

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Activity Involvement as an Ecological Asset: Profiles of Participation and Youth Outcomes

Agans, J. P., Champine, R. B., DeSouza, L. M., & Mueller, M. K. Johnson, S. K., Lerner, R. M. (2014). Activity involvement as an ecological asset: Profiles of participation and youth outcomes. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 43(NULL), 919-932. doi:10.1007/210964-014-0091-1

SUMMARY: The goal of this study was to examine the relationships between participation in youth programs, positive youth development, and risk behaviors. Results indicated a link between positive youth outcomes and participation in out-of-school activities.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants who participated in out-of-school activities had higher scores on measures of positive youth development (e.g., confidence, competence, character).
- Participation in several activities was consistently associated with positive youth development but was inconsistently linked to reducing problem and risk behaviors such as substance use.
- Adolescents who went from high levels of participation when they were younger to low levels of participation when they were older were more likely to be involved in at-risk behaviors.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Encourage adolescents to participate in out-of-school activities, especially in high school
- Partner with military parents to help emphasize the importance of out-of-school activities and positive youth development

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Collaborate with community organizations to offer additional out-of-school activities to military-connected youth
- Host workshops for military parents to learn about what they can do in the home to promote positive youth development

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend that professionals who work with military families increase out-of-school programs on installations
- Support the dissemination of materials that provide professionals who work with military-connected youth education on positive youth development

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METHODS

- Data were gathered from participants who were part of the 4-H Study of Positive Youth Development.
- For this study, data were obtained annually from 7th to 12th grades.
- Data from the first two time points were gathered in person; subsequent data collections were completed online.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 927 middle and high school students.
- Average age of the participants varied by time point; in 7th grade it was 13 years (SD = 0.51) and in 12th grade it was 18 years (SD = 0.83).
- The majority of the sample was female (63%) and White (65%).

LIMITATIONS

- The design of the study is cross-sectional and therefore no conclusions about causality between positive youth development and participation in activities can be made.
- There were no analyses to determine if there were differences between data that were collected in person as opposed to online that could have influenced the results.
- There were no data indicating if the youth who discontinued the study were any different than those who participated in the entire study.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Apply qualitative research methods to examine adolescents' motivations related to participation or lack of participation in activities
- Explore differential rates of out-of-school activity participation based on personality variables (e.g., motivation, work ethic, etc.)
- Explore the impact of out-of-school activity participation on outcomes in adulthood.

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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