

## Culture Committee CC 01-03 p3 Annex 1

Date: 16 January 2003

Time: 1.30pm - 4.00pm

Venue: National Assembly for Wales, Committee Room 2

### BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

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#### Gender

Many studies including those conducted in Wales and England show that participation rates for women are significantly lower than men. A review of the research literature suggests the following reasons why this is the case:

- Experience of physical education at school: a number of factors contribute to a negative feeling towards sport and physical activity whilst at school:
  - PE kit is seen as old-fashioned, unsuitable for cold weather and embarrassing
  - A fear of enforced showering leads many girls to ‘forget’ their kit or be absent on PE days
  - Girls are worried about embarrassing themselves in front of boys because of a perceived lack of sporting ability
- Physical appearance and femininity: women who participate in sport seem to be regarded as ‘tomboyish’ or ‘butch’ reflecting the perceived ‘maleness’ of sport.
- Lack of positive role models: women’s sport receives much less coverage within the national media despite international successes (Nicole Cooke Vs the Welsh Rugby team is a prime example of this). There are very few examples of sportswomen who the media concentrate on purely as a result of their performance. Furthermore, traditional female sports such as netball get very little media coverage.
- More caring/family responsibilities: whether it is for young children or elderly relatives, caring is more likely to be seen as the woman’s responsibility. Therefore, while it may seem ‘acceptable’ for the male to spend every Saturday playing football, this is less likely to be the case for the female.
- Amount of free time: because of the factors above, free time for women tends to be in shorter chunks and therefore restricts the type of activity that can be undertaken.
- Lack of clubs: SCW research has shown that pro-rata to current participation rates there are less clubs catering for women than men.
- Personal safety out of the home: fears centre on travelling on public transport or visiting sporting facilities alone.

## Ethnicity

A Sport England study conducted in 1999/2000 provides the only real large scale quantitative measure of participation among minority ethnic communities. It found that in England, participation rates in the ethnic population are at 40% (compared to 46% seen among the national population).

The main barriers to participating amongst minority ethnic communities uncovered by this study and other more qualitative research projects can be summarised as follows:

- Home/family responsibilities: particularly for Asian Communities and also much more likely to be mentioned by women
- Work/study demands: more likely to be given as a reason by men. There appears to be more of an emphasis on academic achievement and getting a good job. Sporting activities are given a much lower priority partly due to the lack of perceived benefits
- Lack of role models at a higher level: for some ethnic groups the lack of sports stars from their ethnic group reinforces feelings that this type of activity is inappropriate for them.
- Fears of abuse/not welcome/don't fit in: The Sport England Survey revealed that one in five in the survey had had a negative experience to do with their ethnicity whilst participating in sport.
- Lack of facilities: to some extent this reflects the fact that ethnic minorities are more likely to be living in areas of social deprivation.
- Sports kit: this can cause problems particularly within Muslim women as sports clothing is often inappropriate to their culture.

However, the study also emphasised that ethnic groups are not homogeneous and the overall results mask significant cultural variation.

## Age

Unsurprisingly SCW research along with many other studies has shown that increasing age is directly linked with decreasing levels of participation. Whilst this may be regarded as inevitable, particularly during the latter stages of life, the drop-off in participation comes at a much earlier stage than would be caused solely by physical ability.

Some of the reasons for this are discussed above and are related to increasing time pressures such as work/study demands and family commitments. The latter partly explains why declining participation with age is steeper among women, although provision of appropriate facilities (e.g. sports clubs) and negative experiences at a young age also contribute.

Another factor that may accelerate declining levels of participation is the types of activity that are undertaken. Many activities that are popular and encouraged at a young age such as rugby, football and hockey require a certain level of physical fitness which becomes more difficult to maintain later in life.

Thus, for many individuals participation in sport ends when these 'youth' sports are given up. It is for this reason that SCW emphasises the importance of developing physical literacy and a broad portfolio of skills at a young age.