Barriers to women and girls’ participation in sport and physical activity

Participation rates among women and girls are much lower than among men. This gender gap is caused by many barriers, which can be categorised as ‘practical’, ‘personal’ and ‘social and cultural’. These play a significant role in women’s and girls’ attitudes and behaviour. Below is a list of the main barriers, with recommendations of how sports deliveries can help to overcome them.

Practical barriers

Lack of time and lack of childcare. Women’s leisure tends to be reactive to the needs of their families. They often have less leisure time than men, as they take on the greater burden of responsibility for housework and care for children and elderly relatives.

Recommendations: provide childcare facilities or classes for toddlers and children, so that adults can bring their children when they go to exercise.

Lack of money. Women tend to earn less than men. Scottish women working full-time earn on average £529 less per month than men, and the disparity is greater for women working part-time. Low income families may not be able to afford to invest in club membership or pay for sporting clothing and equipment, and mothers from low income families are unlikely to be able to afford childcare to give them the time to take part in sport.

Recommendations: subsidise for sports or physical activity can present particular barriers for these groups. Recommendations: make a safety assessment of the venue, taking into account the security of the area, street lighting, transport links, etc. Ask participants about their experiences and views of personal safety in these areas. Offer self-defence lessons and personal alarms.

Ensure activities are offered in locations or facilities that are safe and appropriate for women and girls. Also væreactivity in groups can make physical activity safer for women and girls.

Funding. At most levels, women’s sport attracts less funding than men’s. During 2006/07, 41% of female sports players received sponsorship from local businesses because they do not have large supporter bases. The result of this funding gap is poorer facilities, equipment and kit.

For more information, please contact our communications team on 0131 317 7200 for more information.

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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.

Note: For more information on the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation, please visit www.wswff.org.uk

Registered charity number 1093267

The women of sport

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Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation staff

Read more about which local women you could promote as role models – they could be coaches, volunteers or athletes at any level. Work with them to help inspire and motivate other girls and women. Research has suggested that people respond best to role models they can relate to.

Work towards an equal balance of males and females as coaches, organisers, participants, workshop leaders, etc. Around 40% is the suggested minimum for either gender.

Female invisibility – media representations

Technical aspects of physical touch in coaching the sport.

Softball

Women tend to earn less than men. Scottish women working full-time earn an average £529 less per month than men, and the disparity is greater for women working part-time. Low income families may not be able to afford to invest in club membership or pay for sporting clothing and equipment, and mothers from low income families are unlikely to be able to afford childcare to give them the time to take part in sport.

Recommendations: provide childcare facilities or classes for toddlers and children, so that adults can bring their children when they go to exercise.

Lack of money. Women tend to earn less than men.
Western fashion promotes increasingly revealing clothes and perceptions of their bodies. Girls and women who are obese or have disabilities may be particularly vulnerable to these trends, as they are often increasingly body-obsessed, these women are frequently required to change their bodies. Generally, girls and women may have to put up with certain body goals proscribed by the fashion industry and if it is suitable for women with disabilities.

Recommendations: review personal barriers and cultural barriers

Personal barriers

Body image. Research shows that in general, female adolescents report greater body image dissatisfaction than boys. This is a result of women and girls being portrayed as being thin, especially on television and in print. Girls and women who are overweight or have disabilities may be particularly affected by these trends. With the obsession with the ideal body, many girls and women have to make do with less than perfect bodies. Access to sporting facilities is particularly limited for women and girls with disabilities. For example, one third of disabled young people feel excluded from local sports opportunities. Access can be limited by physical barriers such as inaccessible entrances, reception areas, changing rooms and sports facilities, or lack of accessible transport and parking. Barriers can also be created when information is presented in formats that are not easily read or understood by individuals.

Recommendations: review the allocation of facilities and parking. Barriers can also be created when information is presented in formats that are not easily read or understood by individuals. Ensure all staff are trained in working with people with disabilities.

Social and cultural barriers

The male-dominated culture of sport. The culture of sport is highly stereotypical, and has traditionally been defined, organized, promoted and contested as a male activity. Women are often excluded from sport altogether because they see it as a male-dominated territory that is not suitable for being sporty, let alone to be competitive with men.

Recommendations: challenge sex stereotypes and assumptions about gender and sport. Provide equal opportunities to take part in sport and to participate in sport at all levels. There are several reasons:

• physically inaccessible facilities, venues and equipment
• lack of role models in your facility, club or organisation
• lack of support/sponsorship
• lack of role models to inspire, motivate and encourage
• lack of role models for girls and women with disabilities

Recommendations:

- Use a variety of images in publicity, not just those which show the idealised female figure.
- Provide single-sex activities, staffed by women and make sure that they don't run within normal session times. There is no point in running a women-only session in a hall full of men when football is the main event.
- Clothing and equipment. Clothing and equipment are important issues. It is essential that women and girls, given that, on average, they weigh less than men, images of sportspeople can promote the idea that, unless you are dressed in fashionable clothing designed for a particular sport, you'd look out of place. Some sports clothing is also quite revealing, which creates problems for women and girls, linked to the issue about body image and culture mentioned earlier. Strict requirements about clothing can also prevent some BME women from participating. For example, swimming pools which don't allow women to wear T-shirts over their swimming costumes, and cabbie which insist members wear tight-fitting and/or revealing uniforms, can exclude those women who do not feel comfortable wearing such clothing; self-conscious of their bodies.

Equipment can be inappropriate for women and girls. For example, women's development in golf has at times been stymied by equipment that was inappropriate for their bodies. The less likely they are to take part in sport, the less likely they are to be included in sport and socialisation. This can lead to a positive cycle of getting into sport as a result of their positive perceptions of their bodies.

Western fashion promotes increasingly revealing clothes for men and women, whereas in cultures where the body cultur e prohibits exposure of the female body and promotes modesty. As a result, the ideal dress codes in swimming pools and leisure facilities might clash with cultural norms and customs.

Coach training and career pathways. Coach training and career pathways need to be inclusive of women and girls. Women and girls are more open to ideas about ‘health’ and ‘wellbeing’ than men. Positive role models can help people who feel isolated about body image: girls who don’t feel good about their bodies can lack confidence in their physical abilities and may be over- or under-confident in their abilities.

Recommendations: challenge self-confidence and assumptions about ability. Provide single-sex activities, staffed by women and make sure that they don’t run within normal session times. There is no point in running a women-only session in a hall full of men when football is the main event.

Sport culture. Sports culture promotes the idea that, unless you are dressed in fashionable clothing designed for a particular sport, you’d look out of place. Some sports clothing is also quite revealing, which creates problems for women and girls, linked to the issue about body image and culture mentioned earlier. Strict requirements about clothing can also prevent some BME women from participating. For example, swimming pools which don’t allow women to wear T-shirts over their swimming costumes, and cabbie which insist members wear tight-fitting and/or revealing uniforms, can exclude those women who do not feel comfortable wearing such clothing; self-conscious of their bodies.

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Coaches, instructors and leisure centre staff should be aware of the idea that, unless you are dressed in fashionable clothing designed for a particular sport, you’d look out of place. Some sports clothing is also quite revealing, which creates problems for women and girls, linked to the issue about body image and culture mentioned earlier. Strict requirements about clothing can also prevent some BME women from participating. For example, swimming pools which don’t allow women to wear T-shirts over their swimming costumes, and cabbie which insist members wear tight-fitting and/or revealing uniforms, can exclude those women who do not feel comfortable wearing such clothing; self-conscious of their bodies.

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Promote modesty. As a result, the dress code in sports is tailored for women and girls, whereas social norms in some cultures dictate that women and girls have to make do with less convenient ones.

Access to sporting facilities is particularly limited for women and girls with disabilities. For example, one third of disabled young people feel excluded from local sports opportunities. Access can be limited to physical barriers such as inaccessible entrances, reception areas, changing rooms, and sports facilities, or lack of accessible transport and parking. Barriers can also be created when information is presented in formats that are too visually impaired and/or hearing impaired people.

Organise Parent and Daughter sessions to help create a flow of information from parents to coaches and teachers, and within and between different impairment groups and across sex.

Social and cultural barriers

The male-dominated culture of sport. The culture of sport is based on an increasingly body-obsessed culture, where the image of the athlete is often an ‘idealised’ female figure. Images show the idealised female figure.

Recommendations:
• having positive role models of BME women and girls taking part in a range of sports can make a difference to individuals and groups of BME women and girls.

There are several reasons: some women when confronted with certain sorts of behaviour by coaches, and vulnerability, low self-esteem and high aspiration among athletes.

Recommendations: adopt rigorous screening procedures and establish codes of ethics and conduct for coaches and teachers. Be aware of religious and cultural festivals such as Eid and festivals of other faiths. Be aware of the tendency to depict sportswomen as overly feminine. Be aware of the need for active participation in enjoyable, fulfilling activities. Be aware of the need for active participation in enjoyable, fulfilling activities. Be aware of the need for active participation in enjoyable, fulfilling activities.

There are several consequences: some women refrain from taking part in sport and physical activity. For girls and women the barriers are often more severe than they are for boys. Often girls and women are turned off sport because they feel their needs are not being met.

Recommendations: challenge sexist assumptions and challenge sexist assumptions and challenge sexist assumptions.

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Barriers to women and girls’ participation in sport and physical activity

Women and girls who are obese or have disabilities may be particularly affected by problems around body image. With obesity, there is an increasingly body-obsessed culture, these women are frequently judged negatively. Generally, girls who are obese have to put up with certain pokes by the sport of teasing or rejection. Research shows that women and girls who are obese are turned off sport because they do not feel good about their bodies, the less likely they are to take part in sport, and some traditional team sports are less popular. Girls and women who are obese or have disabilities may be particularly affected by problems around body image. With obesity, there is an increasingly body-obsessed culture, these women are frequently judged negatively. Generally, girls who are obese have to put up with certain pokes by the sport of teasing or rejection. Research shows that women and girls who are obese are turned off sport because they do not feel good about their bodies, the less likely they are to take part in sport, and some traditional team sports are less popular.

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Female invisibility – media representations of sport. Demand the highest standards of accountability at all levels and in all roles – community participation, officers, athletics, coaching, leadership – women, especially those from marginalised groups, have been under-represented in the sports sector. Working in a sector where they are in the minority can be challenging, but it also offers opportunities for growth.

In media, invisibility covers almost entirely on men’s sports. On average, only 5% of sports coverage in national and local print media is dedicated to women’s sport. This is significant because the media plays a central role in informing our knowledge, opinion and attitudes about women and sport, which, in turn, influence participation levels. Women’s sports are often portrayed as less exciting and ‘feminine’, which can deter potential female participants.

Recommendations: use press releases and good relations with your local journalists to promote girls’ and women’s achievements at all levels and in all roles – community participation, officers, athletics, coaching, leadership.”

Practical barriers: lack of time and lack of childcare. Women’s leisure tends to be reactive to the needs of their families. They often have less leisure time than men, as they take on the greater burden of responsibility for housework and childcare for children and elderly relatives.

Recommendations: provide childcare facilities or classes for toddlers and children, so that adults can bring their children when they go to exercise. Lack of money. Women tend to earn less than men. Scottish women working full-time earn on average £229 less per month than men, and the disparity is greater for women working part-time. Low income families may not be able to afford to invest in club membership or pay for sporting clothing and equipment, and mothers from low income families are unlikely to be able to afford childcare to give them the time to take part in sport.

Recommendations: subsidise for women’s activities to make them more affordable. It subsidies cannot be sustained, consider offering them at the start of a new project or activity, and then gradually increase fees. Lack of transport. This is a particular problem for women with young children, elderly women, women with jobs, women and girls with disabilities, and women and girls living in rural areas.

Recommendations: explore partnerships with transport providers. Provide information about public transport. Develop a system so participants can organise share-a-ride systems.

Promote physical activity which doesn’t require transport, such as walking and running. Walking and running groups can be accessed through organisations such as ‘jogscotland’ and running groups such as ‘Running Sisters’.

These organisations can support women to take part in easily accessible physical activity in a friendly, supportive group.

Personal safety. Personal safety on the streets, on public transport, and in and around sports and community venues is a particular problem for women. Some groups are particularly vulnerable. For example, black and minority ethnic (BME) girls and women can become the focus of racist behaviour. People with disabilities are often the targets of bullying and abuse. Travelling to and from venues for sports or physical activity can present particular barriers for these groups.

Recommendations: make sure provision is safe. Carry out safety assessments at venues, taking into account the security of the area, street lighting, transport links, etc. Ask participants about their experiences and views of personal safety in those areas. Offer self-defence lessons and personal alarms.

Ensure activities are offered in locations or facilities that are safe and appropriate for women and girls. Also ensure in groups in can make physical activity safer for women and girls.

Funding. At most levels, women’s sport attracts less funding than men’s. During 2005/06, 41% of female athletes were funded through various programmes. At community sport level, girls’ teams tend to attract less sponsorship from local businesses because they do not have large supporter bases. The result of this funding gap is poorer facilities, equipment and kit.

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Get involved in coach education programmes, which inform and advise about the ethical and interpersonal aspects of physical touch in coaching the sport. Be constantly vigilant and avoid complacency. Expect and demand the highest standards of accountability at all levels and in all roles – community participation, volunteers, toplevel coaches, hosts, leaders, etc.

Work towards an equal balance of males and females as coaches, volunteers, workshop leaders, etc. Around 40% is the suggested minimum for either gender.

The work of the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation is motivated by our belief in the value of active women, both in sport and exercise as an integral part of everyday life. scotland documents are available in a range of formats and languages. Please contact our communications team on 0313 171 7200 for more information.

Get involved in sport. The objectives and benefits are manifold. The cost of non-participation, in terms of personal, social, economic and health outcomes, is considerable. Engaging in sport helps to improve the physical and mental health and well-being of individuals, communities and society at large. It contributes to the country’s social, cultural, economic and sporting capital. These benefits are realised at all levels of participation from participation through to excellence. It is important that everyone has the opportunity to participate in sport, in terms of both access and performance. The work of the Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation is motivated by our belief in the value of active women, both in sport and exercise as an integral part of everyday life.

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Lack of transport
Lack of transport is a particular problem for women. Some groups are particularly vulnerable. For example, black and minority ethnic (BME) girls and women can become the focus of racist behaviour. People with disabilities are often the targets of bullying and abuse. Travelling to and from venues for sports or physical activity can present particular barriers for these groups.

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Recommendation: subsidies for women’s activities can make them more affordable. Subsidies cannot be sustained, consider offering them at the start of a new project or activity, and then gradually introduce fees.

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Lack of transport
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Relevance: obesity partnerships with transport providers. Provide information about public transport.

Develop a system so that participants can organise their own transport systems.

Promote physical activity with which does not require transport, such as walking and running. Walking and running groups can be organised through organisations such as ‘Inforunners’ and running groups such as ‘Running Sisters’. These organisations can support women to take part in easily accessible physical activity in a friendly, supportive group.

Personal safety
Personal safety on the streets, on public transport, and in and around sports and community venues is a particular problem for women. Some groups are particularly vulnerable. For example, black and minority ethnic (BME) girls and women can become the focus of racist behaviour. People with disabilities are often the targets of bullying and abuse. Travelling to and from venues for sports or physical activity can present particular barriers for these groups.

Recommenda