

# Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:  
Civilian

## Extracurricular Activities and Adolescent Development

Eccles, J. S., Barber, B. L., Stone, M., & Hunt, J. (2003). Extracurricular activities and adolescent development. *Journal of Social Issues*, 59(4), 865-889. doi:10.1046/j.0022-4537.2003.00095.x

**SUMMARY:** There were 1,259 Michigan youth who participated in a longitudinal study predicting risk behaviors, job functioning, and educational outcomes at age 25-26 from extracurricular activity involvement in 10th grade. Participants in the most extracurricular activities achieved better educational outcomes than those who engaged in fewer activities. Participation in service and religious activities predicted lower rates of later drinking and drug use.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Participation in all five types of extracurricular activities (i.e., prosocial, performance, team sports, school involvement, academic clubs) predicted better than expected educational outcomes (e.g., high school GPA, college attendance, graduation rates).
- Students who participated in sports, school-based activities, and academic clubs were more likely to be enrolled in college full-time at age 21.
- Alcohol and drug use in young adulthood and at grades 10 and 12 were lower among students who participated in prosocial activities; participation in performing arts served this same function for boys only.
- Participation in sports was strongly linked to positive educational and occupational outcomes.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Attend workshops on positive youth development to learn how to best foster positive development when leading programs
- Collaborate with city and community sports leagues to provide positive youth development opportunities to military children

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Educate parents about the range of benefits of children participating in extracurricular activities
- Collaborate with public schools and community-based organizations to promote involvement in extracurricular activities via media health and well-being campaigns

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Promote the development of extracurricular programs for military youth, both in connection with school and in the community
- Recommend that Service members be allowed scheduling flexibility, when possible, to be able to attend their children's extracurricular activities (e.g., games, performances, competitions)

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## METHODS

- Michigan 6th graders were recruited from 10 school districts in 1983 and followed for eight waves of data collection until 1996-1997 when most were 25-26 years old.
- At each wave, adolescents were administered an extensive interview assessing a wide range of constructs, including activities in 10th grade, risk behaviors in 10th and 12th grades, age 21-22, and 25-26, educational outcomes from 10th grade to age 26, job characteristics at age 25-26, and family characteristics in 6th grade.
- Analyses examined whether 10th grade extracurricular activities predicted later educational and occupational outcomes and risky behaviors.

## PARTICIPANTS

- Participants were 1,259 Michigan 10th graders, and other timepoints were not included in this analysis.
- Of participants' mothers, 46% had a high school diploma, 38% had some college education, and 16% had a bachelor's degree.
- The vast majority of youth were White and from working- and middle-class families, although specific information was not included.

## LIMITATIONS

- Little demographic data were presented, making it difficult to know how to generalize these findings.
- The participants were from one state (i.e., Michigan) in the 1980s and 1990s; the extent to which these youth's experiences generalize to other children and youth is uncertain.
- Youth were not randomly assigned to participate in extracurricular activities, and they may have self-selected activities based on specific characteristics associated with the outcomes measured.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Assess the possible mechanisms (e.g., identify formation) through which extracurricular activities influence these outcomes
- Conduct a similar study and measure additional participant characteristics (e.g., personality) to differentiate between the effects of self-selection and programs
- Explore whether participation in extracurricular activities is associated with later mental health or interpersonal outcomes

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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