



# GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN

## PROFILE

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# INTRODUCTION



We're trying to introduce girls-only pathways around the country to try and meet the social needs of girls that don't want to play in a mixed environment. We recognise that girls have different needs, so if we actually want to increase participation we have to give them a choice and give them lots of opportunities to give it a go"

- HOLLY NIXON, NEW ZEALAND FOOTBALL WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT MANAGER'

Sport New Zealand's Community Sport Strategy identifies females aged 10–18 years as a target participant group.

It is essential that the needs of girls and young women are understood, so high-quality support, experiences and opportunities can be provided that help in the development of their skills and confidence contributing to a life-long love of being active.

The information in this resource is based on national and international evidence. It is intended to be a starting point to help organisations better understand the experiences and needs of girls and young women.

We recognise that the category of girls and young women aged 10–18 includes many diverse individuals with different and evolving needs. Therefore, the high-level themes identified in this resource won't be true for all girls and young women in this category all the time. We encourage organisations to build on the knowledge in this resource within their own context, to better understand the specifics of the girls and young women they are targeting.



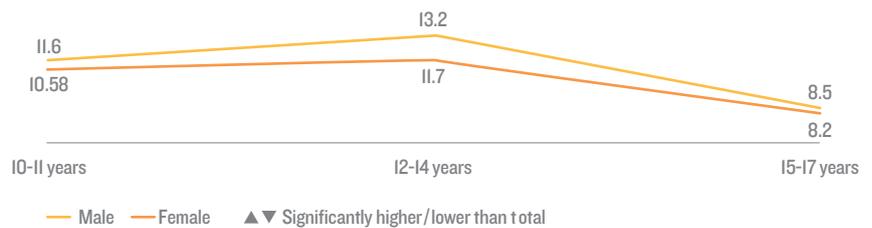
# GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PLAY, ACTIVE RECREATION AND SPORT

Overall, the proportion of young females aged 10–17 years\* participating in play, active recreation and sport in any given week is in line with young males (95% compared with 94%).<sup>2</sup>

Differences exist, however, between young females and young males in terms of how they participate.

- Young females (10–17 years) spend less time in weekly participation than young males (10–17 years) (10.31 hours compared with 11.61 hours).<sup>2</sup>
- The New Zealand Health Survey (2015/16) shows a gender gap when it comes to meeting the physical activity guidelines (53.1% males compared with 41.0% females aged 15–17 years).<sup>3</sup>
- Overall, young females (10–17 years) are just as likely as young males (10–17 years) to participate in organised activities including physical education (PE).<sup>2</sup>
- Young females (10–17 years) are less likely than young males (10–17 years) to say they enjoy PE (73% compared with 79%).<sup>2</sup>
- Young females (10–17 years) are less likely to be active informally via play than young males (10–17 years) (4.23 hours compared with 5.53 hours per week), and this difference is significant between the ages of 12 and 17 years.<sup>2</sup>

Average number of hours spent participating over the last 7 days



Note: \*the age range of 10–17 years is used for data relating to Active NZ. This includes those aged between 10 and up to 18 years.

# GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PLAY, ACTIVE RECREATION, SPORT

## We also know that different groups of young females participate in different ways.

Females in their teenage years are significantly less active.

- The amount of time spent in weekly participation peaks between ages 12–14 years before significantly declining between ages 12–14 years and 15–17 years.<sup>2</sup>

Participation rates are lower and the gender gap wider for young females from some ethnic groups, compared with all females.

- Young females (5–17 years) who identify as Asian spend significantly less time per week (2.9 hours less per week) participating in sport and active recreation than the total for all young females.<sup>2</sup>
- The gender gap in time spent being active also appears to be greater for young females (5–17 years) of Pacific and Asian ethnicity particularly those identifying as Indian, 2.9 hours less per week, and Samoan, 2.1 hours less per week, than males of the same ethnic group.<sup>2</sup>

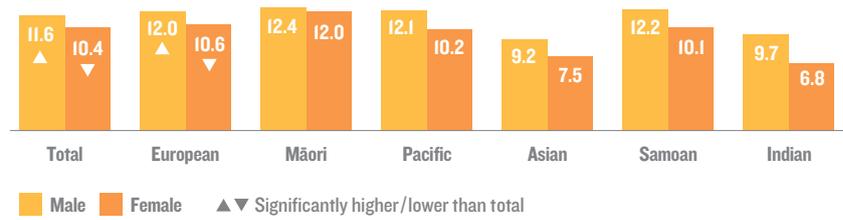
Young females perceive more barriers to being active than young males.

- Young females (10–17 years) = 3.0 barriers.
- Young males (10–17 years) = 2.5 barriers.<sup>2</sup>

A large proportion of young females want to do more.

- 71 per cent of young females (10–17 years) want to be more physically active.

Average number of hours spent participating over the last 7 days



Note: \*the age range of 10–17 years is used for data relating to Active NZ. This includes those aged between 10 and up to 18 years.

# HOW VIEWS AND EXPERIENCES OF GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN CHANGE OVER TIME

How girls and young women participate in and experience sport and what they identify as barriers, motivators and influencers change with age.

## 10 – 11 YEARS      12 – 14 YEARS      15 – 18 YEARS

### PARTICIPATION



- Top activities:
- 52% – Running, jogging or cross country
  - 47% – Playing on playground (e.g. jungle gym)
  - 43% – Playing (e.g. running around, climbing trees and make believe)

### MAIN MOTIVATIONS



### MAIN BARRIERS

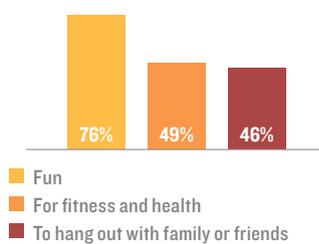
- Too busy (38%)
- Already do a good amount (27%)
- Family can't afford it (17%)

### PARTICIPATION



- Top activities:
- 60% – Running, jogging or cross country
  - 48% – Games (e.g. four square, tag, bulrush, dodgeball)
  - 43% – Walking for fitness

### MAIN MOTIVATIONS



### MAIN BARRIERS

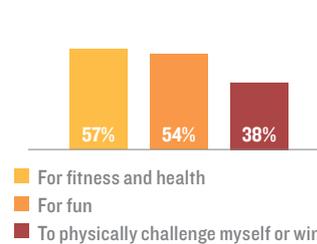
- Too busy (45%)
- I'm too tired/don't have the energy (20%)
- It's too hard to motivate myself (18%)

### PARTICIPATION



- Top activities:
- 52% – Running, jogging or cross country
  - 47% – Walking for fitness
  - 35% – Workout (weights or cardio)

### MAIN MOTIVATIONS



### MAIN BARRIERS

- Too busy (57%)
- I'm too tired/don't have the energy (34%)
- It's too hard to motivate myself (31%)

# WHAT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WANT

In reviewing a range of quantitative and qualitative research, themes have emerged regarding what girls and young women are telling us are their motivators, influencers or barriers to participating in sport and active recreation.

These themes are discussed in the sections that follow and can be used as a starting point for understanding what quality support, experiences and opportunities might look like through the eyes of girls and young women.

We've also included questions within each section, to help you consider how you might use these themes to engage with girls and young women.



# WHAT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WANT

## I WANT TO HAVE FUN AND SOCIALISE



What's really jumped out at me is how important meeting that social need is. That becomes the foundation for every event in the whole programme – it's the little stuff like knowing somebody's name, asking about their day, being genuinely interested, creating the culture in the group that we appreciate one another, that we're listening to one another's stories.<sup>7</sup>

The opportunity to have fun and socialise with friends and family while participating in play, active recreation and sport is a primary motivator for girls and young women.

- 70 per cent of young females (10–17 years) identified fun as their primary reason for taking part.<sup>2</sup>
- 42 per cent of young females (10–17 years) identified “to hang out with family and friends” as their primary reason for taking part.<sup>2</sup>
- Nearly 54 per cent of young females (10–15 years) identified friends as the most influential aspect when asked “who influences you the most when you choose what sports/active things you do”.<sup>4</sup>

As well as being a motivator, the influence of friends can also be a barrier to participation. Some girls and young women see sport and active recreation as taking time away from socialising and drop out of sport because their friends do.<sup>5,6,7</sup> Barriers relating to friends, such as “I have no one to do it with” and “my friends aren't physically active”, increase between the ages of 12 and 17 years.<sup>2</sup>

Having fun and being with friends is an integral part of sport and active recreation in the primary school years. However, many girls and young women find the competitive nature of secondary school sport means there are fewer opportunities to use sport and active recreation as a way to socialise and have fun.<sup>6</sup>

While the number of young women who identify fun as their primary motivator for taking part declines in the secondary school years (10–11 years 79%, compared with 15–17 years 54%), studies show that the “fun factor” is still important, because young women are more likely to participate if they perceive activities as fun.<sup>1,8</sup>

### Questions to guide practice:

- How might you build a programme based on the foundation of social connectedness?
- How might you co-design activities to ensure you understand what fun means to your target audience and what is on offer is fun, relevant and engaging?
- How might you engage family/whānau members to positively influence and support the participation of girls and young women?

# WHAT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WANT

## I WANT TO FEEL SAFE TO PARTICIPATE. I DON'T WANT TO FEEL JUDGED



If I could feel happy about exercise that would be really good, happy with myself. I want to be free to do what I want, to do it at my own pace and not be judged.”<sup>5</sup>

“People care what people think more at high school... but at primary school you just go with the flow or whatever... because [at high school] there's older kids and they're different age groups.”<sup>10</sup>

Young women become more conscious of their bodies, their ability and the opinions of others in their teenage years and this often affects their desire to participate.

National and international research has shown that fear of being judged by others, particularly peers, underpins many of the barriers that girls and young women identify in their play, sport and active recreation experiences.<sup>5,6,7,9</sup>

Young females (12-17 years) are significantly more likely to identify “not fit enough”, “not confident enough”, “I don't want to fail” and “I don't like other people seeing me being physically active” as barriers, compared with young men.<sup>2</sup>

Qualitative studies of young women in New Zealand have found that the way judgement manifests itself changes as girls get older.

- In primary school, sport was not seen as competitive and girls did not talk about feeling anxious, self-conscious or embarrassed about their engagement in sport. Instead, judgement tended to be more concrete (for example, direct teasing or not being picked for teams).<sup>5,6</sup>
- At secondary school, judgement became more internalised or subtle and young women reported feeling more self-conscious about not being good enough or how they looked.<sup>5,6</sup>

Fear of judgement can relate to many factors, the two main ones being appearance and ability. These are explored further in the following two sections.

### Questions to guide practice:

- What kind of conversations could you have with girls and young women about confidence, failure and judgement so as to acknowledge and explore their concerns with them?
- How might you create a supportive and welcoming environment where girls and young women feel confident and safe to participate in?
- How can you incorporate co-design into your initiative, to create the right environment for girls and young women to participate?

# WHAT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WANT

## I WANT TO KEEP FIT AND MAINTAIN MY WEIGHT



My friends asked me to go on a 2-hour hike with them, I wanted to go, felt keen but didn't want to walk next to someone while red and puffing, don't want them to judge me."<sup>5</sup>

"Well I want to do it [physical activity] but I'm so self-conscious about my weight and how big I am or whatever that I'm scared about what people would think... when I have a whole heap of people around me I don't want to do it [physical activity] in front of them."<sup>10</sup>

Being active for fitness and maintenance of weight becomes increasingly important for young women in their teenage years.

Appearance and body confidence can be hugely influential on whether girls and young women take part in certain activities, and this can be associated with a fear of judgement from others.

The number of young females who identify fitness and health as their main reason for taking part increases substantially between the ages of 8–11 years and 15–17 years (18% compared with 57%). Participating for fitness and health is the primary motivator identified by young females aged 15–17 years.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, the number who identify their main reason for participating is to lose or maintain weight increases significantly between the ages of 8–11 years (1%) and 15–17 years (22%). This is significantly higher than young males between the ages of 12–14 years (6% males compared with 10% females) and the ages of 15–17 years (6% males compared with 22% females).<sup>2</sup>

Many young women report that they:

- don't like others seeing their body while they are exercising
- feel shy exposing their body due to sport clothing requirements (particularly true for Māori, Pacifica and Asian cultures)
- feel they might be judged for being overweight (or occasionally too skinny)
- feel, or their family feels, that being active doesn't meet traditional feminine behaviours (particularly true for Asian and Pacifica cultures)<sup>5,6,8</sup>

Being aware of these underlying motivations, and creating opportunities that promote body confidence and healthy behaviour with regard to fitness and weight management, is therefore important for ensuring girls and young women feel engaged and safe to participate.

### Questions to guide practice:

- How might you use your opportunity to champion role models of all shapes, sizes, abilities and cultures?
- How might your opportunity encourage girls and young women to feel body confident?
- How might you align your messaging with the priorities of the family/whānau (for example, social connectedness, academic success, health)?

# WHAT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WANT

## I WANT TO FEEL CONFIDENT DOING WHAT I'M DOING



I feel like I'm tired, I'm behind. They tease me, come on Sarah, they tell me I should be more active. Say go Sarah, catch it. Or Sarah – we lost a point because of you – why do you have to be in our team... they talk behind their hand about me but I can see them and I can hear it..."<sup>4</sup>

Girls and young women want to be able to participate at a level that suits their ability.

What young women think counts as play, active recreation and sport, their perceived ability at that activity, and the potential to embarrass themselves in front of their peers as a result of lack of ability can influence their desire (or not) to participate.<sup>5,6,7</sup>

- Significantly fewer young females (10–17 years) agree with the statement “I am good at sport” than young males (10–17 years) (70% females compared with 78% males)<sup>2</sup>
- Confidence and competence declines with age for both young males and females. Young females (15–17 years) are significantly less likely than young males to agree with the statements:
  - “I feel confident to take part in lots of different activities” (54% females compared with 65% males)
  - “I am good at lots of different activities” (56% females compared with 70% males)<sup>2</sup>

Anxiety about ability can be linked to multiple concerns including:

- not feeling or being as good as other people and not knowing what to do when others already have well-developed skills
- looking like the odd one out or being different
- not wanting to let others down
- fear of being last or left behind.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>

The organised and competitive nature of traditional sport and PE can be highly influential in shaping girls and young women's perceptions of sport and active recreation. This factor becomes more influential in secondary school where sport becomes an activity they have to compete in, be measured and meet standards in, and for some is no longer for fun. Furthermore, some young women highlight that the presence and behaviour of young males in PE classes can increase self-consciousness and undermine their confidence to participate.<sup>5,6,7,8</sup>

This is not to say that girls and young women do not thrive in this traditional and competitive sport environment. Active NZ 2017 found that 76 per cent of young females (15–17 years) agree with the statement “I love challenging myself and trying to win.”<sup>2</sup> Thirty-eight per cent of young females (15–17 years) identified “to physically challenge myself and win” as their main reason for taking part, significantly higher than young males of the same age (29%).<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, a New Zealand study highlighted that some young women felt that school sport was not competitive enough, and others preferred mixed-sex classes because it provided the opportunity to compete against boys and young males and to challenge themselves.<sup>6</sup>

As such, providing girls and young women with the opportunity to challenge themselves at a level that suits their ability is important. For some, this will be in the traditional sport context and for others it will be without the rules, routine and pressures of competitive sport.

# WHAT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WANT

## I WANT TO FEEL CONFIDENT DOING WHAT I'M DOING continued

“

Our reputation for sport is quite high and so people get intimidated that they have to know how to do it and they have to be the best to even sign up to a team. I signed up for volleyball; we didn't get taught how to do it – no techniques or coaching. It was expected that you know how to do it.”<sup>4</sup>

### Questions to guide practice:

- How might you offer opportunities that are female-only and cater for those who don't want to participate in a mixed environment?
- How might you structure a session so participants at different levels are challenged but can still achieve?
- Have you considered how you might provide opportunities for those interested in competitive sport to compete, extend and challenge themselves?



# WHAT GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN WANT

## I WANT ACTIVITIES TO FIT AROUND MY OTHER COMMITMENTS



Exercise is time consuming. I wish it would be an easy-going thing but you need to plan for it and make time for it ... I have so much work to do to get my credits in and so I have no time. Exams are coming up and I need to focus on that.”<sup>5</sup>

“I went through a stage where I just didn’t even want to do it, it was, like I wanted to spend more time with friends and it was taking up all my time. It’s quite demanding and you kind of get to a point where you need your exam time and you need your friend time and you need to just catch up with everything else in your life... Yeah, it’s quite like overwhelming and you just kind of want a break.”<sup>6</sup>

Girls and young women don’t participate in play, active recreation and sport in isolation, they do so alongside multiple other commitments and interests, and this can be a barrier to participation.

Finding time to be active around school commitments, paid work, family responsibilities (chores and caring for family members), religious and cultural commitments, socialising with friends and other commitments can be a challenge. Many girls and young women state that being “too busy” is their primary barrier to participation. For some, they struggle to find time to participate due to an increase in other commitments, or they may simply prioritise other activities.<sup>6,2,8</sup>

- Young females (8–14 years) are significantly more likely to identify being “too busy” as a barrier than young males (8–14 years).
- For those who say they are too busy, it is: 1) school work, 2) other hobbies, and 3) other physical activity that are keeping them busy.<sup>2</sup>

For those who indicate they prefer to do other things or are too busy with other hobbies, the top response for all ages is “time with family and friends”. This increases with age, again highlighting the importance of providing opportunities to connect socially.<sup>2</sup>

In a qualitative study of young women in New Zealand, sport was noted to be a time-consuming activity, particularly when involved at a competitive level. Many young women wanted to participate but didn’t have the time and imagined they would return to physical activity once they had finished secondary school.<sup>5</sup> However, Active NZ 2017 data shows us that, once individuals drop out, numbers never return to previous rates.<sup>2</sup>

### Questions to guide practice

- How could you create an environment where girls and young women feel they have the time, place and permission to play?
- How might you support girls and young women to stay engaged during life transitions, for example, moving to high school, exams or the change of seasons?
- How might you empower young people to design and deliver experiences themselves to help keep up with changing needs and time commitments?

# APPLYING THESE INSIGHTS LOCALLY

## WE DON'T ALL WANT THE SAME THING

While the themes outlined in this resource present trends in terms of what girls and young women want from a play, active recreation and sport experience, it's not a one-size-fits-all scenario.

A young woman's participation is based on a range of personal, social and environmental factors that differ for each individual and can change from one week to the next.

As such, the themes outlined in this resource will not be relevant for all girls and young women all of the time.

These themes should be considered as a starting point when developing initiatives to encourage girls and young women to be active before seeking to establish an understanding of girls and young women within their specific context.

Our three approaches (Insights, Locally Led and Physical Literacy) provide guidance on how to develop a deeper understanding of girls and young women's needs and the environment in which they live and, therefore, they help guide development of truly participant-centred initiatives. You can find more about the Three Approaches, how they work together and how to use them in this guide, [sportnz.org.nz/three-approaches](https://sportnz.org.nz/three-approaches).



# CASE STUDIES

You can find the case studies here – [sportnz.org.nz/casestudies](http://sportnz.org.nz/casestudies)

Several New Zealand organisations use insights to develop and offer relevant and quality opportunities that encourage more girls and young women into play, active recreation and sport. We're sharing these organisations' stories through case studies that provide detailed information about the creation and implementation of these initiatives and the main factors that led to their success.



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SPNZ00011  
ISBN: 978-0-947502-82-9