

# Women's participation in sport and physical activity

This factsheet provides a background to women's participation in sport and physical activity and tries to give a snapshot of their current levels of participation. It shows not only how active women are, but also where and in what context they take part in sport and physical activity. It is crucial to consider these participation figures when discussing women's sport and physical activity, and when providing services for women. Although statistics cannot give us a complete picture they do provide a background and a starting point against which to measure progress.

## National participation

In a 2005-2007 survey, around 39% of women aged 16 and over in Scotland had taken part in some sport or physical activity, excluding walking, in the previous four weeks. This compares with 56% of men. When walking (2+ miles) is included, the figures are 65% and 56%, respectively.<sup>1</sup>

## Regional participation

Activity levels vary by region. The least active women are in East Ayrshire, where only 18% of women took part in regular sport and active recreation, closely followed by Glasgow with 19%. The most regularly active women are in Moray, where 38% participated.<sup>2</sup>

## Most popular activities

Whether by choice or availability, women tend to take part in non-competitive activities. The six most popular activities for women are walking, swimming, keep fit and aerobics, cycling, dance, and visiting the gym. In contrast, for men, the most popular activity after walking is a competitive team sport: football (19%). While football is the most popular team sport for girls, only a small proportion of women over 16 (2%) play football.

**Table 1:** Top ten sports participated in monthly by adults aged 16 and over by gender; Scotland; 2005-2007

Sport	% of all female respondents	% of all male respondents
Walking*	33	26
Swimming	18	13
Aerobics/Keep fit	9	3
Cycling	7	14
Dance	6	1
Visiting the gym	4	7
Yoga	< 0.5	3
Hillwalking	3	5
Running/Jogging	3	6
Bowls	4	7

\*Further than 2 miles.

Source: sportscotland Sport Participation in Scotland Survey, (2008).

As suggested by the popular sports data, women are less likely than men to take part in organised competitive sport. Organised team sport is more popular among young women and girls. 36% of young women aged 8-15 take part in team sport, but this drops to 3% among women over 16.

## The impact of different demographic factors on participation

Activity levels among adults reduce only slightly until the age of 45, when the first large drop out occurs. They then continue to drop, and by the age of 85, few women (6%) are involved in any sport or active recreation.

With respect to sports participation, excluding walking, 56% of men take part regularly, compared to 39% of women.<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>1</sup> Data from sportscotland Sport Participation in Scotland Survey, (2008).

<sup>2</sup> An analysis of variations in sport participation in Scotland, Research Report 105, (2006), sportscotland.

<sup>3</sup> Data from sportscotland Sport Participation in Scotland Survey, (2008).



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. Women in managerial and professional roles (for example doctors, lawyers and nurses) are more active – more than a quarter took part in regular activity in the previous four weeks.<sup>4</sup>

Participation levels among the different black and minority ethnic groups also vary. Women of Asian, African or Caribbean origin are the least likely of all ethnic minority groups to take part regularly in 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.<sup>5</sup>

More than three in four women (78%) with a limiting long-term 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-term illness or disability (50%). Men with a disability are more likely to be active than disabled women, reflecting overall participation patterns.

### **Sports club membership**

The rate of sports club membership varies significantly between males and females at both the adult and junior levels. Of club members, 52% are male, 30% female, 10% male juniors and 4.5% female juniors.<sup>6</sup>

### **Volunteering**

Only 3% of women did at least one hour of volunteering in sport in the previous week, which is half the rate of male sport volunteering (6%). Young women aged 16-24 are the most likely to volunteer in sport (6%).<sup>7</sup>

### **Barriers to activity**

Nearly three-quarters (74%) of Scottish mothers are not taking part in physical activity and sport. Research has identified that married women with children are most likely to cite lack of time as a major barrier to participation.<sup>8</sup> For families, a low income has also been proven to have a significant influence on participation.<sup>9</sup> In addition to time and finance, there are other social barriers that prevent women from taking part. 42% of women feel that 'having more confidence in their body' would help them to take part in sport or exercise more often. 26% of women 'hate the way that they look' when they exercise or take part in sport.<sup>10</sup> When providing opportunities for women in sport and physical activity, these barriers should be taken into consideration. Initiatives such as reducing entrance or membership fees, extending opening hours and providing crèche facilities could be introduced to encourage participation.

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The work of the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation is motivated by our vision of a nation of active women, where sport and exercise is an integral part of everyday life.

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4 Active People Survey, (2006), Sport England.

5 Active People Survey, (2006), Sport England.

6 Report on Women in Sport Leadership, **sportscotland**, (2004).

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8 Increasing Demand for Sport and Physical Activity for Adolescent Girls in Scotland, **sportscotland**, (2006).

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