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Young Women Profile - September 2021

Theme:
Participation

 Young Women Profile - September 2021

Co-authored by Sport NZ

A resource to assist organisations in understanding the needs of young women, and support quality experiences in active recreation and sport. It is well-known that teenage girls and young women face diverse barriers to participation in sport and active recreation. This is corroborated by national research that highlights a strong decline in physical activity for this demographic. This report provides key insights into the perceptions of young women aged 12-17 – their behaviour, experiences, needs and desires – to help those working with young women navigate these complexities and support young women on their physical activity journey. It is designed to be a starting point for those looking to better engage with and provide for young women as we recognise that not all environments and communities are the same, and young women are a diverse group with different and evolving needs.

How are young women participating?

Understanding the value of physical activity

This evidence suggests that there is a clear difference between how young women behave and their knowledge and intentions.

It is important that the reasons for the difference are understood in order to design experiences that support young women and provide opportunities to establish a life-long love of being active.

The good news is that young women understand the value of physical activity and want to be more active.

Participation over time

There is a consistent decline in participation as young women get older. Māori and Pacific young women spend more time being active than their Pākehā counterparts while Asian young women have significantly lower levels of participation.

However, for the most part, the experience of growing up female in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the relationship with physical activity within that, is more similar than it is different across ethnicities.

The number of activities young women participate in also decreases with age. Amongst other reasons such as increased pressure on time, this is a reflection of how young women narrow their focus as they figure out what they enjoy. It is also a function of young women believing they need to be good at an activity to join in or continue participating. Later sections of this report explore the reasons behind the declining participation in more detail.

Activities over time

From age 15, the number of physical activities young women participate in drops by 29% compared with 18% for young men. As young women get older, the kind of activities they participate in also changes from organised physical activities to self-driven activities. By age 17, the top three activities young women undertake are running, workouts and walking: all informal activities. The average number of hours young women spend informally participating in activity is significantly lower than it is for young men.

If young women drop out of organised activity it does not necessarily mean they will participate in or increase informal activity. As we will discover, young women struggle to maintain motivation to participate in informal activities, leading to a decline in overall activity levels.

Barriers to participation

Overall, young women experience more barriers to participation in physical activity than young men, regardless of their participation levels and whether they want to increase their participation or not.

In addition, compared with young men, young women who want to increase their participation are more likely to identify ‘too busy’, ‘struggle to motivate myself’, ‘I am not confident enough’, ‘I have no one to do it with’ and ‘I don’t want to fail’ as barriers.

When time is precious, young women will choose to spend their time doing something they enjoy and where they feel confident and supported. Unless physical activity offers that support and enjoyment, they are unlikely to access it.

A New Zealand qualitative study commissioned by Sport NZ in 2020 focused on how young women felt about physical activity. It found that the level of engagement in activity underpinned the barriers to participation mentioned above. This data has been cross-referenced with quantitative data to understand young women’s attitudes and beliefs towards physical activity.

Young women who are disengaged or moderately engaged are more likely to be influenced by environmental and social factors when it comes to maintaining their activity levels.

For example, within the qualitative interviews they may initially say they are ‘too busy’ or ‘too tired’ to participate in physical activity; however the discussion uncovered they were intimidated by an environment, or worried about their performance. In comparison, highly engaged young women will prioritise physical activity.

In summary, engagement suffers when fun disappears, particularly for moderately engaged young women. Social judgement, body confidence, and confidence in their abilities all factor into young women’s decision to disengage with physical activity or not, as we discuss later in this report.

What’s important to young women?

Understanding key motivators and influences

This section introduces what research indicates are key motivators and influences for young women’s participation in physical activity. The following section provides more detailed qualitative and quantitative data, with the aim of providing a base-level understanding of the perspectives of young women, in order to identify the opportunities to develop quality opportunities and support for them.

Overall, feelings of enjoyment, happiness and fun play a key role in young women’s positive physical activity experiences. This relationship flows both ways, with the benefits of being active having a positive impact on wellbeing and satisfaction. Young women who participate in over seven hours of physical activity a week have higher levels of happiness and are more likely to find concentrating on schoolwork easier after being active.

The importance of ‘fun’ in physical activity cannot be over-emphasised; it outweighs and counteracts the stress, emotional pressures, and social and family complications of young women’s daily lives. Many young women report the outcomes of physical activity are feelings of accomplishment (through completion not skill), self-worth and empowerment. This sense of accomplishment incentivises continued or future participation.

Maintaining social interaction and having fun are two of the main motivators for young women to continue participating in physical activity. However many young women believe that participation for fun is not universally endorsed by adults in their lives. This leads some young women to believe that an activity must have elements of competition or skill development for them to continue participating in it.

Young women also believe schools expect participation to have a performance element, which is measurable and competitive. They believe schools demonstrate limited support for non-competitive activities and can make it quite challenging to form socially oriented, friendship-based teams. Many schools are focused on trials and putting participants together based on their ability rather than their social connectedness.

As well as being a motivator, the influence of friends can inhibit young women from joining or continuing with an activity. Some young women believe physical activity interferes with their opportunity to socialise because their friends do not participate. Young women are:

1. more likely than young men to have friends who are not physically active
2. less likely to have friends who favour the same activities as they do.

In the United Kingdom, 63% of young women would not play sport or exercise without a friend by their side and this is also evident in Aotearoa New Zealand. Friends who participate in the same physical activity act as a buffer to dropping out.

When young women talk about really enjoying physical activity, it is a situation in which they are having so much fun they have forgotten that barriers exist. This includes those who have low engagement with physical activity.

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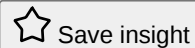
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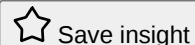


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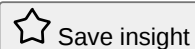


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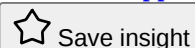


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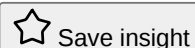


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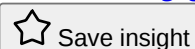


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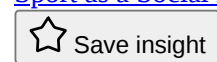
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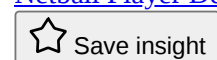


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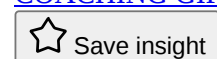


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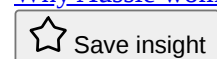
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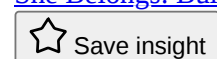
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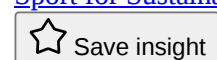


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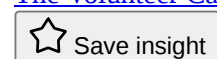
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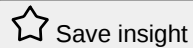
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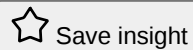
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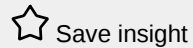
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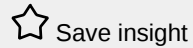
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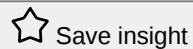
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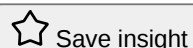
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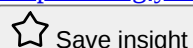
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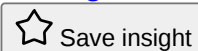


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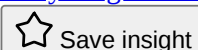


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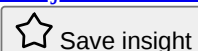


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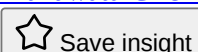


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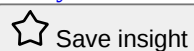


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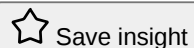


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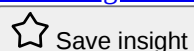
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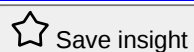


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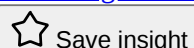
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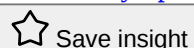
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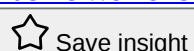
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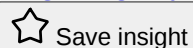
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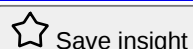
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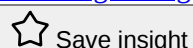
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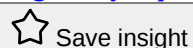
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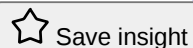
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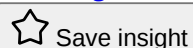
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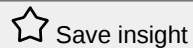
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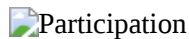
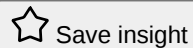


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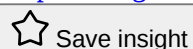


Participation

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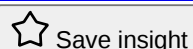


Participation

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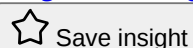
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Participation

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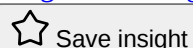


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Insights to Young Women's Participation - Webinar #1 "Rethinking the offering"

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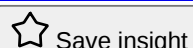


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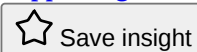
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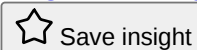


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