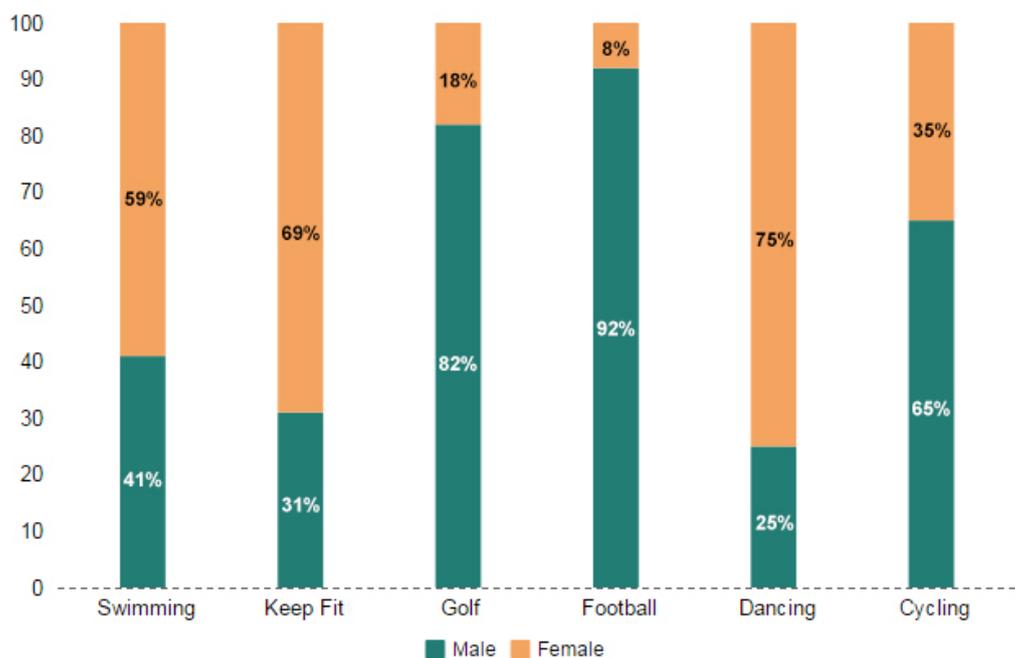


# Women in sport

## What are the important issues?

There is a lot of research into women's participation in sport. Evidence shows that women don't take part in sports as much as men. For example, Scottish evidence from 2014<sup>1</sup> shows that more men (57%) than women (46%) reported taking part in sport and exercise in the past four weeks. The same evidence shows that as girls move into their teenage years, sports participation reduces and stays lower than boys'. And many different research studies across the UK show persistently low rates of women and girls participation in sports<sup>2</sup>.

Men and women also often participate in different sports. The graph below shows the balance between men and women for those participating in a range of sports over a four week period in 2014, in Scotland<sup>3</sup>.



These lower participation rates are important for equality in sport. But they are also important because participation in sport can have a positive impact for women and girls on health and

<sup>1</sup> Active Scotland Outcomes: Indicator Equality Analysis, Scottish Government, 2015

<sup>2</sup> House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Women and Sport, First Report of 2014/15, July 2014

<sup>3</sup> Scottish Household Survey, 2014

wellbeing, self esteem and empowerment, social inclusion and integration, and opportunities to develop leadership and other skills.

## What do we know about the problem?

### Barriers to participation

There can be a range of barriers to women and girls taking part in sport:

#### 1. Experiences of PE

Research has consistently demonstrated that girls are less positive about their school experiences of physical education than boys. Schools are where most girls and young women form their relationships with sport, and any negative experiences here can influence their involvement in sport over time.<sup>4</sup> PE and school sports tend to meet the needs of 'sporty' girls, but are often unappealing to less active girls.<sup>5</sup> There can be issues around lack of choice and a strong focus on competition.

Interestingly, experiences of opportunities and facilities in later life are not so different between men and women. Data from 2014 shows that there were no differences between men and women in either use of or levels of satisfaction with local authority sports and leisure facilities<sup>6</sup>. This highlights the importance of encouraging people at an early stage.

#### 2. Self esteem, body confidence and peers

Many girls are put off participation in sport due to concerns about managing their appearance, and a growing lack of confidence. Research shows that while girls who feel self-conscious are more likely to feel they aren't good at sport and to not want to participate, girls reported feeling less self-conscious if they participated with a friend.<sup>7</sup> Research shows that some girls reduce their sporting activity as they are anxious about being rejected from their peer groups if others are not involved.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Women and Sport, First Report of Session 2014-2015, July 2014

<sup>5</sup> Getting Girls Active, Developing inspiring PE and sport through research and innovation, Youth Sport trust, Girls Active

<sup>6</sup> Active Scotland Outcomes: Indicator Equality Analysis, Scottish Government, 2015

<sup>7</sup> Increasing demand for sport and physical activity for adolescent girls in Scotland, **sportscotland**, 2003

<sup>8</sup> Girls Participation in physical activities and sport, World Health Organisation,

However, while body confidence can be a barrier, weight management can also be a real motivation factor for girls taking part in sport. And while the attitudes of friends can be a barrier, they can also be an enabler if sport is undertaken together.

### **3. Opportunities**

Discussion with pregnant women undertaken as part of this research found that the main barrier to participation was lack of opportunities – with many feeling pregnant women were encouraged towards more sedentary or gentle sporting opportunities.

### **4. Sporting system issues**

Equality in sport is not just about participation. There are wider structural issues about how the sporting system in Scotland supports both women and men to participate. Most evidence about these inequalities is at a UK wide level. There are issues around:

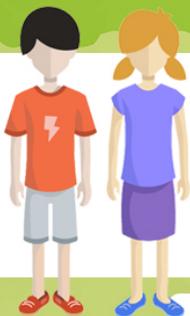
- availability of facilities for training and playing sport;
- the variety of sports on offer to girls at school;
- finance – including sponsorship and prize money;
- media coverage; and
- female role models – as elite sportswomen, coaches and managers<sup>9</sup>.

---

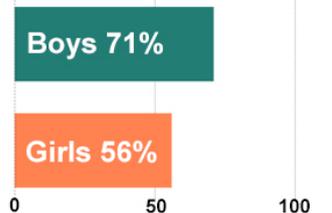
<sup>9</sup> House of Commons, Culture, Media and Sport Committee, Women and Sport, First Report of Session 2014-2015, July 2014

# Taking part in sport...

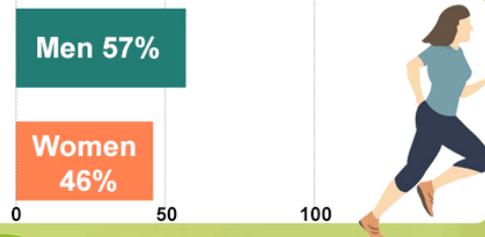
(Source: 2014 Scottish Household Survey)



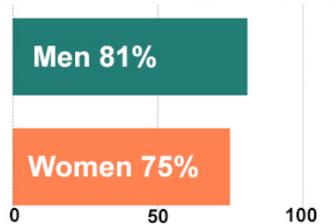
The gap in sports participation begins at around 13 to 15 years old



In Scotland, more men than women take part in sport and exercise



When walking is included, this gap narrows a little



"It's such a chauvinistic sport, I know some of the owners wanted to kick me off. I want to say to everyone else, get stuffed, because women can do anything and we can beat the world."  
(Michelle Payne, Jockey)

"I've had a lot of hostility. When I first rocked up at Teddington they'd never had a female coach. There was one individual who might as well have had 'what the hell do you know?' stamped on his forehead."  
Giselle Mather (London Irish Coach)



## ...coaching and leadership

(Source: Sports Coaching in the UK III, Sports Coach UK, 2011)

In the UK, 31% of coaches are women



A quarter of board members of Scottish Governing Bodies are women



18% of qualified coaches are women



## Media coverage...

TV, radio and the newspapers play a central role in informing our knowledge, opinions and attitudes about women in sport. In turn, these attitudes influence participation in sport.



5% of sports coverage dedicated to women's sport

85% of elite sports women think that media coverage of women's sport is not adequate



## **What can we do about it?**

### **1. Involve women**

If you are planning sports activity, you should firstly speak to women to find out about what they want and need. This means that you can explore potential barriers and negative experiences, and try to set up opportunities which meet people's needs.

### **2. Be flexible**

People like different things. Think about adapting the type of sport; style of sport; timing; venue; mix of participants; coaching style and volunteering opportunities.

### **3. Offer a range of opportunities**

You should promote and provide a choice of sport or activity - including contact, low-contact or non-contact sports; mixed or single-sex sports; team sports, double or single sports. Offering these different categories can help women to find the right sport for them to help increase participation.

### **4. Offer some single sex opportunities**

Offering single sex sports opportunities can help build confidence in sports participation. It can also be essential to ensure that ethnic minority women and women of a range of religions can participate in sport.

### **5. Add fun, fitness and social opportunities**

The atmosphere and style of opportunity is important. Many women enjoy a fun, sociable and less competitive style of sport. Having drop-in, casual and less competitive sports can encourage women and girls to take part in sports without feeling pressure or anxiety. This can help to fulfil the role of sport in offering wider benefits – around confidence, empowerment, information and skills.

### **6. Think about environments**

Women are less likely to be members of sports clubs, and some may feel that there is more of a focus on skills and competition within clubs. Thinking about sports activities in community centres, schools and other trusted venues may help to attract women to participate. Sports clubs can also think about their own cultures and environments, and how these could be adapted to attract more women.

### **7. Tackle unhelpful attitudes**

It is important that everyone involved in sports understands that stereotypes, prejudice and discriminatory behaviour are not acceptable. Clubs and organisations should have clear approaches for tackling these attitudes, and should proactively promote equality and diversity.

## 8. Support coaches, volunteers and decision makers.

There are different ways to take part in sport. Supporting women to become involved as coaches, volunteers and decision makers in sport can provide role models to others, and help ensure positive decisions are made about sport in Scotland. This could involve working with women's organisations, schools, colleges and other organisations which have built up trust with women, to create links into leadership, coaching and decision making roles. Raising awareness of the opportunities available, and demonstrating that women can achieve well in these roles is an important first step.

## What is already happening?

There is lots of good work already happening. Here are just some examples.

### Cricket

Cricket Scotland wanted to focus on the participation of women and girls. It set up an indoor sixes tournament for women and girls, taking place in different locations across the country, and involving a mix of club, school and university sides. Key success factors include:

- providing opportunities to play all year round and therefore maximising opportunities for women and girls to take part;
- developing a welcoming atmosphere at events and building the feeling that everyone is helping each other;

making sure that people know anyone can take part – regardless of age, stage or ability; and limiting injuries in this environment through the use of a soft ball.

This example is from **sportscotland's** Equality in Practice Guide.<sup>10</sup> The guide also includes a range of other useful examples.

---

<sup>10</sup> Equality in Practice Guide, **sportscotland**, 2015

## Communication

Practical guidance on helping women and girls to get active highlights the importance of good communication. Guidance suggests:

- using role models showing women happy and confident to be themselves;
- showing women that sport is a social thing, and it can be fun exercising with the girls, a partner or with the kids;
- emphasising the sense of personal achievement women can feel from having completed a session;
- talking about the health benefits of getting active - though they don't need to be the primary focus of your communications, unless you are targeting a specific audience with health issues.

This example is from Sport England's practical guidance - Helping Women and Girls to Get Active – A Practical Guide (2015)

## Find out more...

Useful sources for finding out more include:

- Women In Sport – [www.womeninsport.org](http://www.womeninsport.org)
- the documents referenced throughout this Learning Note – as footnotes; and
- the full research report on equality in sport, produced for **sport**scotland in 2015.