

Parents' endorsement of vigorous team sports increases children's physical activity, say researchers

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Parents who value strenuous team sports are more likely to influence their children to join a team or at least participate in some kind of exercise, and spend less time in front of the TV or computer, a new study says.

Researchers from Baylor College of Medicine and Duke University studied a sample of 681 parents of 433 fourth- and fifth-graders from 12 schools in Houston. They found that those parents who conveyed the importance of high-intensity team sports to their children had more active children. Both the boys and girls watched less TV and spent less time on their computers.

The findings appear in the July issue of [Health Psychology](#), published by the American Psychological Association.

Endorsing all types of exercise - both team sports and individual sports - increased boys' activity levels but not girls', the study said.

"The difference between activity levels in the girls and boys had to do with the parents' attitudes toward the types of activities. Parents encouraged sons to partake in vigorous- and moderate-intensity team and individual sports, and vigorous-intensity home chores, such as heavy yard work, more than they encouraged these activities for their daughters," said lead author Cheryl Braselton Anderson, PhD. "There

still is gender bias on encouraging boys to participate in certain sports and strenuous activities more than girls."

Vigorous team sports included basketball and soccer, and moderate team sports included baseball/softball, volleyball and football. Intense individual activity included running, cycling, swimming and skating, and moderate individual activity included walking, biking around the neighborhood and golf.

Household chores were also included as a form of physical activity. Vigorous household chores included heavy yard work and moving furniture; moderate household chores included cleaning, raking leaves, weeding and carrying groceries.

Parents' attitudes toward household chores had unexpected influences on children's attitudes and activity levels, the researchers said. "Cleaning house and doing laundry was associated with a decrease in boys' sport team participation and more TV watching," Anderson said. "Right now, we do not know why, but it could be that active boys spend less time inside and more time outside, so staying inside may detract from outdoor activity with friends. Boys shared their parents' attitude about the importance of vigorous household activities (yard work, moving), whereas girls did not. Parents did not believe girls should do these activities, but girls did not agree."

Demographic and ethnic factors also played a role in attitudes toward physical activity, both in sports and chores. Hispanic parents did not value strenuous household chores for children of either sex. Families with more children valued chores more, and families with more education (and money to pay for housekeeping and yard work) valued them less, the study found.

Hispanic parents encouraged their sons to play vigorous team and

individual sports but did not encourage their daughters, Anderson said. African-American girls, but not boys, placed less value on exercise that required light to moderate effort, like riding their bikes, and both African-American girls and boys watched more TV.

More educated parents placed higher value on both vigorous- and moderate-intensity individual or team sports for boys but did not place as high a value for girls, Anderson said. And having more children in the family influenced whether the parents valued sports for girls: More children led to more interest in the girls' being active.

"Playing team [sports](#), especially the more strenuous ones, really makes a difference in decreasing both boys' and girls' media use and making them more active," Anderson said. "It is a good idea for parents to adopt a positive attitude toward all types of vigorous physical activities for [boys](#) and girls and know that [girls](#) can and want to do them."

More information: "Parent-Child Attitude Congruence on Type and Intensity of Physical Activity: Testing Multiple Mediators of Sedentary Behavior in Older Children," Cheryl B. Anderson, PhD, and Sheryl O. Hughes, PhD, Baylor College of Medicine; Bernard F. Fuemmeler, PhD, Duke University Medical Center; *Health Psychology*, Vol. 28, No. 4.

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