

**Why do FFA teenagers leave 4-H?**

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### **Introduction**

The 4-H mission is to empower youth to reach their full potential, working and learning in partnership with caring adults (4-H, 2013). The 4-H organization is important for both elementary and secondary age youth. 4-H has shown to help develop life skills, academic skills, self-esteem, resiliency, and citizenship; lower risky behaviors; and contribute to the development of communities (Avent & Jayaratne, 2017). Times are changing, and 4-H is experiencing difficulty in recruitment and retention in certain age groups (Newby & Sallee, 2011). In particular, 4-H membership for teens, starting around age 11, is decreasing at an alarming rate (Bartoszuk & Randall, 2011). The purpose of this study was to describe the factors FFA members identify when choosing to maintain 4-H membership in high school.

### **Conceptual or theoretical framework**

The study was guided by the Expectancy-Value Theory (EVT) of motivation (Wigfield & Eccles, 2000). Expectancy-value theory suggests adolescents' ability-expectancy beliefs and subjective task values determine their performance and choice to persist in activities. Relative to this study, subjective task values refer to the choice of certain tasks or activities for which students are intrinsically motivated to complete (Loh, 2019). Subjective task values and related expectancy for success are found positively correlated and interactively linked to students' achievement and academic choices (Loh, 2019).

### **Methods/Procedures**

Researchers collected data at the Lincoln University District FFA Contest in Jefferson City, MO, on March 10th, 2020. A paper and pencil survey was distributed to all FFA student attendees. This purposive sample was chosen based on their age and active involvement in extracurricular activities. The survey contained five demographic questions and seven questions pertaining to 4-H and FFA membership. The survey was reviewed for face and content validity by a panel of experts prior to distribution, and all suggested edits were incorporated into the paper-and-pencil survey. 547 of 607 students returned completed surveys for a response rate of 90.1%. All students were active participants in their high school secondary agriculture education program, ranging in age from 14 to 18 years of age. Student responses were anonymous, and the project was submitted to and approved by the institution's Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to data collection.

### **Results/Findings**

For objective 1, researchers compared the demographic data of FFA members and FFA members who have been or still are involved in 4-H (see Table 1).

*Table 1. Demographics of participants*

		4-H members (f,%) (n=218)	All participants (f,%) (n=545)
Sex			
	Male	83 (38.1%)	233 (42.8%)
	Female	133 (61.0%)	305 (56.0%)
Community			
	Rural	149 (68.3%)	333 (61.1%)
	Suburban	62 (28.4%)	194 (35.6%)
	Urban	4 (1.8%)	12 (2.2%)
Parental education			
	No Bachelor's degrees	82 (37.6%)	266 (48.8%)
	1 Bachelor's or higher	77 (35.3%)	154 (28.3%)
	2 Bachelor's or higher	59 (27.1%)	125 (22.9%)

For objective 2, researchers asked former 4-H members why they left. Of the 97 students leaving 4-H, 43 students cited involvement in other extra-curricular activities (19.7%), 38 listed playing sports (17.4%), 34 responded it took too much time to do both (15.6%), and 21 blamed loss of interest in 4-H (9.6%). Ten students (4.6%) did not know why they left, 4 (1.8%) said there were no 4-H clubs close to their home, and 2 (0.9%) said membership was too expensive.

For objective 3, researchers asked current teen 4-H members why they remained in both. Ninety-six (44%) 4-H/FFA members enjoyed activities in both groups, 83 said both provided leadership skills (38.1%), 82 students (37.6%) said 4-H looks good on college applications, 62 students (28.4%) reported 4-H worked good with their SAE project, 12 (5.5%) students said their parents make them do both, and 6 (2.8%) responded they do not know why they do both.

### **Conclusions/Recommendations/Impact on profession**

In objective one, we conclude these FFA members were mostly rural and about 40% were still enrolled in 4-H. male students are leaving 4-H as teen agers, whereas, girl students are staying in both 4-H and FFA. Over 62% of 4-H members had at least one parent with a college degree, but for the non 4-H members, almost 50% reported neither parent had an advanced degree. We know 4-H provides a multitude of skills needed for success in life; are we self-selecting students who may already be successful? For objectives 2 and 3, those who left 4-H cited being too busy, whereas those who stayed cited finding immediate benefits of fun and future benefits of leadership skills and college applications. High school students are very busy; researchers suggest marketing the long-term benefits staying in 4-H, particularly the fun and leadership opportunities, both locally and beyond, reserved for older members. Researchers noted cost was not listed as a barrier. Researchers suggest following up with parents to verify potential cost barriers and barriers of urban and after school 4-H members.

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