

RALLY REPORT 2024

A CALL TO REIMAGINE SPORT SO

ALL GIRLS

CAN PLAY

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral, unceded, and unsurrendered territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations Peoples that call this land home. We also acknowledge the deep-rooted grief, trauma, and loss caused by Canada's colonial systems and policies. As we engage in sport and physical activity across Turtle Island, we recognize the caretakers of the land where we live, work, and play. Above all, we recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples' connection and kinship to the land.

»» INTRODUCTION

Equipping Sport Leaders to Create Lasting Change



In 2024, in partnership with Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities, and in collaboration with global insight consultancy IMI Consulting, we set out to understand the current state of sport for girls by conducting a study with over 5,000 Canadians aged 6 to 65, with a focus on girls aged 6 to 18. We surveyed over 2,000 girls to understand:

- > What are their participation rates in sport and physical activity?
- > Where and why are they playing?
- > What is holding them back from reaching their potential?
- > How can we overcome these challenges?

Rally Report 2024 provides a timely update on girls' participation rates in sport and physical activity. It offers critical insights into the benefits and barriers they experience, and where additional efforts and investments are needed. The research also takes a deep dive into key elements of girls' experiences with sport that have been overlooked, namely body confidence and the menstrual cycle. Through it all, we aim to centre the girls, having them describe—in their own words—how they experience sport and physical activity today and what obstacles they face. Throughout the report, the perspectives and experiences of girls come to life through direct quotes from the research.

Ultimately, Rally Report 2024 aims to move beyond simply surfacing challenges and barriers. Instead, we strive to support and inspire leaders and organizations with fresh insights into how they can reimagine sport in Canada and create more equitable, inclusive environments for everyone.

ABOUT THIS STUDY

Advocates and champions have spent decades fighting for the rights of girls and women to play sport in Canada. Now, after years of work toward gender equity, an overwhelming majority of Canadians finally agree that girls should be encouraged to play sports as much as boys (1).

For over 43 years, Canadian Women & Sport has been leading this movement, working side by side with sport leaders and organizations from coast to coast to coast to drive change at every level (2). We've seen first-hand how critical it is for decision-makers to be equipped with data and insights as they work to transform the sport and physical activity system so that all girls can play.

THE WOMEN'S SPORT MOVEMENT HAS NOT ALWAYS INCLUDED EVERYONE

Girls and women experience and participate in sport and physical activity differently based on intersections of their identities such as race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, and 2SLGBTQIA+ identity. In Rally Report 2024, we took several steps toward building a more complete picture that includes all girls. We approached applying an intersectional lens in this research by expanding what we meant by "sport participation," thoughtfully engaging with how diverse girls may experience sport and physical activity, and actively reflecting on areas where more work is needed to truly support all girls to play. See our Research Methodology for more information.

Throughout this report, reference to girls and women should be understood as self-identified gender, not as assigned biological sex. While the focus of Rally Report 2024 is on girls and young women, we know that gender-diverse youth face significant barriers to participating in sport and physical activity (3). It is not possible in this study to provide sport participation rates of gender-diverse Canadians but recent research suggests that they lag behind cisgender youth (4). Canadian Women & Sport believes that disrupting traditional norms and approaches to sport and physical activity will make them better for everyone, including girls, women, and gender-diverse people, as well as the many boys and men left out of the current system.

» GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

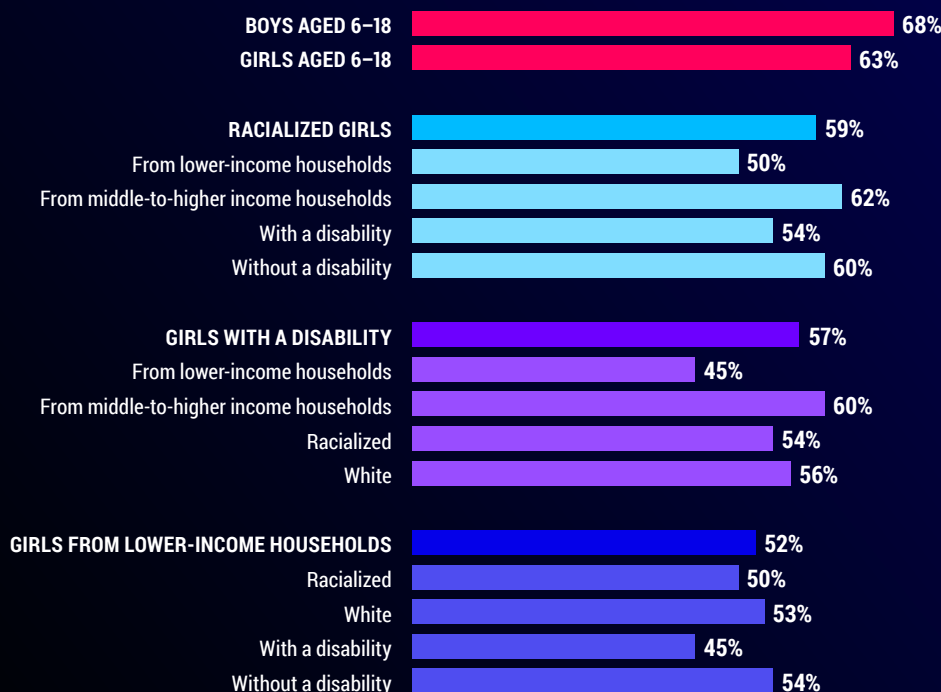
Celebrating Progress & Uncovering Gaps

MORE GIRLS ARE PLAYING THAN EVER, AND THERE IS ROOM TO IMPROVE

Today, 63% of girls aged 6 to 18 report participating in organized team or individual sport at least weekly, compared to 68% of boys. This reflects a steady increase in the percentage of girls playing since we began tracking participation rates in 2016.¹ This progress is worth celebrating! It demonstrates the value of committed leadership, increased investment, and heightened focus on creating equitable opportunities for women and girls in sport.



Percentage of Canadian Youth Reporting Weekly Organized Sport Participation



While this trend is encouraging, the playing field is far from level.

- > **Girls participate at lower rates than boys.**
- > **Nearly 4 in 10 girls are missing out on the benefits of sport altogether. This jumps to 5 in 10 by age 16.**
- > **Girls from lower-income households of all racial backgrounds are less likely to participate, particularly when they also have a disability.**

¹ While methodological changes in our research make direct comparisons challenging, we've observed a consistent upward trajectory.

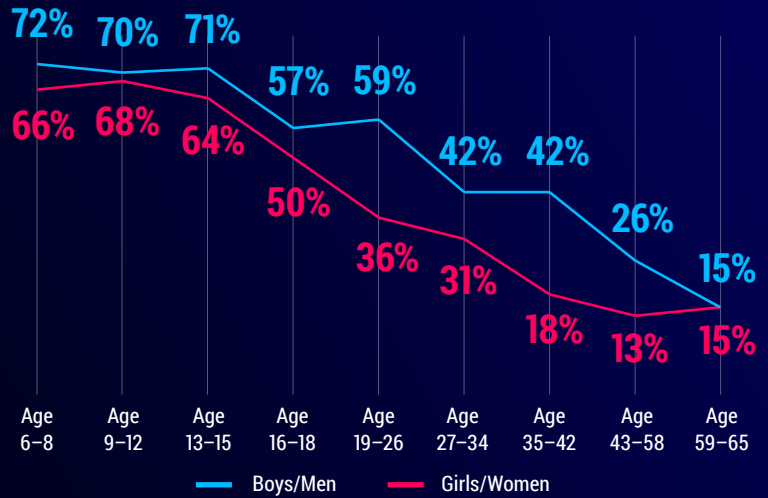
MORE GIRLS ARE STAYING IN SPORT THROUGH EARLY ADOLESCENCE

For years, coaches, sport administrators and organizations, advocates, and champions have focused on keeping girls engaged in sport. The data now suggests that not only are more girls signing up to play, they are also staying in sport longer.

For girls, dropout rates increase at age 16 and accelerate through their late teens. More than 1 in 5 young women leave sport during this time.

A similar number of boys leave sport at this age; however, young men’s participation holds steady through their late teens and twenties, which creates a sizable participation gap between men and women. This means that young women are more likely to miss out on the benefits of continued sport involvement.

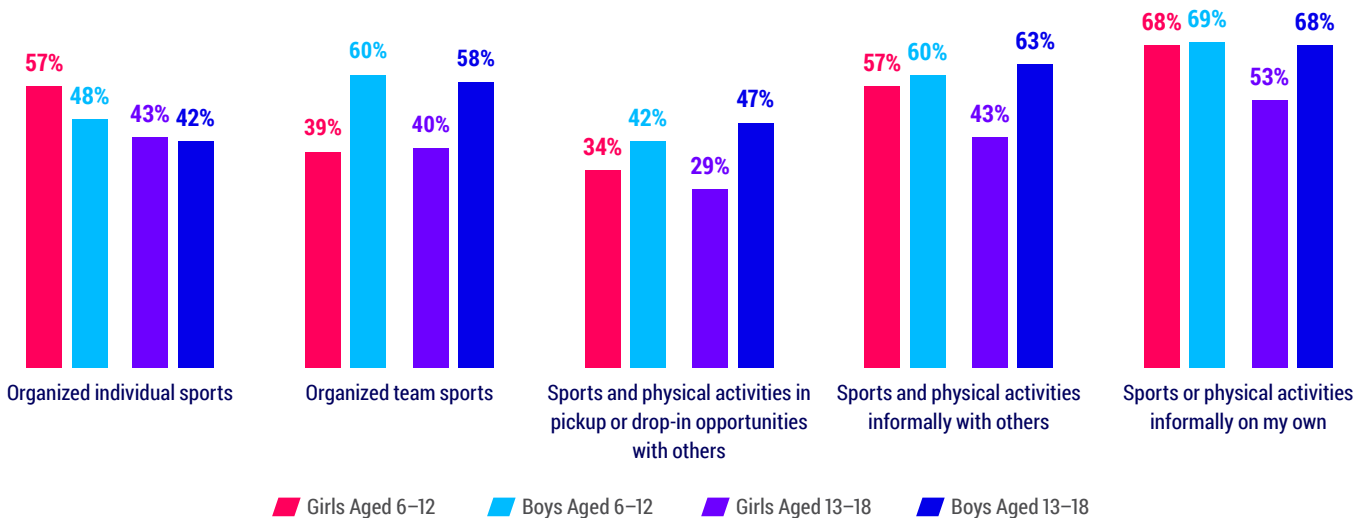
Percentage of Canadians Reporting Weekly Organized Sport Participation



GIRLS ACCESS MOST FORMS OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT LOWER RATES THAN BOYS

Organized team and individual sports are not the only way to engage in sport or physical activity. In Rally Report 2024, we asked girls for the first time to tell us how else they play. The results are clear: girls access almost all forms of sport and physical activity at lower rates than boys (except individual organized sports such as gymnastics, swimming, and dance). This includes organized team sports, informal physical activity by themselves and with others, organized drop-in opportunities, and physical activity through other roles such as coaches, officials, volunteers, and fans.

Percentage of Canadian Youth Reporting Weekly Sport & Physical Activity Participation

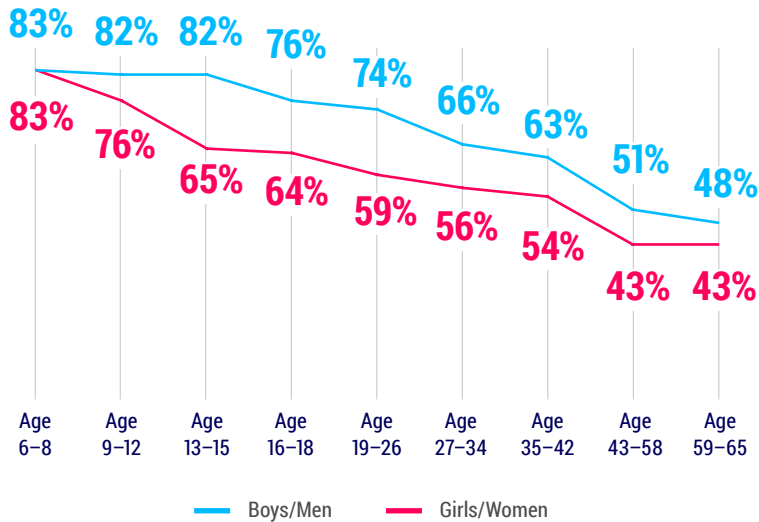


However, a closer look reveals that whether girls get involved and engaged depends on the form of sport and physical activity. Girls who start in organized team sports stay in sport longer. This pattern is strongest among racialized girls, who overall are even more likely to play team sports by age 13 to 18 than when they are younger (41% vs. 35%).

By contrast, it’s clear there is work to be done to retain girls in informal sport and physical activity so they can reap the physical, mental, social, and emotional benefits of being active. This is especially true for girls facing financial barriers to participating in organized sports, such as girls from lower-income households.

Younger girls aged 6 to 12 start out playing informally at the same rate as boys but are less likely to stay involved as they get older. This is consistent with research showing that, particularly since the pandemic, girls are less likely than boys to meet daily physical activity requirements, and this difference widens in adolescence (5).

Percentage of Canadians Reporting Weekly Informal Sport Participation

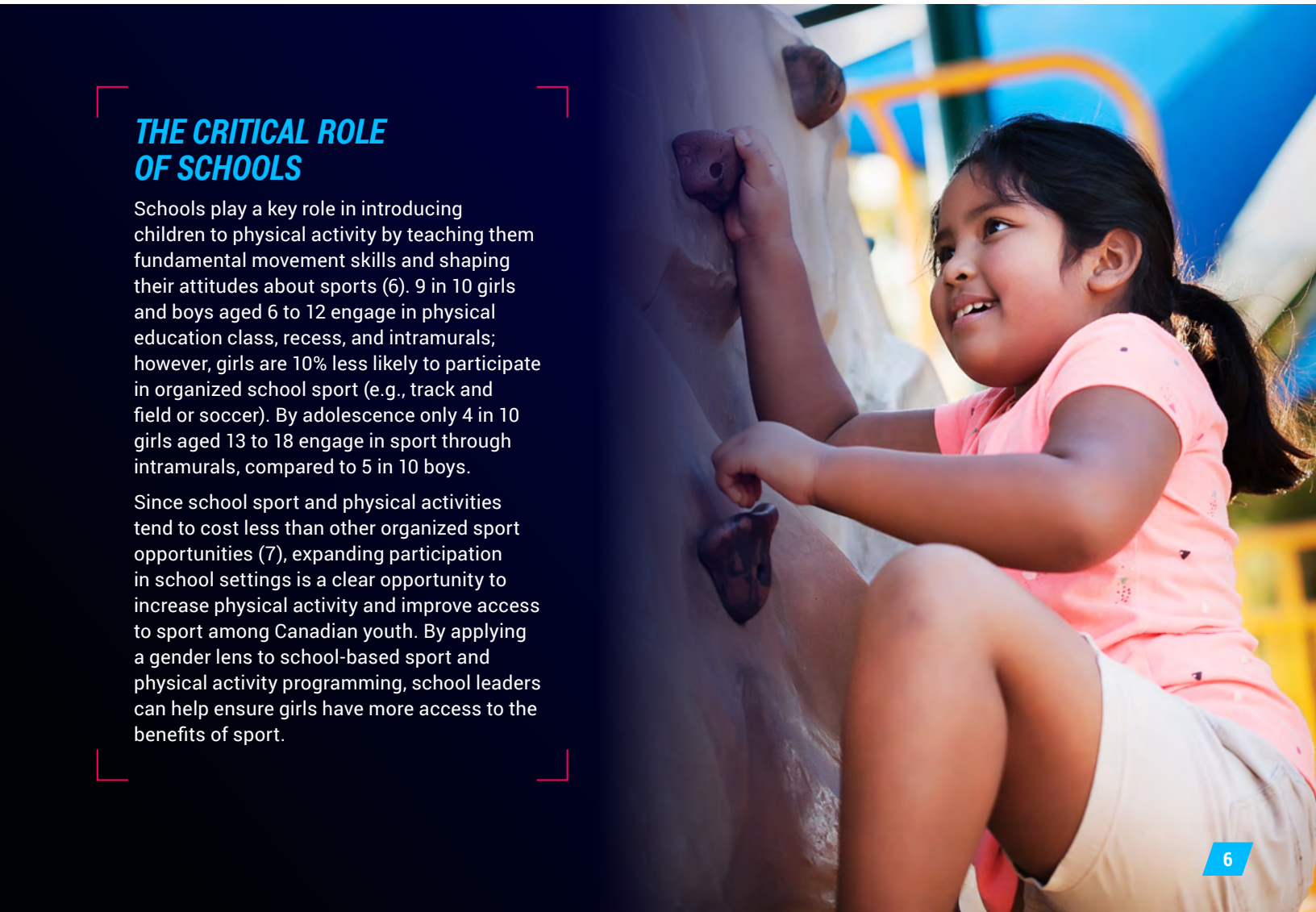


Girls who play organized team or individual sports are more likely to engage in informal sport and physical activity compared to those who never played. This means exposure to sport in a structured environment can create lasting habits and interest in physical activity. It can also help girls build physical literacy and confidence to actively participate in different settings such as school intramurals, physical education class, drop-in fitness classes, and casual activities with friends.

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF SCHOOLS

Schools play a key role in introducing children to physical activity by teaching them fundamental movement skills and shaping their attitudes about sports (6). 9 in 10 girls and boys aged 6 to 12 engage in physical education class, recess, and intramurals; however, girls are 10% less likely to participate in organized school sport (e.g., track and field or soccer). By adolescence only 4 in 10 girls aged 13 to 18 engage in sport through intramurals, compared to 5 in 10 boys.

Since school sport and physical activities tend to cost less than other organized sport opportunities (7), expanding participation in school settings is a clear opportunity to increase physical activity and improve access to sport among Canadian youth. By applying a gender lens to school-based sport and physical activity programming, school leaders can help ensure girls have more access to the benefits of sport.

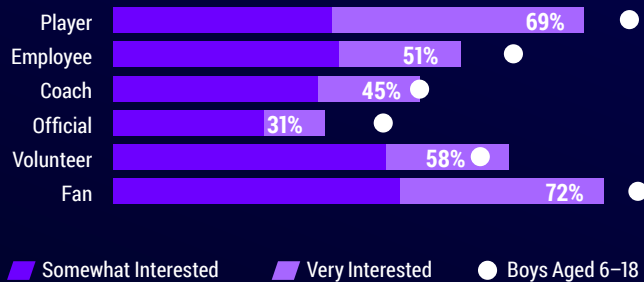


GIRLS ARE BECOMING MORE INTERESTED IN SPORT

The women's sport movement in Canada is growing and girls are taking notice. Overall, 4 in 10 girls report being more interested than ever in playing sports and being active. Enthusiasm is strongest among girls aged 6 to 12 and racialized girls of all ages.

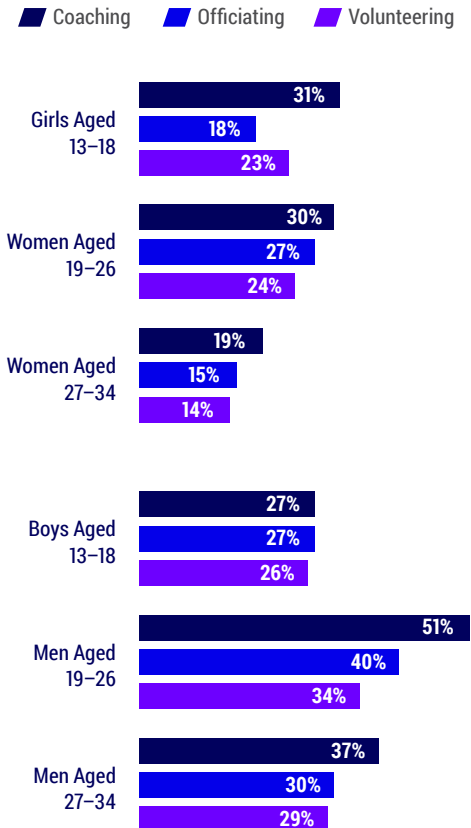
Beyond the playing field, almost half of girls are interested in leadership roles and careers in the sport and physical activity sector, and 7 in 10 are keen to engage as fans.

Percentage of Girls Interested in Sport & Physical Activity Roles



But interest isn't enough to drive equity. For example, nearly half of boys and girls aged 6 to 18 are interested in coaching, and a similar number start out coaching in adolescence. In their teens and early twenties, girls and young women stop coaching, and more young men start. This creates a significant gender gap among young coaches. The result? Women are under-represented as coaches at every level of sport in Canada (8,9).

Percentage of Canadian Youth and Young Adults Currently Engaged in Sport & Physical Activity Leadership Roles



Without women in leadership and decision-making roles, girls not only lack role models that can inspire them to play and lead, but their perspectives are left out of how the sport system is designed. This gap perpetuates systemic biases and limits inclusion.

It's clear that there is interest, excitement, and proof that the sport system has begun to shift. More girls than ever are starting out and staying in sport. They are excited to play, lead, and participate in sport in a variety of ways. Now, it's up to us to identify what's still standing in their way so we can remove barriers and reimagine sport for everyone.



»» GIRLS' EXPERIENCES IN SPORT

Understanding Motivations, Barriers, and Key Impacts

From equipment design to coaching approaches, many aspects of sport and physical activity still default to the preferences of boys and men. The current sport and physical activity system in Canada has not been designed for girls or with girls in mind, and this is no accident. It reflects a legacy where boys and men have traditionally dominated this space, not just as participants, but as decision-makers, influencing everything from which sports receive funding to how programming is designed.

While attitudes are changing and work is being done to build more inclusive environments, sports are still often viewed

as for boys and men. In fact, when we asked why some girls don't play sports, the number one reason shared by girls and boys was startlingly simple: "Sports are for boys."

This long-standing bias greatly impacts sport and, ultimately, how girls feel about themselves and their place in sport environments. It also creates a cycle where girls may feel less welcome, capable, or interested in playing. Breaking this cycle requires reimagining our approach to sport and physical activity at every level to create truly inclusive and empowering environments where everyone can play.



***"THROUGH SPORTS
I HAVE LEARNED TO
BE MORE CONFIDENT
AND TRUST MYSELF."***

GIRLS ARE MOTIVATED BY FUN, FRIENDS, AND GETTING ACTIVE

Any change must start with understanding what brings girls to sport and physical activity. Girls overwhelmingly see the benefits of participating (10). In addition to boosting mental and physical health and well-being, sport helps girls develop friendships, gain confidence, and build leadership skills (10,11).

When asked what they like about participating in sport or physical activity:

- > **2 in 5 are motivated by fun and the enjoyment of playing.**
- > **1 in 4 like socializing with friends.**
- > **1 in 5 appreciate staying active, fit, and healthy.**

1 in 10 girls identified competition and winning as among the top three reasons they enjoy playing. Although competition is not a primary driver of many girls' engagement in sport, girls still want to try hard. They like competing in the context of having fun with friends, being active, and developing skills.

This means it's important to create sporting environments and physical activity programming that balance competitive elements with opportunities for fun, skill development, and social interaction. By doing so, we can ensure that programs directly deliver what girls want and need in their sport experience.

GIRLS REQUIRE TAILORED SOLUTIONS TO COMMON BARRIERS

It's also important to surface the barriers that get in girls' way. Building a more inclusive system depends on tackling these obstacles. When asked what made participating in sport or physical activity difficult:

- > 1 in 3 mention the time commitment.
- > 1 in 3 experience fatigue or injury.
- > 1 in 5 note cost.
- > 1 in 10 worry they aren't good enough to participate.

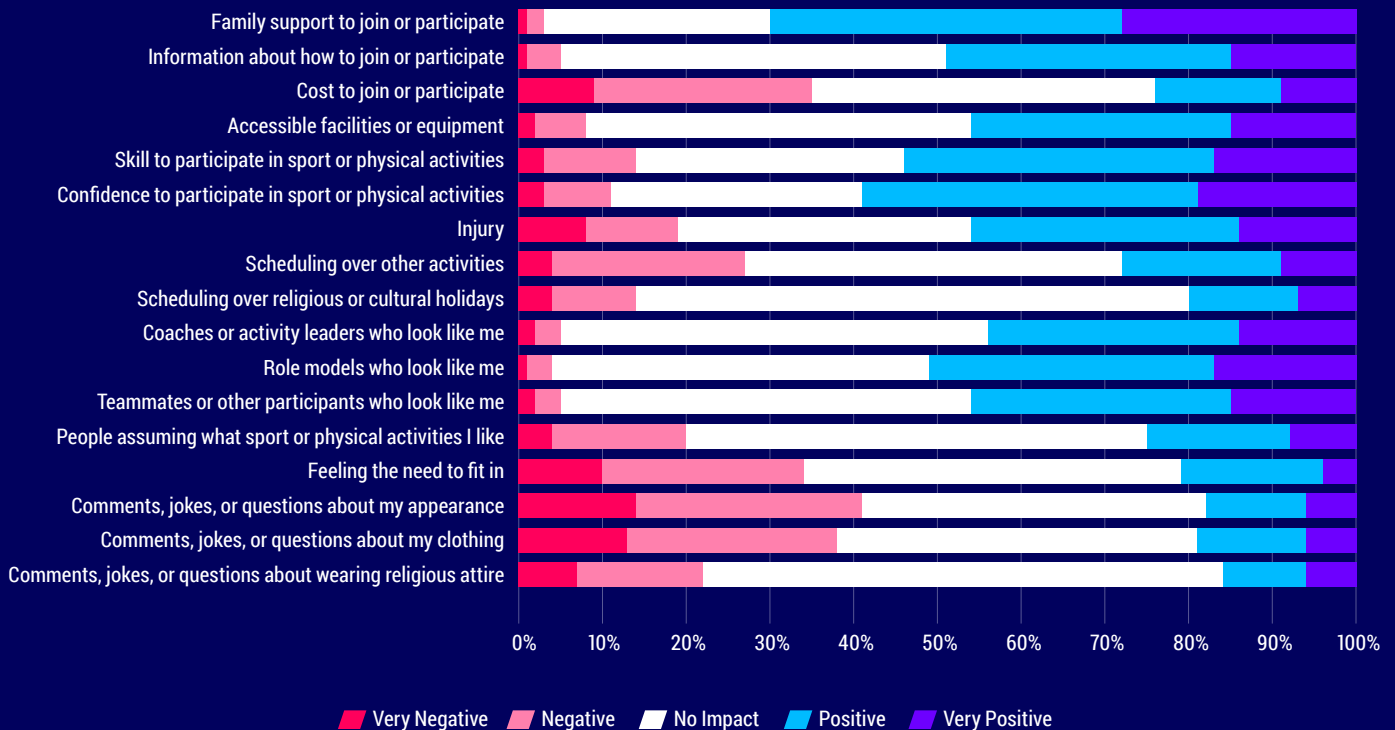
Many of the barriers that keep girls out of sport impact everyone. Boys reported that time commitment, injuries, and cost negatively impact their participation, too. In other words, the current system isn't meeting the needs of many participants.

However, it's critical that any effort aimed at addressing these obstacles includes an intersectional gender equity lens. For example, girls face higher risks for certain injuries such as knee injuries and concussions (12), which are often overlooked in both program design and rehabilitation protocols (13,14). By applying a gender equity perspective, we can design solutions that effectively meet girls' needs.

“SPORTS COST LOTS OF MONEY FOR MY MOM.”

ADDRESSING THESE BARRIERS REQUIRES EMPOWERING SPORT LEADERS WITH INSIGHTS AND STRATEGIES SO THEY CAN HELP GIRLS THRIVE IN AND THROUGH SPORT

How the Sport & Physical Activity Environment Impacts Girls' Participation





TAKE ACTION: TEACHING COACHES AND ACTIVITY LEADERS HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH GIRLS

2 in 5 girls report that comments about their appearance, clothing, or religious attire negatively impact their participation. It's crucial to train leaders on how to discourage such remarks and jokes. Additionally, implementing clear policies addressing bullying and discrimination provides necessary support for both leaders and participants. While all girls may face appearance-related remarks, jokes about hair texture for Black girls, comments about clothing style of 2SLGBTQIA+ girls, questions about adaptive equipment for girls with disabilities, or critiques of religious attire such as hijabs can reflect deeper biases about who "belongs" in sport and physical activity.

>> TAKE ACTION: *ELEVATING DIVERSE WOMEN LEADERS*

Half of the girls surveyed feel inspired by coaches and role models who represent their diverse backgrounds. This underscores a critical gap in current representation and its profound impact on girls' sense of belonging in sport and physical activity. As one participant shared, "Having more female coaches means that players in the sport feel more represented and have someone they can talk to." Seeing oneself reflected in leadership positions is not just preferable but essential to keeping girls in sport longer.



» TAKE ACTION: SUPPORTING FAMILIES TO SUPPORT GIRLS

Family support is the primary factor influencing girls' participation in sport and physical activity. Nearly 7 in 10 girls report that their family members already play a positive role. However, not all girls receive equal encouragement or support to participate in sports or be physically active, and the causes are nuanced.

Socio-economic status can significantly impact a family's ability to support girls' sport participation. For instance, parents, guardians, or other caregivers working multiple jobs may struggle to transport girls to activities, especially in neighbourhoods that lack sport and physical activity facilities or adequate public transportation. They may also rely on older children for household responsibilities, limiting their free time for sports. Financial constraints can also make equipment, fees, or appropriate clothing seem out of reach for many families. It's critical to take a close look at fees and eliminate unnecessary costs.

Cultural and religious backgrounds can also shape family attitudes towards girls' sport participation. Some communities may not traditionally value sports for girls, viewing them as less important than other pursuits or inappropriate for various reasons. It's crucial to approach these differences with cultural sensitivity and open dialogue rather than judgment. Key to this approach is recognizing and supporting the many women community leaders who are already working to create opportunities for girls to play sports and be physically active within their own communities. These leaders often have deep cultural understanding and credibility, allowing them to effectively engage with girls while respecting community values.

Ultimately, as sport and physical activity leaders, it's our responsibility to bridge these gaps. This means not only educating families about the wide-ranging physical, social, and mental health benefits their girls can gain from participation but also addressing practical barriers.



KEY IMPACTS ON GIRLS' EXPERIENCE: BODY CONFIDENCE AND THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE

In addition to addressing common barriers, a reimagined sport and physical activity system must centre overlooked aspects of girls' experience to meet their needs—namely, topics related to girls' and women's bodies. Two key topics are girls' body confidence and the menstrual cycle.

Supporting Girls' Body Confidence

Body image reflects the way girls think about, feel, and see their bodies. It impacts physical, mental, and emotional health and influences overall well-being. This matters in sport and physical activity, where there is often an emphasis on what bodies can do, as well as how they look.

1 in 2 girls report that participating in sport positively influences their body image. How? Sport helps them focus on what they are doing rather than how they look, makes them feel strong and capable, and decreases physical symptoms like anxiety. And women of all ages report these benefits.

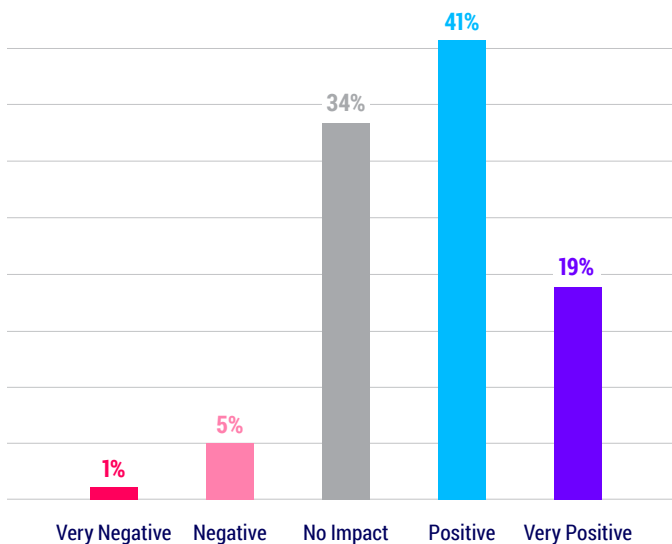
FOR SOME GIRLS, FEELING CONFIDENT ABOUT THEIR BODY IS CHALLENGING.

Focusing more on what their bodies can do rather than how they look can be an accessible alternative. This practice can reduce pressure to maintain a positive body image.

“I FEEL STRONG AND GOOD IN MY BODY AFTER SPORTS.”



Impact of Sport & Physical Activity Participation on Girls' Body Image



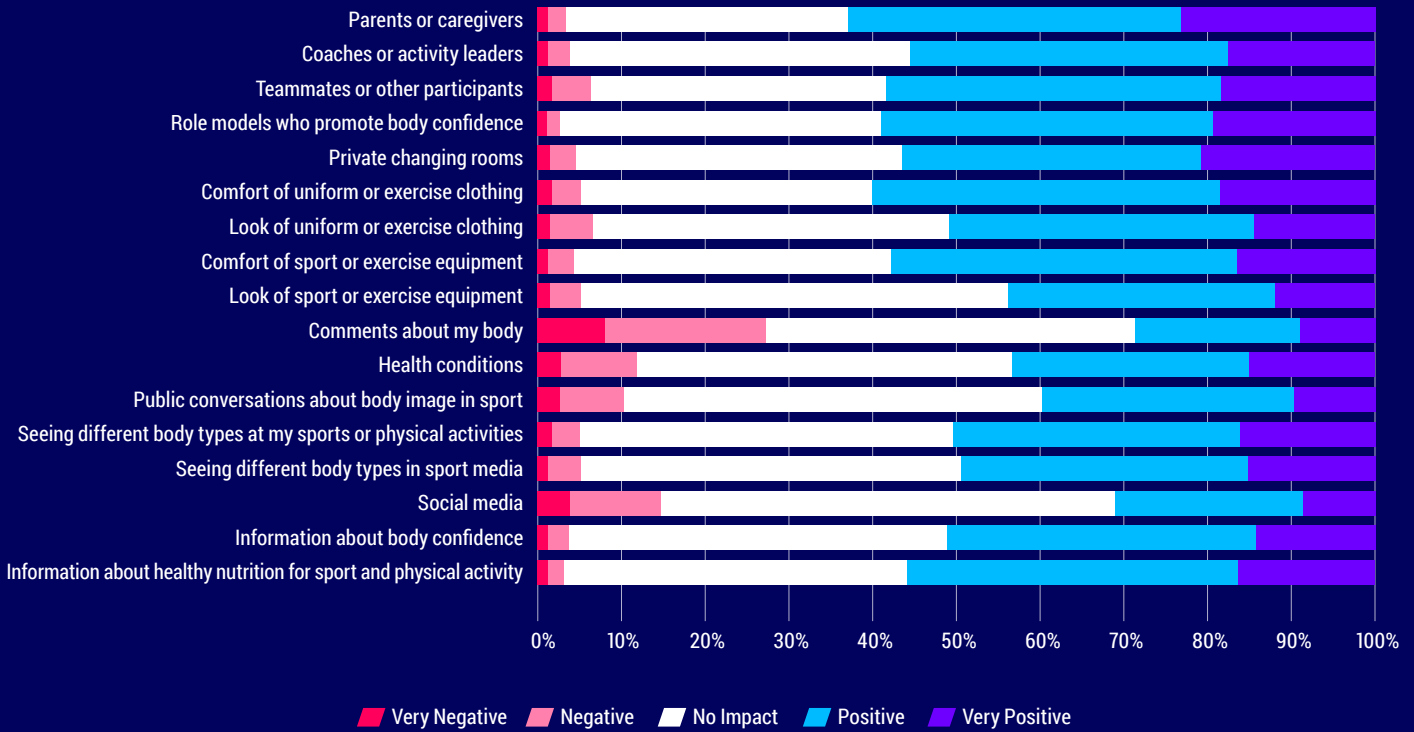
This means sport and physical activity can be a powerful force for helping girls build healthy relationships with their bodies. But it's not guaranteed. For some girls, sport makes them feel worse by promoting negative comparisons to others or requiring clothing that feels uncomfortable. This is more common among adolescent girls and those who have disabilities.

“I DON'T LIKE MY BODY. SPORTY CLOTHES JUST ACCENTUATE IT.”

It's important that we find ways to harness the elements of sport and physical activity that support girls' body confidence: things like supportive family members and leaders and comfortable uniform and exercise clothing options.

EQUIPPED WITH INSIGHTS DIRECTLY FROM GIRLS, SPORT LEADERS CAN SUPPORT GIRLS IN BUILDING BODY CONFIDENCE

How The Sport & Physical Activity Environment Impacts Girls' Body Image



» TAKE ACTION: TAKING A LEADING ROLE

For half of girls, their parents or caregivers, coaches and activity leaders, and other role models are already playing a positive role. But there's an opportunity to strengthen this and lean into actively supporting girls. It's important for leaders and role models to learn how to facilitate conversations and equip girls with tools to talk about body image in a healthy manner.





TAKE ACTION: ADDRESSING THE PHYSICAL ELEMENTS

The physical environment plays a crucial role in girls' sporting experiences. Access to private changing rooms is critical to creating a positive atmosphere, particularly for 2SLGBTQIA+ girls who may feel unsafe or uncomfortable in traditional gender-segregated spaces.

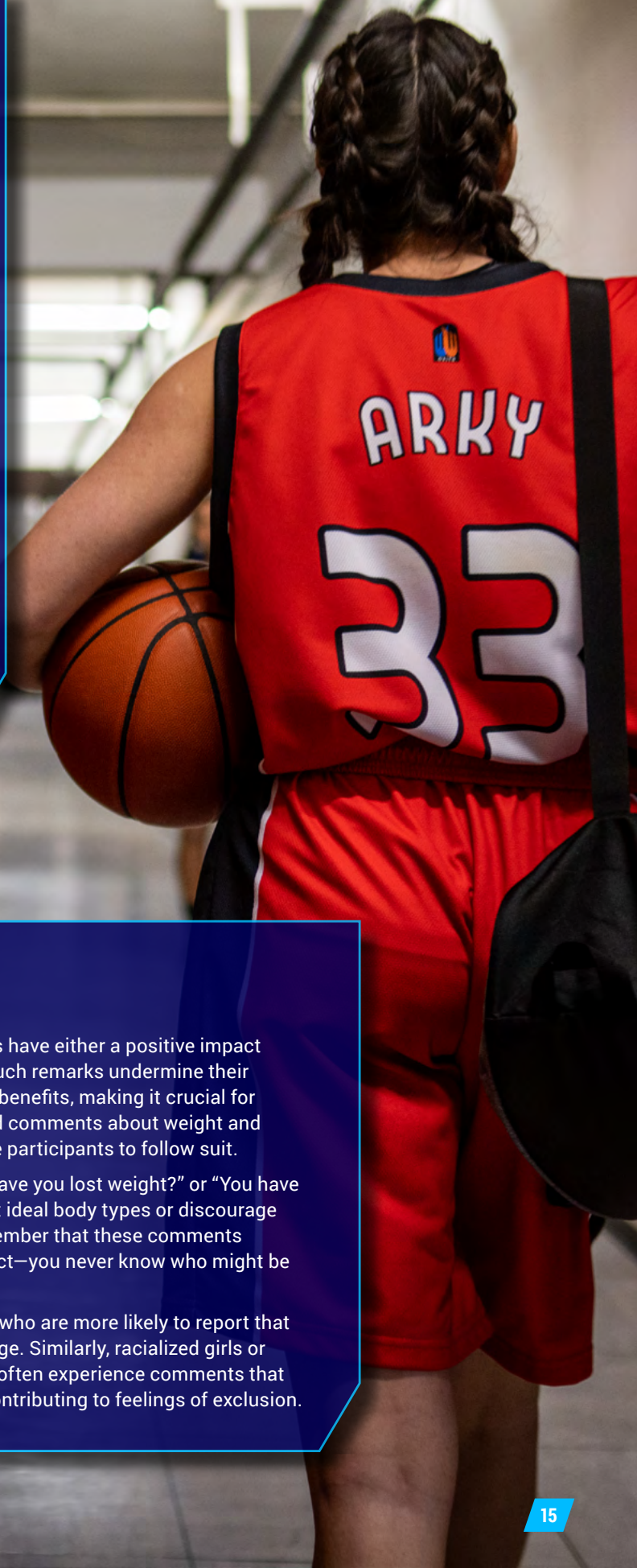
When it comes to uniforms, providing options that girls can choose from is essential. This should include offering a range of styles, ensuring size inclusivity, and allowing for cultural or religious accommodations. It also needs to include the provision of sports bras, particularly for new programs or when engaging young adolescent girls. Many girls, especially those from lower-income households or who are new to sports, may not have access to proper sports bras or be aware of their importance for comfort. Ultimately, to truly meet girls' needs, we must involve them in the selection or design process of uniforms. After all, who better to consult on what makes them feel comfortable and confident?

TAKE ACTION: LIMITING BODY TALK

While many girls report that comments about their bodies have either a positive impact or no impact on their body image, nearly 1 in 3 find that such remarks undermine their confidence. The potential harm outweighs any perceived benefits, making it crucial for parents, caregivers, coaches, and activity leaders to avoid comments about weight and appearance. When modelled well, this will also encourage participants to follow suit.

Even well-intentioned compliments like "You look great, have you lost weight?" or "You have the body of a runner" can reinforce harmful notions about ideal body types or discourage girls from trying different activities. It's important to remember that these comments don't need to be directed at an individual to have an impact—you never know who might be listening and internalizing these messages.

This issue is particularly salient for girls with disabilities, who are more likely to report that body-related comments negatively impact their body image. Similarly, racialized girls or those who wear visible religious symbols such as a hijab often experience comments that subtly reinforce their perceived difference from others, contributing to feelings of exclusion.



>> TAKE ACTION: KEEPING IN MIND THE BROADER ENVIRONMENT

Sport and physical activity don't exist in a vacuum; they take place within a broader societal context where girls are constantly exposed to imagery and ideas about how they should look and act. These idealized body images put pressure on all girls and can be harmful in perpetuating exclusion. Girls with disabilities often find themselves entirely excluded, reinforcing the notion that sport isn't "for them."

The impact also varies significantly based on race and ethnicity. For instance, Black girls often face the additional burden of hypersexualized portrayals in media, which can lead to uncomfortable scrutiny of their bodies in sport settings. These intersecting pressures can make it challenging for many girls to feel comfortable and confident in sport environments.

Promoting body diversity in both media representation and the immediate sporting environment can make a significant difference in how girls perceive themselves and their abilities. Recent trends toward highlighting athletes of various sizes and shapes, along with public conversations

about body image in sport, have the potential to drive meaningful change. One participant described the impact: "Showing girls of different religions, different body types, heights, whatever ... having that representation and saying there is a place in sport for everyone allows girls to know that they don't have to look a certain way. All girls can play no matter what."

Public conversations and visibility must be coupled with high-quality information about developing body confidence and related topics such as healthy nutrition and social media literacy.

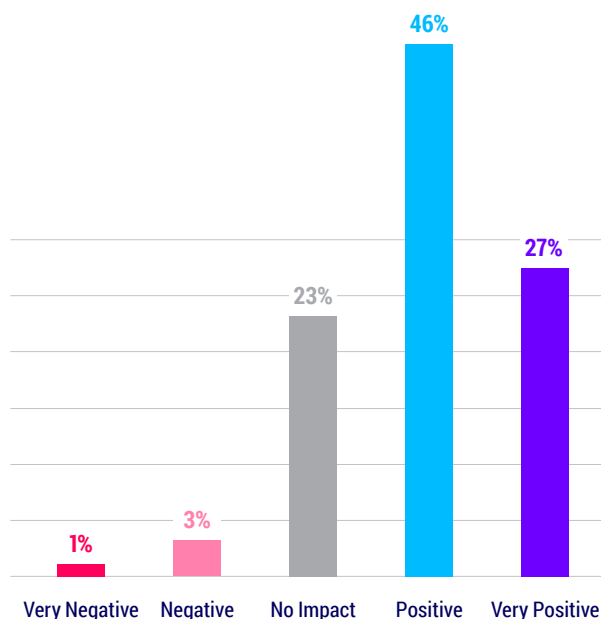
By addressing these factors, we can create more inclusive and supportive spaces for girls in sport and physical activity. This approach will enhance their immediate experiences and contribute to building long-term confidence and positive body image. It will also play a crucial role in reshaping a sport culture that has historically overlooked girls' needs and perspectives, while too often perpetuating a narrative that appearance is more important than capability.

THE IMPACT OF SPORT ON GIRLS' MENTAL HEALTH

Body image is only one component of mental health and well-being. Mental health includes how people feel about themselves and the direction of their lives, and their ability to cope with life's challenges. Recent data suggests that mental health concerns for Canadian youth are on the rise, particularly for girls (15,16).

7 in 10 girls feel that sport and physical activity positively impact their mental health. They can help girls build confidence and resilience, enjoy a sense of accomplishment, and feel more connected to friends and communities.

Impact of Sport & Physical Activity Participation on Girls' Mental Health



“I’M IN AN ALL-GIRLS RUNNING CLUB. THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE IS NEVER MENTIONED, AND IT’S JUST ODD.”

Highlighting the Impact of the Menstrual Cycle

The menstrual cycle is a natural, recurring process that affects almost all girls and women throughout their lives. Despite this, it’s often considered taboo in sports and rarely talked about. Only recently has research begun to consider how the menstrual cycle may influence performance outcomes and the experience of girls and women engaging in sport and physical activity (17).

Our research shows there is still a lot of work to be done to understand girls’ sport experience as it relates to their cycle.

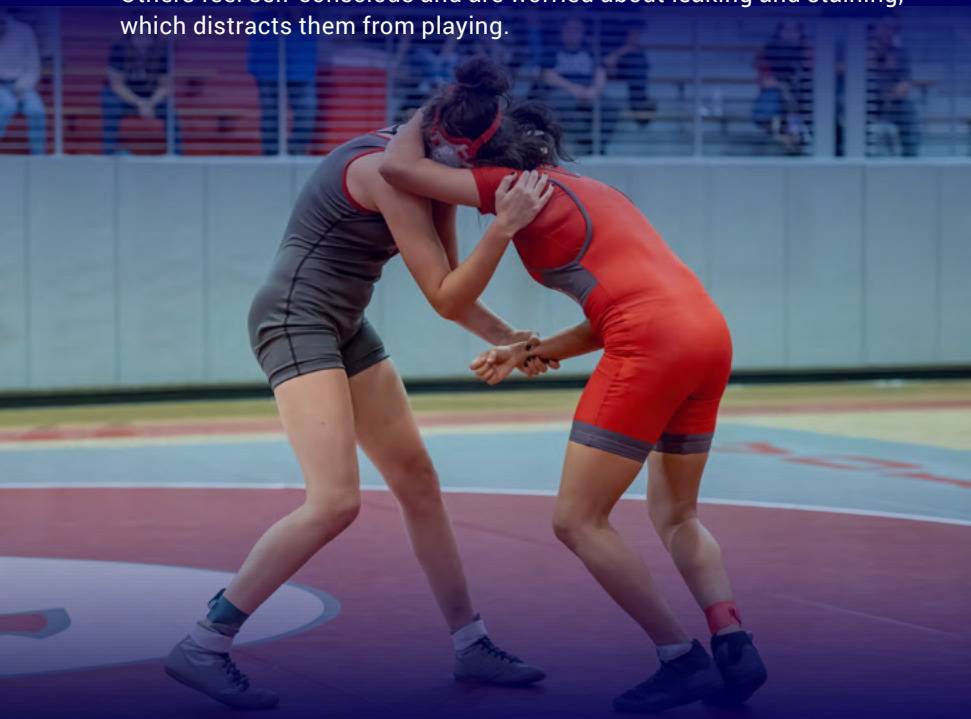


The menstrual cycle is the regular change that occurs in the female reproductive system that makes pregnancy possible. The cycle is characterized by the rise and fall of hormones, typically occurring every 21 to 35 days, with the most visible sign being menstruation, or periodic bleeding.

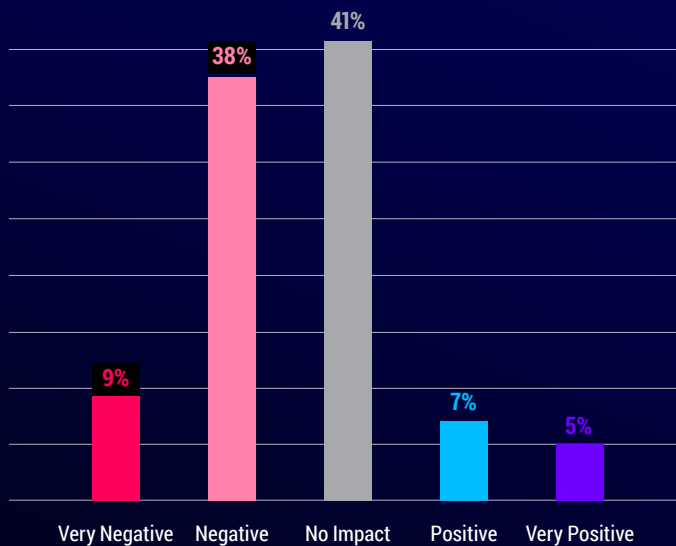
In the context of sport and physical activity, it’s important to consider the entire menstrual cycle, not just the period of menstruation, as hormonal fluctuations throughout can influence girls’ physical and emotional experience.

“I FEEL LIKE THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE DEFINITELY NEEDS TO BE SPOKEN ABOUT, ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNGER GIRLS WHO ARE JUST BEGINNING THEIR CYCLE. IT’S REALLY IMPORTANT TO HAVE SOMEONE YOU CAN TALK TO.”

Nearly half of girls aged 13 to 18 feel that their menstrual cycle negatively influences their sport and physical activity participation. Many girls experience lower energy and manage pain and cramps. Others feel self-conscious and are worried about leaking and staining, which distracts them from playing.



Impact of Girls' Menstrual Cycle On Sport & Physical Activity Participation



“I LACK ENERGY BECAUSE I HAVE STOMACH CRAMPS.”

“I’M SCARED ABOUT LEAKING BECAUSE WE ARE WEARING WHITE OUTFITS DURING TRAINING.”

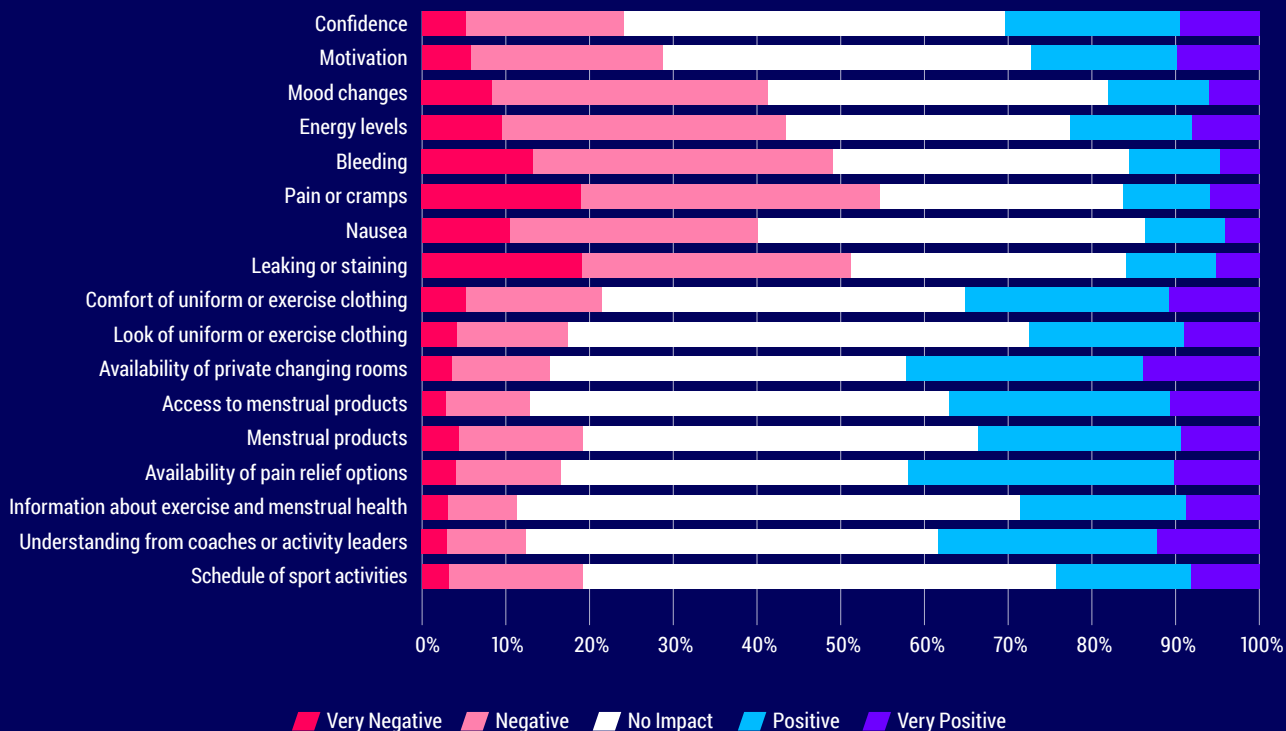
It’s crucial to recognize the wide spectrum of experiences girls have, not only the differences among girls but also the experiences that vary from day to day, month to month, and year to year. While some girls experience challenges, others find that engaging in sport and physical activity can alleviate discomfort and contribute to a healthier cycle overall. In fact, 1 in 5 girls aged 13 to 18 reports that sport and physical activity positively affects their menstrual health.

We must avoid making broad assumptions that could further marginalize girls by portraying them as overly sensitive, fragile, or incapable of participating in sport or physical activity due to their menstrual cycle. As one girl shared, “So many times I have felt shy and nervous to tell my coach about my cramps as it made me feel weaker compared to everyone else.”

Instead, we should view the menstrual cycle as an integral part of women’s and girls’ lives—not merely as an obstacle to be managed or mitigated but as a natural process that deserves consideration in supporting their athletic pursuits. The goal is to create an inclusive environment that empowers girls to participate fully in sport, regardless of where they are in their cycle.

SPORT LEADERS CAN IMPLEMENT SUPPORTIVE MEASURES TO HELP GIRLS NAVIGATE THEIR MENSTRUAL CYCLES IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

How the Menstrual Cycle and Environment Impacts Girls' Sport and Physical Activity Participation



TAKE ACTION: ENSURING ACCESS TO SAFE AND APPROPRIATE FACILITIES AND PRODUCTS

Again, girls are making it clear that private changing rooms are essential for meeting their needs, yet many still lack access to these basic amenities when engaging in sport and physical activity. As one participant shared, “The dressing rooms I’d be sent into were like closets ... one time I was in a rink and there were actual brooms and mops in my dressing room.” Similarly, access to a variety of menstrual products—such as pads, tampons, menstrual cups, and period underwear—and pain relief options are critical. Simple changes can make a significant difference, especially for girls from households where the menstrual cycle is considered taboo and access to products that would support continued participation in sport and physical activity is limited. Making menstrual products easily accessible for girls in facility washrooms, dressing rooms, and equipment bags or providing comprehensive information about available pain relief options such as medication, topical pain relief creams, and heating pads can greatly improve girls’ comfort and participation.

Uniform design also plays a pivotal role in girls’ experiences with their menstrual cycle, with nearly 1 in 5 girls aged 13 to 18 indicating that uniforms or exercise clothing negatively impact their experience. This jumps to 1 in 3 among girls with disabilities, reinforcing that the look and feel of uniforms or clothing options are not working for many girls.

In some sports and activities, traditional uniforms such as white shorts, skirts, leotards, and other tight clothing can increase discomfort and self-consciousness, particularly during menstruation. Girls may feel compelled to wear different attire during practice, inadvertently drawing attention to their menstrual status, or risk visible leaks and staining. Thoughtful uniform design that considers these factors can significantly enhance girls’ comfort and confidence in their sporting environments.



TAKE ACTION: ENCOURAGING OPEN DIALOGUE TO DESTIGMATIZE THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY SETTINGS

1 in 4 girls reports that understanding from coaches or activity leaders is crucial for a positive sport and physical activity environment. However, not all girls have access to such support, and many leaders may lack the knowledge or skills to provide appropriate support effectively.

Showing an understanding of the impact of the menstrual cycle goes beyond simply allowing girls to opt out when they're menstruating. It means recognizing that while girls may experience lower energy or discomfort on some days, this doesn't equate to a lack of interest or commitment. As one participant stated, "I've seen girls go up to coaches and say, 'I have cramps' ... and they tell them 'OK, you can sit out' ... and they're like, I don't want to sit out. I just want you to understand that my energy is lower today because of it ... I still want to participate. And I want you to be understanding with that."

It's equally important to eliminate off-handed or derogatory comments such as "oh, she's on her period," which further stigmatize menstruation and perpetuate the misconception that girls are less capable in sports due to their menstrual cycles. Such remarks can have a lasting negative impact on girls' confidence and willingness to participate.

Ultimately, the menstrual cycle should be viewed as one of many factors influencing how girls engage in sport and physical activity, alongside considerations for sleep, academic or work demands, and family responsibilities. Fluctuations in confidence, mood, or energy during a girl's cycle do not indicate a lack of interest in participation. Focusing on each individual's needs and experiences is key to creating an inclusive environment that supports girls' ongoing engagement in sports and physical activity, regardless of where they are in their menstrual cycle.



»» A CALL TO REIMAGINE SPORT & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The research is clear—we've made progress, but there's still work to be done to ensure that sport and physical activity truly serve all girls. This isn't just about increasing participation numbers—it's about reimagining the entire system with diverse girls' needs at the core so that everyone has a chance to access the benefits of sport and physical activity.

Through Rally Report 2024, we've uncovered encouraging trends and seen how girls' experiences continue to be shaped by persistent challenges. Now, we call on all leaders in the Canadian sport and physical activity ecosystem—from administrators, board members, and funders to coaches and activity leaders—to reimagine sport for girls and help bring gender equity to life. Our sport system is complex and multi-faceted. Meaningful, sustainable change requires everyone to do their part.

And it starts with listening to the girls. We asked what approaching sport differently could look like, and 3 in 5 girls told us they would like to see:

- > **Affordable options and clear information about how to sign up.**
- > **Activities and programming designed for girls.**
- > **Campaigns and stories that celebrate women and girls in sport.**
- > **More women playing professionally.**
- > **Leaders receiving training on how to foster a sense of belonging.**
- > **Programs that support diversity and inclusion.**

This work isn't easy, but it's essential, and we have a clear path forward. By taking on this challenge, we'll create a more vibrant and diverse sport and physical activity culture that includes all Canadians.



**REIMAGINING SPORT CAN
BENEFIT EVERYONE.**

**SPORT IS
FOR ALL.**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Canadian Women & Sport is a national non-profit with a 43-year history of work as the leading voice for women and sport. We believe in the power of sport as a platform for advancing equity for women across all areas of society. We are committed to creating a more equitable and inclusive sport system that empowers women and girls as participants and leaders, within sport and through sport. For more information, visit womenandsport.ca.



Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities is a national charity committed to ensuring kids in need have equal access to sport and recreation. With an extensive, national network of more than 1,000 grantees and 289 local chapters, Jumpstart helps eligible families cover the costs of registration, transportation, and equipment, and provides funding to selected organizations for recreational infrastructure and programming. Supported by the Government of Canada through Sport Canada and the Canadian Tire Family of Companies, Jumpstart has provided more than two million opportunities for Canadian kids to get in the game since 2005. For more information, visit jumpstart.canadiantire.ca. Follow Jumpstart on X and Facebook to learn about how the charity is giving kids across Canada a sporting chance.



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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In collaboration with global insight consultancy IMI Consulting, we conducted a study in July 2024 with a representative sample of over 5,000 Canadians aged 6 to 65.

This report explores current trends in sport participation with a specific focus on the target groups of girls aged 6 to 18. Girls 6 to 12 were supported by their parents to answer the survey. Any reference to girls and women in this research should be read as self-identified gender, not biological sex assigned at birth.

The women's sport movement has not always been inclusive and has, at times, deliberately excluded certain women and girls. Furthermore, girls and women experience and participate in sport and physical activity differently based on intersections of their identities, such as race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, and 2SLGBTQIA+ identity. In Rally Report 2024, we took several steps toward building a more complete picture that includes all girls.

First, we convened an academic advisory group with diverse expertise. The feedback we received significantly shaped our research questions and survey, and in particular it led us to broaden our definition of sport and physical activity to capture many forms of participation, from organized team sports to pickup soccer with friends to hiking alone. To this end, we used open-ended questions where possible to support respondents in describing their activities and motivations in their own words, rather than imposing predefined categories.

Second, we expanded our sample of girls aged 6 to 18 to increase the representation of racialized girls, girls with disabilities, and girls from lower-income households (see Sample Characteristics). While this ensured we could provide robust, disaggregated participation rates for girls from these three groups, the approach is inherently limited. Namely, these three categories do not capture all aspects of identity (e.g., Indigeneity, 2SLGBTQIA+ identity), unique experiences based on specific racial or cultural identities, types of disabilities, or intersections of factors. The number of participants within each subgroup limits our ability to examine many combinations. Moreover, comparing subgroups without context risks oversimplifying complex and multi-faceted experiences.

To address this limitation, we aimed to qualitatively explore how participation and barriers manifest similarly and differently for various girls. We also engaged a diverse group of girls aged 12 to 17 to review our findings and incorporated their perspectives throughout the report. Their insights not only added depth to the analysis but greatly influenced our thinking as we developed the report.

However, we recognize that this is still a limited view and that more extensive qualitative research is needed to capture truly nuanced experiences.

Taken together, while these steps represent progress in applying an intersectional lens to the Rally Report, there is more room for improvement. Our future research will benefit from more diverse and deeper community partnerships and more extensive qualitative research to capture girls' experiences. Larger sample sizes—in conjunction with different sampling approaches—would also allow for more detailed analyses.

We share our process in the spirit of ongoing reflection and improvement in how we understand and support girls' participation in sport and physical activity. We remain committed to evolving our approach to better represent and advocate for all girls and women.

Sample Characteristics

2,068 girls aged 6 to 18 responded to the survey. 1,253 girls identified themselves as White and 716 girls as racialized. Specifically, the sample was 3.7% Indigenous, 7.9% Black, 6.1% East Asian, 4.6% Southeast Asian, 7.8% South Asian, 2.0% West Asian or Arab, and 2.3% Latin, Central, or South American. Due to small sample sizes in some racial and/or ethnic groups, we did not compare participation rates or experiences within them in the main report. Supplemental analysis of groups with at least 100 respondents showed that approximately 60% of girls who were White, Black, South Asian, and Chinese participated in organized sport compared to 50% of Southeast Asian girls. It is not possible in this study to conduct intersectional analyses that consider racial or ethnic background with other factors (e.g., household income, disability status, 2SLGBTQIA+ identity).

489 girls (23.6%) reported they were from lower-income households, which we defined as household income less than \$50,000. Specifically, the sample was 13.9% less than \$35,000, 9.7% less than \$50,000, 14.5% less than \$75,000, 17.9% less than \$100,000, 24.1% less than \$150,000, and 19.9% more than \$150,000. Generally, higher income is associated with higher likelihood of participating in organized sport.

468 girls (22.6%) identified themselves as having a disability. Specifically, we asked participants to indicate if they had a long-term or recurring physical, mental, sensory, psychiatric, or learning impairment and did not differentiate between type of disability in our analyses.

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