



The Women and Girls: Active, Fit and Sporty Participation Survey 2019 Insight Report

November 2019

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Introduction and background

The **Women and Girls: Active, Fit and Sporty strategic framework**, which was launched in 2016 aimed to work strategically with a wide range of partners and stakeholders, to raise the profile of women and girls in sport and physical activity. It's vision is for **'Every woman and girl across Northern Ireland to feel that participating in sport and being physically active is a vital part of their everyday life.'** The Active, Fit and Sporty framework specifically targets the development of female focused campaigns, projects and programmes in four key areas of;

- 1. Media** – Increasing the visibility of female success
- 2. Leadership** –Driving cultural change to involve more females in leadership roles
- 3. Role models** - Inspiring role models can have a significant impact on participation
- 4. Research and Evaluation** – Providing an evidence base to support extending the reach of sport and physical activity

Sport Northern Ireland as the leading public body for the development of sport in Northern Ireland are passionate about maximising the power of sport to change lives. As we develop our new strategy, for the next five years, key themes of; well-being, diversity and inclusion will all be central to the critical development of our sporting system in Northern Ireland. Sport Northern Ireland's mission statement is; **'By 2025; we want the power of sport to be recognised and valued by all.'**

In planning for the future, Sport Northern Ireland with our Active, Fit and Sporty partners are undertaking a consultation process focusing on women and girls in sport and physical activity. We want to know how best we as an organisation, in conjunction with our partners, and the wider public can encourage more females to take part and flourish in all aspects of sport whether this be as; a participant, volunteer, coach or leader, high performing athlete or an employee working in the area of sport or physical activity.

This consultation process will be conducted in various phases over the coming year. Three separate surveys have been developed and will be circulated to the public for response. The surveys will relate to;

- 1. Participation**
- 2. Leadership and**
- 3. High Performance**



This initial report relates to the first phase of the process and focuses on the findings from the **'Participation Survey'** which was conducted during the Spring of 2019.

We asked anyone involved in female sport or physical activity (both male and female), aged 16+ years, to take part in this survey. The intention of this survey was to understand the current sporting participation trends of women and girls sport, to identify barriers and factors that would assist in increasing participation rates.

Methods

The survey was co-designed by Sport NI in conjunction with other Active, Fit and Sporty partners including Ulster University, the Female Sports Forum, Governing Bodies of sport and community/voluntary sector organisations. The survey itself, was developed using 'Citizen Space' survey software and was available online for completion from the 13th May to the 30th June 2019.

Results

A total of 1,102 participants completed the survey. The results from the data collected are illustrated graphically with an extended description of key findings and relationships relating to; demographics, activities, membership, barriers, factors to stay active and key trends.

Demographics

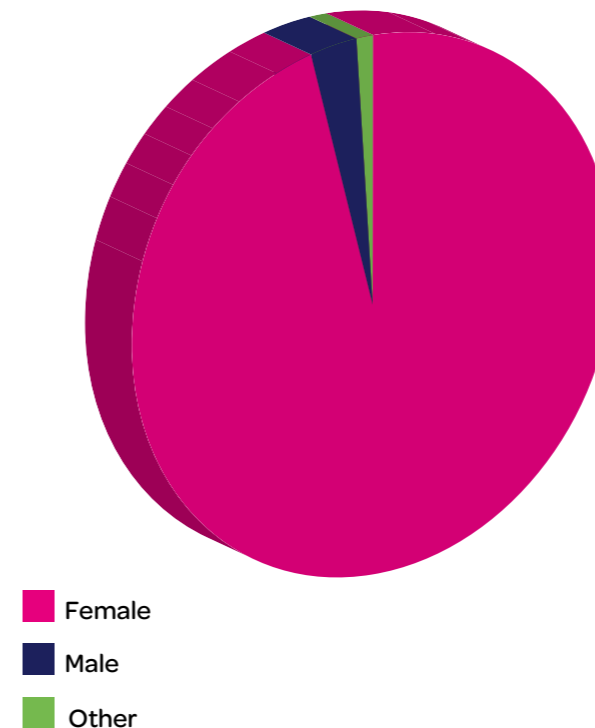
This section shows a breakdown of the demographics of survey respondents:

Gender

Figure 1 below shows survey respondents by gender.

96% (n=1,054) of respondents are female
3% (n=41) are male
 and
1% (n=7) identified as other or preferred not to say.

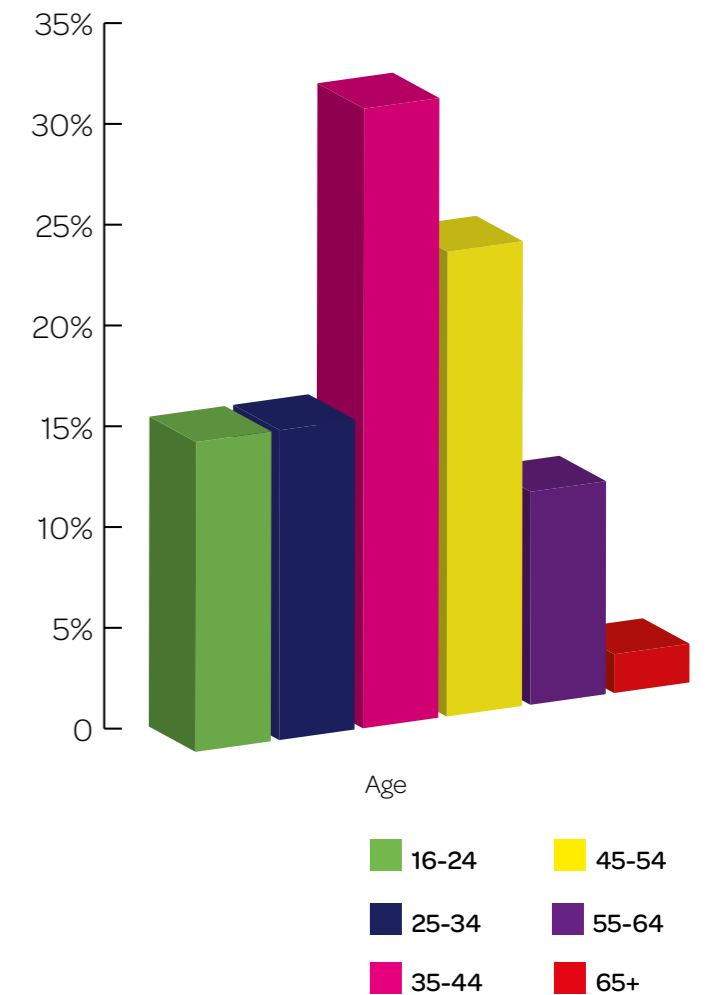
Figure 1: Respondents by Gender



Age

Figure 2 shows the percentage of total respondents based on their age.

Figure 2: Respondents by Age

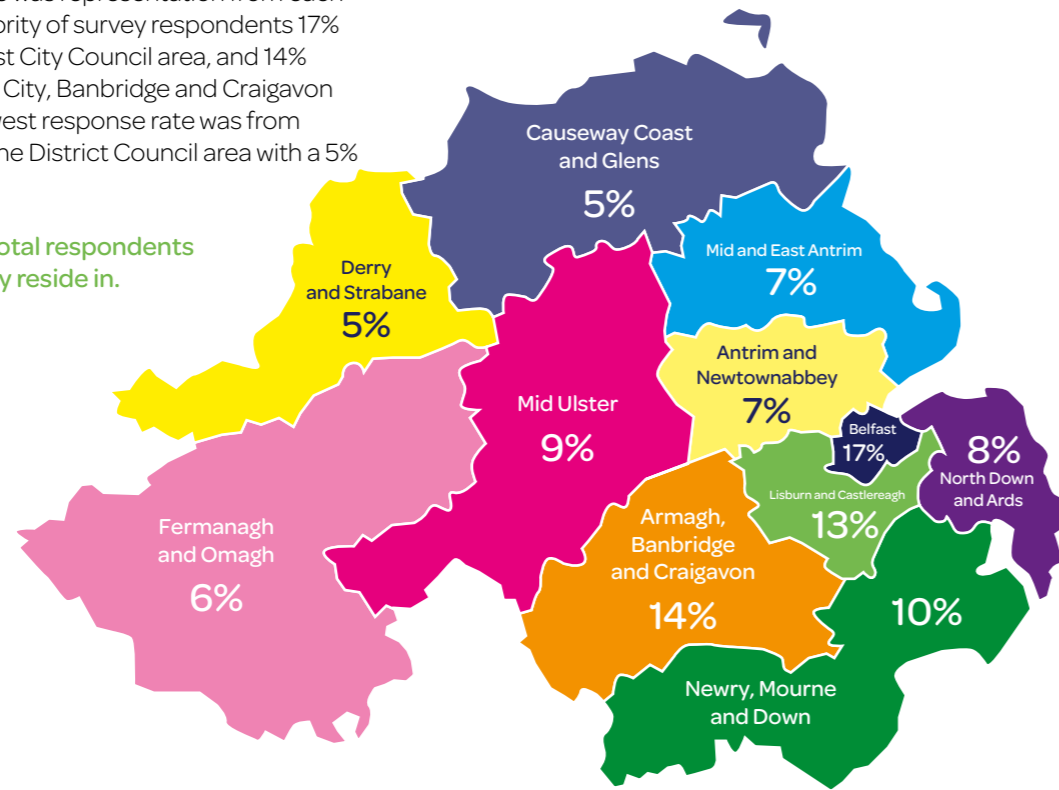


In regards to the age of survey participants, the largest group of responses, 32%, (n=357) were from those aged between 35 and 44; 24% (n=263) aged 45-54 and the lowest response, 2% (n= 19) from people aged 65+

Geographic Location (District Council Area)

As shown in Figure 3, there was representation from each council area with the majority of survey respondents 17% (n= 182) living in the Belfast City Council area, and 14% (n= 154) from the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council. The lowest response rate was from the Derry City and Strabane District Council area with a 5% return (n= 52).

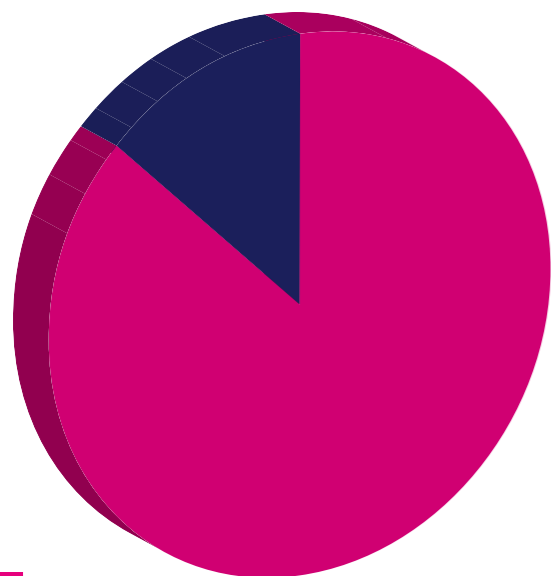
Figure 3. Percentage of total respondents and the Council area they reside in.



Disability or Medical Condition

A total of 13% (n=140) of the respondents stated they had a disability or medical condition, which is illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. Percentage of total respondents who have a disability or medical condition.



Yes
No

Footnote 1: For a full description of disability or medical condition see Appendix A

How active are women and girls across Northern Ireland?

We asked various questions to measure how active the respondents are in terms of sport and physical activity.

Below are the main findings:

94% (n=1,038) take part in sport and/or physical activity

65% (n=713) are active 3-5 days per week

84% (n=925) are actively involved in sport and/or physical activity often/very often in the past 12 months



71% (n=783) are a member of a sports club

33% (n=369) take part in recreational activity e.g. parkrun events

20% (n=219) take part in physical challenges for charity e.g. walks, runs

48% (n=527) have a child/children who is/are physically active

45% (n=498) attend sports events

The statistics above suggest that our survey respondents are actively engaged in sport and physical activity on a regular basis.

What type of sporting activities are women and girls participating in?

This section is divided into 3 parts to highlight the results:

Part A: Walking, Mountaineering and Running

Part B: Fitness Activities

Part C: Sporting Activities

The respondents were given a choice to pick more than one activity from the allocated list of sporting activities, if applicable.



A. Walking, Mountaineering or Running

A number of respondents are involved in walking and running/jogging. Table 1 below shows the number of responses for each of the three activities (participated in over the past 12 months) and the percentage of total participation in the activity.

Activity	Number of Participants	% Participation
Walking	678	62
Running and/or Jogging	539	49
Mountaineering and/or Rambling	129	12

Table 1: Participation number and percentage for each activity

B. Fitness Activities

The main fitness activities respondents participated in over the last 12 months were attending classes or going to the gym. Table 2 below demonstrates the number and percentage involved in fitness related activities.



Activity	Number of Participants	% Participation
Exercise Classes e.g. spin, HIIT	543	49
Going to Gym	543	49
Keepfit/Aerobics/Yoga/Dance Exercise e.g Line Dancing, Zumba	413	37

Table 2: Top 3 Fitness activities based on participation numbers and percentage

C. Sporting Activities

There were a considerable number of sporting activities identified by respondents. The four main activities participated in by respondents over the last 12 months were swimming and/or diving, cycling, gaelic football and athletics. The specific number of participants indicating they participated in these sports (and percentage) are shown in Table 3.



Activity	Number of Participants	% Participation
Swimming/Diving	296	27
Cycling	271	25
Gaelic Football	134	12
Athletics	113	10

Table 3: Top 4 sporting activities by participation number and percentage

Footnote 2: A breakdown of all sporting activities with results are in Appendix B

Club membership

71% of the respondents said they have been a member of a sports club or gym over the past 12 months.

Table 4 details the 10 sporting activities with the highest % of participants who have indicated they are members of a club.

Table 4 : Top 10 sporting activities that have the highest membership rate

Activity	Number of Participants	% Participation
Athletics	113	95
Triathlon	27	93
Rugby	77	93
Gaelic Football	122	91
Rowing inc. Dragon Boat Racing	38	90
Hockey	62	90
Netball	74	89
Cricket	16	89
Gymnastics	31	89
Camogie	58	88

Tables 5 and 6 below show how active participants are if they are either a club member or non-club member. For the purpose of this comparison, we have assumed that participants who selected 'Often or Very Often' to be a club member and participants who selected 'Never or Rarely' are non-club members.

Table 5 : Club member activity level as % of total club members

Club Members

Number of Days Active Per Week	%
1-2	10
3-5	71
6-7	21

Table 6 : Non Club member activity level as % total non club members

Non-Club Members

Number of Days Active Per Week	%
1-2	35
3-5	42
6-7	14



What are the perceived barriers to women and girls participating in sport and/or physical activity?

We asked respondents to consider why 'Some people do not participate in sport and/or physical activity'. Respondents rated the following perceived barriers to involvement in sport and/or physical activity from 'Not Significant to Extremely Significant.'

Table 4 details the 10 sporting activities with the highest % of participants who have indicated they are members of a club.

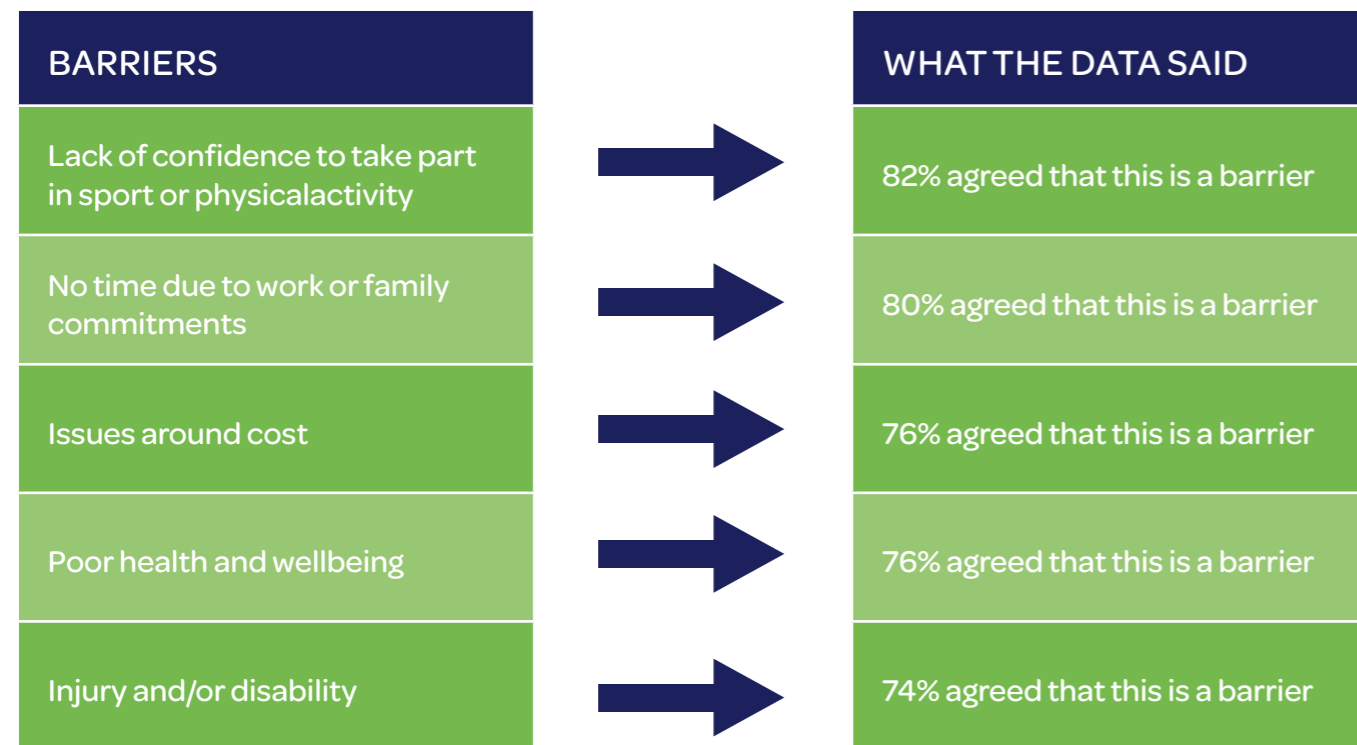


Figure 5: Top 5 barriers to participation

The barriers above suggest that **social and economic factors** e.g. cost, family commitments and mental health/wellbeing factors such as lack of confidence, poor health and wellbeing are main barriers to participation. In particular, **82%** of respondents felt that **a lack of confidence** is a barrier which is the highest rating barrier to participation.

What factors are important to stay active in sport and/or physical activity?

We then asked respondents to rate from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' for the following question:

To what extent do you agree with the following statements as being important to keeping active?

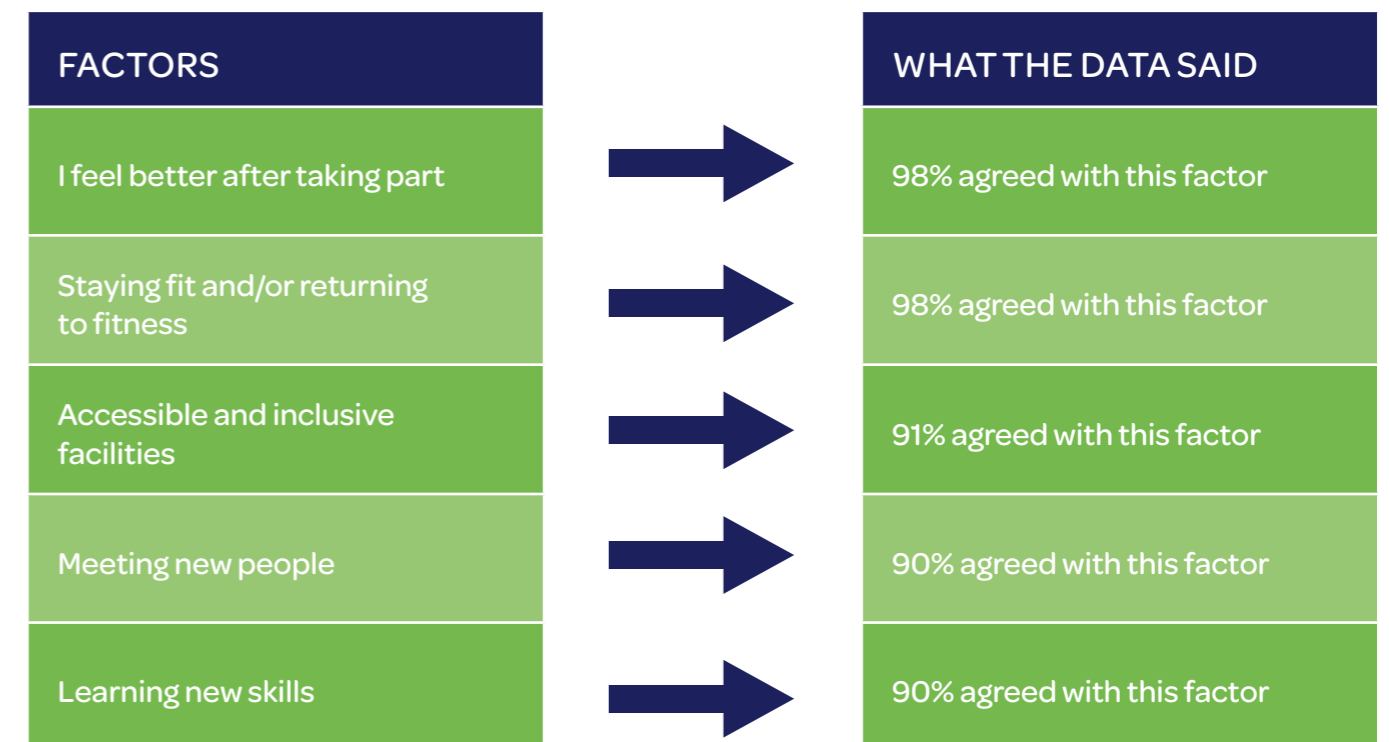


Figure 6: Top 5 factors deemed to be important for staying active

Mental health and wellbeing factors scored very high with **98%** of the respondents stating they feel better after exercising. **98%** of the respondents also said that staying fit/returning to fitness was a fundamental factor for staying active. **91%** felt that having inclusive and accessible facilities is important for staying active.

What would encourage women and girls to stay active?

We asked:

'In your opinion, relating to the statements below, what would encourage you to participate in sport and/or physical activity?'

Respondents rated these from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'.

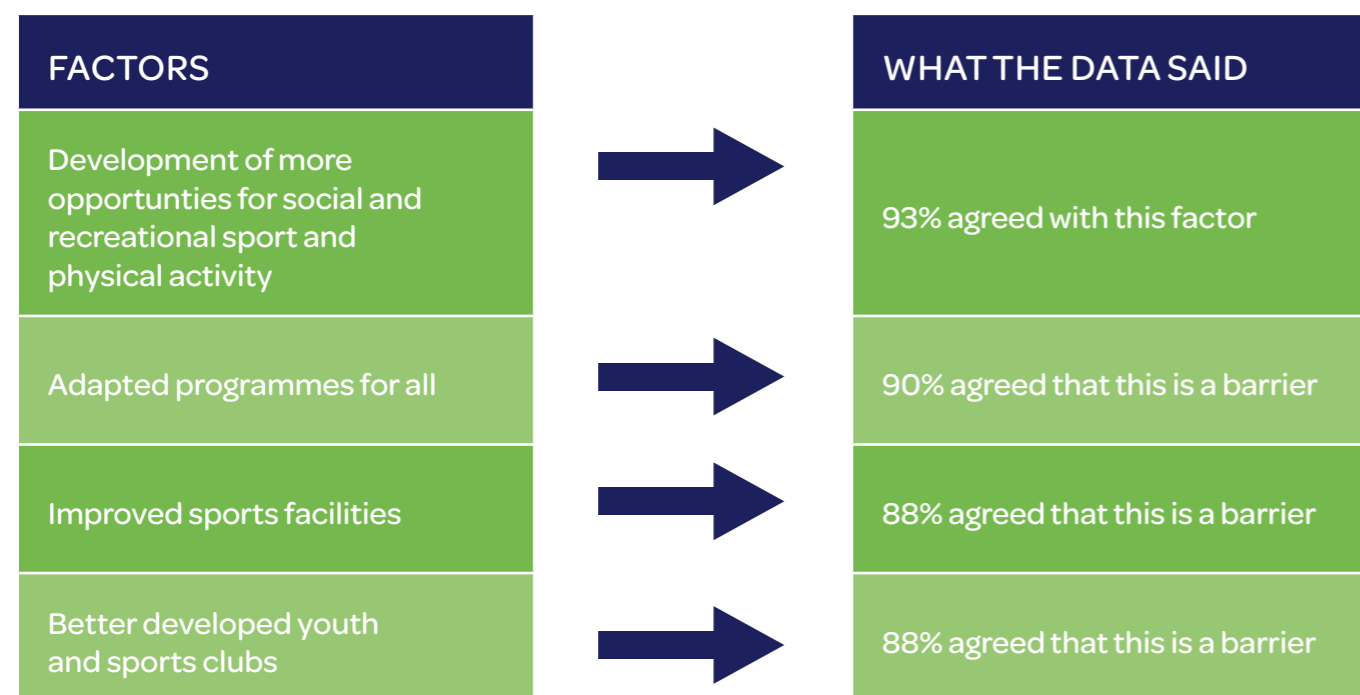


Figure 7: Top 5 factors that would encourage participation

93% of respondents felt that the development of **more opportunities for social and recreational sport and physical activity**.

90% also said that having **adapted programmes** for all would increase participation.

Analysis

From the results and analysis of the data undertaken we have identified two key areas where there are clear relationships between each of the identified trends. The two key areas are that women and girls;

- 1. Understand the benefits of their participation in sport;**
and
- 2. Understand how to address the lack of confidence which may restrict their participation**

Many of the respondents thought that providing more recreational and social opportunities for sport may help address the issue of a lack of self confidence which may be limiting participation. Better and enhanced provision for women and girls in sports clubs may also lead to being more active on a regular basis.

A **lack of confidence** and **poor health** and well-being are clearly barriers to female participation in sports and physical activity.

- 766 of the 1102 total participants (70%) indicated that a lack of confidence to take part in sport and physical activity and poor health and well-being were considered significant (extremely, fairly and significantly) barriers to participation in sport and physical activity.
- 98% of the respondents state they felt better after exercising with 82% of respondents indicating that they felt that a lack of confidence was a barrier to sport and physical activity participation.
- From that, 886 of the 1102 participants (80%) agreed or strongly agreed that feeling better was an important factor for staying active and that a lack of confidence was a significant (extremely, fairly and significantly) barrier to participation in sport and physical activity.

These figures suggest that the respondents are aware that participating in sport and physical activity will make them feel better however, a lack of confidence may prevent them from participating in the first place.

- 685 of 1102 total participants (62%) agreed or strongly agreed that more promotion/advertising around benefits of taking part in sport and physical activity would encourage increased participation. They also indicated (extremely, fairly and significantly) that they felt poor health and wellbeing was a barrier to participation in sport and physical activity.
- 756 of 1102 total participants (69%) agreed or strongly agreed that using role models to promote female sport and physical activity would encourage increased participation and indicated significantly (extremely, fairly and significantly) that a lack of confidence was a barrier to sport and physical activity participation.

- 848 of 1102 total participants (77%) agreed or strongly agreed that the development of more opportunities for social and recreational sport and physical activity would encourage increased participation and they also indicated (extremely, fairly and significantly) that a lack of confidence was a barrier to sport and physical activity participation.
- 741 of 1102 total participants (67%) agreed or strongly agreed that the development of more opportunities for social and recreational sport and physical activity would encourage increased participation and indicated (extremely, fairly and significantly) that having no one to go with (peer support) was a barrier to sport and physical activity participation
- Participants who indicated they were a club member were more likely to be active.
 - 10% (n=75) of club members were active 1-2 days per week. This is in comparison to 35% (n=75) of non-club members who were active 1-2 days per week.
 - 71% (n=557) of club members were active 3-5 days per week. This is in comparison to 42% (n=90) of non-club members who were active 3-5 days per week.
 - 21% (n=167) of club members were active 6-7 days per week. This is in comparison to 14% (n=29) of non-club members who were active 6-7 days per week.
- 814 of 1102 total participants (74%) agreed or strongly agreed that better developed youth and sports clubs would encourage increased participation and they also indicated (extremely, fairly and significantly) that a lack of confidence was a barrier to sport and physical activity participation.
- 274 of the 315 (86%) respondents who participate in high performing sport agreed or strongly agreed that improved sports facilities would increase participation.

Recommendations

The majority of our survey respondents 94% (n=1,038) are in fact Active, Fit and Sporty in some capacity with walking 62% (n=678) being among the most popular activity.

Women and girls are aware that participating in sport and/or physical activity has health benefits however, it is clear from the survey findings that mental health and well-being is recorded strongly when asked what the main barriers are for participation in sport and/or physical activity. A lack of confidence has been identified as the top barrier to participation by 82% of participants.

Overall, participating in sport and physical activity in a recreational/non-structured manner was identified as the most popular choice for women and girls. These figures would suggest that some women and girls may at different times in their lives, prefer to participate for social reasons rather than competitive reasons. An improved club environment with the right offer may attract more women and girls to join a sports clubs – and more likely to be and stay active.

From the findings of this survey the following recommendations have been made to assist the future planning for those engaged in the provision of opportunities for women and girls sport and/or physical activity.

More Mental Health Wellbeing/Body Image Interventions

A lack of confidence was the main barrier to participation even though women and girls are aware of the benefits of sport and/or physical activity can bring to their mental and physical wellbeing. More mental health and wellbeing/body image interventions at all ages may reduce this barrier.

Role Models

Women and girls need more visible role models at all levels of participation as this may help address the lack of confidence and lack of peer support to participation.

Sports Clubs

Women and girls are inclined to be more active if they are a club member. Additional support to Governing Bodies on how to recruit and retain members may increase club membership and therefore increase activity levels for women and girls.

Recreational and Social Opportunities

The majority of respondents stated the development of more opportunities for social and recreational sport and/or physical activity is a factor that would encourage participation. This suggests that the respondents enjoy what they are currently participating in but want more development in those areas. More development in social/recreational activities would both increase participation and sustain the current participants.

Facilities

- More development of inclusive and accessible facilities may ensure women and girls of all abilities are given the opportunity to participate in their chosen activity.
- The improvement of sports facilities for women and girls who participate in high performance sport may increase participation at this level



Appendices

Appendix A

Disability and/or medical condition list:

- Physical disability
- Wheelchair user
- Ambulant
- Blind
- Partially sighted
- Learning disability
- Medical condition
- Deaf
- Hard of hearing
- Other disability/medical condition
- Prefer not to say

Appendix B

All sporting activities participated in over the last 12 months, total number of individuals indicating that they had engaged with the sporting activity and % of total participation

Activity	Number of Participants	% Participation
Walking	678	62
Exercise classes	543	49
Gym	543	49
Running/jogging	539	49
Keepfit/aerobics/yoga	413	37
Swimming/diving	296	27
Weightlifting	281	25
Cycling	272	25
Gaelic football	134	12
Dance	129	12
Mounteering/rambling	129	12
Athletics	113	10
Badminton	100	9
Netball	83	8
Rugby	83	8
Canoeing	74	7
Football/soccer/futsal	72	7
Hockey	69	6

Appendix B ...continued

Activity	Number of Participants	% Participation
Mountain Biking	69	6
Camogie	66	6
Boxing	63	6
Golf	59	5
Tennis	57	5
Rowing inc Lagan Dragons	42	4
Basketball	38	3
Gymnastics	35	3
Table Tennis	30	3
Volleyball	30	3
Sailing	29	3
Triathlon	29	3
Judo/Karate/Taekwondo	27	2
Boccia	24	2
Tai Chi	23	2
Cricket	18	2
Bowls	15	1



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