A Place for Everyone: Assessing Recreational Opportunities for Children in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Communities Across the United States

Emily Cook
Utah State University
Introduction

- The fitness levels of children tend to decrease with age

- Children need an hour of structured and unstructured physical activity to optimize development in:
  - Physical
  - Psychosocial
  - Emotional

- Participating in sports is associated with higher GPA. However, more public and private schools are reducing physical education

Cooper, 2010; Fox, Barr-Anderson, Neumark-Sztainer, & Wall, 2009; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2004
Due to the rising cost associated with team sports, many families are looking for an alternative option outside of the school setting.

With the increase in obesity rates, it is important to find accessible and cost-effective options.

This makes community based sport programs a possible alternative.

Guo, Chumlea, & Roche, 2002; Subramanian, Sharma, Arinachalam, Radhakrishnan & Ramamurthy, 2015
Researchers and private industries are looking at trends in physical fitness, but they have yet to consider the lack of physical activity resources at the community level.

The present study was designed to address the potential link of community and youth well-being across different states and communities.
Participants

- 201 parents aged 24 to 67 ($M = 43.13; SD = 7.91$)

- Drawn from *urban*, *suburban*, and *rural* communities in Nevada, Mississippi, and New York

- Had children aged 6 to 18 ($M = 11.60; SD = 3.32$) participating in community based recreational sports
Procedures

- Relationships were established with key stakeholders (e.g., mayors, city councilmen, parks and recreation directors) in urban, suburban, and rural communities from the three states.

- Stakeholders were asked to distribute an online survey to families in their community who met the study’s inclusion criteria:
  - Child is active in community sport
  - Child aged 6-17 years
The 50-item online survey asked the parents perception of their *sense of community* in the community, as well as their perceptions of their children’s *competence*, *enjoyment*, *commitment*, and *stress* in relation to community sport participation.
Measures

Sense of Community variables:

- **Membership**: “I put a lot of time and effort into being part of this community”

- **Influence**: “I have influence over what this community is like”

- **Reinforcement of Needs**: “I get important needs met because I am part of this community”

- **Shared Emotional Connection**: “Members of this community care about each other”

Biddle & Asare, 2011; McMillan, 1996
Measures

Child Outcome variables:

- **Competence**: “Compared to most of your child's other activities, how good is your child at sport?”

- **Enjoyment**: “My child has fun participating in recreational sport”

- **Commitment**: “How dedicated is your child to participating in recreational sport for the remainder of this year?”

- **Stress**: “How often has your child felt that he/she was unable to control the important things in recreational sport?”

Cohen et al, 1983; Harter, 1982; Scanlan et al., 1993;
Data Analysis

- Bivariate correlations were calculated and descriptive statistics were examined across all eight DVs.

- A MANOVA was conducted to examine the impact of state (Nevada, Mississippi, and New York) and setting (urban, suburban, and rural) on the eight dependent variables.

- Tukey post-hoc tests were conducted and output was examined to determine significant group differences across states and settings.
### Descriptive statistics

(all participants, $N = 201$)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>$\alpha$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Membership</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>.42</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Needs</td>
<td>2.58</td>
<td>.43</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connection</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>4.55</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>1-7</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td>4.45</td>
<td>.45</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>3.95</td>
<td>.61</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>.56</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Main Effects (State)

- When comparing the eight DVs across Nevada, Mississippi, and New York, significant differences were detected for all variables except for Connection.
Main Effects (Setting)

- When comparing the eight DVs across urban, suburban, and rural settings, no significant differences were detected.

![Bar chart showing mean scores for different variables across urban, suburban, and rural settings.](chart.png)
**Interaction Effect**  (State x Setting)

- When comparing the eight DVs across *state* (Nevada, Mississippi, and New York) and *setting* (urban, suburban, and rural) the only significant difference was on Sense of Community: *Influence*
Interpreting the data

- Results suggest that state is a more important factor than the type of community.

- Results also suggest that Mississippi is unique in the impact has on parents’ perceptions of sense of community and young recreational athletes’ sport-related outcomes.
Limitations

- Survey respondents were self-selected from among the nine partner communities.
- Survey responses were limited to a single parent participant from each family.
- No consideration of the impact of infrastructure or community level influences on child outcomes.
Conclusions

- Present findings may help inform the design of programs, facilities, and initiatives to provide more community level recreation opportunities for youth.

- Future efforts could examine the improvement of physical and psychological well-being of the children in these and other targeted communities.

- Researchers should seek a deeper understanding through open-ended responses.
THANK YOU!

Emily Cook
Student Researcher
3emilycook@gmail.com

Travis Dorsch
Faculty Mentor
Travis.Dorsch@usu.edu