



Facts and figures about women and girls in sport

Women's participation in sport

While statistical information about women's participation in sport is important, it must be recognised that such data do not provide insights into the process of women's participation, the meanings women attribute to sport or the influences on their patterns of involvement.

What does the research show?

National Participation

- In 2005-06, around 45% of women aged 16 and over in England (9 million) took part in some sport or physical activity in the previous four weeks for at least 30 minutes, compared with 54% of men (10.6 million).¹

- Just 19% (3.8 million women) took part in regular sport and active recreation for at least 30 minutes compared with 24% of men (4.7 million).

- The most recent data published in Wales and Scotland show similar patterns: in Wales, only 45% of women aged 15 and over took part in at least one indoor or outdoor game or outdoor pursuit in the previous four weeks in 2002/03, compared with 53% of men.² Data published in 2005, shows that 59% of women in Scotland were active in the previous four weeks, compared with 68% of men.³

Regional participation

- Activity levels vary by region. The least active women are in the West Midlands where just 16.6% of women took part in regular sport and active recreation in the previous four

weeks. The most regularly active women are in the South East (20.3%).

Most popular activities

- Whether by choice or availability, women tend to choose sports and active recreation that do not require joining a team or having to take part competitively. The five most popular activities to participate in are

walking, swimming, visiting the gym, athletics (including road running and jogging), and aerobics. In contrast, for men, the most popular sport to take part in is a competitive team sport: football (13%). While football is the most popular team sport for women, it is only the joint 12th most popular activity to take part in (equal with Pilates) and still only for a small

Table 1: Top ten sports participated in monthly by adults aged 16 and over by gender; England, 2005-06.

Women		Men	
Sport	Percentage of all female respondents	Sport	Percentage of all male respondents
Walking ¹	19	Walking ¹	21
Swimming	17	Football	13
Visiting the gym	10	Visiting the gym	11
Athletics including road running/ jogging	4	Swimming	10
Aerobics	3	Golf/pitch and putt	6
Yoga	2	Athletics including road running/ jogging	6
Badminton	2	Badminton	3
Tennis	2	Tennis	3
Keep fit/sit ups	2	Squash	2
Exercise bike/ exercise machines/ spinning	1	Cricket	2

¹ At least one recreational walk lasting 30 minutes at moderate intensity.
Source: Active People Survey, 2005-06, Sport England

proportion of women (1%).

- As suggested by the popular sports data, women are less likely than men to take part in organised competitive sport. Only one in ten women took part in organised competitive sport in the previous 12 months compared with one in five men. Organised team sport is more popular amongst young women – with 17% of 16-24 year old women taking part, but this drops to under 10% from aged 25 onwards.

The impact of different demographic factors on participation

- Almost three in five women aged 16-24 years did some sport and active recreation for at least 30 minutes in the previous four weeks (60%). Activity levels reduce only slightly until 45 years of age when the first large drop out occurs, and then continue to drop off. By the age of 85, few women (6%) are involved in any sport and active recreation.

- With respect to regular sports participation, almost double the proportion of men than women aged 16-24 take part in sport regularly (41% compared with 24%). But from age 25 onwards, the gap closes between the sexes, so that by age 35-44 there is little difference between men and women's regular activity levels.

- Younger women are more likely to take part in competition, belong to a sports club, receive tuition and do some volunteering.

- Activity levels also vary by economic status. Women in routine and semi-routine jobs (for example, care assistants, shop assistants and cleaners) are the least active – just 15% take part in regular activity, while women in managerial and professional roles (for example doctors, lawyers and nurses) are the most likely to be active – over a quarter took part in regular activity in the previous four weeks.

- There are different participation levels among the different Black and Minority Ethnic groups. Asian, and African and Caribbean origin women

are the least likely of all ethnic minority groups to take part regularly sport: just 13% of Asian women and 14% of African and Caribbean women regularly take part in sport or active recreation, compared with 19% of White women and 20% of women from the Mixed ethnic group.

- Over three in four women (78%) with a limiting long-standing illness, disability or infirmity did no sport or recreation for at least 30 minutes in the previous four weeks compared with just over half of women without a limiting long-standing illness or disability (50%). Men with a disability are more likely to be active, reflecting overall participation.

Sports club membership

- Approximately 4.4 million women are members of sports clubs (21% of women) compared with 5.8 million men (29% of men).⁴

Volunteering

- Just 3% of women did at least one hour of volunteering in sport in the previous week, which is half that of male volunteering (6%). Young women aged 16-24 are the most likely to volunteer (6%).⁵

Barriers to activity

- Almost four in ten women (36%) would do more sport if they were less busy. Over one in ten women (12%) said cheaper admission prices would encourage them to do more sport. Other reasons cited include people to go with (9%); and help with childcare/crèche facilities (6%). While men also mention being less busy and cheaper admissions, help with childcare/crèche facilities was not an important factor (just 1%).

- For those who do no sport at all, the main reason given by almost half of women was that their health wasn't good enough (50%). Lack of time was mentioned by almost two in five women (17%). In addition, 15% suggested that they were not really interested.⁶

Women's Sports Foundation
Third Floor, Victoria House
London, WC1B 4SE

Tel: 020 7273 1740

Fax: 020 7271 1981

Email: info@wsf.org.uk

Web: wsf.org.uk

Registered charity number: 1060267

February 2007

The Women's Sports Foundation has a vision of a society which celebrates the diversity of women and girls, and enables them to benefit from, excel at and fulfil their potential through the sport of their choice.

Supporting women's sport

The Women's Sports Foundation is the only organisation that works solely to increase opportunities for women and girls. We are a small team of seven people, campaigning for women's sport. These fact files are provided to you free of charge to help raise awareness of the issues – and empower you to advocate for change. However, if you would like to make a contribution to cover admin costs, and to support women's sport, please visit our website and follow the links to the 'make a donation' section.

Endnotes

- This data is from Sport England's Active People Survey, the largest sports participation survey ever carried out, showing adults aged 16 and over participating in sport and active recreation in England in 2005-06. Around 1,000 people in every local authority in England (around 350,000 people in total) were asked questions about their activity levels. In the Active People Survey there are two measures of activity: 'some activity' refers to someone who did moderate intensity sport or active recreation for at least one session for 30 minutes in the previous month. 'Regular activity' refers to sport or active recreation at least three times a week for at least 30 minutes continuously in one session.
- Data from the Wales Participation Survey, 2002-03. People are not asked about duration or intensity.
- Data from the 2003-2005 Scottish Continuous Sports Participation Survey. These data are not comparable with the Active People data as sportscotland did not ask questions about intensity or duration of activity, so these figures will include people who did sport for less than 30 minutes.
- Active People Survey, 2006, Sport England
- Active People Survey, 2006, Sport England
- Taking Part Survey provisional results 2006 (June 2005-January 2006), DCMS.