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## **Abstract**

Annual chronological age-grouping is a common strategy to organise children and youths in sports. Although well-intended, relative age effect (RAE) is created and it seems to put relatively younger children and youths at a disadvantage in sports. To date, we have little understanding of RAE in youth participants in schools sports. The purpose of the present study was to determine the prevalence of RAE in male soccer in Singapore schools and examine possible mechanisms related to physical attributes, family background, previous sporting experiences and coach's influence to RAE. Chi-square analyses revealed an insignificant RAE among male youth soccer athletes (N=172) aged between 14 to 15 years old across the four birth quarters. Mechanisms related to family influence (i.e., parents' social economic status, parents' sporting background, siblings' involvement in sports) and prior training experience did not establish any significant differences among these youth soccer athletes across birth quarters. However, there was a significant difference in the average height and weight between the youth soccer athletes born in quarter 1 and 4. Through the qualitative analysis, interviews with five existing school soccer coaches shed light on information (i.e., limited talent pool, selection criteria: technical, tactical skills and fitness, coach's influence on selection and varying selection structure in schools) related to the current talent identification and development system in Singapore schools. This explained the absence of RAE for male soccer in Singapore schools. As there is no or little research of the prevalence of RAE related to social influence, the findings from the present study informs the local governing bodies [i.e., Ministry of Education (MOE), Sport Singapore (SportSG)] that impact of RAE could be mitigated by social influence such as the coaches who are working closely with the youths in schools. It is important for local governing bodies (i.e., MOE, SportSG) to work closely (i.e., conversations, workshops) with

school coaches to increase coaches' awareness of RAE and its impact, thus ensuring that their selection processes do not perpetuate RAE among youth athletes.