

Children who travel to school independently are more satisfied and perform better in school

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Larkmead School. Credit: CC-BY-SA-2.5,2.0,1.0

Traveling to school is just not about getting from home to school. A new doctoral thesis from Karlstad University shows how the choice of mode of transport and activities during the trip affects children's well-being and achievement in school.

Jessica Westman, Ph.D. in Psychology at CTF, Service Research Center at Karlstad University, has in her dissertation studied how different factors such as mode of travel and activities affect [children](#)'s well-being and achievement at school, and why parents choose to drive their

children.

"Children who do not travel independently, i.e., without parents' supervision, lose natural opportunities to explore their neighborhood and to interact with friends on their own. As a result, they become less independent and secure in their immediate environment. Thus, the increased car travel may on some levels be related to children's decrease in wellbeing, says Jessica Westman.

More parents drive their children to school

Jessica's studies show that children feel better when they walk, ride a bike or go by bus to school. Nevertheless, more and more parents choose to drive their children by car – whether the distance to school is short or long.

"Parents choose the car for practical reasons. Unlike parents in other countries, many Swedish parents consider that the road to school is safe and appropriate for children to travel independently. Yet, they choose the car. It's a worrying development and I hope my research can help motivate a change," says Jessica Westman.

To achieve a change, [school bus](#) and other options need to be experienced as equally practical. It is important to capture all aspects of travel choices and not just focus on how "hard factors" such as distance, traffic and age of children affect the journey to school – but also how personal preferences govern, such as parents' behavior and emotions. This will make it easier to find tools that can motivate parents to change their children's travel habits.

Activities affect children positively

The dissertation shows that children who are active during their trip to school – talking and socializing with friends, or surfing on the mobile phone—are happier than the children who sit silent by themselves or slumber in the car. Active children also performed better on a cognitive test that was conducted when they arrived at school

"We need to reassess children's school trips. A school trip is an opportunity for children and young people to engage in activities that make them happy and alert, which can lay the foundation for the rest of the day. It is best to [travel](#) with friends – active mode or [school](#) bus. If you still have to go by car – make sure you have fun with your child and make the trip a pleasant moment for socializing. It's probably my best tip for car driving [parents](#)," says Jessica Westman.

Provided by Karlstad University

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