



## Report Subject:

**Young Female's attitudes and engagement in sport/physical activity**

## Title:

**Research study to explore attitudes and engagement in sport/physical activity amongst young females attending FE Colleges in areas of high deprivation**

## Background

The study was conducted by marketing agency, diva creative on behalf of StreetGames and Sport England between October 2011 – January 2012.

The study focused on exploring attitudes and engagement in sport/physical activity amongst young women (aged 16-19 years) attending FE Colleges within disadvantaged areas. It also looked to identify how best to communicate effectively to promote the benefits of sport/ physical activity and ultimately encourage them to take up and maintain a healthy level of physical activity in adulthood.

Students involved in the study were from a range of geographic areas across the country including: Chesterfield, Leicester, Durham, Sunderland, Darlington, Warrington and North West London. The study looked to predominantly capture the views of students on vocational



courses, such as hairdressing, beauty and travel/tourism.

The research methods<sup>1</sup> included an on-line survey, focus groups and creative workshops. This briefing paper provides a summary of the key findings. The full report is available to download from the StreetGames website: [www.streetgames.org/youngpeople-attitudesandengagementinsport](http://www.streetgames.org/youngpeople-attitudesandengagementinsport)

<sup>1</sup> The research methods included an on-line survey (469 completed questionnaires submitted – including over 200 females), 10 focus groups (5 male/ 5 female groups) and 2 creative workshops (1 male/1 female group).



## Summary Findings

The findings show many similarities between this group of young women and the Sport England Market Segment: *Leanne*. The same study was also carried out amongst young men and not surprisingly there are some clear differences between the males and females.

Significantly, the research findings show that there is latent demand amongst this group of young women to participate in physical activity. Positioning the right types of sporting activities for the target audience in a way that will appeal to their motivators should help convert this latent demand into participation.

## Current Participation Profile

The survey results show that 25% of female respondents said that they take part in some form of sport/physical activity three or more times per week, 36% take part once a week, whilst 35% take part less often. By comparison, the male students were more active, with 73% of males taking part in sport/physical activity at least once a week.

The current level of physical activity stated by the young women is surprising. The question, however, did not specifically ask about the amount of time or level of intensity of the physical activity and discussions during the focus groups suggested that activity such as walking to the bus to get to college were counted by the girls. This statistic therefore may be slightly misleading. Nevertheless and encouragingly only 5% of females said that they never take part in physical activity and are not interested in doing so.

Table 1 below shows the types of activities which the young females are currently taking part in.

**Table 1: Main activities respondents currently take part in**

Activity	% Females
Individual activities (e.g. swimming/cycling /running)	45%
Keep fit/gym (including aerobics/yoga classes)	36%
Dance (e.g. street dance/cheerleading/modern)	17%
Team sports (e.g. football, rugby, netball)	17%
Martial arts	1%
Others (e.g.martial arts, roller sports, walking)	13%

N.B: Respondents were able to select more than one response to questions, therefore responses sum to >100%

# Background Facts for Doorstep Sport

The table shows that individual activities such as swimming/running and keep fit/gym are most popular amongst the females – followed by dance and team sports.

The main difference between the males and females was that nearly three times as many males (48%) are taking part in team sports as females (17%).

This trend was reinforced by responses which told us their one favourite activity. As Table 2 shows, activities such as dance, swimming, walking and running were most popular amongst these females followed by football - with other traditional sports such as netball, tennis and badminton being selected by only a relatively small proportion.

**Table 2: Favourite activities respondents currently take part in**

Activity	% Females
Dance	14%
Swimming	12%
Walking	11%
Running/jogging	10%
Football	10%
Gym	5%
Horse riding	5%
Cycling/BMX	3%
Boxing	2%

## Barriers to Participation

**A lack of time/too much college work and cost** are the two factors which are most likely to prevent these females from taking part in sport/physical activity more often – see Table 3. Although a range of other factors also play a part, such as:

- Having no one to go with
- A lack of confidence and concerns over their ability
- A lack of knowledge about what's on and where to go; and
- A lack of opportunity.

The main difference between the males and females was that almost twice as many females (24%) compared to males (13%) said that confidence is a barrier.



# Background Facts for Doorstep Sport

**Table 3: Key factors preventing respondents from taking part in sport/physical activity**

Barriers	% Females
Too much college work	53%
Too expensive	34%
No one to go with	27%
Not confident enough	24%
Don't know where to go	17%
Nothing on at the right time	16%
Too far away	13%
Too busy socialising	12%
Am not good enough to play for a team/club	11%
Don't have/can't afford right kit	11%
It's too competitive/serious	9%

Comments captured via the focus groups emphasise these findings:

*"If you go to the gym it's pretty expensive and you think 'well am I really gonna go that much for it to be a benefit?'"*

*"Swimming's gone up to £4 and that's a lot for an hour"*

*"I want to learn to ice-skate... I would never go there because everyone is looking over from the balcony and I can't ice-skate so I don't wanna go there for everyone to laugh at me"*

*"I feel like everyone's looking at you. If you're chunky it's like 'oh my god everyone else is skinny'"*

*"If I had someone to make me then I would"*

*"If you're on your own you feel stupid doing stuff"*

Given the competing time pressures amongst this group, it is useful to understand their priorities. Table 4 shows that college, family and friends were the main priorities, whilst being active was only seen as a key priority for a minority (10%) of females.

More than twice the amount of males (22%) prioritised sport. Spending time with family was also a much higher priority amongst the females compared to the males (67% compared to 43%).

**Table 4 – Main priorities for respondents**

Priorities	% Females
College	77%
Family	67%
Friends	46%
Relationships	39%
Part-time job/work	34%
Hobbies/interests	20%
Playing sport/ being active	10%
Shopping/fashion/image	8%

The respondents main motivations for taking part were predominantly based around **fitness, fun/enjoyment**, weight loss and to feel better, although there were also respondents who took part for the challenge/competition or to learn new skills – see Table 6.

Motivations around losing weight were far more significant amongst females, whilst circa twice as many males as females are motivated by improving performance and gaining new skills.

## Motivations and Requirements

Factors which are most likely to encourage these young females to take part in regular sport/physical activity include **affordability of sessions and ease of access** – see Table 5.

However, there were many other factors which were also considered important, such as:

- Sessions which focus less on competition and more on getting fit
- A good instructor/coach
- The provision of female only sessions
- Opportunities to learn new skills e.g. team work that might help with employment
- Opportunities for social time to talk and meet friends
- A wider range of activities/alternative formats – not just traditional team sports
- The provision of kit/equipment.

# Background Facts for Doorstep Sport

**Table 5: Key factors that would encourage respondents to take part in regular sport/physical activity**

Factors	% Females
Cheap to do	65%
Easy to get to	52%
If sessions focused on getting fit rather than competition	26%
A really good coach/instructor	26%
Girls/Boys only sessions	26%
If taking part helped learn skills	23%
If sessions included social time	23%
Wider range of activities	20%
If kit and equipment provided	19%
If I could turn up changed or knew changing rooms were clean	12%
If there were incentives for attendance	11%
If there were more opportunities for competitive matches	10%
If there were more social leagues/fun matches	10%

In comparison to the males the females are more likely to be encouraged by girls only sessions, whilst males are more interested in competitive opportunities compared to the females.

The respondents' main motivations for taking part were predominantly based around **fitness, weight loss, fun/enjoyment and feeling better** – see Table 6.

**Table 6: Main motivations for taking part in sport/physical activity**

Factors	% Females
Cheap to do	65%
Easy to get to	52%
If sessions focused on getting fit rather than competition	26%
A really good coach/instructor	26%
Girls/Boys only sessions	26%
If taking part helped learn skills	23%
If sessions included social time	23%
Wider range of activities	20%
If kit and equipment provided	19%
If I could turn up changed or knew changing rooms were clean	12%
If there were incentives for attendance	11%
If there were more opportunities for competitive matches	10%
If there were more social leagues/fun matches	10%



# Background Facts for Doorstep Sport

Motivations around losing weight were far more significant amongst females, whilst circa twice as many males as females are motivated by improving performance and gaining new skills.

Comments captured via the focus groups emphasise these findings:

*"I think it'd be good if you made things fun 'cos then if it's fun and you're having a good time it takes your mind off it and you don't realise that you're doing exercise"*

*"I do it so I don't get fat"*

*"I'd feel more confident if it was only girls"*

*"Some people are embarrassed, especially girls don't want to do it (exercise) in front of boys"*

*"Sports can make you a more confident person but it's just getting that confidence to start with"*

*"It clears your mind, takes your mind off things"*

*"It's a break from college work"*

## Latent demand

There is clearly an interest in sport/physical activity amongst these females – demonstrated by the survey results which show that:

- Only 5% said that they never take part/not interested in sport and physical activity
- 64% said that they would like to know more about where they can take part in sport/ physical activity locally.

Most of the females were interested in taking part in some form of sport/physical activity in the future; with the **most popular activities including: swimming, fitness classes, going to the gym, dance, running/jogging, trampolining and badminton** - see Table 7.



**Table 7: The main sports/activities respondents would like to take part in**

Activity	% Females
Swimming	47%
Classes (e.g. step/tone/Zumba)	46%
Gym	41%
Dance	37%
Running/jogging	33%
Trampolining	25%
Badminton	20%
Cycling/BMX	16%
Adventure sports	15%
Netball	14%
Tennis	12%
Martial arts	11%
Boot camp style fitness	11%
Volleyball	11%
Football	10%
Boxing	10%

In addition, the majority of females (63%) said that they would be more likely to take part in sport/physical activity if they had something to work towards, such as a fundraising event or fun run. This was confirmed via discussions within the focus groups, with a particular interest in events such as Race for Life – although there was less interest in sports tournaments amongst the females.

## London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics

The London 2012 Olympics and Paralympics does not appear as yet, to have had a significant impact on inspiring participation – particularly outside of London. 42% of respondents from London and only 16% of respondents from the rest of England said that forthcoming Olympics had inspired them to take part in sport/physical activity. Discussions in the focus groups also revealed only limited interest, and for some a clear disinterest!

## Communication

Although respondents in the survey stated that they would be most likely to look for information on posters and leaflets at college, discussions within the focus groups revealed that in practice – posters and leaflets were often not noticed or read (except on the back of toilet doors) and that there was a lack of clarity about what activities were on offer within the college settings.



# Background Facts for Doorstep Sport

The females consulted were **far more likely to attend sport/activity session if someone they knew recommended it or encouraged them to go** – with a lack of confidence being a key issue.

Having someone to go with and taking part in friendship groups was really important; with participants most likely to respond to word of mouth from friends or tutors, taster sessions/demonstrations and Facebook.

In addition, taking part with their mums, sisters or other female family members was appealing – as demonstrated by the comments below captured in focus groups.

*"If you're on your own you feel stupid doing stuff"*

*"If you've got friends you can make it fun"*

*"It's good to have a laugh as well with your mum sometimes and it's like a good girly session"*

*"I'm joining the gym in the new year with mum 'cos I don't want her going on her own"*

The messages which appealed most to the females emphasised the key elements of fitness and taking part with friends such as: *"Get in shape with a mate"*, *"Join our class - It's our duty to kick your booty"*, *"Do it together"*, *"Come with me"*, *"We'll have fun"* – with messages emphasising fun, variety of activities, women-only sessions, discount offers and looking good/losing weight as well as providing basic information about times, dates, costs and contact details.

They were most attracted to promotional images which included photographs of 'real people' taking part in activities with bold, eye-catching colours and clear wording, rather than posed models or urban style graphics.



## Conclusion

The research findings, suggest that there is latent demand amongst these females. From a behaviour change perspective, a significant proportion of the target audience are in the 'contemplation phase' of participation (i.e. inactive, but interested in doing some sort of sport). Therefore, by positioning the right types of sporting activities for the target audience in a way that will appeal to their motivators, we should be able to move them along the stages to change towards preparation, action and maintenance.

These young females need activities which focus on social activity rather than a competition and consider involving friends and family members in sessions. As young women are concerned about their appearance (both how they look whilst participating in sport and how they imagine they will look as a result of participating) sessions should focus on looking good, keeping fit/losing weight as well as having fun.

In summary, opportunities which are most likely to appeal to this market need to:

- Be low cost/affordable (circa £1.50-£2.50, or paying up to £3 per session was considered acceptable, with the use of equipment included and opportunities for promotional and loyalty discounts – 'getting a bargain!')
- Be easy to access
- Be informal, social, non pressured and fun with 'hidden coaching'
- Consider the inclusion of music – which provides a real motivating factor
- Provide sessions which focus on either fitness/weight loss or de-stress/relaxation
- Consider the use of taster and multi-sports sessions
- Be led by a coach/instructor who makes sessions fun, is friendly/approachable and that they can relate to (the gender of the instructor is not important)
- Last about one hour
- Include female only opportunities and consider options for females to exercise with their mums or other female family members
- Include the provision of kit/equipment
- Include social time
- Include incentives to reward attendance, improvement and achievement etc. Females were attracted to loyalty discounts.

## Implications for doorstep sport

Area	Suggested Actions
Doorstep sport basics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The basics of doorstep (right time, right place, right price, right style) sport remain of paramount importance with this group – particularly ensuring that sessions are affordable, easily accessible and run by coaches/leaders who can relate to the participants and make sessions fun.</li> </ul>
Programme of Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Project Coordinators need to ensure that programmes reflect demands for a wider range of activities. This may require:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Linking up with wider sports providers/instructors</li> <li>Additional training for coaches/leaders in different sports/activities</li> <li>The provision of demonstration and taster sessions as sometimes it is the non-traditional activities and/or activities with a 'twist' that appeal which may never have been tried before.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Encourage and develop a sense of independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects need to help young women to develop a sense of independence to assist participants wishing to take part in solo/informal sport such as swimming/running/aerobics and going to the gym. This may involve:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simply showing participants where to go and how to find such activities and where sport can be read about and watched.</li> <li>Physical visits to sports venues/leisure centres – to teach young participants how to use them.</li> <li>Liaising with leisure centre staff to help engender a welcoming environment for new/young users.</li> <li>It may also be useful to discuss with leisure centre staff the communication channels and messages that young people are most likely to respond to – ie word of mouth, Facebook and taster sessions.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Foster links with NGBs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fostering links with NGBs: many NGBs have developed new products aimed at appealing to the 'informal sport' market, where participants do not have to commit to the rigours of formal training, matches, affiliation and competition; such as No Strings – Badminton, Cardio Tennis, Back to Netball or Just Play football.</li> </ul>
Identify and supporting peer champions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The research data highlighted the importance to young women of going to activities with friends or in friendship groups; a peer champion could build this bridge. A peer champion is a local leader of formal and informal social groups. Peer champions do not have to be outstanding at playing sport, but they will be at the hub of local social groups for young people with a willingness to advocate the benefits of participating in sport to their peers.</li> </ul>

# Background Facts for Doorstep Sport

Area	Suggested Actions
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects need to use the 'right' communication tools and messages.</li> <li>Simply putting up posters and leaflets around college sites, is unlikely to successfully engage these groups.</li> <li>Having someone to go with and taking part in friendship groups or with other family members was really important; with a lack of confidence being a key issue.</li> <li>Messages that appealed most were often fun, short and to the point and emphasised losing weight, looking good, relaxing, de-stressing, feeling confident and spending time with family and friends</li> <li>Messages should be fun, vibrant and non-competitive</li> <li>Communication materials should use images of young women that the target audience identify with who are having fun</li> <li>Communication channels and tools include peer influencers, Facebook, taster sessions, tutors, text messages and student intranet.</li> <li>Offer loyalty cards to earn free sessions and group discount schemes for bringing friends or family.</li> </ul>
Provide opportunities to develop leadership skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects need to ensure that young people have the opportunity to mature and develop leadership skills and confidence through coaching, volunteering and devolved decision making.</li> </ul>
Support young people to look for opportunities to join sports clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects need to support young people to look for opportunities to join sports clubs and attend events in their local community – helping them to identify where these are and how to join them. In addition where a young person has the skills in a particular sport and a desire to progress it is important to highlight the appropriate player pathways/exit routes. Signposting and follow up contact are important aspects of this work as are identifying the opportunities to create new informal groups e.g. jogging groups.</li> </ul>
Increase motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects need to try and helping to increase young peoples' understanding of why a sporting and active lifestyle is good for them. Explaining the value of lifelong activity. Gentle health and lifestyle advice from coach/sessional staff can be 'drip fed' into sessions over a period of time and built into additional activities.</li> <li>Integrating music into a physical activity session has been shown to increase motivation and is attractive to young females.</li> </ul>

# Background Facts for Doorstep Sport

Area	Suggested Actions
Develop sports specific skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whilst it is important to provide informal 'join in /have fun' sessions within doorstep sport programmes, for those females which are potentially interested in progressing within a particular sport, it will be important to provide opportunities for participants to develop activity specific skills. This may require the provision of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Structured coaching opportunities; delivered via a relaxed manner, with participants given the opportunity to learn basic skills, build confidence and be able to put their skills into practice via a game-led approach and small-sided games.</li> <li>Setting participants skills or tricks to practice between sessions</li> <li>Recognition, rewards and incentives – such as player of the week or month</li> <li>Access to competitive opportunities - this may be as simple as internal round-robin competitions, friendly games or challenges. Additionally it may include home and away matches, involvement in tournaments, festivals and local Central Venue Leagues. Thus providing young people with the opportunity to develop their playing skills, tactics and confidence in a competitive environment. Whilst also helping to get participants used to making the commitment to taking part on a regular basis, visiting new places and meeting new people to help build resilience and learning that in sport 'sometimes you win, sometimes you lose'.</li> </ul> </li> <li>To facilitate this, coaching staff may require access to additional training/qualifications or support from experienced sports specific coaches. Courses within the StreetGames Training Academy can support these needs.</li> </ul>

## StreetGames

StreetGames is a national partner of Sport England and a centre of expertise for developing doorstep sport in disadvantaged communities.

The charity supports community based sports projects that deliver sport and volunteering opportunities to young people living in the 20% most deprived wards in the UK.

StreetGames works with National Governing Bodies of Sport to establish and develop links between community and mainstream sport. Recognised by the London 2012 Olympic & Paralympic Games Inspire Mark, StreetGames is creating a lasting legacy of doorstep sport in the UK.



streetgames.org