

# Parental characteristics among factors influencing family weekend activities

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Whether a child has an older father or lives with a single father are among important factors affecting how kids spend weekend time, according to a new study conducted by transportation engineers at The University of Texas at Austin.

The study, based on a national survey, was done to reveal how family structure and dynamics influence weekend leisure activity choices. These activities influence travel choices, which in turn can inform cities regarding infrastructure planning for future travel needs.

"It's becoming clear that children's age and the presence of children have a substantial impact on adult travel patterns," said Professor Chandra Bhat. "If we don't understand the interactions within families and how that is influenced by demographics, we're not going to understand how to forecast travel patterns."

The study focused on families with children between 5 and 15 years of age who participated in the 2002 child development-related survey of the U.S. Panel Study Income Dynamics. Bhat and graduate research assistant Ipek Sener from the Department of Civil, Architectural and Environmental Engineering analyzed the families for time spent in various in-home and out-of-home activities. Which parent spent time with a child on Saturdays and Sundays, parental age and other family characteristics were among the factors considered.

Bhat and Sener present results from the study on 1,574 children today at

the annual meeting of the Transportation Research Board in Washington, D.C. Their findings include the following:

The children spent a daily average of 7.5 hours on weekends at home in leisure activities, including watching TV, playing computer games and playing with siblings. When they left home for leisure, a mother's age didn't influence how likely the child was to participate in a leisure activity with her. However, one in four children with fathers 65 years or older spent time with their fathers outside home in leisure activities compared to one in 10 children whose fathers were aged 50 to 65. The likelihood that children spent time outside of home with their fathers continued to drop as the father's age fell.

Children whose fathers had at least a bachelor's degree were more likely to spend time socializing outside home in general, and to spend a longer time doing so, than children with less well-educated fathers. Children whose mothers had at least a bachelor's degree less often spent time shopping outside home in general, and spent a shorter time doing so, than children with less well-educated mothers.

Children who lived only with their fathers participated more often in out-of-home leisure activities with only their father, and spent more time doing so, than children from two-parent households. When the father's race was considered, African-American fathers were somewhat less likely than fathers of other races to spend time outside the home with their children, regardless of partner arrangement.

Boys were somewhat more likely to participate in active recreation than girls. That included participation in organized sports or bicycling in their neighborhood.

Caucasian children were somewhat more likely to participate in active recreation outside of home and in passive recreation (such as going to

sporting events and arts and crafts activities) than children who are African-American, Hispanic or of other races.

"We're not completely certain," Bhat said, "but it's possible that there's a lack of adequate recreational facilities in and around neighborhoods of non-Caucasians."

Bhat, the Adnan Abou-Ayyash Centennial Professor in Transportation Engineering, discusses study results like these while participating on national panels that consider improving neighborhood travel options to meet recreational and other needs, and to improve travel-forecasting methods. He has worked extensively with the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan planning organization, and has served on national panels to examine land-use and transportation planning undertaken by metropolitan planning organizations in cities such as Los Angeles, San Francisco and Washington, D.C.

Source: University of Texas at Austin

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