



Sport Participation in Canada

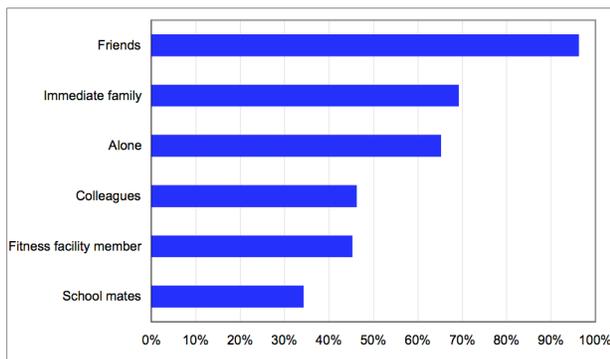
Key Locations and Partners for Sport

About 36% of Canadians (15 years and older) participate in sport (see bulletin 1 of this series).¹ Where do they participate, and with whom? The 2006-2007 Sport Monitor examined the most frequent partners and locations for sport among Canadian sport participants.

With whom do Canadians participate?

Canadian sport participants may undertake sport activities on several occasions, and may do so on different occasions alone or with different people, including family, friends, colleagues, and schoolmates. In fact, nearly all have participated in sport with more than one of the groups mentioned above. The vast majority of Canadians who participate in sport report doing so with friends (96%). Generally, Canadian sport participants are more likely to report ever participating alone (65%) or with close family (69%) than with colleagues (46%), schoolmates (34%), or fellow members of gyms and fitness facilities (45%). Other co-participants cited by Canadians include extended family members, pets, neighbours, teammates or coaches, and strangers (2 – 3% each).

FIGURE 1: PARTNERS IN SPORT, OVERALL

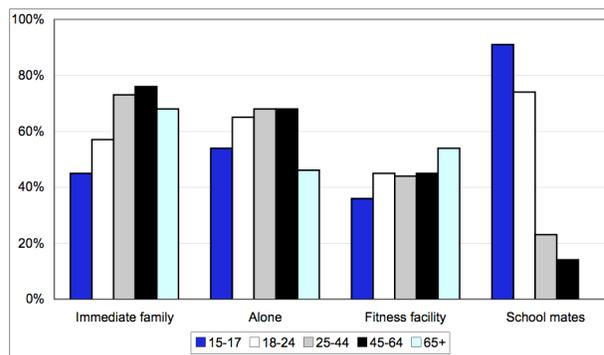


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Region Atlantic Canadian sport participants are less likely than the average Canadian participant to undertake sport by themselves. There are no other differences among the regions of Canada with respect to participation with other people.

Age and sex Sport participants aged 65 years or older (especially men) are less likely than 25 to 64 year-olds to undertake sport as a solitary activity. Participation with immediate family is more likely among 25 to 64 year-olds. Unsurprisingly, those aged 15 to 17 years are most likely to report participating in sport with schoolmates, followed by 18 to 24 year-olds, while those aged 25 years or older the least likely to report sport participation with schoolmates. Men are more likely than women to report participating with coworkers.

FIGURE 2: PARTNERS IN SPORT BY AGE



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Activity level Solitary sport is more likely among more active Canadians than others who have lower activity levels.

Socio-economic and demographic characteristics The likelihood of reporting participation in sport by oneself increases with increasing education.

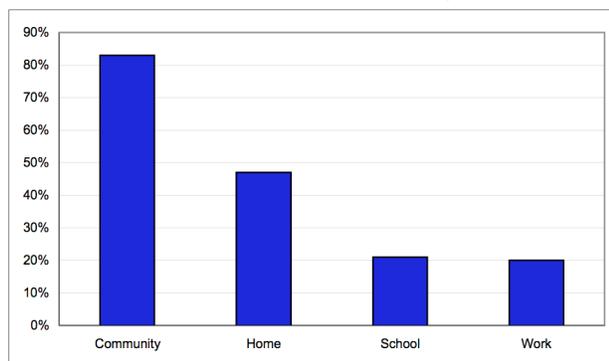


Other relationships with socioeconomic and demographic characteristics with respect to sport partners do exist; however, these are likely related to other characteristics of these groups (e.g., characteristic age profiles).

Where do Canadians participate?

Similar to their variety of sport co-participants, Canadians who participate in sport may do so in a number of different locations on different occasions. The majority of Canadian sport participants (82%) report that they participate in sport in their communities. Nearly half of Canadians (46%) who participate in sport report doing so at home. One-fifth of sport participants indicate that they participate at work; the same proportion report that they participate in sport at school. About 17% of Canadians report participating at a sport-specific location or facility (e.g., soccer pitch, hockey arena), 9% participate in specific geographic locations that involve travel away from home (e.g., out-of-town tournaments, ski vacations, cottage), and 4% report participating in sport at general use community centres and meeting halls. When asked which of these locations is the most frequent site for sport participation, 57% say their communities; a further 14% participate most frequently at home, 9% at school, and just 4% at work. A further 4% report multiple sites as equally frequent locations for sport.

FIGURE 3: LOCATION FOR SPORT, OVERALL



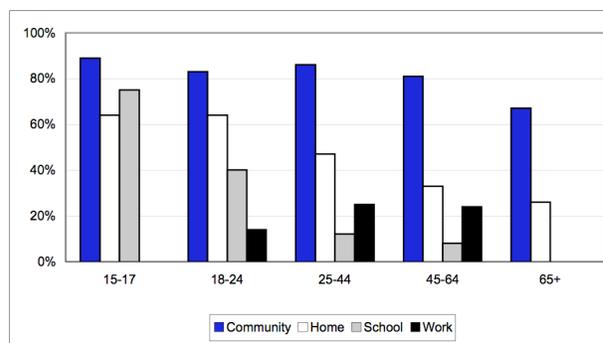
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Region Residents of Yukon Territory and Northwest Territories are more likely than the national average to participate in sport in the

community; Quebec sport participants are less likely to report this. Participation at home, school, or work does not vary by region.

Age and sex Older adults are less likely than those aged 25 to 44 years to participate in the community. Men and women aged 15 to 24 years are more likely than all other adults to participate in sport at school; this is not surprising, since this age group is also more likely to be current students. Those in the 15 to 24 years age group are also more likely than those aged 45 years or older to participate in sport at home. No differences by age exist with respect to reported participation in sport at work. Additionally, men and women do not differ in participation by location (e.g., at home, at work, at school, or in the community).

FIGURE 4: LOCATION FOR SPORT BY AGE



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Activity level No differences appear with respect to sport at work, school, home, or in the community by activity level.

Socio-economic and demographic characteristics

The reported locations for sport does not differ by income levels. Canadians who hold less than high school education are most likely to report participation in sport at school; this is not surprising, given that a large proportion of those who have not completed high school are younger people who are currently in school. Never-married Canadians are more likely to report sport participation at home or school than the national average; again, this is likely related to the age profile of never-married Canadians (that is, they are younger and more likely to be students than average). There are no socio-economic and -

demographic differences related to participation at work or in the community.

Summary and Recommendations

Generally, Canadians are significantly more likely to participate alone, with immediate family, or friends than with acquaintances and colleagues. Those who are of the age typical of having children at home are more likely to participate in sport with their immediate families; older adults are less likely to undertake sports alone. Canadians who are more active are more likely than those who are less active to participate in sport alone, but equally likely to participate in sport with other people. Community and home are generally the most frequent sites of sports undertaken by Canadians, while workplaces – where many Canadians spend a large proportion of their days– are less often used for sport participation.

It is recognized, however, that the concept of “in the community” may mean different things to different people; that is, the scope of “community” may be quite narrow to some and broader to others. This is likely the reason for the high proportion citing this location. Further research is currently being conducted to probe more specific and detailed locations in the community.

In light of these findings, sport policy should encourage:

Sport opportunities for families Not only is family sport an important constituent of total current sport participation, but research indicates that positive sport experiences for children within the family environment are a major determinant of life-long sport participation.² Further, Canadian evidence suggests that physical activity levels of individuals are likely to resemble the activity levels of other family members.^{3,4} Many Canadians report that barriers to sport participation include a lack of time, competing obligations, and the potential loss of quality family time;⁵ this may be increasingly true for some, as average family time among Canadians has decreased over the past few decades⁶ (see Bulletin 3 in this series entitled *Barriers to sport participation* for more information⁵). Given the

concern expressed by Canadians about their family time, along with the high rate of family sport participation of Canadians, policies and programs should aim to make it easier for families to participate in sport together or in complementary programs in the limited free time they have. This can include setting aside time at community facilities specifically for families to participate together in addition to sport activities that children and parents into different age-specific groups.

Sport opportunities for older Canadians The perceived barriers to physical activity and sport participation faced by many older Canadians are numerous.^{5,7} Unfortunately, we know little about the experience of Canadian older adults. However, interviews conducted with new retirees in England reveal that only certain forms of exercise are seen as ‘appropriate’ by older persons for themselves, such as gentle low-intensity activities like gardening and walking; this may especially be true for certain minority ethnic groups who face other specific barriers to sport participation.⁸ Fear of injury or limitations due to existing injury or disability are significant worries for many older Canadians when considering sport participation.⁵ Consequently, most seniors do not participate in sport at all. Sport which is undertaken by older adults tends to be less team-oriented,¹ and while many seniors indicated that they miss competitiveness, they felt that safe and appropriate opportunities do not exist for these types of sports for older adults.⁸ Further, inactive adults more frequently state that appropriate partners with whom to participate in sport would be an important motivator in their future participation, but they may feel too self-conscious to use shared community facilities where potential sport partners may be found.⁸ Additionally, these same English retirees (especially women) expressed a desire for sport opportunities close to home.⁸ Policymakers seeking to encourage sport participation among older adults should consider developing local programs which offer sports of differing intensities to bring together older adults of similar skill and activity levels in a safe, controlled, and enjoyable environment.

Sport opportunities at work Nearly two-thirds of Canadians work.⁹ As this bulletin describes, however, only a small proportion of Canadians participate in sport at work. While 30% of workers report that sport opportunities exist at work, employees who actually participate in these opportunities are a minority.¹⁰ Sport opportunities at work are more common among larger worksites,¹¹ but nearly half of private-sector employees in Canada work at small businesses.¹² Many employees do not believe that their employers are supportive of sport at work;¹⁰ the barriers faced by employers, including lack of space, organizational capacity, and funding, are substantial.¹³ Workplace-specific recommendations can be found in a series of bulletins published by the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute,¹⁴ also, the Public Health Agency of Canada has published *The Business Case for Active Living at Work*¹⁵ which offers evidence for the benefit to businesses to encourage sport and physical activity as well as workplace success stories.

Sport opportunities at shared community facilities The community is the most cited location of sport participation in Canada. However, the barriers to sport participation cited by non-participants include a number of issues surrounding the availability, accessibility, and affordability of sport facilities in their communities.⁵ The use of facilities in the community that may not be specifically designated for physical activity (for example, schools, churches, or various workplaces) can also be promoted for use. For example, the Government of Ontario has developed the *Community Use of Schools Initiative*,¹⁶ a program that provides funding and governmental support to schools (via their school boards) to open their recreation facilities to not-for-profit groups during after-school hours at affordable rates. This type of initiative may appeal to other jurisdictions which have no such formal policies. On a smaller scale,

communities or community groups seeking to find new recreation opportunities may be able to negotiate access to non-public sport facilities by providing incentives or developing mutually beneficial agreements for use.

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