

Are your children overdoing it? Too many extracurricular activities can do more harm than good

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Family Number	Child's Gender	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Lower-middle-class								
17	Male	Scouts	Running club*	Dodgeball* Guitar lesson*	Drama*	Junior club		Hockey
25	Female		Running club* Guides		Netball*			
39	Male	Ukulele lesson	Football		Football*		Football	Church group
40	Female	Football	Swimming club		Guides		Football	Swimming club
51	Male	Drama* Football		Swimming club	Football*	Swimming club	Swimming club Football	Swimming club
Mid-middle-class								
6	Female	Violin lesson	Street dance	Netball*	Judo*			Hockey
7	Female	Swimming	Running club* Tennis	Piano lesson	Drama* Stagecoach	Junior club	Triathlon club	
9	Female	Dance	Running club* Tennis	Swimming lesson	Art club*	Junior club	Dance	
35	Male	Hockey* Rugby	Football* Athletics	Tag rugby*	Judo* Fencing*		Athletics Tennis	Rugby
60	Male	Art club*	Football	Swimming lesson			Tennis	Football
Upper-middle-class								
3	Male	Guitar lesson*	Swimming lesson	Football*	Cricket*		Football	Rugby
5	Male	Guitar lesson*	Rugby	Football*			Rugby	Cricket
20	Female	Orchestra* Piano lesson*	Violin lesson* Swimming	Newspaper club*	Animation club*	Chess club	Swimming club	Swimming club

The typical weekly extracurricular activity schedules of a subset of the studied children. Credit: © Taylor & Francis Group, 2018.

The growing demand for children to get involved in organized activities outside of school is placing unprecedented strain upon families.

A new study, published in Taylor & Francis journal *Sport, Education and Society*, reveals just how significant a role extracurricular activities, such as music lessons and sports clubs, play in [family life](#).

Attempting to understand the impact [children](#)'s extracurricular activities is having on [family](#) life, researchers interviewed almost 50 families from twelve primary schools in North-West England.

They discovered that the majority of children—88% - took part in organized activities on four to five days per week, with 58% doing more than one in an evening. Extracurricular involvement was therefore found to dominate family life, especially for families with more than one child.

Consequently, families were spending less quality time together, and [parents](#)' money and energy reserves were often depleted. One mother referred to 'knackered' children who 'don't get in until 9 or 10pm', admitting that she was 'sadly, over the moon' when something was cancelled.

Explaining these findings, researchers pointed towards growing pressure from fellow parents, children, and schools for children to have a busy extracurricular schedule.

As the study's lead author, Dr. Sharon Wheeler, comments: "We know that parents are particularly keen to ensure their children get on in life. Parents initiate and facilitate their children's participation in organized activities as it shows that they are 'good' parents. They hope that such activities will benefit their children in both the short-term (by keeping them fit and healthy, and helping them to develop friendship groups) and longer-term (by improving their job prospects).

"However, our research highlights that the reality can be somewhat different. While children might experience some of these benefits, a busy organized [activity](#) schedule can put considerable strain on parents' resources and families' relationships, as well as potentially harm children's development and wellbeing."

Although multiple car ownership and a rise in time-poor working mums have increased the accessibility and convenience of extracurricular activities, Wheeler warns parents to be mindful of overdoing it.

"Raising awareness of this issue can help those parents who feel under pressure to invest in their children's organized activities, and are concerned with the impact of such activities on their family, to have the confidence to plan a less hectic schedule for their children.

"Until a healthy balance is struck, [extracurricular activities](#) will continue to take precedence over family time, potentially doing more harm than good."

More information: Sharon Wheeler et al, 'The helping, the fixtures, the kits, the gear, the gum shields, the food, the snacks, the waiting, the rain, the car rides ... ': social class, parenting and children's organised activities, *Sport, Education and Society* (2018). [DOI: 10.1080/13573322.2018.1470087](#)

Provided by Taylor & Francis

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