Flinders
UNIVERSITY

YOUNG PEOPLE
IN SPORT
FINAL REPORT
2017–2020

SHAPE

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Professor Murray Drummond (Lead Investigator)
Dr Sam Elliott (Chief Investigator)
Prof Claire Drummond (Chief Investigator)
Dr Lucy Lewis (Chief Investigator)
Dr Ivanka Prichard (Chief Investigator)
Ms Nadia Bevan (Research Assistant)
Dr Jamie-Lee Pennesi (Research Assistant)
Mr Christopher Bailey (Research Assistant)

EXECUTIVE
REPORT

Flinders University's Sport, Health, Activity, Performance and Exercise (SHAPE) Research Centre are pleased to submit the following report related to young people's sport participation in South Australia to the Office for Recreation, Sport and Racing (ORSR).

The Young People in Sport Project is the first study of its kind in South Australia to focus on organised sporting pathways for girls and young female adults. The project comprises one of the most comprehensive data collections in South Australian sport which involves 2273 surveys with young people in Years 8, 10 and 12, as well as focus groups and interviews with an additional 37 teachers, parents and adolescents. The project spanned 2017-2020.

As director of SHAPE, I would like to thank ORSR and Flinders University for funding this important research investigation. The findings in this report will positively impact the sporting sector, and support efforts to improve participation and retention in South Australia.

I would like to acknowledge each of the chief investigators and research assistants for their tireless work over the last two and a half years. Recruiting young people from schools situated in low, medium and high socioeconomic areas in South Australia is a difficult task. However, our sample size and quality results are a testament to their hard work and commitment to enhancing sport participation and retention for young people in South Australia.

BACKGROUND

Participation in organised children's sport is associated with wide ranging social, psychological and physical health-related benefits (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity, & Payne, 2013; Janssen & LeBlanc, 2010). The focus on increasing sport participation is evident in local, state and national sporting policies, whereby a third of all active participants under 18 years are aged between 10-14 years (Eime et al., 2016b). However, many adolescents discontinue their involvement in sport during childhood and adolescence owing to a range of intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental factors (Crane & Temple, 2015).

Across Australia, girls are vastly underrepresented in sport at 5-8 years, 9-11 years, 12-14 years and throughout adolescence in comparison to boys (Eime, et al., 2016b). While some girls sample sport during childhood through modified and entry level sport programs, fewer than 25% successfully transition into organised club sport beyond the formative years (Eime et al., 2015). Furthermore, of those girls who do engage in organised club sport, approximately 20% discontinue their involvement during the adolescent years (Casey et al., 2016). So while increasing participation in sport is a priority for both government and sporting organisations (Eime, et al., 2016a), finding solutions to attract and retain girls in sport warrants attention.

Although barriers to participation and dropout can affect all children, girls encounter a range of additional obstacles to initial and ongoing involvement in organised youth sport. Attitudinal inequalities at the family level (i.e, discouragement by parents and relatives) appears to remain a key barrier for many young females (Cooky, Begovic,

Sabo, Oglesby, & Snyder, 2016), maintaining the view that 'girls' and 'sport' are incompatible. Attitudinal inequalities are further compounded by broader stereotypes (i.e, the 'frailty' myth), the maintenance and perpetuation of poor perceptions of body image in Physical Education settings, and a lack of familial support for both sport and academic study (Cooky et al. 2016).

Another barrier surrounds the conflicting gendered performances that girls must learn to navigate if they do decide to pursue sport. Krane, Ross, Barak, Lucas-Carr, & Robinson (2014) suggest that girls can experiment with how they perform gender within sport if there are strong friendships and social support available to act as a 'safety net' for negotiating gender. However, the capacity to explore the spectrum of gendered performance is inhibited by 'peer-policing', whereby girls are actively involved in reinforcing sport as contexts for judgement and approval (or disapproval) of gendered behaviour (Metcalfe, 2018). One consequence is that girls may hold back effort and downplay accomplishments in order to reinforce humility and 'proper femininity' (Clark & Paechter, 2007).

The consequences of these deeply seeded sociocultural barriers are self-evident in the broader literature. In comparison to boys, research has shown that girls feel more self-conscious about their appearance and self-perceived image (Slater & Tiggemann, 2010). Girls also experience higher degrees of teasing within the sport experience and consequently report higher levels of self-objectification and body image concerns (Slater & Tiggemann, 2011). Furthermore, they

are more likely to be laughed at because of their appearance and perceived competence and be called names associated with body size and weight (Slater & Tiggemann, 2011). However, these perspectives are worthy of further inquiry given that contemporary sport opportunities have challenged the dominant attitudes and discourses surrounding girls sport in Australia (c.f. Elliott, Bevan & Litchfield, 2019).

Developing effective pathways into and across sport, from general participation to more intensified involvement, is key to attracting and retaining girls in sport but little is known about sporting pathways for girls and young females. The typical sport participation model (Figure 1) adhered to in the social and scientific community is one where children diversify their involvement in sport during the formative years, only to decrease their involvement to perhaps one sport between 12-15 years (Côté & Hay, 2002). The question is, what is the best way to assist girls and young females in this process? Understanding the factors that impact sporting pathway choice and accessibility for adolescents and young adults in school and community sport programs will assist in improving sporting pathways from grassroots to specialised professional sport and assist in shaping policies that support introduction, transition across, and retention in sport.

DROP
IN INVOLVEMENT

SAMPLING YEARS

SPECIALISING

$

INVESTMENT
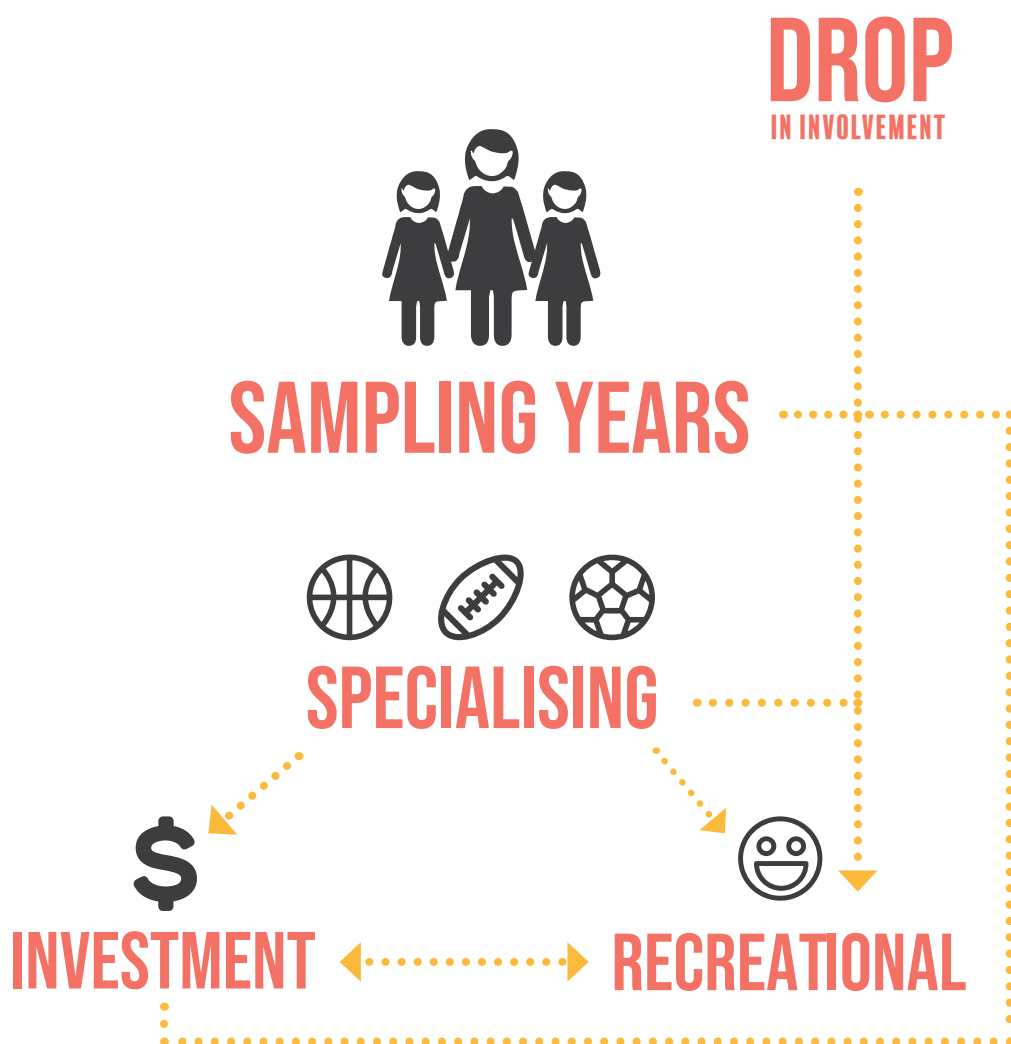
RECREATIONAL

METHODOLOGY

AIM

The aim of this study was to examine the intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental influences on sporting pathways (community, recreational, state, national and international) for girls (12 years) and young adults (up to 25 years) in Adelaide, South Australia.

OBJECTIVES

1. To explore current sporting pathways and forms of engagement for girls and young women involved in international, national, state and community-based sports in comparison to males;

2. To undertake a metropolitan-wide survey and follow-up focus groups with girls, young women and key stakeholders;

3. To understand the facilitators and barriers to girls and youth sporting engagement across all levels of sport;

4. To understand the reasons, motives and contextual factors leading to children's and young adults' participation in organised sport;

5. To explore the aspects of participation that help to determine what keeps children and young adults involved in sport;

6. To develop recommendations for the Office for ORSR to assist the planning and development of strategies in improving female sporting participation and retention in South Australia.

STUDY DESIGN

A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was utilised to address the research objectives. The project consisted of two phases (Figure 2):
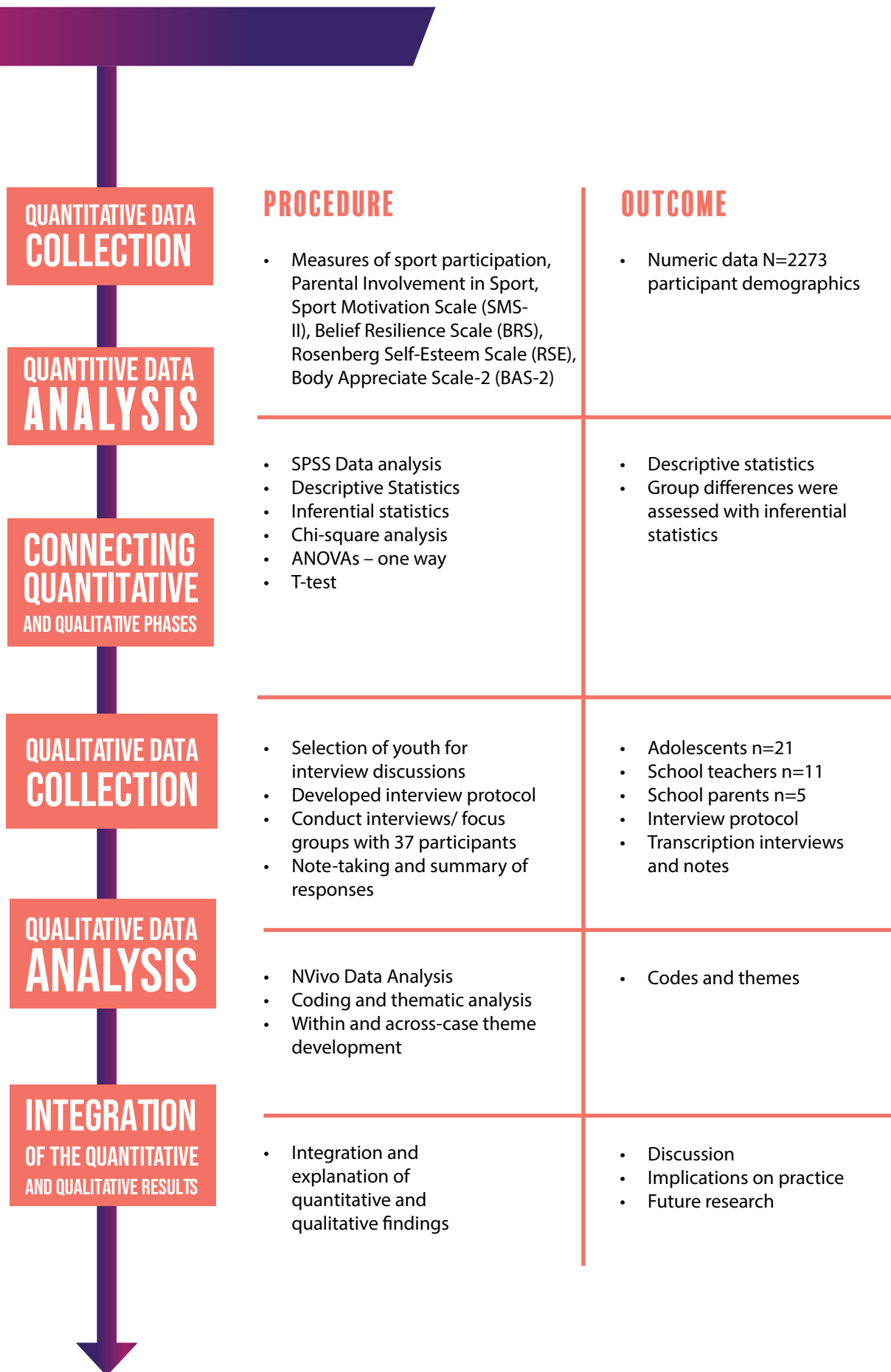
PHASE 1. The Young People in Sport Survey consisted of demographic items six validated measures. Participants were asked to complete a paper-based questionnaire survey (booklet) comprising of demographic questions (e.g., date of birth, ethnicity) and the following validated measures: Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire (PISQ) (Lee & MacLean, 1997), Sport Motivation Scale-II (SMS-II; Pelletier, Rocchi, Vallerand, Deci, & Ryan, 2013), Belief Resilience Scale (BRS) (Smith et al., 2008), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE) (Rosenberg, 1965), Frost

Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale (FMPS; Frost et al., 1994), and the Body Appreciate Scale-2 (BAS-2; Tylka & Wood-Barcalow, 2015).

The questionnaire took between 30-45 minutes to complete dependent on the year level of the participant—only the school-aged sample completed this phase of the research.

PHASE 2. Phase 2 consisted of focus groups and individual interviews with teachers, parents and students in Year 8, 10 and 12, separately. Questions were developed from the key themes identified from the survey results and relevant literature. Phase 2 data collection occurred at the completion of Phase 1.

PHASES

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

PROCEDURE

- Measures of sport participation, Parental Involvement in Sport, Sport Motivation Scale (SMS-II), Belief Resilience Scale (BRS), Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE), Body Appreciate Scale-2 (BAS-2)

OUTCOME

- Numeric data N=2273 participant demographics

QUANTITIVE DATA ANALYSIS

PROCEDURE

- SPSS Data analysis
- Descriptive Statistics
- Inferential statistics
- Chi-square analysis
- ANOVAs – one way
- T-test

OUTCOME

- Descriptive statistics
- Group differences were assessed with inferential statistics

CONNECTING QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE PHASES

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION

PROCEDURE

- Selection of youth for interview discussions
- Developed interview protocol
- Conduct interviews/ focus groups with 37 participants
- Note-taking and summary of responses

OUTCOME

- Adolescents n=21
- School teachers n=11
- School parents n=5
- Interview protocol
- Transcription interviews and notes

QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

PROCEDURE

- NVivo Data Analysis
- Coding and thematic analysis
- Within and across-case theme development

OUTCOME

- Codes and themes

INTEGRATION OF THE QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESULTS

PROCEDURE

- Integration and explanation of quantitative and qualitative findings

OUTCOME

- Discussion
- Implications on practice
- Future research

ETHICS AND
SAMPLING

ETHICS

Ethical approval was received from Flinders University, Department for Education South Australia and Catholic Education South Australia. The research project was approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee (Project number: 7874).
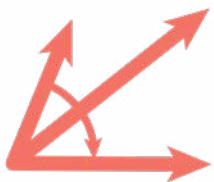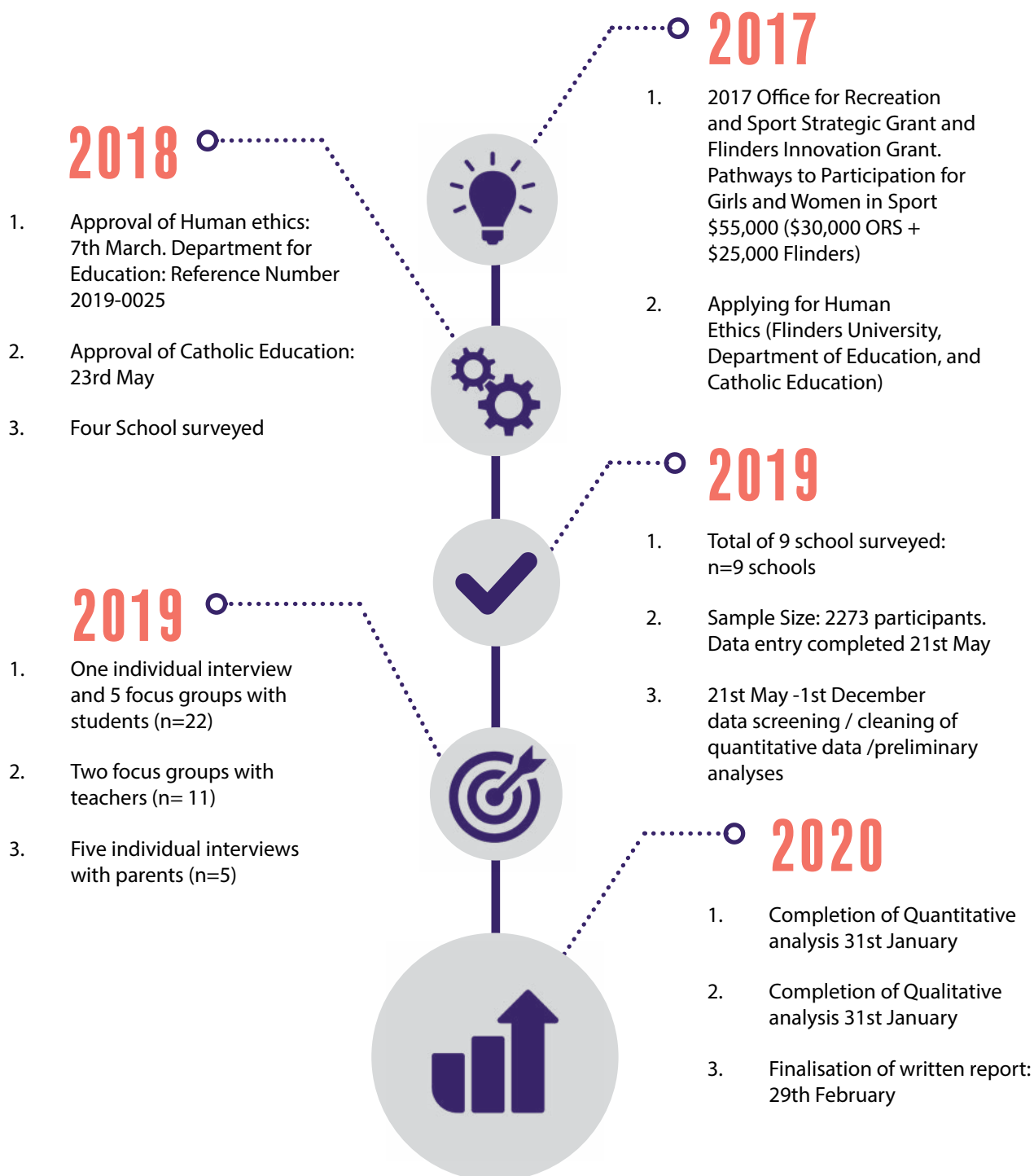
SAMPLING

Secondary schools in metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia were invited to participate in the study. After receiving Principal support for the study at the school level, study information packs were distributed to the parents and caregivers of students in years 8, 10 and 12 at participating schools. Parents and caregivers were given an option to opt-out of the study for their child/children. A face-to-face time was organised with the participating school for a member of the research team to distribute a paper-based questionnaire to participating year levels. Students were given the option to opt-out of completing the questionnaire at this point.

SAMPLE SIZE CALCULATIONS

Sample size calculations were based on aiming to obtain a representative sample (or cross-section) of adolescence and young adolescents across metropolitan Adelaide.

PROJECT
TIMELINE

2017

1. 2017 Office for Recreation and Sport Strategic Grant and Flinders Innovation Grant. Pathways to Participation for Girls and Women in Sport $55,000 ($30,000 ORS + $25,000 Flinders)

2. Applying for Human Ethics (Flinders University, Department of Education, and Catholic Education)

2018

1. Approval of Human ethics: 7th March. Department for Education: Reference Number 2019-0025

2. Approval of Catholic Education: 23rd May

3. Four School surveyed

2019

1. Total of 9 school surveyed: n=9 schools

2. Sample Size: 2273 participants. Data entry completed 21st May

3. 21st May -1st December data screening / cleaning of quantitative data /preliminary analyses

2019

1. One individual interview and 5 focus groups with students (n=22)

2. Two focus groups with teachers (n= 11)

3. Five individual interviews with parents (n=5)

2020

1. Completion of Quantitative analysis 31st January

2. Completion of Qualitative analysis 31st January

3. Finalisation of written report: 29th February

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS
PHASE 01

DATA MANAGEMENT AND ANALYSIS

Data analysis for the quantitative phase was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software 25.0 (SPSS, 2017). Data were screened for normality and no imputations were used for missing data (Enders, 2010; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample (i.e, means and percentages), and inferential statistics were used to establish any significant differences between groups (e.g. by gender or age group).

COMPARISONS WERE CONDUCTED ACROSS THE FOLLOWING DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS:

- Across year levels (years 8, 10 & 12) for the whole sample, and for boys and girls separately;
- For participants who reported playing a sport currently or in the last 12 months, level of sports participation, type of sport, time spent training, and time spent competing.

PARTICIPANT
CHARACTERISTICS

OTHER ASIAN
11% 13%

PARTICIPANTS WERE
CAUCASIAN
62%
INDIAN
6% AFRICAN **1%**
3% ABORIGINAL / TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER

MAJORITY
HAD NO DISABILITY OR IMPAREMENT

972 YEAR 08 **968** YEAR 10 **248** YEAR 12

6 PUBLIC
2 INDEPENDENT
1 CATHOLIC SCHOOL

9 SECONDARY **SCHOOL**

2189
ADOLESCENTS AGED 12-18 COMPLETE
DATA

QUESTIONNAIRES

MALE **1164**
FEMALE **972**
NO ANSWER **4**
OTHER **38**
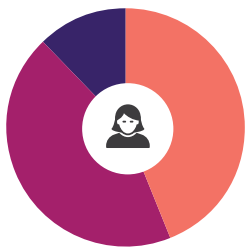
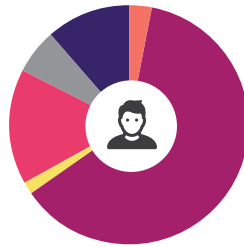**FEMALE**
- YEAR 12
- YEAR 10
- YEAR 8
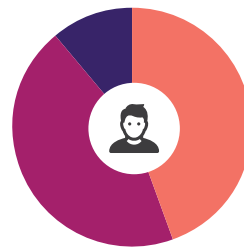
MALE
- YEAR 12
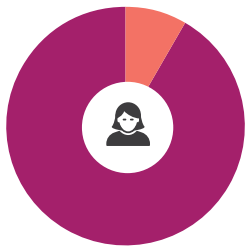- YEAR 10
- YEAR 8
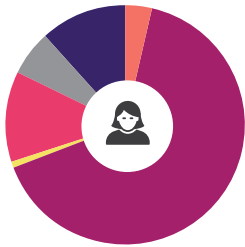
FEMALE
- OTHER
- INDIAN
- ASIAN
- AFRICAN
- CAUCASIAN
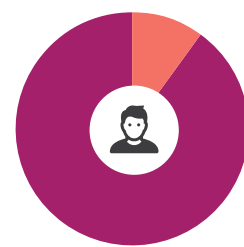- ABORIGINAL / TORRES STRAIGHT ISLANDER

MALE
- OTHER
- INDIAN
- ASIAN
- AFRICAN
- CAUCASIAN
- ABORIGINAL / TORRES STRAIGHT ISLANDER

FEMALE
- NO DISABILITY OR IMPAIRMENT
- DISABILITY OR IMPAIRMENT

MALE
- NO DISABILITY OR IMPAIRMENT
- DISABILITY OR IMPAIRMENT

PARTICIPATION IN ORGANISED SPORT

All participants were asked whether they were currently involved in an organised sport or had been involved in a sport in the last 12 months. The organised sport was defined to include team sports such as Australian football, netball or hockey, or individual sports such as athletics, triathlon, swimming or rowing.

67%
(1461)
PARTICIPANTS

...reported either currently playing an organised sport or playing in the last 12 months. Some participants had played more than 12 months ago (18%), and some had never played organised sport (14%)
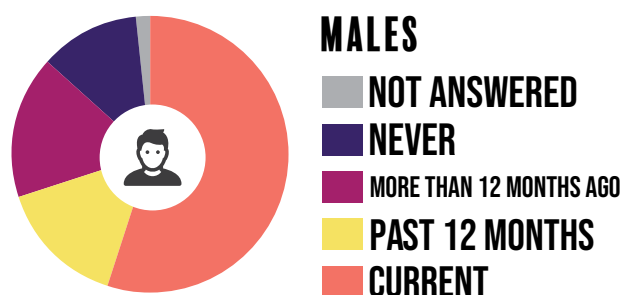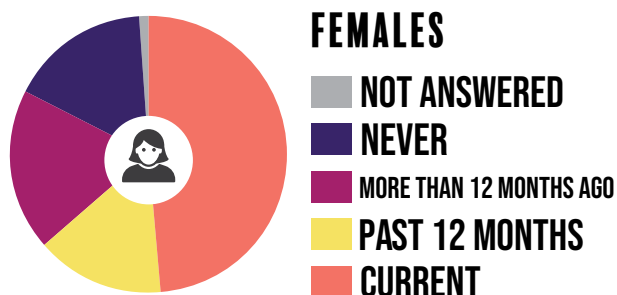
64%
(626)
FEMALES

70%
(816)
MALES

...reported participating in an organised sport currently or in the last 12 months

16%
(161)
FEMALES

12%
(137)
MALES

...reported having never participated in organised sport

PARTICIPATION IN ORGANISED SPORT FOR FEMALES AND MALES

FEMALES
- NOT ANSWERED
- NEVER
- MORE THAN 12 MONTHS AGO
- PAST 12 MONTHS
- CURRENT

MALES
- NOT ANSWERED
- NEVER
- MORE THAN 12 MONTHS AGO
- PAST 12 MONTHS
- CURRENT

- Of those that either currently play or have played organised sport in the last 12 months, 47% play 1 sport, 33% play 2 sports, and 8% play 3 or more sports

- The percentage of participants playing no organised sports increased with year level for both males and females (males: year 8=24%, year 10=30%, year 12=52%; females: year 8= 26%, year 10=30%, year 12=58%)

- The most commonly reported number of sports played in year 8 was 1 for males (35%) and females (27%), in year 10 was 1 for males (38%) and females (33%), and in year 12 was none for both males (52%) and females (58%)

The number of sports that participants were involved in appears to change over time. It also varies by gender. In year 8, roughly the same

percentage of males and females do not play sport. However, there is a significant difference in the number of sports played: 35% of males vs 27% of females play only one sport. In contrast, 15% of males vs 21% of females play 3 or more sports at this age.

For year 10s, this pattern changes, and significantly more females (40%) than males (30%) reported not playing any organised sport. The number of young people playing 3 or more sports had also dropped for both genders, with only 9% of males vs 8% of females playing 3 or more sports. This is a drop of 5% for males and 12% for females, and this signifies an important time to potentially intervene for young females.

For year 12s, we found no significant difference between genders. Close to 55% of either gender reported not participating in organised sport.

THE NUMBER OF ORGANISED SPORTS PLAYED BY GENDER AND YEAR LEVEL

FEMALES
- 3 OR MORE SPORTS
- 2 SPORTS
- 1 SPORT
- 0 SPORTS

MALES
- 3 OR MORE SPORTS
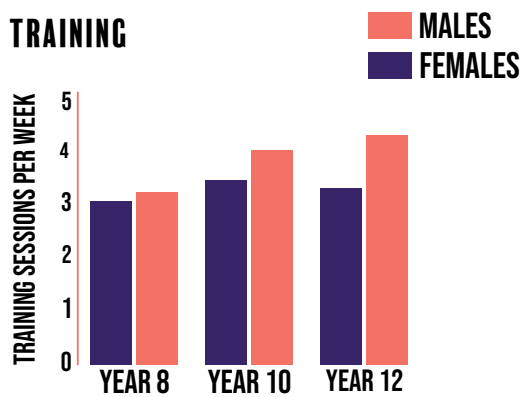- 2 SPORTS
- 1 SPORT
- 0 SPORTS
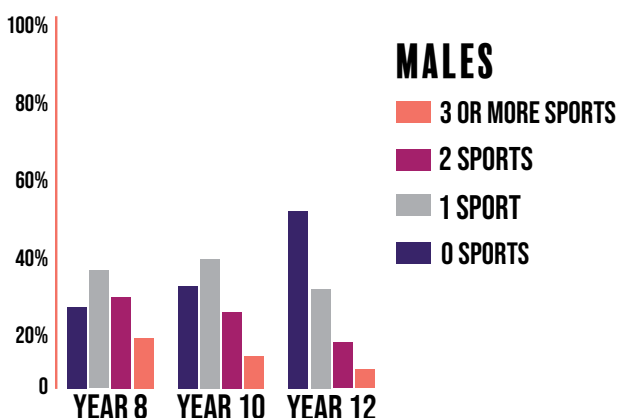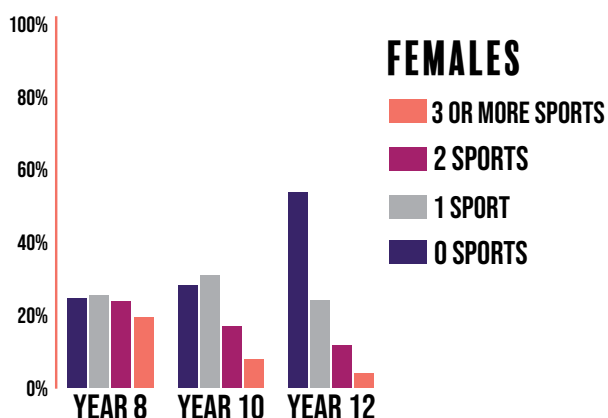
For participants who reported playing an organised sport currently or in the last 12 months, we also examined their highest level of participation, ranging from school sport to national and international level sport for the main sport that they reported playing.

- 1461 participants provided details on the highest level they had played sport.

- Overall, the most common level of sport was club/community (40%), followed by school (11%), state (9%), national (4%) and international (2%).

- There was no significant difference between males and females.

- Overall, there was a significant difference in the amount of time that male and females spent training and competing in sport, with males spending more time.

- Across year levels, in year 8, there was no difference in time spent at sports training between males and females, but males spent significantly more time competing in a sport than females. In years 10 and 12, the males were significantly more active in both training and competing in sport than their female counterparts.

- Participants who were in years 10 and 12 also spent significantly more time at sports training than participants in year 8.
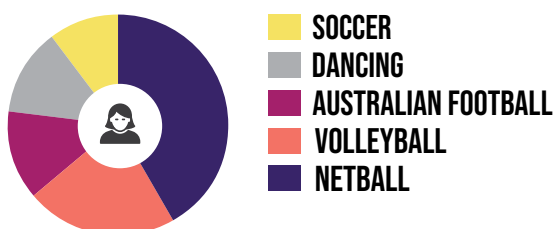
TRAINING

COMPETING
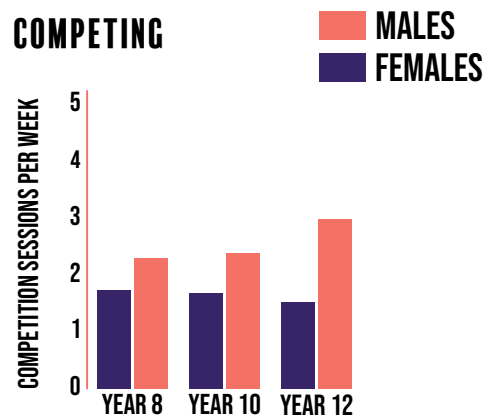
The types of organised sports participants were involved in, either currently or in the last 12 months.

- The top 5 sports played by females were Netball (42%), Volleyball (22%), Australian Football (13%), Dancing (13%), and Soccer (10%)
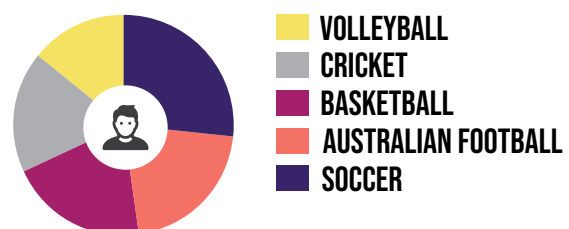
- The top 5 sports played by males were Soccer (28%), Australian Rules Football (22%), Basketball (21%), Cricket (18%), and Volleyball (15%)

+Note. One school involved in the study was heavily focused on volleyball and this may have influenced these percentages.

FEMALE SPORTS

- SOCCER
- DANCING
- AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL
- VOLLEYBALL
- NETBALL

MALE SPORTS

- VOLLEYBALL
- CRICKET
- BASKETBALL
- AUSTRALIAN FOOTBALL
- SOCCER

MOTIVATION, PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

We examined participants' sport motivation using the Sport Motivation Scale-II. In this scale, participants rate statements on what they enjoy about playing sport on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all true) to 7 (very true). The scale provides a total score, as well as sub-scales for difference types of motivation (i.e, intrinsic, integrated, identified, introjected and external motivation, and amotivation), with higher scores representing a higher level of agreement with the statements that make up that sub-scale.

- Both males and females demonstrated moderate motivation to play sport, with a mean rating of 4.2 out of 7 for all participants.

- The highest motivation scores for males and females were intrinsic (female = 5.4, male = 5.2) and identified (female 5.3, male 5.1). Intrinsic motivation relies on a person's internal values and the reward of feeling good to achieve a positive outcome. Identified motivation is when a person knows that something needs doing but has not yet decided to do anything about it.

These forms of motivation were also much higher for participants who were currently playing an organised sport in comparison to participants who had played a sport in the last 12 months or more than 12 months ago. They were also higher for participants who played a greater number of sports.

Participants also rated their degree of satisfaction with parental involvement in their sport using an adapted version of the Parental Involvement in Sport Questionnaire. Scores for this instrument can range from -4 to 4, with negative scores

representing dissatisfaction with the behaviour happening, and positive scores representing dissatisfaction with the behaviour not happening. Scores close to zero represent relative satisfaction with the behaviour. Items were rated separately for Mum/Caregiver and Dad/Caregiver.

- Overall, young people were relatively happy with the amount of support they received from their parents/caregivers for their sport participation, with all scores close to zero for this instrument.

- The number of sports that participants played was not linked to their satisfaction with parental involvement.
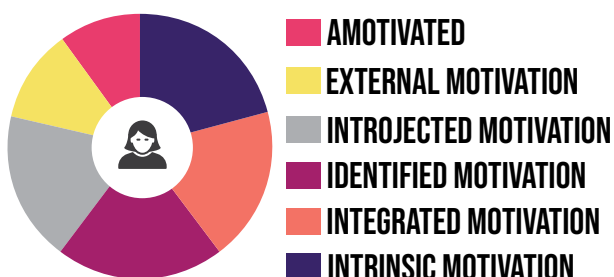
Psychological factors examined included perfectionism, resilience, self-esteem, and body appreciation. There were no differences between those who played sport and those who did not on self-esteem or perfectionism, however, there were differences on resilience and body appreciation. Participants who played sport had higher levels of both resilience and body appreciation compared to participants who did not play sport.
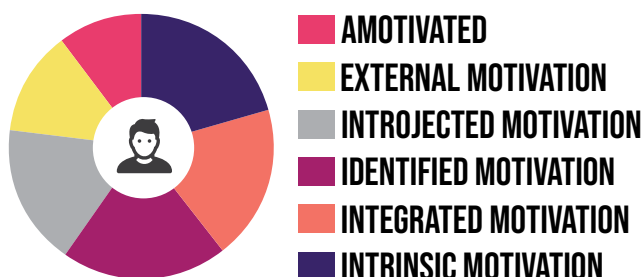
SUMMARY AND TAKE-HOME MESSAGES

Gender differences in sport participation are apparent and rates of sports participation decline with age for both genders. This decline appears to occur before year 10 for girls, and before year 12 for boys. Thus, it would be important to intervene before year 10 for girls.

1. In general, boys play more sport, and compete more, than girls.

2. Internally driven motivation (i.e. intrinsic motivation) is key. As such, increasing intrinsic motivation by promoting exercise for functional reasons (e.g., health, fitness,

FEMALE SPORT MOTIVATION

- AMOTIVATED
- EXTERNAL MOTIVATION
- INTROJECTED MOTIVATION
- IDENTIFIED MOTIVATION
- INTEGRATED MOTIVATION
- INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

MALE SPORT MOTIVATION

- AMOTIVATED
- EXTERNAL MOTIVATION
- INTROJECTED MOTIVATION
- IDENTIFIED MOTIVATION
- INTEGRATED MOTIVATION
- INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

mood improvement) is important.

3. There were no differences between those who played sport and those who did not on self-esteem, perfectionism, or satisfaction with parental involvement in sport.

4. Those who played sport had significantly higher resilience and body appreciation

than those who did not play sport – indicating the importance of focusing on these factors to promote sport participation in those who do not play sport. For enhancing body appreciation, it is important to focus on what the body can do, rather than how it looks.

MOTHERS INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT
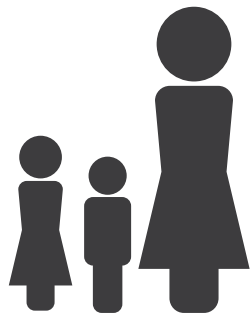
FATHERS INVOLVEMENT IN SPORT
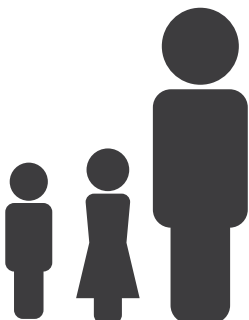
PHASE 02

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

A thematic analysis approach was used to explore information central to the research objective (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A reflective journal was used to record field notes. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional transcriptionist in South Australia who signed a confidentiality agreement. One research assistant reviewed transcripts for accuracy against the original audio recordings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Audio-recordings and transcripts were read and re-read to build familiarity with the data. Two qualitative researchers coded data manually using open coding technique. Assigned initial codes were collated to condense the data into sub-categories and categories. The researchers met on a regular basis to review codes, subcategories and categories in order to increase the trustworthiness of the findings (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Some of these issues may be idiosyncratic to the sport or organisations irrespective of their size or footprint on the South Australian sporting landscape. Nevertheless, the voices of these participants have been listened to and need to be documented.

FOCUS GROUPS WITH STAKEHOLDERS: SCHOOL TEACHERS

Two focus groups with school teachers from two schools was undertaken. The average length of interview: approximately 60 minutes.

36%
FEMALE TEACHERS
INTERVIEWED
(OUT OF 11)
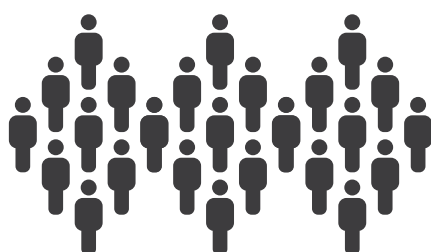
64%
MALE TEACHERS
INTERVIEWED
(OUT OF 11)

SCHOOL PARENTS

All individual interviews were conducted from two schools. The average length of interview: 43.9 minutes

FOCUS GROUPS WITH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Number of focus groups conducted across Adelaide: 4. Number of individual interviews conducted across Adelaide: 1. The average length of interview: 22.16 minutes.

THEMES

Social and developmental forces

A delicate combination of friendship and the development of sports skills were central forces for the promotion of sampling sport and continuing a sporting pathway for boys and girls. The development of friends outside of school was particularly important for those who wanted to join a new sport or sporting club. Parents also noted the important role of friendship for ongoing participation in sport during the teenage years. The club atmosphere was a contributing factor in fostering enjoyment and a setting for developing physical skills and competencies. For many girls, this involved training with their male counterparts to develop skills in Australian football. The organic blend of social and developmental advancement was thus a critical factor for supporting girls sustain their participation.

> *"I don't know… the club I'm at is really supportive and everyone is really close. It's like a close group and I just really enjoy being around the people I'm with in the team and so it makes it fun pretty much". (Focus Group 4, Year 10 FS)*

QUALITY SPORT COACHES

"It would be great if it [parent and coaches involvement] could be improved, but I wouldn't be wanting to put big expectations on them because I think it would die. These people are already giving up a lot of their time and energy. Like I don't think we give these coaches and parents enough cred personally. But it can be hard. I just have to coordinate some emails and texts and things like that and then you get families – like one family abused the crap out of our coach because his son got dropped (School teacher", FG 2, Male).

The role of quality sports coaches in keeping adolescents interested and motivated in organised sport was evident from adolescents. Sport enjoyment and skill development was primarily attributed to the quality of community coaching. The development of quality sport coaches was also seen as a priority by teachers and parents in relation developing a retention strategy. There was also a strong view toward promoting communication and strong relationships between parents and coaches to create a more meaningful and influential impact on young people's attitudes toward sustained sport involvement.

DUAL COMMITMENTS REMAIN A CHALLENGE

"Yeah, definitely. It's like one of the main reasons I don't play sport because you've got all of these assignments due and all this homework that you need to do and then just a million other things" (FG 4, Male, Year 10)

The second theme that emerged was a reduction in the number of sports when the adolescents were entering secondary school. Lifestyle priorities was a considerable factor in the reduction of sports as the student was entering year 10 and year 12. Lifestyle priorities consisted mainly of time management between school homework, employment, and school exams. Adolescents reported that 'achieving a balance between school and participating in organised sport' was challenging. However, there were a few cases in relation to sport and school homework in that these students found sport as a stress reliever during the school studies. Dual commitments involving sport and academic commitments nonetheless, remains a key challenge.

SOCIALLY CONNECTED IN SPORT

In addition to friendship formation and maintenance, a big indicator of continuation in sport surrounded the security of being socially connected through sport. While peer influence was found to be a strong motivator for initiating participation, it also comprised an important antecedent for transitioning out of one sport and into another. A year 10 participant in a focus group claimed:

Sometimes your friends can influence whether you want to stay or whether you want to try something else because they might want to do some other sport and you might want to not be by yourself doing the same sport, so you might want to join them or maybe other things you want to do, like other sports

or other activities in general that might happen on the same night when you might have training for that sport, or games. So that might give you a reason not to do that sport anymore as well. (FG 3, Female, Year 10)

THEMES

Year 12 and the cost of sport

There are many competing issues to attend to with as a young person involved in year 12. There are expectations placed upon these students to "do well" in year 12 and attain a certain arbitrary ATAR score that will supposedly "set them up for life". Parents, teachers, school and individual expectations are all a part of this as many young people have built this period up as the crescendo oft their schooling existence. As a consequence a number of seemingly extraneous activities beyond education in the quest for attaining the desired and expected ATAR fall by the wayside. One of those activities, particularly for girls and young women is the sport and therefore physical activity as a result. The year 12 girls in this research identified that time constraints were a major factor in limiting their participation is sport and physical activity. There was a perceived underlying tone that it was "just for one year". However, in reality this year-long hiatus can often be the catalyst to a longer abstention from sport and physical activity which can lead in to many years, thereby making it incredibly difficult to return to sport for fear of intimidation, failure or the fact that "life has moved on". In terms of time costs year 12 students claimed:

⏰ TIME COST:

I sort of notice the difference when I came to high school as well. I started doing a lot of sport in primary school – so soccer, cricket and swimming – then as I started going through high school I couldn't do it.

This year I've had to put all of my sports off. So I've put them all off in terms of work and school – because they collide. And I found there was no time - I can't do both.

The last sport I ever did was tennis. And say I was doing Saturday's game and then I was training throughout the week. Trainings would collide with if I needed to study or something like that. And also I've got shifts usually on a weekend. And so sometimes during the week as well. And on a Saturday that's when the game is. And that also collided. So I was unable to go to numerous games, which just – I had to kind of pull out.

I guess with schoolwork over the years it was consistent to how much effort I put in. So say I was doing what I need to get an A in year 10 was OK, but if I didn't want to achieve the highest kind of grade I'd put a – like a C grade sort of effort. In year 12 I'd be putting much

more time into studying to get an A.

Oh, I got a job this year, so it was really hard trying to tackle this year was just super tough and the job as well. So, I sacrificed stopping sports so I could focus on those 2 things. But I plan to once I finish year 12 to come back to play sport.

I think there is just a lot of pressure to do well in school, to get your assignments done, get everything done, get a job. Thinking more long-term, what do I need to do to get – to be able to do what I want in the future? And then you also have things that you're also personally interested in that aren't sports related. So, then all of these other things that you just want to do. (so it is easy to drop the commitment of sport).

💲 FINANCIAL COST:

There's a lot of sporting opportunities. But they're very expensive. And a lot of people can't undertake it because of price, because I know that a few schools in Adelaide that focus on tennis. I know a lot about tennis. But tennis

schools are very expensive schools to go to. And say if you're a family that doesn't have that amount of money it's hard to go for that. And also tennis coaching I used to do, and that's very expensive as well. So there are a lot of pathways to do it but the expense involved is pretty high. So some people may not go down that path because of the cost.

I think a big one is the cost of many sports. I know when I was doing tennis a big reason why I stopped was the cost. To become actually good at it you need all the coaching, and that's expensive plus all the enrolments.

And I think it's just really heavy. That's why a lot of people would also quit a lot of sports as well. Just because the cost of it – the cost is very high. I know a lot of boys who are – they wanted to get into basketball. But they never actually did because of the cost. So that's a big thing as well yeah, pretty much it.

And then there is the time and financial cost of transport to sport. I mean there's trains everywhere and trams. Even before I had my licence getting around Adelaide was quite easy and quite good. But sometimes the bus wouldn't be on time.

THEMES FOR YEARS 8-10

The themes for years 8 and 10 are a little different and far more wide ranging than those in year 12. It seems the primary year 12 theme revolved around the manner in which sport and physical activity can be fit in around schoolwork as schoolwork was prioritized over almost all else.

In years 8 and 10 the themes tend to be a little more diverse as there are many opportunities to engage in sport and physical activity, given that in many schools PE remains compulsory until year 10. Therefore there is at least a minimal opportunity to engage in some form of human movement. Additionally, the demands of schoolwork are not perceived to be as high while the employment to earn money is not high on the agenda at this point in their lives. Therefore sport can be a natural addition to the lives of adolescent with too many issues regarding time. There are however,

mitigating circumstances that can impact the positive or negative attitudes that influence continued involvement or abstention from a particular sport, or a range of sports.

POSITIVES OF SPORT FOR GIRLS:

Some of the girls identified the importance of staying involved in sport for a range of reasons these included, fun, friendship and empowerment which is an important perspective to maintain at an age where dropout in sports, for many girls, is high.

The following dialogue from two girls highlights this claim when they stated:

So what are some of the important things about sport?

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH SPORT:

SOPHIE: I mean, it's fun.

JADE: It's empowering.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

JADE: I feel strong when I'm at rowing training, and I spend time with various people.

INTERVIEWER: So, can you explain that?

SOPHIE: It's enjoyable.

INTERVIEWER: And when you say empowering, what does that mean?

JADE: Like when, say, if we're doing a circuit, if you do something really well, and you just – you feel stronger, and you know that you're improving, because you're doing these things; and with improving in that area, you can improve in other areas of your life.

CLOSE FRIENDSHIP THROUGH SPORT:

INTERVIEWER: So tell me about footy (Australian football)?

KYRA: I'm usually in the midfield and, I don't know, I guess the club I'm at is really supportive and everyone is really close. It's like a close group and I just really enjoy being around the people I'm with in the team and so it makes it fun pretty much.

INTERVIEWER: Is that something that you guys enjoy about like if you wanted to be part of sport you need to have, as you say "the right people" around you?

ELLA: Yeah.

ALYSSA: It makes it more enjoyable if you are doing netball with close people that are you friends with it makes it funner and you look forward to it – yeah just better.

INTERVIEWER: Is there is a difference between doing in clubs because when I used to do karate and swimming and all that that was obviously at a club level, but where in terms of schools do you like that difference? Is that something you guys enjoy or do you prefer having sport at the school mainly?

KYRA: I don't play any school sports.

ELLA: Yeah I prefer out of school sports.

INTERVIEWER: Why is that?

ELLA: I feel like it's just more competitive out of school – I don't know that's just me.

KYRA: I play school footy and it's very different from club. School footy is more like everyone is there to have fun and learn a bit, and that's for most sports. I think that school sport should just be for people that want to try something new and so when there's – I don't know there's really competitive people sometimes they find it difficult – find at different levels I guess of competition.

LOVE THE COMPETITION, COMPETITIVENESS AND WINNING

INTERVIEWER: What do you guys find about sport?

ALYSSA: I like the competition and like winning.

ELLA: Yeah winning is pretty good.

INTERVIEWER: So what motivates you to participate in sport? What else do you sort of find-

ELLA: Winning.

INTERVIEWER: Is that about it, anything else?

ELLA: Personal results for yourself as well – having goals for yourself that you want to achieve.

THE TEAM EXPERIENCE

> I enjoy what you get out of sport because, when you say for example I have done a race but haven't won it, but you've improved and you've still got a lot of fitness out of it, I mean, it's fun at the end of the day; having like a whole team with you and being close together.

TEACHERS

The teachers were overwhelmingly in support of the importance and significance of sport in the lives of children and young people. They identified key issues such as sport playing a role in:

- Positive mental health

- Increasing levels of physical activity

- Reducing chronic diseases down the track

- Learning life lessons through sport (teaching them how to win and lose)

- Provide young people with structure, which is need in these contemporary times

- Bringing the community together

The teachers also identified key issues, which impacted sport participation among young people including:

- Noticed that social media in the last 10-15 years has had a huge impact on kids not participating in sport

- Incidental leisure play has dropped away

- There is a lack of opportunity to attain foundational movement skills of running, jumping, landing, balance through current sporting programs

- Coaches role can have a big impact on the child's life

- Childs experience of sport can influence sport participation

- Challenges of mentoring of future coaches

- Sport relies on volunteers

- Structure of volunteers for coaching is required – to support knowledge and experience

- Parents are becoming more challenging in terms of coaching from the sideline – undermines what the coaches are trying to do

TEACHERS' RESPONSE TO GIRLS AND SPORT

In terms of girls the teachers identified that many girls are seeking to play a variety of sport, and some of them are traditional masculinized sports such as Australian football, which is now termed AFLW. However they claim that there is an interesting dilemma occurring:

KATE: Yeah, so our girls. With the amateur clubs that are taking on the girls, they're taking on from under 10 level, and they're really driving it, and the males in the clubs are embracing it, and it's got to a point now, as an example, Hectorville,

there's more junior girls playing than junior boys, and what's happening now is-

MARK: Are you talking in Aussie rules now?

KATE: Aussie rules, yeah.

MARK: Okay.

KATE: And what's happening now is these clubs are finding that they can't facilitate or cater for the girls, and they're going to have to now renovate their buildings to include girls, females change rooms, find space for them to actually train, because they haven't got enough oval space, and they're trying to find a time to get all of the competitions in, because they don't have a schedule program for competitions. And also umpires, they haven't got enough umpires. So, actually in some areas, the girls are starting to take over in junior boy's football.

INTERVIEWER: So, why is that? Why are they moving towards this expansion?

KATE: Money.

INTERVIEWER: Money?

KATE: The clubs are getting money in from the girls. The girls play – like the boys and they get their fees, they're getting recognised through the media – girls, AFL women's football. I mean, girls find that attractive, they're finding it an easier pathway, SANFL are recruiting now with girls, as young as under 14's, and they're moving out of other sports, like basketball, netball, and they're gravitating towards AFL.

Role models for girls to aspire to:

MARK: I think they can see a pathway though sport, as well.

LISA: They've got role models up there now too.

DAVE: Yeah, they've got role models at top level playing AFLW, and they've got something to aspire to. They can see that as an option in there, and it's got the option to do it, as a regular team. So it's taken off. And there's been massive promotion for it as well, and they're choosing it.

LISA: And with the success of the Australian women's rugby team, as well, at the Olympics, I think that's been another positive for the girls to look up to, you know?

DON'T STEREOTYPE GIRLS IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES:

You don't stereotype girls. It's a simple as that. Like there's – so, now particularly particularly with the AFL coming in, all of a sudden that's shown that you don't have to – you can't – put girls in the box of netball, or softball and stuff like that. It's now a broad spectrum of sports, and you need to allow them to –the eight percent, or whatever it number of girls it is, to go and play football, and the other twenty percent, they go and play netball.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this study was to examine the intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental influences on sporting pathways (community, recreational, state, national and international) for girls (12+years) and young adults (up to 25 years) in Adelaide, South Australia. In total, 2273 surveys and focus groups and individual interviews with 37 girls, parents, and teachers were completed between 2017-2020 across metropolitan Adelaide, South Australia.

The results from the Young People in Sport survey indicated that more than 67% of the students that completed the survey were currently involved in at least one organised sport or had been involved in at least one organised sport in the last 12 months. This included 64% (n=626) of all female and 70% (n=816) of male respondents. Although sport participation generally declined with age, the decline occurred before year 10 for girls, and before year 12 for boys. This is consistent with other Australian research examining the peak age for youth sport drop out (Australian Sports Commission, 2016; Eime et al., 2016a; Eime et al., 2016b; Wong et al., 2016).

A recent study by the Youth Sports Trust (2017) of 26,000 girls and boys across England and Northern Ireland displayed a significant difference in girls' attitudes and actual physical activity levels. The findings indicated that school-aged girls participate in less physical activity and sport than their male counterparts, with girls facing barriers such as low self-confidence, self-consciousness, the academic pressure of school achieving at their academics, and severe body image dissatisfaction. The findings in the Young People in Sport project also found that dual commitments such as academic study and sport were difficult to manage. However, it was also found that those who played sport had significantly higher resilience and body appreciation than those who did not play sport – indicating the importance of focusing on these factors to promote sports participation in those who do not play sport. For enhancing body appreciation, it's important to focus on what the body can do, rather than how it looks. So while

low perceptions of body appreciation are linked with low-to-no sport participation among young people in South Australia, sport may also be an avenue for building and/or maintaining positive self-perceptions and cultivating psychological resilience. This could help to inform broader messages around the benefits of ongoing sport participation.

To advance theoretical understandings of what factors support and inhibit female involvement along the sporting pathway, the qualitative findings suggest that a delicate blend of social and developmental progress comprises a vital source of encouraging initial and ongoing participation. Clubs and organisations seeking to maximise girls' participation rates might therefore reflect on their policies and practices against this criteria to assess if the sport climate and these initial experiences respond to the motivational climate girls prefer. Our results indicate that the careful advancement of girls' social and development progress is key to continuation along a sporting pathway.

Another challenge to maintaining involvement in or transitioning into a sporting pathway was girls and young people's inability to manage dual academic and sport commitments. This is consistent with recent research examining concerns raised by Australian youth athletes in relation to making decisions about pathways as a dual-career athlete (Elliott, Drummond & Knight, 2018). However, our report indicates that while school priorities place pressure on ongoing sport participation, sport was also viewed as a stress reliever among young people. One implication is for the ORSR and all of the associated sporting organisations to develop information support and advice to assist young people to manage dual commitments given the role of sport in reducing perceptions of school-related stress. This requires a reconceptualisation of sport and school commitments as complimentary rather than competing priorities.

Quality coaching was also regarded essential to developing a broader strategy to engage girls

and young adults into sporting pathways long-term. However, this was not limited to merely their pedagogical capability. Rather, participants discussed the importance of coaches developing relational skills to improve communication with participants as well as parents and other adults in the sport setting. Perceptions of positive parent and coach relationships are associated with creating a task-focused motivational climate, which are linked with sport continuation (Cumming et al., 2007). Therefore, our findings provide support for sporting clubs and organisations to develop coach qualities that advance their interpersonal skill and communication as a way of retaining girls in the sporting pathway. This also offers theoretical potential to enhance parent and coach relationships, which can lead to increased volunteerism and organisational support.

STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

There were several strengths of this commissioned research including:

- The use of six validated instruments to measure students' opinions and attitudes of their participation in organised sport.

- Surveying nine schools across Adelaide, South Australia, resulting in a significantly large sample size that is representative of the population in Adelaide, South Australia.

- The use of a mixed-methods explanatory research design to assist in the triangulation of findings of the quantitative results and the qualitative results. This assisted in providing a multidimensional perspective of the phenomenon with reliable, rigorous and contextually rich data that can interpreted with some degree of assurance.

- We employed several means of qualitative excellence to ensure methodological rigour including the use of a critical friend, field notes for auditability, intense time in the field, methodological triangulation and sincerity in reporting the findings. These are key markers of excellence qualitative fieldwork.

READERS SHOULD ALSO BE AWARE OF SOME POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY INCLUDING:

- School recruitment involved convenience sampling methods which may have resulted in attracting schools that have

a strong emphasis on sport and the development of elite athletes. Every effort was taken to obtain a randomised sample within a two-stage, stratified, cluster design methodology, from government, catholic and independent school systems representing all socioeconomic tertiles. Our method involved surveying the entire school in years 8, 10 and 12 with the use of an opt-out approach as a proxy to approximate equal chance of being selected in the sample and obtain a sample that is representative of Adelaide, South Australia.

- Although there was sufficient qualitative depth and richness to satisfy the objectives of the project, another potential limitation was the limited number of parents involved in focus groups. Children's and teachers' perspectives were dominant voices in the data, but parents also hold rich and informative experiences which could have further enhanced, expanded or extended our understanding. Similarly, conducting focus group discussions with coaches would have provided valuable insights into the phenomenon.

SUMMARY

Overall, this study provides new insights into the phenomena of pathways to organised sport in the education context and in the wider sporting community for girls, boys and young adults. The findings indicated that gender differences in sport participation are apparent and rates of sports participation decline with age for both genders. A decline in sport participation before year 10 for girls, and before year 12 for boys was identified. Participants who played sport had higher levels of both resilience and body appreciation compared to participants who did not play sport. The qualitative and quantitative data within this research have highlighted several issues that concern sport participation, retention and dropout in metropolitan South Australia. We conclude with eight recommendations that are extrapolated from our data.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1 State sporting policies, funding programs and organisations should intensify focus on retention practices that extend beyond promoting participation and developing inclusive environments. Funding and policies aimed at demonstrable improvements in retention practices should be given equal importance to efforts seeking to promote and grow participation.

2 Strategic investment in research is required to improve efficiencies between school and community sport programs designed to promote participation, develop talent, and sustain longer-term involvement of players, coaches, parents and volunteers.

3 As a key retention strategy, invest in evidence-based resources for parents, teachers and adolescents that assist young people to develop skills and strategies to maintain a dual commitment between academic study and organised sport participation.

4 Investment in community and research-based projects that seek to enhance coaches' and parents' relational capabilities and pedagogic contributions to community sport to reinforce long-term attitudes and practices conducive for children's sport participation and retention.

5 To build intrinsic motivation and positive perceptions of competence, develop an integrated and theoretically informed approach to prolong children's diversification (e.g. sample more than one sport) in sport into late adolescence.

6 Create multifaceted support materials and programs to assist girls to sustain a sporting trajectory between Year 8 and 10 to address sharp declines in the sporting pathway.

7 Develop state-based campaign that promote the strong association between sport participation and higher body appreciation and resilience as a strategy to engage more families and young people in community and school-based sport.

8 Seek government and school based solutions to arrest the decline in sport participation among girls in year 12.

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