

## Go Out and Play: Entry into Sports, Dropping Out of Sports

*Go Out and Play: Youth Sports in America* is a comprehensive, 184-page research report, which covers a range of topics, including children's participation in organized sports, youth involvement with exercise, links between athletic participation and family life, gender and the frequency of physical education, associations between athletic participation and children's physical and emotional well-being, age of entry into sports and drop-out rates, how gender equity varies across communities (urban, suburban and rural), gender and interest in sports and physical activity, and sports involvement among understudied populations (children with disabilities, children in immigrant families).

The parent survey provided detailed information about the age children first get involved with sports and if or when they drop out. The findings in Section Six document the existence of a narrower window of opportunity for girls in sport. Girls enter sports at a later age than boys and drop out sooner and in greater numbers. The student survey results show the main reasons girls and boys drop out of sports. Some important findings are:

- Girls' first experiences with team sports occur later than boys do. On average girls enter sport at 7.4 years old and boys do so at 6.8 years old.
- While 47% of girls are involved with some kind of organized sport by age 6, 60% of boys that age are participating.
- Children in families with incomes higher than \$100K enter sport at the average age of 6.3, compared with an 8.1 average age among those in families with less than a \$35K annual income.
- A gender gap in early involvement with sports persists across all family income levels, with fewer girls than boys involved with sports before age 6.
- White girls and boys are most likely to be involved with sports at age 6 or younger (53% and 68%, respectively). The early entry rates for African-American girls and boys are 29% and 51%, respectively, compared with 32% and 44% of Hispanic girls and boys.
- No matter where children live or go to school, the sport drop-out rate for both genders moves upward as they grow older.
- Urban children experience the highest percentage of sport drop-out in middle school (18%, compared to suburban, 9%, and rural, 10%).
- The main reason both girls and boys drop out of sports is "not having fun."
- "It was no longer fun" tops the list of parental explanations for both daughters and sons to drop out of sports. Too much competition and not being "good enough" were motives for sons to exit sports but not for daughters.

**Conclusion:** Many boys get a head start entering a lifestyle that includes athletic participation. In addition to their gender, the extent that girls tend to get a late start depends a lot on where they live, their family's income level, and their race and ethnicity. We can only speculate about how girls' "late start" in sport impacts their later experiences. The worse-case scenario is that they are being set up for failure. Late entry may impair or slow down the development of physical skills and athletic self-confidence. Once they get to middle school where there are more sports opportunities available, the lack of basic skills and athletic know-how may catch up to girls. For urban girls especially, who have meager access to community-based recreation and sport programs, the increased array of programs offered in middle schools are a real opportunity to get more involved. But succeeding in these programs can be problematic if youngsters lack the fundamental skills and self-assurance to stick with the team. Sports experiences are less likely to be "fun" and fulfilling for less physically skilled children—prime reasons why children drop out of sport.

To access the full report, go to [www.WomensSportsFoundation.org/GoOutandPlay](http://www.WomensSportsFoundation.org/GoOutandPlay)

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