



Sport and Recreation



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Benefits of Sport and Physical Recreation

Physical activity reduces the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and obesity; improves fitness, bone strength and mental health; lowers mortality rates; fosters respect, responsibility, self-esteem and teamwork; and enhances social connections (Victorian Government, 2015; British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity, 2013; Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2010).

Sport also holds the promise of advancing female leadership, achievement and opportunity (Victorian Government, 2015). Lori and Millar (2012) explain that "As self-esteem and self-direction are improved, participants begin to function more equally in community life". Our Watch (2015) adds that in such settings, sports leaders may exert a beneficial influence as community champions for causes such as equality of opportunity and the prevention of family violence.

For sporting clubs, equal participation of women and men raises membership, volunteers, club revenue and community engagement (Knox City Council, 2017); enhances public interest, while attracting government and private financial support (Lori and Millar, 2012); incorporates diverse views into decision-making; strengthens a club's connection with the community; and boosts its reputation as a family-friendly environment (Yarra Ranges Council, undated).

Therefore, aside from extending the benefits of physical activity to girls and women, sporting organisations may further the cause of equal opportunity and respect for women, including among young people.

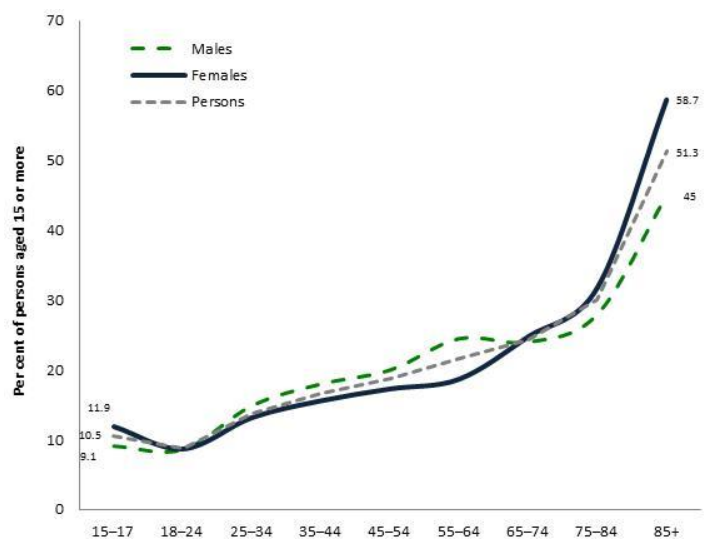
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Though levels of exercise among females and males are similar, the range of sport and physical recreation activities in which they engage differs, with women and girls less often participating in organised team sporting activities than males. These trends are reviewed here, accompanied by a summary of proposed measures to increase female participation in team sports.

Levels of Exercise by Women and Girls

The 2018 National Health Survey found that approximately one in ten 15 to 17 year-old males and females (11.9% of women and 9.1% of men) obtain *no* exercise in a typical week. This figure rises gradually throughout adulthood to nearly one in five people aged 55-64, before surging in older age to over half of people aged 85 years or more (ABS, 2019).

Proportion of persons who obtain no exercise each week, by sex and age: 2018, Australia

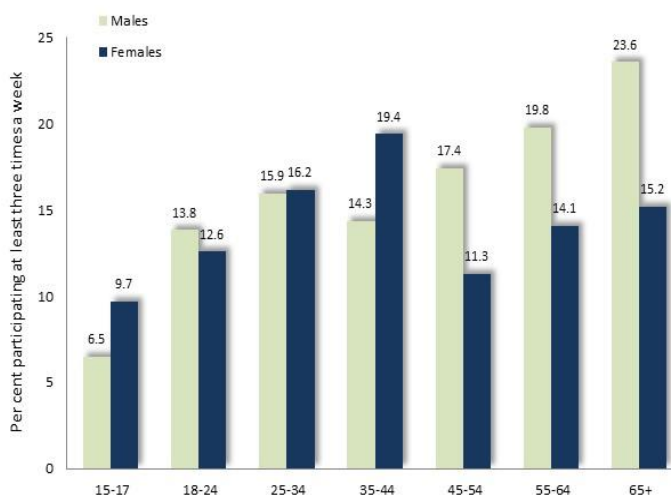


Women and men with limited education, lower income levels, from some cultural backgrounds, with disabilities or of Indigenous heritage, exhibit lower rates of participation in exercise than others (VicHealth, undated A; Victorian Government, 2018).

Levels of Participation in Physical Recreation

A 2018/19 Australian Sports Commission survey found that the proportion of people who *did not* participate in sport or physical recreation at least once per week was greater among males of most ages (Ausplay, 2019).

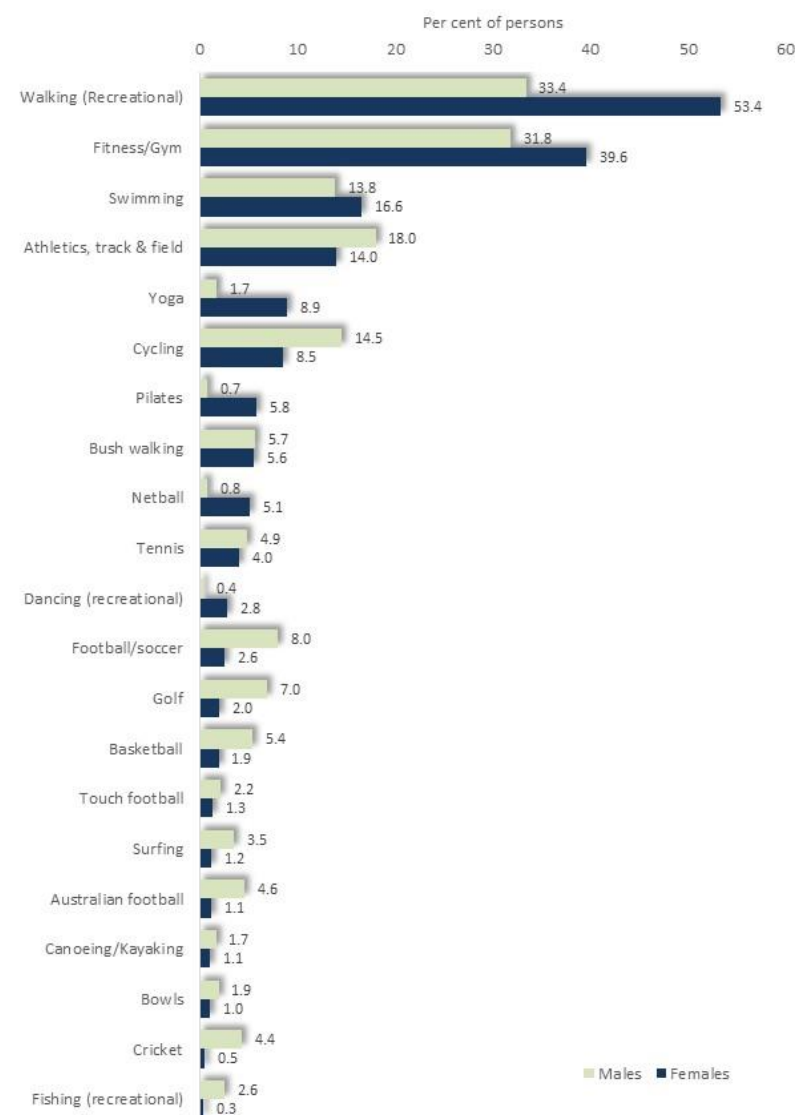
Proportion of persons who do not engage in sport or physical recreation in a typical week, by sex and age: 2018, Victoria



Lesser participation in physical recreation was

associated with limited education: 23% of women with incomplete secondary education *did not* participate in sport or physical recreation at least once per week, compared with 11% of those with a degree – pointing

up one of the many benefits of education to the advancement of women’s opportunities.



Patterns of Physical Recreation

The survey also found that a decisive majority of participants in walking, fitness or gym, yoga, Pilates, netball and dancing were females. By contrast, males accounted for most people engaged in cycling, basketball, golf, football, soccer, surfing, fishing and cricket (Diagram, left).

Per cent of persons who engaged in sporting activity in the previous year by sex: Australia, 2018/19

Levels of Participation in Team Sports

The 2018/19 Australian Sports Commission survey found that 63% of both males and females participated in some, or all, of their sport or other physical recreation through an organisation or venue. However, women were less likely to attend a sports club (17% compared with 31% of males) with many favouring gyms or fitness centres (39% vs. 33% of males) – a finding consistent with the observation that levels of participation by women in organised sport are lower than for men (VicHealth 2017).

The 2018/19 AusPlay survey generated similar findings, with female survey participants representing only a third (36%) of those who played sports at Victorian clubs or associations (AusPlay, 2019).

Deterrents to Participation in Team Sports by Women and Girls

Though surveys show that many women not currently engaged in sport and physical recreation would prefer to be more physically active (Maribyrnong Council, undated; Sport and Recreation Victoria, undatedA; VicHealth 2017), many women and girls may be deterred from participating in team sports or physical recreation by concerns about their fitness and ability, body weight and image; a desire for more less competitive recreation, in favour of social activity; the cost or inconvenience of some sporting activities; and by competing family and caring responsibilities. In addition, attitudes and allocation of resources at sporting clubs often favour sports where males predominate while minimising the importance of sport and physical recreation for females.

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Some women and girls may be concerned that they lack the ability to participate in a sport, do not know the rules, or do not possess the required equipment (VicHealth, 2017). Indeed, research show that women are twice as likely to entertain concerns about their fitness and ability as men (VicHealth, undated A) and are more inclined to doubt their ability, even when they are as proficient as anyone else (Victorian Government, 2015).

It is reported that girls and women also experience considerable emotional pressure and scrutiny as they mature, and may feel vulnerable when wearing sporting attire or swim suits, often receiving unwanted and distasteful sexual attention, or being belittled for their appearance (Lori and Millar, 2012; VicHealth, 2017). Many also hold concerns about being judged unfavourably when engaged in sport or changing in front of others (Lori and Millar, 2012) – ideas reinforced by media emphasis upon the importance of feminine appearance, rather than athleticism (Mills et al, 2017; Groesz et al, 2001; Blond, 2008; Vigo, 2019).

Moreover, women's accomplishment in sport is often depreciated in favour of men's sport (Sennae, 2018). One commentator remarks: "Girls are deemed less talented, less coordinated, less skilled, less motivated and less successful at sports than boys. At best, girls are thought to need special rules and remedial instruction; at worst, they are humiliated, discriminated against, or ignored" (Tucker Centre for Research on Girls and Women in Sport, 2007).

A further consideration is that many women favour social interaction over competition and are deterred by the intense competitive atmosphere of some sports settings. VicHealth research discloses that nearly half of Victorian women aged 25 years or more perceived sporting clubs as intimidating and unwelcoming (VicHealth, undated A).

The cost and commitment of time entailed in some sporting activities also sets limits to participation by some women, while other obstacles reported include family and caring responsibilities, the expectation that women should be concerned with domestic responsibilities, or resistance by families to their engagement in sport and physical recreation (Lori and Millar, 2012; Moreland Council, 2019).

Further barriers to the involvement of women relate to the priorities and practices of some clubs and include limited allocations of grounds and quality facilities to female teams; lack of female change rooms; unclean facilities; absence of preferred sporting options, women-only activities or culturally-relevant sport; and the prioritisation of sport for boys and men over the participation of females (Sport and Recreation Victoria, undated). Relevantly, Knox City Council (2017) remarks that “A club is a family and some clubs make the mistake of making the women’s team a daughter, not a sister, to the men’s senior teams”. Accordingly, one commentary admonishes: “Leaders need to focus on establishing and nurturing a cultural environment that is receptive and willing to change; identifying and acknowledging existing barriers; and making a public commitment to change...” Victorian Government (2015).

PROCESS AND PLANNING

The 2016 Victorian Government ‘Gender Equality Strategy’ was intended to enhance women’s participation in sports and representation in leadership of sporting organizations, through measures which include:

- implementing recommendations of the Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation;
- piloting gender equality and family violence prevention programs in sports clubs;
- working with councils and sporting organizations to promote fair treatment of women and girls in the provision of infrastructure and facilities; and
- creating an advisory committee to address family violence and gender equity through sport.

Features of effective sports programs include mounting a sustained effort; focusing upon prevention rather than only on responses to violence; addressing issues such as condoning violence against women, healthy, respectful relationships and equality between females and males; ensuring the organization supports and promotes bystander action to help extinguish discrimination and harassment; and recruitment of family violence professionals, coaches and former players to motivate and guide program recipients.

Practical steps proposed by a number of commentators to increase the involvement of women and girls in sports and its administration are proposed by commentators and briefly outlined here (Women’s Health in the South East, 2019; Moreland Council, 2019; Knox City Council, 2017; Maribyrnong Council, undated; Victorian Government, 2015; Yarra Ranges Council, undated; Sport and Recreation Victoria, undated):

Organisational Engagement

Liston et al (2017) favours consultation with girls and women, participation by the management committee, review of the general sporting club environment and its infrastructure - such as appropriate female change rooms - and well-informed and supportive club members helping to champion the program.

Among specific steps recommended in the literature:

- Inform the board and membership about the purpose, issues and progress, and obtain their support.
- Strive for equitable representation of women on boards, and in coaching and other club roles.
- Training to raise board awareness of the benefits of gender equity (Maribyrnong Council, undated).

- A position on the executive with responsibility for guiding gender equity initiatives.
- Supporting those willing and able to assist (Knox City Council, 2017; Yarra Ranges Council, undated).

Evidence

Survey or speak with women about gender issues at the club, as a basis for proposals for change, including any experience of barriers or discrimination, what measures were taken and their outcomes.

Assembling statistics on women's participation in sport and management, to monitor club progress.

Planning

Involving staff and members in developing a gender equity plan that is specific, measurable, achievable and time-bound (Yarra Ranges Council, undated).

Conducting training on relevant aspects of the plan.

Reporting regularly on its implementation to the board and membership, seeking feedback about its progress.

Representation of Women

It is reported that women often feel uncomfortable on boards or committees in male-dominated environments, frequently departing if they find themselves among a minority in an unwelcoming and unreceptive environment (Victorian Government, 2015). However, State Government quotas, requiring 40% representation of females on the boards of state-funded sporting associations, coincided with a rise in the number of boards with 40% representation on management committees, from 44% to 93% in the two years to mid-2019 (Koroiz, 2019). Recommendations to improve women's representation include these set out below.

Provide women with key roles at the club, ensuring they are well represented on its executive, nominating and hiring committees (Knox City Council, 2017; Yarra Ranges Council, undated; Lori and Millar, 2012; Canadian Sports for Life, undated; Sennae, 2018).

Encourage women and girls to be involved in all aspects of the club (Moreland Council, undated; Yarra Ranges Council, undated; Lori and Millar, 2012; Canadian Sports for Life, undated), while resisting discrimination in the selection of women and men to official positions.

Engage female mentors who can support female club volunteers.

Ensure that women are not relegated to traditional, subordinate roles – such as preparing food in the canteen (Yarra Ranges Council, undated)

Accommodation of Family Commitments

Schedule meetings to accommodate caring responsibilities of club members (Maribyrnong Council, undated).

Create a breast-feeding space, baby change facilities and a children's play area, if appropriate (Yarra Ranges Council, undated).

Sharing of Sporting Resources

Promote and support participation of girls and women in sports.

Redress any disparity between females and males in participation in sport, allocation of sports fields and facilities and quality of equipment (Lori and Millar, 2012; Yarra Ranges Council, undated; Sport and Recreation Victoria, undated). To this end, one council established a female-only club with cricket, football and snooker. Another instructed clubs to be inclusive of women, people with a disability and those from culturally diverse communities, including the fielding of junior teams and female participation. It offered workshops and face-to-face officer support to help institute these changes, cautioning recalcitrant clubs of the risk of otherwise relinquishing their ground allocation (Moreland Council, undatedA, undatedB).

Provision of sporting opportunities

VicHealth (undatedB) proposes that sports planners should ask women about their preferences when designing programs. Experience shows that many women and girls favour sporting activities which promote a positive perception of their physical ability and appearance; foster enjoyment and pride in sporting activity; and offer companionship with others. Some women also prefer convenience, including shorter playing times, limited training obligations, sessional rather than seasonal commitments, and ease of access to the facility. Key features of sporting activities and environments preferred by many women are summarised here.

Convenience

Activities scheduled at convenient times, easy to get to and which don't require significant travel.

Short playing times.

Matches without training requirements.

These attributes are embodied in some unorganised activities, such as walking and cycling, which may be undertaken with families and without membership fees, and are favoured by many women. Moreland Council offers the example of conducting yoga and Pilates at council-owned facilities, where women are likely to attend, to enhance participation in such activities, permitting sessions to be scheduled at convenient times and for just an hour in length.

Affordability

Reduce financial and time commitments, as for instance, with sessional rather than seasonal payments.

Supply equipment and fee subsidies to disadvantaged women.

Sociability

Provide social, less competitive, or non-traditional physical activities, such as yoga or Pilates.

Create fun, social formats, to foster self-confidence.

Favour smaller groups to encourage social interaction.

Institute effective dispute resolution to promote friendship within teams.

Match team members to people without companions.

Encourage participants to bring friends along.

Safety & Privacy

Provide indoor settings if possible.

Supply appropriate toilet and shower facilities.

Ensure support from the coach, mentors or buddies, to help women adjust.

(Gippsland Women's health, undatedA; Knox City Council, 2017; Maribyrnong City Council, undated; Moreland Council, 2019; Sport and Recreation Victoria, undated; VicHealth, undated B; Victorian Government, 2015; Yarra Ranges Council, undated)

Behaviour which is Respectful to Women and Girls

Approximately nine-tenths of respondents to a 2012 VicHealth survey expected their sports clubs to inform males about respectful conduct towards women, encourage respectful behavior and to provide a welcoming environment to girls and women. Moreover, sport settings reach large groups of people, including children and adult participants, as well as their families, sports club employees and volunteers, providing training and guidance to participants which may include issues connected to health and fairness. This make sporting clubs "..an important education environment for the delivery of direct participation programs aimed at addressing the drivers of violence against women." (Liston et al, 2017: 17).

Key steps recommended in the literature include these, recounted below.

- Officially encourage and model respectful behaviour between women and men.

- Amend procedures and meeting conduct to make meetings more congenial to women.

- Remove sexist displays and discourage such behaviour.

- Create a harassment policy, code of conduct, and social media policy, articulating the club's position and explaining how to address such behaviour.

(Knox City Council, 2017; Sport and Recreation Victoria, undated; Yarra Ranges Council, undated)

As Knox City Council (2017) explains, "Creating environments where everyone feels equal and respected, builds a club culture that is strong, united, inclusive, family friendly, supportive and representative of the local community".

Social Activities

Conduct social events such as jumper presentation and award nights, shopping tours and trivia nights.

Make social activities accessible to diverse women; among them: Indigenous, disabled, gender diverse and people of diverse birthplaces, cultures and spoken languages.

Reduce prominence of liquor and the bar

(Moreland Council, 2019; Yarra Ranges Council, undated).

Facilities: quality, cleanliness, access and safety

Incorporate principles of universal design and gender equity guidelines into the planning and maintenance of sporting facilities.

Establish women's change and shower areas, or facilities suitable for males and females.

Maintain clean facilities, and signage to toilets and exits.

Provide pathways for ease of access, prams and disabled people, as well as seating and shelter.

Ensure safety, including lighting, clear sightlines, removal of potential concealment points and proximity to parking.

Inspect facilities, with the participation of women, during both day and night-time, to gauge their convenience, suitability and safety.

(Canadian Sports for Life, undated; Maribyrnong City Council, undated; Yarra Ranges Council, undated)

Communication

Incorporate gender-neutral language into club rules, by-laws and other official documents.

Address gender issues in planning or training workshops.

Depict a balance of females and males in publications and promotional videos.

Encourage the public to support both male and female teams equally, striving for equal sponsorship and prize money for women's and men's competitions

(Knox City Council, 2017; (Yarra Ranges Council, undated).

Promotion of Sporting Opportunities to Women and Girls

Promote opportunities among girls and women in the wider community, through websites, social media, print, conversations with community groups and schools. Such information may be imparted also to CALD, disabled, Indigenous and other often-marginalised groups of women.

Collaboration with schools is a further proposed step, which offers the means to reach children, "...with the result that principles of gender equity exhibited in junior sport may flow onto other aspects of life".

Obtain high-profile speakers for girls and women's team events.

(Yarra Ranges Council, undated; Moreland Council, 2019)

Club Civic Engagement on Gender-related Issues

Conduct events, or display posters and brochures, to raise awareness about gender equality and family violence, for White Ribbon Day, 16 Days of Activism, International Women's Day, or at any other time of year, where members can help raise the club profile in the community. Support community-strengthening activities, including partnerships with police, CFA, churches and other community organisations

(Knox City Council, 2017).

OTHER ISSUES

Challenges for Clubs

Many sporting facilities are at, or reaching the limit of, their capacity, while demand continues to rise in step with the population. As a result, some clubs need additional training, more volunteers and other assistance to develop club capacity. Depleted of volunteers, some clubs flounder as they struggle to cope with administration, sparing little capacity to promote sport in schools or create, manage and support female teams. As a result, Moreland Council cautions, it may be difficult for women to obtain further access to such facilities without intervention by governments (Moreland Council, 2019).

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