

# Understanding participation and non-participation in sport amongst Black and minority ethnic groups in Wales

## Background:

The sport sector in Wales has articulated and established an ambitious vision.

We, as a sector are committed to...

*'uniting a proud sporting nation in which every child is hooked on sport for life'.*

The significance of these words should not be overlooked:

- ★ **'Uniting'** means bringing people together. Harnessing the power of sport to integrate and encourage social cohesion and in doing so creating a larger sense of community (common-unity).
- ★ **'Proud'** means that people are instilled with a sense of confidence, vitality and self-worth; the natural result of strong physical literacy skills developed from an early age.
- ★ And **'every'** means that *all* children, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, disability or socioeconomic background, will have the opportunity, the ability and the desire to participate in sport at least three times each week.

As the national authority on sport in Wales and the official provider of applied research, Sport Wales has an integral role to play in making sure that this vision becomes a reality. To move towards our sector vision we must of course first understand where we currently stand. The 'School Sport Survey' has provided us with indispensable intelligence in this respect with the 2013 results revealing impressive increases in overall sports participation. In spite of this encouraging upturn however, the evidence of stubborn and enduring inequalities has remained. Ethnicity is no exception.

While the pattern of participation by ethnicity is varied, the overall picture is sharp and clear; those children and young people from Minority Ethnic Groups in Wales are significantly less likely to be hooked on sport than the White Welsh population.

To gain a greater insight into the underlying reasons for these disparities and a richer understanding of the lives and experiences behind the figures, Sport Wales commissioned the 'Institute of Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure' (in conjunction with Ecorys) to undertake a Wales-wide qualitative research project.

## Method:

The project was designed to include people from a wide range of ethnic groups (Polish, Chinese, Indian, African-Caribbean, plus an open category for other minority ethnic groups) living in a variety of geographical locations across Wales (Cardiff, Wrexham, Newport, Swansea and Rhyl/Prestatyn). The fieldwork involved both one-to-one interviews with adults (16+) and focus groups with children and young people. In addition, a case study was conducted in Newport which involved telephone interviews with individuals (from the local authority, NGBs, clubs and equality organisation) possessing knowledge of local sport policy and provision. This was done to provide a supply-side context to the information given by respondents located in this area.

## The nature of participation

Most of those involved in the research were introduced to sport through school or family members when they were children. Respondents across the sample were aware of the health benefits of sport though this knowledge did not necessarily translate into participation. This was evident in the case of adult females who were the least active of all respondents in the survey – a finding consistent with data from the Active Adult Survey 2012.

While the research wasn't designed to provide statistically robust evidence of participation rates there was some indication that gender, socioeconomic status, life stage and ethnicity had a bearing on the types of sports respondents took part in (or wanted to take part in).

- In the case of young women, for example, there was often a preference for gym activity in which focus was less on traditional sport and more on body image/health.
- In terms of ethnicity, participants in the research often had a proclivity towards sports which were popular in the country their family originally came from or to which they had a strong cultural affiliation. For example, the popularity of martial arts amongst Filipino respondents; a sport which was seen to instil the qualities of discipline and respect that are valued in Filipino culture.
- Although participation tended to involve friendship groups, those that took part as a family often cited cycling and walking as good family activities. These sports were favoured because they are free to do and require little or no preparation. The investment in cycle paths was recognised and these appeared to be well used.

Although both providers and participants recognised the potential power of sport for encouraging integration and cohesion, there was a strong tendency for ad hoc and informal participation with those sharing the same ethnicity or religion. Examples of this included Black, South Asian, Gypsy/Traveller and Filipino communities participating in ethnicity-specific football, cricket and basketball teams and leagues. These forms of participation provided participants with a sense of community and the cultural solidarity, which they believed could not be recreated in the formal structures which currently exist. They also provided spaces that were free from the risk of racism. While a lack of mixed participation may be seen as a negative, the confidence and sporting capital nurtured in these environments may make the next step of integration easier.

It should be noted that not all respondents participated in ethnicity-specific environments. For many of the younger respondents integration was less of a barrier as a result of attending ethnically diverse schools, whilst those living in Rhyl/Prestatyn had little choice but to participate in mixed environments given the size of ethnic minority communities in these areas.

## Constraints:

The research identified a wide-range of constraints which reduce the likelihood of people from BME communities taking part in sport. These broad factors are not unique to BME communities, nor will they be new to those working in sports development, yet their prevalence and intensity should not be underestimated. Given the disproportionate representation of BME communities in areas of high deprivation, issues of **time, energy, transport, crime/safety, quality of facilities** were not uncommon. These inhibitors do not however exist in isolation and are exacerbated by sociocultural

factors, such as language barriers, racism, social alienation, gendered expectations, and a lack of sporting knowledge. The severity of these constraints largely depended upon the age, gender, ethnicity, geographical location, immigration status and length of time that the individual had been living in Wales:

- ★ **Lacking English/Welsh language Skills** – Lacking basic English/Welsh is a major barrier to integration and the findings suggest that this constraint discourages many from taking part in sport. This was a particular issue for members of the Chinese community as well as asylum seekers and older (particularly female) migrants. While many young people were bilingual due to their daily use of English in the school environment, older migrants tended not to have the same level of English exposure due to the nature of their work (for example, housewives, or those working with people sharing their ethnic identity and therefore relying on their first language). Lack of language skills also presents a barrier to those wishing to complete funding applications.
- ★ **Social alienation** – For asylum seekers as well as older migrants who lack language skills this was particularly an issue. Without contacts and friendly support people are less likely to be aware of sporting opportunities or have company to go with them. For those with children they are also less likely to have family or friends who can provide childcare.
- ★ **Racism** – Many viewed racism as an unremarkable and inevitable aspect of everyday life in Wales with accounts ranging from hatred to misunderstanding. The findings suggest that racism was more common in rural areas such as ‘the valleys’ and may be most frequently experienced by white minorities (such as Polish and Gypsy Travellers). While many experienced racism playing sport, for others sport provided a space to escape the discrimination experienced in their everyday life.
- ★ **Inappropriate provision:** A lack of ethnic minority coaches is particularly an issue for those lacking English skills, while for South Asian (predominantly Muslim) women and those women conscious of their bodies a lack of single-sex facilities/sessions is a major barrier.
- ★ **Cultural Expectations:**
  - a) **Gender roles:** The research highlighted evidence of some females receiving less support or being actively deterred from participating in sport by their family and wider community. This was observed throughout, but was more prevalent among South Asian and Black African families. In addition, some ethnic minority communities viewed childcare and housework as ‘women’s work’. Accounts suggest that the strength of these cultural expectations may depend on the individual’s proximity/attachment to the wider community or diaspora. The male domination of sports organisations was seen to reinforce these cultural norms and make sports environments intimidating for some women.
  - b) **Sport vs. Academic priorities:** For many adults that took part in the research there was an acknowledgment that their parents (first and older second generation migrants) had not seen the value of sport, and that education, viewed as a passport

to a better life, had been their main priority. This however was not thought to be a significant feature of younger generations who were now much more aware of sport's many benefits. In spite of this attitudinal shift, education was still seen as a competing and more important priority for many parents with their child's participation hinging on good grades, or being curtailed for exam preparation. Whilst these views will undoubtedly be replicated in many White Welsh families, ethnic minority children may feel added pressure because in some cases their parents have not received a formal education.

We know from previous analysis of our 2013 School Sport Survey data that Ability, Confidence and Enjoyment (ACE) are critical ingredients in ensuring sustained participation in sport. It is worth noting that many of the above constraints (for example, racism, lack of social connections, lack of language skills, lack of sporting capital, gendered expectations) seriously undermine these all-important components.

## 1. RAISING AWARENESS

*'I'm aware of what's on offer'*

Improved communications:

- ★ Sport Wales to provide basic literature in different languages.
- ★ Sports clubs and centres make links with BME community contacts for both translating and disseminating information. Capitalise on existing BME networks and leaders to access people who are least likely to be part of existing sports networks. (e.g. new migrants and older people).
- ★ Provide targeted information about relevant activities and their timing/location.

## 2. INCREASING CONFIDENCE & DESIRE:

*'I want to take part in sport'*

Promotion (making sport appealing) - harnessing the 'movers and shakers':

- ★ Sports stars and coaches visiting schools and other community venues.
- ★ Locate and support the 'movers and shakers' capable of encouraging greater participation.
- ★ Promote the value of sport (both health and career benefits) to parents and community leaders.
- ★ Showing the participation of people from BME communities in official material, celebrating their achievement and sharing success stories.
- ★ Encouraging sports bodies to recruit people from BME communities to their boards and committees.

# Recommendations

## 4. IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE

*'I enjoyed it. I want to go again'*

Appropriate offer - shaping a better service:

- ★ Sporting networks to advance their understanding of BME communities via:  
Equality awareness training alongside an appreciation of important aspects of BME communities and a recognition of other human needs that need to be met to allow participation in sport.
- ★ Sharing ideas and good practice and creating new forums and channels to facilitate this knowledge exchange.
- ★ Put into practice this knowledge and insight to create sports experiences in which participants feel welcomed, included, valued, respected and supported.
- ★ Providing opportunities for participating in alternative forms of sport.
- ★ Initiatives to engage women and girls including:
  - a) Zumba and dance related activities as informal fun.
  - b) More women only sessions
- ★ The improvement of existing facilities.

## 3. MAXIMISING OPPORTUNITY & RESOURCES:

*'It's convenient for me to participate in sport'*

Making sport the easy option:

- ★ Making free/low cost activities accessible to BME communities.
- ★ Providing more accessible spaces and equipment to facilitate informal/ad hoc participation.
- ★ Liasing closer with schools and LAs to create new spaces of play.
- ★ Assisting with bureaucracy such as grant applications.
- ★ Providing training for volunteers prepared to get involved in administration, coaching, officiating, ground preparation and maintenance. This might extend to providing guidance on how to replicate models for sustainable clubs.
- ★ See also: 'Promotion'