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Women and Informal Sports Participation

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This factsheet is one of a series produced by sports coach UK and the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation aimed at sports deliverers and sports coaches who work with women in informal sports settings. These factsheets provide insight into the informal female participant and her needs, and provide guidance on the type of environment and coaching style she needs in order to be attracted to, and retained in, informal sport.

In particular, this factsheet is relevant to anyone who is involved in both the development of informal sports offers (governing bodies of sport, CSPs, local authorities), as well as those directly delivering it (coaches, leaders, coordinators etc – referred to as 'coach').

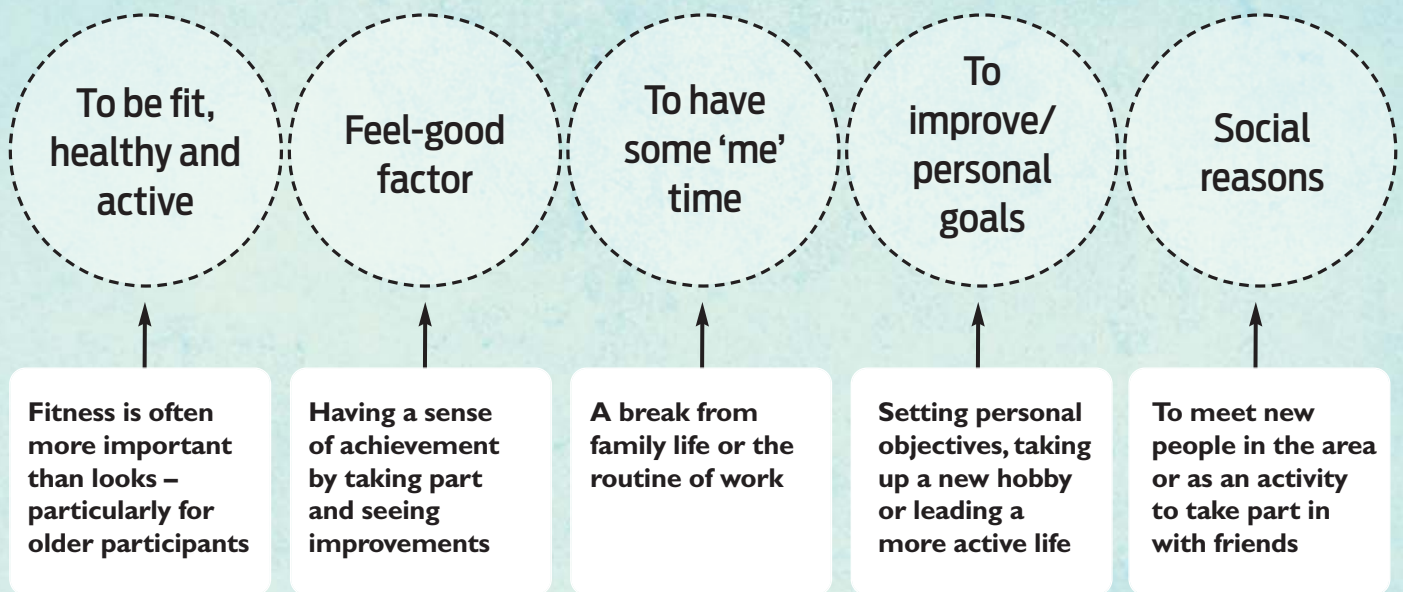
The information contained in this factsheet was obtained by an independent research agency who interviewed over 40 women and 11 coaches from across the country who participate in Run England, No Strings Badminton or Just Play football. The sports were selected to be representative of individual, racquet and team sports.

While we aim to provide advice and guidance, we are cautious about making generalisations, and it is for you, the coach and sports deliverer, to contextualise the following information to your own settings. Also, remember that your participants are individuals. What appears in the information below will not be representative of all female participants but is a generalisation based on research carried out. This information is for guidance only.



This factsheet is aimed at sports deliverers and focuses on how the informal sports setting overcomes many of the barriers women face to participating in sport, and why it is so appealing to a broad range of women.

What motivates women to participate in sport?



Why don't more women participate in sport?

Women gave a variety of reasons as to why they do not participate in more sport and physical activity. These include:

- family commitments or general feeling of lack of time
- logistics of organising a game (booking a court etc)
- bad weather
- perceived lack of facilities
- cost of being a member of a gym or club
- cost of equipment/membership/venue hire
- not having anyone to participate with (particularly in racquet or team sports)
- committing to a club is off-putting
- worried about lack of skill/knowledge of the rules
- lack of motivation
- injury/age.

'I used to do swimming and athletics too – 100m – but age caught up!'

No Strings Badminton participant, Leicestershire

'I haven't got the time really, or sometimes, you know, after work it can be a bit of a chore.'

Just Play football participant, Staffordshire

What is appealing about informal sports settings?

Informal sports settings are appealing because, in many ways, they do not present the barriers to participation already outlined.

- The group environment is motivating.
- The environment, coach and other members are not intimidating.
- The environment, coach and other members allow women the opportunity to achieve their goals.
- They are fun and sociable.
- They are **not** a club or a team.
- They do **not** involve organised competition.
- They do **not** require a commitment in terms of time or money.

'I think, because it is a group, it does make you go, as opposed to if you were just going out by yourself you think "Oh, it's cold, it's dark, I will shut the curtains." I wouldn't have come out tonight if I was going for a run on my own.'

Run England participant,
Sheffield



Motivation – more likely to do sport more frequently because of the group environment and the coach



Convenience – often at local facilities at convenient times



Fun – no pressure to perform



Social – have friends who attend or made friends at sessions



Visible improvements to fitness and performances

'I just thought I'd try this No Strings because I work shifts and I never know what shift I'm going to be on, and it suits me because I can go when I want to. I wouldn't want to commit to a gym because some weeks I can't go.'

No Strings Badminton participant,
Leicestershire

'It is also a time factor, if you've got children and you've got other things on.'

No Strings Badminton participant,
London

Who participates in informal sport?

While informal sports settings are appealing to beginners who may lack confidence in their ability, the environment has a wider appeal than this and also attracts women returning to a sport, as well as women who participate more formally in a club environment. It is also attractive to women across all age groups. It is therefore vital that an individual approach is taken to training women in these settings, as they may well have different levels of skill and experience.

Entry level

Informal settings are appealing to entry-level women because they overcome the barriers of lacking ability and skill. Informal environments are seen to be non-intimidating and friendly.

Returning to sport

Women who used to participate in a sport but haven't for a number of years find the informal setting appealing because they can regain confidence in their ability, and practise their skills at their own pace.

Experienced participants

Experienced participants find informal settings appealing because of the environment. It is seen as another opportunity to participate in the sport they love, in a different kind of environment, with like-minded people.

Age

Informal settings appeal to a variety of ages, but some sports may appeal to younger or older audiences. In our research, football tended to appeal to younger women, while running tended to appeal to older women. Badminton appealed to both those in their late teens and early twenties, as well as older age groups.

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