

STATS PACK FOR MEDIA

JANUARY 2022



ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This document is intended to provide headline statistics on women's sport for use by the media. New versions will be made available whenever new research is published at www.womeninsport.org. Full versions of the reports listed below (except Sport England Active Lives Surveys) are also available from www.womeninsport.org.

The Women in Sport media team is available 24/7 to verify data. Contact details are available at the end of this document.

ABOUT WOMEN IN SPORT

Women in Sport (formerly The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation) is the leading charity dedicated to transforming sport for the benefit of every woman and girl in the UK.

With over 30 years' experience of working in the sport sector, Women in Sport draws on its unique insight to champion the right of every woman and girl in the UK to take part in, and benefit from, sport: from the field of play to the boardroom, from early years and throughout her life.

PARTICIPATION

Active Lives Adult Survey

The Active Lives survey measures participation levels in a wider range of sport and physical activity including, but not limited to: walking, cycling for travel/leisure, and creative dance. Active Lives excludes participants under the age of 16 years, who are part of the Active Lives Children and Young People Survey.

The latest statistics are taken from the [Active Lives Report \(May 20 to May 21\)](#), which was published in October 2021. The statistics should be viewed within the context of the broader range of physical activities included.

The levels of men and women who were active was growing before the Covid-19 pandemic hit England. Between mid-March and mid-May 2020, both men's and women's activity levels declined and women remain less active than men with activity levels dropping back to those 3 or 4 years ago.

From May 2020 to May 2021:

- 28% of women are inactive (less than 30 minutes of physical activity each week) compared to 27% of men.

- 12% of women are fairly active (30-149 minutes of physical activity each week) compared to 11% men.
- 60% of women are active (doing 150+ minutes of physical activity each week) compared to 62% of men.
- Black and Asian women continue to be the least active with only 50% of black women meeting the recommended activity guidelines compared to 60% of all women and 56% of black men. Only 46% of Asian women are active compared to 50% of Asian men.
- Women's positive attitudes to physical activity are lower than men's across capability, opportunity and motivation. Motivation to exercise was the largest difference, when asked do you find sport enjoyable and satisfying, 26% women agreed vs 37% men).
- Women's activities, particularly swimming and fitness classes, saw the biggest decreases during this period (due to the pandemic) but walking and cycling for leisure saw the biggest increase.

Both men and women's inactivity levels have increased since the last survey. There are 516,300 more inactive women than men in England.

While the participation gap between men and women has shrunk, this is not because the percentage of active women has increased. This change is entirely driven by fewer men being active than in the previous survey.

In addition, women have not bounced back as quickly as men since restrictions have lifted, meaning more needs to be done to support women back to physical activity. Women in Sport will be working with Sport England to create recommendations later in the year.

Active Lives Children and Young People Survey

In September 2019, the Chief Medical Officer updated the guidelines on physical activity. Instead of the measure of children and young people doing 60+ minutes of moderate activity every day, this has now changed to 60+ minutes/day equivalent across the week. This effectively means they need to do 420 moderate minutes or more a week to meet the guidelines.

The full report is available [online](#).

The following statistics are taken from the fourth [Active Lives Children and Young People Survey](#), which surveyed children aged 5-16 in the academic year September 2020 to July 2021. Data contains a full year of Covid-19 restrictions, including comparisons back to the summer term of 2020, when school sites were closed to most pupils for much of the period.

The proportion of children and young people who are active (45%, 3.2m) has not changed compared to 12 months ago. However, this is down 2% compared to pre-pandemic levels (2018-2019). 32% of children and young people (2.3m) do less than an average of 30 minutes a day. Existing inequalities have widened, with children from the least affluent families remaining the least active, and only 36% of Black children are active compared to 45% of all children and young people.

Participation

- For the first time in Active Lives boys' activity levels have fallen to the point that they are now equal to girls', with only 45% of both girls and boys achieving the recommended levels of activity.
- 41% of girls in school years 3-6 are active, compared to 44% of boys.
- 45% of teenage girls in school years 7-11 are active, compared to 42% of boys (down 8%).
 - The fall in teenage boys' activity is due to the ongoing disruption to organised sport (and school sport) which is a key contributor to their activity levels, more so than girls.
 - There has been no significant increase in teenage girls' activity in the last 12 months. Girls have maintained levels due to taking part in more accessible forms of physical activity such as walking.
- Despite ongoing disruption, there is still a large gender gap in team sport participation with 58% of boys taking part at least once a week, compared to just 40% of girls.
- The pandemic continued to disrupt girls' ability to take part in activities such as gymnastics, trampolining or cheerleading (down 7%), swimming (down 13%) and walking to school or other places (down 2%).

Attitudes and Wellbeing

Sport England measures five attitudes toward sport and physical activity: enjoyment, confidence, competence, understanding and knowledge. Due to the pandemic there has been a significant decrease in many positive attitudes to physical activity for both girls and boys. But boys are still more likely to have more positive attitudes towards sport and exercise than girls.

Girls continue to have lower physical literacy than boys throughout every age group, and especially in relation to enjoyment, confidence and competence. The largest gender differences can be seen in school years 9-11.

- Only a third of girls (38%) in school years 3-11 enjoy taking part in sport and exercise, compared to more than half of boys (53%).
- Only a quarter of girls (26%) in school years 3-11 feel confident when they exercise and play sport, compared to 43% of boys.
- Only 15% of girls in years 3-11 find sport and exercise 'easy', compared to 24% of boys.
- Girls report lower mental wellbeing (happiness), with those in school years 7-11 experiencing significant decreases in mean happiness scores (no change for boys).

- Teenage girls in school years 7-11 are more likely to feel lonely than boys. Older girls in years 9-11 (15%) are nearly twice as likely to feel lonely 'often/always' than boys (8%).
- Girls have lower resilience than boys across school years 3-11 ('if I find something difficult, I keep trying until I can do it').
 - Girls in school years 5-6 (40%) and 7-8 (27%) have seen significant drops in resilience over the last 12 months (down 5% and 4% respectively), whilst boys' resilience remains unchanged.
 - The resilience of older teenage girls in years 9-11 remain worryingly low – only 16% will keep trying if they find something is difficult.

TEENAGE GIRLS

Over the last few years, we have been collecting deeper insight on teenage girls wider lives and released four key reports: [The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Teenage Girls' Lives and Physical Activity - Women In Sport](#) (March 2021), [Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls](#) (April 2019); [Puberty and Sport: An Invisible Stage](#) (August 2018); and the [Girls Active Survey](#) (produced in partnership with Youth Sport Trust in November 2017).

The Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Teenage Girls' Lives and Physical Activity – Women in Sport, supported by Comic Relief and Sweaty Betty.

This research looked to understand how the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the lives of teenage girls and their relationship with sport and physical activity.

We conducted in-depth ethnographic research over a 2-month period with a group of girls aged 13-16 who were both active and less active before the pandemic and how their lives were affected. We also undertook a survey of 1,500 girls, representative of the diversity of people in the UK.

The research showed that 62% of girls reported doing less physical activity than before the pandemic. However, lockdown has led girls to recognise the value of exercise for physical and mental health more:

- 52% of girls agreed that keeping fit and doing physical activity was more important than ever
- 55% of girls said they felt being physically active made them happier
- 54% said that it made them less stressed.

Perhaps most critically, 82% of girls said they will put more effort into being fit and active when life returns to normal.

Less positively, half of the girls (51%) surveyed by Women in Sport were concerned that they were losing their fitness and 45% worried that it would be hard to get back into the habit of sport and exercise after the pandemic. Many have lost confidence in their sporting ability (41%) and many are worried about being in large groups again (40%).

Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls

This insight puts the spotlight on the wider world of teenage girls. We have put them at the heart of this research, through online ethnographic work, co-creation sessions and discussions, letting them lead our understanding. We also reviewed over 30 reports, shared knowledge and developed thinking together with 25 other organisations both from inside and outside the sports sector. This has helped us to start the journey of reframing how sport and physical activity can have both relevance and appeal during this time.

We uncovered [five important anchors](#) which reflect what girls value most in their lives and these build the foundations of who they will become.

We need to reframe sport and physical activity as something that girls' value and perceive to enhance their lives. We have developed [8 Principles of Success to support organisations](#) to bridge the 'relevance gap' in sport for girls and ensure it has a more meaningful place in their lives.

Statistics from Women in Sport and Youth Sport Trust's Girls Active Survey

Girls aged 12-14 years:

- Only 41% feel happy they are doing enough exercise
- 36% are unhappy with their body
- 42% avoid exercise when they have their period
- Only 42% say exercise is important to their lives
- 28% do no other exercise except PE at school
- Only 23% really enjoy PE

Girls aged 14-16 years:

- 35% don't take part because they are not confident
- 34% don't take part because they don't like being watched

MENOPAUSE

Menopause is a taboo subject in our society and women going through the menopause are missing out on the benefits of being physically active. Women in Sport wanted to find out more. In 2018, we published our first report on menopause and physical activity. [Menopause, Me and Physical Activity](#) provides insights from the research and recommendations for sport deliverers to support women to maintain and re-engage with physical activity during menopause. We followed this up in 2021, with an in-depth 5-month long insight project and report [Inspiring Women to Be Active During Midlife and Menopause](#), supported by players of People's Postcode Lottery and Getty Images.

Statistics from Menopause, Me and Physical Activity 2018

In our survey of 427 women:

- 84% of women who do not meet physical activity guidelines would like to be more active.

- 90% would consider physical activity if recommended by a GP or health professional.
- 82% experienced menopause symptoms.
- 70% felt their symptoms had a moderate-severe impact on quality of life.
- 55% had symptoms for 2 years or more (27% for 5+ years).
- 30% of women were less active since menopause.

Findings and recommendations from Inspiring Women to Be Active During Midlife and Menopause 2021

We examined every aspect of women's lives to fully understand their experiences of menopause and physical activity and uncover the barriers that women experience to being active throughout midlife and menopause.

We focused specifically on women in lower socio-economic groups because we know they face additional barriers and are less likely to be active and spoke exclusively to inactive women who had either lapsed from being active previously or had never enjoyed being active.

We found multiple physical, psychological and social midlife and menopause factors are preventing women from getting active at this time which are displayed in our [Model of Midlife, Menopause and Exercise](#).

In order to consider how to re-engage women and re-introduce physical activity to them, we also developed [five principles](#) to help the sport sector deliver programmes that speak to women's needs:

- **Endless possibilities** – expand perceptions and opportunities for being active.
- **Judgement-free zones** – welcoming and supportive environments.
- **Support networks** – offer build-in social support.
- **Expand the image of what sporty means** – inspire and create relatable role models.
- **Make it relevant** – reference specific and relevant benefits.

COVID-19's IMPACT ON ADULT PARTICIPATION

In June 2020, [we published Comic Relief-funded research on the impact of lockdown on women across different life stages](#), from young women without children to those in later life (age 70+). The research comprised of a representative survey of 100 women as well as an in-depth look at how women's lives were affected by the pandemic. Considered alongside each other, the research indicated that there were several shifts and changes in what women valued in life, and how they wanted to behave in the future, post-lockdown.

The research showed that women had been disproportionately impacted by the lockdown, especially those women with children juggling home-life, work, and schooling, and women aged 70 plus who suffered the greatest isolation.

- 39% of women said that losing their fitness would have a long-term impact.

- 25% of women were worried that getting back into the habit of exercise post lockdown would be hard.
- 32% of women couldn't prioritise doing exercise during lockdown as they had too much to do for others

The research also showed that lockdown resulted in a resetting of priorities and an increased motivation to exercise post-lockdown, with 61% of women surveyed stating that they will put more effort into being fit and active after lockdown is over.

LEADERSHIP & WORKFORCE

We have been campaigning for many years for greater representation of women in leadership roles in the sports sector. We have previously carried out an annual audit into the gender make-up of the boards of the National Governing Bodies of sport in England and researched the barriers to women achieving senior leadership roles in sport. Our seventh audit, [Beyond 30%](#), was released in February 2017.

Our latest work in this area is Beyond 30%- Workplace Culture in Sport Report. This insight was co-funded by Comic Relief and Sport Wales and was released in June 2018. The full report is available for download [here](#).

Key findings:

1. Women working in sport feel less valued than men

40% or 4 in 10 of the women working in sport feel they are valued less than men in the workplace because of their gender.

2. Gender discrimination is still evident in the sports workplace

38% or nearly 4 in 10 women working in sport report having experienced discrimination in the workplace because they are female.

30% or 3 in 10 women working in sport have experienced inappropriate behaviour from the opposite sex.

3. Sporting competence can have a disproportionate impact on professional credibility and limit the pool of women

34% of women have seen their professional performance judged by their sporting ability.

29% of women believe there are fewer women in senior roles because they lack connections in sport.

4. It's recognised that women face more challenges to progress in the sports sector

40% of men and 61% of women believe women face more challenges to become senior leaders.

Only 9% of men and 3% of women believe it's easier for women to progress but in contrast, 23% of men and 53% of women believe it's easier for men to progress.

MEDIA COVERAGE

In October 2018, Women in Sport released a new report on media coverage and visibility of women's sport across Europe. The research was funded by the European Union's Erasmus+ project. The full report can be viewed [here](#).

The project was delivered in partnership with institutions from four countries: Girls in Sport (Sweden); FOPSIM (Malta); West University of Timisoara (Romania); and the European Institute for Local Development (Greece).

Key Findings

- 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.
- It is at its lowest in Malta and Greece, where it failed to achieve more than 2% of the total coverage in either period.
- In Sweden and the UK, the picture was marginally better, but still variable and only achieved between 3%- 6% (Sweden) and 4%-10% (UK).
- Men's sport in three of the countries, UK, Sweden and Malta, accounted for over 80% of the total sports coverage during the monitoring periods, with football a significant driver of this.

To access the best practice recommendations and toolkit click [here](#).

KEY INSIGHT

Women in Sport deliver an extensive research programme to unlock new insights to help transform sport for the benefit of every woman and girl in the UK. All research reports can be found on our [resources page](#) and more detailed information can be found below on reports we are applying in the sector:

1. [Reframing Sport for Teenage Girls, 2019](#)

This Sport England-funded piece of insight puts the spotlight on the wider world of teenage girls. It puts them at the heart of the research, through online ethnographic work, co-creation sessions and discussions, letting them lead our understanding. We also reviewed over 30 reports, shared knowledge and developed thinking together with 25 other organisations both from inside and outside the sports sector. This helped us to start the journey of reframing how sport and physical activity can have both relevance and appeal during this time.

2. [Puberty & Sport: An Invisible Stage, 2018](#)

In 2017-18, Women in Sport conducted qualitative research to explore whether coming to terms with puberty is having a long-term impact on how girls engage with sport and to identify the key barriers and issues girls face during this time. We conducted focus groups in triads and friendship pairs with 24 girls, both active and inactive and from a mix of ethnicities.

[3. Inspiring Women to be Active During Midlife and Menopause](#)

Funded by players of the People's Postcode Lottery, this report builds on findings from our 2018 research (link below) that shows that women overwhelmingly want to be more active during this life stage. However, at present far too many women in midlife are missing out on the social, psychological and physical health benefits of being active. Within this research, we examined every aspect of women's lives over a five-month period to fully understand their experiences of menopause and physical activity and uncover the barriers that women experience to being active throughout midlife and menopause.

[4. Menopause, Me and Physical Activity, 2018](#)

Our Sport England-funded research used a mixed method approach of a national survey (427 women) and focus groups (28 women) to explore active and inactive women's (aged 45-60) relationship with sport and physical activity during menopause.

[5. Beyond 30%- Workplace Culture in Sport Report, 2018](#)

This research, which was co-funded by Comic Relief and Sport Wales, comprised in-depth discussions with 42 career-minded women and men in the sports sector and surveys from 1152 men and women working in the sector (NGBs, leisure organisations, Active Partnerships, sports charities etc). The report marked the first time that our leadership study had included men and women.

[6. What Sways Women to Play Sport? Using Influencers to Unlock Opportunities that Positively Impact Women's Sporting Behaviours, 2015](#)

This landmark research report, which was funded by Sport England, uses behavior change model to identify opportunities for sport to make better use of influencing figures.

[7. Understanding Women's Lives: Re-designing and Re-positioning Sport and Physical Activity to Engage Women, 2013](#)

A ground-breaking Sport England funded-study, Understanding Women's Lives used an innovative semi-ethnographic approach to unlock new insight around:

- Women's lives in modern Britain and what's important to them.
- Women's perceptions of sport versus fitness and how we need to re-position sport to women.
- How we can tap into women's values to activate behaviour change towards increased levels of physical activity.

SPOKESPEOPLE

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