

# Two NGO-Run Youth-Centers in Multicultural, Socially Deprived Suburbs in Sweden—Who Are the Participants?

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## Abstract

**Objective:** Leisure-time is an important part of young people's lives. One way to reduce social differences in health is to improve adolescents' living conditions, for example by enhancing the quality of after-school activities. Multicultural, socially deprived suburbs have less youth participation in organized leisure-time activities. This study explores who the participants are at two NGO-run youth-centers in multicultural, socially deprived suburbs in Sweden and whether socio-demographic, health-related, and leisure-time factors affect the targeted participation. **Methods:** The study can be seen as an explanatory mixed-methods study where qualitative data help explain initial quantitative results. The included data are a survey with youth ( $n = 207$ ), seven individual interviews with staff, and six focus-groups interviews with young people at two youth-centers in two different cities. **Results and Conclusions:** The participants in the youth-centers are Swedish born youths having foreign-born parents who live with both parents, often in crowded apartments with many siblings. Moreover they feel healthy, enjoy school and have good contact with their parents. It seems that strategies for recruiting youths to youth-centers have a large impact on who participates. One way to succeed in having a more equal gender and ethnicity distribution is to offer youth activities that are a natural step forward from children's activities. The youth-centers' proximity is also of importance for participation, in these types of neighborhoods.

## Keywords

Youth-Center, Leisure-Time, Participation, Suburbs, NGO

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## 1. Introduction

Leisure-time is important for young people's psychological, cognitive, and physical development [1]. Individuals

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outside the family become more important to adolescents, and leisure-time can therefore have a greater impact on their beliefs and behavior [2]. Most children and youth can decide how they want to spend this time, which gives the content of leisure activities an important role in youth development [3] [4]. Leisure-time also comprises a large part of young people's lives today and differs in some ways from that of earlier generations [4] [5]. However, there is no guarantee that young people will use their leisure-time beneficially, for example by choosing activities that challenge them [6].

Multicultural, socially deprived suburbs have less youth participation in organized leisure-time activities than other areas, due to both their higher proportion of immigrants and lower socioeconomic status (SES) [7]-[9]. Young people do not choose their leisure activities randomly; social circumstances are one of the determinants that matter [10]. Children's activities are also often chosen by their parents [11]. One way to reduce social differences in health is to improve children's and adolescents' living conditions, for example by enhancing the quality of school and after-school activities [12]. Much of the variation in health among children and adolescents can be explained by social factors (cf. [13] [14]).

Studies of adolescents' participation in leisure-time activities often examine organized sports activities and confirm that participants to a greater extent are male and have high SES background (cf. [15]-[18]). Adolescents who participate in both sports and other organized activities have been found less likely to use alcohol and drugs [19]. Moreover, harmful use of alcohol is less common among adolescents born outside of Sweden than adolescents born in Sweden [20]. Participation in leisure-time activities is associated with better academic achievement [21] [22]. It can be of particular significance for adolescents with lower SES [15].

Participation in structured activities relates to low levels of antisocial behavior [23] and to having a clear idea of what to do after leaving compulsory school [24]. It seems as if it is the psychologically healthy adolescents who tend to be involved in structured activities [25]. On the other hand, participants in low-structured activities were characterized by deviant peer relations and poor relations between parents and children [23]. They also more often lived in two homes and had an unemployed mother [24]. One reason that participation in structured activities relates to good adjustment is self-selection, because well-adjusted youth choose structured activities [26]. A medium level of participation in organized leisure activities is most favorable for adolescents' health and well-being [24]. Youth-centers are often less structured than organized sports and other leisure-time activities. However, they have opportunities to reach youth who are not interested in sports or other leisure activities.

Leisure-time activities for adolescents are constituted differently in different parts of the world. In countries like USA, extracurricular activities and out-of-school time [27] are two concepts. In Sweden, two orientations can be identified as important. On the one hand there is the widespread tradition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which run leisure-time activities, for example within sports. On the other hand, there are youth-centers, which are often run by municipalities.

Leisure-time is an important part of adolescents' lives. Leisure-time activities can be beneficial to young people's development. However, young people, especially girls, living in multicultural, socially deprived suburbs participate less in leisure-time activities. There is a need to understand who the participants are to be able to develop youth-centers in these neighborhoods. Youth-centers located in these neighborhoods can be a way to get young people to participate in leisure-time activities. Therefore this study has aimed to explore who participate in two NGO-run youth-centers in multicultural, socially deprived suburbs in Sweden with special focus on socio-demographic factors, health-related factors, or leisure-time factors.

## 2. Methods

This study is part of a study focusing on "Leisure-time as a setting for alcohol and drug prevention" in a special venture financed by the Swedish government [28]. The research program will answer a series of questions as why do young people participate in this type of activity and what particular strategies do the different youth-centers use in their everyday work. A three year longitudinal study will also try to answer the question what the young people gain from being participants in youth-center activities. The study was approved by the regional ethical committee in Uppsala in January 2012 (reg. No. 2011/475).

This study can be seen as an explanatory mixed-methods study, using Creswell and Plano Clark's approach [29], whereby qualitative data helps to explain initial quantitative results. Data were collected at the two youth-centers using surveys, individual interviews, and focus-groups interviews.

The study has also used a participatory and practice-based approach. This involves cooperating with youth-

center staff on survey questions, data collection procedures, and samples (Figure 1). It also includes regular feedback to the youth-centers within six months after data collection, as well as extra feedback upon request. This approach was chosen for two reasons: (1) people are experts on their own settings, and (2) it is of great importance that the research results be of practical use for the setting, in this case the youth-centers.

## 2.1. The Study Context

The two youth-centers in this study are located in suburbs in two of the top-ten cities (by population) in Sweden. Both of these suburbs are characterized by apartment blocks and a high proportion of residents with immigrant backgrounds (60% - 90% compared with 20% for Sweden as a whole). The most frequent countries of origin are Iraq and Somalia [30]. The youth-centers are run by two different NGOs. The first, hereafter called T, is located in the neighborhood's central shopping area. T's activities cater to young people in the area aged 12 - 16 years. The second NGO, hereafter called V, has two different premises, one for youth up to 13, and another for youth between 13 and 18 years. Both youth-centers provide structured activities, such as dance groups, travel groups, tutoring, exhibitions, and leadership training, as well as unstructured activities, such as playing games, watching television, or just hanging out with friends. The youth-centers have both paid and volunteer staff. The paid staffs have educational training and the volunteer staffs are older youth, former participants, with internal leadership training. T primarily has employed leaders. V has few employed leaders, but many volunteer youth leaders.

## 2.2. Sample

The study used purposive sampling; those who came to the youth-centers during a defined time period were invited to take part, the idea being to reach people in voluntary and partly unstructured activities. Both youth-centers are member-based, and lists of all members in the targeted age group (12 - 16 years) were provided by each youth-center (Table 1). Since not all members visited the youth-centers on a regular basis, we chose to use the member lists to broaden the sample as much as possible.

Parents of youth who had not reached 15 years of age (62% of the sample) received information about the study. Due to the high proportion of immigrants, information was sent in five different languages: Swedish, English, Turkish, Arabic, and Somali. The choice of languages was decided in cooperation with the staff at each youth-center. Parent could refuse consent by returning a form stating that they did not want their child to participate (5% did so).

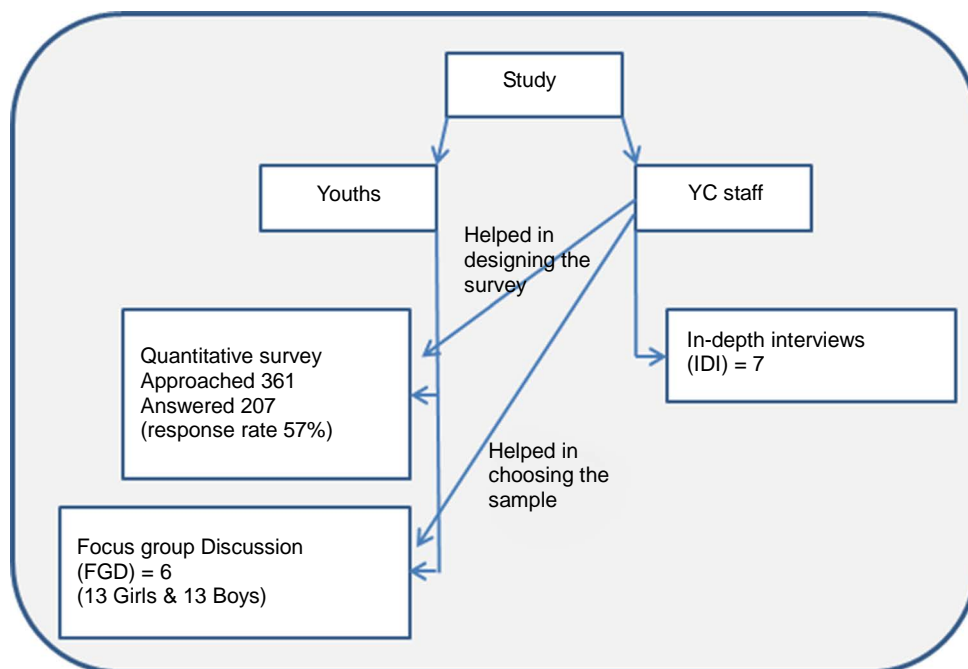


Figure 1. Samples and data collection with a participatory approach.

**Table 1.** Demographic factors of the respondents.

Youth center	Original sample	Response rate	Girls	Boys	Younger (<15 years)	Older (>15 years)	Total
V	271	144 (53%)	61 (42%)	83 (58%)	86 (60%)	57 (40%)	70%
T	90	63 (70%)	28 (44%)	35 (56%)	28 (44%)	35 (56%)	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>361</b>	<b>207 (57%)</b>	<b>89 (43%)</b>	<b>118 (57%)</b>	<b>114 (55%)</b>	<b>92 (45%)</b>	<b>207 (100%)</b>

Staff members were instructed by the researchers to choose youth of different ages for the youth focus-groups. There was to be one group of girls and one of boys per youth-center location, *i.e.* three groups of girls and three groups of boys in total. (One center had two separate premises.) Center staff recommended that the groups be homogenous with regard to gender instead of age. The focus-groups contained three to five members. The sample for individual interviews was decided jointly by researchers and staff, but was to include both paid and volunteer staff as well as both genders. In total seven staff members, either paid or volunteers, were interviewed.

### 2.3. Data Collection

Data was collected through a survey in spring 2012. The questionnaires were distributed by the center leaders during a period of six weeks at V and 10 weeks (not open on weekends) at T. The young people who voluntarily visited the centers during this time were requested to fill in the questionnaires on the premises. The length of the data collection was decided upon together with the staff of the youth-centers in order to reach as many participants as possible.

The in-depth interviews of the staff were conducted by SG and IF in all but two cases. Two interviews were conducted by IF alone. Focus-group interviews were conducted by SG or IF at the premises. The interviews were conducted in February 2013, recorded with the permission of the respondents, and then transcribed verbatim. Both in-depth interviews and focus-group interviews lasted for around an hour each.

No individuals were paid for their participation, but the youth-centers received a small sum depending on the young people's level of participation.

### 2.4. Questionnaire

The questions used in this particular analysis concerned the three categories: the young person's socioeconomic background, health-related factors such as alcohol and tobacco use, and leisure-time interests and habits (thoroughly described in [Tables 2-6](#)). Many of the questions have previously been used in earlier studies (cf. [\[31\]](#) [\[32\]](#)).

### 2.5. Interview Guide

The semi-structured interview guide included questions about who participates and why they participate in youth-center activities. It also focused on what the young people gained, and what particular strategies the different youth-centers use in their everyday work. The questions specifically focusing on who participates concerned age, gender and birth countries. But also questions on other leisure-time interests, frequency of attendance, who stays and who drops out, and if who participates differ from year to year. The same interview guide was used for both in-depth interviews and focus-group interviews.

### 2.6. Analysis

#### 2.6.1. Statistical Analyses

Descriptive statistics were employed using chi-square tests to find out if there were any differences between gender or frequency of attendance and the independent variables. Logistic regression analyses were conducted with the dependent variable gender. First, unadjusted odds ratios with 95% confidence intervals were estimated for all independent variables. Then three different logistic regression analyses were performed using three categories of independent variables (socio-demographic, health-related, and leisure-time factors). Only individuals with full information for all variables were included in the logistic regression analyses. It was not possible to enter all variables in all categories into the same model due to the low number of participants in relation to the

large number of variables.

### 2.6.2. Qualitative Analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. An inductive qualitative content analysis was performed to analyze both the in-depth interviews and the focus-group interviews and describe variations by identifying differences and similarities in the interviews [33].

Each interview, in its entirety, was used as a units of analysis. Meaning units were first identified in accordance with the study aim of who participates and then condensed. The condensed meaning units were then abstracted into codes. Interviews were jointly analyzed into codes from whole units of analysis by two authors (SG and IF). In moving from codes to categories, other researchers were involved to validate and discuss the results and together create categories. The codes were color-marked concerning which youth-center the respondents belonged to and whether the respondents were staff, female adolescents or male adolescents to be able to see if any categories were shared by all groups or were unique to a specific group.

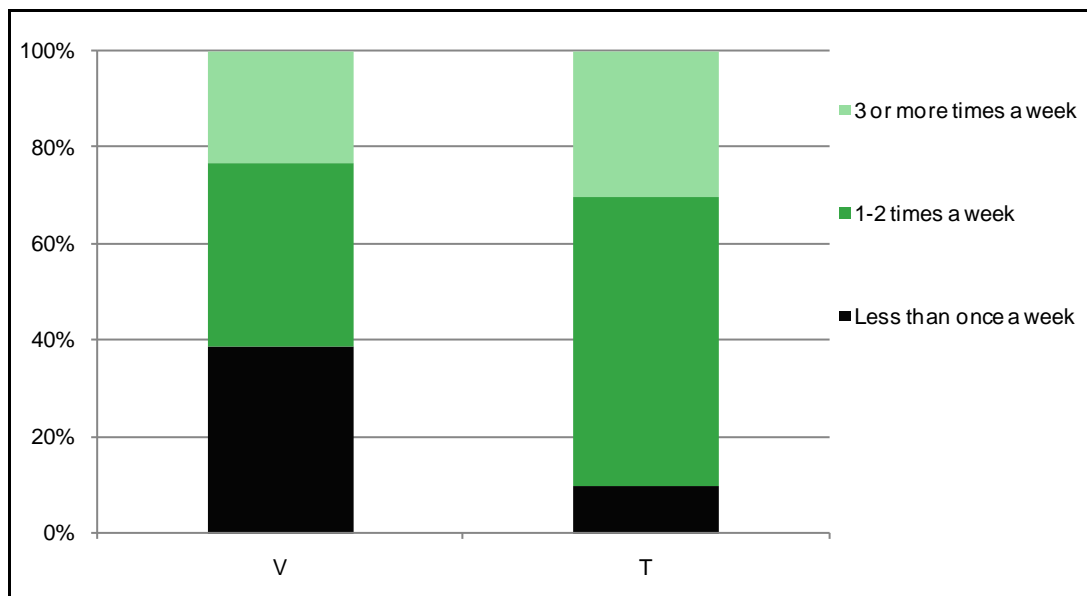
## 3. Results

### 3.1. Who Are the Participants?

The survey includes 207 youth, 57% boys and 43% girls. Most participants come from youth-center V (70%, [Table 1](#)). The gender distribution is similar, but there are a higher proportion of younger participants in the sample from youth-center V.

However, the young people from the two youth-centers share many features. The majority was born in Sweden, but have foreign-born parents. Most of them live with both their parents and have fathers who work. They feel healthy, enjoy school, and feel quite safe in their neighborhoods. Almost none of them use tobacco and a small proportion has tried alcohol. Their parents know what they do in their leisure-time.

There are also some differences worth noticing between the adolescents at the two youth-centers. At V there is a higher proportion of youth who were born in Sweden, but a lower proportion whose parents were born in Sweden or Europe. At V there are also more young people who live with both parents and fewer who live in a rented apartment. More of the youth at V also have mothers who work and they enjoy school to a greater extent. Almost everyone at T lives within walking or biking distance of the youth-center; at V more than a third live farther away. The young people's frequency of attendance has significantly different distributions at the two youth-centers ([Figure 2](#)). At V more than one third of the adolescents participate less than once a week, compared to one tenth at T.



**Figure 2.** Frequency of attendance at the two youth-centers (in percent)  $n = 181$ .

### 3.2. Are There Gender Differences?

Concerning socio-demographic factors, more girls than boys have fathers born in Sweden and live in an owned residence. Regarding health-related factors, the girls agree to a greater extent that they feel safe in their neighborhood during daytime. A higher proportion of the boys exercise more than once a week, and they are also members of a sports club to a greater extent than the girls. Other leisure-time factors that differ are that girls visit friends at home more often in the evenings, and more of them use computers more than four hours a day. The girls state to a greater extent that their parents know what they are doing in their leisure-time (Table 2).

The socio-demographic factors that remain significant after controlling for the other socio-demographic factors in a logistic regression (Table 3) are that girls are more likely to have a father born in Sweden (OR = 5.1) and to live in an owned residence (OR = 2.5). There were difference between girls and boys with regard to health-rated factors (Table 4). Girls were more likely to exercise infrequently (OR = 2.6) and were more likely to feel safe in their neighborhood during daytime (OR = 0.2). The only leisure-time factor that remains significant when controlling for other leisure-time factors is that girls to a lesser extent than boys are members of sports clubs (OR = 14.7, Table 5).

**Table 2.** All independent variables compared between girls and boys (in %) with chi square tests.

<i>Socio-demographic factors</i>		N	Boys	Girls	p-value
Age	Younger (Years 6 - 7)	114	55	56	0.932
	Older (Years 8 - 9 + 1)	92	45	44	
Birth country	Sweden	172	81	85	0.435
	Other country	35	19	15	
Mother's birth country	Sweden	17	5	13	0.053
	Other country	178	95	87	
Father's birth country	Sweden	14	4	12	<b>0.028</b>
	Other country	175	96	88	
Lives with both parents	Yes	176	87	84	0.569
all the time	No	29	13	16	
Type of housing	Rented apartment	122	67	51	<b>0.02</b>
	Owned residence or both	82	33	49	
Mother's employment	Working	125	62	65	0.69
	Other	73	38	35	
Father's employment	Working	158	84	82	0.69
	Other	32	16	18	
Perceived economic status	Worse/much worse than friends	13	9	3	<b>0.042</b>
	About equal to friends	114	49	65	
	Better/much better than friends	77	43	32	
Has a smartphone	Yes	132	67	72	0.466
	No	60	33	28	
Hashis/her own room	Yes	122	39	39	0.974
	No	77	61	61	
<b><i>Health-related factors</i></b>					
Feels safe in neighborhood (daytime)	Strongly agree/Agree	156	83	95	<b>0.021</b>
	Disagree/Strongly disagree	21	17	5	
Feels safe in neighborhood	Strongly agree/Agree	138	77	80	0.602
	Disagree/Strongly disagree	38	23	20	
Self-perceived health	Neither good nor bad, or not good	15	5	11	0.327

**Continued**

	Feels well	41	20	22	
	Feels very well	140	75	67	
Enjoys school	Very/Pretty much	178	96	89	0.069
	Neither good nor bad or pretty/very bad	13	4	11	
Good in school compared	Among the best/better than most	106	60	54	0.445
to classmates	Equal, worse or among the worst	79	40	46	
Exercise	≤1 time a week	56	22	38	<b>0.015</b>
	>1 time a week	139	78	62	
Alcohol consumer	Yes, have drunk at least once	38	18	22	0.457
	No or just tasted	157	82	78	
Tobacco consumer	Yes, party or regular	5	2	4	0.449
	No, tried or stopped	193	98	96	
<b>Leisure-time factors</b>		<b>N</b>	<b>Boys</b>	<b>Girls</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Youth-center	V	144	70	69	0.781
	T	63	30	31	
Frequency of attendance	Less than once a week	57	28	37	0.345
	1 - 2 times a week	79	44	43	
	More than 3 times a week	45	28	21	
Close to youth-center	Yes, walking or biking distance	137	72	67	0.443
	No	60	28	33	
Peers at school mostly friends	Yes	118	58	71	0.062
	No answer	69	42	29	
Peers at center mostly friends	Yes	84	47	42	0.522
	No answer	103	53	58	
Walks/Bikes to school/leisure	Never/few times a year	56	33	26	0.319
	Once a month or more often	130	67	74	
Goes to parties	Never/few times a year	116	58	63	0.463
	Once a month or more often	76	42	37	
Goes to concerts, museum	Never/few times a year	84	44	48	0.603
	Once a month or more often	99	56	52	
At friend's home in evening	Never/few times a year	61	40	24	<b>0.02</b>
	Once a month or more often	122	60	76	
Computer use during week	<1 h a day	32	21	11	<b>0.015</b>
	1 - 3 h a day	96	54	46	
	>4 h a day	63	25	43	
Sports club	Never been member	22	5	24	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
	Have been member	74	40	46	
	Am member	78	55	30	
Reads for pleasure	Never/few times a year	78	46	33	0.07
	At least some times a month	114	54	67	
Same hobby as parent	Yes	95	47	52	0.477
	No	97	53	48	
Parents know about	Never/rarely/varies	16	12	2	<b>0.011</b>
leisure-time	Most of the time/always/almost always	187	88	98	

**Table 3.** Unadjusted odds ratios and all socio-demographic factors entered (CI 95%).

<i>Socio-demographic factors</i>	Unadjusted = 199	Adjusted = 157
<i>Gender</i>		
<i>Age</i>		
Younger	1.0*	
Older	1.0 (0.6 - 1.7)	0.8 (0.4 - 1.7)
<i>Birth country</i>		
Sweden	1.0	
Other country	0.8 (0.4 - 1.6)	0.5 (0.2 - 1.5)
<i>Mother's birth country</i>		
Other country	1.0	Excluded due to strong correlation to
Sweden	2.7 (0.96 - 7.6)	Father's birth country
<i>Father's birth country</i>		
Other country	1.0	
Sweden	<b>3.6 (1.1 - 11.9)</b>	<b>5.1 (1.2 - 21.8)</b>
<i>Lives with both parents</i>		
Yes	1.0	
No	0.8 (0.4 - 1.7)	0.5 (0.1 - 1.5)
<i>Type of housing</i>		
Rental	1.0	
Other	<b>2.0 (1.1 - 3.5)</b>	<b>2.5 (1.2 - 5.4)</b>
<i>Mother's employment</i>		
Work	1.0	
Other	0.9 (0.5 - 1.6)	1.0 (0.5 - 2.2)
<i>Father's employment</i>		
Work	1.0	
Other	1.2 (0.5 - 2.5)	2.0 (0.7 - 5.7)
<i>Perceived economic status</i>		
Better	<b>1.0</b>	
Equal	<b>1.8 (1.003 - 3.3)</b>	1.7 (0.8 - 3.7)
Worse	0.5 (0.1 - 2.1)	0.6 (0.1 - 2.8)
<i>Has a smartphone</i>		
Yes	1.0	
No	0.8 (0.4 - 1.5)	0.6 (0.3 - 1.2)
<i>Has own room</i>		
Yes	1.0	
No	1.0 (0.6 - 1.8)	1.9 (0.9 - 4.2)

\*Reference category: Boys.



**Table 4.** Unadjusted odds ratios and all health-related factors entered (CI 95%).

<i>Health-related factors</i>		
	Unadjusted = 199	Adjusted = 154
<i>Feel safe daytime</i>		
<i>Feels safe daytime</i>		
Strongly agree/Agree	1.0*	
Disagree/Strongly disagree	<b>0.3 (0.1 - 0.9)</b>	<b>0.2 (0.03 - 0.8)</b>
<i>Feels safe evening</i>		
Strongly agree/Agree	1.0	
Disagree/Strongly disagree	0.8 (0.4 - 1.7)	1.7 (0.6 - 5.0)
<i>Self-perceived health</i>		
Feels very well	1.0	
Feels well	1.3 (0.6 - 2.5)	0.7 (0.3 - 1.8)
Neither good nor bad/not good	2.2 (0.7 - 6.5)	2.1 (0.5 - 9.4)
<i>Enjoys school</i>		
Very/pretty much	1.0	
Neither good/bad or pretty/very bad	3.0 (0.9 - 9.9)	2.7 (0.7 - 11.0)
<i>Good in school</i>		
Among the best/better than most	1.0	
Equal, worse or among the worst	1.3 (0.7 - 2.3)	1.0 (0.5 - 2.1)
<i>Exercise</i>		
>1 time per week	1.0	
<= 1 time per week	<b>2.2 (1.15 - 4.1)</b>	<b>2.6 (1.2 - 5.6)</b>
<i>Alcohol consumer</i>		
No	1.0	
Yes	1.3 (0.6 - 2.7)	1.3 (0.5 - 3.1)
<i>Tobacco consumer</i>		
No	1.0	
Yes	2.0 (0.3 - 12.2)	2.6 (0.2 - 32.3)

\*Reference category: Boys.

### 3.3. Are There Differences between Participants' Frequency of Attendance?

Concerning socio-demographic factors, the chi-square test (Table 6) shows that a greater proportion of the young people who participate less than once a week live in an owned residence and have a father who works than those who participate more often. The more often the young people attend the youth-center, the better they seem to rate their health. Those who are at the center often have most of their friends there and live nearby to a greater extent.

### 3.4. Who Participates at the Youth-Centers According to the Interviews?

The content analysis of qualitative data collected at the two youth-centers resulted in three themes (Figure 3) which support the results of the survey on some issues and deepen and widen the understanding of some issues.

**Table 5.** Unadjusted odds ratios and all leisure-time factors entered (CI 95%).

<i>Leisure-time factors</i>	Unadjusted = 199	Unadjusted = 98
<i>Youth-center</i>		
V	1.0*	
T	1.1 (0.6 - 2.0)	1.4 (0.4 - 4.6)
<i>Frequency of attendance</i>		
<1 time a week	1.0	
1 - 2 times a week	0.7 (0.4 - 1.4)	0.6 (0.2 - 2.3)
>3 times a week	0.6 (0.3 - 1.3)	0.3 (0.07 - 1.2)
<i>Lives close to youth-center</i>		
Yes	1.0	
No	1.3 (0.7 - 2.3)	1.1 (0.4 - 3.4)
<i>Peers in school mostly friends</i>		
Yes	1.0	
No answer	0.6 (0.3 - 1.03)	0.9 (0.3 - 2.7)
<i>Peers at youth-center mostly friends</i>		
Yes	1.0	
No answer	1.2 (0.7 - 2.2)	0.9 (0.3 - 2.5)
<i>Walks/Bikes to school/leisure</i>		
Once a month or more often	1.0	
Never/a few times a year	0.7 (0.4 - 1.4)	0.8 (0.3 - 2.5)
<i>Goes to parties</i>		
Never/a few times a year	1.0	
Once a month or more often	0.8 (0.4 - 1.4)	2.2 (0.7 - 6.7)
<i>Goes to concerts, museums</i>		
Never/a few times a year	1.0	
Once a month or more often	0.9 (0.5 - 1.5)	0.4 (0.15 - 1.2)
<i>At friend's home in evening</i>		
Never/a few times a year	1.0	
Once a month or more often	<b>2.1 (1.1 - 4.0)</b>	0.9 (0.3 - 3.4)
<i>Computer use during the week</i>		
<1 h a day	<b>1.0</b>	
1 - 3 h a day	1.7 (0.7 - 4.0)	0.9 (0.2 - 3.6)
>4 h a day	<b>3.4 (1.4 - 8.5)</b>	1.8 (0.4 - 8.2)
<i>Sports club</i>		
Am member	1.0	<b>1.0</b>
Have been a member	<b>2.1 (1.05 - 4.1)</b>	2.3 (0.8 - 6.4)
Never been member	<b>9.2(3.0 - 28.2)</b>	<b>14.7 (2.1 - 102.5)</b>
<i>Reads for pleasure</i>		
Never/a few times a year	1.0	
At least a few times a month	1.7 (1.0 - 3.2)	2.1 (0.7 - 5.8)
<i>Same hobby as parent</i>		
Yes	1.0	
No	0.8 (0.5 - 1.4)	0.5 (0.2 - 1.3)
<i>Parents know about leisure-time</i>		
Most of the time/Always/almost always	1.0	Excluded due to insufficient cell size
Never/Rarely	<b>0.2 (0.04 - 0.8)</b>	

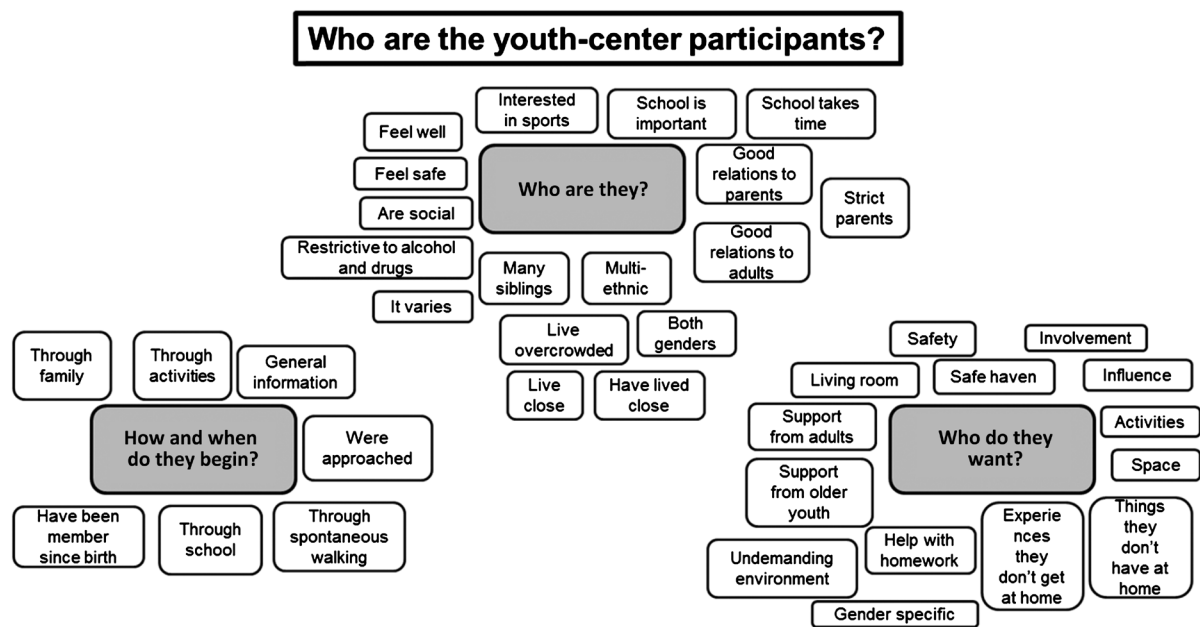
\*Reference category: Boys.

**Table 6.** All independent variables compared between three levels of frequency of attendance (in%) with chi square tests.

Socio-demographic factors		<1	1 - 2	>3	p-value
Age	Younger (Years 6 - 7)	61	46	66	0.053
	Older (Years 8 - 9 + 1)	39	54	34	
Gender	Boys	53	61	67	0.345
	Girls	47	39	33	
Birth country	Sweden	84	80	82	0.798
	Other country	16	20	18	
Mother's birth country	Sweden	4	9	7	0.534
	Other country	96	91	93	
Father's birth country	Sweden	4	10	2	0.223
	Other country	96	90	98	
Lives with both parents all the time	Yes	93	85	86	0.327
Type of housing	No	7	15	14	<0.001
	Rented apartment	34	77	70	
Mother's employment	Owned residence or both	66	23	30	0.347
	Working	72	66	58	
Father's employment	Other	28	34	42	0.003
	Working	96	83	69	
Perceived economic status	Other	4	17	31	0.343
	Worse/much worse than friends	2	9	9	
	About equal to friends	58	49	59	
Has a smartphone	Better/much better than friends	40	42	32	0.220
	Yes	75	70	59	
Hashis/her own room	No	25	30	41	0.593
	Yes	64	57	55	
	No	36	43	45	
Health-related factors					
Feels safe in neighborhood (daytime)	Strongly agree/Agree	88	88	88	0.998
	Disagree/Strongly disagree	12	12	12	
Feels safe in neighborhood in evenings	Strongly agree/Agree	71	82	83	0.307
	Disagree/Strongly disagree	29	18	17	
Self-perceived health	Neither good nor bad, or not good	11	7	2	0.009
	Feeling well	34	16	11	
	Feeling very well	55	77	86	
Enjoy school	Very/Pretty good	93	96	95	0.671
	Neither good nor bad or pretty/very bad	7	4	5	

**Continued**

Good in school compared	Among the best/better than most	54	60	59	0.769
to classmates	Equal, worse or among the worst	46	40	41	
Exercises	≤1 time a week	31	28	34	0.781
	>1 time a week	69	72	66	
Alcohol consumer	Yes, have drank at least once	22	23	7	0.065
	No or just tasted	78	77	93	
Tobacco consumer	Yes, party or regular	2	5	0	0.199
	No, tried or quit	98	95	100	
<i>Leisure-time factors</i>					
Youth-center	V	91	63	69	<b>0.001</b>
	T	9	37	31	
Lives close to youth-center	Yes, walking or biking distance	48	72	14	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
	No	52	28	86	
Peers in school mostly friends	Yes	74	57	53	0.065
	No answer	26	43	47	
Peers at center mostly friends	Yes	23	53	58	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
	No answer	77	47	42	
Walks/Bikes to school/leisure	Never/a few times a year	42	26	28	0.138
	Once a month or more often	58	74	72	
Goes to parties	Never/few times a year	79	45	60	<b>0.001</b>
	Once a month or more often	21	55	40	
Goes to concerts, museum	Never/few times a year	60	42	37	<b>0.044</b>
	Once a month or more often	40	58	63	
At friend's home in evening	Never/few times a year	45	19	42	<b>0.005</b>
	Once a month or more often	55	81	58	
Computer use during week	<1 h a day	24	10	18	0.056
	1 - 3 h a day	40	53	61	
	>4 h a day	36	37	21	
Sports club	Never been member	15	8	13	0.571
	Have been member	36	44	50	
	Am member	49	48	37	
Reads for pleasure	Never/few times a year	44	44	40	0.914
	At least a few times a month	56	56	60	
Same hobby as parent	Yes	43	51	49	0.627
	No	57	49	51	
Parents know about	Never/rarely/varies	2	10	13	0.083
Leisure-time	Most of the time/always/almost always	92	90	87	



**Figure 3.** The themes and categories from the qualitative content analysis.

### 3.4.1. Who Are They?

Many of the youth at both centers come from families with lower SES, and many of them live in crowded apartments with many siblings. They do not attend activities in the city center, where their parents would have to drive them. However most of the young people have good home conditions and enjoy spending time with their families.

They aren't able to spend time together at home. It's crowded; they have many siblings. (Staff, T)

They feel comfortable in their homes. They enjoy the company of their parents. Sometimes they think their parents are too strict, but don't almost all young people think that at that age? (Staff, V)

They respect adults and see no problems with adults being present during different activities. Most of the young people are against alcohol, tobacco, and drugs and most abstain completely. Sport is an interest mentioned by many young people at both youth-centers.

And then you'll skip everything bad, like alcohol, cigarettes, and stuff. Instead of partying on a Friday, you can just come to the center and be with your friends, play FIFA and stuff. (Boy, T)

Especially the boys are members of sport clubs; the girls used to be members, but nowadays they often mention that schoolwork takes a lot of time. Many of the girls find it more difficult to hang out at the center and participate in various activities for reasons related to cultural gender norms.

At both youth-centers many respondents report feeling unsafe in the neighborhood. It is common for the young people accompany each other home from the center in the evenings. The young people feel safe at the centers; the older they are the safer they feel. At V there is no difference between girls' and boys' feeling of safety. But at T boys seem to feel safer than girls.

Or if some girl from the youth-center is going home, one of us can follow her home. Yes, we usually do. Everyone helps like that. (Boys, V)

At V boys and girls hang out more together. They sit and talk, relax, and watch television or films together, although at T it is more common that girls attend structured activities such as dance, while boys play indoor-football, FIFA (PlayStation), or hang out. At both T and V boys are at the center on weekdays more often than girls. At V they think that all the young people are nice and social, consider everyone friends, and hang out with each other even outside V. At T they think that friends are important and they often come together with friends.

Right now there are very few girls. It shifts a bit, but right now it's like that. And the girls come for directed activities more than perhaps ten years ago. (Staff, T)

They have more boys' activities, more boys' games; it's always FIFA and PlayStation and such, which are not girls' activities; that's a reason why girls don't come; we're more interested in beauty, nails, and such, but it's only on girls' evenings that they do that. (Girls, T)

### 3.4.2. How and When Do They Begin?

How and when the youth start coming to the centers differs quite a lot. Most of the young people at V have been members and have come to the center's different premises since childhood. They start coming because they had family members and friends there. At T they start to come in grades 6 - 7, and most have been members for 2 - 4 years.

Many have grown up with this; many are members since birth. It's like a second home. (Staff, V)

...the youth who come here now are not...it's different now than 10 - 15 years ago when everyone went to the same school and were in the same classes. Everyone knew everyone, even before they came to us. Now they might know each other, because they live in the same area, but they're not so closely knit and they don't bump into each other every day, because they go to different schools and are in different classes. (Staff, T)

Visiting nearby schools is used as a way of recruiting members to both V and T. At V another active strategy is to take spontaneous walks in the neighborhood.

We usually walk around, spontaneous walks, three or four of us. We may meet some people we know; they have hardly anything to do. We talk to them about V. Tell them it's a place where you can spend time, especially in the winter when it's cold outside. That's one way to spread the message. (Staff, V)

### 3.4.3. What Do They Want?

The young people want things they don't have at home or experiences they don't get at home.

...if it weren't for V I wouldn't, I'd never go to Dalarna and, like, be there for a week and stay in a cabin. There are such things, experiences; this activity has given me experiences that I otherwise would never get to do (Girls, V)

Not everyone has the resources. For example TV-games, Ping-Pong tables, and so on. You don't have room for that in an apartment. (Staff, T)

Young people at both V and T talk about having a living room. A place where there is space for friends and where the environment is safe and undemanding. They also want adults to help them with homework, or just be there to talk to. At V they also emphasize the support from older youth.

Sometimes you need peace and quiet and so on. But V is like my second home; I can come here with only pants, a cardigan, newly awake—and just be here. (Girls, V)

The young people at V want to have influence and participate in decisions. Those who attend more often seem to take more responsibility. Girls show more engagement in different activities and take more responsibility. At T, some youth want to do this more than others, and the difference between genders is especially distinct. Not everyone is interested in taking responsibility and working for something they want. Some mention that they are in need of activities free from demands and obligations.

## 4. Discussion

This has been an explorative study. It fills a gap in the knowledge regarding who participates in NGO-run youth-centers in multicultural, socially deprived suburbs in Sweden.

Compared to a representative sample of Swedish youth, the participants in this study perceive their health as at least as good and see themselves as exercising a bit less, enjoying school a bit more, and being about as good at school as their classmates [12]. The youth also state that their parents know about their leisure activities and that they have a nice family environment. It is also an interesting finding of the study that the young people

participating in the centers' activities do not use tobacco, and few have tried alcohol. Many of them state in the questionnaire that they feel safe in their neighborhood, especially girls. In the interviews, however, they talk about the unsafe neighborhood they live in, but it is also clear that they know how to handle the situation by accompanying each other home, as an example. Earlier studies by Persson, Kerr, and Stattin [34] and Mahoney and Stattin [23] showed a concentration of problem youth with poor relations with their parents in low-structured activities like Swedish youth-centers. In this study we find quite the opposite. Holder and colleagues [11] conclude that parents choose their children's leisure activities. It is hard to say if this is the case for these youth, but especially youth-center V has the policy always to meet with the parents of participants, unless staffs already have been in natural contact with the parents because they accompanied the participant as a young child. Some parents, especially of girls within certain ethnic groups, demand to meet the center leaders before allowing their children to participate. At youth-center T there is a pronounced trend that girls participate in structured activities and boys in unstructured activities. One explanation is that girls have fewer leisure activities overall, both because they think their schoolwork takes more time and because spending time with their families was important to them, which is in line with the study reported by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare [35]. In the past almost everyone was involved in sports, but now the girls in particular are not involved anymore. At T the unstructured activities seems to attract boys more, as Lindström and Öqvist [17] also concluded.

Youth-centers help young people who live nearby to participate in leisure activities. In these multi-cultural, socially deprived suburbs, young people often live together with many siblings and family members, and lack personal space. It is also mentioned that their parents do not give them rides into town to participate in other leisure-time activities—in this case for reasons of SES, e.g. having irregular working hours or not owning a car, rather than being uninvolved parents. The youth-centers offer the young people a sense of being in a place made for their own leisure activities, and often provide a living-room atmosphere. Immigrant youth living in disadvantaged neighborhoods perceive their schools as safe havens more than youths in advantaged neighborhoods [36]. In this study the youth in the same type of neighborhoods enjoy school as well, but also see their youth center as a safe haven.

Knowledge that was added from the interviews was that youth-centers' strategies for recruiting seems to have a large impact on who participates. Youth-center V, whose members often get involved in early childhood by coming with their parents, becomes part of the both boys' and girls' everyday life, and members view each other as friends or even family. At youth-center T, however, which involves youth from 12 years and up, it is more important that you bring your friends (often same sex) instead of considering everyone there to be your friends already. This makes youth-center T more sensitive to trends, causing it to attract different groups (gender or ethnicity) over time as friends become more important in early adolescence than they were in childhood [2]. It seems like the group of youth who visit youth-center V less than once a week are a special group when it comes to, for example, SES. They often live in another part of town and less often in a rented apartment. The young people at V who only come for weekend or holiday activities used to live close to the center or have friends who do so. At youth-center T there are few youth who visit less than once a week, but then the center does not offer weekend or holiday activities. Hertting and Kostenius [24] conclude that the adolescents who participated in organized leisure activities less than once a week were the most vulnerable from a socioeconomic perspective. This is not the case in our study, however this type of activity cannot strictly be regarded as organized leisure activity. The youth in our study are probably more socioeconomically vulnerable than Swedish youth in general.

## Methodological Discussion

As in all studies we are struggling with some limitations. Collecting data from youth participating in a voluntary, partly unstructured activity can be tricky. Our approach was to get as many respondents as possible from the two participating youth-centers; therefore we set quite a long period for data collection. The data is self-reported and cross-sectional, which means that no causal relationships can be determined. However we think that the samples are representative of the participants at the youth-centers, because a quite large proportion of the regularly visiting youth took part. Due to some internal loss, only individuals with full information for all variables were included in the logistic regression analysis (not the unadjusted odds ratios), which affected the construction of models. We argue that the study's explorative character justifies including the large number of variables in the analysis. We are aware of the mass significance issue, which could make 5% of our tests significant although they were not.

One could discuss whether the focus-groups gave more or less information than individual interviews [37].

We argue that interaction between participants provided breadth in the answers, and that it was a cost-effective form of data collection. Interpreting interviews requires knowledge of the context in which a study is conducted [33]. The interviewers in this study were also the ones who analyzed the interviews and who analyzed the questionnaires. A strength is that staff and youth had concordant views on who participated at their youth-centers.

## 5. Conclusion

The participants in the youth-centers are Swedish born youths having foreign-born parents who live with both parents, often in crowded apartments with many siblings. Moreover they feel healthy, enjoy school and have good contact with their parents. It seems that strategies for recruiting youths to youth-centers have a large impact on who participate. One way to succeed in having a more equal gender and ethnicity distribution is to offer youth activities that are a natural step forward from children's activities. The youth-centers' proximity is also of importance for participation, in these types of neighborhoods. Good contact with parents is important for every youth activity, but is even more important to get youth to participate in a neighborhood with many immigrants with diverse views of society's institutions. Maintaining good contact with parents can also indirectly affect parents' networks and well-being.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that no conflict of interest exists.

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