

Submission to the Senate Inquiry
on
Women in Sport and Recreation in Australia

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This submission is based on findings of a study conducted for the Women's Sport Foundation WA (1998), which identified a range of issues, and when looking at these issues eight years on one may ask, "What's changed"? All these issues continue to be relevant for women in sport and recreation in 2006

1.1. Issues for women in recreation and sport

These issues may be grouped into 18 themes:

Attitude/Body Image	Sport and Sport Clubs
Family	Coaching
Health/Well-being	Media
Participation	Work/Unemployment
Provision	Funding of Women's Sport/Sponsorship
Gender Equity	Access/Opportunity- Barriers/Constraints
Economics	Alternative Activities
Lifestyle	Crime rate
Schools	Olympic/Commonwealth/World Games

Some issues flow across themes, for example, participation and gender equity, or provision and family. However, these issues are separated to best express the view of the respondents.

Some responses reflected the members' view about themselves, as much as about women's sport and physical activity in the future. In some cases positive and negative perspectives of an issue were offered. The themes are not presented in any particular order or with any special emphasis. Quotations from respondents are shown italics. There is a degree of inter-relationship between all the themes, so these are cross-referenced to show where the interdependency of issues was identified.

Recommendations are shown in the boxes at the end of each section. These recommendations are directed at national, state and local governments, as well as national and state sport associations, and local clubs. Each has a part to play. Guidelines, policy and encouragement are needed to support implementation.

1.1.1. Attitude/Body Image

This theme suggests that women's attitudes about themselves is changing and that these changes could improve the interest women will have in sport and physical activity. New attitudes were thought to free women from stereotypical images of the "ideal female figure" and promote positive views, for example, *it's cool to feel good about yourself*.

A variety of images of physically active women need to be portrayed so that young girls can find active role models and activities that appeal to them. Role models should include

“ordinary” women, not always elite athletes, enjoying the benefits from sport and physical activity.

Attitude/Body Image use a variety of positive images of women of all ages and levels of ability to promote enjoyment and achievement of women in sport and physical activity, and to promote the benefits of an active lifestyle.

1.1.2. Family

These issues revolve around childcare and other family support to release women from family constraints to pursue physical recreation.

Fathers were identified as being more willing to take on the role of primary care giver for children. However, women will still have difficulty finding time and family support to participate in their chosen sport or physical recreation. Single mothers, in particular, it is suggested, will continue to *find it difficult to juggle family, work [and] personal activity commitments*.

See also Participation, Provision

Family continue to encourage community and commercial sport and recreation providers to include child care facilities/services, accessible at times that facilitate their members'/customers' participation in sport and physical activities, as officials, committee members, players, and even spectators.

1.1.3. Health/Well-being

The future health issues identified were related to the increasing general awareness of the health benefits of physical activity. Obesity and other eating disorders were identified as specific concerns for women and girls.

An awareness of developmental changes in women's bodies was also identified, especially osteoporosis and its relationship with both physical activity and diet, will be increasingly important in the future.

Stress related injuries, both physical and psychological, were mentioned. Overcoming stress from work and personal issues will be an increasing concern for women in the future.

Drugs were a general health concern, but not raised in any specific context by respondents.

See also Lifestyle, Attitude/Body Image, Work/Unemployment.

Health/Well-being..... continue to promote the benefits to be gained from participation in sport and physical activities. Attention will continue to be given to dietary practices essential to maintain health and a health active lifestyle at all ages. A special focus on stress and its management through physical activity need to be addressed.

1.1.4. Participation

This theme has several sub-themes: general participation, specific groups, and information.

There will continue to be a need to provide general encouragement for women of all ages to *have a go* at sport and physical activity. Women need to find activities that suit their current abilities and levels of fitness. There will be a need to provide more social, non-structured physical activities with a strong fun and friendship element. If the focus is on elite and winners only, “ordinary” women will be less likely to try if they perceive that they are expected to perform at a level that may be beyond their current ability and aspirations.

Increasing the numbers and visibility of female sport participants will be necessary to attract sponsorship and media coverage for women’s sport and physical activity.

More specifically, the concerns about participation are:

- the relatively low participation rates and high drop-out from sport by young girls;
- the need for the fun elements of sport and physical activity to be promoted, especially at primary schools;
- elderly women will need special attention;
- the increasing pressure to produce elite athletes will be detrimental to the community leisure sports base;
- achievement versus fun will detract from nurturing social competition at the community level.

Information about clubs and activities that are available and accessible to women will continue to be a pressing need for all women with limited time and financial resources who need to seek out the activities of their choice.

See also Provision, Schools, Access/Opportunity.

Participation..... continue to promote the fun and enjoyment elements to encourage women and girls to take up and maintain a life-long involvement in sport and physical activity.

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Participation use existing information resources to inform women of the sport and physical activity opportunities available to them; for example, Departments of Sport and Recreation Directory of Sports and Calendar of Events.

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Participation explore new avenues and partnerships to disseminate information about physical and sport activities that are accessible to women (e.g. local government).

1.1.5. Provision

Childcare was the predominant issue of this theme. With decreasing childcare resources in the general community, sport and recreation providers will need to take an increasing shared role in childcare to encourage women with children to participate on the playing fields and at meetings.

Providers of sport and physical activity for women will need to consider different methods of delivering their services to give women greater access to the activities of their choice (e.g., timing of services, program relevance to the women, cost of activities, including child care). In the future it is anticipated that providers will need to give special attention to the specific and different needs of women as a target market for their services.

See also Family, Economics.

Provision continue liaison with sporting associations and community organisations to inform them about the nature of women's sport, and to encourage support for and delivery of programmes to meet the different needs of women.

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Provision provide child and mother friendly sport and physical activity environments and activities.

1.1.6. Gender Equity

Gender equity in all areas of sport and physical activity will continue to be a major issue for women in sport and physical activity.

In those sports where men are the top decision makers, women will continue to have limited access in sport clubs and organisations and their administration, in part due to men's lack of understanding of pregnancy, child care and other issues impacting on women's involvement.

See also Sport and Sports Clubs.

Gender equity encourage sporting associations and community organisations to create opportunities for women to become involved in planning and decision making roles to ensure that women's needs are considered in these organisations and their activities, so that women in these roles are seen as leaders in their respective organisations, and as role models and mentors for other women.

1.1.7. Economics

There were several issues recurring under this theme: sponsorship, cost of participation, user pays and government policy. The declining sponsorship dollar (government and commercial) has resulted in many organisations looking to other sources to generate revenue.

This is reflected in community recreation centres, in particular, where there is an increasing emphasis on the user-pays approach and at least break-even operations. Previously subsidised programmes may no longer be financially accessible for people on limited incomes, generally

women with children, older women and young girls. This trend is expected to continue, even increase, to the disadvantage of many women.

General economic tightening and the GST (goods and services tax) and high fuel costs may create the perception that the costs of sport and physical activities are too high. Perceived and actual rising costs, and a declining disposable income for many women, will serve to restrict participation by women of all ages.

See also Participation, Work/Unemployment, Funding for Women's Sport/Sponsorship

Economics identify and monitor changes in government policy that may impact on the financial resources (e.g., fixed income, unemployed, availability of subsidies and sponsorship) and work with providers to develop strategies to reduce any negative flow-on to women's sport.

1.1.8. Lifestyle

The main message in this theme is the promotion of a healthy lifestyle image to encourage women, in particular, teenage girls, into sport and keep them involved. However, they will still need to be consistently reminded and encouraged to persist in sport and physical activity, and resist the stereotyping.

As *young women are demanding their "place in the sun"*, there will be increasing opportunities for some young women to be leaders and mentors to other young girls ("girl power").

See also Attitude/Body Image, Health/Well-Being

Lifestyle persevere promoting a range of positive female body images and attitudes by telling stories of women who didn't give up and achieved their personal goals through sport and physical activity.

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Lifestyle explore, in partnerships, ways and means of providing young women with leadership opportunities through sport and physical activities.

1.1.9. Schools

The issues for this theme are teachers and curriculum, and both were identified as having a negative impact on involving girls in sport and physical activity. Some teachers are less involved in out-of-school activities, which limits the sports opportunities for some girls. At the same time, physical education hours have been reduced in the state school curriculum, further reducing relatively accessible opportunities for sport and physical activity in the "captive" environment of the school.

There is a strong view that school is an important partner for involving girls in sport and physical activity, where girls can enjoy learning lifelong skills:

- *The need to ensure that girls develop sporting and leisure skills at school in preparation for adulthood.*
- *Need to introduce sport to primary school girls as an enjoyable and easily performed activity.*
- *Emphasis on participation and fun, especially at primary level.*

In addition, drug and health education will continue to be important to encourage young girls to adopt and maintain a healthy lifestyle.

See also Lifestyle, Attitude/Body Image, Health/Well Being

Schools..... pursue partnerships to negotiate with the Education Departments to review:

- curriculum hours for Physical Education in high schools
- placement of Physical Education specialists in primary schools
- alternative means of providing sport and physical activity for schoolgirls at all year levels where/when teachers are not available.

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Schools use current research findings to support the case for increased access of schoolgirls to school spaces and programmes for physical activity.

1.1.10. Sport and Sport Clubs

This theme is associated with sporting clubs and their lack of appeal and attractiveness to women. Members believe it is important for women to take up positions in sports administration to increase the number of women in planning and decision-making positions in sport and recreation in sports organisations and the wider community.

Members perceived a need for women to become involved in traditionally male sports. There is a need to promote opportunities and acceptance of women in the traditionally male sports.

See also Participation, Provision, Gender Equity.

Sport clubs continue to challenge the stereotypical image of women in sport, especially those sports traditionally in the domain of men.

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Sport clubs challenge the conservatism of sport clubs and associations that results in a reluctance to accept women in a variety of roles, e.g., officials, administrators, coaches, and members.

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Sport clubs promote to sport organisations the benefits of increased membership from women, a relatively untapped resource in the community.

1.1.11. Coaching

Three coaching issues are closely related to other themes - (improved) status of female coaches and athletes; better training for junior athletes in schools and, more specifically, eating disorders in elite female athletes. There is a need to liaise especially with those involved with young women in schools, possibly through professional associations, would offer another avenue to tackle the issues related to coaching. Participation through officiating is an alternative avenue for women in sport.

See also Schools, Participation.

Coaching continue to liaise with the Coaching Foundation of WA and other agencies (e.g., Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation - ACHPER) to address the coaching issues for women at all levels of sport in Western Australia.

1.1.12. Media

The major issue is about the limited coverage for women's sport in the media. Although the coverage has increased in recent years, there is more scope for greater coverage of women's sport in all media. While it may be difficult *to loosen the hold of Australian Rules football on the media* (or vice versa) other avenues, such as television and community newspapers are suggested as alternative avenues that could be explored to promote women's sport.

The relatively low media coverage influences public interest, which in turn affects the amount of sponsorship from all sources.

The awareness of women's successes and achievements in sport, especially at international events, could be improved through greater media coverage.

Community attitudes about women in sport and physical activity are influenced by media (positively, negatively or merely by the absence of coverage). These community attitudes in turn influence women's choices to participate in certain activities or not to participate at all.

Media continue to promote all the positive aspects of women's sport and physical activity - role models, women's achievements and the value of women's sport.

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Media in liaison with all sporting associations approach the media with stories about women's sporting successes, as well as human interest stories.

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Media run seminars for female volunteer/paid administrators in women's and mixed sports to improve their techniques in public relations and promotion to improve media coverage of women in sport.

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Media explain bench marking to selected partners to monitor and report on any changes in media coverage of women's sport.

1.1.13. Work/Unemployment

Members identified two dimensions to this theme of employment: the impact of work limiting women's opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity, and increasing unemployment for some women.

More women in the workforce means that more women have less time to be active (as paid work is usually additional to domestic unpaid work). A corollary is that inactive women may have less active daughters. Another aspect is that working women are less available to be volunteers in community sporting clubs (and other community settings), which in turn has an impact on these organisations.

On the other hand, while work is increasing for some women, unemployment is a growing concern for others, especially young women.

The issues for the future will include providers catering for the needs of working women by restructuring opportunities for them to participate in activities in limited, irregular time periods. The issues for younger women, who are unemployed, will be cost, transport, motivation and self-esteem.

See also Participation, Provision, Economics.

Work/Unemployment promote the special needs of working women to be considered by providers in the scheduling and pricing community and commercial sporting and physical activities.

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Work/Unemployment promote the special needs of unemployed women to be considered by providers in the scheduling and pricing community and commercial sporting and physical activities.

1.1.14. Funding of Women's Sport/Sponsorship

The uncertainty associated with ongoing government funding for women's sport - either directly or through funding agencies will continue, and funding will be increasingly dependent on contracts for service, development and business plans. Funding is unlikely to increase in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Sports administrators in women's sport organisations will need expertise (or organisations will need to attract the expertise) to obtain additional funding for the delivery of sport and physical recreation for women. They will also need training in the preparation and application of strategic and business plans, and service contracts.

There is increasing competition for the sponsorship dollar amongst all sports and sportswomen are finding it harder to attract sponsorship at a time when more women are competing at an elite level. Better sponsorship is required by and for elite sportswomen.

See also Media, Economics.

Funding run seminars for female sports administrators to assist them to identify alternative sources of funding, expanding membership base to/for women, strategic and business planning, marketing sport to women, and other means of improving the financial base and sponsorship for women's sport.

Funding identify appropriate partners for projects, for example, Community Services, Health Services, Universities and other agencies, where there may be the possibility of shared funding for projects, in addition to traditional funding sources.

1.1.15. Access/Opportunity & Constraints

Women will continue to need easy access to information about the sports options that are available to them and how to access activities and organisations that interest them. Opportunities will have to be accessible in terms of cost, time, proximity and relevant to their interests and ability, with ancillary services, such as childcare.

Constraints will continue to prevent or limit women and girls from participating in sport and physical activity. The task of identifying constraints to participation and developing strategies to remove or reduce them to facilitate participation is a priority.

See also Participation, Provision.

Access/Constraints, in identifying target groups of women, identify alternative avenues to channel information to women, e.g. community medical suites/centre, infant health centres, church groups, ethnic groups, business women's groups, even traditional men's groups (Apex, Rotary, etc.) that have women as members or in supporting roles.

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Access/Constraints monitor and investigate constraints that limit women's participation and develop strategies to remove or reduce these to increase opportunities and access for women in sport and physical recreation.

1.1.16. Alternative Activities

Computers, videos, and electronic games will continue to be attractive to young girls, but result in them spending less time being physically active. Women in the workplace (and the home) are increasing less active due to automation and computerisation.

The electronic media and computerisation may have negative impacts. However, it may also provide avenues to promote the benefits of sport and physical activity, for example, Internet, CD ROM for information, reduced time spent on routine tasks, and as a source of information and modelling.

Alternative activities consider the impact of electronic technology on women's work and activity as a seminar topic, to be conducted in conjunction with appropriate partner(s), for example, Worksafe, Health Departments, Education Departments.

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Alternative activities adopt electronic technology as a means of promoting its policies and to enhance its communication capabilities with members and

1.1.17. Crime Rate

Interestingly, the increasing crime rate and violence against women was identified as a factor that limits women's willingness to go out, especially to use public transport, after dark.

Older women and young women are most affected by this fear, although all women will experience vulnerability and fear, even in the most public places. It is likely that this will be a continuing concern for women likely to limit their inclination to participate in certain sporting and physical activities in the future.

See also Provision.

Crime liaise with sporting clubs and community recreation centres to identify alternative ways to make their services safely accessible to female members and participants by, for example:

- training male and female staff in risk management
 - installing public telephones
- providing well lit, publicly visible and supervised access to community centres
 - promoting car pools/travel groups for specific activities in suburbs.

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Crime liaise with martial arts groups to conduct self-defence classes for women around the metro and country areas about the time of the "reclaim the night" march.

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Crime liaise with appropriate agencies to produce "How to..." brochures/posters for recreation centres, sports clubs to promote safety for members, especially for women and girls.

1.1.18. Olympic/Commonwealth/World Games

Large international sporting events such as the Olympic Games in the year 2000 and the Commonwealth Games in 2006, and other international sport events produce female sports heroes and role models of all nationalities, who capture the imagination of women and girls and inspire interest in many sports.

The inclusion of new disciplines within sports (e.g., windsurfing in sailing, trampolining in gymnastics), and new sports (e.g., triathlon), and their promotion as a result of the Games may attract new interest from those women and girls not interested in the more traditional

team sports, swimming or track and field. However, the national, community and sporting and recreation infrastructure will need to be ready to accommodate any flow-on in the 12 months after any Games.

See also Provision, Sport and Sports Clubs.

Games be constantly alert to the issues for women arising out of the various international games and be ready to identify successful female athletes as heroes and role models, and the values of sport.

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Games work with state, local and community groups to advise them on making their sports and activities “women friendly”.

1.2. Summary of issues for the future

These numerous issues are extensions of issues currently being addressed by respective Women’s Sport organisations (e.g., media, schools, coaching), as well as some issues that will become important influences on women’s sport in the future (e.g., crime rate, international games, changing lifestyles and attitudes). Some of issues, such as work and unemployment are more general social and economic issues that need to be included to ensure their consideration in the development of social and economic policies. However, Women’s Sport organisations, with government, can monitor changes in these areas and respond as and when appropriate to ensure that women’s interests in sport and physical activity are not overlooked in any flow-on effects.

The issues raised are related to women’s different needs and the constraints that prevent or limit them receiving optimum benefits from sport and physical recreation. As expected some of these constraints are related to the structure of sport organisations and the delivery of sport and other physical activities that do not easily accommodate or accept women’s interests and requirements. These issues provide a basis for policy direction and highlight the need for women’s sport and recreation organisations with the help of respective levels of government and sport associations to develop research priorities to establish benchmarks, explore issues and develop strategies to reduce the constraints and increase opportunities for women in sport and recreation as players, administrators and officials.