

2021/22

Report

**PARTICIPATION IN
COMMUNITY SPORT
FOR WOMEN IN
REGIONAL WESTERN
AUSTRALIA**

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REPORT BRIEF

*To ensure sport is inclusive,
engaging, enjoyable and
healthy.*

Disabilities

CaLD

Coaches, Officials, Admin

LGBTQIA+

Regions

Indigenous

WOMEN

Schools

Seniors

Athlete Welfare



INTRODUCTION



50%

of females give up their
sport by age 17



41%

of females are
sufficiently active

Sport is an integral component of our Australian identity. We pride ourselves as champions in many international arenas, dominating the fields across a diversity of disciplines. We are a country built on a culture of sport. So why as a nation, are we still struggling with equality in participation rates?

At a national level, 50% of Australian females give up their sport by the age of 17 (Suncorp, 2019). Only 41% of women are sufficiently active, in comparison to 50% of men (May, 2021).

Western Australia is the biggest state in Australia, covering over 2.5 million square kilometres. (Dept. Agriculture, 2004). Regional Western Australia is made up of nine regions covering the majority of this land area. The Greater Perth area covers approximately 6,400 square kilometres, less than 1% of WA's land in total (Dept. Agriculture, 2004).

With 75% of the population of Western Australia living in the Greater Perth area (ABS, 2020), it is important to acknowledge that state wide data is heavily influenced by the metropolitan population. When examining female participation in sport, it is necessary to disseminate information specific to the needs of the regions beyond Greater Perth.

Given the vastness of the sparsely populated areas covered within the regions, it is applicable to assume the barriers to participation and challenges of retention faced by members of these communities differ greatly from those living within the greater populated, metro region. This report is asking:

“What are the barriers, facilitators and lived experiences of females participating in community sport in regional areas of Western Australia?”

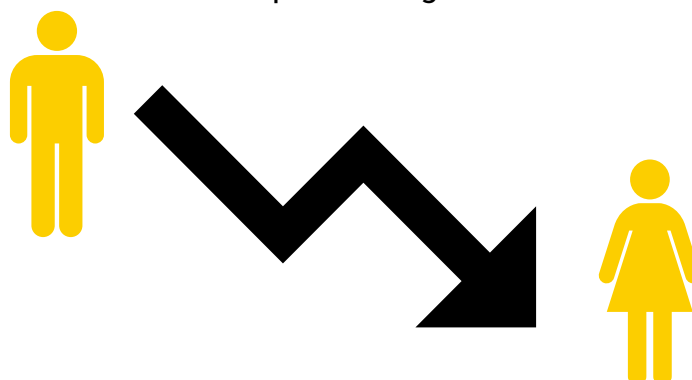
NEEDS ANALYSIS

Regional towns pride themselves on strong communities. Sport and Recreation play an integral role as the 'backbone' of these communities. Physical activity (PA) is defined as any bodily movement resulting in energy expenditure with exercise being a sub-set of PA that is planned, structured and repetitive with the goal of improved or increased physical fitness and/or strength (Caspersen et al., 1985). Participation in physical activity directly correlates with the health and well-being of community members. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS., 2018) data showed country-based Western Australians (over 14), participated in less physical activity than their metropolitan counterparts.



The statistics are even more concerning for females, where the participation rates in physical activity are consistently lower than males, leaving them at greater risk of health conditions associated with sedentary lifestyles (Tomlin S, 2016). Mental Health is also an area of great concern, with one in three Australian women suffering from anxiety at some stage in their life (ABS., 2018). Research has shown that exercise significantly reduces anxiety symptoms (Stubbs, 2017).

Given the implications on the public health system and the physical and mental health of the female population, further investigation into the barriers to sport participation for females is required in regional Western Australia.



BACKGROUND

Globally, gender disparity and decreasing participation rates in female sport has been recognised as a concerning health issue (Hanlon, Jenkin, et al., 2019). Governing bodies have allocated funding to the development of programs to increase female participation. Examples include, the Gender Equality in Sport Strategic Actions 2014–2020 (European Commission), Actively Engaged: A Policy on Sport for Women and Girls (Sport Canada), and the “This Girl Can” Campaign (Sport England), (Hanlon, Jenkin, et al., 2019).

A report from the Australian Sports Commission (2017), indicated that girls and women are underrepresented in sport participation in comparison to their male counterparts (Hanlon, Millar, et al., 2019). Federally, the Australian Government actioned the “Girls, Make Your Move” campaign in 2016. Inspired by England’s “This Girl Can” program, the Federal Government recognised that young women are twice as likely as young men to be physically inactive, as well as facing more barriers to participation (Department of Health, 2018). Australian females are also suffering symptoms of depression at a rate 30% higher than males (Global Health Data Exchange, 2019).

In October 2018 at the National Meeting of Sport and Recreation Ministers, the 'Women in Leadership Targets' were endorsed in line with the National Policy Framework for Girls and Women. The announcement of the targets included promotion of initiatives to support organisations reach the required targets along with funding impacts for not meeting the target deadline of June, 2022.



The Western Australian Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSCI) has maintained ongoing communication with state sporting associations to support the attainment of 50% female board members by June 2022. DLGSCI provision included a review of 15 targeted organisations, their current status and readiness to achieve the Women in Leadership Targets. Support from DLGSCI comprised of the development of achievement plans in partnership with the organisations to attain gender equality within the set time frame. DLGSCI also provided leadership to governing sporting bodies through the promotion of the ‘Case for Change’ project.

BACKGROUND CONTINUED

The Western Australian Government introduced the gender diversity project, Gender Diversity Case for Change: The case for gender-balanced leadership in sport and recreation on leadership and management in sport in 2019, (Appendix One), suggesting that sporting clubs were unaware of or lacking understanding of the benefits of a gender-balanced leadership team. The Gender Diversity Case for Change proposes that for a gender balance in leadership to occur, sporting clubs must “understand the effects of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, as well as the underlying reasons for these dynamics.”(Cunningham, 2019).



Whilst this project focuses on club leadership and not the participation rates of females in sport, research indicates that female leadership supports higher female membership at sporting clubs (Hanlon, Millar, et al., 2019). The Case for Change project included the provision of resources for state sporting associations, and the professional development program “What Women Can Do,” provided by DLGSCI.

Another strong predictor of increased participation rates for females in sport is the visibility of female role models, (Casey et al., 2009) with research demonstrating that women are strongly motivated by same-gender sporting role models (Midgley et al., 2021). In 2013, a group of six women in leadership roles within the Western Australian sporting community, formed the group, Women Of Sport. The group advocates for female leaders in sport to be visible and creating an impact on Western Australian Sport across all sporting levels. The group has now grown to over 200 members, currently supported by Sophie Row (CEO Swimming WA). In line with the visibility of females participating in sport, the advocacy group Women in Sport WA formed in 2020. The goal of the group is to spotlight female athletes and girls in grassroots sports across Western Australia. The main platform for Women in Sport WA is social media, targeting young girls by filling their feeds and stories with images of female athletes of all levels and promoting local community sporting groups. These platforms are key to facilitating outreach and engagement of the female adolescent population (Arora et al., 2019).

At an association level, sporting bodies have introduced a variety of programs to support female participation and leadership within their organisation. Some examples being Football West’s ‘Game Changers’ program, Surf Lifesaving ‘Coaching the Elite’ program and Cricket WA’s ‘Press for Progress, among others.



A search of PsychInfo, CINAHL, SportDiscuss, ProQuest and Google Scholar databases yielded no research articles on the participation rate of females in Western Australia, nor the regions. The inclusion of national and international studies returned limited articles, highlighting the need for further research in the area of female participation in sport, particularly females in regional areas.

Common themes emerging in the existing literature suggest the following barriers to female sport participation: environment and facilities (Hanlon, Jenkin, et al., 2019), adolescent development (Pedersen & Seidman, 2004), self-perceived competence (McDonough & Crocker, 2005), community attitudes toward female sport (Adams & Leavitt, 2018), social influences (McDonough & Crocker, 2005; Shakib, 2003) and visible role models (Midgley et al., 2021).

01

ENVIRONMENT AND FACILITIES



02

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT



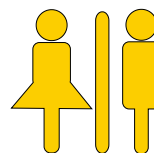
03

SELF-PERCEIVED COMPETENCE



04

ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMALE SPORT



05

SOCIAL INFLUENCES



06

VISIBLE ROLE MODELS

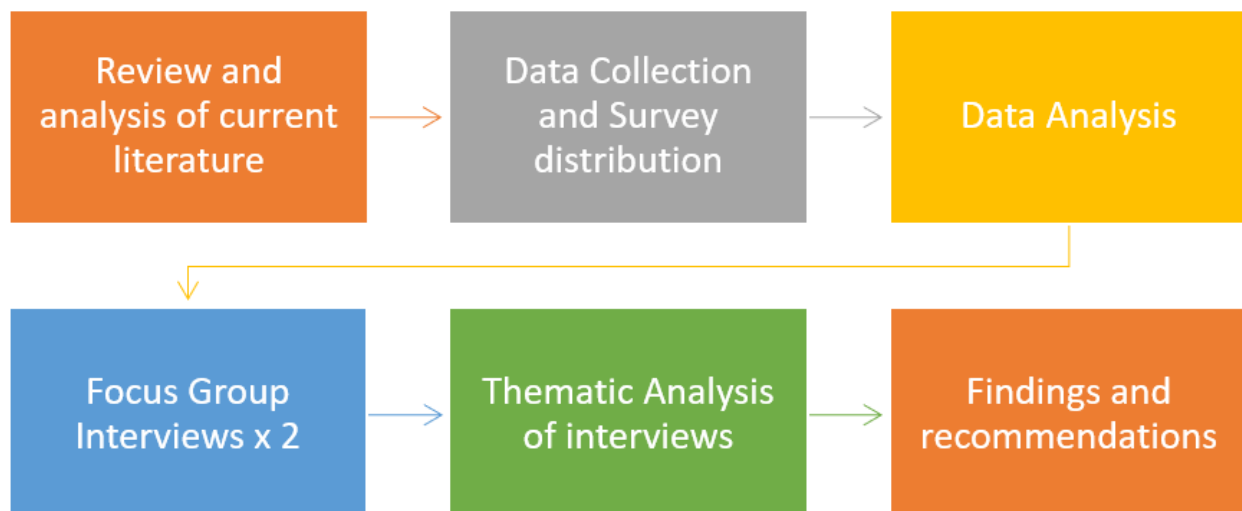
Further investigation is required to assess if these barriers are representative of females in regional Western Australia. Are there barriers specific to women in regional Western Australia? What further measures can be done to support female participation in sport?



REPORT MODEL

This report provides a 'snapshot' of the experiences of female participation in regional Western Australia. In order to achieve this outcome, state data was analysed, survey data was collected from a small amount of regional clubs, two focus group interviews with key stakeholders were carried out and results amalgamated for the report.

Figure One - Model of report process



RESULTS - STATE DATA

50%

Top performers, gender equality:

- Masters Swimming
- Tennis
- Athletics
- Triathlon
- Rowing

>31%

30% or lower gender disparity:

- Wave Ski
- Fencing
- Paddle
- AFL
- Archery

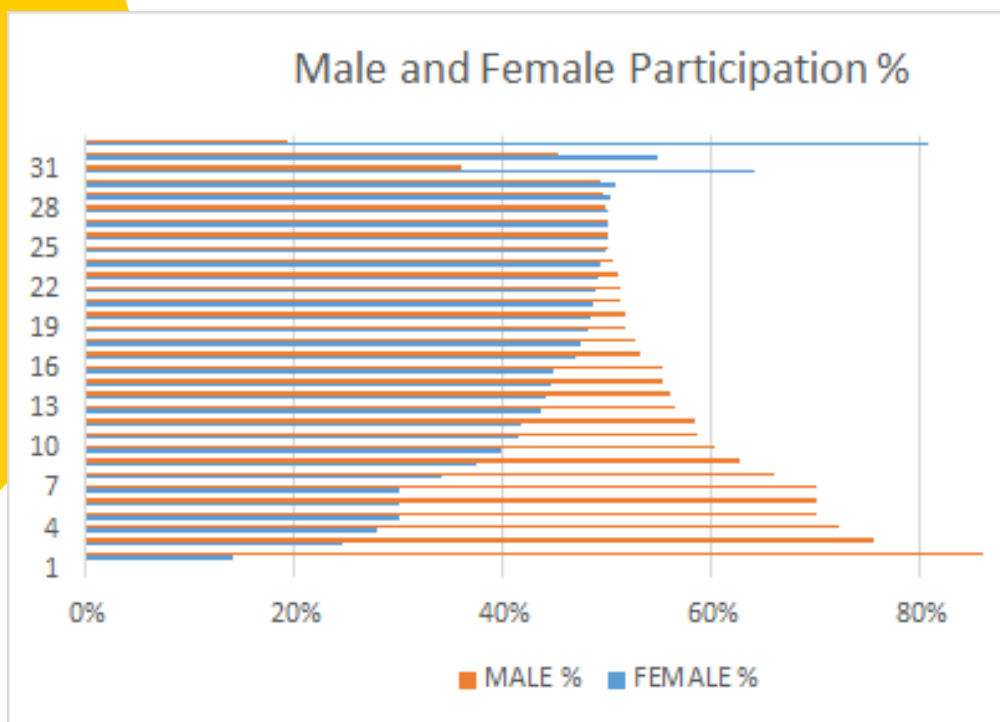


Figure 2 – Male and female state wide participation rates (percentages)

Across Western Australia, Sporting Associations are required to submit data on active membership, active participation, membership within age groups and number of coaches. This information is included in order to gain an overview of how Western Australia is performing as a state with reference to male/female participants and male/female coaches.

RESULTS - STATE DATA

Table 1 – State wide sport participation and coaching figures/

Sporting Association	Participants		Coaches	
	FEMALE %	MALE %	Male	Female
Western Australian Wave Ski Association	14%	86%	3	1
Western Australian Fencing Association	24%	76%	12	4
Paddle Western Australia	28%	72%	30	16
West Australian Football Commission	30%	70%	3885	256
WestCycle	30%	70%	50	25
Archery Western Australia	30%	70%	42	25
WA Disabled Sports Association	34%	66%	24	26
Football West	37%	63%	4004	647
Badminton Western Australia	40%	60%	60	18
Rugby League Western Australia	41%	59%	230	44
Baseball Western Australia	42%	58%	352	66
Touch Football Western Australia	44%	56%	201	84
WA Water Ski Association	44%	56%	19	8
Water Polo Western Australia	45%	55%	39	8
Volleyball Western Australia	45%	55%	146	222
Western Australian Cricket Association	47%	53%	0	0
Basketball Western Australia	47%	53%	51	35
Federation of Sport Bocce Western Australia	48%	52%	3	1
Rollersports Association of Western Australia	48%	52%	7	7
Lacrosse Western Australia	49%	51%	16	9
Golf Western Australia	49%	51%	1	0
WA Rogaining Association	49%	51%	0	0
Hockey Western Australia	49%	51%	480	300
Masters Swimming Western Australia	50%	50%	49	51
Tennis West	50%	50%	148	67
Athletics West	50%	50%	278	200
Triathlon Western Australia	50%	50%	57	47
Rowing Western Australia	50%	50%	92	53
Yachting Western Australia	51%	49%	454	164
Surfing Western Australia	55%	45%	115	66
Gymnastics Western Australia	64%	36%	128	595
Diving Western Australia	81%	19%	4	10
MEAN	FEMALE 44%	MALE 55.79%	TOTAL COACHES	
			MALE 10980	FEMALE 3055

Whilst this report is interested in participation figures, the severe lack of female coaches can not be overlooked as a potentially significant contributor to reduced female participation rates and retention during the adolescent years.

The author notes that whilst female inclusion in sport is on the rise, with many clubs demonstrating equality, this data may not be indicative of the regions of Western Australia. The highly populated metro area has a strong impact on these figures. Therefore, a minor survey was conducted within the regions of Peel, Murray and Wellington for indication of potential trends in female participation within the regions of Western Australia.

SNAPSHOT SURVEY

Eighty-three surveys were distributed via email to sporting clubs in the Murray-Wellington and Peel regions of WA. Email addresses were sourced via council websites and club Facebook pages. The non-response (NR) rate was very high with only 20% of surveys returned. The author believes that NR may be due to the email linking to the survey not coming from a formal government email, (author's own was used) and lack of administration time for volunteer roles within clubs. Whilst only 20% of responses were received, the information collated gives a brief snapshot of female participation within these clubs.



Club	Male Players	Female Players	Male Coaches	Female Coaches
Leschenault Cricket Club	150	20	15	2
Waroona Redbacks Basketball Club	130	100	15	15
Mandurah Mixed Badminton	40	10	6	1
Dwellingup Razorbacks AFL	42	32	3	0
Peel Archery	60	40	1	1
Mandurah City Football Club	150	50	20	0
Harvey Junior Netball Association	0	60	8	8
Mandurah Hockey Club	45	48	3	3
Mandurah Volleyball Association	55	30	5	4
Mandurah Rockingham Athletics Club	12	37	4	0
Waroona Basketball Association	0	0	0	0
Mandurah Mustangs AFL	100	50	7	3
Peel Junior Cricket Association	1379	221	65	2
Peel Cricket	141	39	11	1
TOTAL	2304	737	195	40

Table 2 – Snapshot survey sport participation and coaching figures

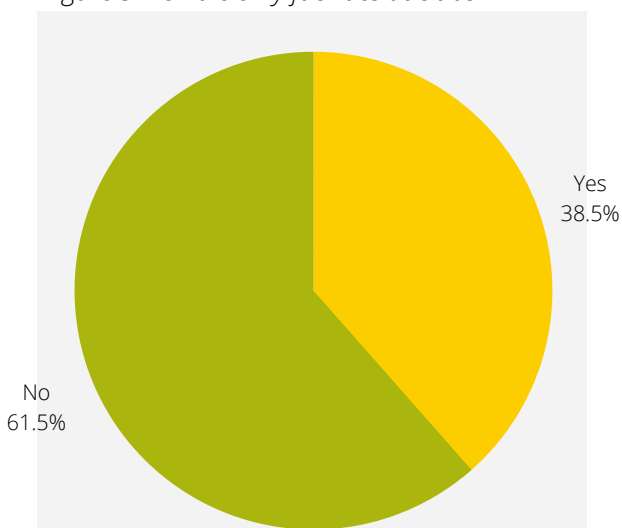
As Table 2 shows, Harvey Junior Netball Association is an expected outlier, with all female participants and coaches. The only club (that completed the survey), with gender equity of players is the Mandurah Hockey Club at 45 female players and 48 male players, with concerning imbalances seen in cricket, AFL, football, basketball and volleyball. It is pertinent to note that with the exception of AFL, these imbalances are not reflected in the state wide data, suggesting the largely populated metropolitan area has masked the underrepresented regional figures.

A further observation that cannot be overlooked is the low number of female coaches. Globally, programs addressing the concerns of female participation in sport hold a strong emphasis on female role models, expressly coaches (Midgley et al., 2021). This snapshot data aligns with the concerning state wide figures. The consequence of limited female coaches is potentially far reaching.



SNAPSHOT SURVEY CONT.

Figure 3 -Female only facilities at clubs



Taking the limitations of the snapshot survey into consideration, the results still indicate potential trends that are concerning for female sport participation, health and wellbeing in the regions. Recommendations in these fields have been addressed further in the report.

FACILITIES

In current literature, environment has proven a strong barrier against participation (Hanlon, Jenkin, et al., 2019). Clubs were surveyed on their facilities for women with the below responses demonstrating a need for female only changerooms (Figure 3). If this small sample proves to be a trend, facilities may be contributing to lack of participation for females in regional Western Australia.



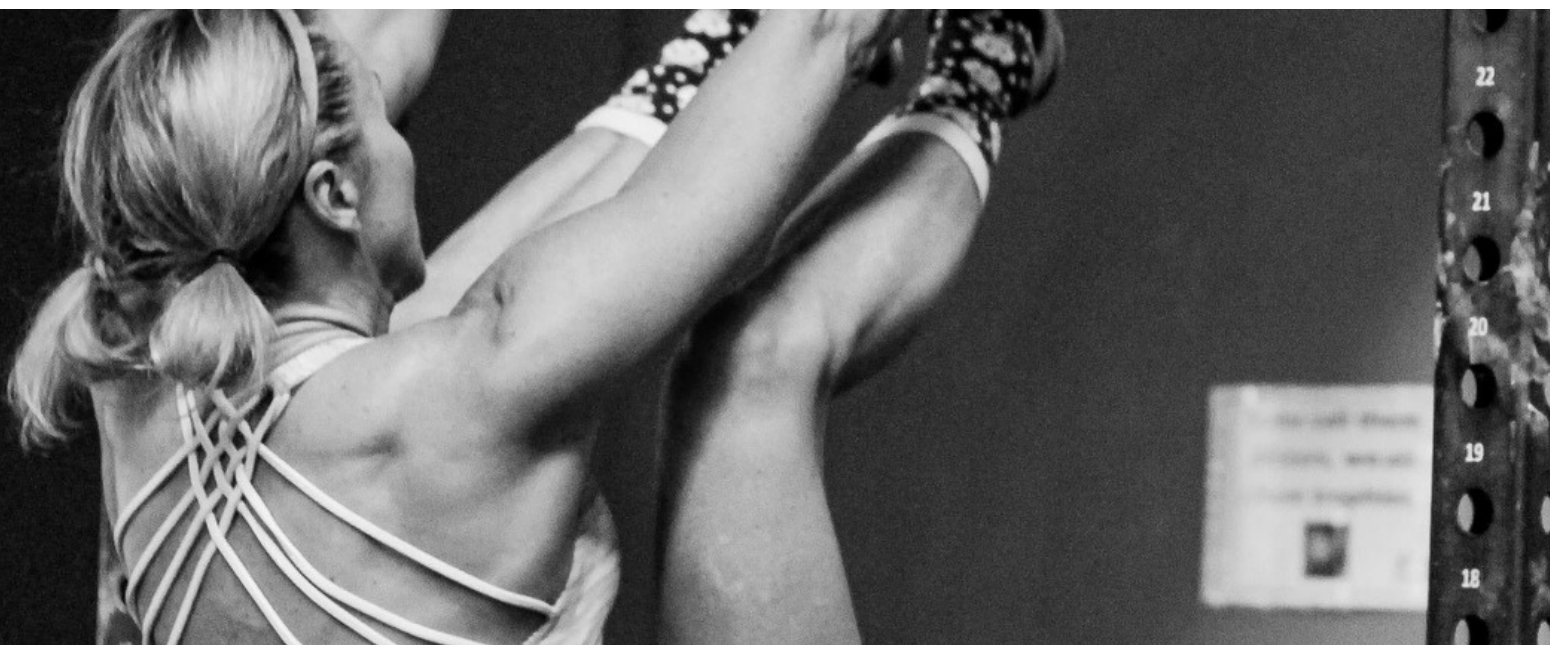
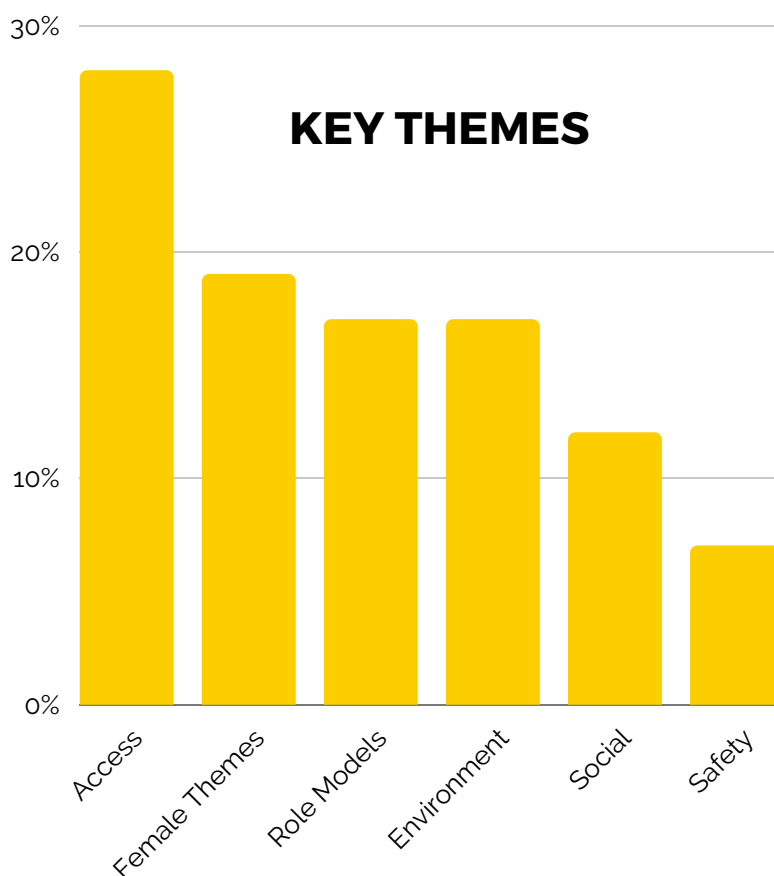
FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Survey responses provided a brief overview of the involvement, or lack thereof of female participation within clubs. A more in-depth understanding of barriers and facilitators was required to explore the lived-experiences of females in regional Western Australia. Focus group interviews were chosen to collect this data.

Convenience sampling was used with flyers shared among the first authors' and Robyn Clarke MLA's networks to attract participants for two focus group interviews. A semi-structured, phenomenological approach was used to conduct the interviews. An interview guide, developed by the first author (Appendix Two) was followed to support conversation around barriers, facilitators and lived-experiences of regional sport participation.

Interviews were recorded as participants conversed among themselves on the themes of female participation in community sport evolved inductively.

Latent content analysis was used to consider emerging themes and similarities within responses.



THEMATIC DISCUSSION

Accessibility

Underlying the theme of 'accessibility', there was a strong emphasis on local community and support of coaches, teammates and neighbours to transport participants to and from training and games:

"Our coaches helped with transporting girls to their training and games."

"If our parents couldn't drive us or pick us up from training we couldn't train."

"Travel and distance to venues is a barrier. Public transport is not available either." The issue of access to coaches in the regions was also evident within the theme of 'accessibility.'

"Trying to get coaching accreditation down here (in the regions) is really difficult."

"I couldn't play elite because I couldn't commute to Perth from regional WA."

"Best trainer drives from Manjilup with no remuneration because his daughter plays on the team...He's not going to do it next year, it's just too hard."

An underlying theme within accessibility was the lack of choice around sports. This is a challenging issue to address in communities with limited populations and resources.

Female Themes

During discussions, there were many comments made around barriers and concerns specific to females. It is anticipated that these themes will prove consistent across the state. However, lack of adequate facilities, female governance and leadership in regional sporting clubs is predicted to amplify the situation.

Four prominent subthemes emerged within 'Female Themes'. **Periods, breasts, uniforms** and **motherhood**.

~ PERIODS

"There is no education around sport and periods."

"You get self-conscious about your period. Swimming is such a hard sport with your period."

"You have to adjust (your training) every month for your hormones and how you're feeling."



THEMATIC DISCUSSION CONT.

Female Themes

~ BREASTS

"Life vests are not shaped, they're just small, medium and large. It became an issue for my elder daughter who wouldn't wear the club vests. We've had to buy her a different vest for \$300."

"I have issues with support. I'm a EE cup and when I'm running down the beach, I don't have a choice and I have to wear bathers."

~ UNIFORMS

"There's some girls who won't wear whites, ever."

"At 16 I didn't want to be in bathers in front of everyone."

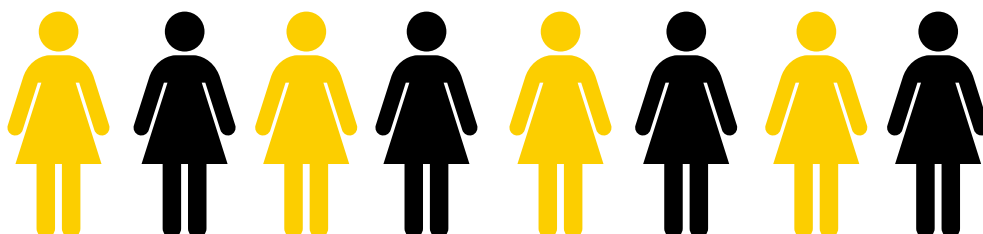
*"The *company said they could try and replicate a pair of female shorts that I brought in because they didn't stock female shorts."*

*A major athletic apparel company on the topic of female shorts for uniforms

~ MOTHERHOOD

"As a mother, the reality of not being there for your kids hits you." (In the context of injury)

"I stopped playing sport when I had babies."



THEMATIC DISCUSSION

Role Models

The presence of female role models in sport improves participation and retention rates (Young et al., 2015). Even the presence of a picture in a sporting club can have a positive impact on the female members within the club. The impact of female role models on the participants of the focus groups was compelling.

“The only role models we have at the club are the people that we play with.”

“Monica (board member and surf sports coach) and I clicked and she’s also sporty and a sprinter so I did everything with her.”

“Now, this generation is going to stop girls from dropping out. Because female participation is only just picking up now. We have U9 and 10 juniors training with the women and we’re going to watch their games. That’s going to stop them dropping out.”

“Peel’s just had 2 girls drafted and they can attribute that directly to having female role models.”

Environment

A systematic review considering the environmental attributes of facilities and participation in female sport found an association between participation and suitable female facilities (Hanlon, Jenkin, et al., 2019). This proved to be a significant theme in the focus group discussions. The McGowan government are aware of this ongoing issue, releasing a series of grants to improve female facilities in 2018.

“I was ten and I looked at the change rooms and I thought, I don’t think I can play, there’s no changerooms for me.”

“Waroona football club don’t have a female team because the male facilities are not acceptable.”

“It’s not nice using men’s change rooms and there’s no female hygiene facilities there.”

“Environment, safety and social. If you can combine those three elements, girls will stick with it.”



THEMATIC DISCUSSION

Social

Quality of friendships is an indicator of sport participation for females (McDonough & Crocker, 2005). The social themes that emerged throughout the interviews were in line with existing research findings.

"I stopped because I went to high school and I stopped because my friend stopped. I went a year without doing anything."

"If your friends aren't doing sport, you don't do sport."

"You finished school and you finished sport."

"We'd have a sport lesson and there'd be no girls participate at all because it was just not cool all of a sudden and I thought, do I have friends or do I have sport?"

"I can't remember how I started sport but I stayed playing (netball) because of my friends."

Safety

The theme of safety from crime was not as consistent a theme of fear of injury. This was a common theme, with elements relating specific to services available in regional areas.

"Before COVID we never had a trainer (first aid) so if you had a sore ankle, you just didn't play."

"Injury prevention is a big deal. There are not enough specialists or first aid at women's sport. There would be an uproar if there was no one to strap ankles at a men's game."

The fear of injury was amplified among mothers in the group.

"I suffered a neck injury playing rugby and my little daughter was in her buggy on the side of the pitch. My husband was away. I had to stop playing, it was just too dangerous."

"I didn't want my daughter going to training in a car with another male that I didn't know."



RECOMENDATIONS

A strategic plan is required to address the themes outlined within this report in order to improve the outcomes of female participation in sport in the regional areas of Western Australia. Whilst some of the barriers to participation require long-term planning and allocation of funding resources, many barriers can be addressed through education and emphasis from leadership on the importance of equal female inclusion within clubs, starting at a leadership level.

Improving the participation rates of females in sport will have a wide-spread impact on public health, mental wellbeing and inclusive communities.

The following recommendations have been developed as a direct consequence of findings within this report. Given the varying levels of support required to action the recommendations, they have been divided into three categories:

ACTIONABLE NOW



12 MONTH ACTION PLAN



3 YEAR GOALS



ACTIONABLE NOW

State Wide Data Collection

- Data collected on male/female executive committees
- Data collected on male/female coaches
- Data collected in regions (a minimal division between metro/regional required)
- Data collection surveys distributed by government

Coaches

- Communicate with clubs with a one-pager info sheet on the importance of female coaches within clubs
- Provide posters for clubs, encouraging females to volunteer as coaches



Facilities

- Communicate with schools to discuss access of facilities to local sporting groups
- Propose re-evaluation of current grant model for grassroots sports (particularly co-contribution amounts for small, regional clubs)



Female Specific

- Communicate with clubs with a one-pager info sheet on accommodating females and menstrual cycles within clubs, (sanitary bins, period starter packs, female mentor for young girls to speak with).
- Communicate with clubs with a one-pager info sheet on the importance of visible female role models within clubs (including photographs and social media presence).

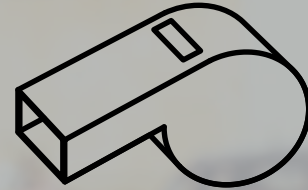


State Wide Data Collection

- Formal annual report on female participation across memberships, coaching and executive levels
- Review of current models in place to improve female outcomes in sport
- It is imperative that high-quality research be conducted to validate existing strategies and develop new tools for clubs to use. A feasibility study proposal should be documented at this stage

Coaches

- Allocate roles, specific to the educational development of female coaches, players and administration
- Introduce incentives for clubs to reach equality in coaching
- Introduce incentives for coaches to travel to the regions to facilitate coaching development programs



Facilities

- Introduce incentives for schools to allow access of facilities to local sporting groups
- Formal proposal of project to collate data and feasibility costings of converting all government facilities to contain female-only change room facilities
- Assessment of government grant program for regional clubs (current model of 33% contribution is unrealistic for small regional clubs)



Female Specific

- Allocate role(s) of responsibility for female education for sporting clubs. Examples of proposed projects to develop: menstrual management, uniform design, female mentor development within clubs as a reference point for female members, female role model program
- Introduce incentives for clubs to reach gender equality with their social media posting



State Wide Data Collection

- Ongoing formal annual report on female participation and comparisons across memberships, coaching and executive levels

Facilities

- Budget allocation based on feasibility report for change room upgrades
- Begin project work on change room upgrades
- Regional grant allocation for sporting clubs amended to remove 33% club contribution

Coaches

- Development and rollout of a Coaching Females educational program that supports the development and support of female coaches within clubs

Female Specific

- Budget allocation for development and roll out of 'Role Model' program providing education, club resource packs, incentives to participate, financial allocation to pay elite athletes to visit all clubs



LIMITATIONS & CONCLUSION

This report identifies that female participation rates and experiences with community sport in regional Western Australia are not reflective of metropolitan areas. Whilst there were various limitations to this report and findings, indicators are highlighting severe gaps in the research and data within the field of female participation in sport in regional Western Australia. Given the vastness of geographical locations across Western Australia, it is applicable to assume that the findings in Peel and Murray-Wellington would be further intensified in the isolated northern regions such as the Pilbara and Kimberley.

Limitations included (and addressed in recommendations):

- Small area covered in interviews and survey (Peel, Murray-Wellington), and therefore not a full representation of regional experiences and participation
- Return rate of surveys was low (20%)
- Data returned in surveys may have been inaccurate (recall bias)
- Single author interpreting data

CONCLUSION

Recent years have seen steady growth in female participation in sport in Western Australia. It is encouraging to see equality in participation numbers for some sporting associations, and this needs to be supported to extend for all governing bodies and filtered through to the regions. This brief report highlights potentially concerning trends in participation for female players and coaches within regional sporting clubs, outside of the metro area. This report highlights that ongoing programs, support and research is needed to continue the upward trend of female participation, with specific approaches implemented for the regional areas of Western Australia.



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