

Young Disabled People and Sport

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Despite growing policy interest in promoting participation in sports by young disabled people, no quantitative research has been undertaken that enables progress to be monitored in this area. Our research, commissioned by Sport England (the national sports development agency for England), set out to identify: current rates of sporting participation by young disabled people; what motivates young disabled people to undertake sport; and barriers to their participation in sport; and to compare these results with findings from a 1999 survey of all young people. The key findings were:

- ▶ In nearly all contexts and for all sports participation by young disabled people was lower than for the overall population of young people.
- ▶ Young disabled people were more likely to participate in sport on a frequent basis in school than they were out of school. However, this pattern was reversed for the population of all young people.
- ▶ Young people in special schools were more likely to participate in sport than those in mainstream schools.
- ▶ Analysis by disability type shows that young people with a mobility disability and those with a self-care related disability were generally the least likely to take part in sport. Young people with a hearing disability were the most likely to participate.
- ▶ Lack of motivation or desire to take part in sport did not explain the low participation of sport by young disabled people. External barriers play a part.
- ▶ Lack of money, health status and the unsuitability of local sports facilities for young disabled people were cited as the main barriers to participation in sport.
- ▶ Young people with a self-care related disability and those with a mobility disability were the most likely to cite their disability, or gaps in disabled sports provision as reasons for not participating in sport. Young people with a hearing disability were more likely to cite reasons that were less connected to their disability.

RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM THE
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Background

In recent years there has been much policy interest in promoting participation in sports by all disadvantaged groups, including young disabled people. The government White Paper *A Sporting Future for all* (2000) highlighted the benefits of sport for young disabled people, while the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) recognised that adjustments were needed in order to enable equal access to sporting facilities by disabled people. Despite this policy pressure, there remains a lack of research on young people, disability and sport. Much of the existing research has been undertaken outside the UK and is qualitative in nature. No data are available on the current participation levels of young disabled people in sport, against which progress resulting from the implementation of initiatives could be measured.

The project's main objectives were to:

- ▶ identify, across a range of sports, current levels of participation by young disabled people;
- ▶ explore barriers to participation;
- ▶ compare baseline participation rates with data from the Young People & Sport National Survey carried out in 1999.

Findings

Participation in sport

The research showed that the majority of disabled young people do participate in sport both in and out of school. Clearly disability *per se* is not a barrier to taking part in

sport. However, both the overall rate of participation and the frequency with which disabled young people take part in sport is lower than for young people in general.

There were some exceptions to this finding. Participation in both swimming and horse riding *in school lessons* was higher than for all young people and young disabled people were *more* likely to have participated in an outdoors activity holiday than all young people.

- The majority of young disabled people did participate in sport, but they had lower rates of participation than young people in general.
- Young disabled people in special schools were more likely to participate in sport than those in mainstream schools.
- Those with a hearing disability were most likely to take part in sport.
- Those with a mobility disability and those with a self-care related disability were the least likely to participate.

There are also important differences between participation in school compared with out of school participation. In school young disabled people participated in sport more frequently (i.e. on at least 10 occasions in the past year) than they did out of school. However, this pattern was the reverse for all young people.

Boys and younger children were more likely than girls and older children to take part in sport, which reflects the findings for the 1999 survey of all young people.

Young disabled people educated at special schools were more likely to participate in sport in school than those in mainstream schools. Since the 1999 survey of young people showed that the majority of young people in mainstream schools were participating in sport in school lessons, this suggests that disabled children in mainstream schools are being excluded from some of the sports activities that are undertaken by their non-disabled peers.

Young people with a hearing disability were generally the most likely to take part in sport and enjoy the sport they participated in, whereas those with a mobility disability and those with a self-care related disability were generally the least likely to take part in sport and enjoy the sport they participated in.

Motivation towards sport

Questions were asked about specific aspects of sport that motivated young disabled people to take part and those that put young people off sports participation.

Young disabled people were more likely than all young people to say that they got embarrassed when they had to do sport. They were more likely to be concerned about some aspects of playing sport such as about being hit or kicked or playing in bad weather. They were also less competitive than all young people. However, they were less likely to mind playing sport with people they did not want to play with and playing with girls and boys together.

Those with a mobility disability and those with a self-care related disability were *less* likely than those with a hearing disability to be

competitive and have confidence in their ability, to consider sport as social activity to be with friends, and to be encouraged by their family and friends. They were, however, *more* likely to recognise the importance of keeping fit.

Despite these specific motivational issues, only 10 per cent of all young disabled people reported that lack of motivation had prevented them from taking part in sport during the past year. Analysis by disability type showed that lack of motivation or lack of desire to participate in sport was conversely related to participation in sport. Those with a hearing disability were the least motivated towards sport and those with a mobility disability and those with a self-care related disability generally had the greatest desire to participate in sport. Furthermore, there was a negative association between severity of disability and lack of motivation

to participate in sport.

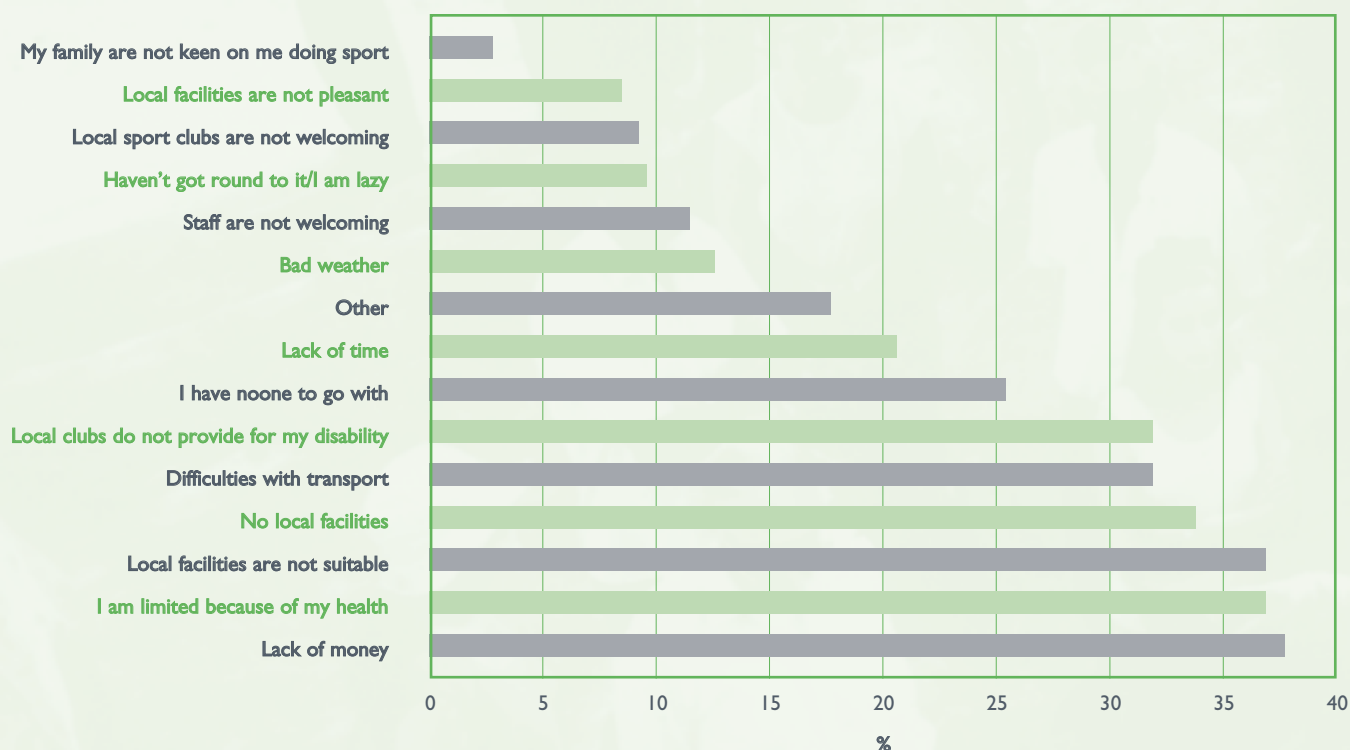
Therefore, motivation cannot explain why those with a mobility or self-care related disability were less likely than those with a hearing disability to take part and enjoy sport, and suggests that other external barriers were playing a part in low sporting participation for young disabled people.

External barriers to participation

The most common barriers to sports participation were lack of money, health condition and the unsuitability of local sports facilities for young disabled people. Relatively high proportions of young disabled people cited lack of disabled facilities generally or lack of suitable facilities for their own disability. Having no-one to go with and problems with transport were also relatively common.

Analysis by disability type produced some explanations for why young people with hearing disabilities were the most likely to participate in sport, whilst those with a mobility disability and those with a self-care related disability were the least likely. Those with a self-care related disability and those with a mobility disability were the most likely to cite their disability, or gaps in disabled sports provision, as reasons for not participating in sport, whilst those with a hearing disability were more likely to cite reasons less connected with their disability, such as bad weather or lack of time. Low participation in sport by young disabled people could therefore, to some extent, be attributed to a lack of facilities suitably adapted to the needs of particular groups of disabled young people, namely those with a mobility disability and those with a self-care related disability.

Barriers to participation in sport



Implications

The findings demonstrate that comprehensive action is needed to bring participation in sport by young disabled people to a level that is comparable with the general population of young people. In addition, any action needs to be sensitive towards different groups of disabled children.

Increased participation can only be achieved if the barriers faced by young disabled people are fully understood and acted upon. Participation in sport can only realistically take place if local clubs provide for people with a disability and if the disabled facilities that are available are suitable for the young person's particular disability. This is especially so for those with a mobility and/or self-care related disability, who experienced the lowest participation rates and who were most likely to say either that local facilities were not suitable or that local sports clubs did not provide for someone with their disability.

Another important barrier to participation by young disabled people is their frequent reliance on other people in accessing sporting facilities. This could be overcome by having staff at sport centres and

other venues who are trained to help and supervise young disabled people and to understand the specific issues related to different disabilities.

For out of school sport and extra curricular sport to be truly accessible to all, the cost of participating needs to be lowered, and cheap transport suitable for disabled people needs to be made available.

A more problematic issue is that of discrimination towards young disabled people. An effect of this is the inhibition felt by a small but significant proportion of young disabled people. Together, these become a barrier to participation, which can only be overcome by a change in public attitudes towards disabled people. In addition, responses to the survey suggest that the duties on service providers under the Disability Discrimination Act to make reasonable adjustments to enable disabled people to use their services and not to treat them less favourably because of their disability have not yet broken down these barriers.

Method

The project was developed and funded by Sport England. The research comprised a postal, self-completion, questionnaire for young disabled people aged 6–16. The questionnaire was designed by Sport England and was modelled on that used for the *Young people and sport national survey (1999)* in order that comparisons could be made. The Health Utilities Index (HUI) system of questions, developed at McMaster University in Canada, was used to establish the type of limiting disability or illness that a young person had and the level of its severity.

A total of 5,600 surveys were sent out to a sample of young people in England and Scotland derived from the Family Fund Trust database. The response rate achieved was just below 50 per cent and the final sample size used in the analysis was 2,293 (home educated children and those who did not report a limiting disability or illness according to the HUI index were excluded).

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Further information

Copies of the full report *Disability Survey 2000: Survey of Young People with a Disability and Sport* by Naomi Finch, Dot Lawton, Julie Williams and Patricia Sloper are available from Sport England. A summary, *Disability Survey 2000: Survey of Young People with a Disability and Sport. Headline Findings* is also available. **Please contact:** Sport England, Information Centre, 16 Upper Woburn Place, London WC1H 0QP (enquiry line: 0207 273 1700) or through the Sport England website: www.sportengland.org.

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