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BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION



Information about what can limit girls' participation or act as a barrier to their participation

For young children, competitive sports or highly structured activities can be limiting, while for teenagers and young women, negative experiences at school, peer pressure, competitive classes and lack of teacher support can impact on participation. Very often a girl's freedom to move is restricted by cultural norms and conditions that determine where it is safe or appropriate for them to go

Many girls want to be physically active, but there is a tension between wishing to appear feminine and attractive and the sweaty muscular image often attached to active women. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to anxiety, depressive disorders and eating disorders, and support from family and significant others is essential to maintaining participation.

Studies show that as girls reach 12-14yrs of age they become more aware of peer pressure, feel embarrassment more easily and have more inhibitions in doing sport. Many 15-17yr old girls do not like doing exercise with, or near, boys because they feel embarrassed.

Girls are keener to take part if the activities are fun and interesting, and if they can do the activity with friends.

Reasons for low participation of girls, and women, in sport & physical activity:

- lack of access to appropriate facilities & services
- fewer opportunities available for participation
- cost of participation
- safety concerns
- lack of culturally appropriate facilities/programs
- social and/or gender stereotyping
- lack of role models
- lack of time
- lack of childcare and lack of awareness of childcare options
- reduced leisure time owing to family responsibilities
- lack of skills or perceived lack of skills
- lack of confidence in approaching activities alone
- poor self-image
- body image
- cultural and social pressures
- harassment
- negative pressure from peers
- negative experiences during school physical activity classes



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PE Classes

The potential of Physical Education to reach virtually all children makes it a uniquely important resource. However, for girls it is often their negative experiences from school physical education classes that have the greatest long-term impact.

It is important to have positive influences at school to become, and stay, physically active. Negative experiences during school PE classes are a strong factor for teenage girls' non-participation. The disruptive influence of boys in PE class, the competitive nature of PE classes and the lack of support for girls from teachers can reinforce these problems.

Being able to demonstrate competency of a skill to peers in class can make girls feel uncomfortable. A narrow PE curriculum, dominated too heavily by competitive team games, fails to address the needs and interests of the whole school population, and does not transfer well to out-of-school and adult sporting participation.

*"It's embarrassing to do things when you're in front of your friends".
"If something goes wrong, it's worse when it's in front of boys"*

Education & work pressures

The majority of pupils are keen to do sport or physical activity if they feel it is accessible and the right opportunity for them. School timetables and the pressure of doing well in exams is often a factor which restricts pupils from taking part as much as they would like to.

The time of optimal training and peak performances in competitive sport often coincides with the phases of school and/or higher education and starting a professional career. Therefore, the most frequent reason for attrition found in the majority of investigations is the time problem which occurs when trying to coordinate school/study/job and competitive sport.