


IRIS
Internet Research
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Series



National Kids Survey
Part III: What Do Kids Do Outdoors?

A RECREATION Research Report in the IRIS Series¹

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¹ The Internet Research Information Series (IRIS) is an internet accessible science report series covering outdoor recreation statistics (RECSTATS), the National Kids survey (NKSSTATS), natural lands research (NATLAND) and other human-dimension and demographics research (DEMOSTATS) related to natural resources. This research is a collaborative effort between the USDA Forest Service's Southern Research Station and its Forestry Sciences Laboratory in Athens, Georgia; the University of Georgia in Athens; and the University of Tennessee in Knoxville, Tennessee.

<http://warnell.forestry.uga.edu/nrrt/nsre/IrisReports.html>

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Introduction

Previously we have reported on time kids spend outdoors (Part I), and included comparisons by age, gender, race and household income (Part II). We reported that 61 percent of kids 6 to 19 have been spending two or more hours outdoors on a typical weekday, and that over three-fourths have been spending two or more hours outdoors on typical weekend days. In this report, Part III from the **National Kids Survey**, we examine what kids do when they spend time outdoors and whether there are differences between boys and girls and between different age groups. For the most part, our interest is in outdoor leisure activities, whether at home, at school or at another location.

The Outdoor Foundation (an outdoor industry group) recently reported sports participation by youth ages 6 to 17 years old. The Foundation reported that bicycling, running/jogging/trail running, skateboarding, fishing, and camping were among the most popular youth outdoor activities between 2006 and 2007. A more recent Foundation report released in 2009 shows increases for youth in many of the more active outdoor recreation pursuits, indicating a positive trend. Biking, backpacking and hiking were among the activities that showed increases in participation among young people. The Foundation survey is oriented mostly toward physically challenging outdoor activities, and those that involve manufactured outdoor equipment. Many of the more passive activities were generally not covered in the Foundation report. A somewhat wider range of outdoor activities is covered in this report.

National Kids Survey

The **National Kids Survey** is conducted as a companion survey with the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment (NSRE). The NSRE is a general population, random-digit-dialed household telephone survey. Telephoning is accomplished by calling a random, cross-sectional sample of non-institutionalized residents of the United States, 16 years of age or older. The Human Dimensions Research Laboratory at the University of Tennessee-Knoxville, an on-going NSRE cooperator, conducts NSRE household interviews almost daily. The system is computer-assisted (CATI) so the trained interviewers work from a computer monitor and the data are automatically entered as telephone interviews are conducted and responses coded. The average length of an overall interview is restricted to 14 minutes. A proxy household member 20 or older (parent, guardian, grandparent, older sibling, etc.) is interviewed to speak for kids 6 to 15 years old in answering the **National Kids Survey** questions. Teens 16 to 19 are interviewed directly. If there is more than one child under 16 in the household, the child with the last birthday is selected for interviewing. The sample size as of the end of April 2009 was 1,201. Data continues to be collected. The following questions were asked:

1. During the past week, which of the following types of outdoor activities did the young person in your household participate in? (The order of the list of activities was randomized. The activities included are shown in Table 1 below. Youth 16 – 19 answered for themselves.)

2. Of the outdoor activities the young person in your household participated in last week, which did they spend the most time doing?

3. Which one of these activities is their favorite?

Results—Kids Activities Outdoors

Figure 1 shows the *top five outdoor activities* of youth age 6 to 19. These are the activities with the highest percentages of survey respondents indicating participation in them in the past week. Of these, the one outdoor activity with the highest participation rate (83 percent) was that of “just playing or hanging out outdoors.” Second with 79 percent participation was biking, jogging, walking, skate boarding or similar activity. Playing music or using other electronic devices outdoors was third, followed by playing or practicing team sports and reading/studying outdoors.

Table 1 compares participation rates (percentages) between *male and female* youth. Just over 87 percent of boys and 78 percent of girls indicated they had participated in playing or hanging out as an activity during the previous week. In comparison, the activity of biking/jogging/walking/skate boarding or a similar activity

was slightly more popular with girls (80 percent) than with boys (about 78 percent). Listening to music or using a screen or other electronic device outdoors, the third most popular activity, was also more popular with girls at about 60 percent participation, while for boys participation was 51 percent. Playing or practicing team sports was markedly more popular with boys at 60 percent, while for girls participation was 40 percent.

Further down the list in Table 1, higher percentages of girls participated in reading/studying, attending camps and classes, and bird or wildlife watching. Higher percentages of boys participated in riding off-road motor vehicles.

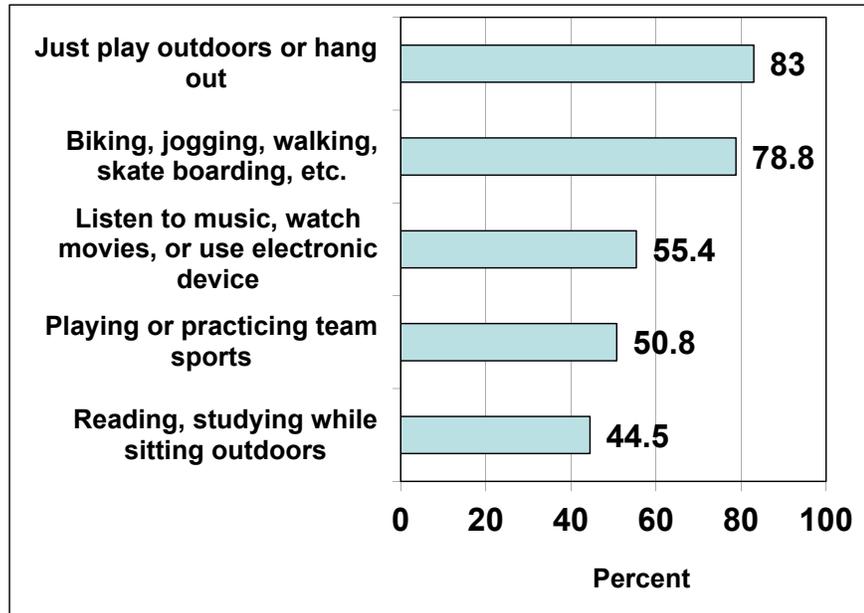


Figure 1.—Activities with highest participation rates by youth 6 to 19 years of age.

Table 1.—Percent of youth participating during the past week by type of activity and gender.

Outdoor Activity	Male	Female	Total
Just play outdoors or hang out	87.5	78.4	83.0
Biking, jogging, walking, skate boarding, etc	77.7	80.1	78.8
Listen to music, watch movies, or use electronic device	51.3	59.5	55.4
Playing or practicing team sports	60.5	40.3	50.8
Reading, studying while sitting outdoors	38.5	51.1	44.5
Other sports, e.g., tennis, golf	37.5	35.5	36.6
Attending camps, field trips, outdoor classes	30.8	39.1	34.8
Bird watching, wildlife viewing, etc	28.2	33.1	30.5
Swimming, diving, snorkeling, etc	29.3	28.8	28.9
Hiking, camping, fishing, etc	29.0	26.7	27.8
Riding motorcycles, ATVs, other off-road vehicles	24.4	15.8	20.2
Snow skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing	9.4	8.4	8.9
Boating, jet skiing, water skiing, etc	7.9	7.2	7.5
Rowing, kayaking, canoeing, surfing, etc	8.5	6.3	7.4
Other outdoor activities	10.3	11.6	10.9

Table 2 compares percentages of youth participating in different outdoor activities by *age*. By far playing or hanging out outdoors is more popular among 10 to 12 year-olds (95 percent participated in the last week), followed by 6 to 9 year olds. Similarly, biking/jogging/walking/skate boarding and related activities are most popular as an activity by 6 to 9 and by 10 to 12 year-old kids. Listening to music, watching videos or other electronic device-oriented activity is more popular with youth over age 13, especially those 13 to 15 with 73 percent participation. Percentages playing or practicing team sports are similar across age groups, but highest participation is by youth 10 to 15 years old. Reading or studying outdoors is more popular with ages 10 to 12 and 16 to 19. Participating in sports, such as golf or tennis, is most popular with younger kids, those 6 to 12. Similarly, bird or wildlife viewing is more popular with kids 6 to 12, while riding ATVs or motorcycles off road is more popular with kids older than 12.

Table 2.—Percent of youth participating by type of outdoor activity and by age group.

Outdoor Activity	Age 6 to 9	Age 10 to 12	Age 13 to 15	Age 16 to 19
Just play outdoors or hang out	89.9	95.2	81.6	67.3
Biking, jogging, walking, skate boarding, etc	83.2	84.0	68.0	78.6
Listen to music, watch movies, or use electronic device	38.2	46.7	73.1	66.9

Outdoor Activity	Age 6 to 9	Age 10 to 12	Age 13 to 15	Age 16 to 19
Playing or practicing team sports	45.5	54.0	59.2	47.3
Reading, studying while sitting outdoors	39.7	49.5	35.4	53.0
Other sports, e.g., tennis, golf	42.9	48.9	25.0	29.0
Attending camps, field trips, outdoor classes	38.7	35.1	33.4	31.1
Bird watching, wildlife viewing, etc	38.9	41.8	21.4	19.6
Swimming, diving, snorkeling, etc	30.0	30.2	31.2	25.0
Hiking, camping, fishing, etc	33.6	24.0	27.4	24.9
Riding motorcycles, ATVs, other off-road vehicles	18.4	13.3	23.5	25.3
Snow skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing	8.2	8.1	8.1	10.7
Boating, jet skiing, water skiing, etc	4.8	6.6	10.4	8.7
Rowing, kayaking, canoeing, surfing, etc	6.7	8.5	5.4	8.8
Other outdoor activities	9.7	11.3	13.0	10.4

Included in the category of “Other outdoor activities” are gardening/landscaping (23%), equestrian (12%), trampoline (11%), band (11%), family cook outs (6%), attending sports (6%), farm chores (5%), cheerleading (5%), and a variety of other outdoor activities (falling below 5%).

Figure 2 shows the percentages of kids indicating the activity in which they *spent the most time* in the past week. The respondents could select only one activity. Playing outdoors or hanging out was the activity most frequently identified, team sports was next most frequent, and biking/jogging/walking/skate boarding was third. Reading or studying and playing or practicing team sports were the 4th and 5th activities listed as occupying the most time, respectively. Much smaller percentages identified any of the other activities as ones in which they spent the most time.

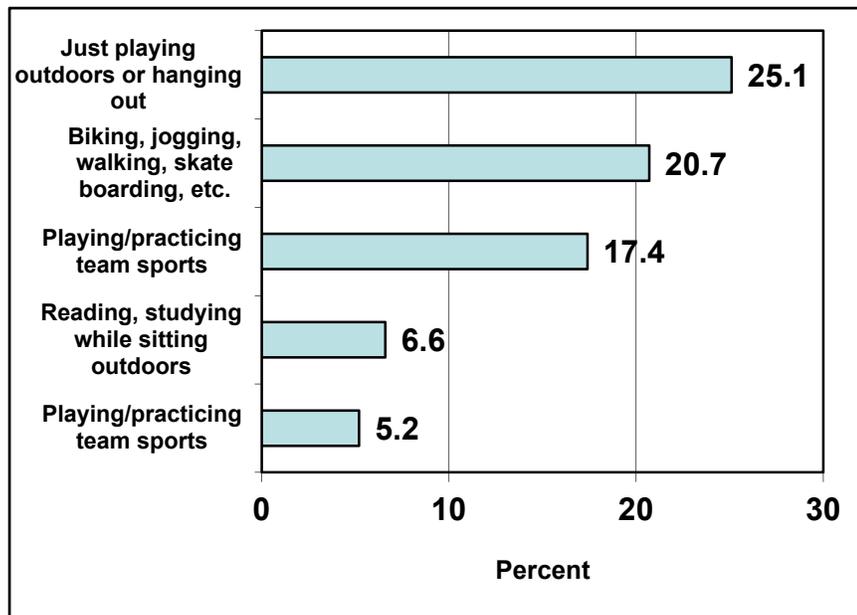


Figure 2.—Percent of youth 6 to 19 indicating the outdoor activity in which they spent the most time in the past week (top 5).

Finally, kids were asked to identify their favorite outdoor activity from among the activities in the survey list. Listed most frequently was playing or hanging out outdoors, second most frequent was team sports, followed by biking/jogging/etc., swimming/diving, reading/studying, riding motorized off-road vehicles, and other sports. Few reported the more traditional nature-based outdoor activities as being their favorite.

Summary

In Part I, we reported that 61 percent of kids 6 – 19 reported spending two or more hours outdoors on a typical weekday during the week, while over three-fourths (approximately 77 percent) spent two or more hours outdoors on a typical weekend day. One half of kids spent 4 or more hours outdoors on a typical weekend day, and just under 65 percent of reported spending 2 or more hours outdoors on a typical weekday. During this time outdoors, the outdoor activity with the highest participation rate (83 percent) was that of “just playing or hanging out outdoors.” Second with 79 percent participation was biking, jogging, walking, skate boarding or similar activity. Playing music or using other electronic devices outdoors was third, followed by playing or practicing team sports and reading/studying outdoors.

Just over 87 percent of boys and 78 percent of girls indicated they had participated in playing or hanging out as an activity during the previous week. In comparison, the activity of biking/jogging/walking/skate boarding or a similar activity was slightly more popular with girls (80 percent) than with boys (about 78 percent). Listening to music or operating any other electronic devices outdoors was third most popular with about 60 percent of girls participating and 51 percent of boys. By far, playing or hanging out outdoors is more popular among 10 to 12 year-olds (95 percent participated in the last week), followed by 6 to 9 year-olds. Similarly, biking/jogging/walking/skate boarding and related activities are most popular as an activity by 6 to 9 and by 10 to 12 year-old kids. Listening to music, watching videos or operating other electronic devices was more popular with youth over age 13, especially those 13 to 15 with 73 percent participation.