



Informal sport: Significance, challenges and opportunities for women's participation

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Informal sport as a health and social resource

<https://www.monash.edu/education/research/projects/informal-sport-health-social-resource-for-diverse-young-people>

- Evidencing the significance of informal sport for equity in access to sport and its many benefits
- Important insights gained in relation to women's engagement in and access to informal sport opportunities



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A mixed-method analysis of the contribution of informal sport to public health in Australia

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- Observation data
- Interviews
- Policy analysis

Who is informal sport accessible to?

Outdoor open spaces

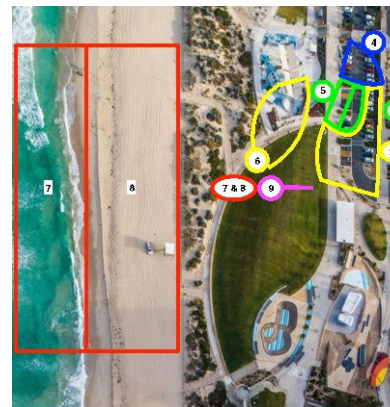
- Frequent absence and apparent marginality of women

Indoor spaces

- Additional sports captured – badminton, netball, wheelchair basketball ...
- Appeal of facilitated informal sport indoors for female participants particularly

Foreshore spaces

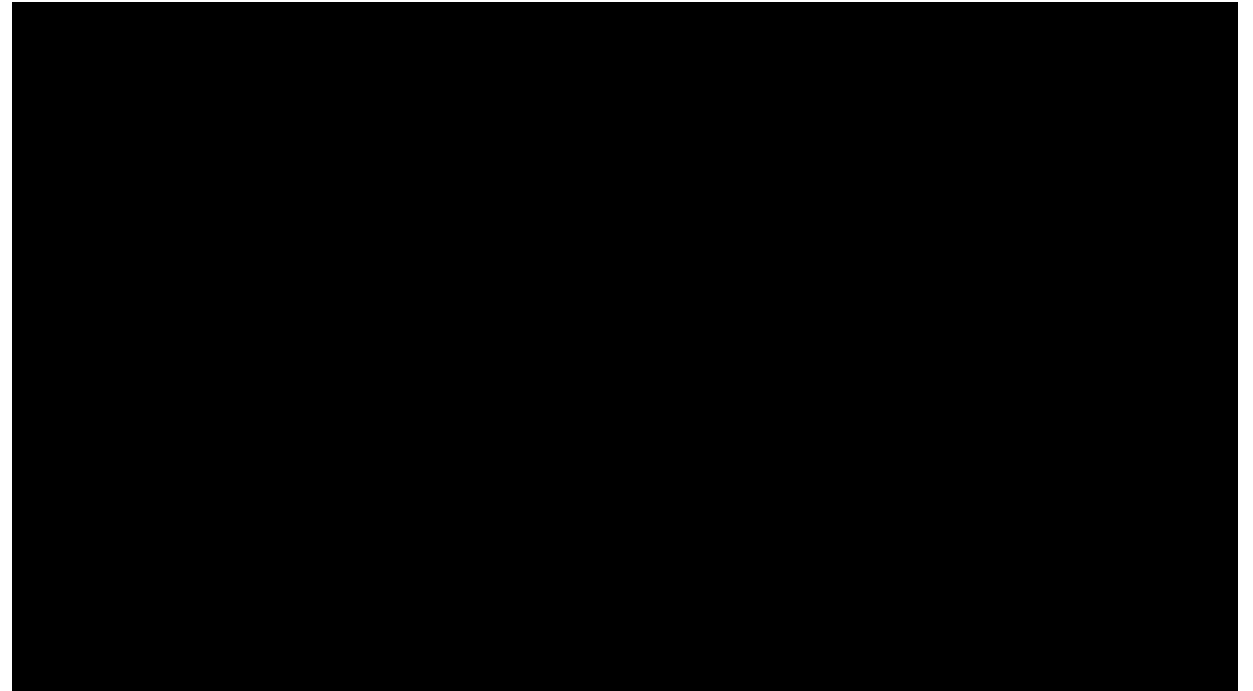
- Always active
- Distinct activities
- Greater gender balance



Informal groups enabling and sustaining access for women

“We needed a place where young women of colour, where they feel safe and confident in physical exercise and they are able to choose sports, the one like that they feel comfortable with, and that they have a lot more autonomy”

(Informal sport group leader).



Policy silences – and opportunities

- Informal sport not explicit as a policy and planning focus – and not established as a central pillar of initiatives to promote and support women’s participation
- Little acknowledgement of informal sport as a sustained participation choice (as compared to programs and/or pathways)
- Yet – a focus that can deliver on identified priorities for all levels of government
- Some encouraging initiatives – leave the lights on; promotion of free access to facilities

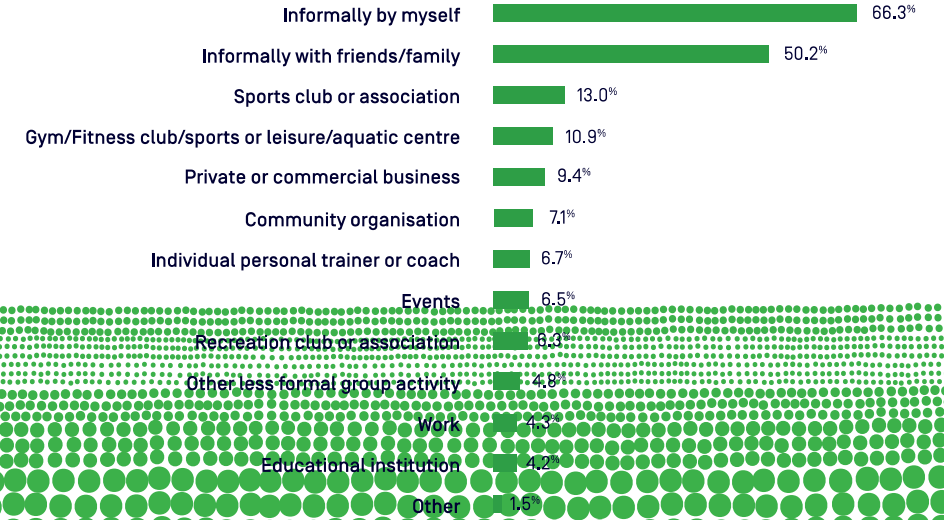
The current sport system is too rigid in its structures and embedded practices. Sport can be more accessible and culturally safe to provide opportunities that meet people’s needs and preferences. Continued action is required to increase diversity and inclusion and to ensure fair outcomes for everyone involved in sport.



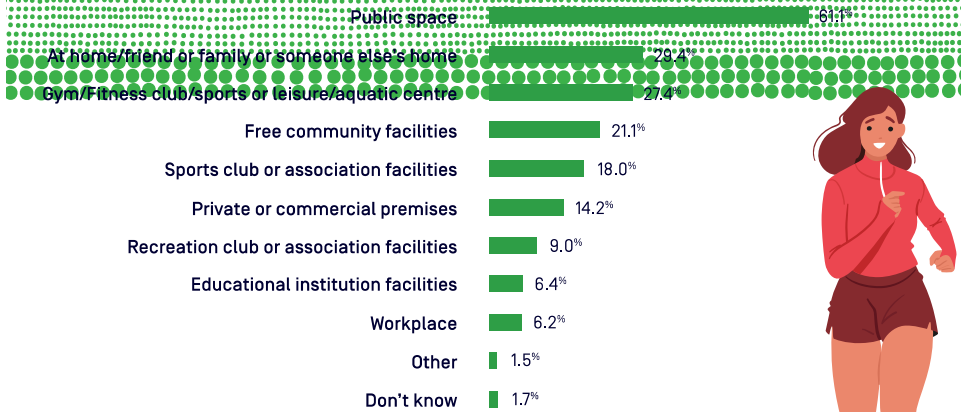
Wider context – AUSPLAY 2024

		Total [#]	Informal only (a)	Mix of informal and organised (b)	Organised only (c)
		Participation rate			
All	Total	84.1%	43.5%	33.6%	6.4%
Females	Total	83.1%	42.7%	33.4%	6.4%
Age group	15-17	84.6%	24.7%	52.1%	7.3%
	18-24	87.2%	34.7%	46.9%	5.2%
	25-34	88.9%	39.1%	42.9%	6.3%
	35-44	87.0%	43.4%	36.4%	6.9%
	45-54	85.7%	51.5%	28.8%	4.9%
	55-64	82.8%	50.8%	26.6%	4.5%
	65+	71.8%	40.6%	21.5%	8.5%

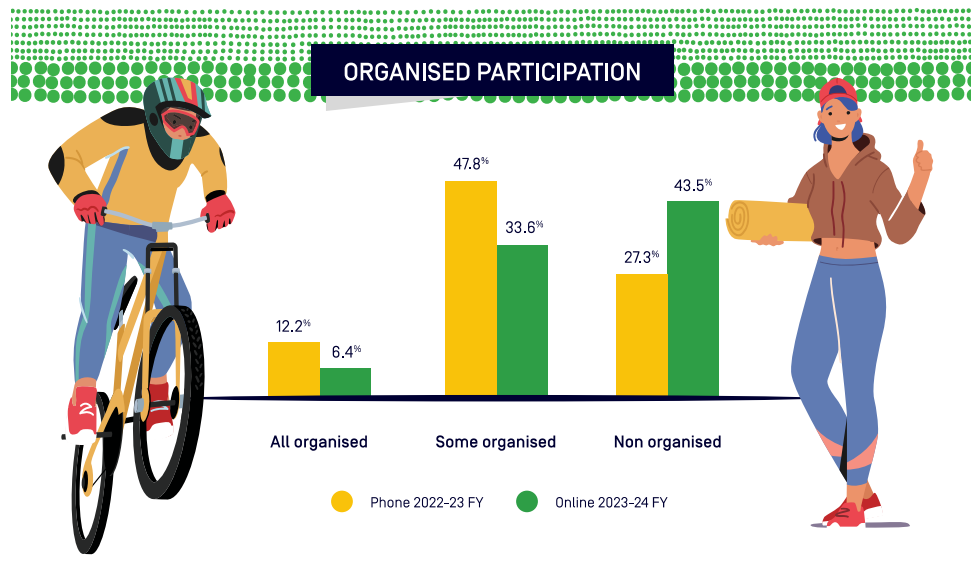
WHO ORGANISED THE ACTIVITY



WHERE THE ACTIVITY TOOK PLACE



ORGANISED PARTICIPATION



Questions arising for further research

- What are the current patterns of girls' and women's participation in informal sport and their use of public spaces and facilities
 - and what is influencing those patterns?
- What promotional strategies and messaging can encourage and support increased 'ownership' and use of spaces/facilities by girls and women?
 - by connecting with their prime interests in participation and countering hesitancies?



Emerging insights from women in WA

Important interest in playing more sport – amongst current participants and non-participants

Greatest interest – playing informally

The attractions – low cost, flexibility, social and health benefits

Limited knowledge of opportunities for informal sport participation – and any booking requirements

Not everyone knows people who they could play with

Not everyone feels confident to invite others to join them

Key messages: Fun, friendship, everyone welcome, and it's good for you!

Thank you and Questions



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