



USE OF TIME AFTER SCHOOL



Introduction

The home environment is a key setting for encouraging physical activity among children and youth, as parents have the ability to influence activity-related behaviours of children from early childhood through their adolescent years. Although there is a lack of agreement about the influences of family, research suggests that parental support and assistance, including encouragement and support, and financial assistance,³⁹ may help to support children's physical activity.^{39,2} In addition to having the potential of modeling appropriate active behaviours for their children, parents and family members also have the potential of regulating or restricting inactive behaviours.

This section explores the choices of pursuits made by Canadian children in their time after school and before dinner. These are characterized in this section as sedentary and active pursuits. The data are analyzed by socio-demographic and economic indicators, including the parent's and child's age and gender, region of residence, community size, household income, parent's educational attainment, parent's daily physical activity level, and parent's and child's sport participation. The analyses also compare trend data over time where possible. This section will finish with a discussion of the implications and recommendations resulting from the data.

Sedentary pursuits after school

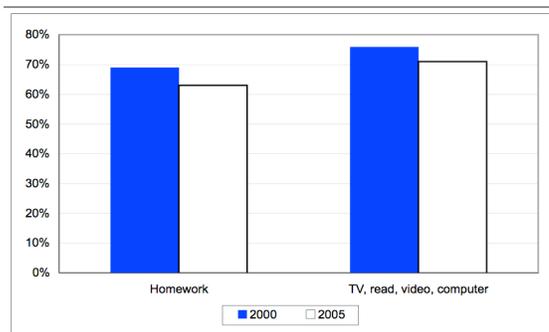
This topic is the first of two exploring the different kinds of activities children do between the time they finish school and the time they have dinner. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of parents report that their children typically do homework during this time, and 71% report that their children do sedentary activities such as reading, watching television, and playing video or computer games. Parents residing in New Brunswick and Ontario are more likely, while parents residing in Quebec and Alberta are less likely, to report that their children typically do homework after school. There are few differences provincially in terms of children doing other sedentary activities after school, with the exception of parents residing in Quebec and the Northwest Territories being less likely and parents in Ontario being more likely than parents nationally to report this.

Child's age and sex According to parental reports, girls are more likely than boys to do homework after school. Although true for both age groups, this is particularly apparent in teenagers (70% of teenage girls versus 53% of teenage boys). Teenage boys, however, are reportedly more likely than teenage girls to do other sedentary activities such as reading, watching television, and playing video or computer games after school.

Child's participation in sport There are generally no differences in the proportion of children doing homework and other sedentary activity after school between those who do and do not participate in sport. However, among sport participants, those who participate in competitive and structured sports are more likely to report doing other types of sedentary activities (like watching television, playing video or computer games, and reading) after school compared to those who participate in non-competitive or unstructured sports.

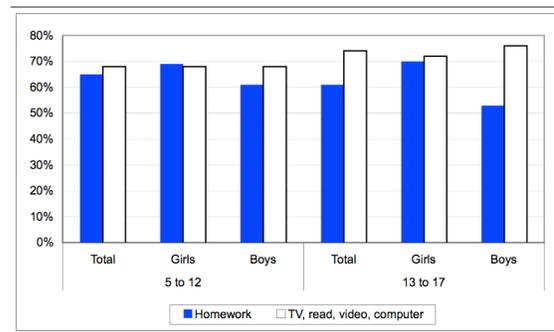
Socio-economic and demographic factors Parents with less than secondary school education are generally less likely than those with higher levels of education to say that their children do homework after school. Parents with the lowest household incomes (less than \$20,000 per year) are less likely than parents with higher incomes to report that their children do homework after school, and are also less likely to report that their children do other sedentary activities after school. Parents who are married are more likely than those who are widowed, divorced, or separated to report that their children do homework after school; however, parents who have never been married are much more likely than others to report that their children do other types of sedentary activities after school.

SEDENTARY ACTIVITIES
overall trends, 2000-2005



2000 & 2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

SEDENTARY ACTIVITIES
By child's age and sex



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

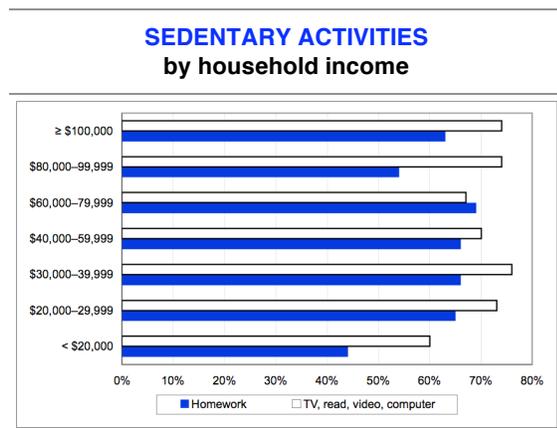
Sedentary pursuits after school (cont'd)

Parent's age and sex Fathers are more likely than mothers to say that their child does homework after school. This gender difference appears for both parental age groups. However, there are no differences overall between younger adults and older adults. There are also no parental age or sex differences in the likelihood of reporting other types of sedentary activities.

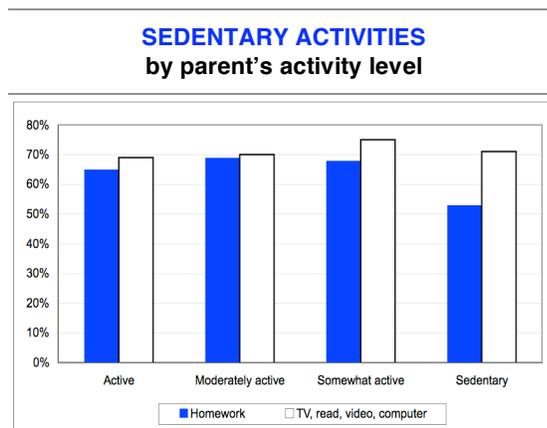
Parent's activity level The least active parents are less likely than others to say that their children do homework after school.

Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are more likely than other parents to report that their children do homework after school, but are just as likely as other parents to report that their children do other types of sedentary activities.

Trends Fewer parents in 2005 report that their children do homework after school compared to 2000. The pattern where girls are reportedly more likely to do homework and boys are more likely to do other types of sedentary activities continues in 2005. Interestingly, in 2000, parental education level and household income were not associated with children's participation in sedentary activities after school, whereas these relationships emerge in 2005.



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Active pursuits after school

According to parental reports, 70% of Canadian children play outdoors between the time they get home from school and the time they eat dinner. Two-thirds of parents report that their children participate in unorganized physical activities after school; these unorganized activities might include bicycling, walking, or running. One-quarter of parents indicate that their children participate in organized activities, such as soccer practice or swimming lessons, after school. Almost half (46%) of parents indicate that their children do chores during this time period.

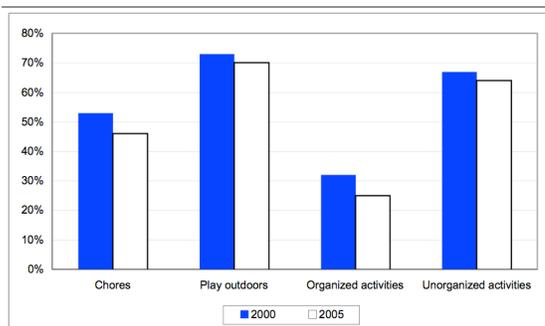
Regional differences Parents residing in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and the Northwest Territories are more likely than parents overall to say that their children do chores or play outdoors after school. Parents in Newfoundland and Ontario are also more likely to report that their children play outdoors. Parents in Saskatchewan, British Columbia and the Northwest Territories are more likely than other parents to report that their children participate in organized activities during this time. Parents residing in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon are more likely to say that their children participate in unorganized activities after school. Parents residing in Quebec, however, are less likely than the national average to report that their children do chores, play outdoors, or participate in organized or unorganized activities after school.

Child's age and sex Boys are more likely than girls to play outdoors or participate in unorganized activities after school, and these differences appear for both age groups. Although boys and girls are equally likely to participate in chores and organized activities after school, younger children are somewhat more likely than teenagers to participate in organized activities.

Child's participation in sport Children who participate in sport are reportedly more likely than those who do not, to do chores after school, play outdoors, or participate in organized or unorganized activities.

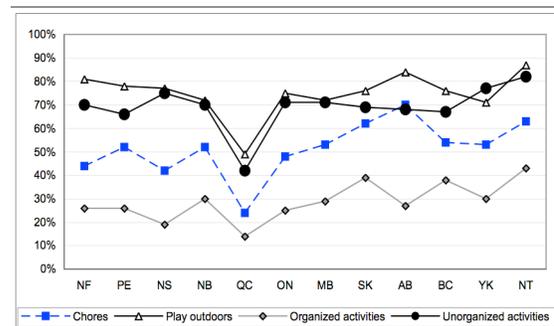
Socio-economic and demographic factors Parents with lower attained levels of education are more likely than parents with a university degree to report that their children do chores or play outdoors, yet are less likely to say that their children participate in organized physical activities and sports after school.

ACTIVE PURSUITS
overall trends, 2000-2005



2000 & 2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

ACTIVE PURSUITS
by province



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Active pursuits after school (cont'd)

Socio-economic and demographic factors (cont'd) Similarly, low income parents are more likely than those with high incomes to report that their children do chores or play outdoors after school, yet are less likely to indicate that their children participate in organized activities during this time. There are significant differences for participation in active pursuits after school when examined by community size; however, the relationship is not clear.

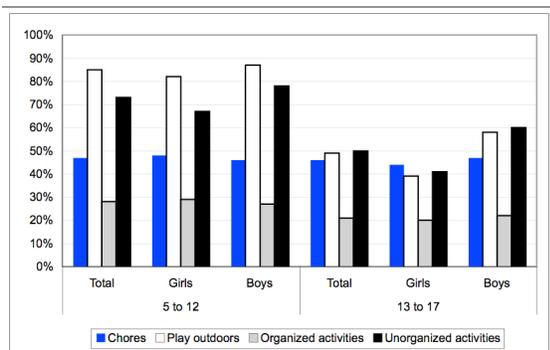
Parent's age and sex Fathers are more likely than mothers to state that their children play outdoors after school. Younger parents (25 to 44 years old) are more likely than older parents (45 to 64 years old) to report that their children play outdoors and participate in unorganized physical activities after school. Among older parents, fathers are more likely than mothers to report that their children play outdoors.

Parent's activity level Active parents are more likely to state that their children participate in organized or unorganized physical activities and sports after school, compared to the least active parents.

Parent's participation in sport Parents who participate in sport are no more likely than other parents to report that their children do chores after school. However, parents who participate in sport are more likely than other parents to indicate that their children play outdoors, participate in organized activities, or participate in unorganized activities after school.

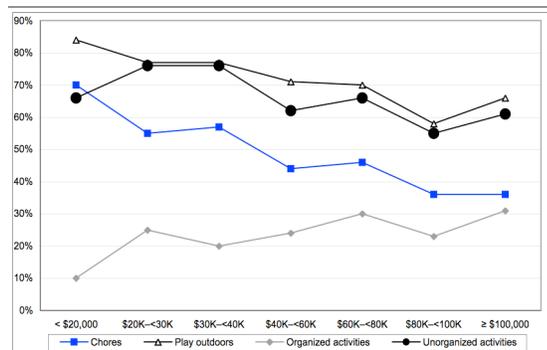
Trends Overall, there has been a slight decrease in the proportion of parents who cite that their children participate in active pursuits after school since 2000. There have been a few notable changes over time, namely: girls are no longer more likely than boys to do chores after school; children are now equally likely to do chores after school, and boys are now more likely to play outdoors regardless of age; and girls are now equally as likely to participate in organized activities after school as boys. Some relationships have persisted over time, specifically: active parents are more likely to indicate that their children participate in unorganized or organized activities after school, and low income parents are more likely to cite chores and less likely to cite organized activities as after school pursuits for their children.

ACTIVE PURSUITS
by child's age and sex



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

ACTIVE PURSUITS
by household income



2005 Physical Activity Monitor, CFLRI

Summary of section

Canadian children participate in a host of activities between the time that school ends and dinner time. According to parental reports:

- 71% of children do sedentary activities such as reading, watching television, and playing video or computer games;
- 70% of children play outdoors;
- 64% of children participate in unorganized activities including bicycling, walking, or running;
- 63% of children typically do homework;
- 46% of children do chores during this time period; and,
- 25% of children participate in organized activities, such as soccer practice or swimming lessons.

Participation in these activities varies widely by geographic region. Girls are reportedly more likely than boys to do homework after school, whereas boys are more likely than girls to play outdoors or participate in unorganized activities after school. Boys and girls are apparently equally likely to participate in chores and organized activities after school. Children who participate in sport are reportedly more likely than those who do not, to do chores, play outdoors, or participate in organized or unorganized activities after school.

Differences also appear for socio-economic groups. Low income parents are less likely to report that their children do homework, do other sedentary activities after school, or participate in organized activities, but are more likely to say that their children do chores or play outdoors after school.

Patterns also appear for parental activity level, where inactive parents are less likely to say that their children do homework after school, while active parents are more likely to state that their children participate in organized or unorganized physical activities and sports during this time.

Regarding trends over time, fewer parents now report that their children do homework after school compared to 2000. However, more parents say that their children participate in active pursuits compared to 2000. Furthermore, in 2005, girls are no longer more likely than boys to do chores after school, boys are now more likely to play outdoors, and girls are just as likely to participate in organized activities after school.

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Data from this section reveal that sedentary activities such as reading, watching television, or playing computer or video games are popular pursuits among young people between the time that school ends and dinner. Some research has shown a relationship between the participation in sedentary behaviours (television watching, reading, and games) after school and lower levels of physical activity,⁴⁰ whereas other research has shown an inconclusive relationship between television watching and physical activity levels.

In addition to increasing time spent in physical activity, Canadian guidelines for physical activity among children and youth focus on limiting ‘non-active’ time spent watching television or playing video games. As such, the guidelines suggest that that children start with a 30 minutes decrease in non active time, and successively expanding this decrease.⁷ Other findings in this report show that doing homework after school is not related to the overall physical activity level of children; however, other types of sedentary activities such as watching television, reading, or playing video or computer games during this time period do appear to be associated with overall reduced physical activity in children and youth. Parents can be encouraged to reduce or set restrictions on the amount of time spent by children in inactive behaviours.

Parents can be encouraged to provide an environment at home that is supportive of physical activity, for example by modeling appropriate active behaviours, helping children establish activity goals, reinforcing activity with rewards or incentives, and fostering a family-oriented approach to activity. Parents can also encourage children to spend more time outdoors, as time spent outdoors is positively correlated with children’s activity levels.⁴¹ Results from an earlier section in this report reveal a positive relationship between children who spend time outdoors after school and steps taken. Moreover, simply being outdoors can also encourage active play by potentially minimizing the temptation to substitute inactive behaviours for otherwise active ones. In addition, playing outdoors is a relatively inexpensive and easy way to increase physical activity. This is an important consideration for low income families whose children typically demonstrate lower levels of leisure time physical activity. To encourage playing outside after school, the urban environment needs to be supportive and there must be adequate safe places for children to play.

Counselling during consultations with physicians and other health professionals may provide an effective means of promoting physical activity among this population. The Canadian Paediatric Society has developed tools and resources to help pediatricians and other health care professionals educate parents and their children about the benefits of physical activity. As such, they provide practice tools to counsel, community resources, links for organizations, and access to a network of pediatricians involved in counseling (see <http://www.cps.ca/English/HealthCentres/HAL/Index.htm>).

Results from this section reveal that a substantially higher number of children participate in unorganized activities than participate in organized activities after school. Other data in this section reveal that children who prefer both unorganized and organized activities take more steps in a day than do those who prefer one of these types of activity in particular. Therefore, providing opportunities for both organized and unorganized activities after school, as well as encouraging children to participate in outdoor play, should be an important focus of strategies to increase activity among children and youth.