

Research-to-Results ^{Brief}

Child **TRENDS**

...information on factors associated with non-participation in out-of-school time programs

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NON-PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS IN OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAMS: CHILD, FAMILY, AND NEIGHBORHOOD FACTORS

Tawana Bandy, B.S., and Kristin Anderson Moore, Ph.D.

OVERVIEW

Out-of-school time programs can offer a secure and nurturing environment for children and adolescents, reducing the worries about what they are doing during these most vulnerable hours.^{1,2} For example, research suggests that participation in out-of-school time programs and activities can lessen the likelihood that children and adolescents will engage in negative behaviors, such as using drugs and alcohol,³ dropping out of school,⁴ and practicing unhealthy eating habits.⁵ Despite the benefits associated with this involvement, millions of children between the ages of 5 and 14 still do not participate in these programs.^{6,7}

Most research on participation in out-of-school time programs has examined markers that predict participation (or non-participation) in certain contexts and outcomes associated with this participation.^{8, 9} Very little research has been done on individual factors (such as health status, academic achievement, and behavior problems) and background factors (such as family characteristics) that influence children and adolescents' non-participation in out-of-school time programs and activities. This brief examines these other factors. Our findings indicate that, overall, child, family, and neighborhood factors *matter*.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, children and adolescents' non-participation in out-of-school time programs and activities has gained national attention.¹⁰ Research indicates that for many children and adolescents, *limited resources, low program availability,*¹¹ and *lack of interest in organized activities*¹² help explain this non-participation. However, additional research, although meager, indicates that other factors also have bearing on non-participation, including:

- **Child factors:** Academic and/or physical difficulties may affect whether or not children participate in out-of-school time programs and activities.¹³
- **Family and parenting factors:** Families with greater challenges or disadvantages—such as parents who work long hours, hold multiple jobs, or are chronically ill—may be less able to see that children get involved in out-of-school time programs and activities.¹⁴
- **Neighborhood and community factors:** The type of neighborhood in which children live may affect participation in out-of-school programs because these programs may not be available in certain neighborhoods.^{15, 16} Moreover, even if programs are available, parents may limit their children's participation because of concerns about neighborhood safety.¹⁷

However, very little evidence based on representative samples of children has been available. We set out to help fill this research gap by examining 2003 data from the National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH). (See box "About the Data Source Used for this Brief" for more on this survey.)

CURRENT ANALYSES

Building on prior research on the potential influence that child, family, and neighborhood factors may have on non-participation, we analyzed multiple variables to determine whether these individual and broad factors are indeed associated with whether children and adolescents participate in out-of-school time programs and activities. Our study sample consisted of approximately 43,000 children between the ages of six and 14 from the 2003 wave of the NSCH. Of the total sample, approximately 10,000 children and adolescents did not participate in any out-of-school time programs or activities in the last 12 months.

FINDINGS

Results from our analyses indicate that child, family, and neighborhood factors were *all* associated with non-participation in out-of-school time programs and activities.

Child Factors Associated With Non-participation

- **Child disability:** Non-participants were *almost twice as likely* to have a physical disability as were children and adolescents who participated in out-of-school time programs (11 percent versus 5 percent).
- **Low academic achievement:** Non-participants were *also twice as likely* to have repeated a grade as were their participating peers (15 percent versus 7 percent).
- **Heavy computer usage, television viewing, and video game-playing:** Non-participants were *more likely* to spend more than two hours a day watching television or playing video games than were their participating peers (60 percent versus 43 percent). Similarly, non-participants were *more likely* to spend time using a computer for purposes other than school work than were their participating peers (50 percent versus 32 percent).
- **Negative social behaviors:** Non-participants were *more likely* to engage in negative social behaviors than were their participating peers (11 percent versus 7 percent).
- **Overweight:** Non-participants were *more likely* to be overweight than were their participating peers (31 percent versus 21 percent).

Family Factors Associated With Non-participation

- **Lack of parental exercise:** Non-participants were *more likely* to have parents who do not exercise than were children and adolescents who participated in out-of-school time programs (47 percent versus 36 percent).
- **Poor parental health:** Non-participants were *twice as likely* to have parents who were in poor health as were their participating peers (16 percent versus 8 percent).
- **Low parental educational attainment:** Non-participants were *four times more likely* to have parents who had less than a high school education than were their participating peers (13 percent versus 3 percent).

Neighborhood Factors Associated With Non-participation

- **Lack of neighborhood support:** Non-participants were *substantially more likely* to live in a neighborhood in which residents do not support one another than were children and adolescents who participated in out-of-school time programs (46 percent versus 36 percent).
- **Unsafe surroundings:** Non-participants were *more than twice as likely* to live in an unsafe neighborhood than were their participating peers (22 percent versus 10 percent)

We examined several other factors but did not find that they were significantly associated with non-participation in out-of-school time programs. These factors included sedentary behavior, time spent reading for pleasure, and parental concern about child’s academic performance.

MULTIVARIATE ANALYSES

Results from additional analyses (not shown in this brief) confirm that all of the differences found between participants and non-participants hold and are statistically significant, even after taking into account child age, child race, family structure, family poverty level, and parent education.^a

TABLE 1: ASSOCIATION BETWEEN NON-PARTICIPATION AND PARTICIPATION IN ANY OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME PROGRAM IN THE PAST YEAR FOR CHILDREN AGED 6-14 WITH VARIED CHILD, FAMILY, AND NEIGHBORHOOD RISKS		
Child Factors	Non-participants	Participants
Physical disability or limitation	11% <i>have a limitation</i>	5% <i>have a limitation</i>
Grade repetition	15% <i>have repeated a grade</i>	7% <i>have repeated a grade</i>
High computer usage (> 2 hours)	50% <i>are heavy users</i>	32% <i>are heavy users</i>
High television viewing/video game playing (> 2 hours)	60% <i>are heavy viewers</i>	43% <i>are heavy viewers</i>
Behavior problems	11% <i>exhibit negative behaviors</i>	7% <i>exhibit negative behaviors</i>
Overweight	31 % <i>are overweight</i>	21 % <i>are overweight</i>
Family Factors		
Lack of parental exercise	47% <i>of parents do not exercise</i>	36% <i>of parents do not exercise</i>
Poor parental health	16% <i>of parents are not healthy</i>	8% <i>of parents are not healthy</i>
Parental education high school or less	13% <i>of parents are not highly educated</i>	3% <i>of parents are not highly educated</i>
Neighborhood Factors		
Poor neighborhood support	46% <i>live in neighborhoods w/ little support</i>	36% <i>live in neighborhoods w/ little support</i>
Unsafe neighborhood	22% <i>live in unsafe neighborhoods</i>	10% <i>live in unsafe neighborhoods</i>

Note: All differences between non-participants and participants are statistically significant (p < .005). All differences remain significant in multivariate regressions that control for child age, child race, family structure, family poverty level, and parent education.

^a Results of logistic regression analyses are available upon request.

CONCLUSION

This brief has presented information about factors that limit enrollment and prevent engagement in out-of-school time programs and activities, helping to fill a critical gap in our understanding of why some children and adolescents do not participate in these programs. These findings are especially salient for children and adolescents who are at risk for social, academic, and health problems. Emerging evidence indicates that out-of-school time programs can contribute to a reduction in negative behaviors and can lead to more positive outcomes, such as school success and physical fitness. At the same time, the findings reported in this brief suggest the need for out-of-school programs to improve their recruitment and targeting strategies. As things stand, the troubling conclusion that might be drawn from our study is that the children who can reap the largest benefits from participating in out-of-school programs and activities are the least likely to do so.^{18,b}

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^bNote: Unless otherwise stated, all estimates are based on weighted data from the National Survey of Children's Health, 2003. Available at www.nschdata.org. Data for the 2007 NSCH will be available in May 2009.

ABOUT THE DATA SOURCE USED FOR THIS BRIEF

The **National Survey of Children's Health** is a national telephone survey involving 102,353 interviews completed between January 2003 and July 2004. One child under the age of 18 was randomly selected in each household as the subject of the survey. The most knowledgeable parent or guardian of the child served as the respondent. Data were collected by the Maternal Child and Health Bureau in collaboration with the National Center for Health Statistics.

Measure of Non-participation in Out-of-School Time Programs

1) Non-participation - During the past 12 months, was [NAME] on a sports team or did he/she take sports lessons after school or on weekends? During the past 12 months did he/she participate in any clubs or organizations after school or on weekends, such as Scouts, a religious group, or Boy/Girl's Club? (No, Yes)

***Non-participation in out-of-school time programs was defined as not participating in any sports activities or clubs or organizations after school or weekends.**

Measures of Child Factors

1) **Physical disability or limitation** - Is [NAME] limited or prevented in any way in his/her ability to do the things most children of the same age can do?

2) **Grade Repetition**- Since starting kindergarten, has [he/she] repeated any grades? (No, Yes)

3) **High computer usage, high television viewing, and video game playing**- Number of hours spent on an average school day using a computer for purposes other than school work, plus the number of hours spent watching TV, watching videos, or playing video games.

***High computer usage, high television viewing and video game playing are defined as spending 2 hours or more a day on these activities.**

4) **Overweight**-Body Mass Index is in the 95th percentile or greater for child's age and gender (No, Yes)

5) **Negative social behavior**- How often is this true for [NAME] during the past month. *Is stubborn, sullen, or irritable? Is disobedient? Bullies or is cruel or mean to others? Argues too much?* (Never, Sometimes, Usually, Always)

***Negative social behavior is represented by an additive score. When a value was reported for at least 3 of 4 of the negative social behavior items, a child was considered to exhibit negative social behavior.**

Measures of Family Factors

1) **Lack of parental exercise**-During the past month, child's caregiver(s) regularly exercised or played sports hard enough to make [him/her/them] breathe hard, make [his/her/their] heart beat fast, or make [him/her/them] sweat for 20 minutes or more. (No, Yes)

2) **Poor parental health**-Child's caregiver(s) health is in excellent, very good, good, fair, or poor condition..

3) **Parental education**-Highest educational level attained by either parent.

***Low parental education is defined as not completing high school.**

Measure of Neighborhood Safety

1) **Neighborhood safety**-How often do you feel [child] is safe in your community or neighborhood? (Never, Sometimes, Usually, Always)

Measures of Neighborhood Factors¹⁹

Neighborhood support-

1) My child is safe in our neighborhood;

2) People in the neighborhood watch out for each other's children;

3) People in the neighborhood help each other out;

4) There are people I can count on in this neighborhood;

5) There are adults nearby who I trust to help my child if he/she got hurt playing outside; and

6) There are people in the neighborhood who might be a bad influence on my children.

***This measure is based on the mean of the above 0/1 items, which were dichotomized into a single "No, Yes" item.**

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