



FACTS ABOUT GIRLS, SPORTS, AND HEALTH

Participation in high quality sports programs can increase a girl's chances of growing up to be a successful, healthy adult, reduce her likelihood of obesity and depression, and decrease her chances of illegal drug use or unprotected sex. Yet girls in low-income neighborhoods have the fewest opportunities to benefit from the power of sports.

Girls and Obesity

- Girls in California, and especially low-income girls, are becoming overweight and obese in alarming numbers. Almost one in five California girls ages 5-17 are overweight, and another 15-20% are at risk of becoming overweight.¹
- For both girls and boys, the highest rates of adolescent obesity are found among Latino and African-American youth. Rates of obesity are also higher among girls and boys in low-income families, with significantly higher rates in households at or below 299% of the federal poverty level.²

The Positive Impact of Sports on Girls

- Sports and physical activity can give adolescent girls positive body image, improved self-esteem, tangible experiences of competency and success, and increased self-confidence.³
- Regular physical activity through sports can help girls develop strength and endurance, manage their weight more effectively, and can significantly improve long-term health, including reduced risk of diabetes, certain cancers and heart disease.⁴
- Participating in sports can also have a positive impact on girls' mental health. Sports and physical activity are linked with decreased likelihood of symptoms related to stress and depression.⁵ Teenage girls who participate in sports are less likely to be suicidal than girls who do not participate in sports.⁶
- High school girls who participate in sports wait longer before having sex for the first time than their peers who don't participate in sports.⁷

¹ C Tudor-Locke, J Kronenfeld, S Kim, M Benin, and M Kuby. "A Geographical Comparison of Prevalence of Overweight School-aged Children: The National Survey of Children's Health 2003. *Pediatrics* Vol 120 No. 4 October 2007 pp. e1043-1050

² National Center for Health Statistics, *Prevalence of Overweight Among Children and Adolescents: United States, 2003-2004*.

³ The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Report. (1997). *Physical activity and sport in the lives of girls*.

⁴ The President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports Report. (1997). *Physical activity and sport in the lives of girls*.

⁵ Phillips, L. (1998). The girls report: What we know and need to know about growing up female. *New York: National Council for Research on Women*

⁶ Miller, op cit.

⁷ Erkut, S. and Tracy, A. (2000). *Protective effects of sports participation on girls' sexual behavior*. Wellesley, MA: Center for Research on Women.



Sports and Reduced Risk of Negative Behaviors

- Female high school athletes are less than half as likely to get pregnant as female non-athletes.⁸
- Teenage girls who participate in sports regularly are less likely to use illegal drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and hallucinogens.⁹
- Adolescent females and males who participate in greater levels of physical activity are less likely to smoke.¹⁰

Female Sports Participation is Low, Especially for Girls of Color

- Girls participate in sports and physical activity at much lower rates than boys, and ethnic minority and low-income girls are at even greater risk for low levels of physical activity and engagement in team sports.¹¹
- Girls of color participate in sports at lower rates than their white peers. In the 2001-02 school year, about 36% of Latina girls nationally played interscholastic sports, compared with 52% of non-Latina girls.¹² In another 2002 study, 56% of African American high school girls reported no regular physical activity, versus 31% of Caucasian girls.¹³

Barriers to Girls' Participation in Sports

- Urban high school girls report a range of barriers to participating in sports and physical activity. These include lack of time; influence of peers, parents, and teachers; safety concerns; inaccessibility and cost of using facilities; and body-centered issues.¹⁴
- One significant barrier to girls' participation in sports is a lack of facilities access. One-quarter of California's teenagers have no access to a safe park, playground, or open space where they can play sports.¹⁵ Girls in low-income urban neighborhoods have less access to parks and facilities than those living in more affluent communities.¹⁶

⁸ Sabo, D., et al. (1998). *The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Sport and Teen Pregnancy*. Women's Sports Foundation. (from WSF list)

⁹ Miller, K, et al. (2000). *The Women's Sports Foundation Report: Health Risks and the Teen Athlete*. Women's Sports Foundation. (from WSF list)

¹⁰ Rodriguez, D. and Audrain-McGovern, J. (2004). "Team Sport Participation and Smoking: Analysis with General Growth Mixture Modeling." *Journal of Pediatric Psychology* 29(4), 299-308.

¹¹ Pedersen, S., and Seidman, E. (2004). Team sports achievement and self-esteem development among urban adolescent girls. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 28, 412-422.

¹² Sylwester, M.J. "Culture, family play role in sports for Latina girls." USA Today, April 28, 2005.

¹³ Kimm, S.Y. et al. (2002). "Decline in Physical Activity in Black Girls and White Girls During Adolescence." *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 347 (10), 709-715.

¹⁴ Dwyer, J.J., et al. (2006). "Adolescent Girls' Perceived Barriers to Participation in Physical Activity." *Adolescence*, 41(161), 75-89.

¹⁵ Babey, S.H. et al. (2005). *Access to Safe Parks Helps Increase Physical Activity Among Teenagers*. UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

¹⁶ Babey, S.H. et al. (2007). *Teens Living in Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Lack Access to Parks and Get Less Physical Activity*. UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.



- Increasing the availability of parks can help girls in low-income communities become more active. Teenage girls who live within a half mile of a public park are more physically active than girls who live further away.¹⁷
- Another major barrier to girls' participation in sports is a severe shortage of female coaches. It is estimated that only 10 to 15% of youth sports coaches are women.¹⁸
- Without female coaches and role models, female athletes may devalue their own abilities, accept negative stereotypes, fail to realize their potential, or fail to consider coaching as a possible career.¹⁹
- Mothers in particular can have a tremendous influence on their daughters' participation in sports by coaching. Yet very few mothers coach. In one recent study of 600 parents in Michigan, over 27% of fathers coached their child's sports team, while the percentage of coaching mothers was less than 4%.²⁰

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¹⁷ Cohen, D. A., et al. (2006). "Public parks and physical activity among adolescent girls." *Pediatrics*.

¹⁸ LaVoi, N.M., and Becker, E. (2007). *Where Have All the Post-Title IX Mothers Gone?: Exploring the Scarcity of Female Coaches in Youth Sport*. Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) Conference in Louisville, KY. (poster session)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Fredricks, J.A. and Eccles, J.S. (2005). "Family Socialization, Gender, and Sport Motivation and Involvement." *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 27, 3-31.