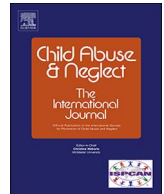


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Research article

Differential impacts of participation in organized activities and maltreatment types on adolescent academic and socioemotional development

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ABSTRACT

Participation in organized activities has been largely regarded as beneficial for academic and socioemotional development for adolescents, but the impacts of various types of organized activities for adolescents at risk for maltreatment have been rarely tested. In this study, we investigated the differential impacts of five types of maltreatment exposure (physical maltreatment, sexual maltreatment, neglect, other type, and multiple types) on the associations between four types of organized activities (mentored groups, art and music clubs, sport clubs, and academic clubs) and academic and socioemotional development (school engagement, delinquency, depressive symptoms, and trauma symptoms) of adolescents who were investigated by Child Protective Services (CPS) for maltreatment exposure. Data came from a national, longitudinal sample of 790 adolescents in contact with CPS in the U.S. After controlling for demographic characteristics of participants and prior levels of each outcome, multiple linear regression models were fitted to the data with interactions between the organized activities and the maltreatment types. The main findings of this study included: 1) adolescents who participated in mentored groups, sport clubs, and academic clubs reported higher levels of school engagement; 2) adolescents who participated in academic clubs reported fewer depressive symptoms; 3) adolescents who participated in art and music clubs reported more trauma symptoms compared to non-participants; and 4) the effects of participation in mentored groups on delinquency and trauma symptoms differed by maltreatment type. These results indicate both possible benefits and risks of organized activity participation for adolescents with certain maltreatment exposures.

1. Introduction

Child maltreatment (i.e., abuse and neglect) is a primary threat to victims' academic development and socioemotional growth (Boden, Horwood, & Fergusson, 2007; Cohen, Brown, & Smaile, 2001; Lansford et al., 2002; Malinosky-Rummell & Hansen, 1993), but the consequences of maltreatment exposure are heterogeneous. Researchers have shown that various individual and psychosocial factors, such as individual levels of intelligence, internal locus of control, self-esteem, and positive peer and parent-child relationships, can be protective against detrimental outcomes of maltreatment (Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Polo-Tomás, & Taylor, 2007). However,

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most research has not acknowledged other distal, contextual influences on the resilience of maltreated adolescents, potentially overlooking the importance of contexts outside of family as protective factors (Ungar, 2013; Ungar, Ghazinour, & Richter, 2013). One such contextual factor is participation in organized extracurricular activities (Haskett, Nears, Ward, & McPherson, 2006). A recent study found that rates of participation in organized activities among adolescents at risk for maltreatment are much lower than for adolescents in the general population (Kwak, Lu, & Christ, 2017). Despite its potential as a feasible point of intervention, no study has explicitly tested the differential impacts of specific maltreatment experiences on the association between specific organized activities and developmental outcomes (Haskett et al., 2006).

1.1. Organized activity participation

A number of studies have documented benefits of organized activity participation for both academic and behavioral outcomes among adolescents (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Feldman & Matjasko, 2005; Fredricks & Eccles, 2005, 2006; Hartmann and Massoglia, 2007; Marsh and Kleitman, 2002). Interestingly, the outcomes of participation vary by type of activity (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003; Larson, Hansen, & Moneta, 2006). For instance, community-based mentored group activities and faith-based organized activities are thought to provide adolescents with social networks and help them build prosocial skills (Larson et al., 2006). Art and performance activities involve learning specific skills that are related to identity exploration and development (Fredricks et al., 2002), and participation in art-based activities has been associated with higher intrinsic motivation, initiative and engagement, and lower apathy and substance use (Fauth, Roth, and Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Larson et al., 2006). Participation in academic activities such as academic clubs or school government has been linked to higher academic achievement (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Stearns & Glennie, 2010) and better mental health outcomes, including low levels of depression among adolescents (Fredricks & Eccles, 2005). Studies of organized sports participation, however, have revealed mixed findings, and thus, researchers have suggested that there are pros and cons for this type of activity participation (Larson et al., 2006). Although organized sports promote initiative and teamwork, they may also result in negative peer dynamics (i.e., competitiveness/aggression) and risky behaviors (Brustad, 1993). For instance, participation in extracurricular sports has been linked to higher academic achievement (Marsh & Kleitman, 2003; Stearns & Glennie, 2010), improved socioemotional outcomes (Fauth et al., 2007; Larson et al., 2006), and at the same time, higher incidences of both violent and non-violent delinquency (Eccles et al., 2003; Fauth et al., 2007; Kreager, 2007; Larson et al., 2006).

Organized activities may be particularly beneficial for adolescents at risk for maltreatment because they can offer psychosocial resources that these adolescents may not be provided with at home (Ungar, 2005, 2011). Organized activities provide adolescents with opportunities for establishing social ties and achieving interpersonal competence in relationships with both peers and adults by involving participants in goal-oriented activities in structured settings (Eccles & Barber, 1999; Larson, 2000; Mahoney, Cairns, & Farmer, 2003). These extra-familial contexts fit well within Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of development, which posits that humans develop within several simultaneous social contexts—all having varying proximity to and influence on the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1972). While families typically have the most proximal and therefore potent influence on adolescents' development, other contexts (including schools and community organizations) can also indirectly and directly influence their development (Stockhammer et al., 2001). For instance, school has been recognized as the most consistent and influential institution in a child's life apart from their immediate family, and has been postulated as a buffer for maltreated children by providing connections with peers and supportive adults (Cicchetti & Toth, 1997). Further, the influence of each context may also change over time, and indeed, research corroborates that as adolescents age, they increasingly spend more time with peers in contexts outside of the home (Bronfenbrenner, 1972; Zielinski & Bradshaw, 2006), suggesting that activities away from their family may have sizable influence on the development of adolescents who experience maltreatment at home.

1.2. Organized activity participation among high-risk adolescents

Due to the potential importance, more research is needed on the consequences or benefits of organized activity participation for adolescents at higher risk. The sparse research on disadvantaged adolescent populations has demonstrated mixed finding depending, in part, on the type of at-risk population and the type of activities. For example, despite low levels of participation in extracurricular activities among racial/ethnic minorities (Darling, 2005), activity participation was linked to greater rates of high school retention among Hispanic adolescents (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999) and higher school-related self-esteem and school bonding among African American adolescents (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2007). These findings suggest positive effects of activity involvement on academic outcomes for demographically at-risk students. Also, among high-risk youth more generally, participation in extracurricular activities has also been linked to lower rates of early school dropout and criminal activity (Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). Dumais (2008) found that although adolescents from low socioeconomic status (SES) families spent less time in school-sponsored activities, they showed greater improvement in math scores when participating in school-sponsored activities than students from high-SES families.

There is, however, evidence that participation in some types of organized activity may sometimes be harmful for at-risk adolescents. For instance, Fredricks and Eccles (2008) found that participation in sport clubs was related to higher depressive symptoms for adolescents from low-SES families, and Fauth et al. (2007) reported an association between longer participation in community-based clubs and higher depression scores among adolescent residing in dangerous neighborhoods. Moreover, one study found that adolescents in foster care have shown higher levels of delinquency with higher rates of participation in any kind of activities (Farineau & McWey, 2011).

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