

Scouting and its Impact on Youth

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Writer's Statement

During my youth, I wasn't sure of much. But one thing that I was sure about was scouting. I feel as though Scouting has helped make me become the person I am today. I have learned countless lessons, made many memories, and it has provided me with many opportunities that I am grateful to have had. I cherish the times I had in Scouting, and when my composition teacher explained this paper to our class, it seemed like a no-brainer to choose this topic. My main research question is "What are the potential benefits, if any, of youth participation in scouting?" Across all of my research, there was one prevailing opinion amongst all of the sources that I had gone through. This consensus was that involvement in Scouting programs is beneficial for youth, and sets them up for success currently and later in life. Even in the public opinion sources that I had gone through, I had little against participation in scouting programs.

An Introduction to Scouting

The Scouting Movement is well known around the globe and has existed for over a century. The Scouting movement was led by Robert Baden-Powell of Great Britain. Baden-Powell, born February 22, 1857, in London, England, was an officer in the British Army and became a national hero for his defense of Maheking, a city now called Mahiking in present-day South Africa, during the Second Boer War. During the war, Baden-Powell wrote a military textbook in 1899 titled *Aids to Scouting*, promoting his unorthodox methods of leading troops through small teams called patrols. Despite being intended for the army, many youths were reading his book and copying his methods. After learning this, Baden-Powell reworked his book for a younger audience and published *Scouting for Boys* in 1908. *Scouting for Boys* was intended to be a guidebook for youth organizations that existed in 1908, but quickly became the handbook of the growing Scouting movement at the time. In 1907, while Baden-Powell was writing *Scouting for Boys*, Baden-Powell hosted a camp for boys on Brownsea Island, an island off the coast of England, where he took 20 boys from different socioeconomic backgrounds camping and put his methods to the test. This camp of 20 boys run by Baden-Powell is widely recognized as the start of the scouting movement (*Britannica*).

At this camp, Baden-Powell split the boys into groups of six or seven, which he called "Patrols" and had the boys in each patrol elect a leader called the "Patrol Leader." This patrol system is very similar to the patrols found within Baden-Powell's *Aids to Scouting*. The patrol leader would lead and direct the boys within his patrol to learn outdoor skills such as tracking, reconnaissance, mapping, signalling, knot-tying, first aid, and several other skills. Baden-Powell (1908) also placed strong emphasis on certain values within *Scouting for Boys* with the "Scout Law," which states:

1. A Scout's Honour is to be Trusted.
2. A Scout is Loyal
3. A Scout's Duty is to be Useful and to Help Others.
4. A Scout is a Friend to All, and a Brother to Every Other Scout, no matter to what Social Class the Other belongs.
5. A Scout is Courteous.
6. A Scout is a Friend to Animals
7. A Scout Obeys Orders of his patrol leader or Scout master without question.
8. A Scout Smiles and Whistles
9. A Scout is Thrifty (pp. 49–51).

The Scout Law is meant to be a set of guidelines that a Scout would follow through their daily activities. Baden-Powell (1908) also put the Scout Oath into *Scouting for Boys*, which states:

You all take the Scout's Oath, that is you promise, *on your honour*, three things, namely: 1. To be loyal to God and the King. 2. To help other people at all times. 3. To obey the Scout Law (p. 20).

The Scout Oath is similar to the Scout Law in the way that it is a set of guidelines; however, they differ in that the Scout Oath is seen as a promise that one takes, while the Scout Law is a list of characteristics that a Scout would aim to have. The Scout Oath is also related more to overall society with the first point, "To be loyal to God and the King" and the second point, "To help other people at times." The first point is encouraging Scouts to be loyal to a higher belief and their country, and the second point is encouraging Scouts to help other people at all times, with no expectation of reward or compensation. With the success of the camp and the release of *Scouting for Boys*, providing a clear framework of values and clear instructions of leadership practices for others to utilize, the Scouting movement quickly took off and spread all over the globe with 176 different national Scouting organizations. While the Scouting movement has evolved over the years, it has still held onto its core values found in the Scout Law and Scout Oath from within *Scouting for Boys* with little to no variation.

The Current Youth Crisis

Worldwide, today's youth are faced with many challenges and stressors not seen before. These challenges have caused a troubling increase in mental health conditions in younger age groups compared to their older counterparts. The Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (HRSA, 2022), a government agency dedicated to health research and data collection in the United States, reported that mental health disorders are increasing sharply among younger populations. Nearly 15% of people ages 10–19 experience a mental health disorder, contributing to 13% of the disease burden — a measure of the overall impact that health conditions have on a population — in this age group.

Further findings from HRSA (2022) paint an increasingly concerning picture of youth mental health in the United States. Among children ages 2–8, 17.4% had a diagnosed mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder. For youth ages 12–17, 20.9% experienced major depressive disorder at least once, 36.7% reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness over a one-year period, and 18.8% had seriously considered attempting suicide. Additionally, the rate of youth receiving specialty mental health care rose from 11.8% in 2002 to 16.7%, and depression diagnoses among children ages 3–17 increased by 27%. Together, these statistics paint a troubling picture of the mental health challenges facing today's youth.

Despite these concerning statistics about the condition of today's youth mental health, several courses of action can be taken to improve their mental health. According to the United Kingdom's National Health Service (2022), several actions can be taken to improve mental health. These include connecting with other people, being physically active, learning new skills, giving to others, and being mindful of the moment. Scouting allows youth to do all five of these activities that are beneficial to mental health. To elaborate, Scouting brings together youth of different backgrounds and helps foster camaraderie and friendship between them. Scouting also leads to routine social activities for youth to look forward to, such as meetings, campouts, and various other activities. Next, Scouting also promotes youth to be physically active on campouts and other activities. Another way Scouting also promotes youth to be physically active is within the requirements of ranks within Scouting, there are several physical fitness requirements that promote education and participation in physical activity.

Continuing on, Scouting provides youth opportunities to learn new skills. As previously mentioned in this paper, Baden-Powell led the group of scouts during the time at his camp and taught them several outdoor skills. Scouting also provides youth opportunities to give to others

through volunteering; a big component of scouting is volunteering. Lastly, scouting provides youth with an opportunity to practice mindfulness through other outdoor activities.

Scouting Sets Youth Up For Success

Scouting has been shown to provide other benefits to youth to help them both short term and long term. Scouting does this by providing an opportunity to exercise leadership and cooperate with others, leading to increased self-confidence, improved social skills, and increased academic achievement. This was found in a study conducted by several researchers from the University of Almeria in Spain. The researchers conducted a study on 430 youth aged 13–17 years old, with half of the youth being a participant in Scouting and the other half not participating in Scouting. The youth consisted of 49.8% boys and 50.2% girls, with an average age of 14.82 years. With this group of students, researchers used several questionnaires, such as the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, the Social Skills Scale, and an academic questionnaire, to collect data on the relationship between the youth, participation in Scouting, and self-esteem, academic achievement, conflict resolution, social skills, and various other qualities. With the data that the researchers collected, they came to several conclusions about Scouting participation. Asensio-Ramon et al. (2020) found that teens that participated in Scouting activities had better academic performance and conflict resolution skills versus teens who don't participate in Scouting activities. The researchers also acknowledged that their findings are consistent with other studies on informal education settings, including Scouting, further indicating that these environments positively influence the personal and interpersonal skills of younger children and teens. The researchers attributed this positive relationship between Scouting and academic performance to the development of discipline, confidence, and increased willingness to confront challenging experiences found within the Scouting program. This study concluded that youth participation in Scouting is very likely shown to have various positive effects on youth, with youth that participated in Scouting outscored their non-Scouting peers on all the questionnaires that the researchers had collected. Overall, this study found that it is beneficial for youth to participate in Scouting, and it is not the only study to find this result.

The following study, conducted by the University of Tartu, also found these results by collecting surveys of Scouting participants. However, in addition to the surveys, researchers also conducted focus group interviews, with a total of 38 participants in these more personal interviews. Within the many findings of the focus group interviews, these following conclusions are notable. Kasearu et al. (2020) found that Scouting was associated with long term positive emotions, which in turn increased youth's energy and motivation in other aspects of their lives. The researchers also noted that many respondents had said something along the lines of how Scouting allows them to put themselves to the test, do things independently, and take responsibility for their actions in a low stakes environment. The respondents also explained how this had given them more self-confidence and made them courageous in their daily lives. A particularly noteworthy conclusion from this study was the aforementioned ability to do things independently.

In today's society, it seems that youth have diminishing autonomy compared to their parents and their parents have less autonomy than their parents' parents. Scouting creates an unique environment where youth have a higher degree of independence than they normally would. This more independent environment, which is laid out in Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys*, allows for personal growth which many other activities that youth do simply can't emulate due to their lack of independence. Another critical part of this paper is the inclusion of quotes from the respondents:

I am more open to challenges and also bolder, it's the same thing again – that I dared to come here, that I take on more challenges in the future. I'd like to become a veterinarian

but it isn't completely certain, maybe Scouting will give me the courage to go and try out whether it's the right field for me. And if it isn't, so what, I will seize some other challenge. Plus, Scouting gives you motivation somehow ... You're in your routine, you go to some event, help organize something and afterwards you feel like it was an energy boost for doing other things (Kasearu et al., 2020).

This study is particularly noteworthy because of these recorded statements from the participants during the focus group interviews. These statements provide a glimpse into the Scouting participants' perspective of the benefits of Scouting. According to these statements and from the researchers' conclusions, Scouting provides an environment for youth to put themselves outside their comfort zone in a low stakes, high reward environment, leading to increased self-confidence and better responsibility. Self-confidence and self-esteem are seen to have a positive impact on school performance as seen in this study facilitated by the university of Bern, Switzerland, in which the authors discuss various studies about self-esteem:

The success orientation of high self-esteem students makes them more engaged and persistent in achievement contexts, and more likely to exhibit adaptive cognitive and emotional reactions to challenge, which then increases the likelihood that they will do well in school (Covington, 1989). Moreover, self-esteem is associated with higher levels of self-efficacy, which increases the use of adaptive self-regulatory strategies (Pintrich & de Groot, 1990) and promotes motivation and task engagement (Green et al., 2012). Finally, high self-esteem is a coping resource that contributes to persistence after academic failure (Baumeister et al., 2003; Orth & Robins, 2022).

This study states that there are a plethora of benefits of high self-esteem and self-confidence, including being well adapted to challenge, having higher self-efficacy, and being tenacious after failure. Tying these statements back to the previous studies in this section of the paper, which show that Scouting increases self-esteem and self-confidence, among other traits, can also be seen to have the benefits of increasing adaptability to challenge, increased self-efficacy, and improving tenacity. Overall, Scouting can help set youth up for success in the present and in their future by improving various traits and aspects of their lives and preparing them to face adversity head on.

Scouting and Citizenship

When one hears "citizenship," their first impression of the word may be the right to participate in elections and enjoy certain privileges. However, there is another meaning of the word. The Oxford dictionary also defines citizenship as "the quality of an individual's response to membership in a community" (Oxford, 2026). According to this definition, a good citizen is one who responds positively to their membership in their community. This can be related to the Scout Oath with the first point, loyalty to God and one's country, in which loyalty to one's country can be seen as having good citizenship. One way one can respond to their community is by voting. The study found earlier in this paper, conducted by the University of Tartu, also found that Scouts have higher participation in elections.

A total of 64.5% of the respondents in the Scout study, aged 16–26, turned out to vote in the 2017 local elections, and 74% plan to vote in the next elections. As these respondents included those who were 16–26 years of age in 2017, we see that the turnout was 79% in the elections. Polls conducted across the country showed that 59% of the 24,000 youths aged 16–17 cast a vote, and by age, the turnout was even lower in the following youth age groups. In comparison, overall turnout at the 2017 local elections was 53.3% of all Estonian citizens eligible to vote. Thus, youths involved in Scouting are politically more active than their peers and the society as a whole (Kasearu et al., 2020).

The evidence found in the study shows that Scouts voted more as a percentage of their age group versus their non-Scouting peers. This means that participation in Scouting could be shown to increase the likelihood of one being involved in local politics and elections, therefore being more involved in one's community and fulfilling their duty as a citizen. Another way Scouting helps one be a better citizen can also be found in the Scout Oath, with the second point, help others at all times. Any act of helping another, no matter how big or small the impact it has, can be seen as a net positive for the community. Overall, Scouting can be seen as a way to help youth become better citizens by improving participation in politics and voting, and by encouraging them to help other members of their community.

Conclusion

The Scouting movement can have a wealth of benefits for youth who participate in it. Scouting participation can improve mental health and help prevent certain mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression, by providing youth with routine social interactions, promoting physical fitness, facilitating the learning of new skills, providing opportunities to get outside and reconnect with nature, and to practice mindfulness. Scouting participation also sets youth up for success in the present and the future by improving their leadership skills, self-esteem and confidence, social skills, better academic performance, improved self-efficacy, and the ability to persevere under pressure. Finally, Scouting benefits society by making youth better citizens of their community through increased political participation and the promotion of selfless acts to others. While seen as a traditional old school activity, Scouting still presents itself as a viable activity with solutions to the problems of youth and has many benefits in store.

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