Sport Participation in Canada

Sport participation rates in Canada

Sport participation was examined in the 2006-07 Sport Monitor, and was defined as physical activities that involve competition and rules, and develop specific skills. The reported rate of sport participation in Canada in 2006-2007 stands at 36%.

Region

Residents of British Columbia, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories are more likely than the Canadian average to report participating in sport.

Age and sex

Sport participation in Canada is significantly related to both age and gender. Men are more likely than women to participate in sport. Rates of sport participation among Canadians decrease significantly with increasing age groups; those aged 15 to 17 are the most likely to participate whereas those aged 65 years or older are the least likely to participate. Sport participation does not differ between males and females for those aged 15 to 17; however, for those aged 18 and older, men are more likely than women to participate in sport.

Activity level

There is a general increase in the proportion participating in sport with increasing activity level. Active Canadians are more likely to participate in sport compared to those who are somewhat active or who are least active.

Socio-economic and demographic characteristics

Although there are no differences in sport participation by education level, sport participation does generally increase with increasing household income levels. Those
with low household incomes are less likely to participate in sport compared to those with higher incomes. Those who never have been married are the most likely to indicate that they participate in sport, while widowed, divorced, or separated Canadians are least likely to participate; these findings are likely associated with age. Similarly, retired adults are also generally least likely to say they participate in sport.

**FIGURE 4: SPORT PARTICIPATION BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME**

2006-2007 Sport Monitor, CFLRI

**Which sports do Canadians play?**

Most Canadians who take part in sport do so as active participants, as opposed to as an official, manager, coach, spectator, and so on. Those who identified themselves as participants were then asked to list up to four sports that they play most often. Among those who play recreational and competitive sport, the most frequently cited sports are hockey, golf, baseball and softball, racquet sports (such as tennis, badminton, and squash), soccer, basketball, volleyball, skiing, and snowboarding. Categorizing sports as either team-oriented (e.g., hockey, soccer) or individual-oriented (e.g., golf, skiing), a significantly higher proportion of Canadians (64%) play at least one team-oriented sport than play at least one individual-oriented sport (53%). Canadians are most likely to report playing only team sports (46%), followed by only individual-oriented sports (34%), followed by a combination of team- and individual-oriented sports (20%).

**FIGURE 5: FREQUENTLY CITED SPORTS, SPORT PARTICIPANTS, OVERALL**

2006-2007 Sport Monitor, CFLRI

**Region** Residents of Newfoundland and Labrador are more likely than the national average to report playing at least one team sport, while residents of Quebec are less likely to report this. Indeed, Quebec residents are more likely than the national average to name only individual sports as the most frequent ones that they play.

**Age and sex** Men are more likely than women to report playing hockey and golf, while women are more likely than men to play volleyball. Although their sport participation rates may differ, men and women do not differ with respect to the team- or individual-oriented nature of the sports in which they participate.

Participating in at least one team sport or only team sports is most prevalent among Canadians under the age of 45 years, and this is true for both men and women. Conversely, Canadians over the age of 45 years are more likely to report playing at least one individual sport or playing only individual sports compared to younger adults, and this is true for both women and men. For example, Canadians aged 45 years or older are more likely than younger Canadians to report that they play golf. No sex or age differences appear with respect to engaging in a combination of team- and individual-oriented sports.
How do they participate?

Competition The majority (63%) of sport participants indicate that they compete in sport. Of these, 71% compete locally, 22% provincially, and 7% compete at a national level. Those in Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan, and the Northwest Territories are more likely to indicate that they compete in sport, while residents of Quebec are less likely to report this. Youth aged 15 to 17 are more likely than adults 25 years and older to compete.

Training and coaching Slightly more than half (56%) of sport participants indicate that they train for a recreational or competitive sport and 40% use a coach. Residents of the Yukon are more likely than the average Canadian to report that they train for their sport.

Women are more likely than men to report that they are coached. Youth aged 15 to 17 are more likely than 25 to 44 year olds to report training for sport, and are also most likely to be coached. Those aged 18 to 24 are more likely than 45 to 64 year olds to report that they have a coach. Those who are active are more likely than those who are least active to say that they train as a part of their sport.

Degree of structure Among Canadians who do participate in recreational or competitive sport, 47% exclusively participate in structured and organized environments (for example at a sports facility or fitness club), 19% participate exclusively in unstructured and casual environments (such as playing pick-up games), and 34% play sports in both structured and unstructured formats. Those living in the Northwest Territories are more likely than the national average to indicate that they participate solely in structured and organized environments.

Women are more likely than men to participate solely in structured and organized environments. Individuals aged 18 to 24 are less likely than younger adults (aged 15 to 17) and older adults (65 years and older) to say that they participate solely in structured sport. These same 18 to 24 year olds are more likely than Canadians aged 45 years or older to participate in both structured and unstructured sport activities. No disparities related to income or education appear with respect to the degree of structure of sport activities.
participation. Among sport participants, those who are least active are more likely than those who are active to indicate that the sports that they play are solely in structured and organized environments.

**Summary and Recommendations for Action**

This bulletin reveals that just over one-third of Canadians participate in sport, as defined by the Sport Monitor. This proportion is higher than that found in 2005 by the General Social Survey (GSS)\(^1\) (28%), but similar to that found by the 1998 GSS\(^1\) (34%) and the 2004 Physical Activity and Sport Monitor (36%).\(^2\) Like the GSS, however, the 2007 Sport Monitor finds that:

- Men are more likely to participate in sport compared to women,
- Younger adults are more likely to participate in sport than their older counterparts,
- Higher income levels are associated with higher rates of sport participation, and
- The most popular sports among Canadians include hockey, golf, baseball and softball, racquet sports, soccer, basketball, volleyball, and skiing and snowboarding. Further, team sports appear to be more popular among younger Canadians, while older Canadians are more likely to favour individual sports.

Recent national data depict an environment where Canadians’ lives are generally unsupportive of sport participation. For example:

- Canadians generally spend significantly more time both at work\(^3\) and commuting to and from work\(^4\) than they did almost 15 years earlier.
- 15% of Canadian workers continue to work more than 40 hours per week,\(^6\) and nearly one-third of Canadians self-identify as workaholics.\(^5\)
- Women (and especially mothers) have experienced significant increases in work time.\(^6\)
- Canadians are experiencing greater difficulty in striking a work-life balance; women especially are affected by role overload, work-to-family interference, and membership in the ‘sandwich generation’ which demands caring for children and older parents simultaneously.\(^7\)
- More than half of Canadians also report that work has a negative effect on time for leisure activities,\(^7\) and higher occupational stress among working adults has been linked to reductions in physical activity, including sport participation.\(^8,9\)

In light of these and other pressures on the lives Canadians lead, policymakers need to tailor their interventions to encourage Canadians to include sport in their routines. For example:

- **Encourage strategic partnerships within communities** – Many Canadians report that the infrastructure they require for physical activity and sport is absent or sparse,\(^2\) and many municipalities report having infrastructure which requires significant repair and maintenance.\(^10\) While the fiscal and logistic issues within municipalities must be addressed to encourage sport, policies to encourage the cooperation of municipalities, community leaders, and organizations within the community can bridge the gap between the needs of the community and the infrastructure present.
For example, schools and other facilities not administered by municipalities may have sport facilities that remain unused for several hours every day. In working with the administration of these facilities, municipalities and community sport groups may be able to address a need within their communities; facilities and schools may also benefit by customizing arrangements to use existing municipal resources that are beyond their fiscal reach, such as pools and ice rinks.

**Target sport participation among women**

— Sport participation rates among women are significantly lower than among men. Though the reasons for this are complex, competing family and work pressures are often cited as concerns to women, and women are more likely to feel little to no control over fitting physical activity in their daily lives.\(^{11}\) Additionally, sport may not be viewed as ‘relevant’ to women and girls: Constructs of femininity in Western societies do not include participation in many sports.\(^{12}\) Body image issues appear to affect women’s participation in sport and physical activity, whereby all-female environments elicit the least anxiety about one’s physique among women.\(^{13}\) In addition, women who do participate in sport are noted to have different sport preferences than men.\(^{1}\) Policies that target participation among women must take these complex issues into account to be effective. For instance, offering child care services or helping to coordinate child care sharing, offering women-only sport groups, and offering preferred sports may encourage more women to join sport programs. Support of needs-assessment and program evaluation activities are vital to the success of any sporting program.

**Encourage implementation and expansion of workplace sport**

— Though many larger workplaces in Canada do offer opportunities to participate in team sports,\(^{14}\) data show that team sports are less likely to be offered by smaller workplaces, at which nearly half of Canada’s private sector workforce is employed; regardless, sport opportunities are not the norm among workplaces both large and small,\(^{15}\) and many Canadians feel they cannot incorporate activity into their work routines.\(^{16}\) Further, a moderate proportion of Canadians favour individual-oriented sports over team sports; a focus on team sports may favour some groups of workers (e.g., younger workers) at the expense of others. Policies should therefore encourage more workplaces to implement workplace sport opportunities, including allowing flexibility for all employees to participate. These policies may also require tools to assess the most appropriate form for new programs and the type of sports they should include. Workplaces that already have sport opportunities should consider expanding the number and variety of workplace sport opportunities to allow a greater number of workers to participate in sport at work.
References


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