

## Factors influencing the leisure participation of children with cerebral palsy in Australia

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*Introduction.* Active and pleasurable involvement of disabled children in activities outside school is a key measure of successful participation. Participation is influenced by many factors including the skills and interests of the child and social and environmental supports. Policies and social expectations in different countries vary and these may also influence participation.

*Objective.* This study investigated the extent to which selected individual, family and environmental variables were associated with participation of Australian children with cerebral palsy in formal and informal activities outside school.

*Methods:* All children born in 1994 or 1995 in Victoria, Australia, and diagnosed with cerebral palsy were eligible for inclusion in this prospective population-based survey. Complete data were available for 108 of 114 participating children (49.3% of the known living population of children with cerebral palsy in those birth years). Participation was measured using the Children's Assessment of Participation and Enjoyment (CAPE). Independent variables included gender, child's activity preference, motor function, temperament and communication ability. Family variables included family type (single or two-parent family), background (Australian-born or not) and socio-economic advantage/disadvantage. Environment variables included living and school environments. Linear regression analysis was used to assess associations between these variables and diversity of participation in informal and formal activities.

*Results.* The variables with the strongest multivariate associations with informal participation were manual ability (22.6% of the variance), a preference for informal activities (7% of the variance) and gender (2.6% of variance - girls participated more). Only two variables were important in the multivariate model for participation in formal activities: preference for formal activities (2.9% of the variance) and attendance at mainstream school (7.1% of the variance).

*Conclusion/contribution.* In this study, child characteristics were more strongly associated with informal participation than environment or family characteristics. The explanatory power of the multiple regression model for formal participation was very limited but attendance at mainstream school was important. Understanding children's preferences is a critical component of intervention planning. Being exposed to a range of activities within supportive environments may provide the opportunity to develop preferences, especially in activities where children with cerebral palsy have reduced participation, such as in physical activities.