



# Academic and behavioral outcomes associated with organized activity participation trajectories during childhood

Florence Aumètre, François Poulin\*

Department of Psychology, Université du Québec à Montréal, C. P. 8888, succursale Centre-Ville, Montréal H3C 3P8, Québec, Canada



## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Organized activities  
Breadth of participation  
Developmental trajectories  
Childhood  
Academic skills  
Internalizing and externalizing problems

## ABSTRACT

Academic and behavioral (externalizing and internalizing problems) outcomes associated with trajectories of breadth of participation in organized activities were examined in a sample of 548 children. Four previously modeled trajectories from Kindergarten to Grade 4 were compared: no participation, increasing breadth, decreasing breadth, high and stable breadth. Potential confounding variables (i.e. sex, academic and behavioral indicators in Kindergarten, and mother's education) were included as covariates in the analyses, and the children's disruptive behavior status was tested as a moderator. Following the inclusion of the covariates, the children assigned to the high trajectory displayed lower internalizing problems than the children assigned to the no participation and decreasing trajectories. Children's disruptive behavior status did not moderate the associations between breadth of participation trajectories and outcomes. It thus appears that participation in a wider range of organized activities during childhood may help prevent subsequent internalizing problems.

## 1. Introduction

Organized activities (e.g., sports, clubs, arts) provide a unique developmental context that has consistently been associated with both adjustment and well-being during childhood. More specifically, previous studies have reported associations with lower externalizing and internalizing problems as well as increased self-regulation, social skills and academic performance (Crosnoe, Smith, & Leventhal, 2015; Denault & Déry, 2014; Piché, Fitzpatrick, & Pagani, 2015). To date, most studies on the effects of involvement in organized activities have focused on adolescent populations, despite the fact that many such activities begin in childhood. Indeed, according to Denault and Déry (2014), 46% of 6- to 10-year-old children living in Quebec, Canada (where the current study was also conducted), are involved in at least one organized activity during the school year. Similar rates are found among children in the US (NICHD *Early Child Care Research Network*, 2004). The current study examined both the academic and behavioral adjustment outcomes associated with trajectories of breadth of participation in organized activities among children from Kindergarten to Grade 4 and investigated the potential moderating effect of the children's levels of disruptive behaviors on these links.

### 1.1. Operationalizing the organized activity concept and its dimensions

Organized activities involve a regular schedule under adult

supervision, entail integration into a peer group, focus on the acquisition of specific skills and typically promote positive youth development (Mahoney, Larson, & Eccles, 2005; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). These activities can take place at school, but are often more widely available in the community during childhood (Fletcher, Nickerson, & Wright, 2003). Participation in organized activities is a multi-dimensional construct. The main structural dimensions of participation include its intensity (time devoted to the activity, typically measured in number of hours per week), duration (number of months or years) and breadth (number of different types of activities engaged in) (Bohnert, Fredricks, & Randall, 2010). Previous studies have shown greater intensity of participation to be associated with better social skills and fewer behavioral problems during childhood (Denault & Déry, 2014; Simoncini & Caltabiono, 2012), and greater duration of participation (over two years) to be related to higher school achievement, better adaptive behavior, and fewer internalizing problems (Metsäpelto & Pulkkinen, 2012). Studies involving adolescents have shown that higher breadth of participation is associated with fewer externalizing and internalizing problems, as well as higher school grades (Bartko & Eccles, 2003; Feldman & Matjasko, 2007; Fredricks & Eccles, 2006). The impact of breadth of participation in organized activities has not been studied extensively among school-aged children. To our knowledge, it is the object of only two studies. Morris and Kalil (2006) measured breadth by creating portfolios of activities for children aged 6 to 12. Five profiles were identified: (1) high involvement in clubs, (2) high involvement in

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [aumetre.florence@courrier.uqam.ca](mailto:aumetre.florence@courrier.uqam.ca) (F. Aumètre), [poulin.francois@uqam.ca](mailto:poulin.francois@uqam.ca) (F. Poulin).

sports, (3) high involvement in sports and clubs, (4) high involvement in sports, clubs and lessons, and (5) low involvement in clubs, sports and lessons. Children who had high levels of participation in sports, clubs and lessons adopted more prosocial behaviors and obtained better grades than those who did not participate in any organized activities. In another study, children that participated in both sports and clubs had better social skills than children who were not involved at all in organized activities (Howie, Lukacs, Pastor, Reuben, & Mendola, 2010). The fact that breadth of participation in school-aged children has received little attention is surprising given that studies simultaneously examining both breadth and intensity of participation have shown breadth to be a stronger predictor of psychosocial and academic adjustment during adolescence (Busseri, Rose-Krasnor, Willoughby, & Chalmers, 2006; Denault & Poulin, 2009). Involvement in a broad range of activities may allow children to develop a wider range of abilities and explore various facets of their self-concept (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Marsh, 1990). It therefore appears important to examine whether breadth of participation is also associated with positive outcomes during childhood.

### 1.2. Examining longitudinal patterns of participation

Two longitudinal studies have investigated evolving patterns of participation in organized activities over the school-age years. Mata and van Dulmen (2012) assessed intensity of participation from Kindergarten to Grade 5 and identified five trajectories: (1) stable low, 52.7%, (2) decreasing moderate, 15.2%, (3) decreasing low, 14.4%, (4) increasing moderate, 13.5%, and (5) increasing high, 4.2%. Aumètre and Poulin (2016) modeled trajectories of breadth of participation from Kindergarten to Grade 4, and they identified four groups: (1) no participation, 13.5%, (2) increasing breadth, 26.4%, (3) decreasing breadth, 14.1%, and (4) high and stable breadth, 46.1%. Overall, these findings reveal that the development of activity participation during the school-age period is rather heterogeneous. Individual and contextual predictors of trajectory membership have also been examined. In Mata and van Dulmen's study, girls were more likely than boys to be assigned to higher intensity trajectories. In addition, children who exhibited more aggressive behaviors were more likely to be assigned to higher intensity trajectories. In Aumètre and Poulin's study, neither sex nor aggression was predictive of trajectory membership. However, both prosocial behavior and social withdrawal predicted assignment to the lower trajectories. Finally, in both studies, higher income and higher parental education predicted membership in higher intensity or breadth of participation trajectories. These findings suggest that pre-existing individual and family characteristics may affect changes in participation over time. Some authors have hypothesized that the positive outcomes previously associated with organized activities might derive from these pre-existing characteristics, rather than from participation in these activities, through a selection effect (Fletcher et al., 2003; Mahoney et al., 2005; Mata & van Dulmen, 2012). Longitudinal studies examining the correlates and outcomes of participation in organized activities should therefore control for these pre-existing individual and contextual factors in order to rule out this selection effect.

We nonetheless hypothesize that organized activities do promote children's adjustment and well-being well beyond this potential selection effect in several ways. First, these activities constitute unique learning environments that entail specific regulations and goals that children must commit to, which likely foster the adoption of prosocial behaviors (e.g., sharing materials, listening to and helping peers) (Denault & Déry, 2014; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003). This high level of structure combined with the reinforcement of prosocial behavior may contribute to reducing externalizing problems. Furthermore, these activities also emphasize skill building and knowledge acquisition (e.g., organization, patience, problem solving and reasoning), which may, in turn, promote academic adjustment. These newly acquired skills could subsequently be reinvested within the school context

(Mahoney et al., 2005). Finally, organized activities also provide socialization experiences that promote warm, supportive and long-lasting relationship formation with prosocial peers and adults (Fredricks & Eccles, 2006; Mahoney et al., 2005). These relationships typically foster feelings of integration and belonging, which can contribute to preventing or reducing internalizing problems such as anxiety or depression (Mahoney et al., 2005).

### 1.3. Does participation provide greater benefits to children with disruptive behaviors?

Previous research has shown that the positive outcomes associated with organized activities may be even greater for at-risk children. For instance, the relationship between participation in organized activities and increased academic performance during elementary school has been shown to be stronger among children from low-income families or families with low socioeconomic status (SES) (Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Crosnoe et al., 2015; Dumais, 2006).

Children with other risk factors such as high levels of disruptive behaviors may also derive greater benefits from participation in organized activities. Children who persist in exhibiting such behaviors after the preschool period often follow a problematic developmental trajectory (Broidy et al., 2003; Vitaro, Brendgen, Larose, & Tremblay, 2005). They typically exhibit lower social competence (Moisan, Poulin, Capuano, & Vitaro, 2014), tend to misinterpret social situations (Crick & Dodge, 1996) and have a hard time recognizing and regulating emotions (Denham et al., 2003). Participating in organized activities could help improve their social competence and reduce their externalizing problems (Larson, 2000; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000).

Participation in organized activities implies integration into a peer group that is typically prosocial. In this context, the social competence of disruptive children could improve through vicarious learning (Bandura, 1977). They could learn new ways to behave and new emotional responses by observing the actions of others, the consequences of their actions and the affective reaction following these consequences. Another mechanism that may contribute to reducing externalizing problems involves the supervision provided by the adults in charge of organized activities. During adolescence, involvement in organized activities, as compared to unsupervised activities, is characterized by the tighter supervision and better support provided by the adults in charge of these activities (Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). Lastly, children with disruptive behaviors who participate in organized activities have less time on their hands to engage in unsupervised activities or hang out with deviant peers (Mahoney, 2000).

Findlay and Coplan (2008) specifically examined whether children with aggressive behaviors (a specific form of disruptive behaviors) derived greater benefit from participating in organized sports than non-aggressive children. They found only one marginal difference ( $p < 0.07$ ): aggressive children who were involved in sports showed higher self-esteem than aggressive children who were not involved in sports. However, the potential moderating effect of children's disruptive behaviors on the relationship between participation in organized activities and subsequent adjustment has yet to be tested.

### 1.4. Study aims and hypotheses

The first aim of the current study was to disentangle potential associations between trajectories of breadth of participation in organized activities during childhood (modeled from Kindergarten to Grade 4), and academic and behavioral outcomes. The indicators considered were those most frequently assessed in studies examining the outcomes of participation in organized activities, namely academic skills, and externalizing and internalizing problems (Mahoney et al., 2005; Shulruf, 2010). A previous study using the same sample of participants (Aumètre & Poulin, 2016) identified the four following trajectories of breadth of participation in organized activities: the no participation

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6842811>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6842811>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)