

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Journal of Adolescence

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jado

Do family environment factors play a role in adolescents' involvement in organized activities?



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 September 2016

Received in revised form 22 May 2017

Accepted 25 May 2017

Keywords:

Adolescence

Extracurricular activities

Parental control

Family support

Joint family activities

Sports

ABSTRACT

The study assessed the association of family environment factors with adolescents' participation in organized leisure-time activities (OLTA). We used data on 10,472 Czech adolescents aged 11–15 years (49.2% boys) from the 2013/2014 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children study. The associations of family support, the presence of parental screen-time rules and joint family activities with participation in at least one OLTA were assessed using logistic regression. High family support and the presence of parental screen-time rules were associated with higher odds of OLTA participation. Moreover, adolescents playing sports, indoor games and going for walks with their families at least weekly were more likely to participate in OLTA. Conversely, those spending time in joint family TV/video watching on most days were less likely to do so. A supportive family environment and direct parental involvement in their adolescent children's leisure are associated with OLTA participation in early to middle adolescence.

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1. Introduction

When adolescents attempt to explore their own identity and gain more independence from their parents (Koepke & Denissen, 2012), the parent-child interaction starts to change. Youth tend to spend more time with peers and start to form cliques (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Larson & Verma, 1999). This happens at the expense of shared family time, which becomes rarer with increasing age (Vokacova, Badura, Pavelka, Kalman, & Hanus, 2016; Zaborskis, Zemaitiene, Borup, Kuntsche, & Moreno, 2007). Consequently, parental control and knowledge about their children's friends and activities decreases, and adolescents might disclose less to their parents (Keijsers & Poulin, 2013).

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Parents, however, continue to be essential for healthy adolescent development (Viner et al., 2012), despite the natural process of children separating from parents. Parents influence most aspects of an adolescent's life, including the content of their leisure time. They seem especially to value organized leisure-time activities (OLTA) as a meaningful way of their children's spending their after-school hours (Weininger, Lareau, & Conley, 2015). Parents across social strata, besides appreciating that participation in OLTA yields instant benefits (being fun and healthy for their children), perceive them as an 'investment in future' (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014).

Indeed, OLTA have been both theoretically and empirically linked to healthy youth development (Lerner, 2005). Adolescents participating in OLTA report having better physical and mental health (Badura, Geckova, Sigmundova, van Dijk, & Reijneveld, 2015; Zambon et al., 2010), performing better at school (Badura et al., 2016; Fredricks, 2012), and having higher educational aspirations (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Chesters & Smith, 2015). They also engage less in risky behaviours (Takakura, 2015; Zambon et al., 2010). Parents' beliefs in the positive long-term effects of structured leisure time are also supported by studies showing that participation in OLTA leads to better later educational attainment (Beal & Crockett, 2010; Martin et al., 2015).

Excessive engagement in unstructured and unsupervised leisure activities, in contrast, is often associated with problematic outcomes. Unstructured peer-oriented activities might be related to higher rates of delinquency (Weerman, Bernasco, Bruinsma, & Pauwels, 2015), substance use (Kiesner, Poulin, & Dishion, 2010) or poor psychosocial adjustment (Trainor, Delfabbro, Anderson, & Winefield, 2010). This applies especially to adolescents from families with low levels of parental monitoring (Kiesner et al., 2010; Kristjansson, James, Allegrante, Sigfusdottir, & Helgason, 2010). In addition, positive feeling about adolescents' own family decreases the likelihood of joining such activities, or buffers the potential risks of joining them (Persson, Kerr, & Stattin, 2007).

Rates of participation in OLTA vary certainly depending on several features of the family environment. Youth from incomplete or reconstituted families are less likely to participate in OLTA (Chesters & Smith, 2015; McMillan, McIsaac, & Janssen, 2016), while those from families with higher income and parental education are more likely to do so (Holloway & Pimlott-Wilson, 2014; Mahoney, Harris, & Eccles, 2006; Weininger et al., 2015). However, family functioning and climate appear to play their roles too, besides family structure and socioeconomic status. The quality of parent-adolescent relationships has been shown to promote adolescents' OLTA participation (Bohnert, Martin, & Garber, 2007). Similarly, rates of OLTA participation are higher in families in which parents provide emotional support and encourage their children to participate (Mahoney & Eccles, 2005; Simpkins, Davis-Kean, & Eccles, 2005). It has been suggested that the family environment enhances OLTA participation through multiple mechanisms, ranging from affecting adolescents' cognitions (Bohnert et al., 2007) over parents' own involvement in leisure-time activities to simple material support (Simpkins et al., 2005). This indicates that the role of parents in adolescents' leisure-time choices is very complex and distinct factors of the family environment act as important determinants of adolescents' involvement in OLTA.

Since OLTA participation is linked with a range of healthy developmental outcomes (Bohnert, Fredricks, & Randall, 2010), it is of interest to better understand what particular parental actions could potentially promote such participation. However, studies on the topic are rare. To the best of our knowledge, none of the studies thus far has also focused on shared family time – particular joint family activities – in combination with OLTA participation in adolescents. In the present study we assessed whether there is an association of family support, presence of parental rules and joint family activities with adolescents' OLTA participation. Based on the existing evidence, we assumed that adolescents whose parents are supportive of them, regularly spend time in joint leisure-time activities with them, and impose rules limiting time spent at the screen, would be more likely to participate in OLTA. Moreover, given the reported gender and age differences in both adolescents' relationships with parents (Kenny, Dooley, & Fitzgerald, 2013; McGue, Elkins, Walden, & Iacono, 2005) and their OLTA participation (Badura et al., 2015; Mahoney et al., 2006), we also assessed whether gender and age moderated these associations.

2. Methods

2.1. Sample and procedure

The data for this study were collected between April and June 2014 within the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) study in the Czech Republic. After stratification by region and type of school (the ratio of primary vs. secondary schools), 244 schools were selected at random from the database of Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, and 243 out of them agreed to take part in the survey (response rate 99.6%). One class from the 5th, 7th and 9th grades was then randomly selected at each of the schools. Trained research assistants administered the questionnaires during regular class time. The teacher was absent from the classroom at the time of the survey in order to reduce response bias. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous and respondents were not offered any incentives to participate. Prior to administration of the questionnaires they were informed about the opportunity to opt out. The study design was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacky University, Olomouc (No. 57/2014).

Out of 16,298 pupils registered in the classes enrolled in the survey, we collected questionnaires from 14,539 (response rate 89.2%); 1732 were absent from school at the time of the survey (mostly due to illness) and 30 pupils declined to participate. Then, according to the HBSC protocol, only the 11-, 13-, and 15-year old adolescents were selected ($n = 10,795$). Finally, we excluded respondents who failed to report data on gender, all six OLTA items and all family environment variables, and those who provided several unlikely responses throughout the HBSC questionnaire (such as contradictory responses on

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