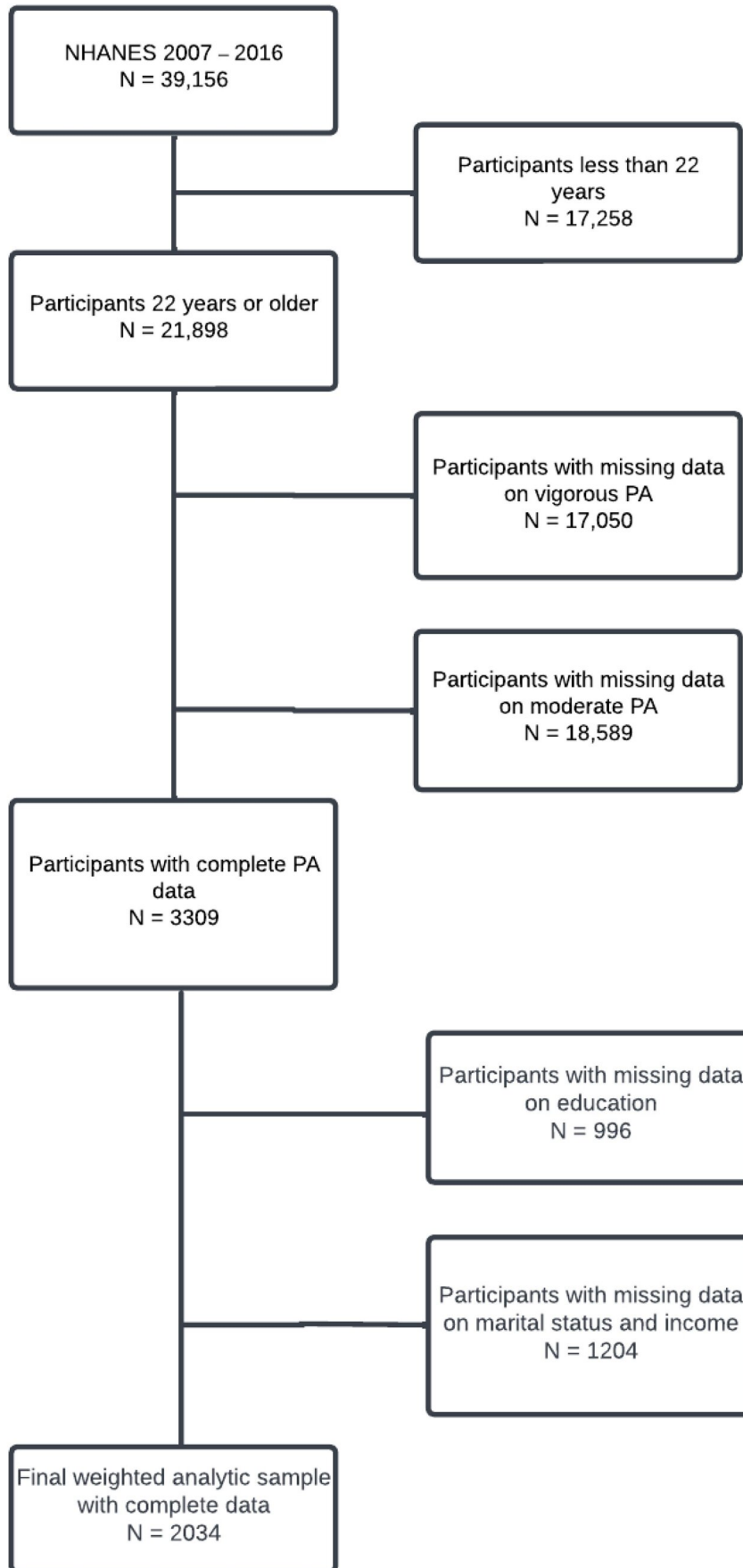


Study: Juggling multiple young children hinders vigorous physical activity for parents

July 13 2023, by Chris Stipes



Algorithm used to define the study cohort. Credit: *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2023). DOI: 10.3390/ijerph20115942

Physical activity is a crucial component of a healthy lifestyle, yet only one in three adults in the United States meets the weekly recommendation for exercise. The struggle to stay fit is complicated even further for parents, who often prioritize their children's needs over their own.

A new study, titled "The Association between Adult Sport, Fitness, and Recreational Physical Activity and Number and Age of Children Present in the Household," reveals that adults with multiple young children engage in significantly less [vigorous physical activity](#) compared to those with fewer or no children. The findings have important implications for adults who aspire to be more physically active but struggle to find the time due to their caregiving responsibilities.

Published in the *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, the study is based on an analysis of data from the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) spanning from 2007-2016, and included 2,034 adults aged 22 to 65.

The researchers examined the association between moderate and vigorous physical activities and the number and age of children in their household. Among the findings, adults with two or more children aged 0-5 reported 80 fewer minutes of weekly vigorous physical activity compared to those with no children or just one child in this age group.

Similarly, adults with three or more children aged 6-17 reported 50 fewer minutes of weekly vigorous physical activity compared to those with no children, one or just two kids in the household. However, there were no significant differences in weekly moderate physical activity regardless of the number of children in the household.

"Parents often face numerous challenges in finding the time and energy to engage in regular physical activity while caring for their children. By understanding these barriers, we can develop targeted interventions to help parents lead healthier and more active lives," said study co-author Bettina Beech, Chief Population Health Officer at the University of Houston, and clinical professor of population health at the Tilman J. Fertitta Family College of Medicine.

The lead author of the study is Jerraco Johnson, an assistant professor of kinesiology, [health promotion](#) and recreation at the University of North Texas.

"Parents typically serve as the primary role models of health behaviors for their children. Finding ways to increase parents' physical activity could potentially influence the [health](#) trajectories these [young children](#) begin on, especially for those parents with multiple kids," he said.

The implications of these findings are significant for interventions and policies aimed at promoting physical activity among parents with multiple children. The study highlights the need for family based physical activity interventions to expand their focus beyond parent-child dyads or triads. Including multiple children in these interventions may have a more significant impact on overall physical activity levels, according to the researchers.

"Workplace wellness programs have been shown as effective avenues for intervention," said study co-author Marino Bruce, director of UH

Population Health Collaboratories and associate dean of research at the Fertitta Family College of Medicine.

"Parents often spend a majority of their time outside of parenting in the workplace, making it an ideal setting to promote physical activity. By offering incentives, feedback mechanisms and short bouts of physical activity throughout the workday, employers can support parents in achieving their activity goals and overcoming time-related barriers."

Interestingly, the study also found that the impact of children on physical activity did not significantly differ between mothers and fathers, despite previous studies which suggested that mothers might be more affected by parental responsibilities. This discrepancy could be attributed to the differing measurements of [physical activity](#) used in the studies, with the current research relying on self-reported sport, fitness and recreational activities.

The researchers note that further research is needed to explore this relationship among parents with children of various ages. The study's findings underscore the importance of addressing the specific needs of [parents](#) with multiple [children](#) to promote a healthier and more active population.

More information: Jerraco L. Johnson et al, The Association between Adult Sport, Fitness, and Recreational Physical Activity and Number and Age of Children Present in the Household: A Secondary Analysis Using NHANES, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.3390/ijerph20115942](https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph20115942)

Provided by University of Houston

Citation: Study: Juggling multiple young children hinders vigorous physical activity for parents (2023, July 13) retrieved 9 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-07-multiple-young-children-hinders-vigorous.html>

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