

Putting Research to Work for Families



Focus:
Civilian

Ongoing Engagement in Organized Activities May Buffer Disadvantaged Youth Against Increasing Externalizing Behaviors

O'Donnell, A., & Barber, B. (2020). Ongoing engagement in organized activities may buffer disadvantaged youth against increasing externalizing behaviors. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 52(1), 1-19. doi:10.1080/00222216.2020.1741328

SUMMARY: Participation in organized activities during adolescence is associated with many positive psychological and social outcomes. This study investigated associations between continued participation in organized activities and socioeconomic status of schools in predicting externalizing behavior (e.g., skipping school, fighting, etc.) among adolescents. The findings suggest that students from socioeconomically disadvantaged schools have a higher risk of externalizing behavior and discontinuing non-sport organized activities.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Students from socioeconomically disadvantaged schools were more likely to stop attending organized activities than to continue participation in the same activities or switching to new ones.
- For students in socioeconomically disadvantaged schools, discontinuing an organized activity was associated with increased risk for externalizing behavior compared to continuing with that activity or switching to another organized activity.
- Increases in externalizing behavior were greater for students who discontinued non-sport organized activities than those who remained or switched activities.
- Increases in externalizing behavior were positively associated with socioeconomically disadvantaged schools.

IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:

- Facilitate support groups to help youth who have difficulty managing externalizing behavior
- Develop self-directed modules to teach youth about self-management of externalizing behavior

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Provide online (or virtual) programming to make the content more accessible to youth
- Educate youth and their families on the importance of continued involvement within an organized youth program or activity

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS:

- Encourage development and evaluation of programs aimed to promote engagement in organized activities, especially among at-risk populations (e.g., low socioeconomic status families)
- Support programs that provide resources and activities to youth programs in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods

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METHODS

- Participants were recruited from 29 high schools from nine school districts in Western Australia.
- Activity status was measured by students reporting extracurricular, non-sport organized activities and how many hours a week they spend on those activities. Externalizing behavior was measured by students' self-report of the frequency of their behaviors within the previous six months on an eight point scale. Socioeconomic status was measured using the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA).
- Socioeconomic status of schools was determined by an averaged score using information from each student (e.g., income, ethnicity, etc.) and school information (e.g., number of indigenous students). A higher score indicated higher socioeconomic status.
- Data were analyzed to identify if participation and retention in organized activities predicted externalizing behavior. Additional analysis was done to investigate if students who attended socioeconomically disadvantaged schools were at higher risk of discontinuing their activity and exhibited worse outcomes.

PARTICIPANTS

- This study included 890 students who participated during the first wave of data collection in eighth grade (M=13.46 years, SD=0.31) and the second wave a year later in ninth grade (M=14.40 years, SD=0.30).
- The number of female students was 59.1%. The race/ethnicity of students was not included.
- Among the 29 high schools, 48.3% were public schools and 51.7% were private schools; 63.1% of the schools were located in a metropolitan district and 36.9% were in regional areas. The percentages of socioeconomically advantaged or disadvantaged schools were not provided.

LIMITATIONS

- The study did not investigate demographic factors other than socioeconomic status that may have impacted participants' activity status, which may have limited the findings.
- The study did not investigate factors other than activity engagement that may have impacted participants' externalizing behavior, which may have limited the conclusions that can be drawn from the study.
- The race/ethnicity of students was not included within this study therefore, it is unknown if this research includes diverse populations and to what extent the findings are generalizable to a racially or ethnically diverse population.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Investigate how externalizing symptoms might vary with age and if results sustain over longer periods of time
- Explore strategies that encourage continued involvement in extracurricular activities for youth
- Explore effectiveness of prevention strategies that reduce externalizing behavior among socioeconomically disadvantaged youth

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design



Excellent
Research Plan
and Sample

Methods



Appropriate
Measurement
and Analysis

Limitations



Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
<https://reachfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works>