

A Multilevel Analysis of the Links Between Youth's After-School Time Activities and their Well-Being

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Many questions remain about how various types of participation (i.e., specific activities, duration) or participation for diverse youth relate to youth development. In this study we address both these issues by investigating how participation in specific activities over time influences adolescents' well-being and how the impact of participation varies for youth living in different neighborhoods.

Data Source

The *Project on Human Development in Chicago Neighborhoods (PHDCN)*

- Directed from Harvard School of Public Health
- Followed seven age cohorts of children (birth through 18) from 80 Chicago neighborhoods
- 3 waves of data collection: 1995-1996, 1998-1999, and 2000-2001

Analytic Sample

- 1,313 youth from 9- and 12-year-old cohorts
- *M* age wave 1=10.66, *M* age at wave 3=15.21
- 50% male, 50% female
- 49% Latino, 36% Black, 15% White
- 38% lived in low SES neighborhoods, 39% in medium SES neighborhoods, 22% in high SES neighborhoods

Measures

- Independent variables
 - After-school time participation. Longitudinal pattern of participation (waves 2 and 3 only) in six after-school activities: sports or cheerleading, performing arts (e.g., band, theater, drama, dance, or choir), student government or student council, community-based clubs (e.g., YMCA or Boys/Girls Clubs), church groups, employment (each activity coded "0" for participation at neither wave 2 nor 3, "1" for participation at either wave 2 or 3, and "2" for participation at both waves 2 and 3); breadth of after-school time participation (*M* # activities)
 - Youth characteristics. Age, sex, race/ethnicity
 - Maternal and family characteristics. Educational attainment, marital status, income-to-needs ratio¹
 - Neighborhood characteristics: Community resources for youth, perceived violence²
- Dependent variables: Longitudinal assessment (waves 1, 2, and 3) of anxiety/depression, delinquency, deviant peer affiliation

Analytic Strategy

- Three-level hierarchical regression models run using HLM software; change over time modeled at level-1 (intercept is expected mean of outcome for youth at average age, linear slope is average rate of growth, quadratic slope dropped from models as not significant), variation between youth (within neighborhoods) modeled at level-2³, variation between neighborhoods modeled at level-3.

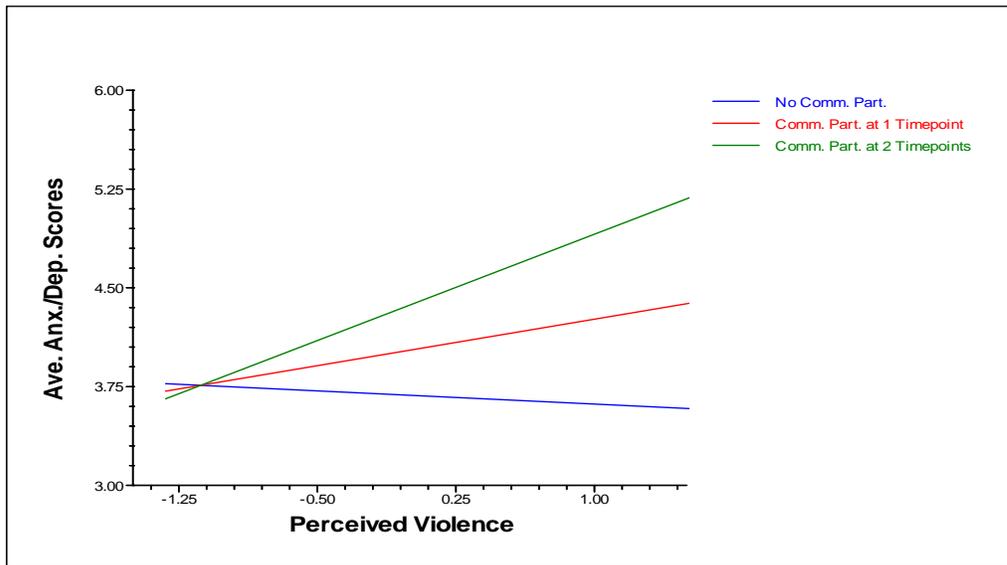
¹With the exception of youth age, all youth and maternal/family characteristics were assessed at wave 1.

²Neighborhood-level data was drawn from an independent, representative sample of residents in each of the 80 neighborhoods.

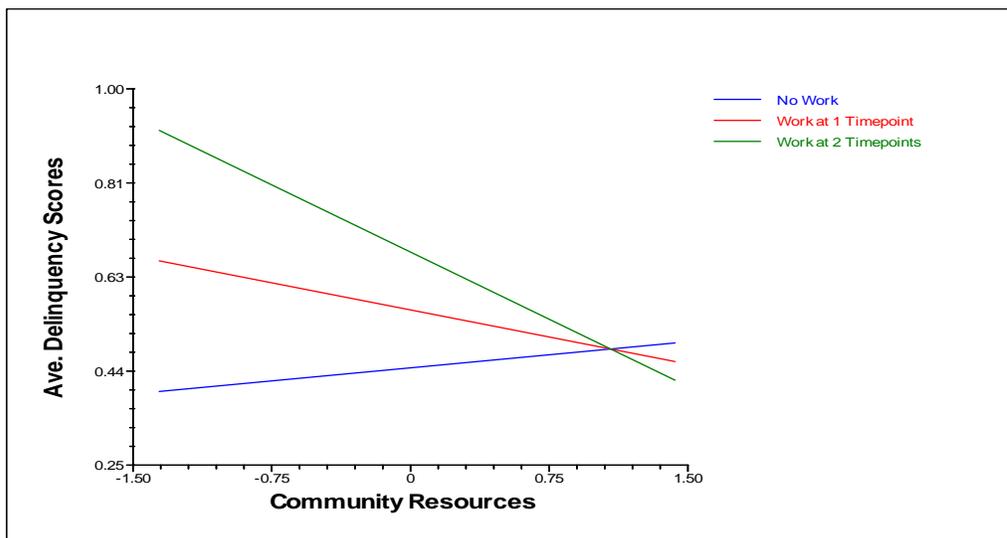
³Youth and family background characteristics were added as statistical controls.

Results

- Linear slopes for three outcomes were positive, indicating increasing growth trajectories.
- Greater **sports participation** over time was associated with lower average internalizing symptoms (i.e., anxiety/depression) and higher average externalizing behaviors (i.e., delinquency and deviant peer affiliation).
- Greater **student government participation** over time was associated with lower average deviant peer affiliation and slowed down increasing delinquency trajectory.
- Greater participation in **community-based clubs** over time was associated with lower average deviant peer affiliation. And, in more violent neighborhoods only, greater participation was associated with higher average anxiety/depression (see figure below).



- **Employment** over time was associated with lower average delinquency and deviant peer affiliation—the latter true only in neighborhoods with plentiful community resources for youth (see figure below).



- **Breadth of participation** over time associated with higher average delinquency and slowed down increasing anxiety/depression trajectory

Conclusions

In brief, sports participation over time was unfavorably associated with youth's outcomes, with the exception of their anxiety/depression. Long-term student government participation slowed down the increasing trajectory in youth's delinquency over time and led to lower deviant peer affiliation. The impacts of participation in community-based clubs and part-time work on youth's well-being were beneficial in resource-rich, non-violent neighborhoods. These findings suggest that different types of activities and patterns of participation over time lead to differing outcomes for youth, and, to some extent, these findings vary with neighborhood characteristics. Greater consideration needs to be given to the types of activities offered for youth in disadvantaged neighborhoods.