

Go Out and Play: Participation in Sports and Exercise Activities

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).

Section Two of *Go Out & Play* examines children's involvement in the full array of sports and exercise activities that are now practiced in U.S. culture. These activities include the old standards (like basketball, baseball, softball and football) and athletic activities such as volleyball, soccer, cycling, lacrosse, field hockey, figure skating, inline skating, skateboarding, dance, ultimate Frisbee, cheerleading, double Dutch and stepping. Statistics reveal the kinds of sports and exercise activities girls and boys are pursuing, the frequency of their involvement, and which activities are most popular. What kinds of factors appear to influence young people's involvement with sports and exercise? These questions are answered below. Key findings include:

- While dance appeals to girls of all ages, volleyball is especially popular among middle-school girls. Basketball engages boys across all grade levels, and skateboarding is popular among third- to fifth-graders.
- While basketball, swimming and jogging/running/cross-country are popular with both girls and boys, dancing and football are gender-specific.
- Inline skating ranks ninth (33%) in popularity for girls, while skateboarding ranks 10th (29%) for boys.
- Overall, girls and boys explore similar numbers of physical activities across grade levels.

- Compared with girls, boys generally engage in a narrower array of exercise and sports activities, tending to focus more on traditional sports. Girls are more apt to explore newly emerging physical activities like volleyball, cheerleading, dance, double Dutch and gymnastics.
- There is a gender gap in physical activity. About four in 10 boys (39%) exercised six to seven days per week, compared with 26% of girls. Girls are also slightly more likely than boys to be physically inactive; i.e., 27% of girls and 21% of boys exercised on two days or less.
- The gender gap in physical activity widens when activity levels are traced across grade levels. As girls get older they are less likely to engage in high rates of physical activity (five days or more), while more boys remain highly involved with physical activity from childhood through the high school years.
- The steepest decline in physical activity is among Asian girls as they move into the high school years.

Conclusion: American girls and boys participate in a wide array of sports and exercise activities during the year. While girls explore a larger number of physical activities, boys' participation is more narrowly focused on traditional forms of sports and exercise. The findings revealed a gender gap in weekly physical activity between girls and boys, and the gap widens as children enter high school. Finally, the variation of physical activity by gender, race and ethnicity, and type of community suggests that it is closely linked with levels of access and opportunity.

To access the full report, go to www.WomensSportsFoundation.org/GoOutandPlay

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