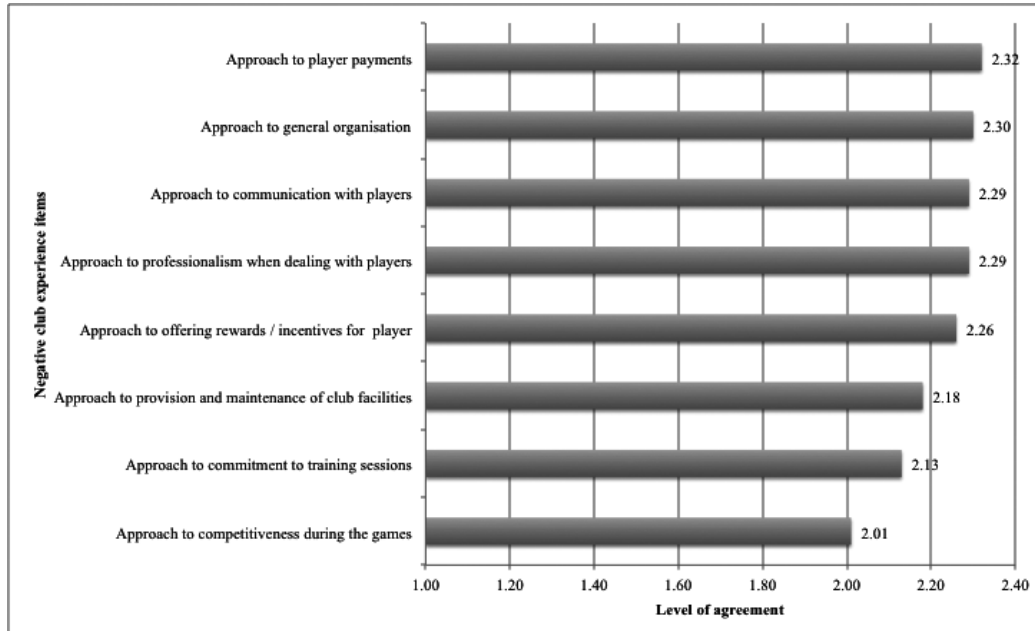
Figure 8.81   QRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative club experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.7.3.7. Playing experience

As illustrated in Figure 8.82, on average, participants rated negative aspects of the playing experience most highly in terms of the approach to limited support. They were least likely to rate negative aspects of the playing experience highly in terms of the approach to fun and enjoyment at games.
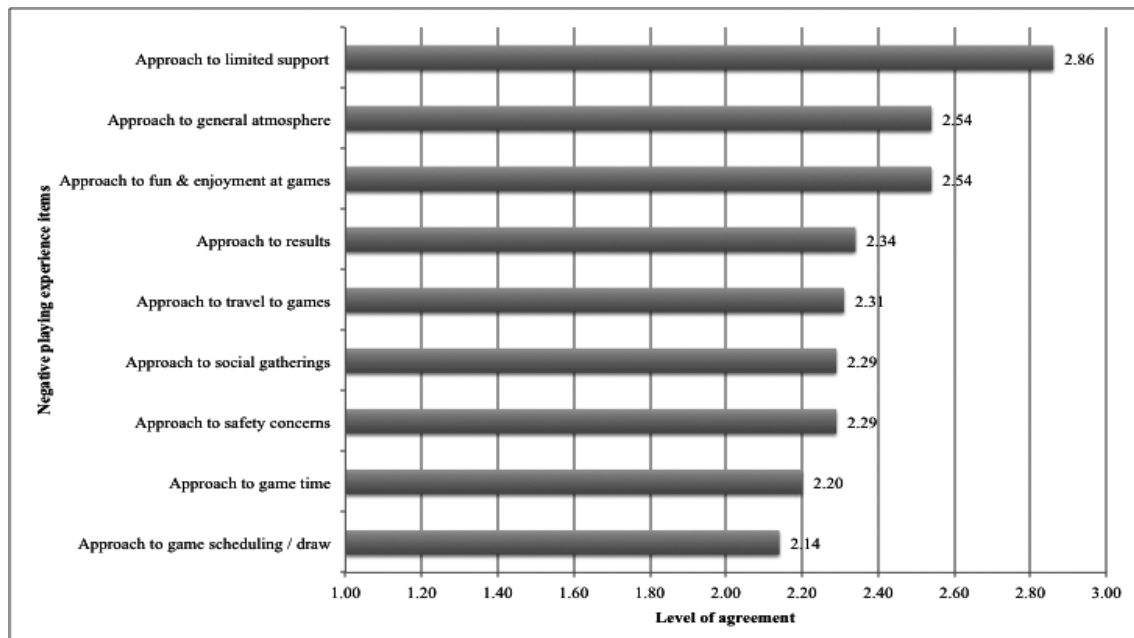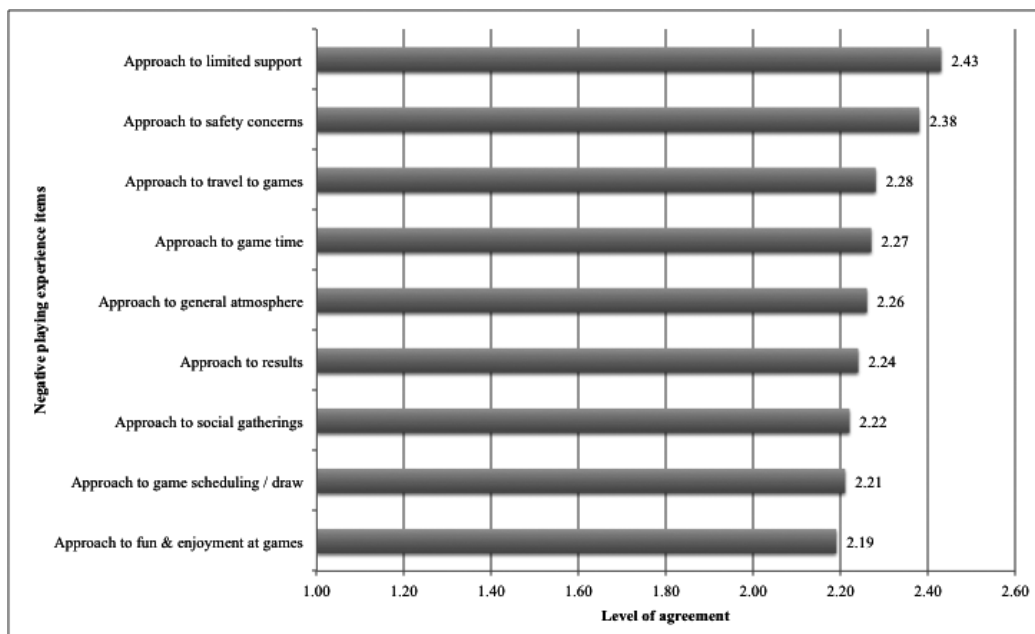

Figure 8.82   QRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative playing experience items (ordered by mean score)

8.7.3.8. *Socialisation experience*

As illustrated in Figure 8.83, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the socialisation experience most highly in terms of feeling that their contribution was not valued. Participants rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience least highly in terms of not looking forward to the game.
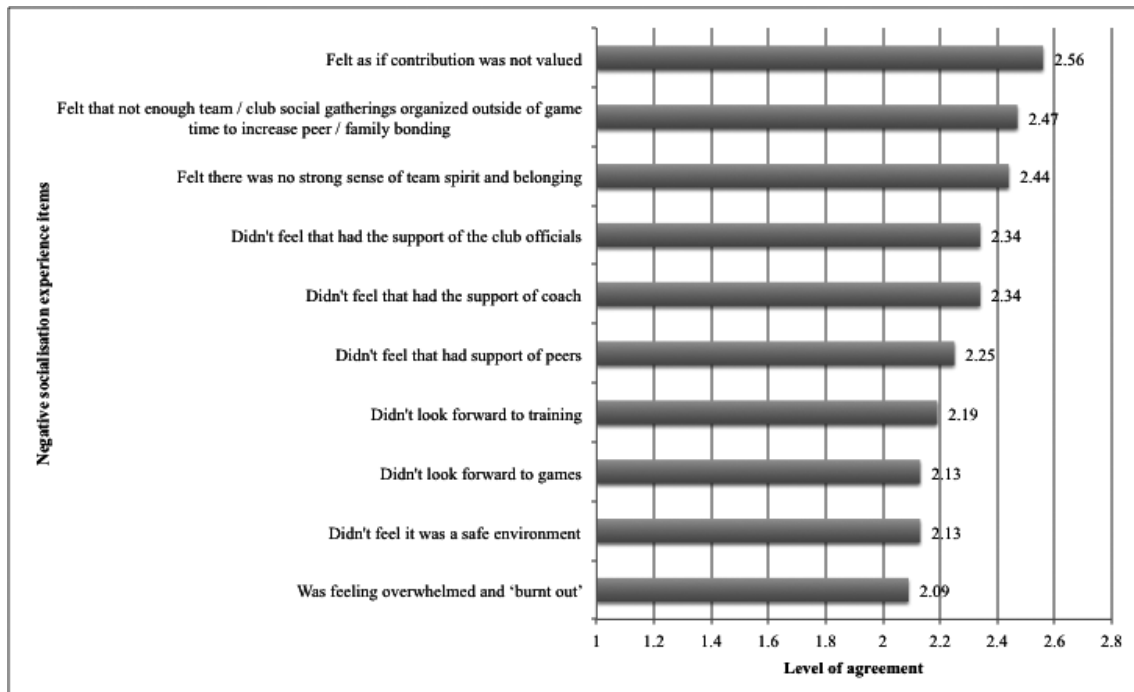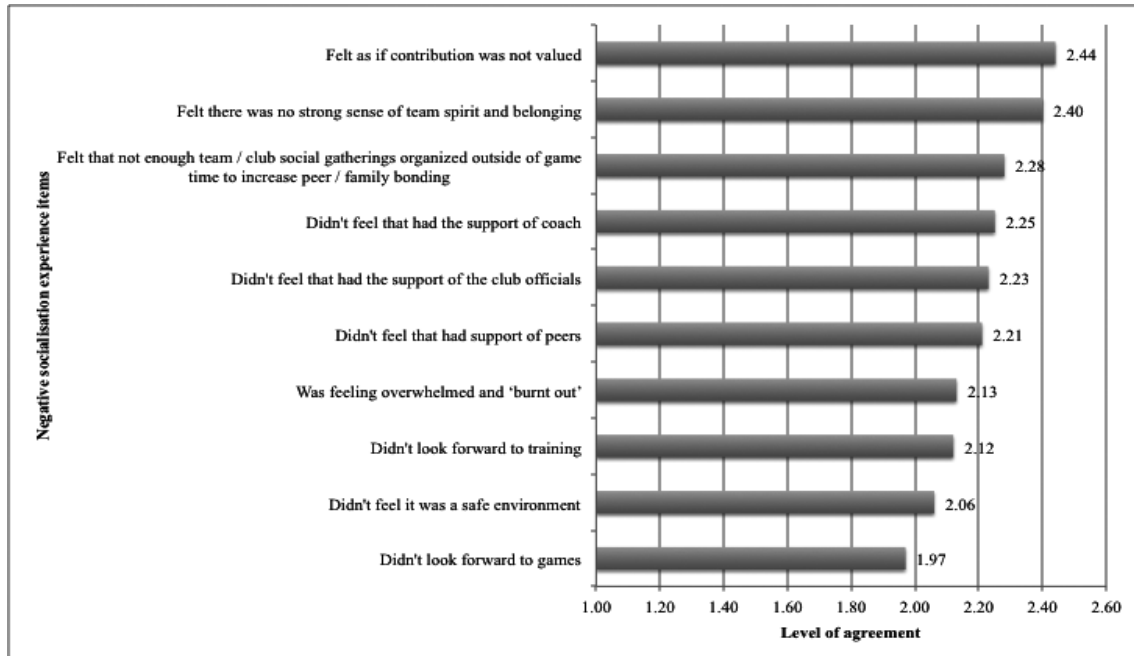

Figure 8.83   **QRL Senior: Level of agreement for negative socialisation experience items (ordered by mean score)**

8.7.4. Individual Senior RL players' negative experiences—NSWRL, NSWCRL, QRL

As illustrated in Table 8.6, on average, the top three common negative experiences, that influenced Senior RL player's decisions to not return in 2017, were associated with: *coaches' player selection not fair*, *limited support* and *contribution not valued*. Tables 8.84 – 8.87 indicates that NSWCRL Senior RL players tend to agree with the majority of these negative experiences more strongly than do NSWRL or QRL.

Table 8.6   **Common main reason for not returning in 2017 (Senior – NSW, NSWC, QRL)**

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2"></th><th>NSWRL</th><th>NSWCRL</th><th>QRL</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="12">Four experiences</td><td rowspan="3">COACH</td><td>player selection</td><td>rewards and incentives</td><td>player selection</td></tr>
<tr><td>rewards and incentives</td><td>player selection</td><td>rewards and incentives</td></tr>
<tr><td>communication with players</td><td>comp too low</td><td>communication with players</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">CLUB</td><td>communication with players</td><td>player payment</td><td>player payment</td></tr>
<tr><td>rewards and incentives</td><td>commitment to training</td><td>general organisation</td></tr>
<tr><td>professionalism</td><td>professionalism</td><td>professionalism</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">PALXING</td><td>support</td><td>support</td><td>support</td></tr>
<tr><td>game travel</td><td>general atmosphere</td><td>safety</td></tr>
<tr><td>safety</td><td>fun and enjoyment</td><td>game travel</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">SOCIAL</td><td>contribution valued</td><td>contribution valued</td><td>contribution valued</td></tr>
<tr><td>support</td><td>social gatherings</td><td>team spirit</td></tr>
<tr><td>team spirit</td><td>team spirit</td><td>social gathering</td></tr>
</table>

*Based on Means for each item.

* The above experiences (retention motivations) should be read as negative in context or low levels. For example, where it indicates 'player selection', it should be taken in the context of 'unfair player selection' or 'low levels of rewards and incentives', unless otherwise stated.

8.7.4.1. Combined coaching
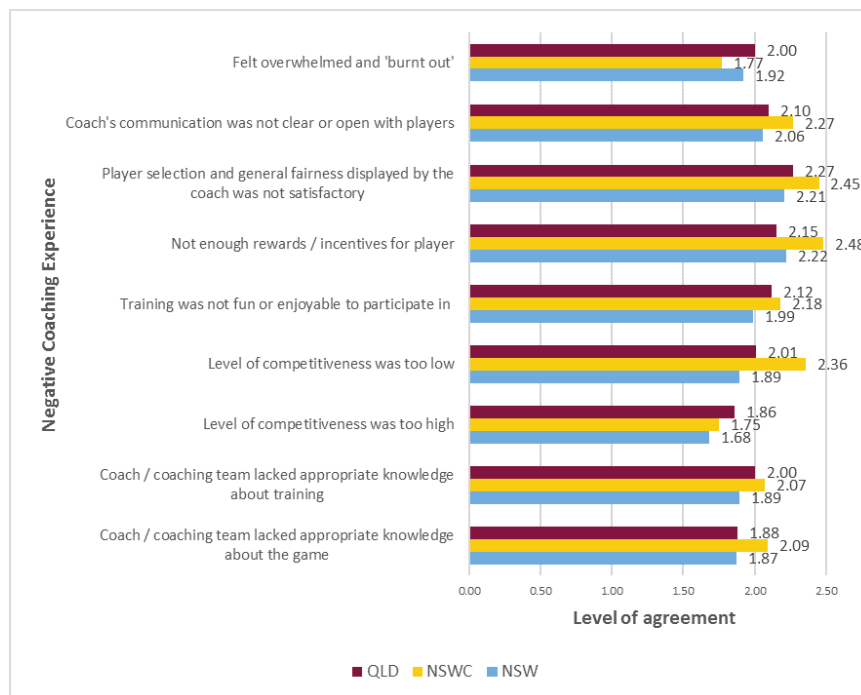
Figure 8.84   Comparison of regional responses to negative coaching experience items (Senior RL)

8.7.4.2. Combined club
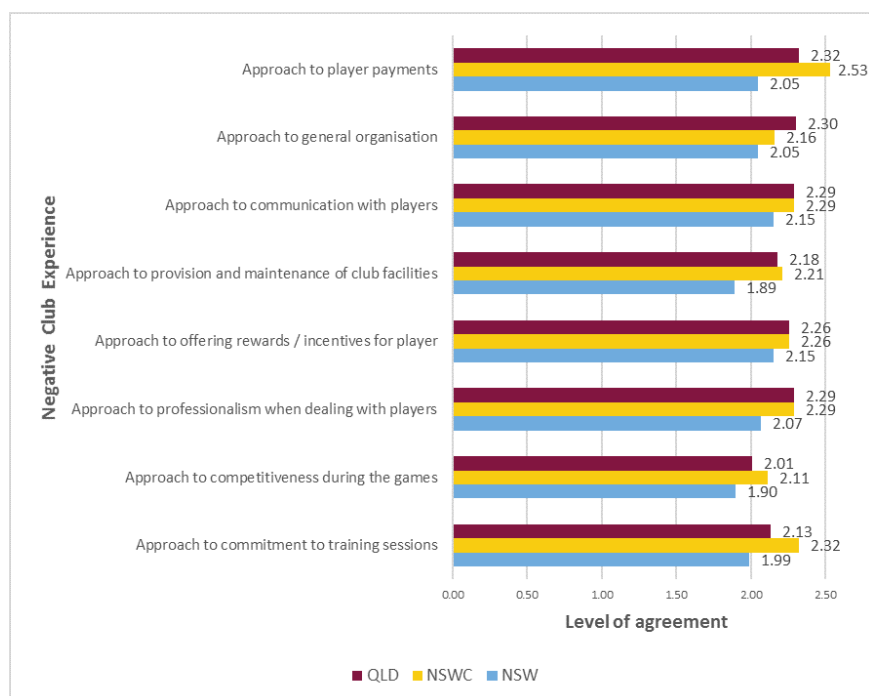
Figure 8.85   Comparison of regional responses to negative club experience items (Senior RL)

8.7.4.3. Combined playing
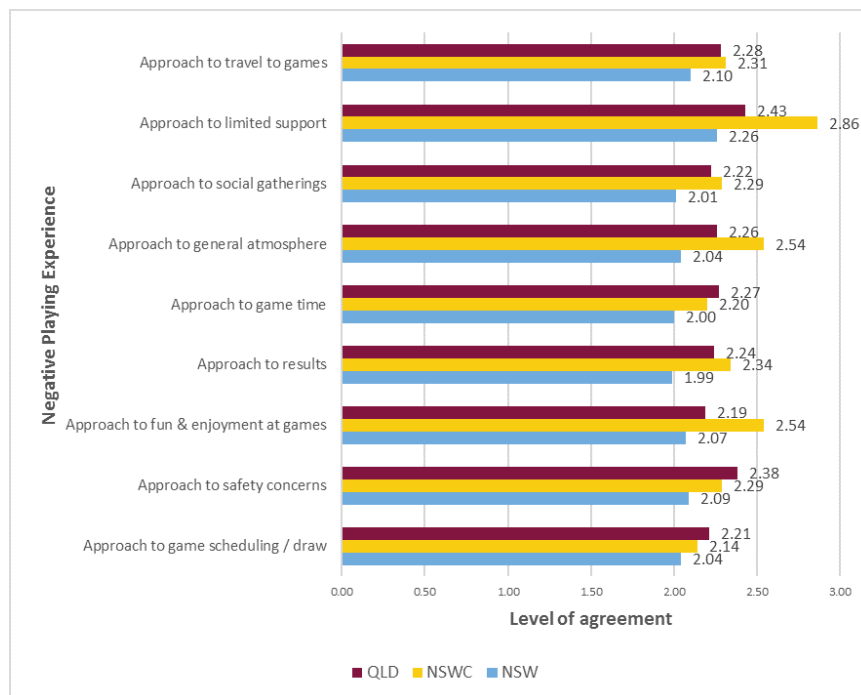
Figure 8.86   **Comparison of regional responses to negative playing experience items (Senior RL)**

8.7.4.4. Combined social
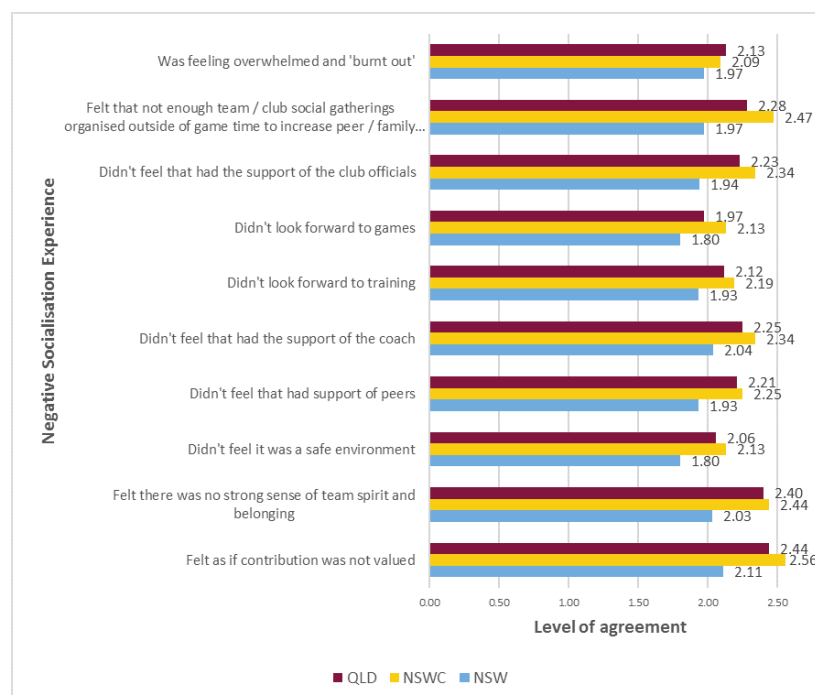
Figure 8.87   **Comparison of regional responses to negative socialisation experience items (Senior RL)**

8.8. Combined Report (Junior vs Senior)

8.8.1. Summary of results—combined

Six main patterns ($p < 0.05$–$p < 0.000$) which have emerged from the combined data (Junior vs Senior) are:

Invariably…

1. Senior RL players were more positive than Junior RL players about aspects of the four experiences.
2. Junior RL players were more negative than Senior RL players about aspects of the four experiences.
3. Male RL players were more negative than female RL players about aspects of the four experiences.
4. Players with more years of RL experience were more negative than others in relation to aspects of the coaching, playing and club.
5. Players with more years of RL experience were more positive than others in relation to aspects of the socialisation experience.
6. Socio economic status and ethnicity of players did not significantly impact on the four experiences.

*Patterns of results and associations are based on only representing the highest agreement level to each item (either positive or negative).

*Significance of associations are recorded between the $p <0.05$–$p < 0.000$.

*Data is represented in paragraph form and tables. It is important to note that section 8.9 is the data analysis based on the 'combined data', that is statistical analysis investigating patterns of associations between Senior and Junior groups against identified items.

Figure 8.88   **Player profile for combined (Junior and Senior)**

8.9. Four experiences—descriptive results - positive and negative responses

8.9.1. Coaching experience

8.9.1.1. Positive aspects of coaching experience

Participants rated *positive* aspects of the *coaching experience* most highly in terms of coaches demonstrating excellent knowledge of the game. They rated the coaching experience least highly in terms of coaches ensuring that player selection was fair and equitable. Senior RL players were more likely than Junior RL players to rate coaches highly as demonstrating excellent knowledge about training, ensuring an appropriate level of competitiveness, maintaining a fun and enjoyable training environment, or maintaining and encouraging clear and open communication with players. Male players were significantly less likely than female players to rate the coaching experience as demonstrating excellent knowledge about the training, ensuring an appropriate level of competitiveness. Players with more years of experience were less likely than others to rate player selection as fair and equitable. The positive aspects of coaching experience were not rated significantly differently by players from higher levels of SES or by players with one of four specific ethnic identities.

8.9.1.2. Negative aspects of coaching experience

Participants rated *negative* aspects of the *coaching experience* most highly in terms of coaches not ensuring that player selection was fair and equitable. They were least likely to give high negative ratings to the coach lacking appropriate knowledge about the game. Male players were more likely than female players to rate coaches as lacking appropriate knowledge about the game or training. Players with more years of RL experience were less likely than others to rate level of competitiveness too high. They were more likely to rate the rewards and incentives for players as too low, player selection and general fairness as not satisfactory, or the coach's communication with players as being not clear or open. The negative aspects of coaching experience were not rated significantly differently by players from higher levels of SES or by players with one of four specific ethnic identities.

8.9.2. Playing experience

8.9.2.1. Positive aspects of playing experience

Participants rated *positive* aspects of the *playing experience* most highly in terms of the games being fairly scheduled. They rated it least highly in terms of personal rewards/incentives for players. Senior RL players were more likely than Junior League players to rate the playing experience highly in terms of the games being fun and enjoyable, the results pleasing, the general atmosphere being positive, and social gatherings being well conducted. Male players were significantly less likely than female players to rate the playing experience highly in terms of the games being fun and enjoyable, the results pleasing or the personal rewards/incentives for players. Players with more years of RL experience were less likely than others rate the playing experience highly in terms of game scheduling/the draw being fair, personal rewards/incentives, or the general atmosphere being positive. Players from higher levels of SES were less likely than others to rate the playing experience highly in terms of the games being fun and enjoyable, the results being pleasing, the playing times being convenient, or the general atmosphere being positive. Players with one of four specific ethnic identities did not rate the positive aspects of playing experience significantly differently.

8.9.2.2. Negative aspects of playing experience

Participants rated *negative* aspects of the *playing experience* most highly in terms of the approach to limited support. They were least likely to rate the negative aspects of the playing experience highly in terms of the approach to results. Senior RL players were less likely than Junior RL players to give high negative ratings to the approach to game scheduling, fun and enjoyment at games, results, game time, the general atmosphere, social gathering. Male players were more likely than female players to give high ratings to the approach to safety concerns, fun and enjoyment at games, results, the general atmosphere, and social gatherings. Players with one of four specific ethnic identities were more like than others to give high ratings to the approach to results, and social gatherings. Players with more years of RL experience or from higher levels of SES did not rate negative aspects of the playing experience significantly differently.

8.9.3. Club experience

8.9.3.1. Positive aspects of club experience

Participants rated *positive* aspects of the *club experience* most highly in terms of commitment to training sessions and competitiveness during the game. They rated them least highly in terms of rewards/incentives for players. Senior RL players were more likely than Junior RL players to rate the club experience highly in terms of competitiveness during games. They were less likely than Junior RL players to rate the club experience highly in terms of commitment to training sessions and in terms of rewards/incentives for players. Male players were significantly less likely than female players to rate the club experience highly for professionalism when dealing with players, rewards/incentives for players, or communication with players. Players with more years of RL experience were more likely than others to rate competitiveness during the game highly. They were also less likely than others to rate rewards/incentives for players highly. The positive aspects of club experience were not rated significantly differently by players from higher levels of SES or by players with one of four specific ethnic identities.

8.9.3.2. Negative aspects of club experience

Participants rated *negative* aspects of the *club experience* most highly in terms of the approach to communication with players and the approach to general organisation. They rated it least highly in terms of the commitment to training sessions. Senior RL players were less likely than Junior RL players to give high ratings to the approach to competitiveness during the games, the approach to professionalism when dealing with players, the approach to provision and maintenance of club facilities, the approach to communication with players, or the approach to general organisation. Male players were more likely than female players to give high ratings to the approach to commitment to training sessions, the approach to competitiveness during games, the approach to professionalism when dealing with players, the approach to offering rewards/incentives for players, the approach to provision and maintenance of club facilities, and the approach to general organisation. Players with one of four specific ethnic identities were more likely than others to give high ratings to the approach to offering rewards/incentives for players and the approach to the provision and maintenance of club facilities. Players with more years of RL experience or from higher levels of SES did not rate the negative aspects of the club experience significantly differently.

8.9.4. Socialisation experience

8.9.4.1. Positive aspects of socialisation experience

Participants rated *positive* aspects of the *socialisation experience* most highly in terms of looking forward to game days. They rated it least highly in terms of feeling overwhelmed and burnt out. Senior RL players were more likely than Junior RL players to rate the socialisation experience highly in terms of support of the coach, support of club officials, looking forward to training and game days, enough team/club social gatherings organised outside of game time. Male players were significantly less likely than female players to rate the socialisation experience highly in terms of feeling a strong sense of team spirit and belonging, having the support of the coach and club officials, or looking forward to training and game days. Players with more years of experience were more likely than others to rate the socialisation experience highly in terms of contribution to team being valued, feeling a strong sense of team spirit and belonging, feeling that have support of

peers, looking forward to game days, feeling that enough team/club social gathering organised outside of game time to increase peer/family bonding. Players from higher SES postcodes were more likely than others to rate the socialisation experience highly in terms of feeling that enough team/club social gathering organised outside of game time to increase peer/family bonding. Players with one of four specific ethnic identities did not rate the positive aspects of socialisation experience significantly differently.

8.9.4.2. *Negative aspects of socialisation experience*

Participants rated *negative* aspects of the *socialisation experience* most highly in terms of feeling that contribution not valued, and feeling that no strong sense of team spirit and belonging. Participants rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience least highly in terms of feeling overwhelmed and burnt out. Senior RL players were less likely than Junior RL players to give high negative ratings to feeling that contribution not valued, feeling a lack of team spirit and belonging, not looking forward to training, not looking forward to games, not feeling that had support of club officials, not feeling that enough team/club social gatherings was organised outside of game time to increase family/peer bonding, or feeling burnt out. Male players were more likely than female players to give high ratings to feeling that contribution not valued, feeling a lack of team spirit and belonging, not feeling that it was a safe environment, not feeling that had the support of peers, not feeling that had support of coach, not looking forward to training, not looking forward to games, not feeling that had support of club officials, not feeling that enough team/club social gatherings organised outside of game time to increase family/peer bonding, or feeling burnt out. Players with more years of RL experience were less likely than others to give high ratings to not feeling it was a safe environment, not feeling that had support of peers, not looking forward to games, and not feeling that enough team/club social gathering outside of game increase the time for peer/family bonding. Players from higher levels of SES or those with four specific ethnic identities did not rate negative aspects of the socialisation experience significantly differently from others.

8.10. Four experiences – Coefficient matrix to give significance of relationships between Senior and Junior responses

Positive aspects of the coaching experience

As indicated in Table 8.7, on average, combined participant responses rated coaches most highly in terms of 'demonstrating excellent knowledge of the game'. They rated them least highly in terms 'ensuring that player selection was fair and equitable'. It can be assumed that RL players (across both Junior and Senior) maintain, that their experience with the coach, is highly favourable, in terms of agreeing that the coach has 'excellent knowledge about the game and training'. However, on a lower scale of agreement, across the combined data, is that RL players indicated a less association with agreement that the coach's player section was 'fair and equitable'.

Table 8.7   **Positive aspects of the coaching experience**

Combined player statistics	Mean	SD
Demonstrated excellent knowledge about the game	4.10	1.049
Demonstrated excellent knowledge about the training	4.00	1.087
Ensured an appropriate level of competitiveness	3.67	1.116
Maintained a fun and enjoyable training environment	3.63	1.166
Maintained and encouraged clear and open communication with players	3.61	1.172
Demonstrated a professional approach at all times	3.57	1.207
Ensured that player selection was fair and equitable	2.70	1.328

In Table 8.8, Senior RL players (when compared to Juniors) were more likely to rate coaches highly as 'demonstrating excellent knowledge about training' ($p < 0.02$), 'ensuring an appropriate level of competitiveness', 'maintaining a fun and enjoyable training environment', 'ensuring that player selection was equitable', and 'maintaining and encouraging clear and open communication with players'. Of importance, is a significant difference identified by Senior RL players concerning the coaching experience associated with, 'ensured an appropriate level of competitiveness' ($p < 0.000$) and 'maintained a fun and enjoyable training environment ($p < 0.000$). It can be assumed that the more Senior the player, the more likely they will differ to their Junior club members surrounding these two coaching experiences.

Table 8.8   **Items where Senior RL players rated positive aspects of coaching experience significantly differently**

Senior league players	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Demonstrated excellent knowledge about the training	.347*	0.025
Ensured an appropriate level of competitiveness	.382**	0.00
Maintained a fun and enjoyable training environment	.178**	0.00
Ensured that player selection was fair and equitable	.164**	0.002
Maintained and encouraged clear and open communication	.162**	0.003

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 8.9 indicates that combined participants responses, with more years of experience, were less likely (negatively significant) than others to agree that the coach 'maintained a fun and enjoyable training environment' ($p < 0.01$).

Table 8.9   **Items where players with more experience rated the coaching experience significantly differently**

Number of years played RL	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Maintained a fun and enjoyable training environment	-.151*	0.015

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

What is more, the seven positive aspects of coaching experience were not rated significantly differently by players from across levels of SES or by players with one of four specific ethnic identities. Therefore, it can be assumed that SES and ethnicity does not significantly impact on a player's positive coaching experience.

Negative aspects of the coaching experience

As indicated in Table 8.10, on average, combined participants responses rated coaches most highly in terms of 'not ensuring that player selection was fair and equitable'. They were least likely to give high negative ratings to the 'level of competitiveness being too low' or the coach 'lacking appropriate knowledge about the game and training'. It can be assumed that RL players (across both Junior and Senior) maintain, that their experience with the coach, is highly unfavourable, in terms of agreeing that the coach's 'player selection and general fairness is not satisfactory'. However, on a lower scale of agreement, across the combined data, is that RL players indicated a less association of agreement with the 'level of competitiveness was too low' and that the coach 'lacked appropriate knowledge about training and the game'.

Table 8.10   **Negative aspects of the coaching experience**

Combined player statistics	Mean	SD
Player selection and general fairness displayed by the coach was not satisfactory	3.92	1.374
Not enough rewards / incentives for player	3.88	1.186
Training was not fun or enjoyable to participate in	3.23	1.199
Coach's communication was not clear or open with players	2.20	1.189
Level of competitiveness was too high	2.16	1.162
Felt overwhelmed and 'burnt out'	2.05	1.057
Coach / coaching team lacked appropriate knowledge about training	2.02	1.114
Coach / coaching team lacked appropriate knowledge about the game	1.98	1.077
Level of competitiveness was too low	1.95	0.957

Table 8.11 indicates that Senior RL players were less likely than Junior RL players to rate coaches as 'lacking appropriate knowledge about the game ($p < 0.002$) or training' ($p < 0.004$), the level of competitiveness being too high ($p < 0.000$), training not being fun or enjoyable ($p < 0.000$), the rewards/incentives not being enough for players ($p < 0.03$), player selection and general fairness not being satisfactory ($p < 0.000$), coach communication not being clear or open ($p < 0.002$) and players feeling overwhelmed or burnt-out ($p < 0.003$). It can be assumed that Senior RL players significantly differed in agreement, to Junior players, when it comes to, 'training was not fun or enjoyable', that the 'level of competition was too high'.

Items where Senior RL players rated negative aspects of the coaching experience significantly differently

Senior League players	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Coach lacked appropriate knowledge about the game	-.065**	0.002
Coach lacked appropriate knowledge about training	-.060**	0.004
Level of competitiveness was too high	-.078**	0.00
Training was not fun or enjoyable to participate in	-.289**	0.00
Not enough rewards / incentives for player	-.044*	0.034
Player selection and fairness displayed by the coach was not satisfactory.	-.075**	0.00
Coach's communication was not clear or open with players	-.066**	0.002
Felt overwhelmed and 'burnt out'	-.063**	0.003

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In Table 8.12, players with more years of experience were less likely than others to rate 'level of competitiveness too high' ($p < 0.04$). They were more likely to rate the 'rewards and incentives for players as too low' ($p < 0.01$), 'player selection and general fairness as not satisfactory' ($p < 0.03$), and the 'coach's communication with players as being not clear or open' ($p < 0.04$). What is more, the seven negative aspects of coaching experience were not rated significantly differently by players from across levels of SES or by players with one of four specific ethnic identities. Therefore, it can be assumed that SES and ethnicity does not significantly impact on a player's negative coaching experience.

Table 8.12 **Items where players with more experience rated negative aspects of the coaching experience significantly differently**

Number of years played RL	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Level of competitiveness was too high	-.142*	0.043
Not enough rewards / incentives for player	.253*	0.01
Player selection and general fairness displayed by the coach was not satisfactory.	.244*	0.034
Coach's communication was not clear or open with players	.141*	0.049

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

8.10.1. Playing experience
Positive aspects of the playing experience

As indicated in Table 8.13, on average, combined participant responses rated the playing experience most highly in terms of the 'playing times were convenient' and 'game scheduling / draw was fair'. Players rated them least highly in terms of 'personal rewards/incentives for players' and 'safety of games'.

Table 8.13   **Positive aspects of the playing experience**

Statistics	Mean	SD
Playing times were convenient	3.93	0.88
Game scheduling / draw was fair	3.92	0.984
Results were pleasing	3.62	0.918
Games were fun and enjoyable	3.09	1.042
General atmosphere was positive	2.53	1.057
Social gatherings were well conducted	2.50	1.059
Games were safely conducted	2.48	1.02
Personal rewards / incentives	2.35	1.002

As indicated in Table 8.14, Senior RL players were more likely than Junior RL players to rate the playing experience highly in terms of the 'games being fun and enjoyable' ($p < 0.000$), the results pleasing, the general atmosphere being positive, and social gatherings being well conducted ($p < 0.000$). It can be assumed that the more Senior the player, the more likely they will differ to their Junior club members surrounding these playing experiences.

Table 8.14   **Items where Senior RL players rated positive aspects of playing experience significantly differently**

Senior League player	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Games were fun and enjoyable	.129**	0.00
Results were pleasing	.051*	0.028
General atmosphere was positive	.079**	0.001
Social gatherings were well conducted	.096**	0.00

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 8.15, players with more years of experience were less likely than others to rate the playing experience highly in terms of 'game scheduling/the draw being fair', 'personal rewards/incentives', or the 'general atmosphere being positive'. It can be assumed that the more years of RL involvement the more critical of the game scheduling, rewards and atmosphere occurs.

Table 8.15   **Items where RL players with more experience rated the playing experience significantly differently**

Number of years played RL	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Game scheduling / draw was fair	-.254*	0.02
Personal rewards / incentives	-.352*	0.024
General atmosphere was positive	-.252*	0.025

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 8.16, players from higher SES postcodes were less likely than others to rate the playing experience highly in terms of the games being fun and enjoyable, the results being pleasing, the playing times being convenient, or the general atmosphere being positive. It can be assumed that players from higher SES are more critical of the game's enjoyment levels, results, times and general atmosphere. What is more, the positive aspects of playing experience were not rated significantly differently by players with one of four specific ethnic identities.

Table 8.16   **Items where players from higher SES postcodes rated the playing experience significantly differently**

SES	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Games were fun and enjoyable	-.269**	0.003
Results were pleasing	-.173**	0.002
Playing times were convenient	-.046*	0.049
General atmosphere was positive	-.048*	0.037

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Negative aspects of the playing experience

As indicated in Table 8.17, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the playing experience most highly in terms of the 'approach to limited support'. They were least likely to rate the negative aspects of the playing experience highly in terms of the 'approach to results'.

Table 8.17   **Negative aspects of the playing experience**

Statistics	Mean	SD
Negative approach to limited support	3.19	1.269
Negative approach to fun & enjoyment at games	3.16	1.249
Negative approach to general atmosphere	3.00	1.179
Negative approach to travel commitments	2.31	1.109
Negative approach to game time	2.29	1.119
Negative approach to social gatherings	2.28	1.086
Negative approach to game scheduling / draw	2.21	1.092
Negative approach to results	2.21	1.036

As indicated in Table 8.18, Senior RL players were less likely than Junior RL players to give high ratings to the negative approach to game scheduling, fun and enjoyment at games, results, game time, the general atmosphere, safety concerns social gathering, and the limited support.

Table 8.18   Items where Senior RL players rated negative aspects of the playing experience significantly differently

Senior League player	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative approach to game scheduling / draw	-.059*	0.011
Negative approach to approach to safety concerns	-.171**	0.002
Negative approach to fun & enjoyment at games	-.129**	0.001
Negative approach to results	-.162**	0.007
Negative approach to game time	-.087**	0.001
Negative approach to general atmosphere	-.110**	0.001
Negative approach to social gatherings	-.096**	0.001
Negative approach to limited support	-.058*	0.012

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 8.19, players with one of four specific ethnic identities were more likely (positive association) than others to give high ratings to the negative approach to results, and social gatherings. What is more, the negative aspects of the playing experience were not rated significantly differently by players with more years of RL experience or by players from higher levels of SES.

Table 8.19   Players with one of four specific ethnic identities rated negative aspects of the playing experience significantly differently

Ethnic identity (2 groups)	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative approach to results	.048*	0.037
Negative approach to social gatherings	.046*	0.045

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

8.10.1.1. *Club experience*

Positive aspects of club experience

As indicated in Table 8.20, on average, participants rated the club experience most highly in terms of 'commitment to training sessions' and 'competitiveness during the game'. They rated them least highly in terms of 'rewards/incentives for players'. Note – there were significant differences between Junior and Senior groups concerning the item 'competitiveness during the game', with Junior RL players being more critical of this aspect of the game delivery.

Table 8.20   Positive aspects of the club experience

Statistics	Mean	SD
Commitment to training sessions	3.19	0.938
Competitiveness during the games	3.17	0.912
Provision and maintenance of club facilities	3.07	1.02
Professionalism when dealing with players	2.93	1.115
General organisation	2.91	1.089
Communication with players	2.88	1.001
Rewards / incentives for players	2.02	1.096

As indicated in Table 8.21, Senior RL players were more likely than Junior RL players to rate the club experience highly in terms of 'competitiveness during games' ($p < 0.001$). They were less likely than Junior league players to rate the club experience highly in terms of 'commitment to training sessions' ($p < 0.000$) and in terms of 'rewards/incentives for players' ($p < 0.001$).

Table 8.21   Items where Senior RL players rated positive aspects of club experience significantly differently

Senior League player	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Commitment to training sessions	-.184**	0.00
Competitiveness during the games	.074**	0.001
Rewards / incentives for players	-.272**	0.001

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 8.22, players with more years of experience were more likely than others to rate 'competitiveness during the game highly' ($p < 0.000$). They were also less likely than others to rate 'rewards/incentives for players highly' ($p < 0.010$). The positive aspects of club experience were not rated significantly differently by players from higher levels of SES or by players with one of four specific ethnic identities.

Table 8.22   Items where players with more experience rated the club experience significantly differently

Number of years played RL	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Competitiveness during the games	.181**	0.001
Rewards / incentives for players	-.258**	0.01

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Negative aspects of the club experience

As indicated in Table 8.23, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the club experience most highly in terms of the 'approach to communication with players' and its approach to 'general organisation'. They were least likely to rate the negative aspects of the club experience highly in terms of its 'approach to commitment to training sessions'.

Table 8.23   Negative aspects of the club experience

Statistics	Mean	SD
Negative approach to communication with players	3.90	1.217
Negative approach to general organisation	3.88	1.213
Negative approach to professionalism when dealing with players	3.25	1.213
Negative approach to offering rewards / incentives for players	3.22	1.121
Negative approach to competitiveness during the games	2.13	1.087
Negative approach to provision and maintenance of club facilities	2.09	1.046
Negative approach to commitment to training sessions	2.03	1.046

As indicated in Table 8.24, Senior RL players were less likely than Junior RL players to give high ratings to the negative approach to 'competitiveness during the games' ($p < 0.000$), the 'negative approach to professionalism when dealing with players' ($p < 0.009$), the 'negative approach to maintenance of club facilities' ($p < 0.003$), the 'negative approach to communication with players' ($p < 0.008$), or the 'negative approach to general organisation' ($p < 0.000$).

Table 8.24　　　　**Items where Senior RL players rated negative aspects of the club experience significantly differently**

Senior League player	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative approach to competitiveness during the games	-.103**	0.001
Negative approach to professionalism when dealing with players	-.258**	0.009
Negative approach to maintenance of club facilities	-.267**	0.003
Negative approach to communication with players	-.159**	0.008
Negative approach to general organisation	-.279**	0.001

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As indicated in Table 8.25, players with one of four specific ethnic identities were more likely than others to give high ratings to the negative approach to 'offering rewards/incentives for players' ($p < 0.043$) and the negative approach to the 'maintenance of club facilities' ($p < 0.023$). The negative aspects of the club experience were not rated significantly differently by players with more years of RL experience or by players from higher levels of SES.

Table 8.25　　　　**Items where players with one of four specific ethnic identities rated negative aspects of the club experience significantly differently**

Ethnic identity (2 groups)	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative approach to offering rewards / incentives for player	.145*	0.043
Negative approach to maintenance of club facilities	.150*	0.023

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

8.10.1.2.　*Socialisation experience*

Positive aspects of the socialisation experience

As indicated in Table 8.26, on average, participants rated the socialisation experience most highly in terms of looking forward to game days. They rated them least highly in terms of feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.

Table 8.26 **Positive aspects of the socialisation experience**

Statistics	Mean	SD
Looked forward to game days	3.83	1.054
Looked forward to training	3.64	1.102
Felt that they had support of the coach	3.59	1.259
Felt that they had support of peers	2.58	1.129
Felt that they had the support of the club officials	2.54	1.152
Felt a strong sense of team spirit and belonging	2.45	1.24
Felt as if contribution to the team was valued	2.02	1.218
Felt that enough team / club social gatherings organized outside of game time to increase peer / family bonding	2.00	1.171
Was feeling overwhelmed and 'burnt out'	1.40	1.144

As indicated in Table 8.27, Senior RL players were more likely than Junior RL players to rate the socialisation experience highly in terms of contribution to team being valued, a strong sense of team spirit and belonging, support of peers, support of the coach, support of club officials, looking forward to training and game days, enough team/club social gatherings organised outside of game time.

Table 8.27 **Items where Senior RL players rated positive aspects of socialisation experience significantly differently**

Senior League player	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Felt as if contribution to the team was valued	.205**	0.00
Felt a strong sense of team spirit and belonging	.201**	0.00
Felt that they had support of peers	.101**	0.00
Felt that they had support of the coach	.149*	0.039
Felt that they had the support of the club officials	.178**	0.001
Looked forward to training	.162**	0.009
Looked forward to game days	.241**	0.00
Felt that enough team / club social gatherings organized outside of game time to increase peer / family bonding	.248**	0.00

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As indicated in Table 8.28, male players were significantly less likely than female players to rate the socialisation experience highly in terms of feeling a strong sense of team spirit and belonging, having the support of the coach and club officials, or looking forward to training and game days.

Table 8.28   **Items where males rated positive aspects of the socialisation experience significantly differently**

Male players	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Felt a strong sense of team spirit and belonging	-.248*	0.044
Felt that they had support of the coach	-.254*	0.022
Felt that they had the support of the club officials	-.249*	0.04
Looked forward to training	-.270**	0.003
Looked forward to game days	-.263**	0.007

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As indicated in Table 8.29, players with more years of experience were more likely than others to rate the socialisation experience highly in terms of contribution to team being valued, feeling a strong sense of team spirit and belonging, feeling that have support of peers, looking forward to game days, feeling that enough team/club social gathering organised outside of game time to increase peer/family bonding.

Table 8.29   **Items where RL players with more experience rated the socialisation experience significantly differently**

Number of years played official club RL	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Felt as if contribution to the team was valued	.270**	0.003
Felt a strong sense of team spirit and belonging	.247*	0.046
Felt that they had support of peers	.289**	0.00
Looked forward to game days	.169**	0.003
Felt that enough team / club social gatherings organized outside of game time to increase peer / family bonding	.155*	0.019

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As indicated in Table 8.30, players from higher SES postcodes were more likely than others to rate the socialisation experience highly in terms of feeling that enough team/club social gathering organised outside of game time to increase peer/family bonding. Players with one of four specific ethnic identities did not rate the positive aspects of socialisation experience significantly differently.

Table 8.30   **Items where players from higher SES postcodes rated the socialisation experience significantly differently**

SES	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Felt that enough team / club social gatherings organized outside of game time to increase peer / family bonding	.252*	0.029

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Negative aspects of socialisation experience

As indicated in Table 8.31, on average, participants rated the negative aspects of the socialisation experience most highly in terms of feeling that contribution not valued, and feeling that no strong sense of team spirit and belonging. Participants rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience least highly in terms of feeling overwhelmed and burnt out.

Table 8.31   Negative aspects of the socialisation experience

Statistics	Mean	SD
Felt as if contribution was not valued	3.57	1.345
Felt there was no strong sense of team spirit and belonging	3.28	1.311
Felt that not enough team / club social gatherings organized outside of game time to increase peer / family bonding	2.47	1.152
Didn't feel it was a safe environment	2.37	1.078
Didn't feel that had the support of coach	2.36	1.307
Didn't feel that had support of peers	2.33	1.21
Didn't feel that had the support of the club officials	2.33	1.216
Didn't look forward to training	2.27	1.164
Didn't look forward to games	2.18	1.144
Was feeling overwhelmed and 'burnt out'	2.12	1.046

As indicated in Table 8.32, Senior RL players were less likely than Junior RL players to give high negative ratings to feeling as if contribution not valued, feeling a lack of team spirit and belonging, not feeling that it was a safe environment, not feeling that had the support of peers, not feeling that had support of coach, not looking forward to training, not looking forward to games, not feeling that had support of club officials, not feeling that enough team/club social gatherings organised outside of game time to increase family/peer bonding, or feeling burnt out.

Table 8.32   Items where Senior RL players rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience significantly differently

Senior League player	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Felt as if contribution was not valued	-.114**	0.00
Felt there was no strong sense of team spirit and belonging	-.130**	0.001
Didn't feel it was a safe environment	-.135**	0.00
Didn't feel that had support of peers	-.137**	0.00
Didn't feel that had the support of coach	-.103**	0.031
Didn't look forward to training	-.127**	0.001
Didn't look forward to games	-.144**	0.00
Didn't feel that had the support of the club officials	-.126**	0.00
Felt that not enough team / club social gatherings organized outside of game time to increase peer / family bonding	-.135**	0.00
Was feeling overwhelmed and 'burnt out'	-.068**	0.004

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As indicated in Table 8.33, male players were more likely than female players to give high negative ratings to feeling as if contribution not valued, feeling a lack of team spirit and belonging, not feeling that it was a safe environment, not feeling that had the support of peers, not feeling that had support of coach, not looking forward to training, not looking forward to games, not feeling that had support of club officials, not feeling that enough

team/club social gatherings organised outside of game time to increase family/peer bonding, or feeling burnt out.

Table 8.33 **Items where males rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience significantly differently**

Male players	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Felt as if contribution was not valued	.189**	0.00
Felt there was no strong sense of team spirit and belonging	.190**	0.00
Didn't feel it was a safe environment	.195**	0.00
Didn't feel that had support of peers	.160*	0.011
Didn't feel that had the support of coach	.179**	0.001
Didn't look forward to training	.185**	0.00
Didn't look forward to games	.173**	0.002
Didn't feel that had the support of the club officials	.163**	0.008
Felt that not enough team / club social gatherings organized outside of game time to increase peer / family bonding	.151*	0.029
Was feeling overwhelmed and 'burnt out'	.190**	0.00

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

As indicated in Table 8.34, players with more years of RL experience were less likely than others to give negative high ratings to not feeling it was a safe environment, not feeling that had support of peers, not looking forward to games, and not feeling that enough team/club social gathering outside of game increase the time for peer/family bonding. Players from higher levels of SES or those with four specific ethnic identities did not rate negative aspects of the socialisation experience significantly differently from others.

Table 8.34 **Items where players with more RL experience rated negative aspects of the socialisation experience significantly differently**

Number of years played official club RL	Spears rho	Sig. (2-tailed)
Didn't feel it was a safe environment	-.256*	0.018
Didn't feel that had support of peers	-.269**	0.003
Didn't look forward to games	-.249*	0.039
Felt that not enough team / club social gatherings organized outside of game time to increase peer / family bonding	-.263**	0.008

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed); * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

8.11. Qualitative—data analysis outcomes

8.11.1. Synopsis of conceptual framework —themes and domains

In keeping with Creswell's (2008) *Visual Model of the Coding Process in Qualitative Research*, a process of segmenting and labelling text to form descriptions and broad themes in the data was undertaken. Participants' commentaries were sorted based on the combined identified, ranked major player reasons for not returning to play in 2017 (a negative experience and fear of injury) and associated four experiences (coach, player, club and socialisation). The data will be analysed and present sub themes, giving a more direct and explicit understanding associated with each major theme.

As an extra layer of data interpretation, an example of individual participants' commentaries will be presented and matched to each major theme. Analysis of the data allowed for the ranking of participants' comments based on the number of 'hits' recorded for each term, thus allowing for thematic categorisation to unfold. From such an identified process, a pattern is presented, representing participants' thematic categories, by way of identifying associations between participants' comments (lived and witnessed experiences) and recommendations for improving the RL experience to improve retention rates.

The analysis of the qualitative data had two main aims, these being:

- In the first instance, a general overall (combined Junior and Senior RL players) data analysis will be done to present general themes from the qualitative data. Participants were asked to share their experiences (lived or witnessed) against the four experiences: *coaching*, *playing*, *club* and *socialisation*.

- Secondly, investigate, in more depth, the two main reasons why individual groups (Junior and Senior RL players) indicated *why they did not return to RL in 2017*. It was indicated that Juniors did not return in 2017 due to 'a negative experience' and Seniors was due mainly to 'injury or fear of injury'. Thematic coding will be applied to each of these two main reasons, presenting a selection of personal participants' commentaries.

8.11.2.   Aim 1—Four experiences and retention—Junior and Senior[24]

Table 8.35   *Coaching* **- Junior and Senior RL experience—Positive and negative responses to coaching knowledge of game and training and player selection**

	Theme	Participants' commentaries
Positive	Demonstrating excellent knowledge of the game and training	...it was very positive. The good thing about him is that he pushes you to the max so that we can put in the right amount of work in each training session.
		...every coach has been an amazing role model and made the game enjoyable.
		...coach was great and wouldn't be surprised if he coached on a professional level.
		...the coach was the best thing about playing in 2016. Very professional and knowledgeable about the game.
		...the coach was and is excellent in every way. The type of person that should be mirror imaged for future coaches.
		...excellent coaching staff. Knows the ins and outs of footy, picks up every common error that happens during game time. KNOWS how to teach and demonstrate the skills and techniques required to play footy.
		...the coaching was on the whole fair, professional and to the level expected for the competition.
		...my coaching experience was very good. My coach was a very experienced and passionate father of one of the players who had retired and put all of his energy into rugby league coaching both our team in a grade and a Junior team for the same club.
Negative	Player selection was not fair and equitable	...coach would only use star players and punish average players for not performing. If an average player did something wrong coach would not let them play the following week but would let star players punch someone and get rewarded by extra time and praise.
		...while playing I felt that the coach always had his favourites and I did not once get full game unless we had no subs.
		...our coach at Junior level loved to play his favourites which weren't always the best players. He was often influenced by others.
		...coach in his final year (last year) was great. before that, there was a tendency to run the more experienced (or better) players through the game to ensure a win.
		...got dropped for a player without fair reasoning behind it.
		...the club I played for did not take care of its players and were not interested in making team selections fair.
		...my coach was all about winning and picked bigger players and players of a certain ethnicity which he believed ensured him winning the games.
		...the coach failed to let anyone know what his plan was for the team. I was left out and other players of the club left out of semis without any communication as to why.

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[24] Junior and Senior RL players' 'lived experiences' were recorded together, against each positive and negative experience, as they were similar and uniformed in their responses against each item.

Table 8.36 *Playing* - **Junior and Senior RL experience—Positive and negative responses to game scheduling was fair and rewards for players.**

	Theme	Participants' commentaries
Positive	Games scheduling was fair	...the environment was positive and the draws made it easy to get to the games each week.
		...the NRL did a good job in organising the events and games for all so it was fair.
		...I felt that the draw made things a lot easier to get to the games on time.
		...the coach made sure that we played each team a number of times and at different fields which was good.
		...a good bunch of blokes that; looked after one another.
		...there was a feel that the scheduling of games was equal across the teams and shared the games.
		...the coach prepared us for the time scheduling and it was easy to get to games.
		...the times were great to play for the junior players.
Negative	Poor levels of rewards / incentives for players	...my son, and 10 others, did not return primarily because of all the politics within the club and league in general. They all enjoyed playing and we had a great year, again. But enough is enough from the [redacted for sensitivity], selectors biased, committee, rules, funds, etc. No incentives to return.
		...actually, spend the money on the Junior players not the committee.
		...I told the coach to quit or give the kids a fair go for the money they paid.
		...the Junior competition was disorganised, children were playing out of their age groups, no incentive for players to engage with sport.
		...put more funding into struggling bush clubs to help them survive against the bigger cashed up clubs maybe help with rego, etc. Need to look after the Grassroots more. Clubs are dying out here with not enough money.
		...the Juniors need more fun and incentives to keep the kids coming back each year.
		...a more modern facility for the Grand finals. No disrespect for the ground that has been used in the past or, previous great players and teams that have reached a pinnacle in their career.
		...more support for the outback players and teams that wish to play footy but find it hard in the cost and support area.

Table 8.37   _Club_ **- Junior and Senior RL experience—Positive and negative responses to commitment, competition and communication and organisation.**

	Theme	Participants' commentaries
Positive	Commitment to training	...the league needs to attend games and see how coaches and clubs are trying to drive a better learning experience for young players.
		...the coaching team was well organised and there was a nice buzz at training.
		...all the players were expected to wear a training uniform which gave the training a more professional feel and this helped encourage teams.
		...coach very passionate about seeing the kids do well.
	Competitiveness during the game	...was always a positive atmosphere. Would turn up to training with coaching staff already prepped and ready for the hour/hour and half training session.
		.... I loved the playing group and support staff including the manager and president.
		...when I am fit I can keep up with the game's pace.
		...I found the degree of playing okay.
Negative	Communication with players	.... negative. Club unsupportive with providing clear communication. Little assistance to coaches. Wasn't supportive to players wanting to play with mates from school.
		...the club committee (of which I was part of) was unfriendly and unwelcoming to both myself and the club president, therefore the environment was not conducive to our family wanting to be part of the club. There was no clear communication about games and training.
		...communication with the club was next to impossible. Has since improved but really made it hard.
		.... negative. Club unsupportive with providing clear communication. Little assistance to coaches. Wasn't supportive to players wanting to play with mates from school.
	General organisation	...the club is very old fashioned and needs a lot of change to bring it into the current ways of communication.
		...there was limited communication from the club to teams all year and everything was found out last minute.
		...no communication regarding alleged fraud committed by team manager not being dealt with.
		...games draw came out weekly which was very frustrating.
		...a few too many rumours were flying about regarding the committee and how money was handled. How stock was handled and how the club bar was run.

Table 8.38 *Socialisation* **- Junior and Senior RL experience—Positive and negative responses to looking forward to game, contribution and team spirit.**

	Theme	Participants' commentaries
Positive	Looking forward to the game	...very positive they bonded well enough to play in a grand final
		.... we have a good club and enjoy time spent with our teams and game and training.
		...loved the feeling of being part of the team and playing with my mates. loved game day and training.
		...club experience was always a good atmosphere to be in and motivated me for the game.
		...the coach and team had a great attitude and we all turned up for games and training.
		...the club was always supportive of its players.
		...game day was great to be part of.
		...game days were always well run and made it a nice environment and experience for players and their family—a nice family atmosphere at our club.
Negative	Feeling that their contribution not valued	...social gatherings—are you kidding!!! This is a Junior rugby league club and the only social gathering is held for the 'old boys' to get drunk at the trivia night. There are no social gatherings that involve Juniors.
		.... club turned into a win at all costs club—lost the local family environment.
		...there wasn't any social gathering that I was invited to? Our team that went to finals was a div1 team the year before that played in div 2, not sure if that was fair.
		...there was little team spirit and encouragement around the club house, it was almost as if we were all defeated and just waiting till the end of the season.
	No strong sense of team spirit	.... other parents contributed to poor perception of female players—telling their boys that they ran/played like a girl in earshot of female players.
		.... there were not any organised gatherings other than presentation from the [redacted for sensitivity] club, parents and coach organised a dinner together after training when the boys made the finals.
		...only social event organised for the Junior players was presentation day.
		...no support or encouragement for those learning.
		.... other parents contributed to poor perception of female players—telling their boys that they ran/played like a girl in earshot of female players.

8.11.3. Aim 2—main reason why Junior players did not return in 2017[25]

Theme: 'a negative experience' (25%) ⇨Sub-themes: 1. Favouritism, 2. Weight differences.

Table 8.39   Junior RL experience—Negative responses and sub-themes

		Participants' commentaries
Negative Sub-theme	**1. Favouritism (Hits > 150)**	...try to keep parents and officials pushing their own agendas and realise most kids are there for fun.... most of these kids will not make professional levels.
		...the ball always seemed to be passed to the same selected kids each week. My child could go weeks without touching the ball. This gets boring for a young boy.
		...trainer "ruled the roost" of who went where, and primarily "looked after his boys" rather than creating a team.
		...many talented players in the region, that are not getting the right opportunity to develop. I see very over confident children being developed, but many talented children are being bypassed in our region.
		...I found that it wasn't our coach the problem but other coaches from same age group that were picking and choosing their players for the best team before grading is even done. It should be a fun learning experience at a young age and the competitiveness should come later on at an older age group. This is why coaches should not pick their A team at Under 8's, 9's, etc.
		...the coach only focused on four main players, would have 14yr players sitting on bench and play up 13yr when there was clearly enough 14yr players to take to field. The strongest players got more game time.
		...while playing I felt that the coach always had his favourite and I did not once get full game unless we had no subs.
		...felt that the coach did not give players a fair go. Always picked favourites.
	2. Weight difference (Hits >150)	...tattooed [redacted for sensitivity] over 100kg playing under 15s. Birth certificates are done the day of the christening and kids are up to two years older in real age. This size difference lead to my neck injury from a player throwing me back onto my head and neck.
		...my boy is small and even now he was talented he was sick of being smashed by larger kids .... wake up NRL and start weight for age.
		...there were a few games where the mismatch in player sizes had a detrimental effect on the enjoyment of the game. In some matches the opposition players (in under 11s) were more than twice the size of our team.
		…the aim of the game seems to be to tackle as hard as you can and parents cheer when a kid gets hurt. The sport has changed to be a weight game and the smaller kids can't complete with kids twice their body weight.

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[25] Junior and Senior RL players' 'lived experiences' were separated due to each group having specific and differing reasons that significantly impacted on their reasons for not returning to play RL in 2017

Participants' commentaries
…my son wanted to play socially in Division 2 but not enough teams in the comp so they often played Division 1 teams so was not a level playing field. Also, he is very small build so was constantly up against boys same age that were much, much bigger. This was not enjoyable for him plus as a parent we had safety concerns.
…as said earlier my son now plays Aussie rules. The game is far better thought out. No contact at the younger groups with the field broken down to ensure the kids learn skills. Your Junior game teaches fast kids to run sideways and big kids to run over smaller ones. No one is learning and useful skills and it is flat out dangerous. To be frank, based in what I have seen between the Jnr levels of the two codes, league is not going to be around in 20 years. The risk of concussion to a developing brain is not being addressed while the Aussie rules as developed a game that addresses this while teaching skills. Let me be clear, I HATE Aussie rules but I'm not about to watch my children play a game designed for men that has not been modified at all to address the massive risks to their safety.
...my son was still learning the game, getting confidence to tackle and run the ball. Instead he was getting trampled and smashed. Experience and weight division. If league is to retain players, it's a MUST !!! Still play for fun and no points. My son loves Rugby League but won't play again for the fear of getting hurt. PS. He plays soccer now against players his own ability and loves it.
...my son was too small to compete against the larger boys. It's a shame because he really loved the game and there are no modifications done for him and other boys of similar weight and size.

8.11.4. Aim 1—main reason why Senior players did not return in 2017

Theme: 'injury / fear of injury' (30%) Sub-themes ⇨1. Injuries Cause Retirement

Table 8.40   Senior RL experience—Negative responses to INJURIES and sub-themes

		Participants' commentaries
Negative Sub-theme	**Injury / fear of injury: retirement (Hits > 150)**	...concussions, love the game but unfortunately had to stop for fear of serious head injury, after having 10 concussions within four years.
		...the only reason he did not return to play is that he required surgery related to an injury to his tackle shoulder and was medically advised to no longer play. His team mates and coach were like mates to him. He learnt excellent football skills and his skills improved with every game.
		...season ending knee injury (ACL) which required major surgery and six months off work. Work advised him that if he played again and got hurt job would be lost. I would have played again if there was income protection in the insurances
		...I have had to retire early as I have accumulated too many concussions and after seeing a sports neurologist I have decided it's in my families' interests to not okay again.
		...it was the first year I've ever played rugby league in my life. I unfortunately lost my footing and had a head clash that fractured my cheek bone and eye socket. As a result, I couldn't work for two months. I wish I never took that hit up.
		...I would like to be uninjured after snapping the ACL in both my knees. I would also like to change the younger grades; especially in my town called Roma there has been a lack of support for the younger grades, which is of no fault of the clubs but from scared parents.
		...during my second game of the season, I got flopped on and dislodged my SC joint from the socket. Leaving me in rehab for three months, after this injury I decided to not play the rest of the season and return to rugby union the following year.
		...I need to look after my job and I was injured at training, so I did not return in 2017.

9.0   Recommendations

From the data, player and retention motivation profiles emerge. From such profiles, recommendations can be proposed. However, it should be identified that such data are describing patterns of associations and that for a more 'wholistic' approach, both data sets (qualitative and quantitative) should be taken into account. To minimise the subjectivity of the interpretation of the data, a number of data collection approaches have been implemented across groups, hence minimising biases and heightening the rigour of the research approach, findings and subsequent recommendations. Of particular note, this research and its findings, mirror other similar research concerning player retention motivations in sport. To a large extent, the lack of positive experiences associated with sport can explain the exodus from organized sport at such a critical juncture in childhood (Bailey, Hillman, Arent & Petitpas, 2013). Specific findings from this research, and similarities to past investigations, exist around a number of common motivational elements as to why players terminate active participation in a sport. These commonalities being due to 1) a negative experience/s and 2) injury (Coakley, 2004). Furthermore, it is understood that when players end their active participation in one sport, they often initiate participation in another – one that is more or less competitive (Coakley, 2004). Such findings and statements give further interpretation to the patterns of associations identified in this research report, especially between groups (Junior vs Senior).

Due to the nature of this type of research (retention motivations) a player does not necessarily leave a game due to just one negative experience. It can be indicated that there are a number of negative experiences, that combined, influences the players' decision – retention motivations. The findings have identified the top three reasons and a number of key negative experiences specific to each groups' (Junior and Senior) experience/s in 2016. It can be concluded that these combinations consistently present themselves as key findings throughout this study and have are represented as the most significant relationships. With this said, the data sets reliably bring forth a number of key findings, presenting 'patterns of associations', providing a platform for recommendations.

There are eleven identified recommendatiosn that have come from the data. Recommendations are based on the research findings and are designed to address each of the four player experiences, that are across: *coaching*, *playing, club* and *socialisation*. Specifically, and in relation to this research report, improving retention rates and determining why players leave the game, requires a concerted multifaceted approach and will focus on a number of important player retention motivational elements, these being:

1. **Individual characteristics**—age (related expectations), gender, life transitional phases

2. **Performance factors** —coaching and playing experiences,

3. **Social identity**—prestige and social status,

4. **Social setting** —socialisation experiences, club setting and characteristics.

9.1. Coaching experience

9.1.1. Recommendation 1 – *Favouritism*

Participants noted highly their negative agreement levels associated with 'player selection being fair and equitable'. Qualitative data, for top responses, indicates that 'Favouritism' was the top theme of concern for Juniors.

- Player selection needs uniformity across the clubs. Policy design and implementation at the club level needs further investigation concerning the fair and equitable player selection—based on long term player development rather than short term game competition and results.

- More research to investigate strategies to heighten player selection based on fairness and equity.

9.1.2. Recommendation 2 – *Rewards and Incentives*

In respects to the players' coaching experience, there was a common agreement that their coaches displayed excellent knowledge about the game and training. However, there was a common lower level of agreement, associated with the coach's 'rewards and incentives for players'.

- Build on existing 'good practice' associated with coaching knowledge about the game and training techniques.

- Create communication platforms that share RL coach's 'best practice'—what works and what does not. Tailored for Junior and Senior players.

- Create a shared common mechanism to ensure that coaches practice fairness and equity concerning player selection. What does it look like and how to implement across RL clubs?

The lack of personal player rewards and incentives was a frequent experience expressed across the two groups. It would be highly advantageous for RL to invest in more frequent incentives and rewards for various aspects of the game, that is, training, competition, end of year progress and so on. This key retention motivation was significant in its level of agreement across the two groups. Such a pattern of response from participants, concerning this item, goes to re-enforce the theoretical basis of claim concerning the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS). To increase player retention rates and player transition, it is recommended that, at the individual club level, there is a concentrated effort / attempt to implement a system of rewards and incentives for player performance (both in training and game). Such an approach and design framework need to give consideration to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational aspects (see section 4.3 – The Sport Motivational Scale, page 17).

More research is required to determine what types and frequency of rewards and incentives would be welcomed across the two groups and divisions. A move to implement a tailored and structured reward program for players, officials and administration in recognition of players' abilities, commitment and administrative roles throughout the various club levels.

9.1.3. Recommendation 3 – *Fun Factor*

There is a significant difference identified between Senior league players compared to Junior players concerning their coaching experience. Senior players indicated, more

positively than Juniors, that their coaches ensured an appropriate level of competitiveness ($p < 0.000$) and maintained a fun and enjoyable training environment ($p < 0.000$). It was further noted, from combined participants responses, that players with more years of player experience (more than 4 years), were less likely (negatively significant) than others to agree that the coach maintained a fun and enjoyable training environment ($p < 0.01$). What is more, Senior players being less likely (negative association) than Junior league players to rate coaches differently across numerous aspects of the game, ranging from lacking appropriate knowledge about the game ($p < 0.002$) through to coach's communication with players as being not clear or open ($p < 0.04$).

- Recognise that there is a difference between Junior and Senior RL players expressed needs concerning certain aspects of the game—one approach does not fit all.

- Ensure that Junior training and competition are structured and delivered at levels that cater to all players' skill abilities, interests and physical maturation.

- Ensure that there is an added emphasis in Junior training environments that are based on fun, engagement and inclusivity. Data indicated a significant relationship between the 'fun factor' and Junior retention motivations. There is an abundant amount of literature that supports the approach to increasing / sustaining Junior participation in sport through heightening fun and enjoyment at training and games.

- Develop a shared, common platform which identifies training and game initiatives that heighten fun, engagement and inclusivity in Junior club experiences.

- Recognise that the longer a player stays in the game, the more likely he / she will be less likely to agree that the training is fun and enjoyable (more critical). A need to ensure that training techniques and environments are new and innovative, rather than repetitive in delivery across the continuous year levels.

- More research to investigate and identify what constitutes favourable Junior and Senior training and playing environments so as to ensure sustainable retention rates.

9.2.   Playing experience

9.2.1.   Recommendation 4 – *Player Weight and Injury Surveillance*
In respects to players' playing experiences, the common agreement across both Junior and Senior cohorts indicated that they thought that game scheduling / draw was fair. There is a lower agreement across both Junior and Senior players concerning 'high degree of support for players'. Qualitative data, for top responses, indicates that 'Weight Differences' were the top themes of concern for Juniors and 'Injuries Cause Retirement' was the top theme of concern for Seniors.

- Increase support for players of all ages and abilities (financially or club).

- Programs that are adjusted in terms of their degree of contact and intensity required to participate.

- Players have the option to play into a variety of modified games, with rules, playing field dimensions and level of contact and intensity adapted to cater to differing player physical capabilities and interests.

- Player weight taken into consideration, especially in the Junior teams. Introduce weight restrictions and cut offs for each year level.

- Options available for Junior players to play lower grades if birth date falls within a last quarter of the year.

- More time invested in ensuring that players have been given adequate skill development (e.g., tackling) and physical fitness specific to rugby league.

- Investigate how other sporting codes address the issue of player weight and age.

- More research to investigate the type and how injuries occurred in RL. Evidence can inform better coaching practices—technique and match fitness—creation of a RL database to record and track player injuries.

- High-quality injury surveillance information is crucial. Future advances in injury prevention will only be achieved if research efforts are directed towards understanding the implementation context for injury prevention, as well as continuing to build the evidence base for their efficacy and effectiveness of interventions. All reported injuries, should include information on key implementation factors, such as recording the rate of uptake of the interventions being tested, including reasons for use/non-use.

9.3. Club experience

9.3.1. Recommendation 5 – *Communication and Contribution*
There is strong positive agreement across both Junior and Senior players concerning the club's commitment to training sessions and competitiveness during the game. However, there was a lower agreement across both Junior and Senior RL players concerning the level of 'player support', 'contribution not valued', 'communication with players' and 'general organisation'.

- It is recommended that clubs organise and implement a more committed approach to communication with players of all ages.

- It is envisaged that by implementing a more transparent and committed approach to 'communication', that other aspects of the club experience could be heightened, that is flow on effects to player support and contributions being felt as valued amongst players.

- More research will be required to determine what platform/s would best serve communication requirements across the differing groups and levels. Investing more resources to ensure heighten communication with players is seen as an important strategy for ensuring organisation and attendance. Exploring digital tools for player communication would prove advantageous.

9.3.2. Recommendation 6 – *Level of Competition*
There is a significant difference identified between Senior RL players compared to Junior RL players concerning their club experience. Senior players indicated a more positive association with the competitiveness during games ($p < 0.001$) when compared to that of the Junior players' experiences. There was also noted differences between Senior and Junior player when it came to the general approach to competitiveness, with Juniors indicating that it was to high and was a negative experience.

- ▪ Ensure that Junior games are conducted with appropriate age-related competitiveness.

- ▪ A view to design and implement modified games and rules to reduce competitive nature in game, especially for Junior players. Offering a variety of intensity levels that are scaffolded in nature and complexity.

9.4.   Socialisation experience

9.4.1.   Recommendation 7 – *Building Social Identity*

There is strong agreement across both Junior and Senior RL players concerning the socialisation experience of looking forward to game days, looking forward to training. However, they rated least highly in agreement concerning feeling overwhelmed and burnt out and that they felt enough 'team / social gatherings organised outside game'. Data suggests that players feel that the team spirit is lacking in many occasions and that there were not enough social gatherings outside of games. Given that players join sporting clubs for a myriad of reasons (social/career player), it would be advantageous for clubs to invest more in creating a more club/team spirit around social gatherings. Players join sporting clubs based on: *Social identity—prestige and social status*, and *Social setting— socialisation, setting and characteristics*.

- ▪ More research needed at the club and team level to determine and tailor social events that would height social networks.

9.4.2.   Recommendation 8 – *Heightening Team Spirit*

There is a significant difference identified between Senior RL players compared to Junior RL players concerning their socialisation experience. Senior players indicated a more positive association with the below socialisation experiences when compared to Junior players concerning, contribution to team being valued ($p < 0.000$), a strong sense of team spirit and belonging ($p < 0.000$), looking forward to training and game days ($p < 0.000$) and enough team/club social gatherings outside of game time ($p < 0.000$). Interestingly, both groups indicated a significant ($p<0.000$) positive association with the negative level of feeling that their contribution was not being valued.

- ▪ At the club level, there is a need to establish various approaches to heightening team spirit and socialisation throughout the differing Junior and Senior groups— one approach does not fit all.

- ▪ Platforms and initiatives that create transparency and avenues to contribute to overall club planning and other game related activities (player selection policies, grievances, training and game days etc.).

- ▪ Invest in designing strategies which assist Junior players' team and clubs to implement tailored programs to address youth engagement.

- ▪ Marketing of Junior RL involvement needs to designed to emphasis a sense of 'belonging', team work and participation, rather than competition for elite players.

9.4.3.   Recommendation 9 – *Utilising Experienced Players*

Players with more years of experience were more likely than others to rate the socialisation experience highly across the majority of variables. Players from higher SES postcodes were also more likely than others to rate the socialisation experience highly in terms across many of the same variables.

- Players who have been in the game for longer would be expected to have built social networks throughout the team and club. A strategy could be to encourage long term members of clubs to become more involved in recruitment activities and organising social bonding and events outside of game time.

10.0   Discussion

10.1.   Summary of data findings

The purpose of this study was to understand RL players' retention motivations, that is, why individual players in the RL (Junior vs Seniors) chose to leave the game and not return to play RL in 2017. In its simplest form, to understand retention rates, there are two questions to address, these being: 1) What influences players to remain in the game and 2) What influences players to leave the game. Once such questions are understood, RL will be in a better, more informed position, to tailor future strategies to support and address individual retention motivations and rates.

For this report undertaking, the influences (four experiences) that impact on a player's decision to not return to the game is under investigation. To assist in the interpretation of data findings, a theoretical basis of claim was made, with this being aimed at interpreting an individual player's motivation to engage in the RL from a Social / Symbolic Interactionist Theory (SIT) and the Sport Motivation Scale (SMS) - motivational (intrinsic / extrinsic) perspective. What is more, this study defined motivation levels as key reasons players give to explain why they discontinued / disengaged with RL. This study has found that players' motivation to not return to the game in 2017, arises from links (or interactions) between the:

- *individual characteristics of the player* (e.g., age, division, experience, number of years played and negatives associated with four experiences),
- *social identity* they derive from the game (e.g., prestige, status, rewards),
- *social setting* in which they act (e.g., socialisation, club organizational characteristics, sense of community and team spirit).

The breadth and depth to which these variables impact on an individual player is dependent on his / her age, gender and number of years involved in the RL.

11.0   Conclusion

11.1.   Investigating RL player experiences and retention rates

Internationally and nationally, research has focused on player development and participation through sport with an emphasis on the social objectives achieved through physical activity (Nichols, 2004). Others have examined the development of sport and its applications to elite athlete development (Thibault & Babiak, 2005). The resulting efforts have provided significant insight but have been ad hoc insomuch as sport development has so far lacked a theoretical framework. This lack of (empirically based) theory has also impeded the progress of sport development research.

With this said, it is recognised that at the highest level, there is a need for RL to understand what player experiences contribute to, by way of an individual's decision to remain an active member of the game. In addition, at a more discrete level, there is a need to broaden RL's understanding of the interrelated issues that shape its landscape, by differentiating between populations studied (e.g., Junior vs Senior, male vs. female, years of RL experience), the fluctuating life demands of RL players (e.g., Junior and Senior life

transitional phases) Figure 11.1, and the level of impact and realities that such personal experiences as: *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation* have on urban versus rural environments, socio-economic status (SES), differing state bodies and affiliations and cultural / ethnic differences.
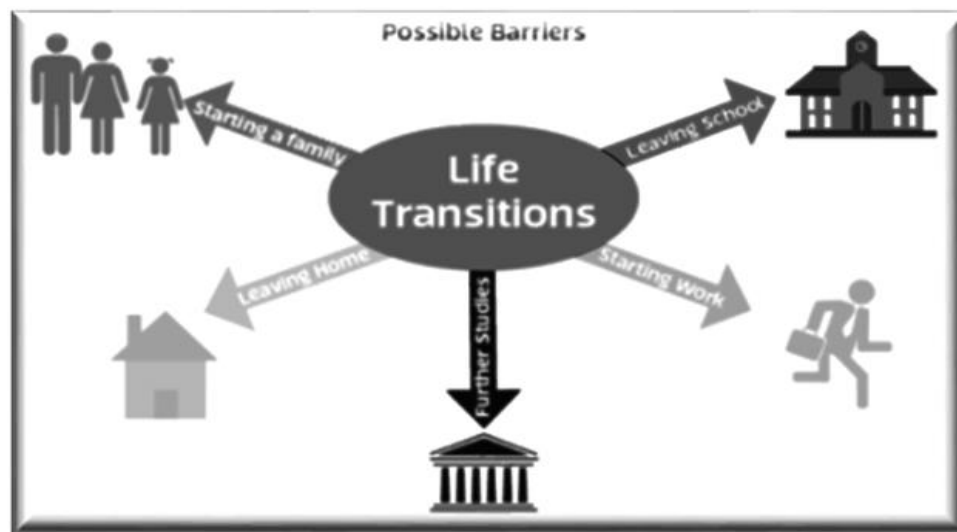

Figure 11.1 **Life transitional barriers**

Whilst improving player recruitment and supporting various transitional stages, throughout the RL landscape is considered paramount, there is an additional need to explore aspects of player retention rates, by way of identifying why players fail to continue their involvement and what may entice them to develop a long-term commitment to the game (retention motivations). To assist in such a research approach and aim, this study employed a mixed methods approach to examine Junior and Senior RL players' retention rates and motivations (2016–17). It aimed to investigate the factors contributing to initial and sustained engagement with RL, as well as the reasons why players disengage with the game. Two nationwide online surveys were developed, consisting of specific questions aimed at understanding Junior ($n = 1804$) and Senior ($n = 506$) RL players' 'lived experiences' that were seen to be associated with their decision to not return to the game in 2017.

A number of important findings (quantitative and qualitative) and subsequent recommendations have emerged from the data, which are directly related to a player's age, stage of development and life transitional phases. What is more, findings suggest that there are a number of critical points and identified player experiences where disengagement with RL occurs. This research raised two critical questions:

1. ….is Australia witnessing a shift away from RL (especially with juniors) in terms of retention rates? and

2. …will this have an impact on the way in which the game is perceived as being an integral part of its national identity into the 21st century? [26]

A possible underlining reason for fluctuating retention rates could be in relation to the increasing popularity of other sporting codes, which are potentially proving a significant barrier in the retention of players in the RL – this could especially be the case for many

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[26] Reference and alignment with Australian Sporting Commission – in relation to Australia's National Sporting Organisations.

junior (grassroots) players who have indicated that 'player selection', 'contribution not valued', 'fear of injury', 'favouritism' and 'weight differences' cause them to look elsewhere for sport involvement.

It has been clearly identified, that whilst there are a number of immediate strategies RL can commence with, to address retention motivations, there are certain facets of the game and data findings that will be out of the control and reach of the NRL (i.e., individual player transitional life phases: relocations; heightened and fluctuating study, work, and family commitments). However, with this said, there is also an opportunity for the game to implement positive changes targeted towards addressing a number of the major, identified reasons why participants and families are choosing to leave the game.

This research and its findings acknowledges that sports and the discourses that constitute them, have become one of the more influential narratives in twenty first century culture. Specifically, this report is concerned with giving meaning to and understanding the multifaceted processes and influences that contribute to the phenomenon under investigation, that is RL's retention motivations.

11.2.   Concluding comments

In order to improve retention motivations and subsequent rates, in the game, there is a need for RL clubs to give consideration to findings and recommendations that have come out of this report. Participants, in this research, have indicated overwhelmingly that the culture and climate of the game (esp. Juniors) needs to be improved, across a number of experiences, so as to ensure that the game continues to thrive at the grassroots. Looking across the data sets, to a large extent, findings could be interpreted to indicate that RL is / has created (ing) a culture that is ensuring that the more skilful player (size, speed, age etc.) is being mentored and favoured. Additionally, it is being viewed that the club environment is predominately less conducive / supportive to ensuring player participation and more focussed on delivering a high level of competition and game results. This approach is perhaps heightened by attempts to emulate the top end elite RL players and coaching role models of the game.

To a large extent, this report and its findings are supported by the identified theoretical basis of claims, ascertaining that a player's decision to not return to play RL (2017) was largely influenced and based on such retention motivations as fairness, social interaction, fun, a sense of belonging and differing intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. Based on these findings, it would be reasonable to suggest that RL needs to invest in a more concentrated effort around aspects of the game, that are more focused on social engagement and cater to individual motivations (especially in Junior groups), rather than solely aimed at ensuring high level of competition and game results. The latter approach will not encourage or sustain player retention at the grassroots, nor, given the increased competitive market, ensure future player recruitment and growth into the 21st century.

It is anticipated that the results of this research will help to inform the future development of RL's short and long-term strategic approach to improve players' recruitment, transition and retention rates. Of importance, are findings from this research report which will provide a map of RL's retention rates as it currently stands, and allow for the identification of the most appropriate ways to proceed in attempting to encourage the development of a nationwide action plan to address player retention rates. What is more, findings from this study, can be applied to identify and tailor practical measures that could

be implemented to specifically address players' experiences associated with: *coaching*, *club*, *playing* and *socialisation* factors. In so doing, it would be possible to substantially reduce the rate of rejection of potential strategies, programs and policy implementation, and save resources from being wasted in areas where the data makes it clear that a certain group would be unlikely to benefit. It would also identify which actions would be deemed more appropriate to undertake and would facilitate a greater awareness and confidence in individual stakeholders and ultimately allow for a more effective and efficient engagement with Australia's Junior and Senior RL players. This will ultimately go towards facilitating better communication and practices and will offer the greatest possible scope in pursuing excellence in delivering and achieving RL's Vision, Mission and initiatives across Australia.

Presently, data suggests, that, at the club / game level, RL is narrowly focused on short term results (fielding the most skilled players) to the detriment of long term gains (player development and retention)—this is specifically identified in the Conceptual Model below (Figure 11.2). In the immediate, and a possible springboard for implementing change, it is an endorsement from this report that consideration be given to additionally exploring the feasibility of designing and implementing a further action plan/s concerning the nine recommendations.

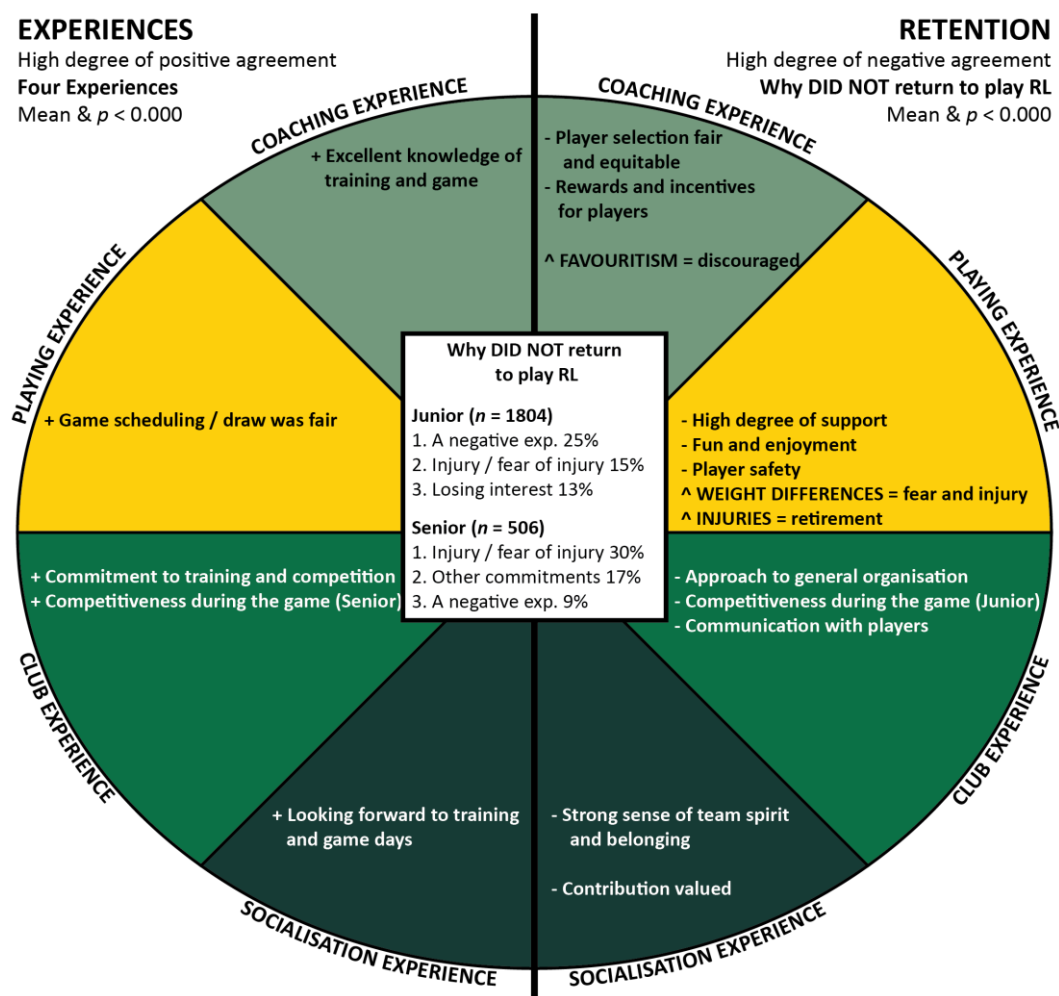**Figure 11.2**   Conceptual Model—combined (Junior [*n* = 1804] and Senior [*n* = 506] [*N* = 2310])—levels of agreement against four experiences (left sphere) and why players did not return to play RL in 2017 (right sphere).

Representing a significant ($p < 0.000$) association with high level of agreement and high (+) / low (-) Mean.

+ indicates positively associates with agreement level (positive or negative) ^ Main themes

In closing, the National Rugby League (NRL) has a Vision to become, "The Greatest Game of All", and a Mission and Key Priority, "To bring people together for the best sports and entertainment experience". To achieve such a Vision, Mission and Key Priority, and to ensure the broadest level of participation and performance excellence, it is a recommendation from this report, that RL invests in a new model of engagement, ensuring that the future approach is based on supporting players of all ages, skill levels, genders, expectations (social and playing) and differing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational needs. The findings from this report clearly aligns with RL's future directions.

This research report adds to the body of literature on player retention and will enable strategies to be developed in order to retain players in RL.

Appendix A   NRL sporting schools' programs

EARLY CHILD CARE

Munchkin League

https://playnrl.com/munchkin-league

Munchkin League is a new and exciting Early Childhood Development Program. The program is designed specifically for 3–5-year-olds, of all abilities and skills, and runs over eight 45-minute sessions. A philosophy of learning through play, promotes physical activity in a fun and interactive environment. Children are supported and encouraged by qualified Early Childhood educators. Munchkin League engages children in learning fine and gross motor skills, problem solving abilities and communication and teamwork. The program supports social and emotional growth and assists children to develop independence, self-confidence and self-awareness. Munchkin League provides an opportunity for children to learn to respect others, try something new and make lots of new friends.

PRIMARY SCHOOL

Backyard League Foundation—Year 2

https://playnrl.com/schools/school-programs/backyard-league-infants-program/

The Backyard League, Foundation to Year 2 Program uses story based learning to assist young students to understand the skills and concepts of Rugby League. Students will meet the story's characters, Red, Bluey and their friends who will help children of all abilities gain a basic comprehension of Rugby League concepts. Lessons which follow on from the story component have been designed alongside a story that requires students to practice fundamental movement skills and active play through minor games. Students will learn to be aware of space and game boundaries, as well fair play and personal safety. The three-week program has been developed to provide non-contact, safe and age appropriate activities that provide an introduction to and understanding of Rugby League, which is delivered by fully qualified NRL Game Development Officers. In 2017, the NRL will be introducing a new book and activities which will follow on from the current foundation to year 2 program.

Backyard League Program— Year 3 – 6

https://playnrl.com/schools/school-programs/backyard-league/

NRL Backyard League is available to your school via the Australian Sport's Commission Sporting Schools program. The NRL Backyard League program can be delivered before/during/after school. There is also an option to request additional sessions through the on-line booking system. NRL Backyard League is one of the most affordable Sporting Schools options available and are delivered by qualified NRL staff so a quality experience is assured. When selecting NRL Backyard League to be delivered in your Sporting Schools program you will receive funding to support coach delivery costs, with Foundation to Year 2 students receiving a take home copy of the 1,2,3 Rugby League story book and a soft Steeden football*. Year 3–6 students receive a Steeden NRL football*.

The Backyard League program is an exciting program that aims to introduce students to Rugby League in a safe, non-competitive and fun environment. The program equips students and teachers with the tools to play a version of our great game in any setting while delivering important education, health and welfare messages. The NRL recently partnered with the University of Wollongong to test the effectiveness of a new Backyard League program which is underpinned by an innovative games and sports teaching approach. The research findings suggest there is strong evidence that the new Backyard League program improves game play understanding and is closely linked to higher levels of motivation, increased participation and more positive attitudes towards playing games and sports. The program has been developed to cater for a range of learners, and has been designed to improve participant understanding of 'why' and 'how' rather than simply what to do. The units are based on game play and involve the students in active learning. The program allows the facilitator to use both questioning and direct instructions appropriate to student understanding and development NRL Backyard League Games are stopped at regular intervals and participants are challenged to reflect on their participation in order to mature the play. Students are encouraged to think strategically about game concepts and will become tactically aware and be able to become decision makers during the game.

SECONDARY SCHOOL

League Integrated Fundamentals Training (LIFT)

https://sportingschools.gov.au/sports/national-rugby-league/schools/NRL-secondary-school-bookings

The NRL League Integrated Fundamentals Training (LIFT) program has the intention of providing opportunities for our Junior High School students to participate in highly engaging and interesting physical movement patterns that promote an introductory understanding of physical literacy. Our program focuses on educating Australian teenagers about the importance of movement to enhance physical literacy.

TEACHER DELIVERED PROGRAM

https://playnrl.com/schools/school-programs/playnrl-programs/

The NRL offer a teacher delivered program as one of the package options when submitting a booking. A teacher delivered program can be an option in the case that an NRL Game Development Officer cannot deliver your program or the teacher is confident with the delivery of rugby league and would like to deliver the program at their school. This may be a particularly appealing option in those cases where the school have already had an NRL Game Development Officer at their school delivering Sporting Schools previously.

Teacher Delivered Program pack includes:
» PlayNRL Activity Cards
» 20 x Coloured Bibs (mesh)
» 1 x Heavy Duty Ball Bag
» 10 Steeden Rugby League Footballs
» 1 x Whistle
» 20 x Markers
» 1 x PlayNRL Ambassador Shirt
Schools can also opt to order footballs for the group / class at an additional cost.

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