



Sport and Recreation in the Lives of Teenagers

The 2011 Young People's Survey confirms what earlier surveys have told us – participation drops off in the teenage years, particularly for girls.

To understand more about the way teenagers participate and how we might encourage them to stay in sport or take up new activities, we looked in more detail at the ways these young people take part in sport and recreation.

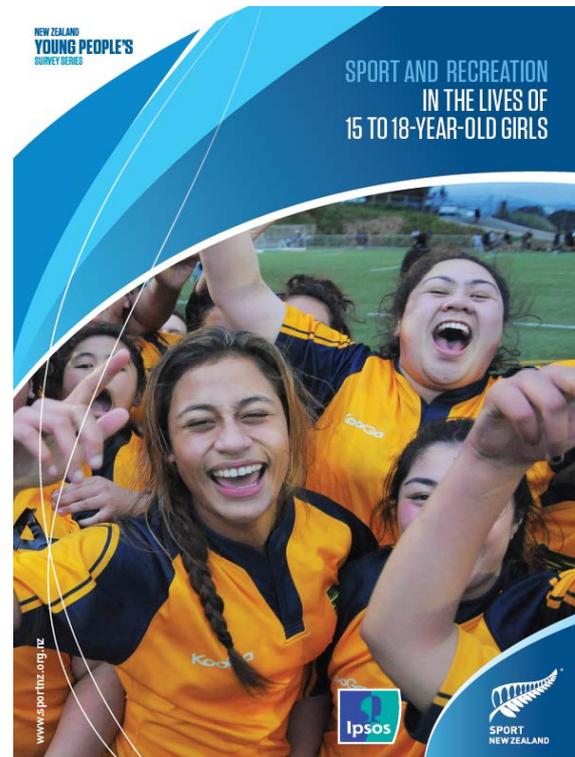
Read on to find out what's important to teenagers:

- Do they like competition or social sport?
- What sports and activities would they like to do?
- Who is more active – girls or boys?
- What puts them off sport and what will encourage them to continue playing?

Insights come from two reports:

- ***Sport and Recreation in the Lives of 15 to 18-year-old Girls*** – a profile of 15 to 18-year-old girls' involvement and interest in sport and recreation. The report also compares these girls' participation and interest with that of:
 - 11 to 14-year-old girls, who are the 15 to 18-year-olds of the future, to understand how participation varies with age, and
 - 15 to 18-year-old boys to explore some of the gender differences.

The final section of the report looks at some of the factors that might encourage participation by these young people.



The authors of this report are the research company Ipsos and Sport New Zealand.

- ***Young Women's Views and Experiences of Sport*** – a summary of a study by Lisette Burrows and Jaleh McCormack from Otago University which explores engagement in sport by 15 to 17-year-old girls.

Many of the findings from these reports are consistent with those from other countries - the UK, Australia, Canada and the US – and show why teenagers, particularly teenage girls, drop out of sport. The views and experiences of teenage girls also flow on to influence women's perspectives of sport and recreation and contribute to lower participation by women than men.

The take-out messages from both the New Zealand and international research point to ways to respond to barriers and create opportunities to increase participation by teenage girls and women.

Sport and Recreation in the Lives of Teenagers – Key Findings

Sport and Recreation in the Lives of 15 to 18-year-old Girls

The findings show that:

- Teenagers (15 to 18-year-old boys and girls and 11 to 14-year-old girls) share many sport and recreation activities and interests in common, although there are some gender differences; for example, netball is mainly a girls' sport and rugby a boys' sport.
- Almost all teenagers take part in some sport and active recreation:
 - over 9 out of 10 teenagers had taken part in at least one sport or recreation activity “this year” (see the Ipsos/Sport NZ report for definition of terms and questions asked).

Older girls versus younger girls

- Older girls are **less engaged** in sport and recreation than younger ones, confirming the drop off in participation shown by earlier New Zealand surveys and international research:
 - while both groups of girls had taken part in many of the same sports/activities, participation rates for older girls (for overall, regular and occasional participation) were lower than those for younger girls for over half the sports/activities reported
 - ~ only one activity was more likely to be done by older than younger girls – gym/fitness/ exercise/ training activities
 - older girls also had taken part in fewer activities
 - ~ the average for all sports/activities (excluding games/play activities) was 12.6 for older girls and 16.0 for younger ones (for sports/activities done regularly, the averages were 4 and 3, respectively).
- The **drop off** in participation by older girls is also clear from other results. These show that older girls were **less likely** than younger ones to:
 - say they *like playing sport a lot*
 - take part in sports/activities organised by schools and clubs
 - belong to school sports teams and sports clubs
 - get coaching
 - spend time taking part in sport and active recreation; older girls were less likely to spend 3 or more hours a week on both organised and informal sport
 - take part in weekend events
 - be volunteers.
- Older girls were **more likely** than younger ones to say that they:
 - did **no** activities *regularly*
 - mostly did **inactive** things after school and at weekends, like watching TV, listening to music and spending time on a computer (although the proportion of both groups saying they mostly did sport and “active” things was similar; 13.6% of older girls and 16.6% of younger ones said this).
- Older girls show **less interest** than younger ones in taking up or doing more sport and recreation activities:
 - around 3 out of 10 older girls said there were **no** sports/activities they wanted to try or do more of, compared with 2 out of 10 younger girls
 - sports/activities that older girls were interested in were: badminton, basketball, dance, football, netball, running/jogging, swimming, tennis, touch and volleyball – netball, volleyball and swimming attracted most interest.

Older girls versus older boys

- **Older girls** tend to be less active than **older boys**, although this is not true for all aspects of participation.
- **Differences** in participation include:
 - girls do fewer activities than boys
 - ~ the average for all sports/activities (excluding games/play activities) was 12.6 for girls and 13.7 for boys, although the number of sports/activities done regularly is the same for both groups – the average is 3 for girls and boys
 - girls spend less time in a week than boys taking part in sport and active recreation
 - ~ older girls were less likely to spend 3 or more hours a week on both organised and informal sport
 - girls are less likely than boys to take part in activities organised by clubs, although both groups are equally likely to say they belong to a sports club (the way the questions were asked may account for these differences)
 - older girls are less likely than boys to say they *like playing sport a lot*.
- **Similarities** in participation include the extent to which both girls and boys:
 - participate regularly
 - participate in activities organised by schools
 - belong to sports clubs and school sports teams
 - get coaching
 - take part in events
 - volunteer
- spend **no time** on organised and informal sport – while girls are less likely than boys to spend 3 or more hours a week on both organised and informal sport, the percentage spending no time is similar
 - ~ 9.7% of older girls spent no time on informal sport, compared with 8.4% of boys; 30.1% of older girls spent no time on organised sport, compared with 24.3% of boys – the differences between these figures are not statistically significant.



- The level of interest in taking up or doing more sport and recreation activities is similar for older girls and boys:
 - a substantial proportion of both groups mentioned one or more sports/activities they would like to try or do more of; around 3 out of 10 of both groups said there were **no** sports/activities they wanted to try or do more of:
 - ~ note - 10.2% of older girls and 14.5% of older boys did not answer this question and so around 6 out of 10 older girls and 5 out of 10 older boys mentioned one or more sports/activities; some young people may have answered “no” because they are satisfied with their current level of participation
 - basketball, football, tennis, touch and volleyball are five activities that both girls and boys are interested in, although girls were more likely to mention tennis and volleyball than boys.

Participation in different settings

- The results also show that:
 - informal participation (“mucking around”) is a key part of the sporting lives of all three groups
 - ~ for older girls and boys and younger girls, overall participation rates were higher in this setting than when they were taking part in sports/activities organised by schools or a club
 - sports/activities organised by schools are important for all three groups
 - ~ overall participation rates were higher in the school setting than with clubs, particularly for older girls
 - all three groups of young people are more likely to do sport/recreation activities occasionally, rather than regularly
 - ~ the exception is younger girls who are more likely to play netball regularly than occasionally.

Participation and interest – older girls

- Comparing sports/activities that **older girls** say they take part in and those that they are interested in shows:
 - **active recreation** plays a key role in older girls’ **participation** - walking for fitness, running/jogging and dance are three activities they do most often, along with netball
 - ~ swimming, football, volleyball, basketball, badminton and cycling/biking make up the rest of the top 10
 - **sports** feature more in the activities they are **interested in** trying/doing more of – netball, swimming, volleyball and badminton are the four activities they are most interested in
 - ~ running/jogging, dance, football, basketball, tennis and touch make up the rest of the top 10.



Factors that would encourage participation

- **Older girls who like playing sport** said that the two things that would encourage them to play sport more often than they do now were:
 - winter and summer seasons that don’t overlap
 - having more sports teams at school.
- **Older girls who don’t like playing sport** said the two things that would encourage them to play sport more often were:
 - being better at sports
 - able to play without joining a club or team.
- Playing friendly games and trying different sports were important for **both groups**.
- The top four factors for **younger girls** who do and don’t like playing sport were similar, although the ranking varies:
 - trying different sports was the number one factor for those who *like playing sport*
 - playing friendly games was number one for those who *don’t like playing sport*.
- Additionally, getting more playing time and less time on the sideline/bench was relatively more important for **younger girls who like playing sport** (ranking 3rd, compared with 6th for older girls who like sport).

For **older boys**, the top four factors are the same as those mentioned by older girls, although the ranking differs:

- having more sports teams at school was the number one factor for those who *like playing sport*
- playing friendly games was number one for those who *don't like playing sport*.
- **Older boys** who say they *don't like playing sport* also say they would play more often if they were better at sports (this ranked second).

The report also provides a wealth of information about the sports and activities that teenagers take part in in different settings and contexts.

Young Women's Views and Experiences of Sport

This study builds a picture of how 71 female students (15 to 17-year-olds) from four New Zealand schools engage in sport. Sixteen staff also were interviewed and school sports programmes and policies reviewed.

The findings give in-depth insights into behaviours and views, and constraints on participation.

Findings

Key findings were:

- Young women see sport as a physical, competitive activity that is fun to do with friends.
- Activities like dance, kapa haka and going to the gym are not seen as sport because the focus isn't on winning.
- For some young women, competitive sport is a "turn-off" and taking part in team selection processes is a "trial".
- Socialising and being with friends is the main reason for participating in sport.



Other reasons include:

- personal ones (health benefits, develop social/team skills)
- more collective ones (interact with family and community)
- excelling and winning are also important for some
- unlike overseas studies, body shape and weight management were not key reasons.
- Sport changes from being fun and inclusive at primary school to being competitive and with less choice about which sports can be played at secondary school.
- Compulsory PE becomes the main way that young women experience sport and many dread PE classes.
- Very few of the young women did not do some form of sport or physical activity:
 - many who thought themselves "non-sporty" were active in community settings and "non-participant" applies to very few, although some young women are not interested in sport.
- Many young women want to play sport but prefer social sport which provides an opportunity to play with friends, have fun and be valued for taking part.

If there are limited opportunities for social sports at school, young women may:

- drop out of sport and take up physical activities with friends
- participate in sport outside of school.
- Continued participation in sport depends on whether families understand and prioritise their daughter's sport.

Constraints on participation

- Constraints include:
 - competitive nature of sport
 - concern about sporting ability
 - co-ed PE classes, with boys undermining girls' confidence
 - friends – if they drop out of sport
 - family, if there are other priorities such as study, religious and cultural activities, paid and household work
 - lack of time
 - cost of fees, uniforms, equipment and transport.
- How young women respond to constraints varies with their individual situation and there is no simple solution.
- The research also shows that schools influence young women's involvement in, and experiences of sport, by the way they:
 - value sport and give it priority
 - organise and resource sport
 - encourage participation by offering girls-only PE classes, social sport and expecting all students to do PE and sport.

Sport and Recreation in the Lives of Teenagers – Take-out Messages

Both New Zealand studies add to our knowledge of how teenagers engage in sport and recreation and the factors that influence their participation. Overseas research adds further insights.

Lessons from New Zealand

Together, the two studies:

- Show that most teenagers take part in some sport or recreation activities, even if this only occasionally
 - non-participant applies to very few teenagers when a broad range of sport and recreation activities is considered.
- Confirm the drop off in participation with age:
 - this is most noticeable for older girls, but the Young People's Survey shows it also occurs for some older boys (especially when charting the time older boys spend doing no sport/recreation in a week), and there are a lot of similarities in the way older girls and boys participate
 - while a focus on girls is important, the need to keep boys engaged in sport should also be part of the agenda.
- Show that a lot of participation is occasional, rather than regular, suggesting that there is scope to increase the frequency of participation, as well as encourage those who don't participate to take part in some sport or recreation activities.
- Highlight the importance of informal participation ('mucking around') in teenagers' lives.

- Show that schools are important providers of sporting opportunities and sports teams:
 - for all three groups; overall, participation rates are higher in the school setting than with clubs, particularly for older girls
 - how schools value, prioritise, resource and deliver sport all affects girls' participation.
- Suggest that older girls' participation may be a result of what is available/what they feel they can do and active recreation is a key part of their participation, however, when asked what they are interested in, sports make up most of the list
 - sports/activities that older girls were interested in were: badminton, basketball, dance, football, netball, running/jogging, swimming, tennis, touch and volleyball – netball, volleyball and swimming attracted most interest
 - a lack of social sports at school is one of the reasons girls say they drop out of sport and take up physical activities.
- Demonstrate that there is no lack of interest in sport and recreation, although the Young People's Survey shows that extent to which teenagers say they *like sport a lot* decreases with age.

Indicate that:

- *confidence* and *competence* are issues for older and younger students, especially those who say they don't like sport
- the responses of younger girls suggest that, even for those who like sport, not getting enough playing time can put them off and this may be one of the reasons that makes older students who don't like sport feel they need to be "better at sports" (younger students who don't like sport also feel they need to be better at sports)
- the way sport is played is also important, with friendly, more social games that are fun preferred, especially by those who say they don't like playing sport
- sport delivered as part of PE is not a positive experience for many girls.

Burrows and McCormack's study also found that other constraints on girls' participation included:

- the influence and support of friends and family
- personal relationships
- the cost of taking part
- time pressures:
 - due to competing priorities of school, work, other leisure activities, part-time employment and caring responsibilities.



Lessons from overseas

The New Zealand findings are consistent with many of those from overseas studies. Research focusing on girls and sport is included in a review of *Women's Sport* by Dr Ralph Richards, Senior Research Consultant, National Sports Information Centre/ Clearinghouse, Australian Sports Commission, available at:

https://secure.ausport.gov.au/clearinghouse/knowledge_base/sport_development/sport_and_government_policy_objectives/womens_sport

Overseas studies provide other key insights, including:

- While many girls are put off competitive sport, this doesn't mean they don't enjoy competition and competing.
 - Overly aggressive and inconsiderate behaviour are the aspects of competition that they don't like and this may be experienced more when playing with boys.
 - Girls like challenge and to display their ability but they also tend to be more considerate of others and focus on team, rather than individual, achievements.
- Most teenage girls (and boys) understand the benefits of taking part in sport and recreation.
- Families and friends are identified as the biggest influence on girls' participation in sport and recreation but schools are seen as having the most opportunity to get girls engaged, as schools tend to be where attitudes to sport and recreation are formed and interests and skills developed.



These studies identify other barriers to participation which can be grouped under four headings:

- Time-based barriers:
 - these include the *time pressures* identified by Burrows and McCormack.
- Access and opportunity barriers, including:
 - sporting opportunities and programmes are not developed around how young adults structure their everyday lives
 - the environment sport is delivered in often does not encourage girls to participate; for example, girls do not like dirty changing rooms and may be put off by communal showers
 - the delivery of sport may not meet girls' needs; for example a lack of girl-only opportunities and uniforms that girls feel uncomfortable in
 - lower priority and resourcing is given to girls' sport, which results in fewer and/or poorer facilities and less equipment being available
 - boys often dominate activity spaces in and out of school
 - girls feel their voices are not heard and they are not involved in decision making and so opportunities may be based on misconceptions of what girls want and value
 - sporting opportunities are not well marketed to girls, there is a lack of role models, and the media focus more on boys' sport and expect female athletes not only to be high performers but also attractive.

Interpersonal barriers, including:

- parents/caregivers may be less supportive of girls' sport
- girls have more rules about where they can play outside the home
- teachers and coaches may focus more on boys' sport than girls', and show favour to both girls and boys who are good at sport.

- Psychological barriers, including:

- girls feel being sporty isn't feminine and think boys are better at sport than girls – this is reinforced by gender stereotypes, which may be deep-rooted and entrenched
- for boys popularity is often linked to being sporty, while girls' popularity is linked to being "girly"
- girls see other school subjects as more important than sport and PE and they may not be aware of career opportunities in sport and recreation
- girls tend to prefer a focus on mastering skills, with an emphasis on learning, effort and improvement, rather than a performance-oriented approach that emphasises comparison, personal superiority and displays of prowess
- girls see more barriers to participation than boys.

All of these barriers may be influenced and exacerbated by factors such as where girls live (for example, girls in rural areas may face more transport barriers), their socio-economic background, and their ethnic or cultural background.



Sport and Recreation in the Lives of Teenagers – Solutions and Responses

Turning girls' interest in sport and recreation into participation (whether this is keeping them engaged or encouraging them to re-engage) requires a comprehensive, rather than a single-issue, approach to the barriers and constraints girls face.

It also requires:

- a focus on the complete girl – her physical, social, cultural and emotional environment
- recognising that not all girls are the same and that their physical, social and emotional development occurs at different rates.

Overseas researchers also argue for *equity*, rather than just equality. Equality often results in programmes and services for one group (eg, boys) being made available to another. Equity requires the consideration of the unique needs, interests and experiences of a target group when delivering services and allocating resources – some services may be the same, but others may be different.

The starting point for all involved in developing and delivering sporting opportunities for girls is to recognise and understand the gender issues and the barriers and constraints girls face.

More specific responses can be grouped under the four headings used to describe barriers: time-based, access and opportunity, interpersonal and psychological. The responses that follow have been written with older girls in mind. However, many of the responses can be applied to creating positive experiences for younger teenage girls and keeping them engaged in sport.

Responses to time-based barriers

These include:

- providing flexible opportunities that are timed to be teenage-friendly – these may be during school hours, straight after school, or in holidays
- providing shorter versions of games that take less time
- showing girls how they can integrate sport into busy lives and supporting them to find the sports/activities that work for them alongside their other commitments.

Responses to access and opportunity barriers

These include:

- first and foremost, listening to girls and what works for them when developing sport and recreation opportunities, and then seeking and acting on regular feedback on what they like and what they'd change
- offering sporting opportunities that focus on social aspects and fun, as well as challenge and competition:
 - opportunities to socialise after games/activities/events may keep girls engaged and help them develop a sporting lifestyle
- offering single-sex and mixed sporting opportunities, so girls have choice; but making sure boys don't dominate mixed games
- developing modified, less competitive versions of sports
- making sure girls feel comfortable when taking part and changing sportswear and uniforms if necessary
- offering "come and try" sessions and "bring a friend" days

- offering a broad range of activities that include sport and active recreation, and not just traditional female sports
- getting a balance between time spent training and playing and making sure all girls get sufficient playing time
- identifying the different markets among girls (eg. based on age, ability, whether they are new or returning participants) and tailoring marketing to the different groups:
 - existing participants and club members can help spread the messages about the opportunities available and the benefits of taking part
 - social media is as good way to maintain regular, two-way contact and create sporting communities
- prioritising sport and recreation in the school curriculum for all students
- building partnerships between schools, community providers, sport and recreation organisations and clubs to maximise opportunities and choice for girls
- considering how to minimise cost and deliver value for money; flexible payment options such as pay-as-you-go may be preferred to single payments of subscriptions or memberships
- exploring ways to overcome transport constraints
- providing well maintained facilities, including support facilities such as changing rooms that cater for girls
- making sure environments are supportive, safe (eg. good lighting) and inclusive
- advocating for funding equity, for recreation activities as well as sports

Responses to interpersonal barriers

These include:

- engaging with parents/caregivers regularly to address their concerns about their daughters' participation in sport and recreation and encouraging them to be as supportive as they can by:
 - demonstrating that there can be a balance between sport and academic and other interests and responsibilities
 - providing inter-generational and family opportunities; for example, opportunities for mothers and daughters to take part in sport and recreation together or different activities at the same time is one way to increase parental involvement and support
- increasing peer support by running sport and recreation events that allow girls to make new friends who participate in sport, as well as keeping existing ones
- working with teachers, coaches and officials to help them understand what works best for girls.

Responses to psychological barriers

These include:

- demonstrating that girls can play sport and are good at it
- enabling individuals to participate at their own level and pursue individual goals and continuous improvement, rather just focussing on winning - girls should not be pressured to play at higher levels than they want to
- building confidence and competence by regularly assessing and offering skill development opportunities to encourage girls to continue taking part in their chosen sport and recreation activities or return to playing:
 - opportunities should cater for different skill levels and girls should not feel they are always playing with those better than them
 - ideally, skill development opportunities should be offered across the life span for girls and women

- at times "life gets in the way" of sport and recreation but there should be multiple opportunities (during tertiary study, in the workplace and community) to re-engage after time off or adapt sporting lifestyles to changing circumstances
- promoting women in a variety of roles – participants, athletes, coaches, officials, leaders:
 - girls (and women) should be supported to help them transition into different roles at different stages in their lives
 - making girls aware of sport-related careers and transferable skills, such as teamwork and leadership, may encourage them to stay engaged in sport and PE
- identifying peer-level role models (not necessarily elite athletes) who can advocate for girls' and women's sport, and:
 - work with the media to increase recognition of girls' and women's teams and achievements, change attitudes to female sport and breakdown gender stereotypes.

Responding to these barriers will create an environment in which girls have positive experiences of PE, sport and recreation that foster a lifelong love of sport and active recreation.

Evaluating the effectiveness of responses and sharing what works and what doesn't is also essential to creating lasting changes and making a difference in the sporting lives of girls.

Sport New Zealand
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