



Brief report: Changes in parent–adolescent joint activities between 2002 and 2014 in the Czech Republic, Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study



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ABSTRACT

Joint family activities (JFA) are linked to healthy adolescent development. The aim of the present study is to report time trends in JFA between 2002 and 2014.

The sample concerned 16 396 adolescents aged 11, 13, and 15 years (48.4% boys) from the 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014 surveys of the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study in the Czech Republic. The overall changes in JFA were evaluated using logistic regression.

Compared with 2002, there was a slight increase in four out of the six selected JFA in 2014. In particular, the likelihood of engaging in joint active activities (sports and walks) increased in the 2002–2014 period. Conversely, nowadays adolescents watch TV with their parents less frequently. Moreover, families today do not eat together as often as in 2002, which might have negative consequences for healthy adolescent development. Adolescents aged 11 get involved in JFA more than their older counterparts.

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Background

Family time is considered to be a very important factor in healthy adolescent development (Berntsson & Ringsberg, 2014). Joint family activities (JFA) may contribute to strengthening relationships between family members (Fiese, 2006) and help reduce the likelihood of adolescent problem behaviours (Windlin & Kuntsche, 2012).

One of the most frequent JFA is eating a meal together (Windlin & Kuntsche, 2012), which provides parents and children with the opportunity to talk about important issues and is beneficial to adolescents' emotional health (Offer, 2013). Moreover, regular family meals increase the odds of children being in a normal weight range and help them adopt healthier eating patterns (Hammons & Fiese, 2011).

Being together while watching TV is another common and family-unifying activity (Zaborskis, Zemaitiene, Borup, Kuntsche, & Moreno, 2007) with a potential positive effect on children's well-being (Berntsson & Ringsberg, 2014).

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However, it is reasonable to avoid watching TV excessively (Brindova et al., 2014), which may be related to childhood overweight and obesity (Tudor-Locke, Craig, Cameron, & Griffiths, 2011). Thompson et al. (2010) found that on weekdays families engaged primarily in joint sedentary activities (e.g. watching TV). Active family leisure is a possible way to incorporate physical activities to combat adolescents' sedentary lifestyle (Rodearmel et al., 2007). However, actually just a small proportion of children's and parents' overall physical activity occurs through joint sports activities (Dunton et al., 2012).

It is known that the content and frequency of JFA is partly dependent on the gender and age of children. The frequency of JFA decreases when children get older (Berntsson & Ringsberg, 2014) and boys are more likely to spend time together with their family than girls are (Zaborskis et al., 2007).

Nowadays, the rushed society contributes to an overall lack of time to do things together as a family unit (Thompson et al., 2010). The current study examines trends in parent–adolescent JFA frequency within a large and representative adolescent population in the Czech Republic between 2002 and 2014.

Methods

The study data comes from four consecutive cross-sectional surveys conducted in the Czech Republic in 2002, 2006, 2010, and 2014 according to the Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) study methodology (Roberts et al., 2009). Throughout all the four waves of data collection, the population of the fifth, seventh, and ninth school grades completed self-reported questionnaires (response rate $\geq 87\%$).

After merging the datasets, we selected only the 11-, 13-, and 15-year-old respondents and excluded the questionnaires missing responses to all the six JFA items used in this study ($N = 121$). This led to a nationally representative sample of 16 396 adolescents (48.4% of them boys). The demographic figures are presented in Table 1. Participation in the surveys was voluntary and anonymous. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacky University, Olomouc.

JFA were measured by six items – *watch TV or a video together, eat a meal together, go for a walk together, visit friends or relatives together, play sports together, and sit and talk about things together* (Sweeting & West, 1995).

The items were dichotomised as *at least once a week vs. less often, except for watch TV or a video together and eat a meal together*, where the cut-off point was set to *most days vs. less often* (Zaborskis et al., 2007).

IBM SPSS 22.0 for Windows (IBM Corp. released 2013) was used for the statistical analyses. First, we described the demographic characteristics of the sample, including the prevalence rates of JFA in the respective survey years. To assess the statistical significance of the gender and age differences in the respective survey years we used Pearson's chi-square test. The changes in the JFA between the pairs of consecutive surveys were analysed by logistic regression, as well as the 2002–2014 trends in the JFA. First, we assessed the crude odds ratios, and then stratified by gender and age.

Results

A higher rate of children engaged in JFA with their parents in 2014 than in 2002, except for watching TV and eating together. Nonetheless, these two were still the most common JFA in all the surveys. Sports and going for a walk were consistently the least frequent activities done with parents but, on the other hand, these were the activities with the largest percentage increase over the 2002–2014 period. We observed somewhat consistent pattern in several JFA, with a significant increase between 2006 and 2010 and a decrease from 2010 to 2014 (Table 1).

Table 1 presents the JFA prevalence rates in particular survey years stratified by gender and age. The prevalence rates of joint sports and visits to friends/relatives did not vary by gender. Eating a meal together was the only activity where gender differences were statistically significant in all four surveys, with boys reporting eating with their parents more than girls did. Regarding the remaining activities, we observed gender differences as being statistically significant in 2002 or 2006 and diminishing in the later surveys. Parents mostly took part in JFA with 11-year-olds and, in general, the rate decreased with increasing age, with going for a walk with one's parents being the most age-dependent. The trends over the 2002–2014 period were, however, generally similar for adolescents of all ages, except for watching TV, where we found an increase in the number of 11-year-olds between 2010 and 2014, but a decline in that of 13- and 15-year-olds in the same period.

Table 2 presents the odds ratios for the overall change in the JFA in the period 2002–2014. Compared to 2002, adolescents were less likely to watch TV or eat a meal with their parents in the last survey. However, the odds on their watching TV with parents only dropped significantly in the two older age categories, especially in the boys. By contrast, adolescents were more likely to spend time with their parents in all the remaining JFA in 2014, with both the active activities (sports, going for a walk) showing the highest likelihood of an increase in their frequency. The strongest association in sitting and talking was found for both the 11-year-old boys and girls. They were also the only subgroups in which a significant positive trend was observed in terms of visiting friends and relatives with their parents.

Discussion

Despite various popular and academic publications suggesting that overworked parents devote less time to their children (Milkie, Mattingly, Nomaguchi, Bianchi, & Robinson, 2004), we found that nowadays families spend time together more often

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