

Inquiry into Women in sport and recreation in Australia

submission prepared by



representing state sporting associations in the ACT

Joan Perry, CEO
ACTSPORT
100 Maitland St.
Hackett ACT 2602
Ph (02) 6247 0260

As the peak body representing state sporting associations in the Canberra Region, ACTSPORT represents the views of more than 100,000 people or one third of the ACT population. We should stipulate clearly that many of our members will also be providing separate submissions to the inquiry which will provide greater detail into their individual experiences. This submission is a collective view on a larger scale of the situation as it exists in the ACT, with reference often made to the national picture.

The terms of reference of this inquiry appear to be somewhat lengthy so for the purpose of preparing this submission the terms of reference have been broken down into five broad sections:

1. Health benefits of women participating in sport and recreation
2. Grass Roots participation
 - i. Number of women participating
 - ii. Characteristics of women not participating
 - iii. Constraints
 - iv. Effectiveness of programs
 - v. Retention/attrition rates
3. Elite participation
4. Media
 - i. Role of Government in regulation
 - ii. Influence of pay TV on coverage of women's sport
 - iii. Promotion and publicity of women's national leagues
 - iv. Financial status/success of women's national league teams
 - v. Strategies to improve amount and quality of media coverage
5. Women in Leadership
 - i. Number in various areas
 - ii. Issues with women in leadership
 - iii. Trends for women in leadership
 - iv. Strategies to improve numbers

After consultation with our members and other industry bodies including Sport and Recreation ACT and the University of Canberra on the extent of the inquiry and our experiences in the ACT, we hereby submit this response for consideration.

Health Benefits

There is plenty of evidence about the health benefits of females participating in sport and physical activity. The following statistics are reproduced in much of the research that exists:

- Increased levels of physical activity protects against cardiovascular disease and several cancers, reduces the risk of diabetes, hypertension, obesity, high cholesterol, falls and injuries in older people, and improves mental health.
- Physical inactivity is a preventable risk factor for ill health. Increasing physical activity for women of all ages requires coordination and collaboration across sectors, and in a range of settings, to address sex role stereotyping, media portrayal of women, and issues associated with body image and social support.
- Women who exercised at least 4 hours/week reduced their risk by over 50%, and women who exercised 1-3 hours/week reduced their risk by 30%.
- Girls and women who participate in sports have higher levels of confidence, stronger self-images and lower levels of depression.
- 80% of all people with osteoporosis (brittle bones) are female and one out of every two women over the age of 60 has osteoporosis. Adequate calcium intake and weight-bearing exercise, especially in a female's high school and college years, is crucial in the prevention of osteoporosis
- Secondary school females who participate in sports often have higher marks than non-participants

The list of research is extensive and all of this points to positive outcomes for females participating in sport and physical activity; it is difficult to find any negatives. What is crucial is the timing of their participation. It is extremely difficult to get girls to start sport later in life; it must begin in their formative years.

Anecdotal evidence shows us that girls who were not exposed to positive experiences or role models in sport and physical activity at a young age are not likely to take up sport in their later years. As most children's experiences in physical activity at an early age occur within the school environment, it is clear that physical education in pre-school and primary school plays a significant role in the future development of young females.

In the ACT, 58.3% of teachers are over the age of 40, which is actually lower than the statistics across Australia which are 65.1% above 40. The situation is actually worse in the ACT secondary school system where 68.3% of the teachers are over 40 which is only slightly higher than the national statistics of 67.1% over 40 years of age.

When examining gender in teaching across Australia, ACT has the highest proportion of women in both primary and secondary schools. Compared with a national average of 79.1% females in primary schools, ACT actually has 83.5% females. In the secondary school system the national average of female teachers is 55.3% with the ACT average sitting at 60.5%. This makes the ACT average for female teachers across all schools nearly 4% higher than the national average.

Physical Education/Health is identified as one of the eight key learning areas yet more and more schools focus on the health aspect but not enough on the physical education and activity. The gender and age profile of teachers across Australia, not just the ACT, often has a negative impact in terms of sporting or physical activity experiences for students because those teachers had limited or negative experiences in physical activity and sport while they were growing up so there is little positive learning to pass on to children.

We acknowledge that the Active After Schools Program is making an attempt to get children physically active, but this is in a limited capacity because it only takes place after school. It is also limited because like most government programs, it takes place for a period of time and then the government moves on to the next best thing. We need to develop sustainable programs and strategies that will impact long term.

Physical Education and positive experiences is a school issue that needs to be addressed. There are two ways to combat this problem in the school environment - continue to work on lowering the age profile of teachers whilst also seeking to increase the number of males in the teaching profession, and work the system back towards having Physical Education (PE) specialists in primary schools. Several years ago PE specialists were utilised in primary schools and this definitely enhanced the physical activity and sport experiences of young children. Without PE specialists we limit the opportunities for children to have a positive experience at a young age which in turn limits the number of people we have participating in sport or physical activity. Strategies such as this will also have an impact on the obesity levels of children and lifelong participation in the future.

We should also focus on partnerships which produce other sustainable outcomes. It should not just be a "sport and education issue". As the outcomes of regular participation in physical activity are health related (both mental and physical) it should be a primary focus of the health departments across Australia to devise strategies to get women regularly physically active as it will reduce the long term health bills. There was an attempt at developing a national physical activity strategy which appears to have stalled, perhaps due to the demise of the SCORS subcommittee on women. That role and function of that subcommittee should be re-examined.

Grass Roots Participation

Again, there is ample evidence of women's participation in sport. According to ABS statistics and the 2003 ERASS report female participation in organised sport in Australia was 40.8%. What these statistics do not show however is the significant drop in female participation at 14 years of age, a problem that has existed for many years. What the statistics do show which is also a concern is the steady decline in female participation from 25 years onwards.

Some of the decline, particularly in the teenage years, can be attributed to past experiences and lack of positive role models as evidenced above. However, in later years there are other contributing factors.

What we have to remember is that this is not specifically a 'women's' issue rather a whole of sport issue. With the amalgamation of many sports across Australia, the responsibility of the delivery of male and female sporting opportunities rests with one organising body. No longer do we have separate bodies responsible for male and female sport delivery. This means that it must be addressed as a whole of sport issue. For some organisations this has presented a problem. The male sport plays the dominant role and the female part of the sport is paid tokenism. This is true in most of the male dominated sports.

At the young or teen age group it is important to start empowering girls. The school environment plays a significant role in determining whether girls play sport or choose not to. In the teenage years, girls succumb to peer pressure from other non-sporting girls to do other things (non physical activity). There are also stereotypes of girls who play sport and often these stereotypes are negative. In addition to the stereotypes are the expectations of parents. It is often expected that the boys will play sport, but looked down upon if the girls choose to do so as well. These stereotypes need to be removed and sport needs to be seen as a positive activity for females.

It is also possible that sport is also not offering an activity that is suited to today's teenage girls. We hear more and more comments about the types of activities that girls and women want to take part in. What we should be doing is empowering women to assist with the development of activities in sport so that it is targeted towards what the women actually want. The participation environment must suit the needs of the users.

A good example of this is the women's masters (+27) football (soccer) program in Canberra. This started as a six-a-side social summer competition for some mature age women who wanted to play, many of whom had never played before. Soccer adapted the product to suit the needs of these women. Not only does the six-a-side summer program still exist, there is now a ten team competition for those same +27 participants. Therefore these women are now participating on a regular basis and there are nearly 200 of them.

Beyond the teenage years and more specifically from 25 yrs. onwards female participation declines again. Often the obvious contributing factors are career and family priorities. However, one of the major underlying issues is that sport is seen as a "highly competitive and regulated" activity. If women at 25+ have not been exposed to organised sport in the past and do not have positive body image and self esteem, then they will choose activities other than sport or do nothing. This can only be addressed by starting at a younger age or modifying sports to offer more targeted opportunities for this demographic group. One other significant issue for this age group is the lack of available child-care options. In order to women with families to participate in organised sport the environment again needs to be conducive and therefore needs to offer appropriate child care facilities.

Sport is driven by volunteers and they are often seen as the backbone of the industry. Therefore, it must also be emphasised that there are opportunities for women to participate in sport and recreation in those types of roles, particularly in coaching, managing and officiating. Not enough emphasis is placed on the importance of these roles for women. Furthermore, when opportunities in these areas do arise they are once again onerous, costly and do not cater for women's needs.

Elite Participation

There are significant issues in regards to elite women's sport including but not limited to the following:

- Few professional sports are on equal pay males/females
- The highest paid athlete in the Super 14 competition could pay all of the Commonwealth Bank Trophy Netball players and still have \$1m remaining
- Because women at the elite level are not highly paid they must also hold full time jobs in order to pursue their sporting endeavours which then inhibits their ability to play sport full time - a vicious circle really

We believe this is a national issue as well as an individual sport issue and therefore will be best addressed by those bodies.

Portrayal of women's sport in the media

The media situation is a very interesting one and also an extremely difficult issue to resolve. We are really no different in Australia when compared to other countries on this matter, so there is not a shining example in other parts of the world about how women's sport coverage in the media might be improved.

The reality is that there are more men playing sport at an elite level than there are women. This is largely because there are more opportunities for elite participation by males as compared to the opportunities for females. However, the elite sport played by women in Australia is of a high standard and I don't believe that this is well understood. Perhaps some type of education needs to take place with those people in the media so that women's sport can be better sold, better understood, better appreciated and better packaged.

The responsibility to do this rests with sport, the media and perhaps there is also a role for government.

Sporting bodies must make their sport attractive to the reading and viewing audience. This might mean more cameras and more camera angles at televised events, it also might mean better sale of the product to the reader of newspapers and magazines. Either way, sport has to examine its product and the consumer market intricately to understand what the needs are and how they might address them. Taking these sorts of steps might assist sporting organisations to sell their product in a more cost effective manner. It might even make the media outlets want to purchase packages of women's sport to cover, rather than the sport having to pay to have it covered, which is the current situation.

The media needs to appreciate elite women's sporting competition for what it is and learn more about it so that they can market it appropriately as well.

One of the problems is that many of the higher profile sports and the various media outlets are all owned by driven by one body. Use NewsCorp as an example in particular relation to Rugby League, a sport which gets excellent coverage in Australia and it is no wonder - NewsCorp owns the NRL, Fox Sports and more than 100 newspapers. No one is able to compete with that sort of entity. Therefore television stations pay large dollars to bring these events live to the viewers and often replay them on various stations. Conversely, the Champions Trophy, an international women's hockey tournament featuring the best hockey nations in the world had to pay \$220,000 to televise their event on a free to air station to a potential half billion audience and live in Korea - it doesn't make sense.

With the advent of pay television, one might have thought that the situation would change, however it has not. Free-to-air television has failed to represent the diversity of Australian sport and has played a significant role in the marginalisation of many sports and of the people who play them (*Rowe 1999*). In addition to the failings of free-to-air television, pay television has intended to rectify the shortcomings of the free-to-air networks, but in reality have also failed to address the diversity of programs as well.

It is interesting to note that when the Commonwealth and Olympics Games take place, the coverage of women increases and the viewers tune in. It is unclear whether this is because of genuine interest, success in terms of performance or other reasons, but the fact remains, during our most prominent sporting competitions where we have Australian representation people watch the women. Therefore it is possible to sell it properly.

Furthermore, the release of multi-media campaigns surrounding films that portray female sporting participation in a positive and inspiring light, such as *Bend it Like Beckham*, for example, create increased enthusiasm in watching female participation in sport. The benefits of these types of campaigns become two-fold; greater awareness and interest in watching female sport and increased attraction of girls to participation in sport and recreational activity. Perhaps the formula of such movies could be considered in other media coverage and portrayal of women in sport.

We need long term solutions not band-aids on the situation. Until changes are made within sport, the media owners/providers and the government in terms of regulation, there is little that will change.

Women in Leadership Roles in Sport

This topic has been researched for many years yet the situation appears to have changed very little. Women often perform the administrative roles, but the number of females in decision making roles diminishes significantly. A simple study of 49 state sporting organisations in the ACT highlighted the following:

Position	Number	Males #	Males %	Females #	Females %
President	49	39	80%	10	20%
Executive Director	35	21	60%	14	40%
Overall	84	60	71%	24	29%

Even though women in Executive Officer positions sits at 40%, many of those positions are not actual decision making roles, they are administrative roles and the individuals in these positions must refer to the President for any decisions. It is understood that this local picture is mirrored across Australia. In fact according to statistics from 1998 (which are the most recent accessible) the national representation picture was even lower with women making up only 25% of Executive Officer positions and 13% of Presidents.

There appears to be very much of a glass ceiling when it comes to the employment of women in decision making roles across Australia. Women only make it so far and then there seems to be limited opportunities, often because they are perceived not to have the same level of skills as their male counterparts or are not part of the sporting culture. That presents an interesting argument in itself.

A study conducted in the USA in 2001 interviewed 401 senior women business executives earning more than \$75,000 per annum and working in companies with at least 100 employees. 81% of these women participated in organised sport growing up, most of them in team sport. Furthermore, these women explained that playing sport had contributed to their success as a leader and cited greater discipline, ability to function as part of a team and leadership skills as primary factors. Therefore, women who have played sport offer vital skills when moving into decision making roles.

An examination at the University of Canberra Sports Studies programs over the last 10 years presents some interesting statistics. In the three sports streams of coaching, administration and media the graduate statistics are as follows:

Graduating student ratio, University of Canberra, 1996-2005

Stream	Male #	Male %	Female #	Female %
Coaching	106	65%	57	35%
Media	89	55%	83	45%
Management	201	58%	146	42%

There is definitely dominance of males graduating with coaching degrees from the University of Canberra, but the number of graduates in the other two streams of media and management appear a bit more evenly balanced. This is not surprising as there are more coaching positions available for males as compared to females. It could also be that coaching still remains a more attractive and viable option for males as a full time profession rather than females.

In the coaching arena, another interesting observation is the coaching situation at the ACT Academy of Sport, which some would see as one of the highest available coaching opportunities in the ACT.

Coach ratio, ACT Academy of Sport, 2006

Role	Male #	Male %	Female #	Female %
Head Coach	20	95%	1	5%
Asst Coach	1	20%	4	80%

This further supports the theory that coaching is dominated by males.

Anecdotal evidence from discussions with the University of Canberra professors tells us that the females actually perform better in terms of GPA than do the males. This is further validated when one examines university students seeking their first opportunity for employment. In the ACT, during the three years 2003-2005, there were 20 internship positions available with a number of high profile sporting organisations. Females actually occupied 70% of the available internship positions, perhaps an indication that they are better at writing applications and performing in interviews. In further assessing the internship program it appears that more women applied for these positions than men. Evidence of employment levels of females in sport indicates that the female university students applying for internship positions felt the need to do so more than their male counterparts because they had to get a 'foot in the door' whereas the males perhaps felt that employment would be just a natural follow on after graduation.

It is interesting to note that in netball, a sport played primarily by females, 50% of the state Executive Directors are male. Netball across the country is also seeking the input of males to their sport so that they can bring a different perspective. Conversely, in a case study of rugby league, a sport primarily played by males, the organisation embarked on national employment scheme by only employing females in each state in a development officer role to get the female perspective or influence on the sport. That supports the fact that females have a significant role to play in assisting the development of sport.

So given the evidence, why then are there less females in decision making roles than males? This can be attributed to a few different issues - all of which are worth looking into further. It could be a lack of understanding of the abilities of women and what they could offer to sport. It could also be a lack of confidence by women to apply for these roles, an assumption they will not succeed in attaining them or that simply some women do not have an interest in that level of authority. This could reflect attitudes that they have been raised with which is that those roles belong to men. It has also been said that the lack of women in decision making roles is a culture problem within the sporting industry. Whatever the reasons - these issues need further research and moreover, attitudes and culture needs to change.

There are various grant programs and initiatives utilised to advance women in the sporting industry, but a comprehensive evaluation of these initiatives does not exist. It would be useful to see what type of impact these programs have had and whether they can be invested in long term as once again we need long term solutions, not short term attempts at resolving the situation.

Women should not be given opportunity merely because they are women, it should always be based on merit. However it is imperative that sporting organisations begin to make a culture shift and create pathways for women to fill decision making positions. This means having a flexible work places and patterns so that women who are also managing families have the ability to perform these roles. In some instances it may also require targets for representation on boards, but again based on merit.