

## Experiences of women participating in sport and physical activity

Surveys from the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute (CFLRI) asked adults (18 years and older) about their level of confidence in participating given particular circumstances, but also about their expressed concerns about participating in sport and physical activity. This summary describes findings from several CFLRI surveys regarding these experiences, especially as they relate to women.

### **Many women report a high level of confidence in their ability to participate in sport and physical activity.**

Findings from the CFLRI's 2019-2021 Physical Activity Monitor cited considerable percentages of women indicating a high level of confidence in their ability to participate in sport and physical activity under generalized circumstances. Specifically:

- 69% of women reported a *moderate* or *great* level of confidence that they have the skills and abilities to participate in their preferred sport or physical activity;
- 75% of women indicated a high level of confidence in their ability to participate in a beginner or trial class for a physical activity that is of interest; and
- 66% of women reported a *moderate* or *great* level of confidence that they could find suitable opportunities to participate nearby.

Interestingly, women did not differ significantly from men in these ratings of confidence; indeed, both showed relatively high levels of confidence. Perhaps not surprising, confidence in abilities and skills varied by age. Older adults (65 years and older) were least likely to have a high degree of confidence in their skills to participate in their preferred sport, and their ability to participate in a beginner or trial class. This age-related pattern was observed among both women and men.

The CFLRI's 2020 Sport Monitor also explored the degree of confidence in abilities among women, but within different circumstances. Table 1 shows the contrasting levels of confidence that women report on their ability to be active in various circumstances.

**Table 1. Level of confidence that women report on their ability to be active in specific circumstances**

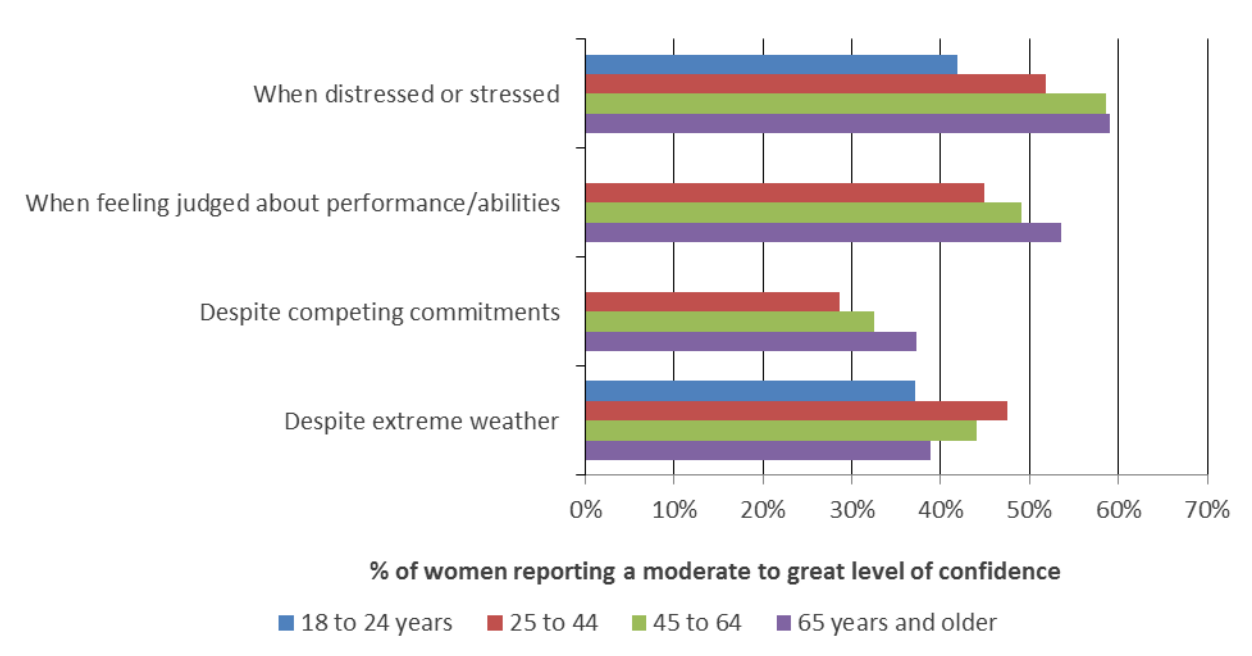
% of women who reported <i>no-to-low</i> levels of confidence	Confidence in ability to be active:	% of women reporting <i>high</i> levels of confidence
42%	despite having childcare responsibilities	32%
34%	despite having competing demands	32%
29%	during extreme weather conditions	43%
26%	when feeling judged about performance or abilities	47%
24%	when feeling judged about appearance	54%
20%	when not having participated in a while	48%
20%	during periods of emotional stress or distress (i.e., when sad/stressed)	55%

Source: CFLRI, aggregated results from the 2020 Sport Monitor

Based on Table 1, individualized factors like feelings of judgement about appearance or ability, or feelings of stress seemed to impact confidence in the ability to be active among women less so than when tangible supports like childcare, other competing demands on one’s schedule, or extreme weather are apparent.

Older women (≥65 years and older) were more likely than younger women to report a high level of confidence that they could be active or participate in sport even when they are sad or stressed. Similarly, older women were more likely than women aged 25 to 44 years to have indicated a high level of confidence that they could be active or participate in sport when the weather is extreme, when they have competing commitments, or when feeling judged about their performance or abilities.

**Figure 1.** Confidence in being active or participating sport given certain circumstances



Source: CFLRI, aggregated results from the 2020 Sport Monitor

**Among women, social factors were rated of highest concern when participating in sport physical activity.**

Similar to confidence, the CFLRI’s 2020 Sport Monitor also asked adults about their concerns about particular aspects of their experiences with sport and physical activity. Survey results for women, in particular are summarized in **Table 2**.

**Table 2.** Level of concern that women report being active given specific circumstances

% of women who reported <i>no-to-low</i> levels of concern	Concerns with respect to participating in sport and physical activity include:	% of women who reported <i>high</i> levels of concern
33%	not spending time with family	27%
52%	not having someone to participate with	24%
47%	spending money on self	23%
49%	not knowing the rules	22%
62%	being judged by others	17%
64%	not knowing what to wear or what equipment to bring	14%
80%	developing too many muscles	9%

Source: CFLRI, aggregated results from the 2020 Sport Monitor

High levels of concern about participating in sport and physical activity were expressed by roughly one-quarter of women related to not spending enough time with family or not having someone to participate with. Just under one-quarter of women were highly concerned about participating and spending money on themselves or simply not knowing the rules of how to play or participate. Among women, there were no age-related differences with respect to the concerns about their experiences with sport and physical activity.



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