



**A Summary of Key Findings from Research
and Insights on Women and Girls in Sport**

Purpose

This paper has been prepared for the Sport NI Women in Sport Panel November 2022 meeting, to summarise the key findings from research data and insights available about participation and representation of women and girls in sport and physical activity. It also summarises what we understand are their motivations, the barriers they experience, and their lived experiences from various insights.

This body of evidence is designed to inform discussions of the Women in Sport Panel around their priority areas for focus.

Structure

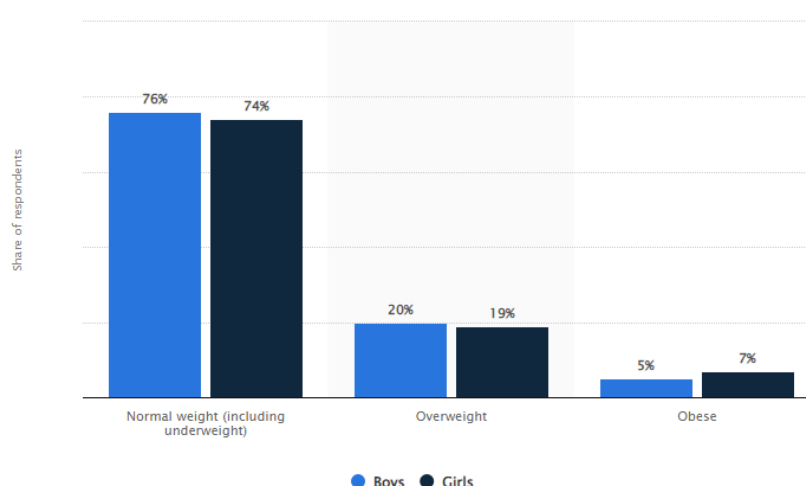
This paper will summarise the headline findings from data and then from the insights on women and girls in sport.

Summary of Research Data

What the data tells us

Young girls are more likely than boys to become obese.

We know there was an obesity issue for girls and indeed children generally in Northern Ireland with 25% of children classed as overweight or obese, according to the Health Survey for Northern Ireland 2019/20¹. Children are also becoming obese younger and are more likely to be obese as adults if they were obese as children. Inequalities also exist, as the research shows that children living in the most deprived areas in Northern Ireland are at greater risk of becoming overweight or obese.



We know that women have higher levels of reported loneliness, lower self-efficacy, lower internal locus of control and higher levels of reported anxiety than males, with women are more likely to report a long term physical or mental health condition than men.

The Wellbeing in Northern Ireland report, 2020/21², provides estimates across four areas which reflect wellbeing, and was produced for the first time in 2020/21. Females reported significantly higher proportions of loneliness than males. Males: 17.5% Females: 22.6%. The proportion of females with low self-efficacy was significantly larger than for males. Males: 14.2% Females: 20.8%. Females had a significantly lower (more external) score than males. Males: 17.3 Females: 17.0 Females reported a significantly higher score for anxiety than males. Males: 2.5 Females: 3.1.

Two-fifths of respondents (43%) to the Health Survey Northern Ireland 2019/20¹ have a physical or mental health condition or illness expected to last 12 months or more, however females (45%) were more likely than males (41%) to report a long-term condition.

Girls are not meeting their physical activity guidelines

We know that fewer primary school girls participate in physical activity than boys however 'post-primary school girls had the lowest prevalence of meeting the physical activity guidelines, with only 7% obtaining ≥60 minutes of MVPA' according to the Children's Sports Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA) (2018)³.

As in 2015, the 2016 Young Person's Life and Times and Kids Life and Times survey⁴ showed that there is a noticeable gender difference in the physical activity levels; how males and females experience sport and physical activity; and the factors they experience as inhibiting.

Current UK guidelines state that, "All children and young people (5-18 years) should engage in moderate to vigorous intensity physical activity for at least 60 minutes and up to several hours every day." The number of young people who report attaining this has remained relatively stable since 2007, with boys (17%) twice as likely to attain this as girls (8%) according to the Young Persons' Behaviour & Attitudes Survey (YPBAS) (2016)⁵.

Girls are less likely to participate in extra-curricular sport

In the CSPPA research, 2018, in post primary schools, a higher proportion of males than females reported participating in extracurricular sport at least once per week (65% males vs 50% females). Among post primary pupils, males were more likely to participate in sport outside of school than females at least once per week (52% males vs 47% females).

Girls participation declines with age and pathway progression

CSPPA 2018 also found that 11% of males and 14% of females reported that they were involved at a recreational level. 35% of males and 29% of females were involved at a competitive level (club competitions) and 13% of males and 9% of females reported competing in performance sport (regional and national recognised standards).

The Young People and Sport In NI (2016): A response to the 2015 Young Life and Times and Kids Life and Times surveys⁶, Sport NI, it is noted that the available evidence consistently shows that participation in sport reduces with age. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent amongst young people. At all of the major transition points from primary school to secondary school, from GCSEs to A Levels, and from secondary to tertiary education young people tend to drop out of sport. If this pattern of behaviour is to be reversed, it follows that we need to know more about young people, their motivations, their aspirations and how they feel about sport. However the main variable that impacted on the experiences of and attitudes to sport and physical activity was respondents' gender, and this was the case in both KLT and the YLT survey. Females were much more likely than their male counterparts to think that they were

not good at sport. Sixteen-year olds, in particular 16-year old females, reported that a lack of time prevented them from taking part in more sport and physical activity.

The picture may be slightly improving generally for children and young people, but gender inequalities remain

The 2022 Ireland North and South Report Card on Physical Activity⁷ awarded a C minus grade for overall physical activity in children and teens across the whole island, representing a slight improvement on the D grade awarded in 2016. Physical activity grades also improved for 'School' (C minus) and 'Physical Education' (D), while other indicators remained unchanged, and others yielded inconclusive results. Physical activity levels in children and teenagers across Ireland and Northern Ireland have improved slightly over the past eight years but not all children and teens have an equal chance to be active, a new Active Healthy Kids Report Card has found. The Ireland North and South Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Adolescents has found a slight improvement in overall physical activity levels across the island of Ireland since 2016 but has also identified a number of inequalities pertaining to gender, age, socioeconomic background and disability.

Indeed the Children's Sport, Participation and Physical Activity 2022 data will be published soon which may further inform of any changes.

Women's participation is lower and declines with age and reduces according to social class, education attainment level and disability.

In 2021/22, The Continuous Household Survey⁸ recorded that more than two out of five adults (45%) had participated in sport at least once within the last year (excluding walking), while almost two out of every five adults had participated in sport over the last 4 weeks (37%). This was impacted by COVID 19 both in survey methodology and results and so comparison with previous years is inhibited, Females were less likely to have taken part in sport at least once within the last year than males (37% and 53% respectively). Similarly, when looking at participation rates over the previous four weeks, just under a third of females (31%) stated that they had taken part in sport compared to over two-fifths of all males (43%).

The Sport and Physical Activity Survey (SAPAS) carried out in 2010⁹, examined the extent to which adults had achieved the recommended 150 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity per week (i.e. activities that raise the breathing rate). It highlighted that only 35% of women across Northern Ireland achieve the recommended 30 minutes of physical activity, 5 times a week. Women's participation in sport peaks in young age groups (16-29 – 43%) and declines with age (50+ - 18%). Participation is significantly greater among women in higher social classes, among those who work or study and women who have a university degree. Women with a disability also participate less than non-disabled women.

The SAPAS survey found that men are significantly more active than women. On average, men spend 557 minutes per week engaging in at least moderate intensity activities, compared to an average of 394 minutes among women. There are also striking differences when analysing the kinds of physical activity carried out. The major source of women's physical activity is in the home, with 213 minutes spent on average undertaking activities in this domain that raise the breathing rate (compared with 132 minutes for men). Within the home, housework is the most important contributor for women (180 minutes compared with 41 minutes among men). With regard to sport specifically, the amount of time that men participate in at least moderate intensity sporting activities is almost double that for women (116 minutes compared to 59 minutes per week). This gap is evident in all age groups; for example, men under the age of 30 participated in 178 minutes in sport per week, compared with 89 minutes for women. The SAPAS survey indicated that women are less satisfied with sports provision in their local area than men (57% compared with 67%).

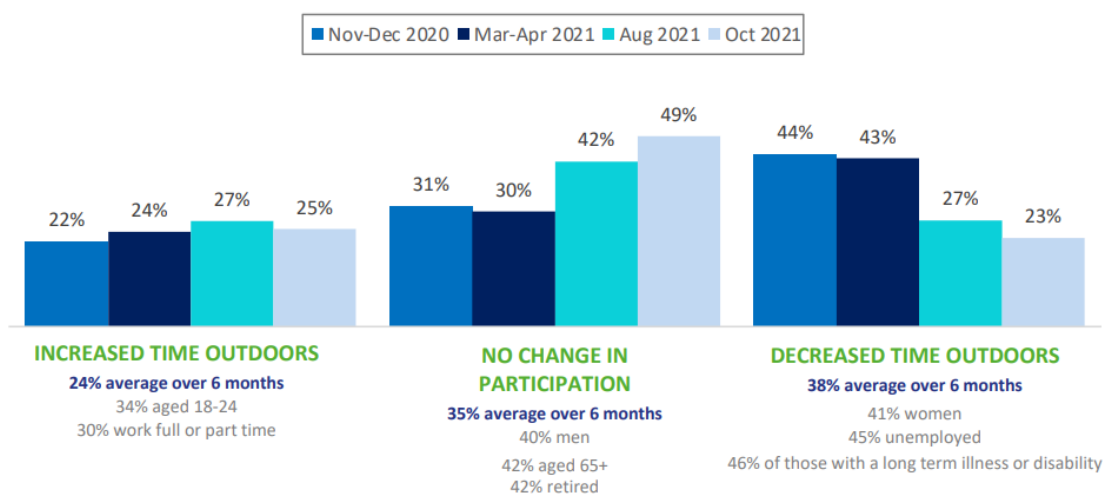
Females are choosing recreational and less sport options

Females were less likely to have taken part in sport at least once within the last year (55%) than males (62%), according to NISRA's Continuous Household Survey 2021/22. A higher proportion of males participated in most sports listed in the survey, however, women were more likely than men to have participated in keep-fit, aerobics, dance exercise, yoga, weight training (35% compared to 22%). The sports where there were no significant differences between males and females included swimming or diving, gaelic games (football, hurling, camogie) and basketball or netball.

Women were taking less visits to the outdoors on 2020/21

However women, unemployed people and people with a long term illness or disability were more likely than average to state that they were taking fewer visits than previously, according to the Outdoors Recreation Northern Ireland, Outdoors in Northern Ireland, Results of population survey, November 2020 to October 2021, by 56 Degrees Insight¹⁰.

Figure 16 – Frequency of visits to outdoors compared to this time last year – overall and by key demographics



Q2. Compared to this time last year, has the frequency that you spend your leisure time out of doors, away from home, increased, decreased or stayed the same? All respondents (Nov-Dec:2,009, Mar-Apr:2,032, Aug:1,007, Oct:1,000)

Women are under-represented in sports club participation which declines as age increases

A recent Sport Northern Ireland (2019/20) Northern Ireland Sports Club Survey¹¹ found that female participation within sports clubs across the region current sits at 35%, with a high of 50.1% amongst pre-school children and a low of 27.1% among the over 50's. The steepest drops in club participation were observed in the transitions from post-primary aged young people to the 19-49 age bracket (10.5%) and Pre-School to Primary School aged children (8.6%). Average female club participation declines as age increases. The 2019 survey returns represent a total of nearly 130,000 sports club members, an average of 154 members per club, split 65% male, 35% female. Female representation is particularly low in the 19 to 49 age bracket where the split is 71% male, 29% female.

There is a lack of representation of women in the coaching workforce

Within the sporting workforce, including coaches, officials and volunteers, in Northern Ireland, there is an under-representation of females. Women represent just 19.5% of the overall sports coaching workforce according to the Sport NI Sporting Clubs Programme – Year One Progress Update (2018)¹², with this number further reduced within performance sport environments to 16.8% of coaches operating within senior international programmes and 10% of coaches from Northern Ireland who coach World, Olympic or Paralympic medallists (Sport Northern Ireland (2019). Performance Pathway Coach Mapping¹³).

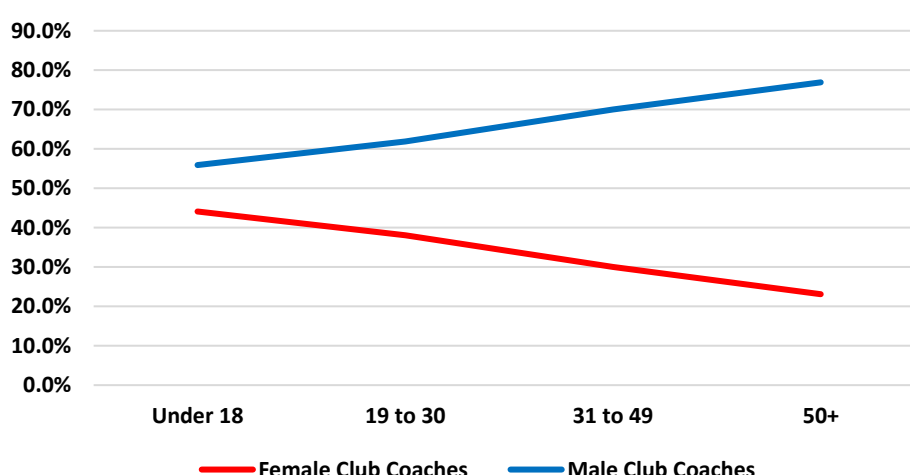
The Sporting Club Survey returns show there are 10,559 coaches, an average of 13 coaches per club, split 69% male 31% female. Nearly a third (32%) of all coaches are men in the 31-49 age bracket whilst women in this age bracket account for only 11% of all coaches. A similar picture is found in the over 50s age bracket. Overall, the gender ratio for coaches is 2.2 males for every 1 female. This is not dissimilar to the ratio of males to females in membership (2.4 to 1) and in volunteers (1.6 to 1). Many sports are proactive in facilitating women into coaching, however, the result here suggests more needs to be done across sport generally. The survey results show a total of 23,899 volunteers across the 710 clubs that supplied information on volunteering, of which 62% are male, 38% female.

Research consistently identifies that the percentage representation of women within the coaching workforce reduces as the level of the pathway increases, and this is mirrored by higher levels of female drop-off within coach education as the levels of qualification progress, according to Norman, L., Rankin-Wright, A.J., and Allison, W. 2018, “It’s a concrete ceiling – it’s not even glass” ¹⁴.

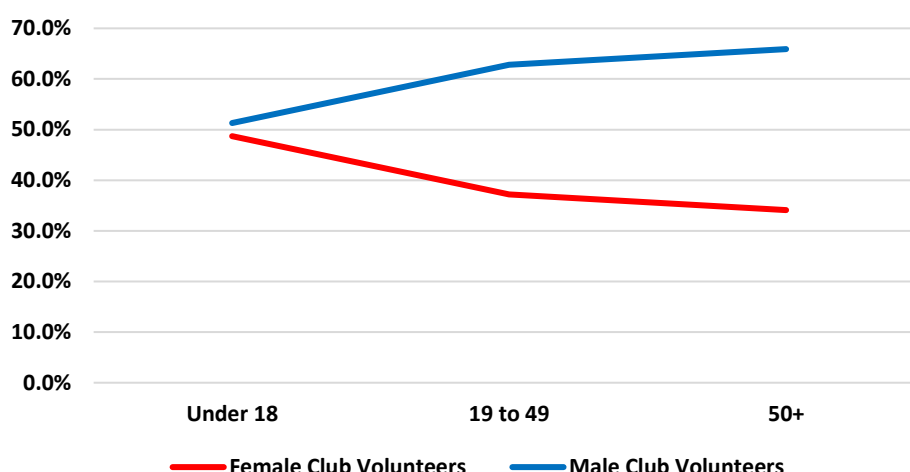
The female club coach and volunteer population declines with age

The 2020 Sport NI Club Survey ¹⁵ also found that the club volunteer population is 37.7% female, with females making up 30.8% of the club coaching workforce. A consistent trend is observed within these populations when dissected by gender and age illustrated by *Fig.1* and *Fig. 2*. Within both club coaching and club volunteering, as with club membership, females become increasingly under-represented as age increases.

Club Coach Gender Trends



Club Volunteer Gender Trends



There is a lack of representation in board positions

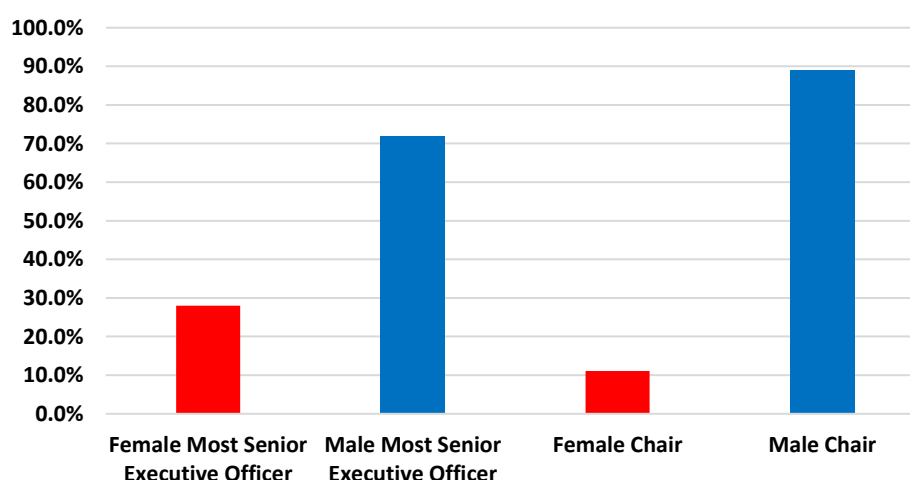
In 2020, three out of 36 boardroom level positions were held by women in the Irish Football Association, Ulster GAA and Ulster Rugby. Indeed, the Deloitte 2020, Data-driven change: Women in the boardroom - A global perspective, Sixth edition¹⁶ notes the under-representation of women globally.

There is an under-representation in performance roles and leadership positions

The performance versus development statistics highlight parallels with the coaching equivalents between performance and participation/development, as is also the case in the Northern Ireland equivalents. The most senior performance sport role within 17.6% of the sporting organisations currently invested by Sport Northern Ireland's Sporting Winners Programme¹⁷ is female. Within Sport Northern Ireland's Sporting Clubs¹⁸ investment, the most senior participation/development role is female in 38.9% of the sporting organisations. Across both investments 28% of sporting organisations has a female as the most senior executive officer, and 11.1% of board Chairs are female. As a result of the scale of the Northern Ireland sporting system, there is a cross-over within some of these roles between post-holders, as outlined in Fig.3.

Fig.3

Sporting Organisation Senior Leadership



There are notable high performance successes to be celebrated

However, for the first time in the Commonwealth Games history there were more medal events for women than men in Birmingham 2022. These demographics are reflected in the Northern Ireland Team, with women in the majority for the first time and over 10% of the team were made up of para-athletes and Alison Moffitt-Robinson the first female Chef de Mission. Other notable achievements were Ireland Women's hockey were finalists and silver medallists at the 2018 Women's Hockey World Cup and competed at the 2020 Olympic tournament, with panel member and team manager, Arlene Boyles. Northern Ireland Women's Football Team were the lowest UEFA-ranked team (27th) to qualify for the European Championships Finals in England in 2022. In September 2021 it was announced that the senior women's team would be adopting a full-time professional set up ahead of Euro 2022. Panel member, Ciara Mageean's recent time's of 3:56.63 took 2.22 seconds off Sonia O'Sullivan's 27-year-old Irish mark in September 2022. She is a three-time European Athletics Championship medallist at the event, with bronze in 2016 and silver in 2022 outdoors, and bronze in 2019 indoors. Ciara Mageean won also silver at the 2022 Commonwealth Games. Panel Member, Kelly Marie Gallagher MBE was the first athlete from Northern Ireland to compete in the Winter Paralympics and won Britain's first ever Winter Paralympic gold medal during Sochi 2014.

Summary of Insights

What are the barriers and lived experiences of women and girls?

Girls enjoyment of sport lowers at post primary school

According to the 2019/20 Young Persons' Behaviour and Attitudes Survey²⁰, the proportion of girls who said they enjoyed sport and physical activity a lot, dropped from 65% in Year 9 to 43% by Year 12, compared with 65% of Year 12 boys.

The Physical Activity, Sport and Physical Education in Northern Ireland School Children: A Cross-Sectional Study²¹ by Sinead Connolly noted females reported higher PA enjoyment scores when compared with males at primary school, there were significant differences in social support from friends between males and females across both school levels, but no differences in family support between genders.

Negative experiences of PE discourage girls and women

Indeed studies have shown that negative experiences during PE are a strong factor in discouraging participation for girls along with issues of body image (European Commission. 2010. Sport and Physical Activity. Special Eurobarometer²²). A number of issues have emerged of tight, ill-fitting uniforms which were considered major barriers to girls participating in school sport, and concerns about image and relationships with peers led to a greater interest in non-active leisure (Allender et al cite: Porter, S. 2002. Physical Activity: An Exploration of the Issues and Attitudes of Teenage Girls. London: Scott Porter Research and Marketing²³; Coakley, J & White, A. 1992. 'Making decisions: gender and sport participation among British adolescents', Sociology of Sport Journal, 9: 20–35²⁴; Orme, J. 1991. 'Adolescent girls and exercise: too much of a struggle?', Educational Health 9: 76–80²⁵). Other issues noted include the disruptive influence of boys during physical education classes, the perception that participating in sport may appear 'butch' or masculine, the notion that school sports are 'babyish' compared with activities such as going to the gym, and a perceived lack of female sporting role models.

Enjoyable, inclusive, teacher led gender equal PE is important

Participants of The 2019 #ActiveFitSporty How can We Encourage Females to Participate and Flourish in Sport and Physical Activity? by Jessica Rutherford²⁶, felt an individual's experience of physical education very much depended on the teacher and so it is vital that teachers are upskilled in different sports and educated on the importance and impact of physical education for young people.

Females value inclusive friendships, growth in personal and skill development and health

The 2019 #ActiveFitSporty How can We Encourage Females to Participate and Flourish in Sport and Physical Activity? by Jessica Rutherford, explored the perceived values of participating in sport and physical activity. Participants valued the social aspect of participating, the friendships they develop and feeling a sense of inclusion and belonging. A second value was developing life skills such as resilience, calculating risk and loyalty. Many mentioned how this prepares you for adult life both personal and employment. Along with these two values, participants expressed health benefits such as improved fitness, increased strength and improved mobility as important values of their participation in sport and physical activity. A significant number of participants also detailed how they valued self-accomplishment, breaking personal records and intrinsic motivation. These values correlated with the self-determination theory in that many participants did not have parental support and instead their own drive sustained their participation in sport and physical activity.

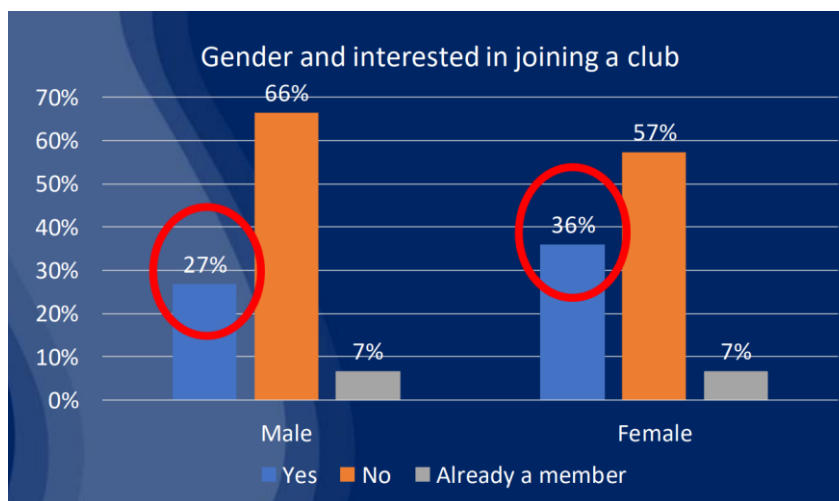
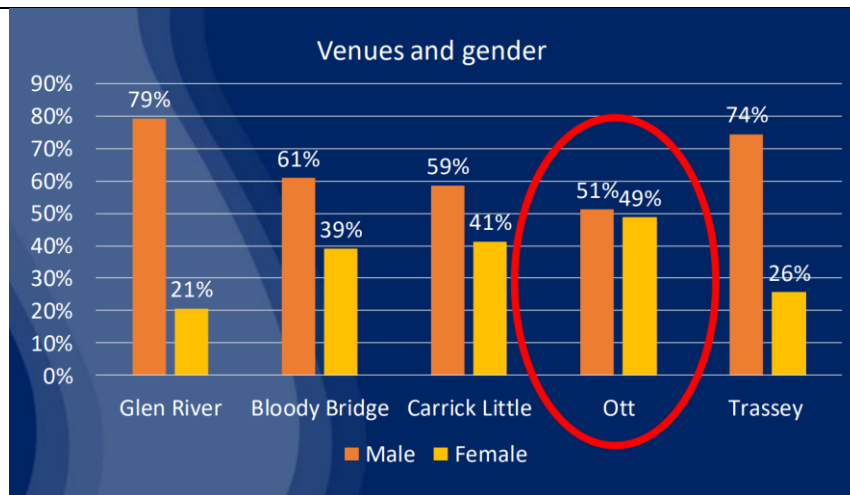
Women are motivated by connection to the natural environment

In a recent study to understanding outdoor sports participants' motivations and connectedness to nature in Northern Ireland, November 2022, participants were asked to complete the Nature Connectedness Index (NCI; Richardson et al., 2019) ²⁷. The NCI contains six items, which use a weighted scoring system with overall scores ranging from 0 to 100 (100 indicating the highest level of connectedness to nature). A mean score of 62.68 (SD=22.1) was found for the current study in 2022. Gender (female n=197, male n=233) demonstrated a significant and visible difference between females (M=66.89, SD=20.73) and males (M=58.74, SD=22.53) with females scoring higher in relation to motivation of connectedness to the countryside.



Indeed anecdotally, a recent successful mental health campaign features the Menopausal Mermaids demonstrates the power of connectedness to nature and community and the organic rise in sea swimming in the Atlantic for women. They note “Our group is a mix of diverse women from different backgrounds with a combination of lived experiences from retirement, mental health issues, bereavement, illness and more. By coming together, we collectively support each other and offer an outlet to talk without judgement, as well as keeping active in the most exhilarating way and having a good laugh.” They note the positive impact on wellbeing and mood; and exercise can also help people with depression and anxiety. It relieves stress, improves memory, helps you sleep better, and boosts your overall mood. This is part of the ‘Small Moves, Big Changes’. <https://covidwellbeingni.info>²⁸.

In the Sport NI, Mourne Users’ Survey²⁹, which provides a greater understanding into demographics, training needs and attitudes of those accessing the Mourne Mountains (especially following the lockdown). Women tend to use the Ott Track to the Saddle, with less elevation, while using significantly less the other goal focused and challenging routes.



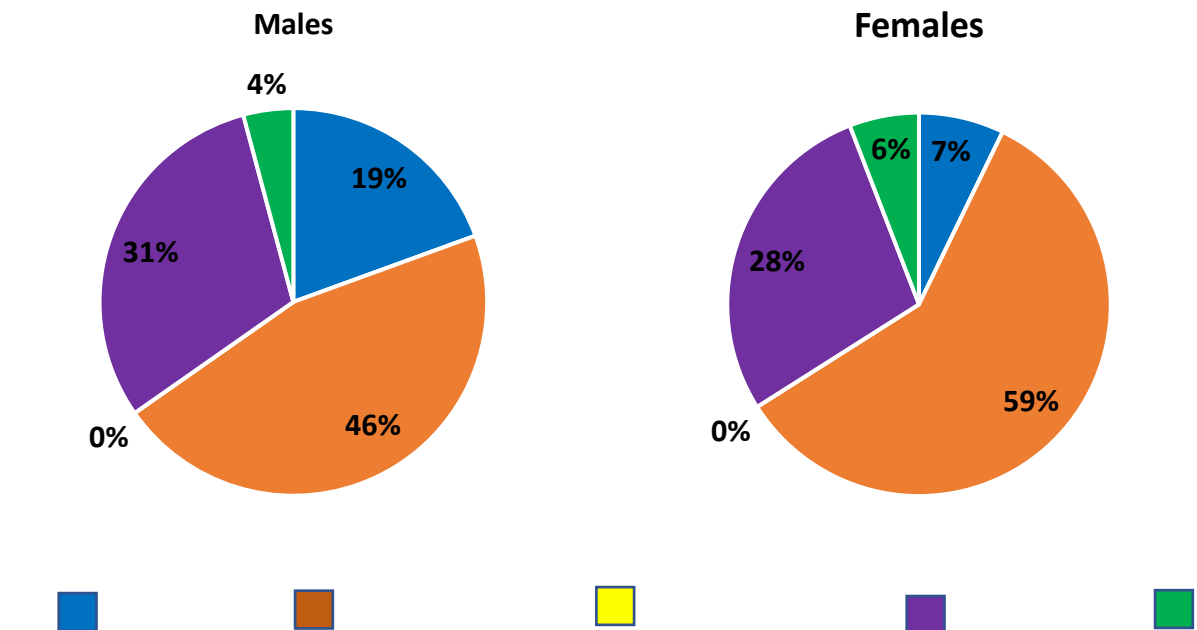
Women are more likely to avail of safety training before accessing the outdoors

The Get Wet Stay Active Project Monitoring Report, November 2022³⁰ is noteworthy in that 68% of the respondents to the survey were female. The tutors running the programmes have also commented on the high proportion of females who are attending the training. Anecdotally there may be a greater willingness amongst females to avail of safety training before use of the outdoors. This leads to inferences as to barriers to participation.

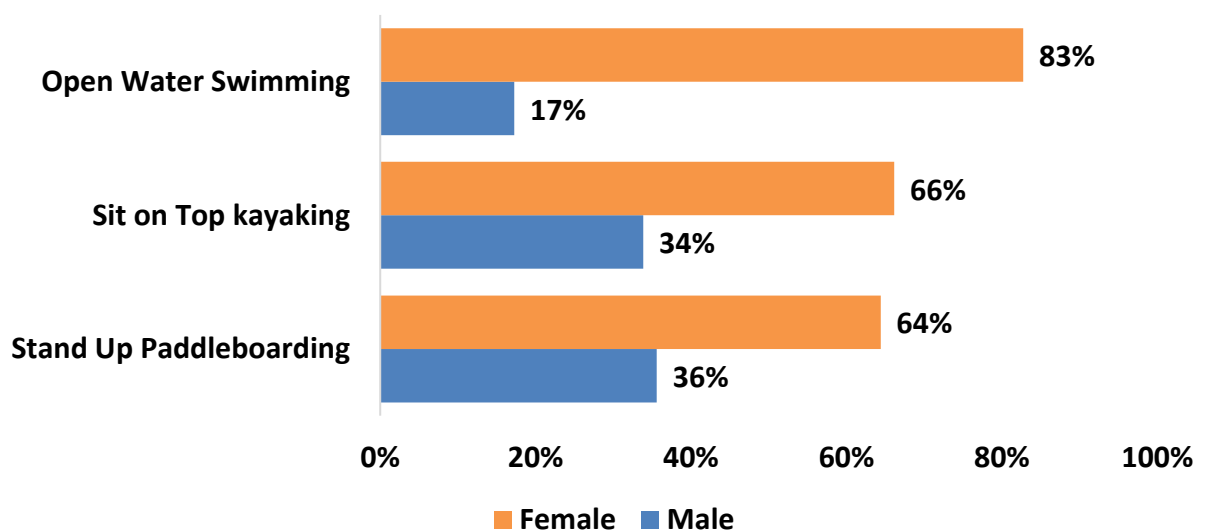
Women are more likely to engage through social media and while they are attracted to informal outdoors activities, they are very keen to join a club

The Get Wet Stay Active Project Monitoring Report, November 2022 found a greater engagement by women through social media outreach than men.

Figure 6: Gender and how respondents found out about the programme



Gender and activity taken



However, as can be seen from Figure 11, while growth has been informal, a significant majority of respondents indicated that they were interested in joining a club (61%), but this increased to 66% for females and reduced to 51% for males. This presents a great opportunity for the NGB's.

Informal sport and an empowering coach is attractive

The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation Study into Women and Informal Sport in 2011³¹ consider informal sport to include: the logistics and flexibility in terms of location time and fees; the atmosphere: informal being more friendly and sociable and; the ability to participate at own pace to achieve individual goals: a lack of pressure to perform. The report notes that women find informal sports attractive because of the no-pressure environment with enjoying participation a priority over performance. It is suggested that pressure to perform and show skill is a key factor in putting women off formal sport. It also found that many women found informal sports to be more convenient, as it can be arranged to coincide with free time, rather than conforming to a competitive timetable. Therefore, informal sport can be more suitable, for instance, for "a working mother". The biggest factor in participating in informal sports seems to be the social aspect. The gym is seen to be isolating, but with informal sport participants can take part within a group of mixed ability. They also found that a lot of satisfaction with informal sport came from a motivational coach, who shows 'passion and enthusiasm' can lead and have sports/fitness knowledge, can 'facilitate the social approach', and is organised and use social media to promote the activity and develop relationships with participants.

Motivation is high to take part but is driven by values, however self-confidence is low, therefore support from coaches is required and sustained participation should be supported in a quality club environment and visible role models

In the (2019) Sport NI, Active Fit and Sporty Participation Survey³², investigated the theory that a positive and healthy coach-athlete or leader-participant relationship is essential for the holistic development of all involved. Relationships between coaches/leaders and participants were analysed to allow for a better understanding of how interventions like the Active, Fit & Sporty projects (of varying length and content) can assist in enhancing the wellbeing of the female population. A series of pre and post questionnaires and focus groups examined psychological variables and elements of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). The psychological variables are: perceived autonomy support (i.e. the level of support from the respondent's coach/ instructor or as a leader ability to be supportive); motivation to involve females in sport; mental well-being; and basic psychological needs satisfaction in terms of autonomy, competence and relatedness; and based on the Self-determination theory, competence, autonomy and relatedness needs must be satisfied for an individual to function at an optimal level.

The 'Participation Survey'³² with over 1,100 responses, and 300 contributing to further research and focus groups. This survey asked respondents how best Sport NI, in conjunction with partners and the wider public, could encourage more women and girls to take part in sport. The report provided insights into club membership and the type of sports respondents participate in. Subsequent to the survey, Sport NI facilitated a series of focus group sessions across Northern Ireland. Designed to help Sport NI plan for the future of female sport and understand how in conjunction with partners and the wider public, Sport NI can encourage more females to participate and flourish in all aspects of sport, as a participant, volunteer, coach or leader, high performing athlete or an employee working in the field of sport or physical activity.

The aims and objectives of these focus groups were to consider: What are the perceived barriers to female participation in sport and physical activity? What are considered the values of staying active? How can we increase female participation in sport and physical activity? Is there a relationship between being physically active and mental health and wellbeing? Headline findings from the project level research demonstrate that the pre activity survey shows that motivation for sport was high and wellbeing average and indicated a shortfall in self-reported confidence. The post activity survey results show motivation for participating in sport was high and higher among those participants who had attended sports lessons (coaching). More autonomy support from coaches and leaders resulted in higher

motivation. The project level focus groups showed that participants felt more confident after taking part in the activity, were more resilient, and felt supported and stronger both physically and mentally. The creation of the right environment was key to sustained involvement in sport, including having the right skilled coach/instructor leading the activity. Headline findings from the online survey include: A need for more mental health wellbeing/body image Interventions because 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. 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. The development of more opportunities for social and recreational sport and/or physical activity is a factor that would encourage and sustain participation.

Women and girls are inclined to be more active if they are a club member. Additional support to Governing Bodies may be needed on how to recruit and retain members may increase club membership and therefore increase activity levels for women and girls. These findings broadly align with recent insights based on Continuous Household Survey datasets.

Headline findings from the focus groups found: Women and girls value the social aspect of participating, the friendships they develop and feeling a sense of inclusion and belonging. A high value is placed on developing life skills such as resilience, calculating risk and loyalty. Participants expressed health benefits such as improved fitness, increased strength and improved mobility as important values of their participation in sport and physical activity. A significant number detailed how they valued self-accomplishment, breaking personal records and intrinsic motivation. Participants shared how participating gave them a feeling of mental release in that it positively affected their mood by temporarily clearing their head of thoughts and stresses. Many described extremely positive feelings post physical activity - the “feel-good” factor. With age, participants have become more aware of the physical and mental benefits of participating in sport and physical activity and many claimed this had now become the main reason for their participation.

It also found that young people face conflicting role models from other avenues outside of sport, such as fashion and music, which can detract from their participation in sport and physical activity. A role model does not necessarily have to be an elite sportsperson and that often there are role models closer to home such as parents and siblings. Those from rural areas described the challenges they faced such as lack of choice of sports, transport issues and social isolation. A lack of confidence and negative body image are significant barriers, particularly for adolescent girls going through puberty, mothers and older women.

The societal role of women emerged as a barrier - women tend to put themselves last and place priority in traditional roles such as caring for children, caring for others and running a household. A lack of time was described as perceived barrier – and potentially the wrong priorities. The cost of participating in sport - particularly among ethnic minorities and multiple children families. Expectation and fear of failure and concerns of looking out of place or following a programme for an extended period of time only to achieve no significant change.

Barriers can be rural isolation, lack of consideration of life changes and caring roles, cost, fear of failure and competing priorities

The 2019 #ActiveFitSporty How can We Encourage Females to Participate and Flourish in Sport and Physical Activity? by Jessica Rutherford noted that in terms of barriers, six main themes emerged from the data. Those from rural areas described the challenges they faced such as lack of choice of sports, transport issues and social isolation. A lack of confidence and negative body image appeared to be significant barriers, particularly for adolescent girls going through puberty, mothers and older women. The societal role of women was discussed as a barrier in that women put themselves last and tend to

place priority in traditional roles such as caring for children, caring for others and running a household. Similar to this, a lack of time was described as perceived barrier however some participants debated this explaining, they believed it was not a lack of time rather wrong priorities. Due to the wide range of sports and activities available to young people, the cost of participating in sport and physical activity was discussed as a barrier particularly among ethnic minorities and multiple children families. Finally, expectation and fear of failure tended to prevent participation in sport and physical activity due to concerns of looking out of place or following a programme for an extended period of time only to achieve no significant change.

Women have told us the solutions they want

A number of possible solutions were discussed during the focused groups of the 2019-20, Sport NI 'Participation Survey'³² which can be summarised as follows:

- Increasing opportunities for social and recreational physical activity. This includes more options of non-competitive activity where individuals can try it with no obligation to join a club or organisation.
- Focus of these opportunities should be enjoyment and friendship.
- Creating sport and physical activity programmes around the individual involved and their needs can increase participation - An athlete or person-centred approach should involve allowing participants to take ownership of the programmes, design them to suit their direct needs and ensure they feel important and valued throughout.
- Upskilling teachers – the experience of physical education depends on the teacher and so it is vital that teachers are upskilled in different sports and educated on the importance and impact of physical education for young people.
- A required culture shift from male dominated sport to a more gender equal sporting environment including improved facilities for women. Increased promotion of the sport and physical activity options available in local communities, particularly in rural areas - many participants explained they believed there are opportunities out there but they were unsure where to look.

The perception of elite and exclusive clubs is a barrier, often linked to negative PE/school sport experiences.

As already mentioned, the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation in 2011 carried out insights on perceptions of sports clubs and made the following findings. Women who are already club-members are motivated by the type of benefits a club is perceived to offer – structured training and development, and competing in events. Women who are not currently club members, however, are not at all motivated by these features. Instead, they perceive sports clubs to be elitist and exclusive. They do not perceive that sports clubs are 'for people like them' or that they cater for women of differing levels of ability. As a result, sports clubs are perceived to be intimidating. Very few women who are non-club members felt that joining a sports club would deliver them any benefit, and the vast majority said they wouldn't have the confidence to approach a club in the first place. Sports clubs need to be more inclusive, place emphasis on creating a friendly and motivating environment, and better communicate these types of benefits to women. Sports clubs are about people rather than institutions. Women are engaged with the people in their club, rather than with the club as an institution. The relationships and atmosphere in a club has a fundamental impact on the enjoyment women get from their favourite sport. One of the strongest motivations for joining a club is the opportunity to meet and socialise with like-minded women. The key driver of loyalty amongst club members is their relationship with the people in the club. Even where women were critical of the institutional elements of their club, they chose to remain at the club because of the group of people that made up the club. Sports clubs are perceived to operate with rigid rules and structures. Women don't feel that clubs offer them any control over their membership. Rather, clubs dictate the terms around what and how to pay, and when sessions are held. This lack of flexibility does not reflect the dynamics of women's lives and causes a major barrier to many women joining a club.

Women expect to be able to customise sport to fit their needs. There is significant appetite for variety in sports clubs in terms of the people, sports and fitness activities and training techniques. Both current club members and non-club members spontaneously talked about the appeal of multiple sports clubs. Women display a significant appetite for individual treatment and personal approach. Since the majority of women are motivated by fitness and fun, the perceived offer is entirely at odds with what most women actually want. Only a minority of women are motivated by training to compete. A large proportion of women are also motivated by improvement – setting and achieving their own personal goals. For the vast majority of women, the motivation to participate is fitness and fun.

Better communications, outreach and information is required

Participants of the Active Fit and Sporty study stated there needs to be increased promotion of the sport and physical activity options available in local communities, particularly in rural areas. The possibility of a sporting directory was discussed, detailing a list of opportunities for sport and physical activity, where they occur and information on how to become involved. Many participants explained they believed there are opportunities out there but they were unsure where to look.

First impressions and a welcoming club environment is critical

The 2019 #ActiveFitSporty How can We Encourage Females to Participate and Flourish in Sport and Physical Activity? by Jessica Rutherford, found that the importance of first impressions for those participating in sport and physical activity for the first time was important and this was down to creating a welcoming culture at sports clubs where anyone of any ability feels welcomed.

More enjoyable entry level activations are essential

In the 2019 #ActiveFitSporty How can We Encourage Females to Participate and Flourish in Sport and Physical Activity? by Jessica Rutherford, six main themes emerged from the data to address such barriers. Participants expressed the need for increasing opportunities for social and recreational physical activity. This includes more options of non-competitive activity where individuals can try it with no obligation to join a club or organisation. Several groups that this could focus on were mentioned such as mother and toddlers groups, pregnancy groups, post-natal mothers groups and church groups. The focus of these opportunities should be enjoyment and friendship. It was suggested creating sport and physical activity programmes around the individual involved and their needs can increase participation. An athlete or person-centred approach should involve allowing the participants to take ownership of the programmes, design them to suit their direct needs and ensure they feel important and valued throughout.

Mentors are crucial

In the case study from the Sport NI and Sported, EngageHER project³³ many of the members and all of the mentors were volunteers, which can often be a challenge, however realistic engagement plans and support at key times helped to keep the project moving forward. The mentors played a crucial role in this project, by providing one-to-one support on the ground and offering a sounding board for members' ideas and plans.

Cultural and societal issues must be overcome in relation to the sporting workforce

A review of literature of relating to the deployment and development of women within the sporting workforce, in particularly relating to coaching and coach development, has identified a number of barriers and challenges. In the main, these relate to the environment and deep rooted culture within sporting organisations and broader society. These challenges and potential solutions to them are summarised through the following quote: 'While it is important that common challenges, barriers and potential solutions to address female under-representation within the sporting workforce are identified, it is also important to note that both men and women have different individual experiences and as such not every person of the same sex will face the same challenges or be aided by the same solutions. The

most prominent and common challenges and barriers are: Culture; Education & Development; Role Design, Recruitment & Development; and Personal.

Female coaches need mentoring, flexibility and support

We understand from Tandy Haughey that the 2021 Female Leadership Survey (UUJ), currently in draft stages, noted the importance of mentoring, the development of Confidence and the support required from NGB and LA. The issues noted were: Balancing Coaching with Conflicting Demands, Funding, Bureaucracy and Education and Development Structures.

Deep rooted culture is a barrier for women

A review of literature of relating to the deployment and development of women within the sporting workforce³⁴⁻³⁷, in particularly relating to coaching and coach development, has identified a number of barriers and challenges. In the main, these relate to the environment and deep rooted culture within sporting organisations and broader society. Evidence suggests that deep cultural change is required to address challenges that negatively impact upon the representation and progression of women sports coaches. Cultural challenges identified within the literature include discrimination, unconscious bias, institutional biases and protectionism, women coaches being under valued and undermined, unequal assumptions relating to competence linked to a frequently misguided perspective that equates the best athlete to become the best coach, and under appreciation of female performance. Female coaches have also encountered disparaging homophobic comments and are hampered by a cultural association with domesticity and child care, which may in turn contribute to expectations that coaching roles will be fulfilled by a male. While there are often no structural or systematic barriers for females coaches to access qualifications at the early stages of a coach education pathway, or indeed children's and participation coaching contexts, there are significant levels of female drop-off as qualification levels progress. Two main factors identified in explanation of this trend are the coaches' perceived return on investment and the coaches' actual, or anticipated, experience of coach education opportunities.

Advanced level coach education qualifications in a number of sports can involve significant cost to the coach. While these costs also impact upon the ability of male coaches to engage in advanced levels of coach education, there are less paid coaching roles within female sport than in male sport which reduces the opportunity of a female coach to recoup their initial investment as instances of females coaching male athletes/teams is reasonably low. There is a reduced purpose for education without opportunity for appropriate deployment. This lower level of uptake on advanced level coach education has a knock-on effect in respect of the Coach Educator workforce who deliver coaching qualifications as these qualifications are generally required in order to become a Coach Educator. This is a significant factor in limiting the proportion of this workforce who are female, described as a critical point of progression. Through the levels of coach education courses delivered by females, there is an even steeper drop off than in Coach Educators than in coaching. The lack of gender balance within the coach education workforce and progressively fewer females as the levels progress, may reinforce the notion of coaching as a male domain. With such as prominence of male coach educators by deployed, their approach, behaviours and attitudes are important factors in the experiences of the women participating in the courses they lead. The traditional structure of formal coach education, tends to create separate chunks of learning and assessment that some female coaches perceive as 'cliff edges'. Evidence suggests that female coaches may feel more supported through a connected 'learning journey' with 'cross-road' type decisions about where they go next discussed with a supportive representative of their governing body, and more on-going learning opportunities. There is also a view that the homogenous nature of the coach education workforce may increase expectations that coaches' coach in a fixed style in order to pass the course, without the opportunity to explore alternative coaching philosophies. While these flaws in coach education compromise professional development support for female coaches, they can also negatively impact upon the development of male coaches. It is important to note that a number of governing bodies in Northern Ireland are already exploring or implementing modern approaches to coach learning that

embrace informal and continuous opportunities. Many coaches within the Northern Ireland sporting system are stretched and often fulfil more than one individual coaching role. This appears to reduce the representation of women in the coaching workforce as it is common for a male to fulfil multiple coaching roles, but it is currently uncommon for a female to do so. While inappropriately high levels of workload are not good for the retention and wellbeing of any coach regardless of gender, this appears to disproportionality impact upon women in coaching. The common over-commitment required and lack of boundaries which result on everything else in a coaches' life being 'put on hold' are particularly prevalent in the high performance environment. The limited scale of the performance system in Northern Ireland contributes to higher levels of 'multiple-jobbing'. Designing roles in a way that amplifies this or circumstantial influences causing this have a greater level of negative impact upon female coaches. (Norman, L. (2010). Feeling Second Best: Elite Women Coaches' Experiences. *Society of Sport Journal*. 27 (1), 89-104. Norman, L. (2014). A Crises' of Confidence: Women Coaches' Responses to their Engagement in Resistance. *Sport, Education and Society*. 19 (5), 532-551³⁸).

Coaching appointments are frequently recruited through informal processes, with research suggesting that these benefit male candidates. A contributory factor in this is an over-representation of male recruiters/managers combined with a sub-conscious bias to 'recruit someone like me'. Male control within sport, the influence of social networks and lack of transparent recruitment processes are all identified as negatively impacting upon the recruitment of female coaches. If female coaches are recruited, evidence suggests that challenges such as being given fewer opportunities to lead programmes than male counterparts, being excluded from planning, and 'bottlenecks' of opportunities as they progress through the coaching pathway. As a result of challenging environments, female coaches can feel the need to work harder than their male equivalents to prove competence and can have challenging relationships with male colleagues. Lower levels of integration can heighten can coach 'burn out', especially in females.

Research suggests that, on average, higher levels of self-efficacy, intention and interest in becoming a Head Coach exist among male coaches. Conversely, lower levels of self-confidence, self-efficacy and self-belief as a coach are reported by females. This can lead to female coaches' self-selecting out of roles due to feelings of inferiority, while the masculine dominated coaching culture can erode motivation and self-assurance among female coaches. Coaching can be an isolated domain for many, this appears to be particularly apparent among female coaches who report lower feelings of belonging and higher feelings of isolation. Many of these challenges may be linked to the cultural challenges outlined earlier in this document.

Personal and family circumstances are frequently cited as a barrier to females engaging in coaching roles, reinforcing the cultural association with domesticity and childcare. It is important to recognise that females, as with males, each have individual circumstances and that it is over-simplistic to draw conclusions on the basis of females coaches as one homogenous group. That said, evidence suggests that in potential 'over-commitment' coaching roles, such as the high performance environment, female coaches are likely to be younger, less likely to be married, less likely to have children and less likely to have a fulltime position. They are also less likely to coach male athletes/teams, more likely to have a related degree and are more likely to have national or international experience as an athlete. There is a clear link to coaching role design here, in designing opportunities that accommodate the life circumstances of coaches where possible. This also highlights that female coaches currently seem to require higher levels of qualification to secure high performance roles and that the personal circumstances of some female coaches do not stop them from operating in potential 'over-commitment' roles.

While many of these challenges and barriers relate to the performance coaching environment as a result of an increased research focus on this environment and a greater levels of underrepresentation within

performance contexts, some many translate to varying degrees to the participation and children's domains. As a result is also important to consider these barriers in the broader coaching context, within and beyond performance sport.

Improved accessible facilities should be available for women

Due to the ever-changing culture of sport and physical activity, there is now a call for improved facilities for females. Many previously male dominated sports such as rugby and cricket have aged facilities that do not include designated areas for girls. Participants of this study felt this needs to be addressed to ensure females experience the team bonding which can occur in changing rooms on competition days.

In the Outdoor Recreation NI, People, Nature and Health NI March 2021 Report³⁹, 29% of the population stated that they do not have greenspaces within easy walking distance. Women, unemployed people, people with a disability, parents with preprimary age children, and residents of rural areas provide the lowest ratings for their local greenspaces and paths and trails. The perception of quality and accessibility of local paths and trails varied across the Northern Ireland population, tending to be lower amongst women, younger age groups, unemployed people, people with a disability and residents of rural areas.

Female Board positions need to be more accessible

The following issues have been noted in the Sport NI Governance Team as barriers to women availing of board positions within sport: restrictive pathways that prevent access to board positions given the nature of the election processes and rules; the need to embrace a more inclusive and diverse culture; the need for capacity building for women in leadership positions.

The 2015, Women In Sport, Checklist for Change: Building A Sustainable Pipeline for Gender Diversity in Sport⁴⁰ noted that Boards benefit from a more gender-diverse membership by adding to the variety of skills and experiences on offer. More women, and indeed a more diverse membership overall, can help boards be more forward-thinking and creative. Encouraging women to enter sports organisations below board level will not only help to bring fresh skills and thinking to sports management, but also bring insights on how to engage more women and girls as participants and spectators of sport.

The 2018 Women in Sport, Beyond 30%: Workplace Culture in Sport⁴¹ noted that women are significantly under-represented in senior leadership roles within the sport sector. Some of the barriers underpinning this underrepresentation include organisational culture, discrimination, established male social networks within the sector, and unconscious bias. Within the sport sector women in leadership positions can feel that they need to demonstrate greater levels of competence to develop credibility, feel excluded or isolated and undervalued, as well as sensing that sports participation ability can influence perceptions of professional performance within their role. The evidence presented suggests that this is not simply a men versus women issue, but one in which each sporting organisation should aspire to create opportunities and a supportive environment for all, regardless of background or demographics. There are noticeable parallels between the challenges and barriers identified to women within senior leadership roles in sport and those identified in respect of coaching.

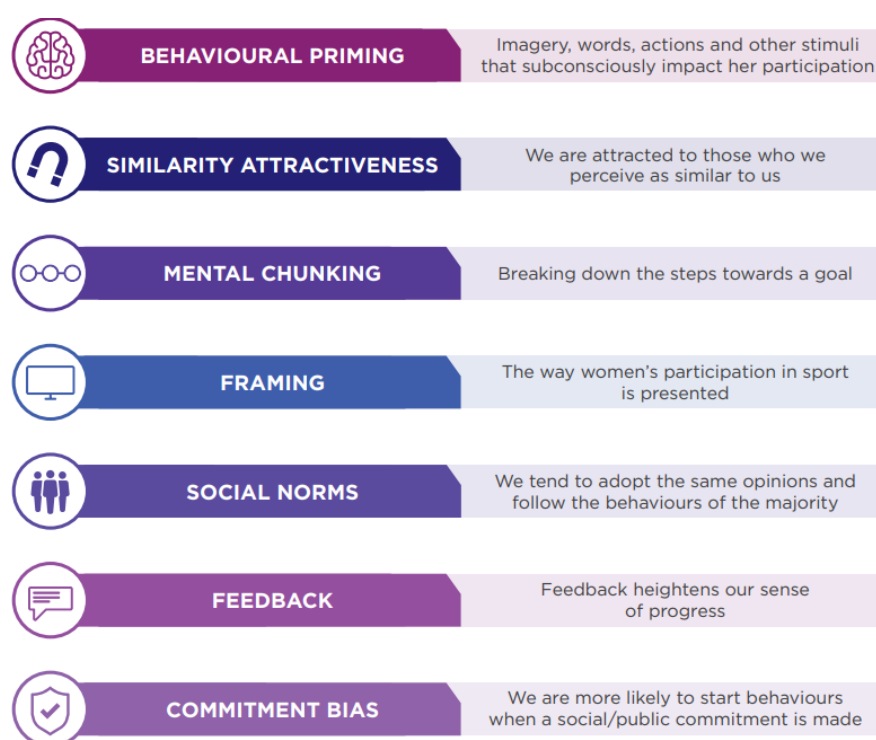
There are a lack of visible female role models

The 2019 #ActiveFitSporty How can We Encourage Females to Participate and Flourish in Sport and Physical Activity? by Jessica Rutherford, participants discussed how female sporting role models are not currently as visible as their male counterparts. It was expressed on several accounts that if you asked a young female to name their role model, they would most likely give the name of a male simply because they do not know the female equivalent. This may be because of the still existent gap in media coverage between men and women's sport. It was also discussed how young people face conflicting role models from other avenues outside of sport, such as fashion and music, which can detract from their

participation in sport and physical activity. It was noted that a role model does not necessarily have to be an elite sportsperson and that often there are role models closer to home such as parents and siblings.

Influencers impact women's participation

The 2017 Women In Sport, What Sways Women to Play Sport? Insight Report⁴² noted using influencers to unlock opportunities that positively impact women's sport behaviours. Influencers are situated within and across different layers of context in women's lives and can impact behaviour in different ways. The roles that families/peers, local communities, specific sports communities and culture/society generally play varies at different times in a woman's life and can include both triggers and barriers to her sporting participation. The research findings identified seven specific behavioural science concepts which can help make sense of how different influencers impact women's sporting participation behaviour:



Women are misrepresented and underrepresented in sports media but media campaigns with authentic representations of women have a positive impact

There has been some progress since Bowdy (2017)⁴³, measured 90 percent of sports television hours have been devoted to men's sports, whereby women's sports are viewed as less significant for media coverage. Media coverage on women's sports is only evident during the Olympics and in "feminine" sports events such as gymnastics and ice-skating. In other sports like basketball, hockey and soccer there lack positive and inspirational stories of female athletes. If they do exist, the media coverage is not available for the public's appreciation.

The EU funded five organisations; EILD (Greece); FOPSIM (Malta); West University Timisoara (Romania), Girls in Sport (Sweden), and Women in Sport (UK) to explore the visibility of women's sport in the media: Where are all the women?⁴⁴. The objective of the project was to identify how well the media represents women's sport across the five countries and from this evidence base, challenge the current situation with journalists, broadcasters, and the sector as a whole, to understand how best to drive change. Firstly, Nielsen Sport conducted primary research, to provide an up-to-date measurement of women's sport coverage in terms of both quantity and quality. More specifically it looked to uncover: Any disparities

between women's and men's coverage; Key areas where change might be needed; and Best practice in media coverage of women's sport. The key findings were that women's sport media coverage lags significantly behind that for men's sport: The narrative is the same in all five countries monitored. Despite some variation in the extent of coverage by country during the year, women's sport is significantly less visible than men's sport by, in some instances, up to 20 times and coverage does not currently reflect the extent of high-level and exciting women's sport taking place. Levels of visibility need to be elevated: In four of the five countries, women's sport coverage failed to achieve above 10% of all sport's coverage in any single monitoring period. Men's sports' reporting consistently dominates the media. Women's sport is attracting significant audiences globally: Broadcast audiences for major women's competitions have grown considerably over the past few years reflecting an expanding fanbase for women's sport. There is also evidence of increasing live audiences for women's sport at major events. This momentum provides a clear opportunity for the media to build this audience for the future.

The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation's Impact report 2012/2013: Elite Sport, Adult Women, Young Women and Children⁴⁵ shows the success of online social media campaigns such as #GoGirl; this campaign achieved celebrity endorsement and widespread media coverage, having a positive impact on the way women viewed sport and their participation in it and it was shown that schools were 'key' in encouraging girls to get active.

The Sport England 'This Girl Can Campaign' messages that there's no right way to get active – if it gets your heart rate up, it counts. It supports choice and autonomy of women to find what's right for them. The campaign celebrates active women who are doing their thing no matter how they look, how well they do it or how sweaty they get. They challenge the conventional idea of what exercise looks like and reach out to women of all backgrounds and ethnicities who feel left behind by traditional sport. 2.8 million 14-40 year old women say they have done some or more activity as a result of this campaign. 1.6 million of these say they have got back into sport or tried it for the first time as a direct result of the campaign. The Our Active People Survey shows that 150,000 more women are now active at least once a week, every week. There have been over 660,000 tweets using the #ThisGirlCan hashtag - and it's been used by women every single day since we launched above the line in January 2015. The This Girl Can films have been watched over 37 million times on YouTube and Facebook⁴⁶.

In 2020, seven in ten adults in Northern Ireland have noticed an increase in women's sport awareness in the last two years, according to new research conducted by Electric Ireland⁴⁷, while fifty-six percent of people surveyed also admitted that the overall perception of women's football has improved significantly in the same period. The research was conducted by Electric Ireland as part of the brand's partnership with the Irish Football Association and its Game Changers campaign which aims to increase levels of participation in female football and attendances at women's games.

A more realistic portrayal of women within the media by portraying a diverse range of women serves to combat the issue of intimidation felt by women who may compare themselves with the models within sports campaigns. The realistic portrayal of women and female athletes demonstrates the journey towards health and fitness and not only display the benefits of sport and exercise, but also the challenges, thereby contributing positively to psychological wellbeing.

Gender based violence in sport is an issue

A study of gender-based violence in sport⁴⁸, commissioned by the International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG), found more than a third of organisations asked had not taken action since they were last surveyed in 2013. Almost a quarter of that third said they had not taken measures to address gender-based violence because it was "not an issue" for them. And while that could be because they already had policies in place - or simply did not work directly with female athletes - those behind the report said dealing with gender-based violence should be a "priority". Gender-based violence is defined

by the European Commission as "violence directed against a person because of that person's gender or violence that affects persons of a particular gender disproportionately", and in the report commissioned by the IWG, includes sexual, psychological and physical harassment and/or abuse.

The Whyte Review⁴⁹, a commissioned investigation into allegations of mistreatment within Gymnastics, by Anne Whyte QC was recently released. Co-commissioned by Sport England and UK Sport, the Review comes following a series of serious allegations being made about the treatment of gymnasts at all levels of the sport.

Indeed more generally, The Northern Ireland Executive has directed that a Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls be developed⁵⁰, and the Executive Office is leading this work across departments, including Sport NI and DfC. A programme of engagement and research is underway to inform the co-design process, with the aim of having a draft framework for the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategy by the end of 2022. The Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Girls; the Equally Safe Strategy will identify actions to tackle all kinds of offences, ranging from micro-aggressions and misogyny, through to violent and abusive behaviour directed at women and girls precisely because they are women and girls. This includes crimes and unwanted behaviour in the physical and online world.

Menstruation is under-researched

Dina Asher Smith and Commonwealth champion Eilish McColgan, as recently as 14 November 2022⁵¹, called for research into women's health to support female athletes in reaching their peak physical fitness. Eilish also mentors young female athletes, whom she hopes will have a better and stigma-free understanding of their bodies, particularly when it comes to how menstruation affects performance. This issue has been consistently raised with several sportswomen, including tennis player Heather Watson who blamed "girl things" on her exit from the 2015 Australian Open⁵². There have been further commercial brand campaigns.

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