

# Examining adolescent participation in extracurricular activities: Is there an optimal level?

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## Introduction

### Have You Ever Wondered....

Whether participation in too many extracurricular activities could be detrimental to adolescent health and well-being?

### Did You Know.....

- Around 83% of 12 to 17 year olds participate in at least one extracurricular activity
- 3-6% of adolescents participate in 20 or more hours of organized activities/week
- Youth spend an average of 5 hours a week in organized activities
- 86% of those in this study reported participating in some type of sport

### Research Questions

1. How does involvement in extracurricular activities affect adolescent health and development (GPA, depression, popularity and health)?
2. Does the impact vary by the number of activities, sex, grade level, and neighborhood quality?

### Sample

4362 adolescents from Wave I and Wave II of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health.

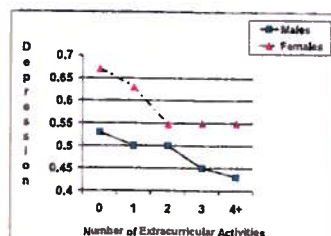
## Methods

- Each developmental/health outcome (popularity, depression, GPA and physical health) was subjected to a 3 (Activity Level) by 2 (Sex) by 3 (Grade) by 2 (Neighborhood Safety) analysis of variance.
- When significant differences for activity level were found, they were followed by a polynomial trend analysis to partition the variance into linear and quadratic trend components.
- In cases where significant interactions involving activity level were found, we attempted to understand them by running separate ANOVAs for each level of the factor that contributed to the significant interaction.

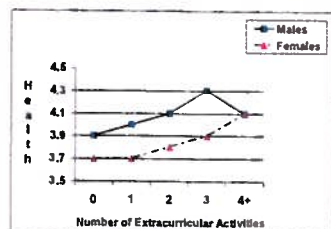
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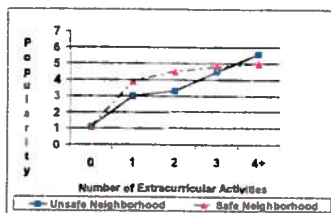
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Depression by Activity Level for Males vs. Females



General Health by Activity Level for Males vs. Females



Popularity by Activity Level: Safe vs. Unsafe Neighborhoods

## Results

**Overall:** Participation in extracurricular activities had a positive impact on most adolescent outcomes. However, the effects were moderated by sex, grade level and neighborhood quality, suggesting that extracurricular activities do not have a uniform effect across all domains.

### Depression

Males showed a decrease in depression with increased activity participation, while females showed a drop in depression from no activities through two activities and then a leveling off of depressive symptoms after two or more activities.

### GPA

GPA rose as activity involvement increased.

### General Health

For males, health increased from zero to three activities, but decreased with four or more activities; females showed no differences in general health from zero or one activity, with improvements from 2 to 4 or more.

### Popularity

Popularity generally increased with activity participation for both males and females. However, popularity for youth in safer neighborhoods leveled off after 2 or more activities while youth in unsafe neighborhood showed a steady rise in popularity with greater participation.

## Conclusion

### Depression

- Extracurricular activities might reduce depression through the development of supportive, caring relationships with adults who lead such activities.
- Increased friendships with greater extracurricular activity participation could lead to the formation of supportive peer relationships, further contributing to a reduction in depressive symptoms
- Males may benefit more from activities that promote feelings of accomplishment and friendship formation through joint activity and competition (i.e. sports).
- Females may benefit more from intimate interactions that allow for personal exchange, self disclosure and support

### GPA

- Extracurricular activities are positively related to GPA regardless of age, sex, neighborhood quality or number of activities.

### General Health

- Moderate levels of participation in activities may provide opportunities for better overall health for males, while high levels of participation may put males at risk for physical injury.

### Popularity

- Youth in unsafe neighborhoods benefit more from the opportunities extracurricular activities present for making friends, while youth in safer neighborhoods may have other opportunities for making friends.
- Younger youth experience fewer social ramifications for not participating in activities than older youth.