



Sport Participation in Canada

Valuing sport

Canadians who participate in sport do so for many different reasons. Not surprisingly then, the relative importance of sport to various aspects of their lives differs. The 2006-2007 Sport Monitor examined the importance of sport to the lives of Canadians, both individual-level contributions (*i.e.*, experiences of the individual person) and social contributions (*i.e.*, in interactions with others).

Overall, 58% of Canadians say that sport is important to them personally. Canadians living in Quebec are more likely, whereas those in Newfoundland and Labrador are less likely than the national average to state this. Canadians are most likely to say that sport is important to them personally if they are:

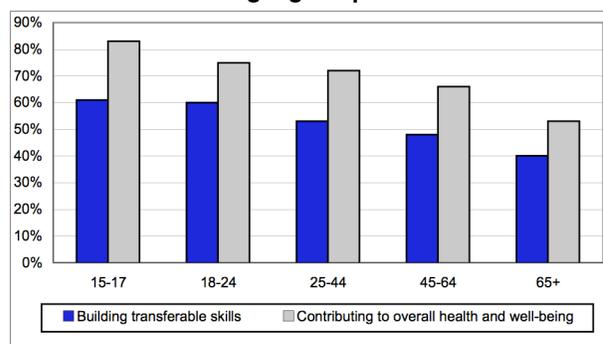
- * male,
- * younger,
- * active, or
- * a sport participant.

Contribution of sport to individual experiences

Half (50%) of Canadians view sport as important for building transferable skills or character such as discipline or leadership, and 68% say it is important to overall health and well-being. Canadians living in Quebec are more likely, whereas those in Newfoundland and Labrador and Ontario are less likely than the national average to report that sport is important to them for overall health and well-being.

Age and sex With increasing age, there is a general decrease in the proportion stating that sport is important for overall health and well-being (among both men and women), and for building transferable skills and character (among men only).

FIGURE 1: INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTION OF SPORT BY AGE % citing high importance

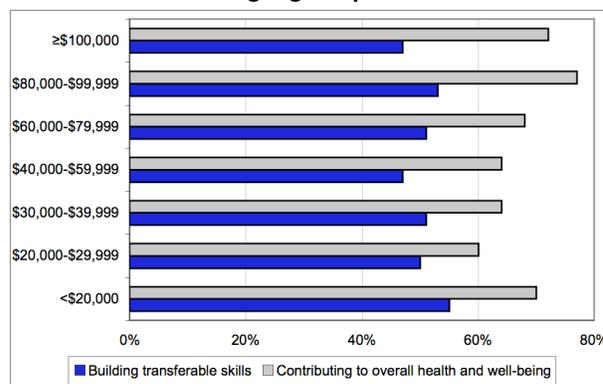


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Socio-economic and demographic characteristics

Canadians with higher household incomes are generally more likely to place great importance on sport for their overall health and wellbeing. College-educated Canadians are more likely than those who have university-level education to report that sport is important in the development of transferable skills and character.

FIGURE 2: INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTION OF SPORT BY HOUSEHOLD INCOME % citing high importance



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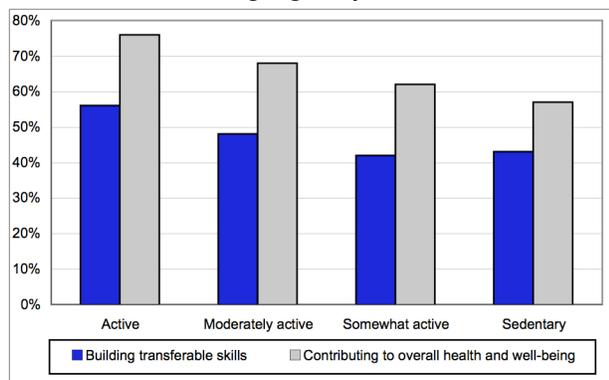


Retirees are generally less likely to state that sport is important for their overall health and well-being (compared to full-time workers, students, and homemakers), and to their skills and character development (compared to students). Never-married adults are most likely to say that sport is important for health and well-being, and are more likely than those who are married to say that it is important for skill and character development. These findings, however, may be related to age.

There are differences in the proportion saying that sport is important in building transferable skills and character in relation to community size, however, the relationship is not clear.

Activity level and sport participation Active Canadians and sport participants are generally most likely to state that sport is important to them for overall health and well-being and in developing transferable life skills or character.

FIGURE 3: INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTION OF SPORT BY ACTIVITY LEVEL
% citing high importance



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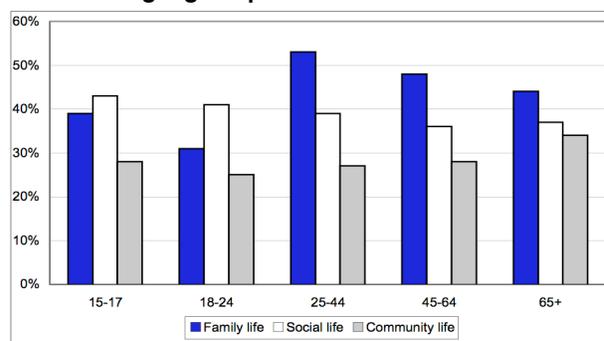
Almost half of Canadians (47%) view sport as important in contributing to family life, 38% say it is important to social life, and 28% state that sport is important for helping make them feel like part of the community. Compared to the average Canadian, Quebec residents are more likely to say that sport is important to their family lives, while residents of Newfoundland and Labrador are less likely to do so. Adults living in New Brunswick and Northwest Territories are more likely than the national average to say that sport is important for

feeling part of their communities. There are no differences across the regions of Canada with respect to the importance of sport to social life.

Age and sex Men and women do not differ in their views of the importance of sport to their family lives. The likelihood of reporting this is lower in early adulthood, increases in middle adulthood, and then declines slightly among older adults. Men, however, are significantly more likely than women to state that sport is important to their social lives, although no age differences exist.

FIGURE 4: SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION OF SPORT BY AGE

% citing high importance of contribution to:



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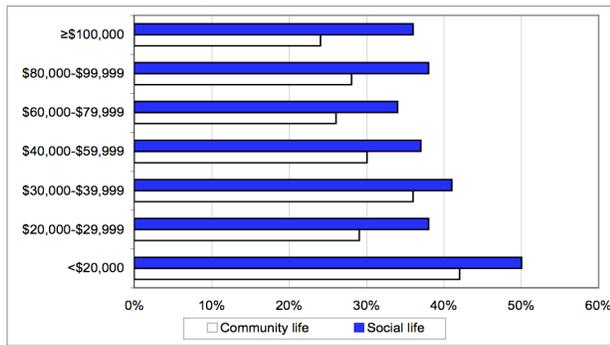
Socio-economic and demographic characteristics

The importance of sport to Canadian family lives does not differ by various socioeconomic and demographic groups, with one exception: Never married adults are least likely to say that sport is important to their family lives.

The likelihood of reporting sport as important to one's social life or one's sense of community belonging generally decreases with increasing income and increasing education levels. Widowed, divorced, or separated Canadians are most likely to state sport is important for a sense of community belonging and are more likely to state that it is important to their social lives when compared to married Canadians.

Full-time workers and students are more likely than part-time workers to report that sport is important to their social lives.

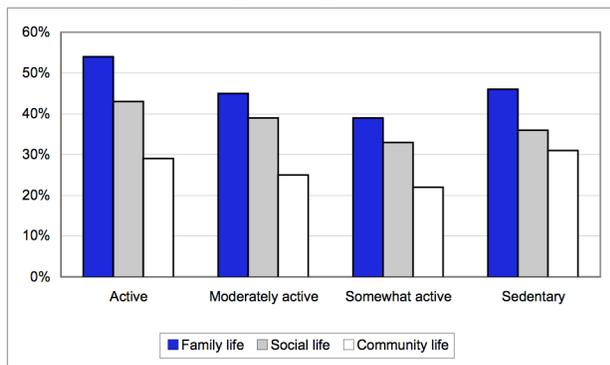
**FIGURE 5: SPORT EXPENDITURES
by household income**



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Activity level and sport participation The proportion citing sport as important to one’s family and social life, as well as to feeling a part of one’s community, is generally highest among sport participants and active Canadians.

**FIGURE 6: SPORT EXPENDITURES
by activity level**



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Summary

Canadians are generally more likely to attribute importance to sport in their individual experiences (50–68% of Canadians) than in their interactions with others (28–47% of Canadians). Sport is more likely to be perceived as important by men than by women in an overall sense and in their social lives, but not in other facets of their individual and social experiences. Older Canadians are less likely to feel that sport is important to their individual lives, and the importance of sport to family life is greatest among those in middle adulthood. Higher household income and education is associated with higher importance of sport to one’s health and well-being, but lower importance to one’s social life and sense of

community belonging. Active Canadians and sport participants are most likely to rate sport as important in all aspects.

Recommendations for Action

Many efforts aimed at promoting sport and physical activity concentrate on the concrete physical health benefits of participation rather than less tangible but rewarding social benefits. It appears that the beliefs of Canadians with respect to the benefits of sport are similarly oriented.¹ In light of these findings, policies to increase the importance of sport to Canadians should balance both health and social benefits by addressing the following issues:

- * **Make it easier for women to participate** Canadian women are less active in their leisure time than men;² and less likely to be sport participants.³ Sport appears to be of lesser importance to women personally and to their social lives. Women experience many barriers to sport, including greater difficulty in striking a work-life balance, being especially affected by role overload, work-to-family interference, membership in the ‘sandwich generation’ which demands caring for children and older parents,⁴ and an increase in work-time.⁵ Focusing on options that can assist women in overcoming these types of obstacles is critical to enhancing the importance of sport in the lives of Canadian women (e.g., finding opportunities to participate in sport as a family or for mothers and children to participate in sport separately but simultaneously). For example, *Mothers in Motion*,⁶ a website presented by the *Canadian Association for the Advancement of Women and Sport and Physical Activity*, may offer sport ideas and tips to mothers of children of different ages, information on local opportunities, and links to other organizations which may assist groups and individuals seeking to increase sport participation among mothers.
- * **Change attitudes among older adults** Canadians aged 65 years or older are generally the least active of all adults.² ‘Slowing down’ with age is a widely-held expectation of and among older adults, and this belief is associated with lower activity levels.⁷ Older Canadians often

cite injury, disability, and chronic disease as significant barriers to participation in sport;⁸ however, similar proportions of symptomatic and asymptomatic older adults fail to meet minimum physical activity guidelines.⁹ For most older Canadians, being active is an important constituent in maintaining physical and mental health in later life.¹⁰ Older adults who participate in active sports have been found to have lower mortality and morbidity rates from common diseases in older age like angina and diabetes.¹¹ Further, risk of future limiting disability is reduced among seniors who participate in sport. This finding is interesting because is true for both those who are consistent exercisers *and* those who become active after years of sedentary living.¹² Policies and programs should be implemented which encourage beliefs that sport is for everyone, regardless of age, and that it is never too late to reap the benefits of sport participation. One example is Canada's Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living for Older Adults which encourages older Canadians to not view age as a barrier to sport and physical activity.¹³

* **Recognize the diversity of non-participating Canadians** Those who do not participate in sport may be inactive for many different reasons. While some people may express a genuine disinterest in sport, many perceived barriers⁸ to participation such as inexperience, seeming cultural incompatibility, feeling embarrassed, and a lack of sport partners, may be more responsive to sport promotion efforts; additionally, different groups may have different motivations for considering participation. The characteristics of different groups of Canadians (*e.g.*, past negative experiences which cause negative attitudes toward sport;¹⁴ lower socioeconomic status which may require different types of public investment and education;¹⁵ cultural values which necessitate single-sex environments for

participation¹⁶) may pose specific combinations of perceived barriers that require unique sport promotion approaches to yield the best results. Initial steps for policy and program development include the identification of the target population, and to critically evaluate the barriers, motivations, and attitudes of the population.

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