

Go Out and Play: Understudied Populations

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 Nine of *Go Out & Play* presents new information about sports and physical activity in two understudied populations of U.S. children and families: children with disabilities and children from immigrant families.

Key Findings for Children with Disabilities

- Nationwide, about nine out of every 100 U.S. families have a child with a disability that can interfere with sports and exercise.
- More than one-third (38%) of parents of a child with a disability said their communities and school did not offer sports or exercise programs for their child.
- When sports and exercise programs for children with disabilities were offered by schools and communities, half of parents said their children participated, and half said they did not.
- Among children with disabilities, 62% of boys have a high interest in playing sports, compared to 40% of the girls.
- A gender gap in sports and exercise activity does exist among children with disabilities, and it is the boys who are less physically active than the girls. More boys with disabilities than their female counterparts did not play any sport during the past year (38% versus 29%).
- Girls with disabilities on average exercise as often as the general population without disabilities (4.3 days per week). In contrast, boys with disabilities average 3.76 days per week—substantially lower than their female counterparts and the general population of students without disabilities.

Key Findings for Children in Immigrant Families

- Nationwide, 23% of children have at least one parent born outside the United States.
- Compared to boys, girls in immigrant families reported lower rates of athletic participation. Sons in immigrant families mirrored the high athletic participation rates of their fathers, whereas daughters reported lower rates of involvement with sport (75% versus 43%).
- While 60% of immigrant mothers agreed that “boys are more interested in sports than girls,” 35% of non-immigrant parents did so.

Conclusion: Significant numbers of children from immigrant families are involved with sports and exercise. Their interest is palpable, but for reasons we do not understand, girls lag behind boys in participation. For many immigrant parents, sports are still deemed less appropriate for their daughters than sons.

The findings belie stereotypical images of children with disabilities leading sedentary lives and being disinterested in sports. Many children with disabilities do participate in sports and exercise, and many of their parents take advantage of special school or community programs when they are available. Meanwhile, other parents say more sports and exercise opportunities are needed.

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

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