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## Barriers to women's participation in sport and active recreation

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### Abstract

The aim of the paper is to provide the information of barriers to women and girls participation. This paper will be a helpful resource for the government organizations, women's organizations, sport and recreation sector and other stakeholders who are seeking to develop policies and/or programs to increase or improve women's and girls' participation opportunities.

The literature shows that the participation of women and girls in sport and active recreation fluctuates throughout the lifecycle. At different stages of life, many events and factors appear to negatively influence women's and girls' participation. The literature had also shown that there are many different barriers of women's participation, and the barriers to girls' and adolescents' participation. These barriers are identified through a review of literature.

The different barriers to women's and girls' participation in sport and active recreation are as follows:

1) Barriers of girls' participation: Competing priorities, Girls perceive that physical education is not an important subject, Physical education classes do not cater well for girls, Friends who do not participate, Perceptions about being feminine, Lack of parental support, Body Image and sports uniforms, Body Image and sports uniforms, Mixed-gender participation, Lack of motivation, Negative experiences, Cultural issues. 2) Barriers of Women's participation: Competing priorities and lack of time, Lack of appropriate and affordable childcare, Lack of appropriate and affordable childcare, Poor access to or availability of venues and places to participate and a lack of appropriate facilities for women, Poor access to programs, Feeling unsafe, Cultural factors and social norms, Personal perceptions and motivation, Injury and health problems, Cultural factors and social norms.

Researches had shown that there are different type of barriers to participation experienced by women and girls. Research is helpful to find that there is a need of specific programs according to these specific problems to improve participation in sport and active recreation for overcoming these barriers. Despite the plethora of research exploring women's and girls' participation in sports there is a need of making policies, implementation of them and evaluating the effectiveness of policies and programs for increasing participation.

**Keywords:** Barriers, recreation, perceptions.

### 1. Introduction

The aim of the paper is to provide information of barriers to women and girls participation. This paper will be a helpful resource for the government organizations, women's organizations, sport and recreation sector and other stakeholders who are seeking to develop policies and/or programs to increase or improve women's and girls' participation opportunities.

The literature shows that the participation of women and girls in sport and active recreation fluctuates throughout the lifecycle. At different stages of life, many events and factors appear to negatively influence women's and girls' participation. The literature had also shown that there are many different barriers of women's participation, and the barriers to girls' and adolescents' participation. These barriers are identified through a review of literature.

### 2. Procedures

The different barriers to women's and girls' participation in sport and active recreation are as follows:

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### **3. Barriers of girls' participation**

#### **3.1 Competing priorities**

Competing priorities are a barrier for girls in both early and late adolescence. As girls move through adolescence, they place a greater priority on activities other than sport and recreation. Competing priorities include:

- School work – school work is seen as a competing priority, particularly as girl's transition from early to late adolescence.
- Other leisure activities – both early and late adolescent girls note that they reduce their participation in sport and recreation to engage in other activities, such as socializing with friends; older girls report that they have more leisure activities from which to choose.

#### **3.2 Girls perceive that physical education is not an important subject**

Among older adolescents, PE is a lower priority than other school subjects. The timetabling of PE classes is also a barrier, particularly for older students, for whom PE is not a compulsory subject. Teachers also perceive the timetabling of PE subjects as a barrier (Craike *et al.* 2009; Halyk *et al.* 2010) [4, 6].

#### **3.3 Physical education classes do not cater well for girls**

PE classes do not appear to cater well for girls. Girls report that they would be more likely to participate in PE classes and would enjoy them more if activities were more varied (Australian Government 2006; Craike *et al.* 2009; Hay & Macdonald 2010; Slater & Tiggemann 2010; Halyk *et al.* 2010) [9, 5, 10, 4].

#### **3.4 Friends who do not participate**

Girls belonging to a friendship group that is perceived to be “not sporty” are less likely to participate. Conversely, friends are an enabler to girls' participation if their friendship group is “sporty” (Allender *et al.* 2006; Australian Government 2006; Craike *et al.* 2009) [1, 4].

#### **3.5 Perceptions about being feminine**

Many girls do not see participation in sport and recreation as a feminine pursuit and therefore do not participate (Craike *et al.* 2009; Slater & Tiggemann 2010; Lee & Macdonald 2010) [4, 10, 11]. Hay and Macdonald (2010) [5] found that school teachers and boys perceive that girls are less motivated and less able to participate and do well than are boys in senior PE classes.

#### **3.6 Lack of parental Support**

Parents influence girls' participation in sport and recreation negatively by not providing access or transport to opportunities, and by discouraging participation in sport and recreation while encouraging participation in other activities, such as jobs, school work and school subjects other than PE.

#### **3.7 Competitiveness**

Girls' participation in sport and recreation declines because the activities are perceived as less fun and more competitive as the girls become older. Sport becomes more competitive during the transition from primary school to high school and from junior to senior high school.

#### **3.8 Body Image and sports uniforms**

Girls of all ages report that poor body image affects their participation (Slater & Tiggemann 2010) [10]. A related issue, feeling uncomfortable in mandated uniforms, is a barrier for all girls (Allender *et al.* 2006; Australian Government 2006; Slater & Tiggemann 2010) [1, 10].

#### **3.9 Lack of facilities**

A lack of community facilities is a barrier to participation. (Halyk *et al.* 2010; Lee 2010; Lee & Macdonald 2010) [4, 11].

#### **3.10 Mixed-gender participation**

For some girls, having to participate with boys in PE classes and outside school sport is a barrier because boys are perceived as being too competitive and not supportive of their participation. Girls from different communities perceive this as a barrier to participation (Craike *et al.* 2009; Knez 2010) [4, 7].

#### **3.11 Lack of confidence**

Lack of confidence to engage with sport and active recreation activities is a barrier to participation in girls of all ages (Slater & Tiggemann 2010; Australian Government 2006) [10].

#### **3.12 Poor team relationships**

Poor team relationships, including conflict, bullying and being left out, influence participation (Slater & Tiggemann 2010) [10].

#### **3.13 Negative experiences**

Girls who experience negative experiences in PE classes or in outside-school sport or recreation are less likely to participate (Allender *et al.* 2006; Hay & Macdonald 2010) [1, 5].

#### **3.14 Lack of motivation**

Some studies have found that some girls do not want to participate in sport or recreation due to lack of motivation from the parents, teachers and peer group (Halyk *et al.* 2010; Knez 2010) [6, 7].

#### **3.15 Cultural issues**

Some girls do not participate for cultural or religious reasons (Knez 2010) [7].

### **4. Barriers of Women's participation**

#### **4.1 Competing priorities and lack of time**

Competing priorities and a lack of time is a barrier for young women and mid age women. Women perceive that they are time poor. Women tend to take on the burden of domestic responsibilities, including housework and caring roles (Australian Government 2006; Caperchoine, Mummery & Joyner 2009; Kowal & Fortier 2007) [3, 8].

#### **4.2 Lack of appropriate and affordable childcare**

There is a consistent lack of access to appropriate, regular and affordable childcare to enable women to participate in community sport and recreation (Australian Government 2006, Caperchoine *et al.* 2009) [3].

#### **4.3 Costs of Participation**

The cost of participation, including associated costs such as childcare and transport, is a barrier to participation for young women, older women, disabled women (Australian Government 2006; Caperchoine *et al.* 2009; Sawrikar & Muir 2010) [3, 9].

#### **4.4 Poor access to or availability of venues and places to participate and a lack of appropriate facilities for women**

Poor access to venues, including venues with appropriate facilities, is a barrier to participation for young women, disabled women and rural women. Poor access can be compounded by a lack of transport and a lack of information on available facilities. A lack of physical access to premises and a lack of venues and facilities with suitable equipment are

barriers for disabled women (Australian Government 2006; Caperchoine *et al.* 2009; Cortis *et al.* 2008; Sawrikar & Muir 2010)<sup>[3, 9]</sup>.

#### 4.5 Poor access to programs

Poor access to programs is a barrier to participation for rural women because of smaller populations and a lack of available people to run programs. It is also a barrier for disabled women because of a lack of culturally appropriate programs and trained staff to run and manage programs (Australian Government 2006; Caperchoine *et al.* 2009)<sup>[3]</sup>.

#### 4.6 Feeling unsafe

Feeling unsafe while participating because of factors such as traffic, lack of lighting and suspicious individuals, was identified as a barrier to participation for: young women and disabled women. (Australian Government 2006; Caperchoine *et al.* 2009)<sup>[3]</sup>.

#### 4.7 Climate

The weather was identified as a barrier for women's participation; participation is affected by hot, humid and wet in summers and cold and dark winters (Caperchoine *et al.* 2009)<sup>[3]</sup>.

#### 4.8 Lack of leisure companions

Not having anyone to participate with is a barrier for women, particularly rural women (Australian Government 2006, Sawrikar & Muir 2010)<sup>[9]</sup>.

#### 4.9 Cultural factors and social norms

Cultural factors can also exacerbate the experience of other barriers, such as competing priorities, lack of facilities, lack of access to programs, and lack of leisure companions (Australian Government 2006; Sawrikar & Muir 2010; Cortis *et al.* 2008)<sup>[9]</sup>.

A lack of cultural awareness in the delivery of sport and active recreation programs also limits participation for women (Caperchoine *et al.* 2009)<sup>[3]</sup>.

Social norms have been identified as a barrier to the participation of women from rural areas (Australian Government 2006).

#### 4.10 Personal perceptions and motivation

Personal perceptions have been identified as barriers to women's participation including: low self-esteem and poor body image (Australian Government; Caperchoine *et al.* 2009)<sup>[3]</sup>; lack of confidence (Sawrikar & Muir 2010, Cortis *et al.* 2008)<sup>[9]</sup>; a perception of being too old (Australian Government 2006); a perception of not being the sporty type (Australian Government 2006); negative early life experiences (Australian Government 2006); and lack of motivation (Kowal & Fortier 2007)<sup>[8]</sup>.

#### 4.11 Injury and health problems

Injuries, health problems and the fear of injury or re-injury are barriers to women's participation, particularly among older women (Brown *et al.* 2009)<sup>[2]</sup>.

### 5. Conclusion

Researches had shown that there are different type of barriers to participation experienced by women and girls. Research is helpful to find that there is a need of specific programs according to these specific problems to improve their participation in sport and active recreation for overcoming

these barriers. Despite the plethora of research exploring women's and girls' participation in sports there is a need of making policies, implementation of them and evaluating the effectiveness of policies and programs for increasing their participation.

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