

Calls 4 Action: Women and girls and sport – what do we know?

Why are we focusing on women and girls?

Despite the progress made in recent years, research continues to show that there is a gender gap in sports participation levels from teenage years onwards – a situation that has seen little change in the last two decades. We now see a balanced picture of provision and participation for girls and boys of primary school age, but a persistent gap from around the ages of 12 or 13 through to adulthood.

We know that women and girls are generally less likely to:

- Be hooked on sport and take part three or more times a week;
- Be a member of a sports club;
- Volunteer in sport;
- Enjoy sport, and feel they have the appropriate skills and confidence to take part;
- Be represented at board level in sports governing bodies.

Sports participation and regular physical activity has a positive impact on health and well-being, but evidence shows that while the current sporting offer works very well for some, it is simply not appealing to a large proportion of women and girls. The reasons for these gender differences have been widely explored across the UK and internationally¹. With a better understanding of how people's attitudes to sport and participation patterns differ, we can start to address imbalances and make a difference. Sport Wales wants to see positive action taken to address these inequalities.

The current picture of participation

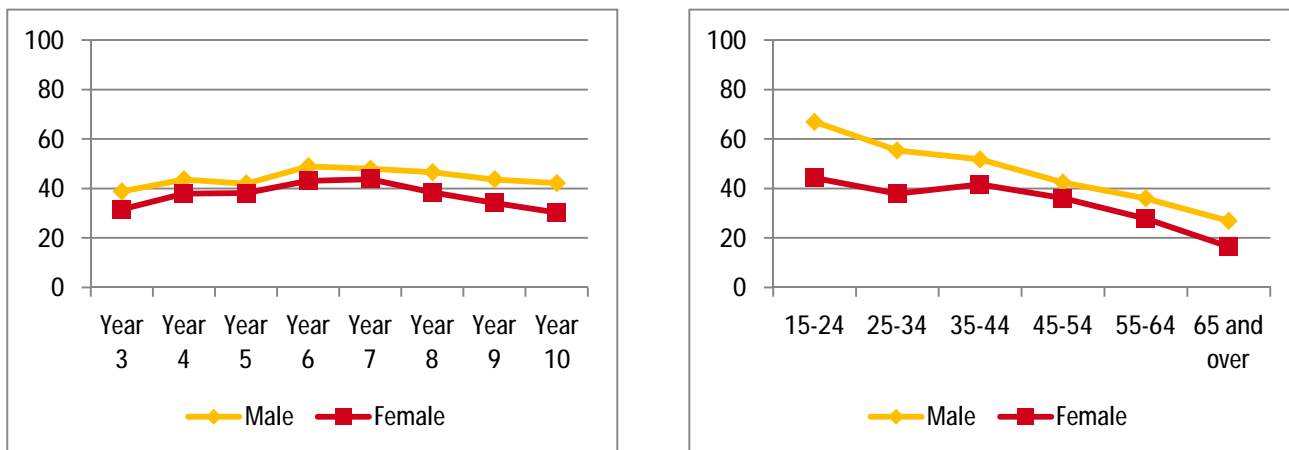
Since 2011, the School Sport Survey has captured frequency of participation, allowing us to explore the number of occasions per week pupils take part in organised sport and recreation outside of the curriculum. In Wales, 40% of pupils across Years 3 to 11 take part in organised activity on three or more occasions per week in extracurricular or club based sport. The Vision for Sport in Wales refers to this as being *'hooked on sport'*. For adults, we classify someone as being hooked on sport if they take part on average three or more occasions a week in sport or physical recreation.

Figure 1 below shows the pattern of participation by age and gender highlighted in the School Sports Survey 2013 and the Active Adults Survey 2012.

¹ Examples include:

- a) Brightpurpose (2012): Sports Participation Amongst 14-21 year olds: How do we encourage young people to stay involved in sport?
- b) Sport Wales (2012): Attitudes to School Sport <http://www.sportwales.org.uk/research-policy/tools-and-resources/publications.aspx>
- c) Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation: Changing the Game for Girls
- d) <http://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/home/support-us/do-you-know-the-factors-influencing-girls-participation-in-sports>
- e) http://sirc.ca/sportcanada/54/additional_articles.cfm

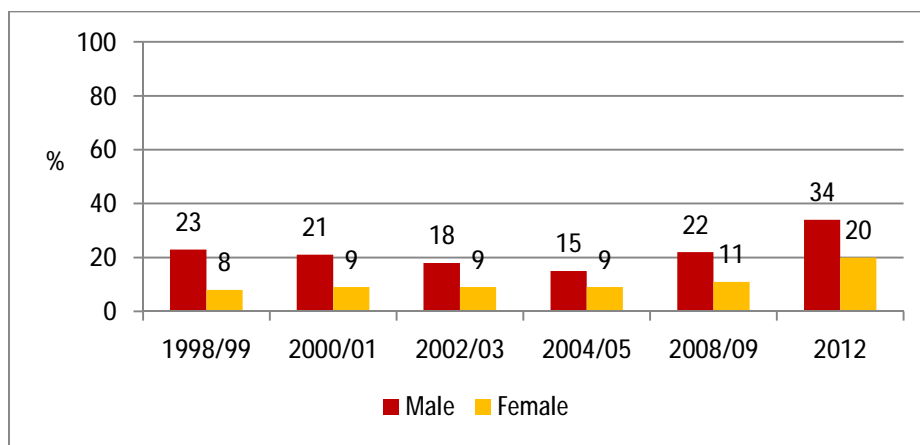
Figure 1: Hooked on sport, age and gender



At every age group, females are less likely to take part in sport frequently than males, but the biggest gender gaps are seen among older teenagers and young women up to the age of 44.

The gap in frequent participation levels is also apparent when it comes to taking part in more formal, organised sport. Figure 2 shows levels of sports club membership and the trend since 1998/99.

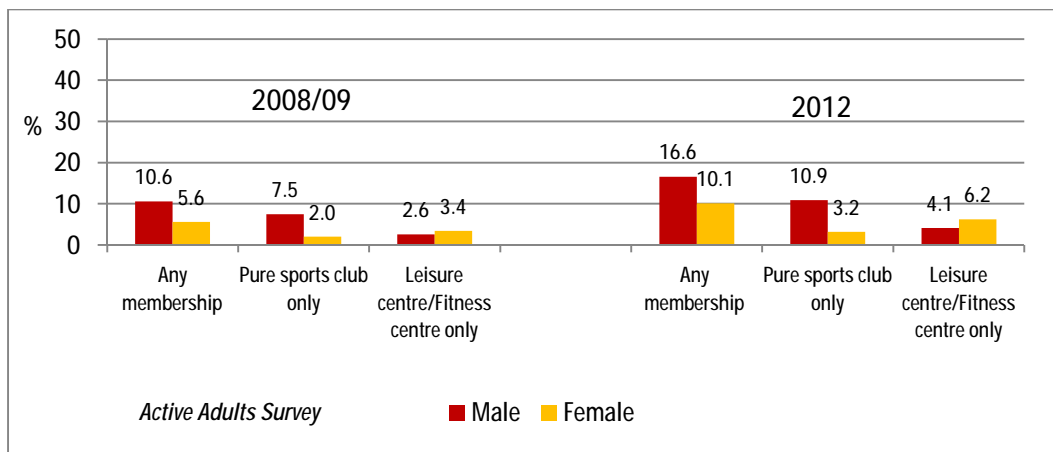
Figure 2: Adults aged 15 and over - Sports Club membership



For a long time, club membership levels have been fairly static, but in 2012 27% of adults were members of a sports club. This is an increase over the 2008/09 survey when 16% were members. Whilst the gender gap has widened from 11 to 14 percentage points, encouragingly, the rate of the increase has been more pronounced among females in Wales. Male sports club membership has increased by 56% and female membership by 81% since the last survey suggesting that efforts made to address the imbalance may be starting to have an effect, but that there is a lot more to be done.

Figure 3 below shows male and female preferences when it comes to the type of club that people want to join.

Figure 3: Percentage of adults taking part in sport clubs and type of club



Whereas males are more likely to be members of ‘pure’ sports clubs – community clubs that are organised for the purpose of doing one more sports – females are more likely than males to be joining leisure and fitness centres. This is backed up by School Sport Survey findings – equal proportions of male and female pupils make use of leisure centres for sport and exercise, with 30% of pupils using them at least once a week. For secondary school age girls, a slightly higher proportion use leisure centres than boys. We know that females may prefer alternative types of provision to that which is on offer in a traditional sports club setting. These preferences are something that sports organisers can address to expand their membership base and retain customers. It also means that females may be more vulnerable to any cuts to leisure centre provision in comparison with males. Listening to customer experiences and learning from the type of provision that appeals to women and girls is vital if we want to make changes to the long term gap in participation levels.

What do we know about women and girls and their attitudes to sport?

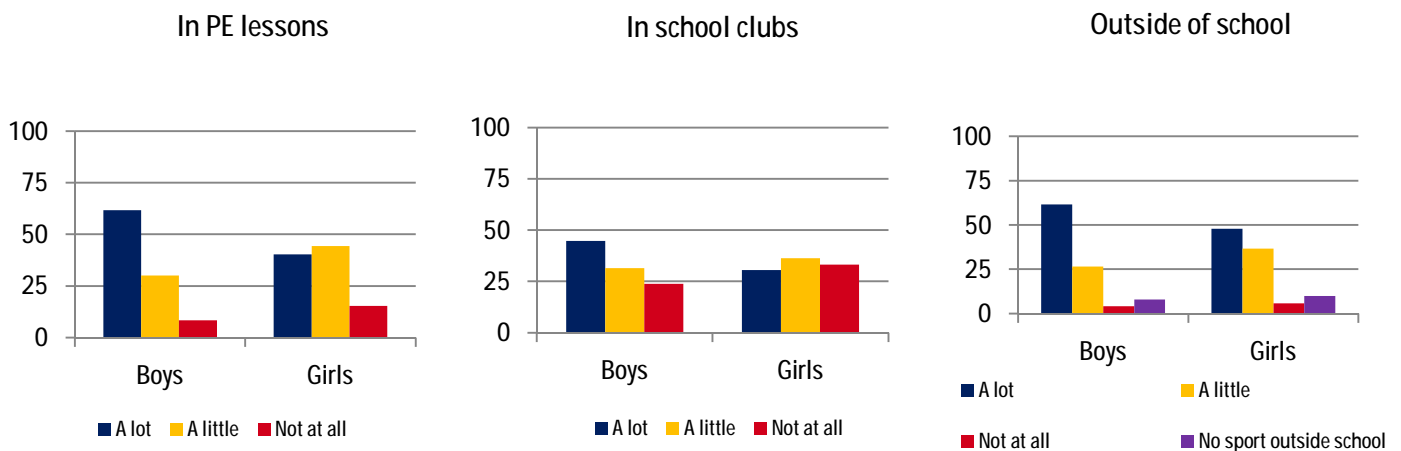
Given this current picture of participation, we need to take account of the many barriers and factors that motivate pupils to take part in sport. Some have a greater bearing according to someone’s ethnicity, gender, income level, disability, age or religion and the ways these characteristics interlink.

Evidence from the School Sport Survey shows that among pupils in Wales, higher levels of enjoyment, ability and confidence are associated with more frequent participation in sport and physical activity. These are not surprising associations, but it is concerning that girls in particular are telling us they have the exact opposite attitudes to sport – they don’t enjoy it, they don’t feel they are good at it, they lack confidence and they don’t feel comfortable taking part.

Generally, pupils enjoy their PE lessons, and there is little difference according to gender, especially at primary school age. However, pupils are less likely to enjoy extracurricular sport (sport in school clubs) when they reach secondary school, particularly female pupils. It is also noteworthy that evidence shows that Asian/Asian British girls in this category are the least likely of all pupils in Wales to be participating and enjoying sport². Figure 4 shows enjoyment of sport in various settings according to gender.

² Calls for Action: BME paper

Figure 4: Secondary School Pupils - Enjoyment of sport



As well as level of enjoyment, we also see lower levels of confidence and perceived ability to take part. The School Sport Survey showed that a quarter of secondary school age girls said they would do more sport *'if I was better at sport'* and 45% said they were either *'not very confident'* or *'not at all confident'* to try new activities without worrying. This is a concerning picture of the experience that a large proportion of female pupils are having of sport in their school years, and it has a knock on effect on participation levels outside of the school environment.

The Active Adults Survey 2012 shows that almost half of adults who were regular participants in sport when they were at school are 'hooked on sport' as adults, compared with a third who weren't regular participants. A similar pattern is shown if adults enjoyed sport at school – 45% are hooked on sport compared with around a third of those who only enjoyed it a little or under a third who didn't enjoy it at all. Enjoyment of school sport and participation outside of lesson time are both significantly associated with frequency of participation in adulthood. They are also significantly associated with reported general health, physical health, mental well-being, and feeling that the things you do are worthwhile. All of these positive associations highlight the potential benefits to the population of Wales in the long term, if we get the sporting offer right for all young people.

What are we doing to address these issues?

Research tells us that the young people who choose to do sport in their leisure time are motivated by fun, wanting to keep fit, spending time with their friends and because they enjoy the competition. For some, the current sports offer provides all of these things. We need to increase the emphasis we place on listening to and understanding the needs of different pupils, particularly those groups who currently do little sport and physical recreation. This is likely to have a positive impact on participation levels in schools and in the longer term, and should routinely be part of the teaching, coaching, planning and delivery of sport.

Sport Wales is seeking to generate positive action to address the issues of inequality within sport. We believe that everyone in Wales should enjoy the positive benefits that regular, weekly participation in sport brings, regardless of background and circumstances.

Calls 4 Action Funding

Via the *Calls 4 Action* programme, Sport Wales is now seeking applications to fund innovative, high impact projects that will make a real difference in breaking down the barriers that prevent these underrepresented groups from regularly participating in sport, creating a lasting legacy opportunity from Glasgow 2014 for everybody in Wales. Sport Wales wants bold, new approaches, and wants to provide assistance to individuals and organisations that bring fresh ideas and ways of getting more people involved in sport. Half of the funding from the Calls 4 Action programme has been ring-fenced to address the issues facing women and girls and their current lower levels of participation in sport.

Inequality in participation between differing groups is not inevitable and can and must be tackled. This year the whole of Wales has the opportunity to get behind our Commonwealth Team and be part of a team three million strong. *Calls 4 Action* will look to ensure that everyone one of us also has the opportunity to take part in sport on a grassroots level.

For further information, please go to the Calls 4 Action webpages:

<http://www.sportwales.org.uk/funding--support/our-grants/calls-for-action.aspx>