

Spring 2018

The Y Can't Do It All: Examining the Decline of Participation in Youth Athletics

Ian Allen
University of Southern Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking_matters



Part of the [Health Economics Commons](#), [Sports Sciences Commons](#), and the [Sports Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Allen, Ian, "The Y Can't Do It All: Examining the Decline of Participation in Youth Athletics" (2018). *Thinking Matters Symposium Archive*. 134.

https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/thinking_matters/134

This Poster Session is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at USM Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Thinking Matters Symposium Archive by an authorized administrator of USM Digital Commons. For more information, please contact jessica.c.hovey@maine.edu.

The Y Can't Do It All:

Examining the Decline of Participation in Youth Athletics

Ian Allen, Russell Scholars Capstone: RSP 402

Abstract

Nationally, since 2008, participation in youth sports (ages 6-17) has dropped significantly. The declining trend--from 45% down to 37%--can be attributed to many factors:

- The rising cost of participation in programs, especially in middle and high school
- Early specialization in a single sport, along with the introduction of hypercompetitiveness in younger age groups
- The need for coaches to have additional training and certification to be hired by schools and recreation programs

These factors cause a significant divide between underprivileged and privileged youth, creating a situation of haves and have-nots with respect to youth participation in sports.

My 30-hour service learning project afforded me hands-on experience instructing youth martial arts classes at the Greater Portland Branch YMCA, where I worked directly with youth from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Specific information on participation trends was acquired through interviews with management, and a review of recent literature in Sports Medicine and Recreation and Leisure Studies journals provided data on national trends.

Question

Is the national decline in youth sports participation reflected in class enrollments at the Greater Portland Branch of the YMCA?

Methods

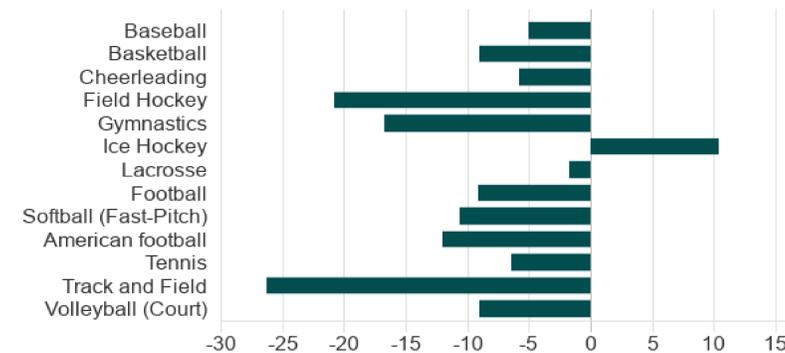
- 30-hour Service-Learning Project: Instruction of local youth in martial arts at YMCA, Greater Portland
- Interviews with YMCA staff members on enrollment trends
- Literature Review: In Sports Medicine & Recreation and Leisure Studies journals



(Figure 1) Teaching two of my students basic technique on our special wrestling day demo

The number of children in sport has declined since 2011

Figures show regular participants, aged 6-17, %



Source: The Aspen Institute Sports & Society Program, as provided by the Sports & Fitness Industry Association, figs for 2011-16

(Figure 2) Data chart illustrating the decline in youth participating in sports



(Figure 3) Teaching students how to do a front roll, a basic move in most martial arts

Results

- YMCA of Greater Portland participation levels are affected by high turnover in facility management.
- Attendance varies from class to class (for example, martial arts vs. dance).
- Local research suggests more investigation is needed to ascertain whether national trends prevail at Greater Portland YMCA.

Next Steps

- Investigate participation trends in City of Portland Recreation Programs
- Investigate Portland School System, particularly how pay-to-play school athletics affects participation rates
- Further research in scholarly journals on community efforts to make sports more readily accessible to all interested youth

Acknowledgements

- Faculty Mentors: Lisa Hibl and Elizabeth Dodge
- Photographer: Shawn Martel