**Sport Participation in Canada**

**Activity Preferences**

Matching available sport opportunities with the activity preferences of Canadians is a likely predictor of whether people will adopt regular sport participation. The 2006-2007 Sport Monitor examined the preferences of Canadians with respect to a number of dimensions of sport participation and physical activity.

**Intensity**

Canadians were asked whether they prefer vigorous activities (which involve a lot of running around) or moderate activities (which are less strenuous) when they are active. A preference for solely vigorous activities is reported by 12% of Canadians. Two-fifths of Canadians state a preference for only moderate activities (39%); a similar proportion report a preference for a combination of moderate and vigorous activities (41%). About 8% of Canadians prefer neither vigorous nor moderate activities.

**Moderate only**
- Women, overall and particularly aged 18 to 64 years
- Proportion with this preference generally increases with increasing age
- Those with moderate or lower activity levels (compared to most active)
- Retirees
- Those who do not participate in sport

**Vigorous only**
- Men, overall and particularly aged 25 to 64 years
- Proportion with this preference generally decreases with increasing age
- Most active Canadians (compared to least active)
- Sport participants

**Both moderate and vigorous**
- Proportion with this preference generally decreases with increasing age (among women, a steady decline; among men, a precipitous drop after age 65)
- Higher household income
- Most active Canadians (compared to least active)
- Sport participants

**Neither moderate nor vigorous**
- Older adults (65 years or older)
- Less than high school education
- Retirees
- Least active Canadians (compared to most active)
- Those who do not participate in sport

**Competitiveness**

More Canadians report a preference for non-competitive activities only (47%) than for competitive activities only (9%); 44% of...
Canadians state that they prefer both competitive and non-competitive activities.

**FIGURE 2: PREFERENCES REGARDING COMPETITIVENESS, OVERALL**

Who is more likely to prefer competitive activities and who is not?

**Competitive only**
- Men
- Proportion with this preference generally decreases with increasing age
- Less than high school education
- Sport participants

**Non-competitive only**
- Women, overall and particularly 18 to 64 years
- Proportion with this preference generally increases with increasing age (highest among women 45+ years and men 65+ years)
- Retirees
- Those who do not participate in sport

**Both competitive and non-competitive**
- Men
- Proportion with this preference generally decreases with increasing age
- Higher household income (compared to lowest income)
- Sport participants

**Challenging one’s skills**
About one-quarter of Canadians (26%) indicate that they would prefer to participate in activities which provide a constant challenge to their skills, while 12% state that their preference is to participate in activities that require a low level of skill. However, most Canadians (62%) report that they prefer to participate in a combination of activities that provide both challenges to skill as well as those that demand a low skill level.

**FIGURE 3: PREFERENCES REGARDING SKILL LEVEL, OVERALL**

Who is more likely to prefer activities that challenge skills and who is not?

**Constant challenge to skills**
- Men
- Sport participants

**Low skill level**
- Women, overall and particularly 25 to 44 years
- Proportion with this preference increases with increasing age
- Least active Canadians (compared to most active)
- Those who do not participate in sport

**Combination of constant challenge and low skill**
- Younger than age 65 years

**Team or Individual Sport**
Most Canadians (62%) prefer to participate in activities that provide a team experience as well as those activities that allow individual expression. Solely team activities are preferred by 16% of Canadians, while individual activities only are preferred by 23% of the population.

**FIGURE 4: PREFERENCES REGARDING TEAM VS. INDIVIDUAL ACTIVITIES, OVERALL**
Who is more likely to prefer team activities or individual activities?

**Team only**
- Lower education
- Lower income
- Those who do not participate in sport

**Individual only**
- Age 45 years or older
- University-educated

**Combination of team and individual**
- Age 18 to 64 years
- College-educated (compared to less than secondary)
- Sport participants

**Participation alone or with others**

Just over two-thirds of Canadians (68%) state that they prefer activities that provide the opportunity for family and friends to participate together. Sixteen percent prefer opportunities for activities that allow friends to participate together, and 7% state a preference for activities that allow families to participate together. Fewer than one in ten Canadians (9%) prefer to participate in physical activity as a solitary endeavour.

**Activities for friends together**
- Men, overall and particularly those aged 25 to 44 years
- Ages 18 to 24 years and 65+ years
- Less than high school education

**Activities for family together**
- Age 65+ years
- Least active Canadians (compared to most active)
- Those who do not participate in sport

**Activities for friends and family together**
- Ages 25 to 44 years (men), 25 to 64 years (women)
- Sport participants

**Summary**

Young Canadian men and women (aged 25 years or younger) are more likely to report preferences for a variety of activities in terms of intensity, competitiveness, skills challenge, and team or individual orientation. Moreover, they are more likely to state preferences for activities that allow friends only to participate together.

On the other hand, older adults (65 years of age or older) are more likely to prefer individual activities with lower intensity, lower skill level, and no competitiveness.

For the competitiveness and intensity dimensions, men between the ages of 25 and 64 are generally more likely to reflect the preferences of young men; on the other hand, women in the same age group are generally more likely to reflect the preferences of older women.

Perhaps as expected, Canadians who do not participate in sport or who are inactive are generally more likely to state preferences for lower intensity and lower skill activities. Canadians who do not participate in sport tend to prefer team over individual activities. Interestingly, Canadians of different activity levels are equally likely to prefer team or individual activities.

Some socio-economic and demographic indicators are related to physical activity preferences, but most of these relationships are likely related to the other characteristics of their constituent groups.

Who is more likely to prefer to participate alone, and who is more likely to prefer participating with others?

**Activities by oneself**
- University-educated (compared to those with less than high school education)
- Those who do not participate in sport

**FIGURE 5: PREFERENCES REGARDING PARTNER, OVERALL**

2006-07 Sport Monitor, CFLRI
(e.g., widowed, divorced, or separated Canadians are, on average, older than other marital statuses; those who hold less than high school education or who have never been married are younger Canadians who have yet to reach the age typical of high school graduation and marriage).

Recommendations for action

Canadians who do not currently participate in sport form the majority of Canadian adults (64%). Policy makers promoting sport participation in Canada should consider the types of policies that encourage non-participants to start some sort of sport, in addition to continuing and enhancing support of those who are current sport participants, which can be achieved through:

* Supporting continued sport participation through teen and young adult years There is a paucity of data in a Canadian context that characterizes the changes over time in sport among youth. Cross-sectional research shows that the greatest declines in physical activity appear to occur through the teen years, with a similar decline in sport participation. A longitudinal Dutch study following youth over time found, however, that while total physical activity declined between ages 13 and 27, the relative importance and contribution of sport to habitual physical activity increased over time; this finding suggests that many young adults may consider sport a physical activity priority, and may be responsive to supportive sport promotion efforts. The activity preferences of young adults tend to be flexible (competitive and non-competitive activities of vigorous and moderate intensities, providing both constant and lower skill challenges in team and individual orientation), likely reflecting a desire for variety in sport opportunities. Barriers cited by young adults include a lack of time and a lack of convenient transportation; offering sport opportunities that are at convenient times and convenient locations may help young adults to overcome the barriers to sport participation that they cite, and to stem the decline in sport participation associated with age. Making these opportunities friendly to participation with friends to reflect this preference among young Canadians may enhance effectiveness. Policy makers may also want to consider the principles of Long-term Athlete Development, (LTAD) which seeks to encourage and support sport beginning at an early age. Further, LTAD encourages support and instruction to be provided at a skill level that engages participants and encourages them to continue their participation.

* Designing sport opportunities for women Women are significantly less likely than men to participate in sport; therefore, women form a large target group for the promotion of sport. The role of family in relation to sport activities appears to be an important consideration for women; they are more likely to believe that sport is a good way to spend time with family, and among those who do not currently participate in sport, are more likely to view regular sport participation as direct competition with family pursuits for available time. Women are likely to have less leisure time than men, so integrating family time and sport into one activity may be viewed favourably by many women. Women are more likely to feel that sport is “too competitive”, and their physical activity preferences agree: non-competitive, low skill, moderate activities. To encourage sport among women who do not currently participate, policy makers and sport promoters need to challenge many widely-held notions about what constitutes ‘sport’, which may be perceived as barriers to participation. The Australian Sport Commission has published a reference tool that covers many of the issues specific to women and girls in sport, which may be of use to policy makers in this area.

* Encouraging older adults to try sport Older Canadians are the least likely to participate in sport and are the least active in leisure time; this situation exists despite the larger portion of each day generally devoted to leisure among older adults as compared to their younger counterparts. Beliefs that one’s later years are an opportunity to ‘slow down’, and that sport and physical activity are recreational rather than health maintenance behaviours, are widely held by older adults, notions that manifest themselves in lower intentions to be active among older adults despite higher levels of perceived control over physical activity choices. The above-described physical...
activity preferences of older adults are in line with these findings. Further, older adults are more likely to have weaker positive beliefs and stronger negative beliefs about sport participation, and are more likely than others to report that a current injury or disability and the fear of incurring a new injury or disability are significant barriers to sport participation. A fear of injury due to sport and physical activity may be particularly problematic to policy makers, since recommendations based on empirical research show that physical activity, including sport, actually reduces risk of many of the disorders and injuries feared by some older adults, including falls. Policy makers and health promoters seeking to increase sport participation among older Canadians can:

- Design sport opportunities that suit the needs and desires of older adults (including lower intensity, low competition, not team-oriented, and suiting a wide range of skill levels), and

- Provide information and encouragement that challenge long- and widely-held beliefs related to aging. This also includes providing clarification to common misunderstandings regarding the level of sport participation that provides health benefits, a level that is, in actuality, more in line with physical activity preferences described above.

References


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—a CFLRI project initiated in partnership with—

Sport Canada, Canadian Heritage, and the Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council