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DEVELOPING SPORT FOR GIRLS AND ADOLESCENTS

Rochelle Eime, Meghan Casey and Jack Harvey

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide an understanding of the motivations for sport participation among young and adolescent girls, as well as an understanding of the barriers to participation that young and adolescent girls face. Motivations to participate in sport do not work in isolation from barriers to participation – the two domains are often linked in a complex web of influences and preferences. The chapter also provides enlightening examples of sport programming that support inclusion of and engagement with girls and adolescents in sport. We present and discuss sport participation trends among girls and adolescents and investigate the key drivers for participation in sport across the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organisational/environmental domains of the socioecological model (McLeroy, et al., 1988).

Internationally, the definition of sport is not uniform or universal, and for this chapter we have focused on organised and generally competitive, community-level, club-based activities; we do not include other recreational leisure-time physical activities, such as non-competitive running, swimming or going to the gym. By this definition, the majority of sport opportunities for girls and adolescents involve traditional competitive sport models. However, it is important to note that there are also many entry-level modified sport programmes offered to girls, which focus on the development of sport skills in a fun and inclusive environment, rather than a focus on competition and winning (Eime, et al., 2018b).

Participation trends

A sport participation rate is the proportion of a population – or a sub-population defined by characteristics like age or gender – who participate in sport at a particular time, for example in a particular season or year. Sport participation rates differ

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according to many factors, including gender, age and residential location of participants; they also vary in terms of the types of sport programmes and other sport and non-sport activities that are available. Women and girls are consistently reported to participate in sport at lower rates than men and boys across the lifespan (Eime, et al., 2016a; Eime, et al., 2018c; Somerset & Hoare, 2018). Girls are also less likely than boys to start participating in sport at a very early age (Eime, et al., 2016b), with a higher proportion of boys than girls participating among children aged 4–7 (Eime, et al., 2016a).

Recent research suggests that there are optimum ages of entry into sport that facilitate continued sport participation. In a four-year study of 13,760 girls, the optimal age of entry into junior modified sport programmes for continued participation and transition into club competition was found to be 7–9 years (Eime, et al., 2018b). Another study, which included boys and girls participating in modified sport programmes, reported that the majority of children withdrew from participation in the sport during the four-year period, rather than transitioning from the modified sport programme to club competition (Eime, et al., 2015a). Across the ages 4–12, 24.5% of girls and 13.6% of boys transitioned to club sport competition within the four-year period. Furthermore, two-thirds of children (67.4%) withdrew from participation in their sport after the first year/season of the study (Eime, et al., 2015a).

Beyond childhood, many changes occur in participation in sport throughout the lifespan, beginning with a sharp decline during adolescence (Crane & Temple, 2015; Eime, et al., 2016a). While participation in sport is popular amongst young girls, particularly those aged 5–14, after this age, girls often drop out of competitive sport and choose to be physically active in non-competitive forms of leisure-time physical activity, such as going for a run or to the gym, or they become inactive (Eime, et al., 2016c). Girls' participation rates in sport peak at ages 10–14 and then drop by half in the ages of 15–19 years and drop by half again during the ages of 20–24 years (Eime, et al., 2016b). Internationally, girls and boys are more likely to play team sports, whereas adolescents are more likely to participate in non-sport activities such as walking, running and athletics (Hulteen, et al., 2017).

Several factors contribute to this drop-off in sport participation. The competitive nature of sport is not attractive to many adolescent girls and some indicate a preference for more social options (Rowe, et al., 2018). Furthermore, some feel that they do not have the necessary sport skills to gain a position in a team (Casey, et al., 2009; Eime, et al., 2015b). The increasing importance of other life priorities may also decrease the capacity or inclination of some to fit in with the organised structures and time commitments imposed by many sports (Eime, et al., 2010). Girls report that increasing levels of school education pressure, socialising with peers, part time work, as well as body image concerns, make engaging in sport more difficult (Rowe, et al., 2018). Some recommendations for retaining adolescent girls in sport include the provision of social sport options, having female-only sessions, keeping friendship groups together, devising strategies to develop sport specific skills, and identifying and promoting women role models (Rowe, et al., 2018).

There are also regional differences in participation in sport, with higher rates of participation observed in regional and rural areas compared to metropolitan areas,

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particularly in traditional sports (Eime, et al., 2017). It has been suggested that this increased participation in regional areas relates to the significant social role that community sport plays in non-metropolitan regions (Eime, et al., 2017); the choice of traditional sports is argued to be related to the limited offerings in regional areas, which sees traditional sports dominate, as opposed to the vast array of leisure activities available within metropolitan areas (Eime, et al., 2017).

Socioecological determinants of sport participation for young and adolescent girls

Following the model used in previous studies (for example, Casey, et al., 2009 and Vella, et al., 2014), in this chapter, we categorise the determinants of sport participation – the motivations and barriers – into the domains of the socioecological model (McLeroy, et al., 1988), specifically the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and organisational/environmental domains. While these are discussed separately here, it is acknowledged that the determinants are interrelated across each domain. For example, for young girls and adolescents, a key determinant of participation is enjoyment (intrapersonal), which is often motivated by playing with friends (interpersonal), and a barrier to enjoyment might be some aspect of club culture (organisational/environmental).

Intrapersonal

~~At the core, a primary internal motivation for children and adolescents to participate in sport is fun and enjoyment (Eime & Harvey, 2018a; Rowe, et al., 2018).~~ At the core, a primary internal motivation for children and adolescents to participate in sport is fun and enjoyment (Eime & Harvey, 2018; Rowe, et al., 2018); when girls are not having fun playing sport, they often drop out. Girls' enjoyment in sport can often be enhanced by  male-only participation (Rowe, et al., 2018) or by the specific type or structure of the activity (Eime & Harvey, 2018a). The main other intrapersonal motivator for girls and adolescents to be physically active is overall health and fitness (Rowe, et al., 2018; Rowe, et al., 2015).

A common barrier to participation in sport is a perceived and/or actual lack of skills or competency (Eime, et al., 2015b; O'Neal, et al., 2015). Women and girls often have fewer opportunities to acquire fundamental movement skills and sport specific skills early in life (O'Neal, et al., 2015). Not being good at sport can also relate to a fear of being judged (Somerset & Hoare, 2018). A recent study reported that the peak entry age into modified sports programmes, with the highest rates of transition into club competition, was 7–9 years (Eime, et al., 2018b). A person starting to play sport at age ten or older may be limited in their competency, compared with those who have played for several years (Eime, et al., 2015a). Feeling self-conscious while playing sport may be related to playing with boys, a lack of competency or to girls' body image and the uniform requirements (O'Neal, et al., 2015).

While not gender-specific, the cost of participation and continued participation across childhood can be a barrier to participation (O'Neal, et al., 2015; Somerset &

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Hoare, 2018), especially for those in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas (Basterfield, et al., 2015; Eime, et al., 2018b). More specifically, it has been recognised that the transition from modified sport to club competition is associated with increased participation costs, such as club memberships, uniforms and other associated costs, such as travel to home-and-away games (Eime, et al., 2015a). It may be that modified sports programmes provide a value-for-money sporting opportunity, but then club competition becomes too costly for families with low socio-economic status (Eime, et al., 2015a). A lack of time is also commonly reported as a barrier to participation in sport (O'Neal, et al., 2015; Somerset & Hoare, 2018), and for adolescent girls this can relate to other competing activities and changes in priorities for their use of leisure time (Crane & Temple, 2015; Eime, et al., 2015b).

Interpersonal

An important contributing factor to fun and enjoyment for girls playing sport is support from their friends, peers and family (Eime, et al., 2015b; Hayoz, et al., 2017). Girls generally enjoy playing sport with their friends, often in female-only activities and social settings (Eime & Harvey, 2018a; Howie, et al., 2018). Girls often take up playing sport because they have been encouraged by family, and this is often because parents or older siblings have played the particular sport (Rowe, et al., 2018). Parental support can include financial support, transport and role modelling, as well as emotional support (Howie, et al., 2018; Somerset & Hoare, 2018). However, in general, support from family and peers for participation in sport significantly decreases during late adolescence for girls (Eime, et al., 2015b).

In contrast to levels of peer support, however, girls in their adolescent years are often becoming increasingly concerned about being judged negatively by their peers (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010; Somerset & Hoare, 2018), or are teased by boys for their ongoing participation in sport (Eime, et al., 2010). Girls want to comply with the norms of their peer group, including the image of what is seen as cool to participate in, and they do not want to be embarrassed amongst their peers (Rowe, et al., 2018). This also relates to gender stereotypes, and there is evidence that girls and women participating in stereotypical 'feminine' sports, such as netball and gymnastics, are often given higher status, as rated by their peers, compared to those participating in stereotypical 'masculine' sports, such as football (Howie, et al., 2018). Often, boys and girls do not enjoy playing sport together; the boys can dominate the play or game and fail to engage with the girls (Somerset & Hoare, 2018). Competitive rivalry and poor culture can lead to teasing and a lack of enjoyment for girls (Rowe, et al., 2018).

Organisational and environmental

The onset of adolescence, a period marked by many personal and social changes, is time of transition, one of the most significant of which is the transition from primary to secondary school. At this point, a clear distinction in trends in participation and barriers to participation in sport for adolescents is noted (Basterfield, et al., 2015;


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Eime, et al., 2016c). Adolescent girls are likely to drop out of competitive sport and replace it with non-competitive forms of physical activity (Eime, et al., 2016c). Much research attention has been aimed at raising the low levels of participation in sport and physical activity in this group, mostly focused on the school environment (Mooney & Casey, 2014; Okely, et al., 2017). However, most of the school interventions have not been successful, sometimes due to failures in implementation of the intervention (Okely, et al., 2017), and participation in school physical education also decreases sharply in late adolescence for girls (Eime, et al., 2016c).

An important aspect of the organisational/environmental domain is the issue of female-friendly environments; this relates not only to the design and availability of suitable change rooms, and associated access and safety issues in local sports clubs (O'Neal, et al., 2015), but also to the general support and provision of opportunities for girls' participation (Rowe, et al., 2018). A three-year longitudinal study of adolescent girls showed that health-promoting sports club characteristics, such as smoke-free and injury prevention strategies, along with a welcoming environment, were important positive influences on participation in club sport (Casey, et al., 2017).

Regarding the broader issue of gender inequalities evident within sport and sports clubs, there has been extensive research highlighting the social construction of sport, the power differences between men's and women's sport, and the lower value society places on the participation of girls and women in sport (Alsarve, 2018; Spaaij, et al., 2015). Sports clubs are socially constructed and there is deep history of power relations associated with gender and politics of identity within sports clubs. Furthermore, there is often a male-dominated culture in sport that is a barrier to girls' and women's involvement (Rowe, et al., 2018) and many sports have traditionally been male dominated (Eime & Harvey, 2018a). Despite considerable development in sport participation opportunities for women and girls, there is still strong gender stereotyping in sport, which is culturally shaped and embedded, and to which girls often feel the need to conform (Somerset & Hoare, 2018; Crane & Temple, 2015).

Despite increased opportunities for women and girls to play sport, they are still much under-represented in all levels of leadership positions, including executive officer and board positions, as well as among coaches and officials (Burton, 2015). The challenge is how to change systems and culture to normalise women in leadership positions. The gender imbalance is also apparent in the limited representation of women's sport and of women role models in the media (O'Neal, et al., 2015; Rowe, et al., 2018). Other gender equity issues include  gender teams and individual participants not receiving equal access to playing spaces, training venues and other resources, such as coaching and equipment, and 'unfriendly' scheduling of matches and training sessions late in the evening or very early in the morning (O'Neal, et al., 2015).

The construction of sports club in Australia and other countries is that they are governed and run by volunteers. With recent policy and investment strategies aimed at increasing opportunities for women and girls throughout a wider range of sports, there may be issues related to volunteer capacity at clubs to cater for an influx of participants (Eime & Harvey, 2018a).

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Approaches to increase sport participation for adolescent girls

The challenges facing the engagement and retention of adolescent girls in sport are increasingly recognised by various levels of government around the world (Parliament of Canada, 2017; Sport and Recreation Victoria, 2015; Sport England, 2006) and various health and sports organisations (Brunette, et al., 2016; VicHealth, 2015). As such, deliberate policies, investment, programmes and strategies have been created in an attempt to improve levels of sport participation by women and girls. For example, in 2015 Sport England launched a nationwide campaign in the United Kingdom (UK) This Girl Can to encourage more women to be active. Likewise, the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) invested in Changing the Game (2015) in Victoria, Australia, which provided funding to sports to develop and implement modified recreation sport programmes for women and girls. VicHealth has also invested in the Active Women and Girls for Health and Wellbeing programme (2017), which included funding for sporting organisations to create opportunities for women and girls in sport and physical activity and funding to promote gender equality and increase the profile of women's sport.

Many campaigns, including those identified above, have tended to target women and girls in general and not specific age groups or gender identities. Further, the various campaigns and programmes to encourage more women and girls to participate in sport have not been fully or independently evaluated to determine their effectiveness. For instance, the media campaign This Girl Can has been linked to an increase of 250,000 women participating in sport by Sport England (Sport England, 2016), but the evidence base for this claim is not strong, due to the lack of detailed and published evaluation reports. Media campaigns – including those which use social media platforms – are often used as a strategy to encourage people to be physically active (Craig, et al., 2015; Zhang, et al., 2015). These types of campaigns have been shown to increase awareness of the messaging and the brand, and sometimes self-efficacy, but they are often not associated with significant increases in levels of activity (Craig, et al., 2015; Zhang, et al., 2015).


There is an absence of high-quality evidence on the outcomes of policies, programmes and interventions that are designed and delivered by sporting organisations to increase sport participation (Allison, et al., 2017; Priest, et al., 2008). Research on the effectiveness of programmes and interventions targeting adolescent girls has tended to focus on physical activity and as such has examined physical activity outcomes rather than sport participation (Pearson, et al., 2015; van Sluijs, et al., 2007). In addition, many interventions have used sport settings such as school sport and physical education to try and improve adolescent girls' physical activity levels (Casey, et al. 2014; Lonsdale, et al., 2013; Lubans, et al., 2012). These interventions have reported outcomes associated with physical activity and/or health. For example, interventions have resulted in increases in the proportion of time students spend in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (Lonsdale, et al., 2013), changes in body composition (Lubans, et al., 2012), and maintenance of the level of health-related quality of life, against a background of a general decline during adolescence (Casey, 2014). Others have found

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limited success in school-based programmes, predominantly due to lack of implementation by intervention schools (Okely, et al., 2017). There is also research that has used sport as a vehicle for social change to promote health, academic success or develop life skills (Bruening, et al., 2009; Hemphill & Richards, 2016). Again, these studies tend not to specifically target sport participation and retention or measure sport-related outcomes.

Physical activity research has found that multicomponent interventions and interventions based on theory have strong intervention effects on behaviour for adolescent girls (Pearson, et al., 2015; van Sluijs, et al., 2007). For instance, Pearson, et al. (2015) concluded that multicomponent interventions that contain a ‘combination of support components (i.e. family, friends, etc.), individual components (i.e. specifically tailored programmes for individuals/groups), choice components (different options to facilitate behaviour change), and educational and environmental components targeting during- and after-school behaviours’ (p. 13) were almost twice as effective when compared with programmes designed to focus on singular components. The results suggested that different agencies – e.g. schools, community organisations – might need to work together rather than rely on one setting, such as the school or family.

Effectiveness of programmes and interventions addressing adolescent girls’ sport participation 

Only a small number of studies, programmes and interventions have specifically addressed adolescent girls’ sport participation and examined their effectiveness and programme features. For instance, in a systematic review that examined evidence for the effectiveness of team sport interventions for adolescent girls, only four studies were found. These studies were found in the ‘grey literature’, which refers to studies that have not gone through a formal, peer review process, a process that verifies the reliability of the research outcomes (Allison, et al., 2017). Although the review was limited to studies in the UK, it supports the view that there is a lack of evidence-based research on sport participation programmes (Allison, et al., 2017). The review reported on participation outcomes and identified several areas for consideration in terms of facilitating girls’ participation in sport (Allison, et al., 2017). The authors identified the importance of consulting with girls about all aspects of their sport participation: programme design and format; the importance of encouraging girls to try new sports and sustain participation; the need for reliable, healthy role models in the media; and the role of the coach, who is a key factor in the enjoyment, motivation and attendance in sports programmes by adolescent girls. Reported participation outcomes were mostly positive, although limited to assessing programme reach and perceptions of physical education teachers about changes in girls’ physical activity (Allison, et al., 2017).

An Australian intervention study conducted in an organised youth sports setting – a school holiday basketball programme – aimed to increase adolescent girls’ moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) levels via education sessions for coaches (Guagliano, et al., 2015). The authors found that brief coach education sessions (2 x 2hr sessions) that focused on strategies to increase MVPA and decrease inactivity during practice can increase MVPA without effects on players’ motivation to participate

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(Guagliano, et al., 2015). The organised youth sport setting provides an opportunity to encourage youth to accumulate MVPA and meet physical activity guidelines. However, Guagliano and colleagues' study (2015) targeted girls already involved in organised youth sport and not those who do not participate or have dropped out. Furthermore, the outcome measures were not specifically sport related.

More recent intervention studies have examined the effects of a ball skill intervention on preschool-age girls' ball skill performance (Veldman, et al., 2017), which might contribute to future sport participation. This study found that girls in the intervention experienced significant gains in ball skills at both post-test and retention (after nine weeks), indicating that early childhood interventions that focus on the development of ball skills in young girls might help improve girls' ball skill performance (Veldman, et al., 2017), which is likely to be important for perceived sport competence and future sport participation.

Conclusion and recommendations

Girls and women participate in sport at much lower rates than boys and men. This is related historically to the cultural norms associated with girls and women playing sport. Historically, there were few opportunities for girls and women to play certain sports, for example, soccer, cricket or Australian Rules football. In recent years, opportunities for girls and women to play a sport of their choice have increasingly become available. Sport policies and investment, specifically targeting the growth of women's and girls' participation in sport, have increasingly been observed. However, there are still barriers which limit their participation in sport.

The development of physical literacy early in life is very important and opportunities for girls to obtain fundamental movement skills and competency are needed, in the home, at school and through community sport. Young women and girls need to have support from family, friends, teachers and coaches to develop their sport skills and competency. The sport programmes and offerings need to be enjoyable for girls and young women, particularly their motivations for participation. People need to have a choice of what sports they play. This includes sport opportunities that cater for those who desire to play competitively and for those who wish to play non-competitive sport. It is also recommended that sports specifically focus on retention of girls and young women, and to achieve this, different sport offerings across the lifespan are required.  male-only programmes, teams and physical education sessions should be encouraged, especially in school-based settings.

At the broader level, there will not be significant changes to women and girls' participation in sport without strategic policy and investment to increase capacity of facilities and club volunteers, as well as continued cultural change regarding gender equity, attitudes, media focus and representation in sport organisational structures. Broader sport and public health policy should include multiple components and not rely solely on mass media campaigns without specific strategies to increase participation for those who are inactive or least active. Strategies to implement cultural change

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within sports clubs are required. Furthermore, there should be rigorous, independent evaluation of all interventions and investments to better identify what kind of strategies and interventions are most effective.


CASE STUDY

Ballarat women's and girls' cricket


In recent years, in Australia, there have been strategic developments to introduce more opportunities for women and girls to play cricket, which has long been a traditionally male dominated sport. For example, Cricket Australia recently developed the Growing Cricket for Girls Fund, which was an investment initiative to support the development of girls' community level cricket competitions. This funding supported a competition coordinator, equipment costs, marketing and promotional materials, and coach accreditation.

The available funding prompted the cricket community in the regional city of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia to develop a  male-only competition that aimed to provide young girls with the opportunity to play competitive cricket in female-only environments.

Development took place in 2016 and the competition was launched in Summer 2016/2017. The developmental phase included discussions with a wide range of stakeholders, including academic researchers in the field of girls' and women's participation in sport, women cricketers, and all levels of cricket administration and governance. This consultation provided guidance on the format of the competition and a smaller working party was formed. Participant recruitment was conducted through schools, and cricket clubs and associations, with entry level and come-and-try programmes offered.

Participation has grown considerably within a short period of time. In the first season there was one competition with nine clubs. In the second season, this grew to two competitions with different junior game formats. The third season saw investment and improvement of  male-friendly facilities. Now that the demand for the different competitions and programmes is strong and growing, the Ballarat Cricket Association has developed the inaugural women's senior cricket club and competition in the region. This now provides a true pathway for female cricketers in the region.

Having all teams and participants (from multiple clubs), play at the same location/facility worked well to create a vibrant atmosphere and allowed the participants and their parents to see a clear cricket pathway with different levels of programmes and competitions being played. Initially, due to lack of capacity and availability of infrastructure including facilities and ovals, the facilities and playing surface were sub-standard. However, this was soon recognised, and improved facilities have now been provided, including suitable change rooms and toilets.

 male participants simply wanted access to try sports like cricket, which traditionally had not been made available to women and girls at club level.

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Initially, the women and girls played in existing clubs which also had teams for men and boys. However, in a recent development, a new female-only club was created in 2018 to assist with breaking down the barriers to women's and girls' participation in cricket. The Ballarat Women's Cricket Club facilitates entry level and open-age competition programmes with the aim to build a complete cricket pathway for women and girls in cricket in the coming seasons/years. For girls' and women's participation in sport to develop, it is important that they have a voice and are heard.

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