

The importance of organized out-of-school activities in developing obesity during childhood and adolescence

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This presentation overviews two longitudinal studies that identify common out-of-school care arrangements for children and adolescents and examined whether those arrangements predicted subsequent obesity. The first study assesses after-school program (ASP) participation on child body mass index (BMI), obesity status, and indicators of peer acceptance over time. Participants were 439 children in grades 1-3 who resided in a disadvantaged, urban city in the Northeastern United States. Obesity status was defined as a BMI $\geq 95^{\text{th}}$ percentile for age and gender. Children who were regular participants in ASPs showed a significantly lower increase in BMI over time and were less likely to be obese at follow-up than non-participants (21% and 33% respectively). Children who participated in ASPs also showed significant increases in popularity, received fewer peer nominations for rejection, and had larger peer networks compared to non-participants. All findings held after controlling for demographics. The second study involved participants from a nationally representative sample of 1,766 adolescents from the panel study of Income Dynamics-Child Development Supplement. Results showed that, beyond baseline measures of BMI before the summer and several demographic aspects known to predict obesity, youth whose summer arrangements involved regular participation in organized activities (sports, extracurricular activities, and after-school programs) showed significantly lower rates of obesity than other youth. This was most evident for youth whose activity participation was consistent across two waves of the study and for early adolescents. Youth whose regular summer arrangement was predominated by parent care without organized activity participation showed the highest rates of obesity.

Biography

Joseph L. Mahoney is a Professor in the School of Education at the University of California, Irvine. Trained as a developmental psychologist, his research focuses on the developmental consequences related to how young people spend their out-of-school time. He earned his doctorate at UNC-CH (1997) and post-doctoral work at Stockholm University's Psychological Institute (1999). He was as an Assistant and then Associate Professor of Psychology at Yale University (1999-2007). The author of over 50 articles, books, and chapters, he received SRCD's Distinguished Congressional Policy Fellowship and served as lead education council for U.S. Senator Jeff Bingaman in 2011-2012.

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