

**Youth Club Attendance and Educational Outcomes in the UK: The Importance of
Activity Variation and Structure**

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INTRODUCTION

Previous research on the youth club attendance has suggested that a range of negative outcomes are associated with their use. For example, an American study by Weber et al. (2001) found a positive association with youth club attendance and delinquency, while analyses from Sweden revealed that youth club attendance was associated with negative pathways towards adulthood (Mahoney Stattin, and Lord, 2004). Swedish research has also found that youth club participation was non-random, such that participants tended to children who had a range of less desirable social, family, and academic characteristics (Mahoney, Stattin, and Magnusson, 2001; Mahoney, Stattin, and Lord, 2004; Persson, Kerr and Stattin, 2004). These researchers also found that attending such clubs was associated with antisocial behaviour, even when a host of individual and family characteristics were taken into account. Mahoney, Stattin, and Lord (2004) also found that the worst outcomes were associated with youth centres that brought many anti-social youths together, with these clubs being more likely to encourage antisocial behaviour among newer attendees. Canadian research (Morris and Kalil, 2006) has also found that attending recreation and community centres were a specific activity (among many examined) that were associated with delinquency and low academic achievement.

In other research, however, youth club participation has been found to be inversely associated with delinquency (Agnew and Peterson, 1989; Eccles and Barber, 1999; Mahoney and Cairns, 1997; Mahoney and Stattin, 2000). One problem with resolving the

disparate nature of these findings is that they span across cultures, age groups, outcomes of interest, and specific youth club contexts.

Combinations of Activities

While there is a considerable body of research on youth leisure contexts, there is a noticeable paucity of research on combinations of activities. American research has, however, provided evidence that participating in a variety of types of activities predicts favourable outcomes more strongly than participating for the same total amount of time in a single type of activity (e.g., sports versus music versus social service or civic engagement type of activities) (Bartko and Eccles, 2003). Pederson and colleagues (2005) found that multiple domains of participation (regardless of what they were and in comparison to single activity engagement) were positively associated with psychological wellbeing and served as a ‘protective’ factor against delinquency. As well, research from Canada (Morris and Kalil, 2006) on low-income children found that participation in a range of activities (rather than a single activity) resulted in better academic and behaviour-related outcomes. It is less clear whether similar variations in the associations will emerge in the UK.

Structure in Youth Activities

The element of ‘structure’ of such extracurricular activities has been shown to be a very important feature by a host of previous researchers. Mahoney (2000) asserted that in order for youth activity programs to be ‘effective’ (i.e. produce positive outcomes rather than negative ones), they must meet four important criteria: 1) they must be highly

structured, 2) they must meet regularly, 3) they must focus on the development of some skill, and 4) they need to be led by at least one competent adult. According to Mahoney, extracurricular activities which contribute to negative outcomes in youth generally have been shown to lack at least one of these key components. But what is 'structure'?

Mahoney (2000) lists the following as features of highly structured youth leisure activities:

“regular participation schedules, rule-guided engagement, direction by one or more adult activity leaders, an emphasis on skill development that is continually increasing in complexity and challenge, activity performance that requires sustained active attention, and clear feedback performance” (p. 115).

Other research on youth activity has also found that adult presence and mentoring outside of out-of-school activities is an important feature in positive youth development (Larson, 2006) and in forming positive relationships with adults and community members (Dworkin, Larson, and Hansen, 2003; Hanson, Larson, and Dworkin, 2003). Related research has also found that there are benefits of both “youth-driven” (i.e. programs where youth are given much decision-making and planning responsibility, but is still under supervision of adults) and “adult-driven” youth programs, such that those that those in the former tend to result in feelings of empowerment and leadership-building skills, while the latter fostered development of youths’ specific talents. Both types of programs were found to have benefits in terms of building the youths’ self confidence (Larson, Walker, and Pearce, 2005).

With regard to ‘structure’, most youths participate in both structured and unstructured leisure activities to varying degrees. The important point, however, is that there are more opportunities to engage in antisocial behaviours during ‘unstructured’ leisure (Mahoney, 2000; Osgood et al, 1996). Related research has found that participation in structured youth activities that involved perceived support from activity leaders was associated with lower levels of depression (Mahoney, Schweder, and Stattin, 2002). Previous studies have also found that young people who had friends in structured activities tend to remain attending structured activities and tend to have positive feelings about their family (Persson, Kerr, and Stattin, 2007).

While previous research has also found that participation in unstructured activities with peers can actually contribute to antisocial behaviours (Mahoney and Stattin, 2000), participation in structured extracurricular activities can lead to a host of benefits, including increased school satisfaction (Gilman 2001; Mancini and Huebner, 2004), less risk-taking behaviours (Mancini and Huebner, 2004), fewer behavioural problems (Hofferth and Sandberg, 2001), greater school success (Mancini and Huebner, 2004; Hofferth and Sandberg, 2001), and reduced risk of drop-out among high-risk youth (Mahoney, 2000.)

Rationale

The objective of the current research is to examine how youth club attendance influences later-life educational outcomes in the UK. While there are a host of possible life outcomes that have been examined by previous literature as possible variables of interest,

educational attainment is arguably one of the most important for determining the future life chances of young people, and thus we have focused on three indicators of educational attainment. We are also interested how attending youth clubs in combination with other leisure activities influences later-life educational outcomes. As this work is largely exploratory in a UK context, we also wish to reveal what characteristics determine participation in a variety of activities. As noted above, a handful of previous research has noted the benefits of combinations of activities, but does this hold true when youth club attendance is considered? The evidence from other countries that suggests youth club attendance is detrimental on a variety of social exclusion outcomes, while the literature on combinations of activities suggests combinations are beneficial. Evidence on how youth clubs impact on later-life outcomes when they are used in combination with other activities is not well-developed, and certainly non-existent in a UK context. We also recognize that the emerging body of work on the importance of structure must be considered, and therefore we are interested to incorporate this additional dimension to our analyses. Thus, we are interested in the following four research questions: 1) Who engages in combinations of activities? 2) How is youth club attendance, in combination with other activities during youth, associated with later-life educational attainment? 3) Who goes to structured and unstructured youth clubs? and 4) How is the structure of youth clubs associated with later-life educational outcomes?

Data and Variables

The analyses in this paper draw up the 1970 British Cohort Study, which is a longitudinal study following into adult life, all the individuals born in GB in the week April 5-11,

1970. Follow-up surveys were carried out at ages 5, 10, 16, 26, 30 and most recently, at age 33. The achieved sample at birth was 17,198, roughly 97% of the estimated target birth cohort. The responding sample was 14,940 at age 10, and 11,628 at age 16. A lower response rate arose at 16 because a teachers' strike at the same time meant that many cohort members did not receive their questionnaires. A total of 11,261 interviews were achieved at age 30 and outcome measures were available for roughly two-thirds of the achieved age 16 sample.¹

Youth club attendance. Frequency of going to youth clubs was measured by an interval level variable which ranged from 0 to four (0= never, 1=less than once a month, 2= once or twice a month, 3=once a week, 4=more than once a week).

Participation in other leisure activities. In addition to youth club attendance, cohort members were asked if they attended sports/community centres, uniformed youth organisations (like boy scouts and girl guides) or church groups. These items were dummy coded 1=yes if the respondent had been to any of these activities within the past 12 months.

Combinations of activities. We consider the possible combinations of going to youth clubs in addition to attending one of the following other activities: sports/community centres, uniformed groups, and church groups. These three other activities were selected after exploratory analyses revealed that they were the most highly associated with youth club attendance and later-life outcomes. In contrast to the frequency of going to youth

club indicator, the combinations indicators were measured on a simple yes/no basis – in other words, we examine whether a cohort member engaged in these combinations *at all*, rather than the frequency of these combinations. All combinations were dummy coded so that 1 is equal to doing that combination (in any frequency) and zero is equal to not engaging in that particular combination of activities.

Measuring structure. In 1986, youths who went to youth clubs were asked about their frequency of attendance (in the categories that are used in the analyses in this paper) as well as an open-ended question. The respondent was given four lines (numbered) to write in whatever he or she wanted. From a random sample the cases where this answer was filled in, some examples of what cohort members wrote (verbatim) in the four spaces are illustrated in Table 1.

--Table 1 about here--

In converting these string values to numeric codes, just under 100 codes were developed, with activities ranging from playing pool, to taking trips, to singing, to ‘being bored’. Codes were collapsed to a more manageable number of categories, so that all outdoor sports, for example, were grouped together instead of having in excess of twenty different codes. By far, the most frequently occurring codes were 1) playing football (retained as its own code due to its very high occurrence), 2) playing pool/snooker, 3) playing table tennis, 4) playing darts, 5) listening to music, 6) watching television or videos, 7) chatting with friends/hanging out, and 8) attending a disco or dancing.

Using Mahoney's (2000) definition of structure provided earlier in the section, a variable was created that tapped into the extent of structure that appeared to be present in the youth club. It should be emphasised that this variable can only roughly estimate the extent of structure, based upon what cohort members reported doing at the clubs. There is no information on what activities were available to which the cohort member declined participation, for example. Examples of activities that would require "regular participation schedules, rule-guided engagement, direction by one or more adult activity leaders, an emphasis on skill development that is continually increasing in complexity and challenge" (Mahoney, 2000:115) were conceptualized as being characterized as activities that required some degree of organization and supervision, particularly beyond that of the eight most reported youth club activities.

In the examples from Table 1, cases that would have been coded 'structured' were 5 (because of debates, seminars, and hiking), 6 (because of the crafts and discussions), 7 (because of the trip organisation), 8 (because of the discussion and singing), 9 (because of drama), 11 (because of the talks on drugs), 12 (all events), and 13 (all events). The vast majority of accounts from the cohort members, however, resembled examples 1 through 4 and case number 10

The majority of cohort members described youth clubs that fit the definition of 'unstructured', in the sense that the activities that were listed (i.e. the most popular eight items listed above) required very little 'organisation' and direction by supervising adults.

This is not to say that such activities had no value or that they were not supervised by adults. The objective here, however, was to identify clubs that offered activities that were more likely to fit into Mahoney's conceptualisation of structure.

Because the objective was to find out if 'structure' was indeed a large part of the answer to youth club association with negative outcomes, an indicator was developed that was a simple dichotomous structured/unstructured indicator. Again, it was not possible to get to the extent of *how much* structure existed in these clubs, given the type of information that was collected from cohort members. In general, a club was coded as structured if some activity beyond the eight described above was mentioned and it required some degree of organisation, e.g. going on outings, doing arts and crafts, doing an outdoor activity, practicing some skill, being trained in something, or playing music. Although this is admittedly a fairly crude measure of 'structure', it is at least a proxy, and makes use of previously unused data. Using these criteria, of the 1,782 cohort members who reported going to youth clubs, just 357 went to 'structured' youth clubs (using the criteria given here) while 1,425 went to unstructured clubs. . It should be reemphasised that a youth club was considered structured if just one item that was listed by the CM fell within the structured definition (i.e. three of the items could be 'unstructured').

Educational Outcomes at age 30. Three dummy variables were used to assess educational attainment by age 30: having no qualifications, having no Level 2 qualifications, and having no Level 4 qualifications. In all cases, the condition of not having these qualifications was coded 1. "Level 2" qualifications refer to five GCSE/'O' level

passes (grades A* - C, which is generally the requirement to go on to study at the postsecondary level). “Level 4” qualifications refer to having a university degree (or vocational equivalent).

Control variables. All estimations shown control for a wide range of distal and proximal factors which included socio-demographic characteristics of the family and the neighbourhood, and child attributes including attainment measures. The variables were grouped in terms of type of influence – distal, proximal, child attribute – and the age at which they were measured – birth, 5, 10 or age 16. There are in excess of 60 control variables used in each estimation, and thus we have been very careful as to not overstate the role of the youth activities under consideration on later-life educational attainment. Descriptive statistics on these variables are available from the authors. Theoretical rationale for the inclusion of these factors as controls can be found in Feinstein, Bynner, and Duckworth (2005).

Analytic Strategy

The modeling in the analyses draws on age 16 activities and contexts, age 0 to 16 family background factors; age 0 to 16 child development outcomes; and age 30 outcomes. We first use logistic regressions to estimate which characteristics predict youth club attendance and participation in combinations of activities. We then regress our age 30 educational attainment variables on the frequency of youth club attendance and combinations of activities to investigate whether there is an association between these forms of leisure and later-life educational outcomes. Next, we use logistic regressions to

investigate what characteristics predict attending a structured (versus and unstructured) youth club. We then examine how the attendance at structured youth clubs is associated with later-life education measures.

Results

What are the characteristics of those youth who go to combinations of activities?

Combinations of activities were regressed on a number of different cohort member characteristics to demonstrate and investigate the strength of different characteristics in predicting participation in activities. Table 2 presents a summary of these findings. For purposes of interpretation, odds ratios that are above 1 indicate a percentage increase in the likelihood of that outcome, while odds ratios below 1 indicate a 1-(odds ratio) decrease in the likelihood of that outcome.

The findings demonstrate that females were 25 percent less likely to go to youth clubs in combination sports/community centres compared to males, while they were 81 percent more likely to go to church groups in combination with youth clubs compared to males. There are no clear patterns, although parental education and class have some association with the combinations chosen by cohort members. For example, medium SES cohort members were almost 60 percent more likely to go to sports or community centres and youth clubs compared to their high SES counterparts, while the reverse is true in the case of church groups combined with youth clubs. Locus of control is also positively associated with membership to combinations of activities, suggesting that those who feel more in control of their lives are more likely to engage in multiple combinations of

activities. Conduct disorders are negatively associated to membership to two of the combined activities considered here.

--Table 2 about here--

What are the later-life educational associations of teenagers engaging in different combinations of out-of-school activities? The results in Table 3 examine the association of going to youth clubs and other activities with later-life educational outcomes. Three combinations of activities were examined alongside youth club attendance: going to youth clubs and sports/community centres, going to youth clubs and uniformed groups, and going to youth clubs and church groups. The results in Table 3 are a summary of the 3 separate logistic regression estimations that were undertaken. It is the instance where both frequency *and* at least one combination were statistically significant that is the most relevant for answering the research question at hand.

--Table 3 about here--

Overall, youth club attendance and combinations of other activities appear to have effects on education-related outcomes. Figures 1 to 3 plot the probability of achieving negative educational outcomes if a cohort member went to youth clubs only. These predicted probabilities were generated by creating an equation that estimated the probability of persons ending up with the negative outcome if they attended youth clubs never, less than once a month, once or twice a month, once a week, or more than once a week. The predicted probabilities for this line, therefore, represent a person who reported attended at

the specified frequency. The predicted probability assigned mean values to the various controls variables in the models, so that the resulting predicted probabilities represent the ‘average person’. Likewise, predicted probabilities were similarly generated in this way for persons who reported going to youth clubs in combination with other activities.

The relationship between youth club attendance and all these educational outcomes share a common feature: while youth club attendance increases the odds that cohort members will not attain these educational outcomes, *going to youth clubs in combination with church groups acts to moderate this effect*. The effect of this combination of effects (going to youth clubs and church groups) is illustrated by line demarcated by triangular plot markers in Figures 1, 2, and 3.

--Figure 1 about here--

With regard to having no qualifications at age 30, it was only the particular combination of going to youth clubs and church groups that acted to reduce the negative effect of youth club attendance. In Figure 1, the upper line illustrates that any youth club attendance puts cohort members at risk of attaining no qualifications at rates higher than the overall average (which is illustrated by the heavy horizontal line at .155). The combination of youth clubs and church groups reduces this risk – as demonstrated in Figure 1. Youth who engage in this combination of activities, however, still have higher than average probabilities for having no qualifications if they attend youth clubs once a week or more.

--Figure 2 about here--

When examining the effects of combinations of activities on the odds of having no Level 2 and no Level 4 qualifications, other combinations of activities were found to be important. In addition to going to youth clubs and church groups, going to youth clubs *along with* sports/community centres were also found to reduce the overall negative effect of youth club attendance with regard to getting Level 2 qualifications. However, it should be noted that this particular combination (youth clubs and sports/community centres) did not decrease the odds of not achieving Level 4 qualifications. In both Figures 2 and 3, the combination of sports/community centre and youth club participation is denoted by the line with circular plot markers. In Figure 3, this line is well below the line representing youth club one – however, in all but one instance, people in this combination still had above average (represented by the horizontal line at 0.21) odds of not attaining Level 2. In Figure 3, this combination has the highest odds of not achieving Level 4 qualifications – even greater than youth club participation alone.

--Figure 3 about here--

To interpret these unexpected findings, educational qualifications should be put in the context of this particular cohort. In this data, just under 66 percent of cohort members achieved Level 2 qualifications, and this number drops to just under 22 percent when Level 4 qualifications are considered. These figures contrast sharply with findings from

the 2006 Labour Force Survey, which show that just under 74 percent of adults in the workforce have Level 2 (or equivalent) qualifications (DfES, 2007). Cohort members who went to both youth clubs and sports/community centres may be youth who are less 'academically orientated' than those who attend other forms of joint activity. Our findings here, however, suggest that sports activities in combination with youth club attendance only moderately reduce the negative 'youth club effect' in the case of Level 2 qualifications. When Level 4 qualifications are considered, those who engage in this particular combination of activities are also the most likely not to achieve these educational credentials.

Finally, with regard to Level 4 qualifications, going to youth clubs in addition to uniformed groups greatly reduced the negative 'youth club effect'. The bottom line in Figure 3 represents the predicted probabilities of not getting Level 4 qualifications for those who went to youth clubs and uniformed groups. Even at the highest level of youth club attendance (more than once a week), attending uniformed groups as week only increased the odds of not achieving Level 4 to the cohort average (just over .84). Again, these findings suggest that what these combinations of activities are actually measuring is the effect of the peer group. Youth who went to youth clubs and sports centres may not have been as academically orientated, while those who went to uniformed activities may have been surrounded by peers who were more likely to have aspirations for higher education.

Who goes to structured and unstructured clubs? This question was investigated by regressing the structured variable on the series of characteristics that have been serving as the control variables for the estimates previously discussed earlier in this report. Table 4 reports a summary of the characteristics found to be significantly predictive of attending structured youth clubs. It should be noted that only the statistically significant predictors are reported here and that the outcome variable was going to *structured* youth clubs.

Females were almost 50 percent more likely to go to structured clubs, compared to males.

The cohort members who went to structured clubs were also more likely to have older mothers (35+ at age of birth) and come from the higher socioeconomic classes.

Externalising behaviours (i.e. physically aggressive behaviours) at age 10 were negatively associated with structured club attendance, as were eating problems at age 10.

Youths who reported doing their homework after school were about 40% more likely to go to structured youth clubs, as were youths who reported reading for pleasure. Cohort members who had been to a pub in the two weeks prior to the survey were about 27 percent less likely to go to structured clubs, while those who had engaged in criminal acts were 11 percent less likely to go to structured clubs.

--Table 4 about here--

Overall, the pattern suggests that youth from better off socioeconomic backgrounds, without behavioural problems at age ten, and pro-academic orientations at age 16 were

more likely to go to structured youth clubs. The flipside to this, however, is that disadvantaged youth were more likely to go to unstructured clubs.

How is the structure of youth clubs associated with later-life educational outcomes? The variable measuring ‘structured-ness’ was added to the previous regressions that were discussed in the first part of this paper, using all the same control variables and retaining the original frequency of youth club attendance measurement as well as the combinations. The unstructured/structured variable was a strong statistically significant predictor of all three educational outcomes. Table 5 presents the results of these estimations, which are illustrated in Figures 4, 5, and 6. The results indicate that attendance of unstructured clubs significantly increased the odds of negative educational outcomes at age 30. It should be noted that in these estimations, the sample is limited only to those who attended some form of youth club.

--Table 5 about here--

--Figure 4 about here--

Figure 4 illustrates how youth who went to youth clubs deemed ‘structured’ fared significantly better on getting qualifications. For infrequent visitors of youth clubs, the probability of having no qualifications at 30 is about 15 percent for those who went to unstructured clubs, compared to around 9 percent for those who went to structured clubs.

This gap grows as frequency of attendance increases. The corresponding figures for those who went more than once a week were 25 percent and 15 percent, respectively.

--Figure 5 about here--

The narrative is almost identical when Level 2 qualifications are considered. In Figure 5, the gap between those who go to structured clubs versus unstructured clubs more than once a week is 12 percent. Again, this effect is seen when Level 4 (Figure 6) characteristics are examined as the outcome, although in this instance, the differences are much smaller (4 to 6 percent), partly due to the overall low uptake rate of university education for this age cohort

--Figure 6 about here--

Discussion and Conclusions

The analyses carried out in the prior sections have provided evidence that life trajectories may be affected by the types of leisure activities within which youth choose to participate. We have shown that youth club attendance is associated with negative later-life educational outcomes. We have also shown that the negative effects associated with youth club attendance are offset by participation in a combination of youth club attendance and other activities. Additionally, we have provided evidence that whether or not the youth club is 'structured' also has an association with adult later-life educational outcomes. In particular, less risk is associated with attending structured youth clubs. Attendance to unstructured clubs appears to be taken up by youths who already exhibit

characteristics of risk – they have behavioural characteristics, for example, that are associated with unfavourable later-life outcomes. These youth, for reasons that we are unable to explore in these analyses, appeared to be attracted to unstructured youth clubs.

Of particular interest to policy makers is the finding that frequency of youth club attendance and the indicator measuring ‘structuredness’ were consistently associated with the education outcomes examined here. The more that cohort members attended youth clubs, the more that they were likely to get no qualifications, no Level 2 qualifications, and no Level 4 qualifications. The ‘structuredness’ of the youth club was also associated with the likelihood of qualifications being obtained, as youth who attended unstructured clubs were significantly less likely to have educational qualifications at age 30.

The analyses in this paper added an important dimension to previous UK work on youth leisure contexts: the issue of ‘structure’. From the descriptions of the clubs given by the cohort members, unstructured youth clubs were less likely to be heavily supervised by adults and such youth clubs provided a place for these youth to socialise with others. It is very likely the case, as suggested by Mahoney, Statton, and Magnusson (2001) in their study of Swedish youth clubs, that “youth centre involvement could be indicative of a more general preference for unstructured leisure pursuits” (p. 519) rather than a direct causal link to later-life disadvantage. Like the Swedish researchers just mentioned, UK research has shown that disadvantaged youth are over-represented among youth club users (Feinstein, Bynner, and Duckworth, 2006).

While the negative later-life educational associations with these clubs has been repeatedly emphasised in this paper, one very important caveat is that these sorts of clubs attract ‘at risk’ youth – and by doing so, they theoretically have the ability to have offer new forms of contact and communication with and between such young people. In other words, the ‘at risk’ youth have come to these clubs and creative, non-threatening ways of introducing ‘structure’ may be our best way to alter the negative trajectories on which such youth may appear to be set. However, the clubs attract this group in part because of the absence of adult control. Therefore, success depends on being able to provide facilitation to the users of the youth clubs, rather than through enforcement of adult control. Structured settings, as we are using the term, does not mean imposition of adult values and activities but empowerment, through adult scaffolding and support of young people to act collaboratively and in the service of a wider group objective. We cannot say why these youth have chosen unstructured clubs – it may be due to prior negative experiences in structured settings (as suggested by Mahoney, Stattin and Lord, 2004), or barriers may exist that prevent these youth from attending structured activities (Caldwell and Baldwin, 2005).

Therefore, the balance between adult facilitation and youth control is both crucial and delicate. Success in this area depends on the very great skill of the youth workers who have to make day to day judgements about the appropriate levels of risk and support, autonomy for challenging and challenged young people and directive management of group dynamics. This capability of youth workers depends on training and the wider

framework of public and voluntary family, adult and children's services within which they operate.

It is difficult to make definitive generalisations about the data, as by the time we limit our analyses to youth club attendees, we are at just over 1700 cohort members, which is roughly just 10 percent of the original birth cohort. But if trying to explain what has happened between age 16 and 30, it seems fair to say that youth who were on risky paths at age 16 were more than likely to continue on them and have a range of negative outcomes in adulthood. We have, however, employed weighting techniques that adjust for attrition from birth to age 16, and we have found that our results are not altered in any significant way. From these adjustments for cohort attrition, it can be surmised that the subsample of the cohort we are examining does not appear to be especially different from the original 1970 birth cohort.

It has been highlighted by critics of the previous UK research (Smith, 2006) on adolescent leisure contexts (Feinstein, Bynner, and Duckworth, 2005) that the subsample of youth club users were not distributed evenly throughout the various counties. It is indeed true that the teacher's strike of 1986 resulted in unequal representation of respondents by Local Education Authority (LEA). This report has not broken down the analyses by LEA, but we have employed weighting that adjusts for characteristics at birth (mothers' and fathers' place of birth, which was strongly correlated with CM's region of birth). We believe that this weighting will adjust for some of these regional anomalies, but add the caveat that our sample was not distributed evenly across urban and rural

areas, with a majority (52 percent) of youth club users living in rural areas, and around 12 percent living in large cities.

While we concede that not all areas are represented equally, our findings suggest that unstructured youth clubs, particularly for disadvantaged youth, are associated with educational outcomes in adulthood. We would not expect this finding to change significantly even if all regions and urban/rural areas were perfectly represented. The findings echo those of previous research by other researchers in other countries, as discussed earlier in the paper. Our findings point to the *average* associations of youth clubs and later-life outcomes when looking at around six thousand youths, of whom around just under a third attended some form of youth club.

We must consider the historical contexts of the present study. Our study has examined youth that attended various forms of out-of-school leisure contexts in 1986, with analyses that examined these forms of leisure consumption and later-life educational outcomes. These findings have pointed to a negative association between youth club attendance and later-life educational outcomes. We must merge such findings with evidence provided by practitioners in the area of youth work to understand if and how such youth centres have changed over the past twenty years. We have not been able to examine if various ranges of structure were particularly effective, of how these associations may have varied by region or urban/rural setting. We also cannot know what would have happened to the disadvantaged youth attending the unstructured youth clubs (i.e. those who had the worst outcomes) if the youth clubs had not been available.

Endnotes:

1. One concern with using the age 16 data from the BCS70 has always been ‘missingness’. As is well documented, a teachers strike during the 1986 seriously affected the success of the data collection attempted in that year. There is also the added complexity that there were several different instruments involved in the age 16 sweep, and many cohort members who did take part only completed a fraction of them. Using the age 16 data, then, always leads to the question of data quality. We know that when we use the instruments that we have drawn the majority of analyses from, we end up with around 6000 cases, which is substantially less than the originally birth cohort of approximately 17000. To address this concern, an attrition weight was constructed, which adjusted for the differences between the birth cohort and the age 16 sample. This weight adjusted for the region of birth of parents, parents’ class and education, mother’s age at birth, and sex. We have not presented the weighted results, but these can be obtained from the authors. The overall pattern of results has not been affected by these adjustments. The overall message of the findings remains the same, once basic factors influencing attrition are accounted for.

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Table 1. Verbatim Examples What Cohort Members Reported Doing in Youth Clubs

	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity 3	Activity 4
1	FIVE A SIDE FOOTBALL	TABLE TENNIS	BADMINTON	SNOOKER
2	SNOOKER, POOL	TABLE TENNIS	DISCO, BADMINTON	GAMBLING
3	PLAY HOCKEY	SNOOKER	TALK TO GIRLS	PLAY HOCKEY
4	TALKED TO FRIENDS	LISTENED TO MUSIC	DRANK COKE ETC	TALKED TO FRIENDS
5	DEBATES	GAMES	DRY SKIING, HIKING	SEMINARS, CONFERENCES
6	POTTERY BASKETS ETC	DISCUSSED PROBLEMS	SPORTS CENTRES	COMPETED WITH OTHERS
7	WATCH T.V.	ORGANISE TRIPS	PLAY POOL	WATCH VIDEOS
8	PLAYED TABLE TENNIS	RAG HOCKEY	RELIGIOUS DISCUSSION	SINGING
9	MUSIC	DRAMA	SPORTS	
10	PLAY SNOOKER	LISTEN TO RECORDS	CHAT TO FRIENDS	TABLE TENNIS
11	TALKS ON DRUGS ETC	PLAY SPORTS	MEET FRIENDS	
12	FUND RAISING EVANTS	CAMPING	BARBEQUES	QUIZ NIGHTS
13	HELP GUIDES	FIRST AID COURSE	PLAYED GAMES	PRACT.FOR DISPLAY

Table 2: Logistic Regressions of Attendance at Youth Clubs and Other Activities on Cohort Member Characteristics (only those who went to youth clubs, N= 1796)[#]

Odds Ratios

Characteristic	YC+ Sports or Community Centre	YC+ Uniformed	YC+ Church Groups
Female (1=yes)	0.751*	0.834	1.810***
Parents Low Education (ref=high)	0.768	0.692*	0.822
Parents Medium Education (ref=high)	0.628*	0.807	1.238
Medium SES (ref=high)	1.585**	1.023	0.698*
Low SES (ref=high)	1.373	0.950	0.856
Mother age 19-24 (ref=mothers 35+)	1.518	1.057	0.621*
Mother age 25-34 (ref=mothers 35+)	1.483	1.159	0.719
Maths Test Age 10	1.085	1.145	1.090
Reading Test Age 10	1.113	1.235*	1.143
Copying Test	1.006	0.998	1.000
Parents Approve of Friends	0.977	0.994	0.799*
Does Homework After School	1.074	1.145	1.361*
Locus of Control at 16	1.055*	1.044*	1.145***
General Conduct Disorder	0.858*	0.986	0.871*
Smoker at 16	0.880	0.871	0.691**
Truant at 16	1.215	0.929	0.870

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

[#] controlling for a wide range of proximal and distal factors

Table 3: Educational Outcomes at Age 30 Regressed on Frequency of Going to Youth Clubs and Combinations of Other Activities[#]

Odds Ratios

<i>Outcomes at 30</i>	Frequency of YC attendance	Went to YC and Sports/Community Centres	Went to YC and Uniformed	Went to YC and Church Groups
No Qualifications	1.137** (0.046)	0.942 (0.149)	0.965 (0.139)	0.731* (0.155)
No level 2	1.213*** (0.047)	0.839** (0.149)	0.820 (0.137)	0.645*** (0.152)
No Level 4	1.139** (0.058)	1.439* (0.173)	0.650** (0.155)	0.732* (0.159)

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

[#] controlling for a wide range of proximal and distal factors

Figure 1: YC Attendance and Probability of No Qualifications at Age 30

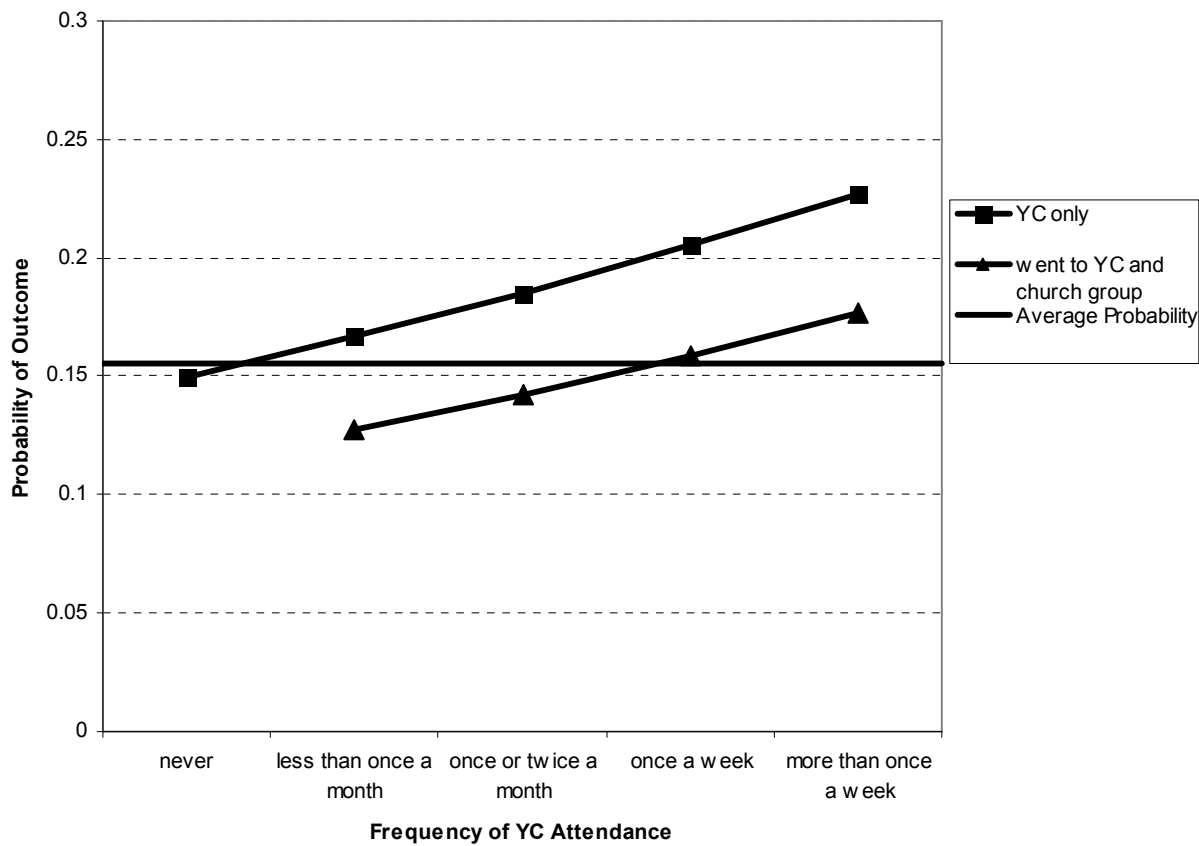


Figure 2: YC Attendance and Probability of Having No Level 2 at Age 30

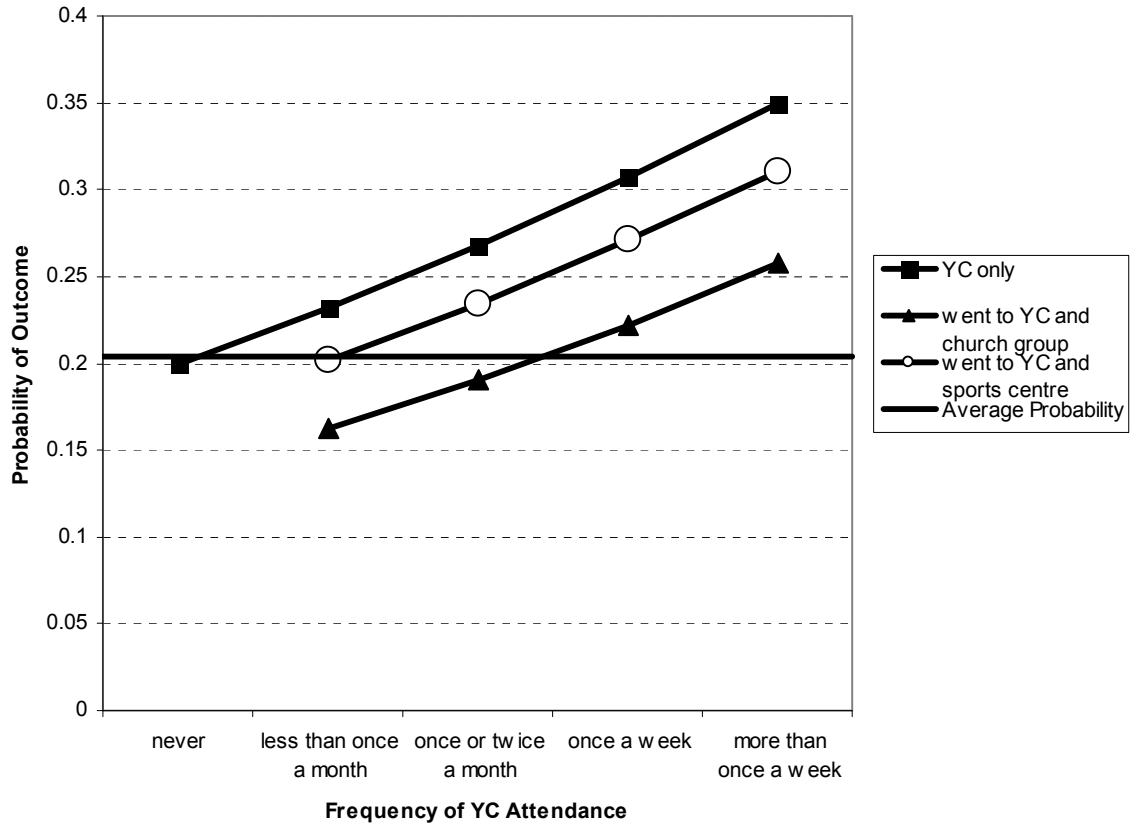


Figure 3: YC Attendance and Probability of Having No Level 4 at Age 30

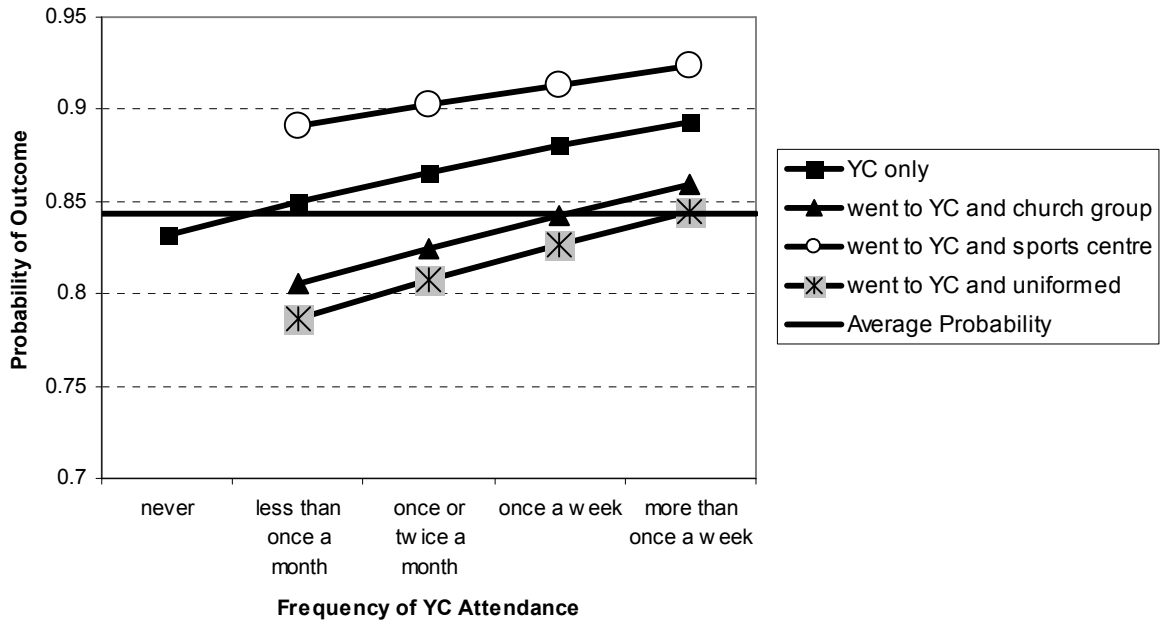


Table 4. Characteristics Associated with Structured Youth Club Attendance[#]
Odds Ratio

Characteristic	
Female	1.494*
Mother age 25-34	0.524*
SES 1/2(%)	1.010+
Externalising Behaviours Age 10	0.770*
Eating Problems age 10	0.827*
Homework after school	1.405*
Reads for pleasure	1.396*
Has been to pub in last 2 weeks	0.732*
Engaged in criminal antisocial acts	0.894**

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

controlling for a wide range of proximal and distal factors

Figure 4: YC Attendance and No Qualifications at Age 30

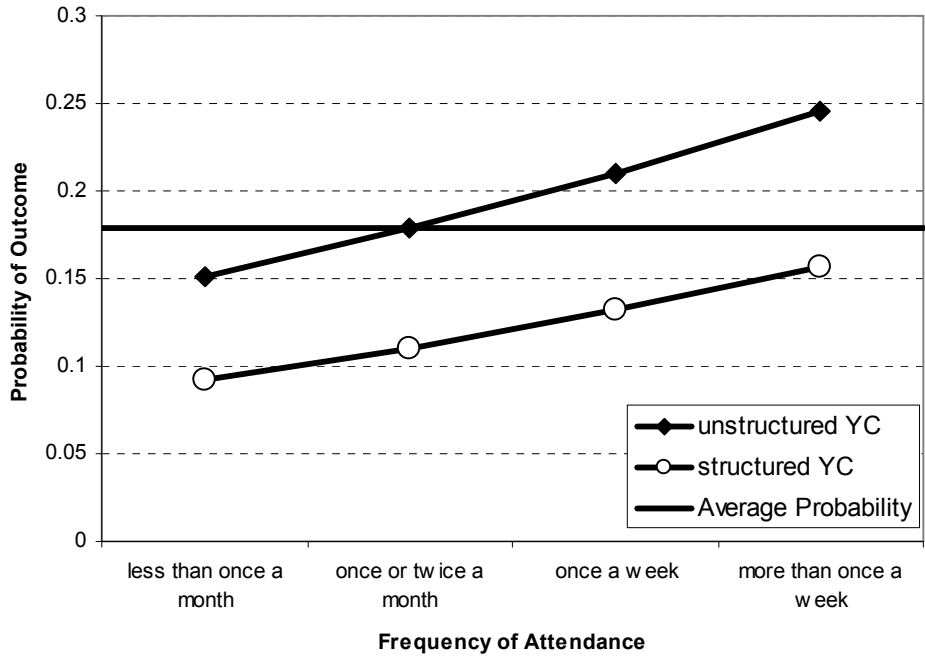


Figure 5: YC Attendance and No Level 2 at Age 30

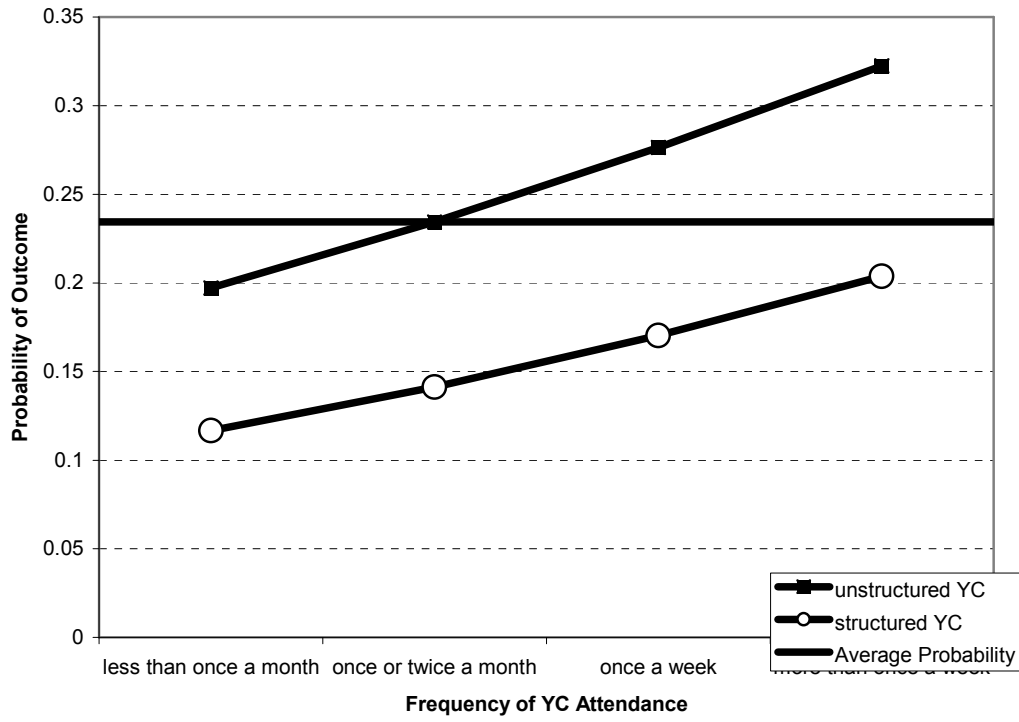


Figure 6: YC Attendance and No Level 4 at Age 30

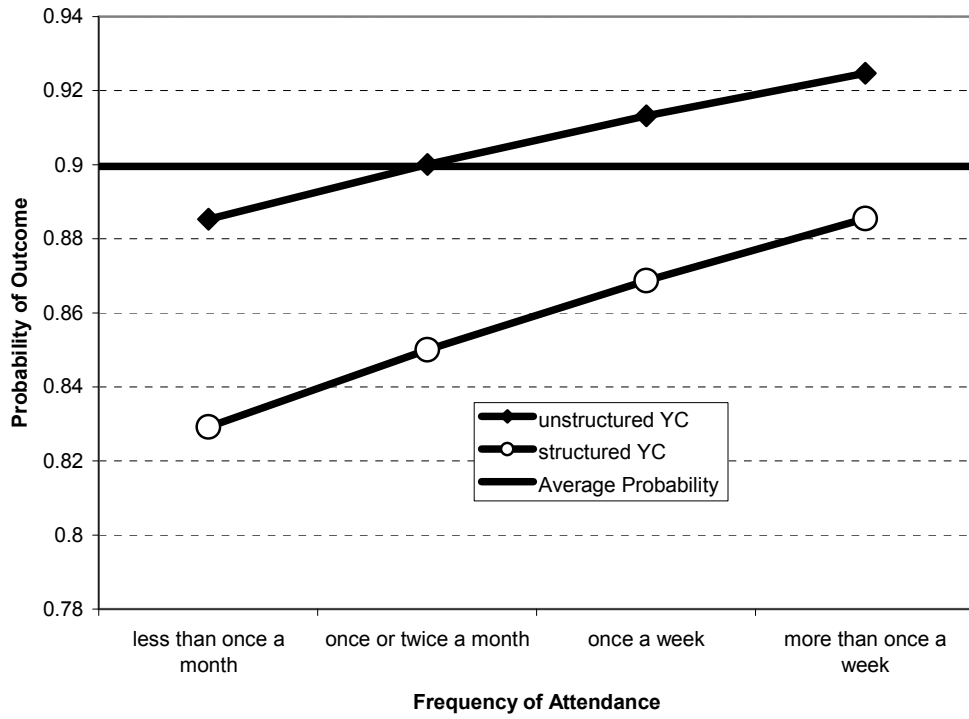


Table 5. Educational Outcomes at Age 30 Regressed on Frequency of Going to Youth Clubs and Whether Youth Club Was Structured[#]

Odds Ratios

<i>Outcomes at 30</i>	Frequency of Youth Club attendance	Unstructured (1=yes)
No qualifications	1.224** (0.080)	1.773** (0.377)
No Level 2 Qualifications	1.251** (0.081)	1.878** (0.386)
No Level 4 Qualifications	1.169+ (0.095)	1.587* (0.321)

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

[#] controlling for a wide range of proximal and distal factors