

How after-school programs help children and teenagers to avoid crime research pap...

[Profession](#), [Student](#)



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Introduction

Parents who work often think about what activities they can allow their children to participate in, especially if the activity will occur after school hours. Most of them are looking for programs that can help their children academically, while some parents prefer that their children join these activities to keep them off the streets while they, the parents, are away. Many students from disadvantaged families or environments do not have the opportunities of experiencing activities that would help stimulate their emotional and intellectual development. As a result, these children end up either lacking in knowledge or becoming street-smart kids who are exposed early on to crimes and prostitution. What can help these kids are after-school programs which are activities that youths may join after their dismissal from class in the afternoon. These activities help them stay away from juvenile crime cases, which mean participation in crimes or illegal behavior or activities.

In my case, I do service learning volunteer work at Yawkey Club at Roxbury,

Boston every Thursday. I do this for 3 hours a week and spend my time working at the Athletics Department where I get to play sports with the teenagers. Other departments that accept volunteer work include the homework department, which helps students do their assignments. The Yawkey Club of Roxbury is open to children and teenagers aged 6-18. Its after-school program aims to contribute in building the youths' educational and character development, where they offer various other activities such as art, music, graphic design, career workshops, and tutoring, among others. Working with these youths has opened my eyes to the varied opportunities that are widely available for them and for that reason, I have continuously dedicated my time to after-school volunteer work in order to become an instrument of learning, goodwill, and peace to the less fortunate ones. It was my community club that inspired me to write this research paper regarding after-school programs. For this paper, the issues to be discussed include what after-school activities are, how after-school activities helps children and teenagers to avoid crimes, how effective these after-school activities are, how they affect the educational path of youths, and how this after-school programs deal with troubling children.

Literature Review

Many studies prove that most of school-age children have parents who work on a regular basis. Thus, these children need safe and secure places to go to after they spend time in school. While there are plenty of activities that they can do to help in child development and minimize incidences of engaging in risk-taking behaviors such as tobacco smoking, drugs, crimes, and teenage

pregnancy, among others, still, a lot of them are left to fend for themselves during the critical hours of after-school. Fashola (1998) noted that the youths were mostly free to do what they want between 3pm and 6pm considering that parents are still at work during this time.

Rivera & McCorry (2007) claim in their study that children and adolescents who usually come from low-income families and live in the inner city neighborhoods are the ones particularly at risk of negative influences and committing crimes when left without adult supervision. Rivera & McCorry further states that these neighborhoods are the ones full of gangs, drug-trafficking, and violence that could easily be seen by schoolchildren who stay home right after classes. Thus, exposure of these children and teens to this environment puts them at risk of developing disturbing behaviors, use of illegal substance, and participation in crimes.

Considering that the government recognizes the possible problems this could cause, the government and private sectors have started funding activities and programs that would keep these kids in school, teaching or tutoring them on their assignments, or engaging in sports to keep them healthy and develop a sense of cooperation among those involved. According to Hall, Yohalem, Tolman, & Wilson (2003), more than 16, 000 youths are now involved in after-school activities in Boston, thus, corroborating other studies that participating in such clubs and engagements provide widespread benefits for children and teenagers (6). Apart from improved academic performance, youths engage themselves in sports activities that teach them the spirit of teamwork and camaraderie. As a result, youths prefer to join in various activities that would further their educational pursuits. Clark (1988)

further attests to the benefits of after-school clubs when he stated that participation in these programs contributed in the positive attitude of students when it comes to school activities, looked forward to attending classes, began aspiring for and planning a better future, improved their interpersonal and social skills, reduced dropout rates, and improved school and academic performance, among others.

Other studies demonstrated the importance of after-school programs, saying that after-school clubs for adolescents helped in reducing children's and teen's exposure to violence and crime, thus, the opportunity to commit crime is also minimized as these students recognize that they have a better life ahead of them. This is also mainly due to the sense of belongingness school-age children and teens experience when they participate in after-school activities.

Critical Analysis

Unlike children from more contemporary environments, after-school activities are aplenty, giving them opportunities to succeed academically, improve their social behavior, participate in personal enrichment programs, and develop and achieve their personal goals (DeAngelis). Despite having multitudes of youth programs, the inaccessibility to rural and inter-city youths has become a problem, which leads to youths joining gangs, trading drugs, and getting involved in various crimes.

In America, the reality is that many children go home to empty homes after school as they wait for their parents to arrive from work. This increases the possibility of falling prey to so-called friends who introduce them to activities

that could harm the child. In time, constant exposure helps develop deviant behaviors and commission of crimes. Based on studies, juvenile crimes are very common between 3pm and 6pm (Juveniles), the period when children are at home from school and without direct adult supervision (Fashola 1). Recognizing the problems besetting the youths today, after-school clubs have increased in the United States. Government and private programs such as the Twenty-first Century Community Learning Center and the No Child Left Behind Act have paved the way for the development of after-school activities. According to studies, after-school activities keep children safe and away from crimes, including protecting children from developing negative and hazardous behaviors (National Dropout Prevention Center). Apart from this, after-school programs provide supervision and ensure children are in safe hands while the parents are out working. After-school clubs are now considered as a way to help the youth improve their academic standing and reach their potentials. By providing opportunities to enhance their academic skills, more youths are saved from becoming a nuisance to the community. In addition to academic enrichment, after-school clubs also provide social, cultural, sports, and recreational activities (Fashola 2). This is especially helpful for kids who are at risk of failing their academic requirements because of “poverty, lack of parental support, reduced opportunities to learn, and other socioeconomic and academic factors” (qtd in Fashola 2). The combination of various factors such as poverty, broken homes, dysfunctional family systems, and troubled neighborhoods, among others, account for the reasons why a huge number of American youths end up as high school dropouts, with low academic achievement, or enormous personal

problems. However, this observation is the opposite for minority children living in single-parent households where children are seen excelling in school despite their family situation and coming from impoverished neighborhoods. In a Westat, Inc. study conducted in 1995, results revealed that “ students who spend no time in after-school activities are 49 percent more likely to have used drugs and 37 percent more likely to become teen parents than students who spend one to four hours per week in after-school activities” (Benavente). The same research concluded that after-school programs help curb teenage pregnancy problems by teaching the youth about the perils of becoming a teenage parent as they are taught to use sound judgment when it comes to premarital sex. In addition, those who attend after-school activities are more likely to finish their high school education and persevere to obtain a college degree as well. What’s more, these same kids who attend after-school programs are also more likely to spend a couple of hours doing volunteer work as their contribution in their community (Benevente). According to research conducted by Children’s Defense Fund (2003), young adolescents who engage in “ after-school, extracurricular activities - such as bands, sports teams, clubs, and community groups - are more likely to graduate from high school than those who spend their afternoon hours without adult supervision” (96). The result of the study was based on a 24, 000-student survey of students belonging in the eighth grade to twelfth grades, in 1, 000 schools all over the United States. Of those surveyed studies reveal that 90 percent of those students who participated in after-school activities graduated from high school as compared with 84 percent only from graduates who did not join any after-school activities. The study

reveals improved grades for those who joined in after-school activities and thus, were “ less likely to [receive or become a] D student” (96). What further makes the survey worthwhile is that the “ study reported that teens who are supervised every day of the school week are less likely to drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes, use drugs, or engage in sex than teens who are unsupervised” (96).

For youths living in our area, they benefit in joining after-school clubs such as the Yawkey Club in Boston because the club offers a host of activities and programs that will keep the teenagers off the streets. For instance, in my case, I am heavily involved in the athletics department where I provide volunteer work three hours a week every Thursday. Whenever I am at the club, I spend time with the kids and play with them. Sometimes, I introduce them to various sports activities, including how to play fair and play as team. With this additional knowledge that they receive, they are able to apply the knowledge on their daily lives, such as their day-to-day dealings with family members, how to relate with their peers, learning how to deal with conflict, and managing their emotions, especially anger, among others.

In terms of their educational path, those students who engage in after-school clubs tend to gain more academically. In fact, a 2007 study funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, “ minority and economically disadvantaged elementary and middle school students who regularly attended high-quality afterschool programs demonstrated significant gains over their non-participating peers” (Nebraska Community Learning Center Network). Students received higher standardized math test scores, improved their study habits, showed decreased rates of truancy, demonstrated lower

occurrence of drug and alcohol abuse. In California, children showed promising results because they reported a 20% drop in percentage of high school dropouts and a higher level of desire to finish high school, attend college, and actually find a decent job (NDCP).

Despite starting off as something that Americans thought of as unimportant, surveys now show different results. It seems that the old thinking that it is just a waste of time is now slowly evolving into that schoolchildren and teenagers must engage in so that they have a safe and secure place that they can go to after school (NCLCN). Americans also see after-school activities as a real need in their community, with about 65% of those included in the survey supporting after-school programs.

The change in opinion began when Americans recognized that there really is a problem considering that most households now have both parents working. On a national level, it is now widely accepted that juvenile violent crimes commence as soon as the school bell rings at 3pm. From this time up until parents arrive at home at 6pm, non-participants to the after-school programs engage themselves in tobacco use, alcohol drinking, sexual activities, and various other crimes – either they are the instigators of crime or the victims of crime. The survey also reveals that about 77% of respondents recognize that “ a lot of kids get into trouble when they’re bored and have nothing to do” (NCLCN).

Another research conducted by Quantum Opportunities reveals that a number of high school freshmen were invited to participate in a four-year afterschool and graduation incentives program. Those invited came from welfare families. After six years, the boys who did not join the incentive

program were found to be more prone to committing crimes and in fact, “averaged six times more criminal convictions than participants” (NCLCN). Considering the data and information gathered, the benefits of joining after-school clubs and programs far outweigh the disadvantages, if any, since the benefits are all geared towards children and teenagers having a bright and promising future.

Conclusion

The problem on juvenile crime should not be so much of a problem now considering the many opportunities those schoolchildren and teenagers are provided. Regardless of gender, race, and age, these youths can have a brighter future ahead of them if they will grab the chance after-school programs offer.

After-school programs and clubs help lift the burden from parents. By taking advantage of quality after-school programs, parents are assured that their children are safe from gang wars and juvenile crime. As a result, parents can now concentrate on their jobs without having to worry where their children are after school. They can now balance their work and family life unlike in the past when parents would claim they miss out on work opportunities because they have to tend to their children and home.

What government and private sectors can improve on is aside from providing opportunities for sports development, musical inclinations, academic excellence, and art education, among others, they might want to consider introducing career orientation programs that would introduce the child or the participants to various kinds of jobs, including the nature of the job, the work

environment, and the job prospects for the occupation. This way, the youths become knowledgeable about what they can become. Finally, government must always review after-school clubs offered to ensure that programs offer constructive support for the youth to help them avoid involvement in whatever crime. If the government can assure this, then there is a high chance that children and teenagers will always stay out of trouble.

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