


IRIS
Internet Research
Information
Series



National Kids Survey

Part V:

Kids Outdoors Summary

A RECREATION Research Report in the IRIS Series¹

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H. Ken Cordell, Carter J. Betz, Gary T. Green, & Patricia G. Dunleavy²

¹ The Internet Research Information Series (IRIS) is an internet accessible science report series covering outdoor recreation statistics (RECSTATS), wilderness research (WILDERNESS) 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>

² The author is H. Ken Cordell, Pioneering Research Scientist, and Carter J. Betz, Outdoor Recreation Planner, Southern Research Station, Athens, GA; Gary T. Green, Associate Professor, and Pat Dunleavy, Graduate Student, University of Georgia, Warnell School of Forestry & Natural Resources, Athens, GA.

Introduction

American kids spend time outdoors, and some spend substantial amounts of time outdoors, according to evidence that contradicts the naysayers. For instance, the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment's (NSRE) **National Kids Survey** found that 64 percent of kids aged 6–19 reported spending two or more hours outdoors on a typical weekday, and over 75 percent reported spending two or more hours outdoors on a typical weekend day. Roughly 50 percent of kids also reported spending as much as four or more hours outdoors on a typical weekend day, while less than five percent of kids reported spending no time outdoors on either weekdays or weekend days. Furthermore, 41 percent of kids reported spending more time outdoors, while only 15 percent reported spending less time outdoors, during the survey year relative to the previous year.

The NSRE survey indicates that the outdoor activity with the highest participation rate by kids during the “past week” was that of “just hanging out or playing outdoors” (over 82 percent). Second, with 80 percent participation, was being physically active by biking, jogging, walking, skate boarding, or engaging in other similar activities. Playing music or using other electronic devices outdoors was third, followed by playing or practicing team sports and reading/studying outdoors.

National Kids Survey

The **National Kids Survey** was conducted at the Human Dimensions Research Laboratory at the University of Tennessee from late 2007 through early 2009 using Random Digit Dialing. Approximately 3,000 households were contacted from which a sample of 1,201 completed interviews was obtained.

Respondent households (i.e., parents) were asked

about the amount of time 6- to 19-year-old kids spent outdoors, regardless of their activity, on a typical weekday, on a typical weekend day, and at the time of surveying relative to the previous year. All data were weighted to reflect the U.S. Census demographic profile of American households, demographics of kids, and seasons of the year.



Photo courtesy of Lincoln Larson.

Results

Time Outdoors

Although the percentage of kids reporting no time spent outdoors on weekdays (two percent) increased to four percent on weekend days, those spending four or more hours a day outdoors increased from 32 percent on weekdays to 52 percent on weekend days, a 20 percent increase (see Table 1). There is a corresponding drop from weekdays to weekend days in percentage of kids spending less than half an hour to three hours a day outdoors. Part of this drop could be related to the fact that many kids have scheduled time outdoors each day throughout their school hours and as part of afterschool programs.

Table 1—Percent with Confidence Intervals (c.i.) of Kids Spending Different Amounts of Time Outdoors on Typical weekdays and Weekend Days during the Week Just Preceding the Interview (2007-2009)

Amount of time	Weekday			Weekend day		
	95% lower	(%)	95% c.i. upper	95% c.i. lower	(%)	95% c.i. upper
None	1.4	2.3	3.1	2.9	4.0	5.1
Less than 1/2 hour a day	3.2	4.3	5.5	1.3	2.1	2.9
About 1/2 hour a day	6.0	7.5	9.0	2.5	3.5	4.6
About 1 hour	19.1	21.5	23.8	10.7	12.6	14.5
2-3 hours	29.3	32.0	34.6	23.4	25.9	28.4
4 or more hours	29.8	32.4	35.1	49.1	52.0	54.8

An increase in the estimated time kids spent outdoors in the survey year as compared to the previous year (41 percent) was also reported. Furthermore, 44 percent of kids reported spending the same amount of time outdoors, while only 15 percent reported spending less time, when compared to the previous year. Interestingly enough, when examining the data by their socio-demographics characteristics, these same trends presented.

GENDER—The most significant difference between boys and girls in time spent outdoors on weekdays and weekend days was in the four or more hours per day category (boys reported 39 percent weekdays and 58 percent weekend days, while girls reported 26 percent and 46 percent in comparison). About 82 percent of boys and 74 percent of girls spent two or more hours outdoors on weekend days compared to 69 percent of boys and 60 percent of girls on weekdays.

AGE—In all age categories, more kids reported spending no time outdoors on weekends than those reporting no time spent outdoors on weekdays, with the largest difference (four percent) being reported by kids aged 16–19. On the other end of the spectrum, it was the youngest group, those aged 6–9, who reported the largest increase, from weekdays to weekend days (29 percent increase), in spending four or more hours outside. However, in general, the percentage differences in time spent outdoors between weekdays to weekend days decreased as the kids became older.

RACE—Again, time spent outdoors when compared by race (Hispanics, Blacks, Whites, and others) showed the same trends as noted above, with kids spending no time outdoors and those spending four or more hours increasing on weekends. Hispanics had the greatest percentage of

four or more hours per day outdoors on weekends (63 percent), compared to 45 percent for Blacks, 51 percent for Whites, and 31 percent for other.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME—The lowest income households (less than \$25,000) reported the greatest percentage (5.5 percent) of kids spending no time outdoors on weekend days than any other income level, while the highest income level (\$150,000+) reported the lowest percentage (1.1 percent). However, results indicated that kids in families with incomes from \$25,000 to \$99,999 spent greater time outdoors (i.e., four or more hours) on weekend days than those in families within the lowest and highest incomes brackets. The greatest percentage shift in time spent outdoors from weekdays to weekend days for kids was in households with incomes over \$50,000, with those in the \$75,000–\$99,999 bracket showing the most pronounced change of 30 percent.

Activities Outdoors

Kids aged 6–19 do all sorts of things while outdoors, but by far “just playing or hanging out” (82 percent) and physical activity like biking, jogging, walking, or skate boarding (80 percent) had the greatest participation in the “past week” (see Table 2). Passive participation such as listening to music and using electronic devices while outdoors engaged 55 percent of kids, and reading or studying involved 46 percent. Team sports, wildlife viewing, camping, fishing, and similar activities captured the time of between 31 and 39 percent of kids, while 20 percent or less participated in activities requiring motorized vehicles such as ATVs, and only 9 percent or less participated in activities requiring specialized equipment and specialized outdoors, such as snow-covered mountains, rivers, lakes, or oceans.

Table 2—Participation Rates in 14 Outdoor Activities by Kids 6 – 19 Years of Age.

Outdoor Activity	Total %
Just play outdoors or hang out	82.3*
Biking, jogging, walking, skate boarding, etc	80.1*
Listen to music, watch movies, or use electronic device	54.8*
Playing or practicing team sports	50.6*
Reading, studying while sitting outdoors	46.0*
Other sports, e.g., tennis, golf	38.6*
Attending camps, field trips, outdoor classes	34.9**
Swimming, diving, snorkeling, etc	34.8*
Bird watching, wildlife viewing, etc.	32.6*
Hiking, camping, fishing, etc	31.2*
Riding motorcycles, ATVs, other off-road vehicles	19.7
Snow skiing, snowboarding, cross-country skiing	8.6
Boating, jet skiing, water skiing, etc	8.8**
Rowing, kayaking, canoeing, surfing, etc	8.4
Other outdoor activities	9.6

GENDER—Ten percent more boys than girls just play and hang out, while 14 percent more girls than boys listen to music and use electronic devices outdoors. But the genders are virtually equal at 80 percent participation for biking, jogging, walking, skateboarding, etc. Nevertheless, boys have a higher participation rate in team sports (57 percent compared to 43 percent) while girls reported participation in non-motorized nature-based activities more than boys (75 percent compared to 61 percent). The genders are essentially equal, at 31 percent, in other nature-oriented activities such as fishing, hiking, and camping.

Interest in music, art, reading, and similar activities was the highest percentage reason given by girls (64 percent) for not spending more time outdoors, while for boys it was video games and watching DVDs and television (54 percent). In addition, not having neighborhood access to outdoor areas, not having a friend to go with, and not having transportation were reasons for not spending more time outdoors given more frequently by girls, while not feeling safe was more likely to be given as a reason by boys.

AGE—Playing and hanging out was most popular among 10- to 12-year-olds (95 percent), followed by 6- to 9-year-olds, while kids aged 13–15 participated more in listening to music or using electronic devices (75 percent) as well as playing team sports (61 percent). They also were the least likely to read while outdoors (40 percent). Kids aged 16–19 participated more in biking, jogging, walking, skate boarding, etc., (78 percent) than other outdoor activities, while just hanging out was their next most prevalent activity (68 percent). Interestingly, non-motorized, nature-based activity participation among the 16- to 19-year-olds was by far the lowest of all the age groups, except for a slight lead over the 10- to 12-year-old group in hiking, camping, fishing, etc., (32 percent compared to 27 percent).

Lower percentages of kids aged 6–9 cited the Internet and text messaging, spending time at the mall/hanging out, and lack of transportation as reasons for not spending more time outdoors, and higher percentages of kids aged 10–12 indicated music and art, video games/DVDs/TV, and safety as reasons. But poor access to outdoor areas was cited most often by kids aged 13–15 as a reason for not spending time outdoors, followed closely by the 10- to 12-year-old age group, and higher percentages of kids aged 13–15 indicated interest in Internet/messaging/networking and involvement in indoor sports as reasons. A higher percentage of kids aged 16–19 indicated hanging out at the mall or shopping as reasons, and much lower percentages of this age group indicated video games/DVDs/TV and safety. All data seem to reflect the changing interests of adolescents and the effect on their outdoor participation.