



Australian Social Trends June 2012

Child's play:

Children's participation in organised sport or dancing

www.abs.gov.au/socialtrends

ABS catalogue no. 4102.0

ISSN 1321-1781

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Child's play

Children's participation in organised sport or dancing

Participation in physical activity, through various activities such as organised sport or dancing, is important for the development of motor coordination skills, social skills and physical fitness.¹

While most children may have access to a wide range of sporting activities, certain circumstances or characteristics of a child may be associated with lower or higher participation in organised sport or dancing.

This article looks at participation in organised sport or dancing across Australia for children aged between 5–14 years, by selected characteristics relative to an average or typical situation.

Who participates in organised sport or dancing?

In the 12 months leading to April 2009, almost two-thirds (63%) of children aged 5–14 years had participated in organised sport or dancing at least once.² A child's likelihood of having participated in organised sport or dancing may be related to many characteristics such as their sex, age, country of birth, parents' country of birth, or socioeconomic status.

...differences by age

While the likelihood of participating in organised sport or dancing did not differ significantly between young children aged 5–7 years and those aged 8–11 years, it did differ for older children.

Compared with children aged 8–11 years, children aged 12–14 years were 7% less likely to participate in organised sport or dancing. Lower participation in older children is likely due to a number of reasons. For example, early adolescence can be a time when a child's interests and responsibilities expand. School and study commitments and participating in their increasingly busy social lives are the types of activities that may compete for their time.³

...differences by sex

In 2009, participation in organised sport or dancing was different for boys and girls. Girls were 5% less likely than boys to have participated in organised sport or dancing. The lower participation among girls was despite initiatives to increase participation in these areas and might be due to a lack of confidence in girls approaching activities, cultural and social pressures as well as social stereotyping.⁴

Data source and definitions

The main data source for this article is the ABS Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey conducted throughout Australia in April 2009 as a supplement to the ABS Monthly Labour Force Survey (LFS). This article is based on a multiple logistic regression analysis around which a more in depth paper will soon be released in ABS *Perspectives on Sport* (cat. no. 4156.0.55.001).

Children refer to those aged between 5–14 years. The survey was answered by a parent or guardian on behalf of the child.

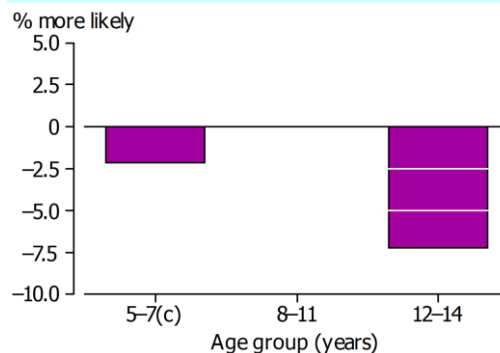
Participation refers to the undertaking of an activity outside school hours in the 12 month period to April 2009. *Relative participation* refers to the participation of one group compared to the participation rate of another group.

Organised sport refers to sports which are played or trained for outside of school hours organised by a school, club or association. Any organised or structured training or practice sessions are included as long as they have been set by an instructor or coach. Whether the child participated in an organised sport was left to the judgment of the respondent.

In this article, *fortnight* refers to the two school weeks prior to interview.

Interpretation of the term *dancing* was left to the respondent. If the respondent queried the definition they were advised it included formal dancing lessons (e.g. ballet, callisthenics), musicals and eisteddfods where the child's predominant activity was dancing. The dancing must have occurred outside of school hours and may have included lessons, practising and performances.

Relative participation(a) in organised sport or dancing by age group – 2009(b)



(a) Relative to participation of 8-11 year olds.

(b) In the 12 months to April 2009.

(c) Not statistically significantly different from the 8-11 year old group.

Source: ABS 2009 Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey

...differences by socioeconomic status

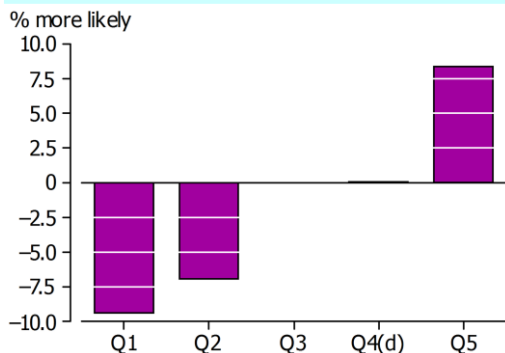
Although not all-encompassing measures, the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) and a child's parents' employment status are good proxy indicators of a child's socioeconomic status. Indeed, there are strong relationships between participation in organised sport or dancing and both these factors.

Using the index of relative advantage and disadvantage, in 2009, children living in areas with the most relative advantage (quintile 5), were 8% more likely to participate in organised sport or dancing when compared with children in quintile 3. Conversely, children living in areas with most relative disadvantage (quintile 1), were 9% less likely to participate when compared with children in quintile 3.

Compared with children from families with one parent employed, children from unemployed single parent families were 20% less likely to participate in organised sport or dancing.

Further, the number of employed parents in the family is related to whether a child is likely to participate in organised sport or dancing. Compared with families with one parent employed, participation for children in organised sport or dancing was 18% more likely when both parents were employed, 13% less likely when neither parent was employed and 20% less likely for children from unemployed single parent families.

Relative participation(a) in organised sport or dancing by SEIFA – 2009(b)(c)



- (a) Relative to children in quintile 3.
 (b) In the 12 months to April 2009.
 (c) SEIFA Index of Relative Advantage and Disadvantage.
 (d) Not statistically significantly different from quintile 3.

Source: ABS 2009 Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey

Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA)

The ABS has developed four indexes to rank the level of social and economic wellbeing of a region. This article uses the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Advantage and Disadvantage based upon the 2006 Census of Population and Housing.

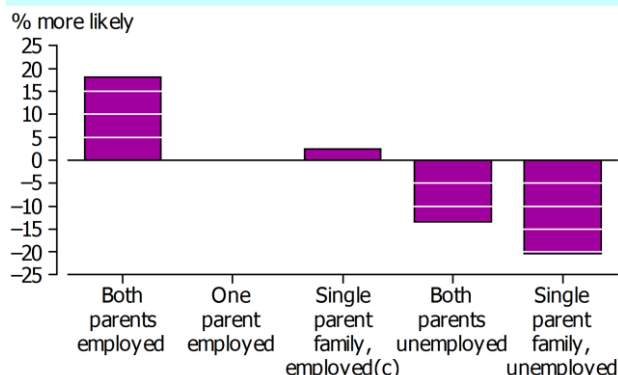
The SEIFA Index of Relative Advantage and Disadvantage combines a number of variables (such as income, education and unemployment) of people, families and dwellings within an area, and ranks these areas on a scale of relative disadvantage.

In this article the scale is divided into *quintiles* - with the lowest or first quintile representing the 20% of households in the areas of greatest relative disadvantage and the highest or fifth quintile representing the 20% of households in the areas of the most relative advantage.

For more information on SEIFA see ABS [Information Paper: An Introduction to Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas \(SEIFA\), 2006](#) (cat. no. 2039.0).

These findings suggest that access to financial resources can affect a child's ability to participate in organised sport or dancing. Parents who are employed may be more able to meet the costs of playing sport such as travel to and from the sport facility, membership fees and uniforms.

Relative participation(a) in organised sport or dancing by parent(s') employment status – 2009(b)



- (a) Relative to children living in a couple family with one employed parent.
 (b) In the 12 months to April 2009.
 (c) Not statistically significantly different from a couple family with one employed parent.

Source: ABS 2009 Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey

Relative participation in organised sport or dancing by selected variables – 2009(a)

Variable	Compared with	Participation likelihood
Female	Male	5% less likely ↓
Born in a non-main English speaking country	Born in Australia	9% less likely ↓
Did not use internet at home	Did use internet at home	19% less likely ↓
Both parents born in a non-main English speaking country	At least one parent born in a main English-speaking country	24% less likely ↓

(a) In the 12 months to April 2009.

Source: ABS 2009 Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey

Does a child's family background matter?

There is an association between a child's place of birth, their parents' place of birth, and organised sport or dancing participation. Compared with children born in Australia, in 2009, children who had been born overseas in a primarily non-main English speaking country were 9% less likely to participate in organised sport or dancing.

However, when the comparison is made looking at the birthplace of their parents, the difference is much greater. Children were 24% less likely to participate in organised sport or dancing if both of their parents were born in a non-main English speaking country, compared with children with at least one parent born in a main English speaking country.

These differences could be because of perceived discrimination, a lack of knowledge about sporting associations and clubs, or a lack of parental support.⁵

The lack of parental support may be due to a difference of priorities. Compared with parents from a country that mainly speaks English, parents from a non-main English speaking background may put more importance on

Main-English speaking countries

For people born overseas, *main English-speaking countries* are the United Kingdom, the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and the United States of America. Being from a non-main English-speaking country does not imply a lack of proficiency in English.

pursuits such as focusing on studies and caring for extended family members, which leaves little time for other activities such as organised sport and dancing.⁶

A matter of time?

Children who have access to a wide range of sporting activities may have access to a wide range of leisure time activities that might compete for their time.

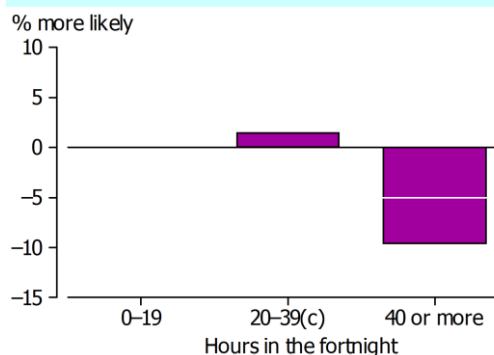
...too much technology?

Spending a lot of time watching TV, DVDs or videos is associated with lower participation in organised sport or dancing. In 2009, children who spent 40 or more hours in the fortnight watching TV, DVDs or videos were 10% less likely to participate in organised sport or dancing when compared with children who spent less than 20 hours watching.

However, children who spent between 20–39 hours watching were just as likely to participate in organised sport or dancing as those who spent less time watching.

Further, not using the internet at home had a negative impact on participation. Children who did not use the internet at home in the previous 12 months prior to interview were 19% less likely to participate in organised sport or dancing when compared with children who used the internet at home. This could be because the absence of the internet at home can be indicative of financial constraints, which also impact on participation. For more information see '[Children of the digital revolution](#)' in *Australian Social Trends, June 2011* (cat. no. 4102.0).

Relative participation(a) in organised sport or dancing by hours watching TV, DVDs and videos – 2009(b)



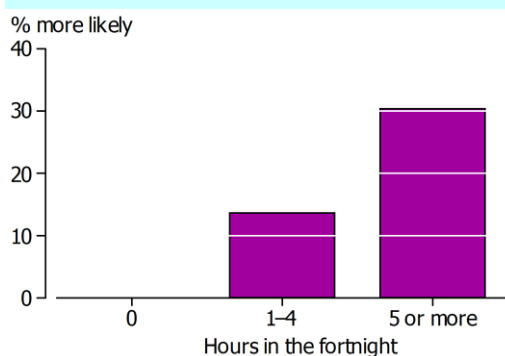
(a) Relative to watching 0-19 hours of TV in the fortnight.

(b) In the 12 months to April 2009.

(c) Not statistically significantly different from 0-19 hours in the fortnight.

Source: ABS 2009 Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey

Relative participation(a) in organised sport or dancing by hours doing drama – 2009(b)

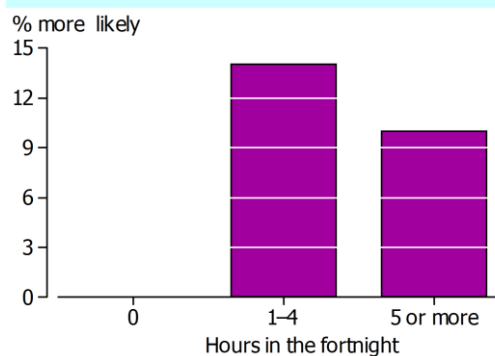


(a) Relative to children doing no drama.

(b) In the 12 months to April 2009.

Source: ABS 2009 Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey

Relative participation(a) in organised sport or dancing by hours doing homework – 2009(b)



(a) Relative to children doing no homework.

(b) In the 12 months to April 2009.

Source: ABS 2009 Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities Survey

...too much culture?

Culture and the arts are an important part of the Australian lifestyle. Cultural activities include singing, drama, playing a musical instrument, participating in arts and crafts, and attending museums and performing arts events.

Generally, in 2009, children who participated in cultural activities were more likely to have participated in organised sport or dancing when compared with children who had not participated in these activities.

Participating in music had a positive relationship with organised sport or dancing participation. Children who were singing for 1-4 hours or playing a musical instrument for 1-4 hours in the fortnight during a school term were also more likely to be participating in organised sport or dancing (12% and 7% more likely, respectively) than children who did not sing or play a musical instrument.

Children who participated in drama for between 1-4 hours in the fortnight were 14% more likely to participate in organised sport or dancing when compared with children who did not participate in drama. Further, children who participated in drama for 5 or more hours were even more likely to have participated in organised sport or dance (30% more likely than those who did not participate in any drama).

Attending a performing arts event had a similar impact to participating in drama. Children who had attended a performing arts event 1-4 times in the last 12 months were also 14% more likely to have participated in organised sport or dancing compared with children who did not attend a performing arts event. Further, for children who had attended 5 or more performing arts events, the likelihood of participating in organised sport or dancing increased to 23%.

However, participating in a cultural activity was not always related to a greater likelihood in participating in organised sport or dancing. Bucking the trend, children who participated in arts and crafts for 5 or more hours in the fortnight were 11% less likely to participate in organised sport or dancing when compared with children that did not participate in arts and crafts, while there was also no positive influence for those who participated in 1-4 hours of arts and crafts.

...too much homework?

Contrary to popular belief, children who do their homework also participate in organised sport or dancing. Indeed, there is a positive association in relation to doing homework and participation in organised sport or dancing.

Compared with children who did not do any homework, children who did 1-4 hours or 5 or more hours of homework in the fortnight were more likely to participate in organised sport or dancing (14% and 10% respectively). It has been suggested that participation in organised sport or dancing can foster character traits that prove valuable in academic work.⁷

Looking ahead

Participating in organised sport or dancing remains popular amongst Australian children and are great ways of improving a child's social skills and physical fitness.

Government and health authorities continue to express concern about the increasing levels of obesity and physical inactivity in children and the consequent long-term health problems. These concerns over children's activity patterns have led to the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Children and Youth.⁸ These include:

1. Children should participate in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity every day.

2. Children should not spend more than 2 hours per day using electronic media for entertainment (e.g. computer games, Internet, TV), particularly during daylight hours.

Additionally, initiatives such as the Active After-school Communities Program and the Junior Sports Framework address concerns about physical fitness.⁹

Recently, the Prime Minister's challenge and the Prime Minister's Paralympic Challenge were introduced by the Australian Government, in partnership with the Australian Olympic Committee and the Australian Paralympic Committee, to encourage "all Australian primary school-aged children to try a variety of Olympic and Paralympic sports whilst developing valuable life skills such as inclusion, fair play and sportsmanship".¹⁰

In the broader context of sports participation for all Australians, the National Sport and Active Recreation Policy Framework promotes and facilitates sports participation for both children and adults.¹¹ A key objective of this framework is on increasing sports participation of particular sub-groups that are under-represented in sport and active recreation.

The development of even more robust policies based on past experience and research aims to ensure that future generations of Australians are healthier than previous generations.

Endnotes

- 1 Parenting and Child Health, 2011, [Sport for Children](#), viewed 21 March 2012, <www.cyh.com>.
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, [Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities, Australia, 2009](#), cat. no. 4901.0, <www.abs.gov.au>.
- 3 Kids Health, 2012, [Fitness and your 13 to 18 year old](#), viewed 18 April 2012, <www.kidshealth.org>.
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- 6 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, [Migrants and participation in sport and physical activity](#), viewed 21 March 2012, <www.abs.gov.au>.
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- 8 Department of Health and Ageing, 2012, [Physical Activity Guidelines](#), viewed 22 March 2012, <www.health.gov.au>.
- 9 Australian Sports Commission, 2012, [Schools and Juniors](#), viewed 21 March 2012, <www.ausport.gov.au>.
- 10 Australian Sports Commission, 2012, [The Prime Minister's Olympic Challenge and the Prime Minister's Paralympic Challenge](#), viewed 15 May 2012, <www.ausport.gov.au>.
- 11 Australian Sports Commission, 2011, [National Sport and Active Recreation Policy Framework](#), viewed 15 May 2012, <www.ausport.gov.au>.

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