

Go Out and Play: Participation in Team or Organized 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).

Section One presents abundant facts and analyses of the number of organized and team sports that third- through 12th-grade girls and boys played during the past year, where they play sports, and how their participation is related to age, economic disparities, race and ethnicity, and school location (urban, suburban or rural). Key findings include:

- Across the entire United States, 69% of girls and 75% of boys currently play organized and team sports.
- Where gender gaps in athletic participation appear, they are related to economic disparities, race and ethnicity, and family characteristics.
- Whereas similar rates of sports participation between girls and boys exist in suburban communities, urban and rural girls are less involved than their male peers.
- In urban communities, only 59% of third- through fifth-grade girls are involved with sports, compared to 80% of boys.
- Among urban elementary school children, 41% of girls do not play sports, compared with 20% of boys.
- As the community income level increases, so also do the percentages of highly involved female and male athletes.
- The lack of economic resources in a community takes its greatest toll by eroding children's life chances in sport during third-eighth grades. This is important because much attrition from sports and physical activity occurs in childhood, particularly during the middle school years.

- Sport drop-out is more common among urban girls who, demographically, are more likely to be poor.
- Similar rates of athletic participation exist for daughters and sons in dual-parent families. In single-parent families, however, daughters are significantly more likely than sons to be non-athletes (59% and 23%, respectively).

Conclusion: The findings suggest that if children are female, live in an urban area, and are growing up in a lower-income single-parent family, they are less likely to be involved with sports during childhood and adolescence. Children's life chances in sport, or the probabilities that they will ever play and benefit from sports, flow from the intersections between personal preferences and social opportunities. Suburban girls have more sport options than their urban and rural counterparts. The chances that a poor girl will never play a sport are greater than for an upper-middle-class girl. Fewer urban girls participate in sports than their male counterparts. These and other patterns of gender inequity and differential opportunity differ between children's elementary school years, middle school years, and high school years.

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

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