



THE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN SPORT

This fact sheet presents some key statistics relating to women's participation in sport in England and Great Britain. The statistics are based on the findings from a number of surveys carried out by Sport England and others over the past five years:

- The General Household Survey (Office for National Statistics, 1996)
- Young People and Sport in England (Sport England, 1994)
- National Survey of Sports Halls and Swimming Pools (Sport England, 1997)
- Public Opinion Survey (Sport England, 1999)
- The Development of Sporting Talent (Sport England, 1997)

How many women take part in sport?

(Table 1)

- According to the latest participation data available from the General Household Survey (GHS, 1996), 77% of adult women (aged 16+) take part in sport at least once a year and 56% take part at least once a month. This equates to about 15 million women in England taking part in sport on at least an infrequent basis and 11 million taking part on a more frequent basis.
- The most popular activity for women is walking with 41% going for a walk or hike of at least 2 miles for pleasure each month. Excluding walking from the participation rates above shows that 60% of women take part in sport on an infrequent basis (12 million women in England) and 38% take part on a frequent basis (7.5 million).

How does this compare with participation by men?

(Table 1)

- The GHS shows that more men participate in sport than women. Including walking 87% of men take part on an infrequent basis (at least once a year, equating to 16.5 million men in England) and 71% take part on a more frequent basis (at least once a month, 13 million men). Excluding walking these figures fall to 73% (14 million men) and 54% (10 million) respectively.

Which sporting activities do women take part in?

(Table 1)

- Apart from walking, women are most likely to take part in keep fit/yoga (17%), swimming (17%) and cycling (8%) on a regular basis (i.e. at least once a month). For men, the most popular activities (excluding walking) were cue sports (20%), cycling (15%) and swimming (13%). Men have higher participation rates than women in all activities with the exception of swimming, keep fit/yoga, horse riding, ice skating and netball.

How has women's participation changed over the past 10 years?

(Table 2)

- Women's participation in sport has risen since 1987 whilst men's participation has fallen. Excluding walking, women's participation rose by four percentage points to 38% between 1987 and 1996. In contrast, men's participation fell by 3 percentage points over the same period to 54% in 1996.
- Walking became increasingly popular between 1987 and 1996, with 41% of women having walked or hiked at least two miles for pleasure in the previous 4 weeks in 1996 compared with 35% in 1987. Other sports to see a rise in popularity amongst women over the same period were indoor swimming (from 11% to 15%) and keep fit/yoga (from 12% to 17%).

How many girls take part in sport?

- According to Sport England's survey of young people carried out in 1994 84% of girls between the ages of 6 and 16 take part in sport outside of school on a regular basis (at least 10 times a year, which equates to 2.5 million girls). This compares with 90% of boys (3 million boys).

Which sporting activities do girls take part in?

- Cycling is the most popular sports activity amongst girls with 52% taking part at least 10 times a year outside of school. This is followed by swimming (51%), aerobics and keep fit (24%), walking (1 hour or more, 23%) and tennis (19%).

Where do women take part in sport?

(Table 3)

- According to the GHS, the most popular location for participation amongst adult women is at an indoor sports facility where 23% take part in sport at least once a month. Nine per cent take part in another indoor venue (such as a church hall, community centre, or village hall) whilst 6% take part at home. Five per cent take part at an outdoor facility such as a court, course, pitch, playing field or pool.
- Ten per cent of women are members of a club so that they can take part in sport as are 35% of girls. Club membership for males is, however, higher with 22% of men and 44% of boys members of a club where they take part in sport.

- The GHS shows that sports participation is most likely to take place in an indoor sports facility. Data collected from Sport England's 1997 survey of the use and management of sports halls and swimming pools compares participation by males and females in local authority owned or managed halls and pools.

How many women and girls participate in sports halls and swimming pools?

(Tables 4 to 6)

- Forty-six per cent of sports hall users in England are female (aged 11 years and over) as are 56% of swimming pool users. This equates to about 200,000 female hall users each week and 400,000 pool users.
- Almost half of all female visits to halls are to take part in a keep fit activity (43%) whilst a further 24% are to play badminton. In terms of swimming, females are likely to take part in general swimming (95% of visits) but are more likely than males to take part in aquafit (6% of visits).

What provision is made for females at sports halls and swimming pools?

(Tables 7 to 9)

- Seventy per cent of sports halls and swimming pools in England have use by women written into their contract specifications with local authorities. However, only 17% have specific targets relating to use of the centres by women.
- The survey also showed how sports hall and swimming pool space was programmed. The majority of programming time is made available to anyone who wishes to take part (i.e. is not restricted to any particular group). However, specific sessions for women are programmed for 2% of available hall time which equates to 6 badminton court hours per week at each centre (or about a one and half hour session each week).
- As with halls, the majority of programme time in pools is made available to anyone who wishes to take part. However, women-only sessions are programmed for 2% of the time, the equivalent of 2 pool hours per centre per week.

How has female participation at sports halls and swimming pools changed over the past 30 years?

(Table 10)

- On average, the gap between male and female participation has narrowed considerably over the last 30 years. In the early years of leisure centre use (1960s) males dominated participation by 71% to 29%. By the 1980s the gap in participation between the sexes had narrowed considerably (55% male to 45% female) and by the 1990s female participation had overtaken male participation (42% male and 58% female), primarily as a result of changes in the use of swimming pools.

What would encourage more women to take part in sport?

- A Sport England public opinion survey carried out in 1999 asked non-sports participants what would encourage them to take part in sport. Of the 57% of women who do not currently take part, 52% say there is nothing that would encourage them (30% of all women in the population). Of the 42% of men who do not currently take part in sport 57% say there is nothing that would encourage them (24% of all men in the population).
- Alternatively, of the 57% of women who do not currently take part 48% say there is something that would encourage them to take part (27% women in the population) and of the 42% of men who do not take part, 43% say there is something that would encourage them (18% of all men in the population).
- Of those who say they can be encouraged to take part, having more leisure time features as the most important factor (21%) and is equally important for men and women.
- There are, however, some significant differences amongst men and women regarding what would 'most' encourage them to take part. Nineteen per cent of women compared with 12% of men say that having more money/lower prices would most encourage them; 15% of women say 'having friends to take part with' compared with 7% of men; 12% of women say having better childcare provision compared with 3% of men; overcoming embarrassment and lack of confidence is referred to as 'the most' important factor by 9% of women compared with 4% of men.
- Generally speaking men are more likely to refer to improvements in facility provision in their locality as important in encouraging them to take part than women. The emphasis amongst women is more on personal and broader lifestyle/social circumstances.
- One in 3 (29%) women aged 25 to 34 years old who are currently non participants say that 'better childcare facilities' would most encourage them to take part. This reaches as high as 35% for parents (men or women) with children aged 0 to 2 years and 32% for those with children 3 to 5 years.

What do women at the elite end of British sport think about the services they receive?

- According to Sport England's 1997 Development of Sport Talent study, women involved in elite level sport find access to good quality support services more difficult than men. They tend to be more concerned about financial hardship, more dependent on family support and less satisfied with access to sports science, sports medicine and good quality facilities.

The following published reports provide further information:

- * Sport England and UK Sport, 'General Household Survey - Participation in Sport in Great Britain 1996'
- * Sport England and UK Sport, 'General Household Survey - Trends in Adult Participation in Sport in Great Britain 1987 - 1996'
- * OPCS, 'Young People and Sport in England, 1994', The Sports Council, 1995
- * Manchester Metropolitan University, 'The Development of Sporting Talent', The English Sports Council, 1997
- * Sport England, 'The Use and Management of Sports Halls and Swimming Pools in England, 1997' (due to be published Winter 1999)

Copies of the reports can be obtained from:

Sport England Publications
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Table 1: Sports, games and physical activities - participation rates by sex

(a). participation rates in the four weeks before interview (% of population)

(b). participation rates in the 12 months before interview (% of population)

Adults aged 16+ (GB)

Active sports, games and physical activities	(a).			(b).		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Walking*	49.0	40.8	44.5	73.1	64.1	68.2
Any swimming	12.7	16.5	14.8	37.4	41.4	39.6
<i>Swimming: indoor</i>	10.6	14.6	12.8	32.5	37.4	35.1
<i>Swimming: outdoor</i>	3.0	2.9	2.9	16.6	13.5	14.9
Keep fit/yoga	6.8	16.9	12.3	10.4	29.4	20.7
Snooker/pool/billiards	19.6	4.3	11.3	32.6	7.9	19.2
Cycling	14.8	7.8	11.0	27.4	16.3	21.4
Weight training	8.7	2.9	5.6	14.2	6.1	9.8
Any soccer	10.0	0.4	4.8	17.5	0.8	8.5
<i>Soccer: outdoor</i>	7.8	0.3	3.8	14.3	0.6	6.9
<i>Soccer: indoor</i>	4.5	0.1	2.1	10.0	0.4	4.8
Golf	8.3	1.6	4.7	18.8	4.4	11.0
Running (jogging etc)	7.2	2.3	4.5	12.0	4.7	8.0
Darts*	14.2	3.9	8.6
Tenpin bowls/skittles	3.9	2.9	3.4	18.1	13.3	15.5
Badminton	2.8	2.0	2.4	8.1	6.0	7.0
Tennis	2.4	1.7	2.0	8.8	5.7	7.1
Any bowls	2.5	1.3	1.9	6.4	3.1	4.6
<i>Carpet bowls</i>	1.4	0.9	1.1	4.0	2.2	3.0
<i>Lawn bowls</i>	1.3	0.5	0.9	4.2	1.6	2.8
Fishing	3.4	0.3	1.7	10.3	1.1	5.3
Table tennis	2.3	0.9	1.5	7.4	3.5	5.3
Squash	2.2	0.5	1.3	6.6	2.0	4.1
Weight lifting	2.1	0.6	1.3	4.1	1.4	2.6
Horse riding	0.4	1.5	1.0	1.8	4.1	3.0
Cricket	1.7	0.1	0.9	6.8	0.4	3.3
Shooting	1.6	0.1	0.8	5.2	0.7	2.8
Self defence	1.2	0.3	0.7	2.9	0.8	1.7
Climbing	1.1	0.3	0.7	3.7	1.5	2.5
Basketball	1.2	0.2	0.6	3.5	0.7	2.0
Rugby	1.2	*	0.6	2.7	0.1	1.3
Ice skating	0.4	0.7	0.6	3.0	3.4	3.2
Netball	0.1	0.8	0.5	0.3	2.3	1.4
Sailing	0.6	0.2	0.4	3.3	1.4	2.3
Motor sports	0.8	0.1	0.4	3.1	0.3	1.6
Canoeing	0.5	0.3	0.4	2.4	0.9	1.6
Hockey	0.4	0.3	0.3	1.2	1.0	1.1
Skiing	0.5	0.2	0.3	3.2	2.1	2.6
Athletics-track and field	0.3	0.1	0.2	1.9	0.6	1.2
Gymnastics	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.6	0.7	0.7
Windsurfing, boardsailing	0.3	0.1	0.2	1.8	0.6	1.1
At least one activity (exc. walking)	54.0	38.5	45.6	72.5	60.4	65.9
At least one activity	70.9	57.5	63.6	86.5	77.0	81.4
Base (all adults)	7186	8510	15696	7186	8510	15696

Source: 1996 General Household Survey (The Office for National Statistics)

* Walking is defined as a walk or hike of two miles or more

Table 2: Trends in participation in sport activities (1987, 1990, 1993 and 1996) by sex

Women aged 16 and over (GB)

Activity	Percentage participating in the 4 weeks before interview			
	1987	1990	1993	1996
**At least one activity	52	57	57	58
**At least one activity (exc. walking)	34	39	39	38
Walking#	35	38	37	41
Any swimming	13	15	16	17
Swimming: indoor	11	13	14	15
Swimming: outdoor	3	4	3	3
Keep fit/yoga	12	16	17	17
Snooker/pool/billiards	5	5	5	4
Cycling	7	7	7	8
*Weight training				
*Weight lifting	2	2	3	3
Soccer	0	0	0	0
Golf	1	2	2	2
Running (jogging, etc)	3	2	2	2
Tenpin bowls/skittles	1	3	3	3
Badminton	3	3	2	2
Tennis	1	2	2	2
Lawn/carpet bowls	1	1	2	1
Fishing	0	0	0	0
Table tennis	1	1	1	1
Squash	1	1	1	0
Horse riding	1	1	1	1
Base = 100%	10443	9455	9490	8510

Activities are listed in descending order of 4 week participation rate for all adults in 1996. Includes only activities in which more than 1.0% of all persons participated in the 4 weeks before interview.

*In 1987-93 these categories were combined. In 1996 they were asked separately.

** Total include those activities not separately listed.

Walking is defined as a walk or hike of two miles or more

Source: 1996 General Household Survey (The Office for National Statistics)

Table 3: Percentage of all adults using different types of facility by gender

All persons aged 16+ (GB)

Location of participation	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Indoor Sport Facility	25.8	23.2	24.4
Other Indoor Facility	14.9	8.9	11.6
At home	8.2	6.3	7.2
Outdoor pitch/court	18.4	5.3	11.3
Natural setting	19.7	9.0	13.9
Other place	10.4	4.4	7.2
School/college	15.9	13.6	14.6
Sample (n)	7186	8510	15696

Source: 1996 General Household Survey (Office for National Statistics)

Table 4: Gender of Sports Hall and Swimming Pool Users

Base: All visitors

	Hall Users	Pool Users	Population in England#
	%	%	%
Male	54.5	44.5	49.2
Female	45.5	55.5	50.8
Weighted Base (n)	488,610	799,973	49,284,000

Office for National Statistics (Population Trends 1997)

Source: 1997 National Survey of Sports Halls and Swimming Pools (Sport England)

Table 5: Sports Hall Activity by Gender

Base: All sports hall visits

	Gender		All Sports Hall Visits
	Male Visits	Female Visits	
	%	%	%
Badminton	24.7	24.1	24.4
Keep fit/ aerobics/ step/ yoga	7.1	43.3	23.6
Indoor 5-a-side football	32.0	2.1	18.3
Martial arts	8.2	3.9	6.3
Carpet/ mat/ short bowls	7.4	4.7	6.1
Gymnastics	1.9	5.6	3.6
Basketball	3.3	1.0	2.3
Netball	*	4.6	2.1
Trampolining	0.5	3.4	1.8
Dance	0.9	3.0	1.8
Table tennis	2.6	1.1	1.9
Indoor hockey	2.7	0.3	1.6
Tennis/ short tennis	1.7	1.2	1.5
Roller skating/ roller blading	1.5	0.8	1.2
Indoor cricket	1.8	0.1	1.0
Climbing wall	1.1	0.1	0.6
Multi-sports session	0.7	0.6	0.7
Volleyball	0.9	0.3	0.6
Raquetball	0.5	0.7	0.6
Boxing	0.5	0.2	0.4
Fencing	0.4	0.1	0.2
Archery	0.3	0.1	0.2
Roller hockey	0.2	*	0.1
Korfball	*	0.0	*
Indoor golf	*	0.2	0.1
Other in hall	0.4	0.4	0.4
Weighted Base (n)	344,166	289,432	635,605

* Less than 0.1%

Source: 1997 National Survey of Sports Halls and Swimming Pools (Sport England)

Table 6: Swimming Pool Activities by Gender

Base: All swimming pool visits

	Gender		All Swimming Pool Visits
	Male Visits	Female Visits	
	%	%	%
Swimming	97.6	94.7	95.2
Aquafit/ Aquababes/ spinning	0.3	5.5	3.2
Canoeing/ kayaking	0.5	0.1	0.3
Sub-aqua	0.5	0.1	0.3
Diving	0.5	0.2	0.3
Life saving	0.3	0.2	0.2
Water polo	0.4	*	0.2
Scuba diving	0.1	0.1	0.1
Used flumes/ waves	0.3	0.3	0.2
Snorkelling	0.1	*	*
Synchronised swimming	*	*	*
In-pool kids fun session	0.1	*	0.1
Other in pool	0.2	0.1	0.1
Weighted Base (n)	535,261	667,083	1,210,715

* Less than 0.1%

Source: 1997 National Survey of Sports Halls and Swimming Pools (Sport England)

Table 7: Contract Specifications for Halls and Pools (Policies and Throughputs)

Base: All sports halls and swimming pools in England

User Group	Centres Having Policy in Contract Relating to User Group (%)	Centres Having Target Throughput Relating to User Group (%)
Schools	85.5	29.0
Casual Use	85.3	28.9
Sports Clubs	80.8	23.3
Disabilities	78.4	17.9
Young People	76.4	18.8
Unemployed	73.5	17.6
Over 50s	72.4	17.1
Women	69.6	16.9
Ethnic Minorities	52.5	11.2
Elite Performers	36.7	6.2
Representative Squads	35.5	8.4
Corporate/Business	24.4	5.6
Non-Sporting Use	53.4	14.0
Weighted Base (n)	1,208	1,208

Source: 1997 National Survey of Sports Halls and Swimming Pools (Sport England)

Table 8: User Groups Programmed in Halls (Main and Ancillary)

Base: Badminton court hours used for sporting activities

User Groups	Weekdays	Saturday	Sunday	Total	Average number of badminton court hours per centre
	%	%	%	%	N
All/ free/ no specific user type	56.0	68.3	87.4	60.9	190
School/ College use	26.8	0.6	0.6	20.9	65
Juniors	5.2	22.5	6.3	7.3	23
50+	3.7	0.6	0.1	3.0	9
Women	2.2	0.5	0.2	1.8	6
Adults	1.6	2.0	2.4	1.7	5
Toddlers	1.5	0.4	0.2	1.2	4
Children (5 to 10's)	0.9	2.5	1.2	1.1	4
Young people (11 to 19's)	0.7	1.0	0.6	0.7	2
Disabled	0.6	0.7	0.2	0.6	2
Men	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.5	2
Families	*	0.2	0.2	0.1	0
Parent & babies/toddlers	0.1	0.0	*	*	0
Ethnic minority	0.1	0.0	0.0	*	0
Not stated	0.1	0.0	0.0	0.1	0
Weighted base (badminton court hours)	200865	29415	28731	259012	312

Source: 1997 National Survey of Sports Halls and Swimming Pools (Sport England)

Table 9: User Groups Programmed in Pools (Main, Learner and Diving)

Base: Pool hours used for sporting activity

User Groups	Weekdays	Saturday	Sunday	Total	Average number of pool hours per centre
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	
All/ free/ no specific user type	60.9	81.2	86.5	66.4	83
School/ College use	19.9	0.0	0.0	15.1	19
Adults	6.5	1.5	3.9	5.6	7
Juniors	4.5	10.8	2.1	4.9	6
Women	2.3	0.1	0.5	1.8	2
Parent & babies/toddlers	1.7	0.2	0.1	1.3	2
50+	1.5	0.2	0.1	1.2	1
Children (5 to 10's)	0.8	2.4	0.7	1.0	1
Toddlers	1.1	0.1	0.2	0.8	1
Families	0.3	1.5	3.6	0.8	1
Disabled	0.4	1.6	1.1	0.7	1
Ethnic minority	0.1	0.0	1.1	0.2	0
Young people (11 to 19's)	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.1	0
Men	*	0.1	0.0	*	0
Weighted base (Pool Hours)	83189	12859	13260	109307	124

Source: 1997 National Survey of Sports Halls and Swimming Pools (Sport England)

Table 10: Averages from Previous Surveys - Gender

Gender	Males (%)	Females (%)
Surveys in 1960s	71	29
Surveys in 1970s	68	33
Surveys in 1980s	55	45
Surveys in 1990s	42	58

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