

Can involvement in extra-curricular activities help prevent juvenile delinquency?

22 March 2008

Parents concerned about their teens' involvement in risky and criminal behavior have traditionally involved their kids in sports, church and community activities. Do those activities really help prevent risky behaviors in youth? And do the activities affect boys and girls differently? New research published by SAGE in *Crime & Delinquency* studies those questions, helping parents and youth workers design effective delinquency prevention plans.

The study, conducted by Northeastern University researchers, looked separately at delinquency and risky behaviors for both young men and young women in a suburban high school and how involvement in outside activities influenced those behaviors. The findings provided interesting, and, in some cases, surprising results.

While they found that involvement in extra-curricular activities definitely seemed to minimize the risky behaviors, there seemed to be a "tipping point" where too much participation had a counter-effect. They also found that nontraditional activities for each gender (such as sports for girls and church for boys) provided a greater protection from delinquency.

The researchers believe that extracurricular involvement helps deter delinquency by reducing unstructured time, providing incentives to conform, and creating avenues for attachments with other pro-social peers and adults.

"Young people who participate in sports and both community and church activities report significantly less serious delinquency as well as less problem drinking and risky sexual behavior," writes co-author Sean P. Varano, Ph.D. "A healthy and measured dose of involvement in extracurricular activities is good for young people."

Source: SAGE Publications

APA citation: Can involvement in extra-curricular activities help prevent juvenile delinquency? (2008, March 22) retrieved 12 October 2022 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2008-03-involvement-extra-curricular-juvenile-delinquency.html>

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