Sport and Recreation Participation and Lifestyle Behaviours in Waterford City Adolescents

2013

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Glossary and Definition of Terms

Sport and Recreation Participants: Those individuals who have participated in at least one sport or recreation activity (for which physical exertion is required) on a competitive or casual basis at least once in a typical week over the period of the previous month.

Non-Participant: An individual who did not participate in sport or recreation events in a typical week.

Lowest Participant: An individual who participated in between 1 and 3 sport and recreation events in a typical week.

Intermediate Participant: An individual who participated in between 4 and 7 sport and recreation events in a typical week.

Highest Participant: An individual who participated in greater than 8 sport and recreation events in a typical week.

Active Travel: Those individuals who use physically active travel such as walking or cycling as a means of transportation to school.

Sedentary Index: A compilation and arrangement of the time adolescents reported to spend watching television, playing with games consoles and using a personal computer during the week and weekend. The higher the score on the index, the more time an adolescent spent per week using such devices.

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs): An umbrella term used to describe an array of electronic technologies that includes equipment such as mobile phones, personal computers, games consoles and television.

Central Statistics Office (CSO): Government body responsible for compiling Irish official statistics.

Highlights

Sport and Recreational Activity Participation

- 72% of adolescents participated in at least one sport and recreation activity in a typical week.
- Males were more active than females on all measures of sport and recreation activity.
- Urban adolescents appear to be more active in sport and recreation activities compared to their rural counterparts. This difference is only apparent up to age 15 and thereafter is relatively small.

Type of Sport and Recreational Activities

- Among the entire research sample, soccer, hurling and gaelic football were the most popular team sport and recreation activities whereas walking, swimming and dance were the most popular individual sport and recreation activities.
- All of the top five sport and recreation activities of males were team based events.
- Three of the top five sport and recreation activities of females were team sport events. Overall, females seem to have lower preference for team events. However, they have a much higher preference for individual activities as compared to their male counterparts.
- There seems to be no major difference in participation in sport and recreation activities between those from urban and rural locations both in terms of team and individual activities. Some minor differences were recorded however.

Barriers and Influences in Sport and Recreational Activity

- The main reasons given for participation in sport and recreation activity are because “I want to keep fit”, “I enjoy sport” and “I enjoyed playing sports in PE”.
- There were some differences in male and female reasons for participation. Of note, a higher percentage of female adolescents cite losing weight as an important motive for participation, whereas a greater proportion of males cite both friends and television sport programmes as influences to their involvement.
- The most popular reasons given for non-participation were “I don’t have enough time”, “I have other interests”, “I’m too lazy”, “I’m not good at sport” and “I have too much study to do”.
- Females display a number of differences to males in their reasons for non-participation. The main points of note were “I’m no good at sport”, I’m too lazy”, “I have too much study to do”, “I feel it’s too much effort” and “Because my friends don’t play”.
- Leaving certificate students detailed study and time commitments as key motives related to their non-participation in sport and recreation events.

Parental Influence in Sport and Recreational Activity

- Adolescents whose parents are both active or were previously active in sport and recreation activity were found to participate more in sport and recreation events as compared to those adolescents who had just one parent or no parents who were active or previously active in sport and recreation activity.

Facility Use

- 48% of adolescents surveyed regularly use sport and recreation facilities in Waterford.
- More males than females are active users of sport and recreation facilities (55% versus 43%).
- The majority of adolescents (78%) use sport and recreation facilities between 1 and 5 times per week.
- A sizable percentage of both male and female facility users believe facilities are expensive, have many restrictions and are of a poor standard.

Active Travel and Sport and Recreational Activity

- 24% of adolescents surveyed use active travel as a means of getting to school. There was no difference of note in male and female use of active transport.
- The majority of those who use active transport live within one mile of their school.
- The percentage of those who used active travel that lived within one mile of their school and participated in sport and recreation activities appeared to be higher than those who were non-active participants in sport and recreation events living within the same distance.
- A higher percentage of junior certificate active sport and recreation participants used active travel compared to leaving certificate active students.

Lifestyle Behaviours and Sport and Recreational Activity

- 14% of adolescents surveyed smoke. 44% of adolescents surveyed regularly consume alcohol. Both behaviours increase with age, but much more predominantly with alcohol consumption.
- Non-smokers and non-drinkers have a higher mean participation in sport and recreation events per week.

Sedentary Behaviours and Sport and Recreational Activity

- Adolescents with the lowest sedentary index scores had a higher participation rate in sport and recreation events compared to those with the highest sedentary index scores.

1 Background and Aim of the Research

The challenge of keeping teenagers physically active against the backdrop of an increased domestication of ICTs in the family home (Delaney, 2011), the current youth drinking culture in Ireland, the attraction of part-time employment and the pressure to obtain high leaving certificate points (McCoy and Smith, 2004) is overwhelming. This research serves to depict the place of sport and recreation activity within the lives of Waterford city adolescents and in addition, examine the lifestyle pursuits of these teenagers and indeed the influence of these lifestyle behaviours on sport and recreation participation. The project involves the collection of over 2,800 questionnaires from a purposive sample of Waterford city students. It is envisaged that the findings from this research will contribute to the understanding of Irish adolescents sport and recreation participation and lifestyle patterns and thus provide a backdrop in which to guide public policy.

1.1 Methodology

The research targeted the entire cohort of public school going adolescents in Waterford city. In total, seven secondary schools participated in the research. Every student within each of the secondary schools who agreed to participate in the research was administered a questionnaire which took one class period to complete. Only students who were present in class on the day of administration completed the questionnaire. Altogether, 2,877 students completed the questionnaire. The age of respondents ranged from 12 to 20 years of age. A higher percentage of females made up the sample group (53% versus 47%) and the majority of the research sample is from an urban location (69% versus 31%).

The design of the questionnaire was largely based on previous research of the sporting, leisure and lifestyle patterns of Irish adolescents conducted in 1997 (Connor, 2003). This questionnaire was then adjusted to reflect the aims of the present survey and in addition to account for changes in adolescents' lifestyle pursuits. The questionnaire was piloted within a number of schools before being used for the live survey, and then administered between March and April 2007.

1.1.1 Questionnaire Unit Measurements

Within the questionnaire design, an array of survey instruments were utilised to measure adolescents involvement in sport, recreation and lifestyle behaviours. These unit measurements are outlined individually in the following sub-sections.

1.1.1.1 Participation in Sport and Recreational Activity

In total, four sport and recreation participation measures were used in this research. For the purpose of clarity however, only one unit of participation will be used consistently in the presentation of this report. The measurement unit chosen is the number of sport and recreation events participated in during the course of a typical week. For example, each time an adolescent reports that they participated in a sport or

recreation event, this is classified as one unit of participation. Respondents were allowed enter up to three sport and recreation events on each day of the week for seven days. Thus, the range in units of participation may vary from one to twenty one. This participation unit in some instances is broken down into four purposely-designated reference categories based on the level of participation events exhibited by each adolescent. Table 1.1 provides an overview of these self-designated groups. As outlined in the glossary and definition of terms, active sport and recreation participants are defined as those persons who have participated in at least one sport or recreation activity (for which physical exertion is required) on a competitive or casual basis at least once in a typical week during the previous month.

Table 1.1 Sport Participation Reference Categories

Reference Category	Description
Non-Participant	Did not participate in sport or recreation events in a typical week
Lowest Participant	Participated in between 1 and 3 sport and recreation in a typical week
Intermediate Participant	Participated in between 4 and 7 sport and recreation events in a typical week
Highest Participant	Participated in greater than 8 sport and recreation events in a typical week

1.1.1.2 Type of Sport and Recreational Activities

In this measurement, adolescents were required to detail the type of sport and recreation events they participated in during the course of a typical week. Multiple response analysis was then used to provide a percentage participation in each sport and recreation activity, which was then cross-examined against basic demographic information.

1.1.1.3 Barriers and Influences in Sport and Recreational Activity

To measure adolescent reasons for and against participation in sport and recreation activities, two likert scale questions were posed to participants and non-participants in sport and recreation events. In these questions, a series of statements representative of those found in the literature were posed to the research sample. Respondents answered whether they agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, or disagreed with the statements.

1.1.1.4 Parental Influence on Sport and Recreational Activity

In order to conduct this analysis, the number of sport and recreation events was cross-compared with parental past and present participation in sport and recreation. To determine parental involvement in sport and recreational events, adolescents were requested to detail if their parents are currently or were previously involved in a sport or recreational activity. The mean number of sport and recreation events was then computed for different categories of parental participation.

1.1.1.5 Facility Use

Similar to 1.1.1.3, adolescents who actively participated in sport and recreation events were queried on their perceptions of facilities in Waterford. Adolescents were provided with a series of statements against which they indicated if they agreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, or disagreed. In addition to this, respondents were queried on how often they used facilities in a typical week.

1.1.1.6 Active Transportation and Sport and Recreational Activity

In this measurement, adolescents were requested to detail their normal method of travel to school. To supplement this information, respondents were also requested to detail the distance they lived from their respective school. This information was then used in conjunction with sport and recreation participation data to provide an overview of adolescent active transportation and the possible influence of sport and recreation involvement.

1.1.1.7 Lifestyle Behaviours and Sport and Recreational Activity

For the purpose of this research, two lifestyle behaviours were examined, smoking and alcohol consumption. In both instances, students were queried on the extent of their smoking and alcohol consumption behaviours. Both behaviours were then cross-examined against basic demographic information and participation in sport and recreation events.

1.1.1.8 Sedentary Behaviours and Sport and Recreational Activity

A sedentary index was computed as an indicator of the time spent in sedentary activities on a weekly basis. This index was based on the time adolescents reported to spend watching television, playing with games consoles and using a personal computer during the week and weekend. The higher the index score, the more time an adolescent spent per week using such devices. This index score was then cross-compared with participation in sport and recreation events. It must be noted that the values of the index itself are meaningless.

1.2 Limitations of Research

There are a number of limitations to this research. Firstly, in dealing with self-report measures, researchers expect that respondents may not accurately report the extent of their activities. In the case of the present study, this issue is of particular relevance given that the sample is made up entirely of teenagers. In a similar vein, the issue of social desirability may also become a problem with individuals answering questions in a manner which they feel will suit the researcher. Secondly, the questionnaire used for this research, though adopted from a previous study (Connor, 2003), is not validated and is thus limited in the extent to which information gathered can be compared accurately to previous research. Within this questionnaire, sport and recreation participation was measured using a previous month recall of typical weekly activity. While this form of measurement (recall questionnaire) is sometimes used in research as a measure of sport participation, it is limited in the accuracy of information recorded in that students may overestimate or underestimate participation.

In addition to this, the definition of active sport and recreation participants used in this research is different to other Irish studies in recent years and thus a precise comparison with other research may not be possible. Finally, the time of year in which the questionnaire was distributed may influence the results found. For instance, questionnaires distributed in the winter months may return lower sport and recreation participation results compared to those distributed in the spring or summer.

2 Participation in Sport and Recreational Activity

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide data on Irish adolescent sport and recreation activity patterns. The data provided will specifically focus on the level of participation exhibited by adolescents.

2.2 Main Findings

In total, 72% of those surveyed participated in sport and recreation events at least once in a typical week over the previous month. A higher percentage of males were active participants compared to females (75.8% versus 68.8%). Shown below is a breakdown of adolescent participation in sport and recreation activities based on four separate participation measures. As can be seen from the figures displayed, the influence of age and gender on participation is similar regardless of the outcome measure used. Males are more active than females from their early to late teens. In addition, the level of participation in sport and recreation events diminishes with age.

Figure 2.1 Participation Events during Typical Week by Age and Gender

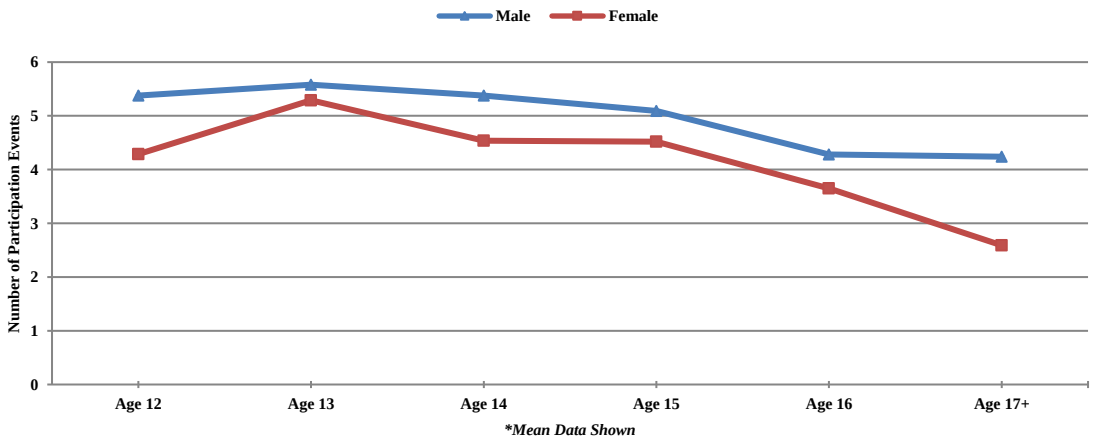


Figure 2.2 Time Spent in Sport and Recreation Activities Per Day during Typical Week by Age and Gender

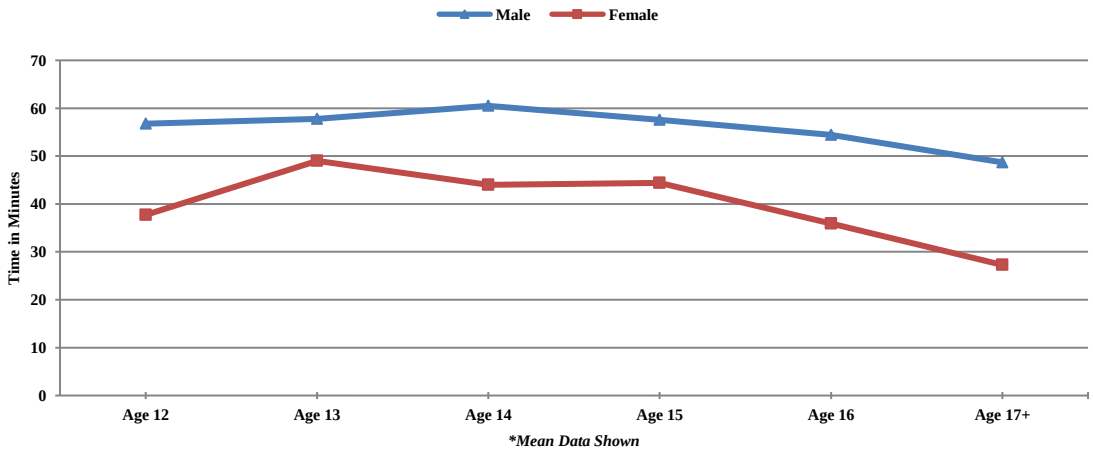


Figure 2.3 **Days during Typical Week Active in at least one Participation Event by Age and Gender**

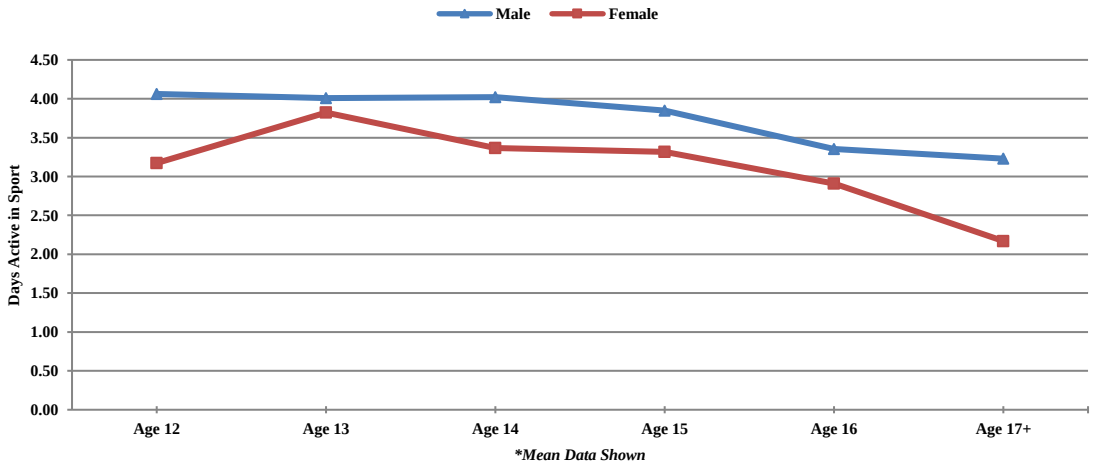
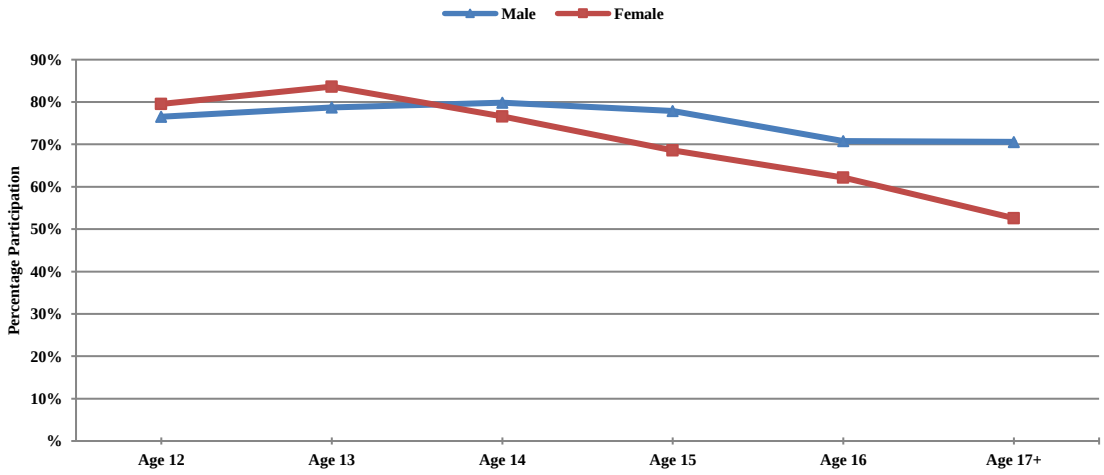


Figure 2.4 **Percentage who participate in at Least one Sport or Recreation Event during Typical Week by Age and Gender**



For the remainder of the analysis in this report, participation will be presented as the number of participation events (1-21) during a recent typical week. Using this measure of sport and recreation participation, figure 2.5 displays the difference in participation events between urban and rural adolescents based on their age. It can be seen from this figure that urban adolescents appear to be more active in sport and recreation activities than their rural counterparts. This difference however is only apparent up to age 15 and thereafter is relatively small.

Figure 2.5 Participation Events during Typical Week in Urban and Rural Adolescents by Age

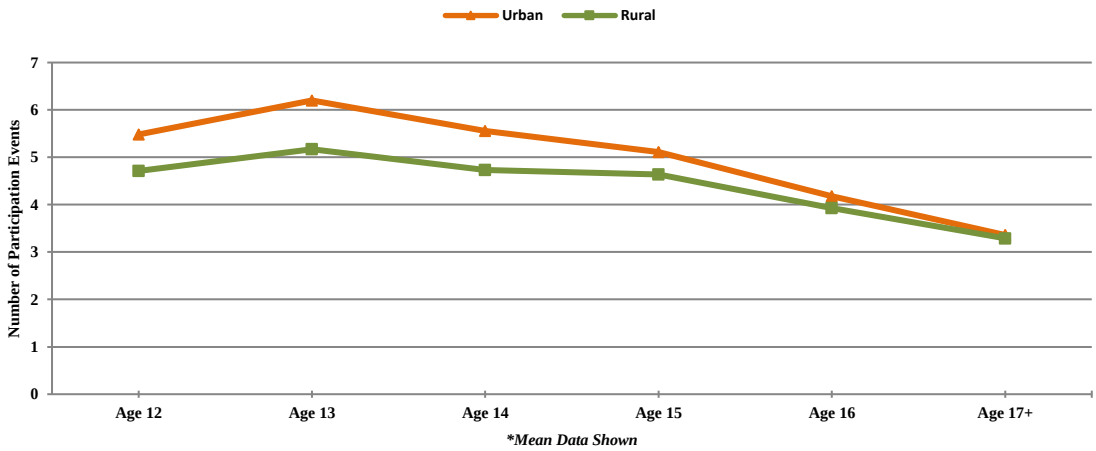


Figure 2.6 provides a breakdown of participation among adolescents surveyed. This figure displays the levels of participation found using the defined measurements provided. In total, 20% of adolescents are in the lowest participation category, 30% in the intermediate category and finally 22% in the highest participation category. Nearly half of all adolescents surveyed participate in three or less sport and recreation activities in a typical week. A greater percentage of males are found in the highest and intermediate category (59% versus 48%) as shown in figure 2.7.

Figure 2.6 Percentage Participation in Sport and Recreation Events during Typical Week

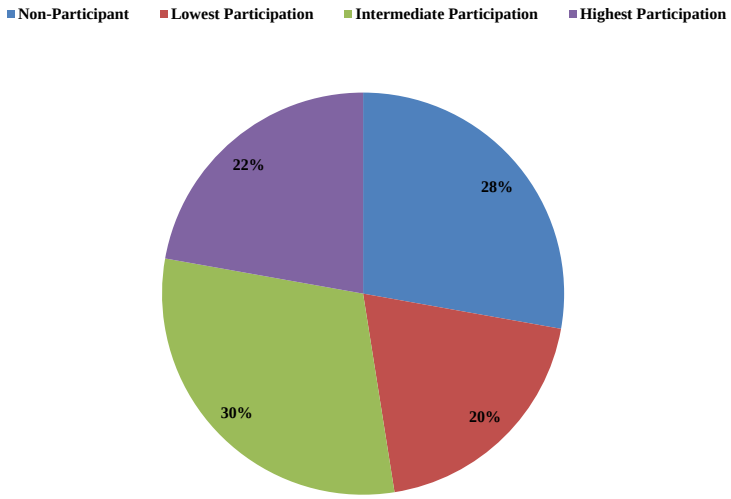
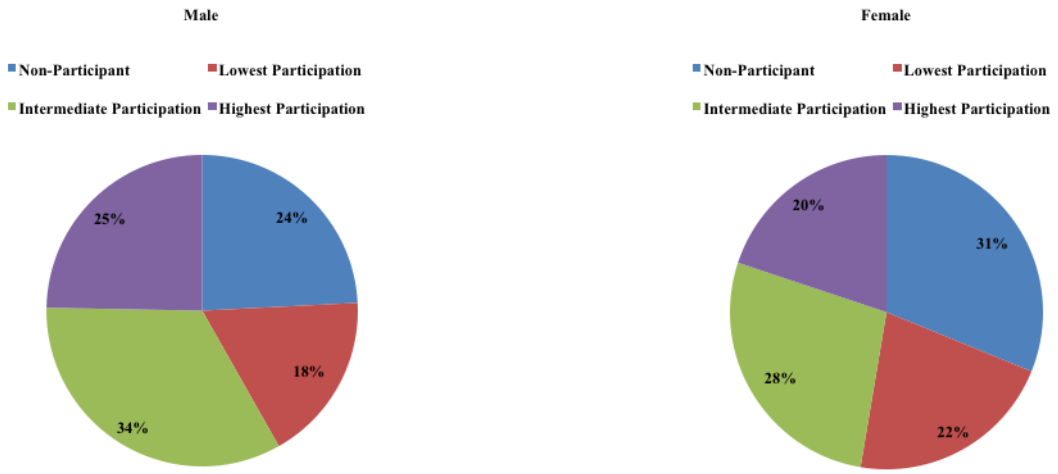


Figure 2.7 **Percentage Participation in Sport and Recreation Events during Typical Week by Gender**



2.3 Discussion

Consistent with a number of studies in the area (Connor, 2003; Woods, 2004; Fahey, Delaney and Gannon, 2005; Walsh, Tannehill and Woods, 2011), participation in sport and recreational activity tends to peak during the early teenage years and drop thereafter. Furthermore, the level of participation exhibited tends to be higher for males throughout adolescence (Connor, 2003; Woods, 2004; de Róiste and Dinneen, 2005). Although urban teenagers appear to have a higher participation in sport and recreation events, this difference is only apparent up to age 15 and thereafter is relatively small. Given the noticeable drop in sport and recreation participation as adolescents grow older, there is perhaps a need for participation strategy which focuses on this group.

In terms of the level of participation shown in the current research, it would appear that a relatively high proportion of adolescents are active in sport and recreational activity with 72% of the students indicating that they had participated in at least one sport and recreation event over the course of a typical week in the previous month. While precise comparisons with previous research is not possible, a greater level of participation was found by de Róiste and Dinneen (2005). In a research sample of 51 secondary schools throughout Ireland (n = 2260), their research found that 88% of their sample report involvement in at least one sport, excluding walking. The CSO (2007a) in the Quarterly National Household Survey however, report a similar figure to that found in the present research, with 77% of students participating in physical activities for exercise, recreation and sport. The questionnaire used in this research queried participation over the previous 12 months. In addition, students were categorised as individuals aged between 15 and 24. Therefore, while the findings are in line with the present survey, a degree of caution must be exercised in drawing comparisons.

Finally, while it is shown in the present findings that the majority of adolescents surveyed take part in sport and recreation events in a typical week, it must be noted that despite this somewhat positive figure, some 28% of those surveyed do not participate in sport and recreation events. Having said this however, 22% of active sport and recreation participants were in the highest participation category and 30% in the intermediate participation category. Overall, this somewhat reflects a positive level of participation in sport and recreation events amongst the research sample group.

3 Type of Sport and Recreational Activities

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to examine adolescent male and female preference for team and individual sport and recreation activities. In addition, an examination of the differences in participation between urban and rural locations will also be shown.

3.2 Main Findings

Figure 3.1 illustrates the main team sport and recreation activities of the research sample. As shown in the figure below, soccer, hurling/camogie and gaelic football represent the most popular sport and recreation activities of the sample group but particularly amongst adolescent males. In respect of adolescent females, basketball, soccer and hurling/camogie are the most popular activities. Significantly, some 40% of males report that they play soccer at least once on a weekly basis. Gaelic games are popular for both males and females but more so amongst adolescent males. Overall, there would appear to be no major difference in participation evident among the urban and rural sample groups bar that of hurling/camogie. Rural adolescents clearly have a greater interest in this sport. Some minor participation differences however can also be seen in soccer and rugby. Specifically, rugby is slightly more popular amongst rural adolescents, whereas soccer is slightly more popular amongst urban adolescents.

Figure 3.1 Percentage Participation in Various Team Sport and Recreation Activities

Team Sport and Recreational Activity					
	Total %	Male%	Female %	Urban %	Rural %
Soccer	25.3	40.1	12.3	26.3	23.4
Hurling/Camogie	18.4	25.7	11.7	15.5	24.8
Gaelic Football	14.4	22.4	7.3	14.6	13.8
Basketball	11.8	6.1	16.9	12.1	11.5
Rugby	6.4	11.7	1.7	5.5	8.6
Hockey	1.9	0.0	3.7	2.0	1.8
Rounders	1.4	0.9	1.8	1.4	1.3
Cricket	1.1	2.1	0.3	1.3	0.7
Volleyball	0.5	0.1	0.7	0.3	0.8

Figure 3.2 shows the breakdown of individual sport and recreation activities amongst the research sample. A number of observations can be seen from this table. Firstly, walking and dance are particularly popular activities among female adolescents. Secondly, the percentage of males who participate in individual activities appears to be much lower than that of females. Finally, there are no major differences in urban and rural sport and recreation activities but some small percentage differences are evident. In this regard, it would appear that walking, horse riding and cycling are slightly more popular among rural adolescents. Conversely, dance is slightly more popular among urban adolescents.

Figure 3.2 Percentage Participation in Various Individual Sport and Recreation Activities

Individual Sport and Recreational Activity					
	Total %	Male%	Female %	Urban %	Rural %
Walking	11.5	1.0	20.9	10.8	13.2
Swimming	8.1	6.1	9.8	7.9	8.9
Dance	6.8	1.6	11.5	7.7	4.8
General Fitness/Conditioning	4.7	4.1	5.2	4.4	5.4
Martial Arts	4.5	5.9	3.3	5.1	3.3
Athletics	4.0	2.6	5.2	3.9	4.3
Horse Riding	3.8	1.0	6.4	2.6	6.8
Cycling	3.6	3.6	3.7	2.9	5.4
Tennis	3.5	2.6	4.3	3.2	4.4
Golf	2.4	3.9	1.1	2.2	3.2
Badminton	2.3	1.2	3.3	2.1	2.9
Gymnastics	1.0	0.1	1.9	1.1	1.0
Exercise Classes	0.8	0.3	1.2	0.8	0.9
Skating	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.6
Surfing	0.6	0.6	0.7	0.5	0.9

3.3 Discussion

The sport and recreation activity preference of adolescents as demonstrated in the findings of this research are relatively similar to those of previous findings in the area. Compared to the earlier version of this research conducted in 1997 (Connor, 2003), four (soccer, gaelic football, basketball and hurling) of the top five-team sports reported still remain albeit with a few adjustments in ranking. Soccer is as it was in 1997 still the most popular sport. Hurling/Camogie rose in ranking to second while rugby replaced hockey in the top five. Only one (swimming) of the top five individual sports in 1997 remains. Numerous factors could be attributed to this change. Firstly, walking was not included in the earlier study and secondly general fitness/conditioning classes were not as accessible in 1997.

In a more recent survey conducted at a similar time to the present research, comparable findings in sports and recreation activity preferences can be found. De Róiste and Dinneen (2005) found that male adolescent sport participation was dominated by activities like soccer and gaelic games. Likewise, sports such as swimming, basketball, camogie and soccer featured highly amongst adolescent females. Surprisingly, walking did not feature as high in this research. This however may have been down to the means of questioning adolescents on this particular activity.

4 Barriers and Influences to Sport and Recreational Activity

4.1 Introduction

Many motives for and barriers to participation in sport and recreation activities have been put forward in the literature. This section will explore many of the common reasons reported and examine if any differences exist among the research sample groups.

4.2 Main Findings

Figures 4.1 and 4.2 illustrate the cited reasons for participation in sport and recreational activity by both male and female and junior and leaving certificate students (the latter groups are broadly representative of younger and older adolescents). As shown in the figures below, the main reasons reported are because "I want to keep fit", "I enjoy sport" and "I enjoyed playing sports in PE", all of which represent a similar percentage of responses among male and female adolescents. Figure 4.1 shows that there are some variations in male and female motives for involvement. Of note, a higher percentage of female adolescents cite losing weight (48% versus 21%) as an important reason for participation, whereas a greater proportion of males cite both friends (33% versus 22%) and television sport programmes (46% versus 25%) as influences to their involvement. In examining such differences from a junior and leaving certificate students perspective (figure 4.2), only one noteworthy difference was found. This was "I enjoyed playing sports in PE". A greater percentage of junior certificate students cited this as an influence to their involvement in sport and recreation events (59% versus 47%).

Figure 4.1 **Motives for Participation – Percentage of Male and Female Adolescents who Identified each as an Influence**

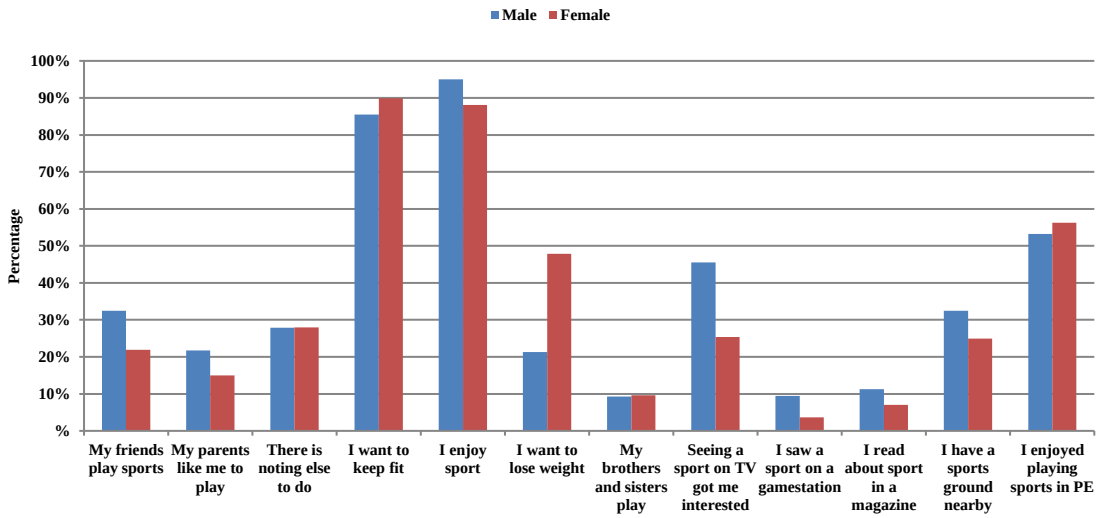


Figure 4.2 **Motives for Participation – Percentage of Junior and Leaving Certificate Students who Identified each as an Influence**

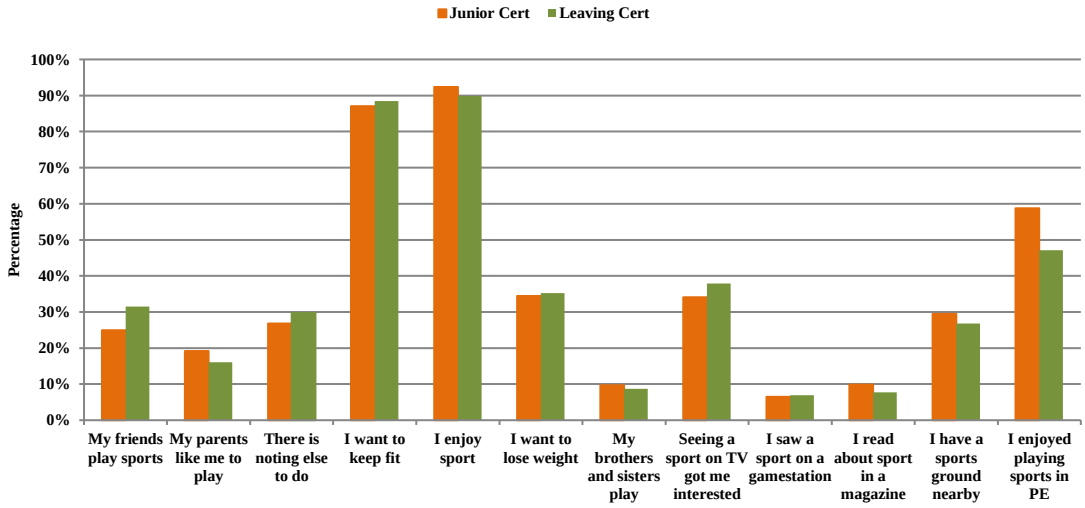
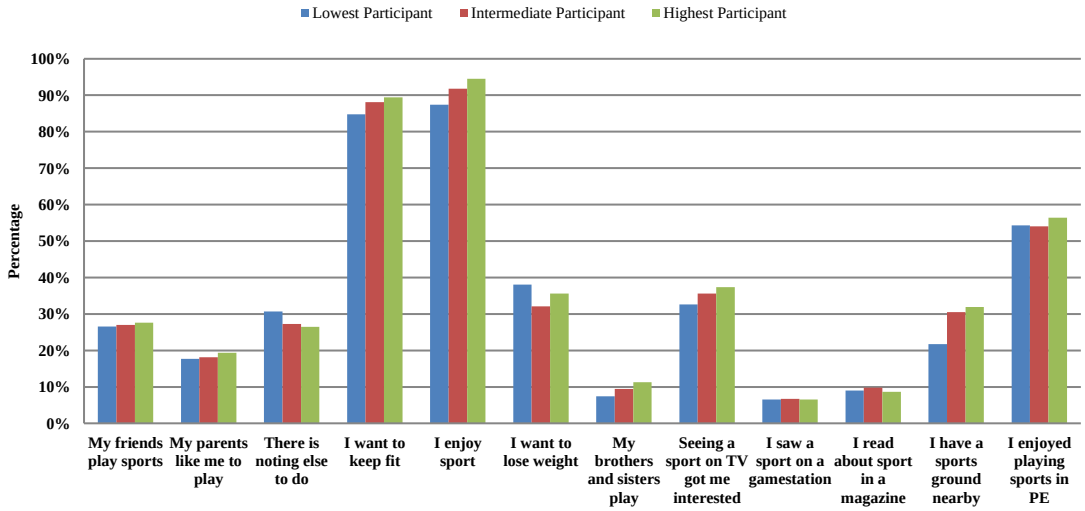


Figure 4.3 illustrates the difference in reasons for sport and recreation participation based on adolescents level of participation in sport and recreation events. As shown in the figure, no major differences can be seen between the groups. In the statements "I want to keep fit", "I enjoy sport", "Seeing a sport on TV got me interested" and "My brothers and sisters play" there is a rise in agreement from the lowest to the highest participation category groups. However, a relatively low percentage of responses are recorded in the latter category. In addition, the highest and intermediate groups also report stronger agreement for the statement "I have a sports ground nearby". In all other groups, only minor differences are evident. Of note, in the categories "There is noting else to do" and "I want to lose weight", participants in the lowest participation group report the greatest agreement with the statements.

Figure 4.3 **Motives for Participation – Percentage of Lowest, Intermediate and Highest Participants who Identified each as an Influence**



Figures 4.4 and 4.5 illustrate the barriers to participation of those who report no typical weekly sport or recreation participation. The most common reasons given for non-participation were "I don't have enough time", "I have other interests", "I'm too lazy", "I'm not good at sport" and "I have too much study to do". As illustrated in figure 4.4, females display a number of differences to males in their reasons for non-participation. The main points of note were "I'm no good at sport" (45% versus 27%), "I'm too lazy" (48% versus 32%), "I have too much study to do" (39% versus 25%), "I feel it's too much effort" (36% versus 24%) and "Because my friends don't play" (25% versus 11%). Barriers were similar among the junior and leaving certificate groups (figure 4.5). The only noteworthy difference observed between these groups is that of perceived laziness, study and lastly time commitments. A greater percentage of leaving certificate students noted these as key barriers related to their non-participation in sport and recreational events.

Figure 4.4 **Barriers to Participation – Percentage of Male and Female Non-Participants who Identified each as an Influence**

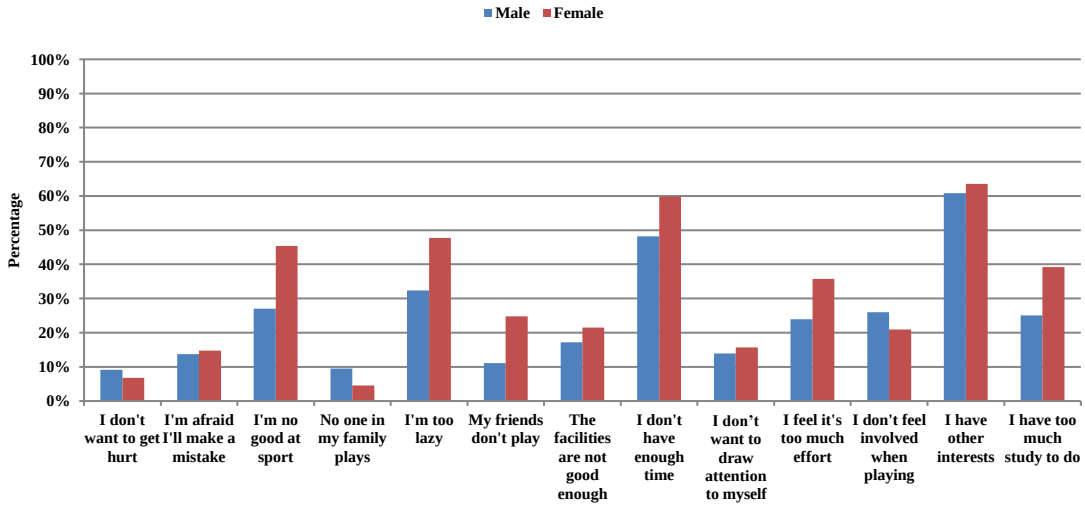
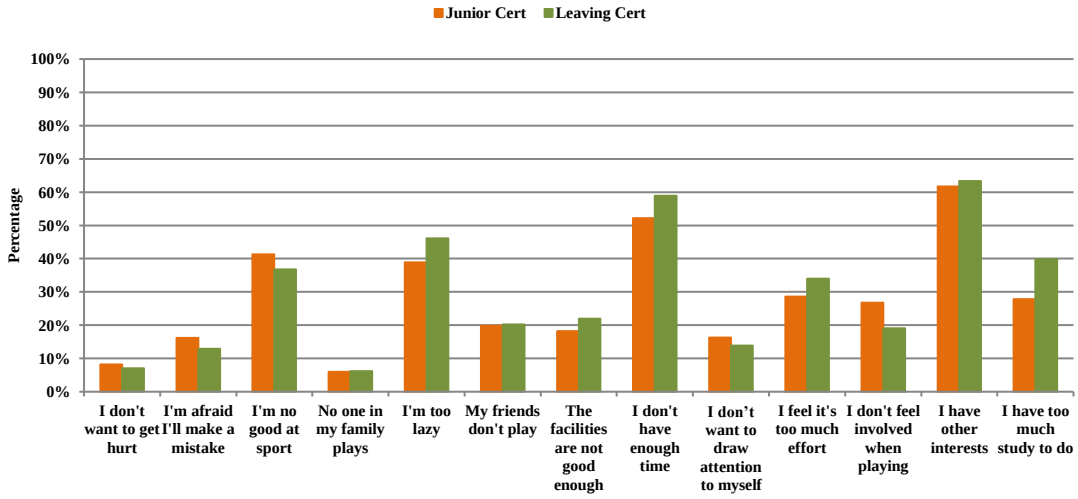


Figure 4.5 **Barriers to Participation – Percentage of Junior and Leaving Certificate Students who Identified each as an Influence**



4.3 Discussion

The main motives for participation in sport and recreation activities were primarily based around passion for and enjoyment of such events. Indeed, the top three motivations found were related to fitness and enjoyment of PE and playing sport. Among the groups surveyed, there were a number of attitudinal differences of note. For example, in addition to the motives already outlined, female adolescents cite weight loss as a central factor in their participation in sport and recreational activities. Given that research has identified that body image and indeed ideal body size, act as strong sport participation motivators for adolescent girls (Ingledew and Sullivan, 2002) and particularly in their late teens, this may come as no surprise. The influence of friends and sport television programming was a stronger motivator for males. While peers appear to play a greater role in male sport and recreation participation, previous studies (Australian Sports Commission, 2004; de Roiste and Dinneen, 2005) have identified this motivator as a much stronger influence on adolescents' sport and recreation participation than found in the present research. The influence of watching a sport on television, and in turn engaging in sport and recreation activity, remains largely uncertain in academic circles. Nevertheless, it would appear that despite the uncertain relationship, such an influence appears relevant in the context of the present findings, particularly among males. That said however, this motivation ranked 5th amongst all the motivations explored. In addition, one should be cautious in interpreting this finding given the manner in how the question was posed.

The reasons found for non-participation are largely similar to those reported in other literature in the area (Connor, 2003; Australian Sports Commission, 2004; de Roiste and Dinneen, 2005). As shown in the findings, factors such as time, being lazy, having other interests, being no good at sport and study commitments are all highlighted as key inhibitors to participation, the greater percentage of which is exhibited by females. This is somewhat unsurprising given the differences in sport and recreation participation between both genders. The matter of study commitments is mainly present in leaving certificate students. Perhaps the pressure from parents to achieve high leaving certificate points (McCoy and Smith, 2004) may prove to be a key influence in this area despite the academic advantages to participation. For example, Coe et al. (2006) found in a study of 200 sixth grade students that regular participation in vigorous physical activity resulted in increased grades. Comparably, similar conclusions were found in research conducted by Marsh and Kleitman (2003) and Troutman and Dufur (2007). Despite being the 4th most important reason given for non-participation among leaving certificate students, it is notable that some 40% of inactive leaving certificate students cite this as a reason for not engaging in sport and recreation events. Thus, from a policy perspective, it may perhaps be worthwhile advocating the advantages of active sport participation to leaving certificate students and indeed to the parents of these adolescents.

5 Parental Influence on Sport and Recreational Activity

5.1 Introduction

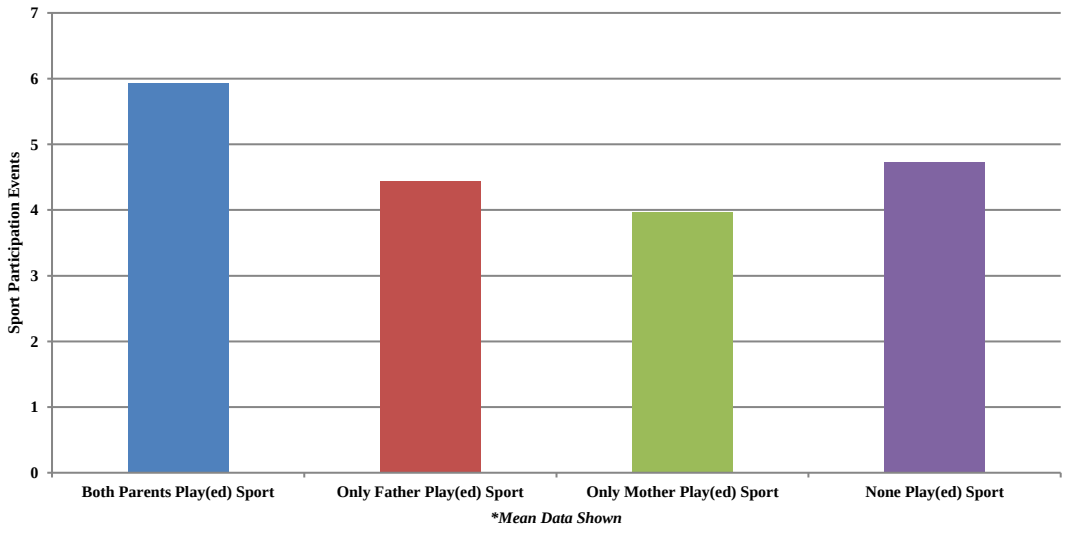
The influence of parents on adolescents' sport and recreation activity is widely acknowledged. The purpose of this section is to explore the extent of parental influence on adolescent participation in sport and recreation events and to examine the dynamics of this influence.

5.2 Main Findings

The influence of parents on adolescents' sport and recreation participation was examined from three perspectives: firstly the influence of parents as a whole on the entire research sample; secondly, the influence of parents on adolescent males; and finally the influence of parents on adolescent females.

Figure 5.1 shows the mean participation events of the sample group depending on if their parents are currently or have previously been active in sport and recreation events. In this figure, it is shown that if both parents are currently or have previously been active in sport and recreation events, in turn their son/daughter appear to participate more in sport and recreation activities. It would also appear that adolescents who have no parents active in their family are just as likely to participate in sport and recreation events as compared to those adolescents who have just one parental figure active. Of note however, there is a 23% difference in participation between those adolescents who have no parents active in their family and those where both parents are currently or have previously been active in sport and recreation events.

Figure 5.1 Participation Events during Typical Week by Parental Participation History



Figures 5.3 and 5.4 illustrate the influence of parents on male and female adolescents. In both figures, it can be seen that both the mother and father exhibit alternate influences over their children's participation in sport and recreation activities

depending on if the child is male or female. Despite this change in influence between male and female adolescents, in both instances, the positive influence of both parents being active or being previously active in sport and recreation events is noteworthy. In a similar vein, the mean score for those whose parents were not active or previously active must also be noted. The percentage difference in participation between both parents and no parent being active in sport and recreation events is 26% in figure 5.3 and 22% in figure 5.4.

Figure 5.2 Participation Events in Adolescent Males during Typical Week by Parental Participation History

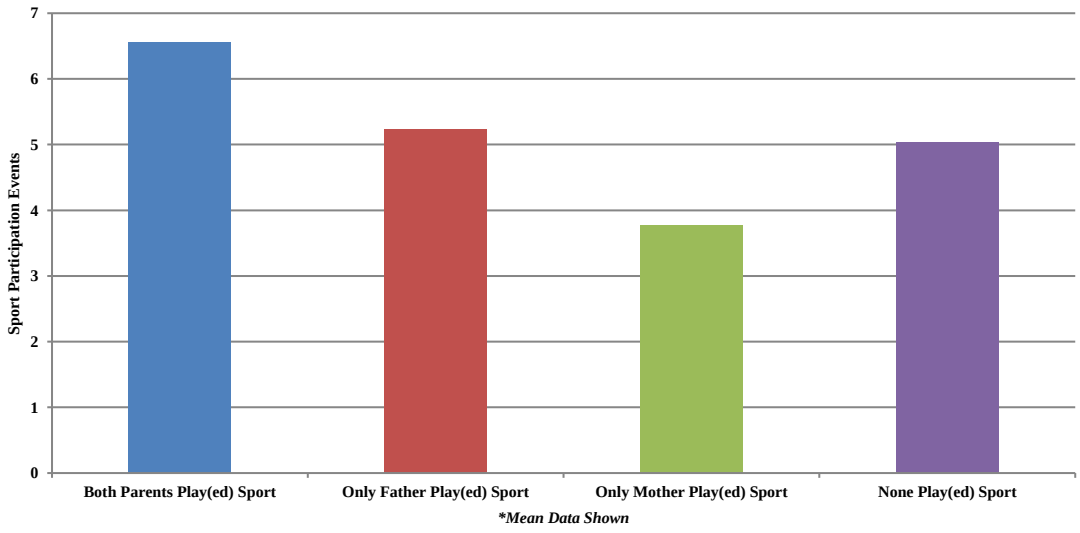
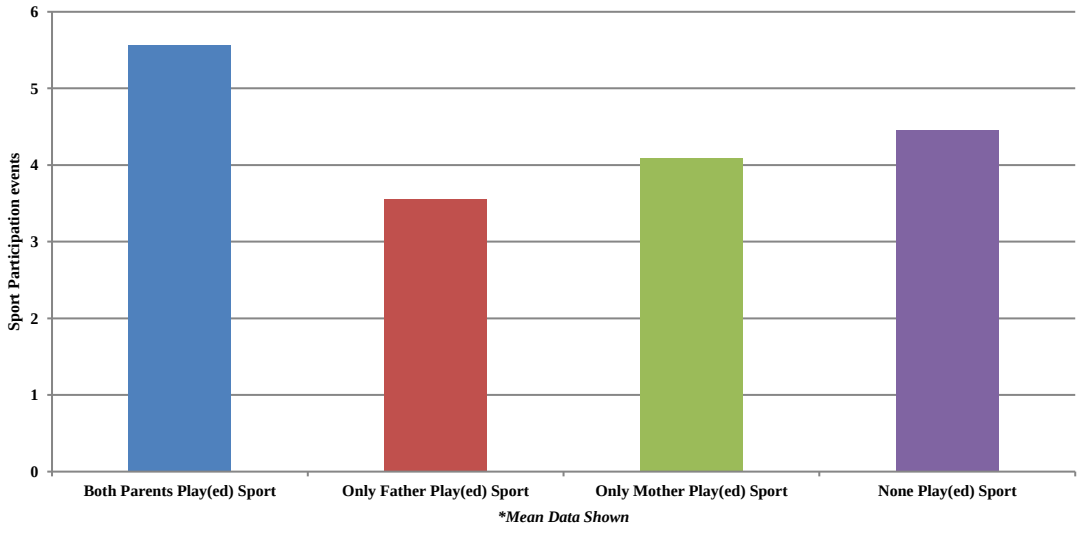


Figure 5.3 Participation Events in Adolescent Females during Typical Week by Parental Participation History



5.3 Discussion

The influence of parents on their children's participation in sport and recreation events is unquestionable. Parents act as a key component in the socialisation process

of their children (Coakley and Pike, 2009). They introduce their kids to activities they are interested in themselves. Furthermore, they are largely responsible for bringing their children to and from activities and promoting sport and recreation events to them. It could thus be expected that if both parents are active or were previously active in sport and recreational activity, in turn their children would perhaps be socialised into such events. This appears to be the case in the present study. On all measures of influence, either from the perspective of the entire sample, just male adolescents or just female adolescents, dual parental impact was evident. Nevertheless, this influence must be viewed in context and must not be overstated. Only if both parents are currently active or were in the past active in sport and recreation events does it appear that an increase in sport and recreation participation is apparent. Thus, if one parent or no parents are active, participation may be lower. In recent years the incidence of single parent families has risen dramatically (CSO, 2012). In such circumstances, it is possible that a single parent may not have the time or financial resources available to promote sport and recreation activity to the same extent as dual parent families. Unfortunately, in the present research this question was not explored and is perhaps an area in need of further research. In addition, as social class was not examined in the current study, it is not possible to explore the possible influence of this variable and thus a degree of caution must be exercised when interpreting the research outcome particularly from the perspective of both parents being inactive in sport and recreation events.

6 Facility Use

6.1 Introduction

This section will briefly explore the level of facility usage found amongst the research sample. In addition, an examination of adolescents' opinions of facilities in Waterford city will also be explored.

6.2 Main Findings

In total, 48% of adolescents surveyed used sports and recreation facilities on a regular basis. More urban adolescents reported regular usage of facilities compared to their rural counterparts (50% versus 45%). Additionally, more adolescent males used facilities on a regular basis compared to females (55% versus 43%). As shown in figure 6.1, the majority of adolescents (78%) who used sports and recreation facilities on a regular basis, used them between 1 and 5 times per week. Some 41% however, do so between 3 and 5 times per week. Among all user categories, only minor percentage differences were recorded between both genders.

Figure 6.1 Adolescent Male and Female use of Sports Facilities in a Typical Week

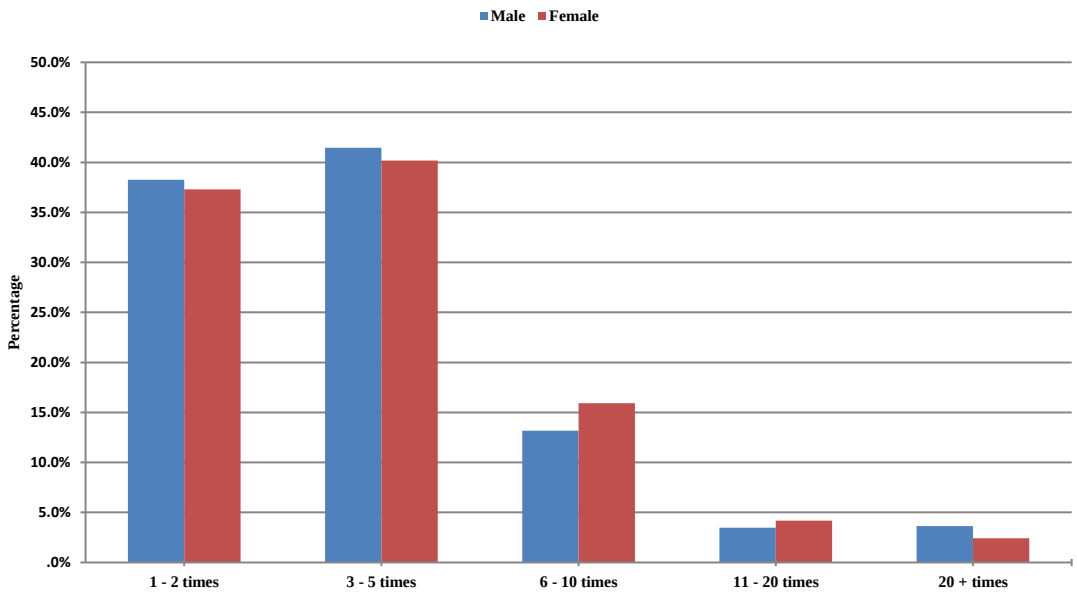
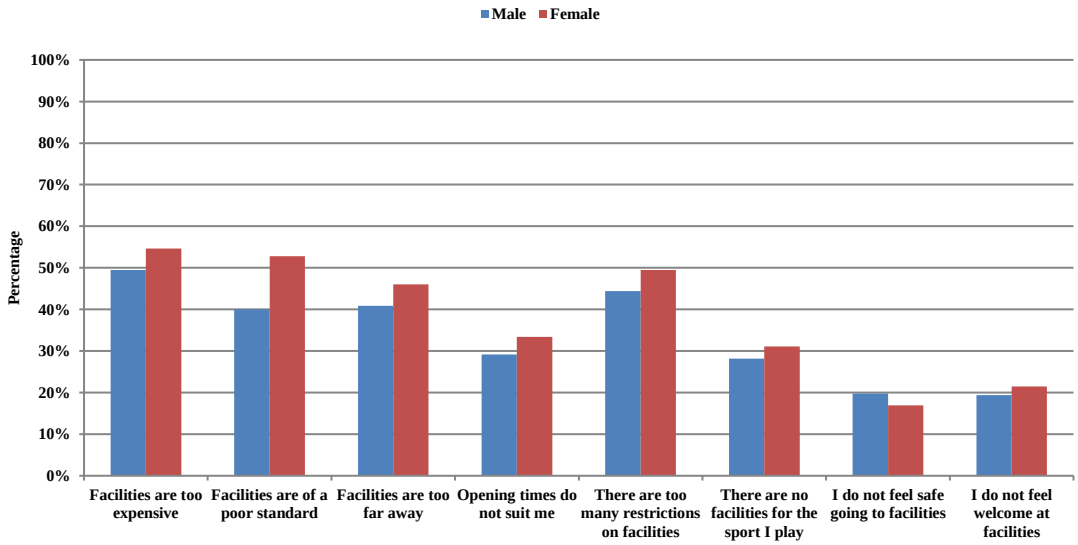


Figure 6.2 provides an overview of adolescents perceptions of facilities in Waterford city. The figure shows the percentage of adolescents who use sports and recreation facilities in the city that agree with specific statements put forward in relation to them. A number of observations can be made from this figure. On all the statements bar one ("I do not feel safe going to facilities"), females have a higher percentage agreement with the statements. Indeed overall, there would appear to be a relatively high percentage of agreement demonstrated among many of the statements put to the sample. For instance, a considerable percentage of both males and females believe facilities are expensive, have many restrictions and are of a poor standard. In respect of the later, a particularly high proportion of females agree with this statement.

Figure 6.2 **Barriers to Facility Use – Percentage of Adolescent Males and Females who Identified Each**



6.3 Discussion

Just under half of the research sample report using facilities on a weekly basis. The majority of facility users tend to use facilities between 3 and 5 times per week. Given that there may be a variety of influences on adolescents choosing to, or being able to use a particular sport and recreation facility, the related findings on facility usage should be viewed quite positively. Nevertheless, despite this positive finding, a certain degree of dissatisfaction was expressed by facility users. For instance, a large percentage of weekly users expressed concern at the price of using facilities, their general upkeep and restrictions on use. While it was not questioned if this would stop facility users from continuing use, the issues raised should be taken into consideration.

7 Active Travel and Sport and Recreational Activity

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this section is to explore the use of active travel by adolescents. The graphs put forward will provide an overview of who is using active travel and the differences in use among specific groups.

7.2 Main Findings

Active travel is defined as those individuals who use physically active travel such as walking or cycling as a means of transportation to school. In total, 24% of the research sample use active transport as a means of travel to school. No major difference was found among male and female (23% versus 25%) use of active transport. The majority of individuals, who use active transport, live within one mile of their school as shown in figure 7.1. Furthermore, the percentages of those using active travel drops the further individuals live from their respective school.

Figure 7.1 **Percentage of Adolescent Males and Females who actively commute to School by Distance from School**

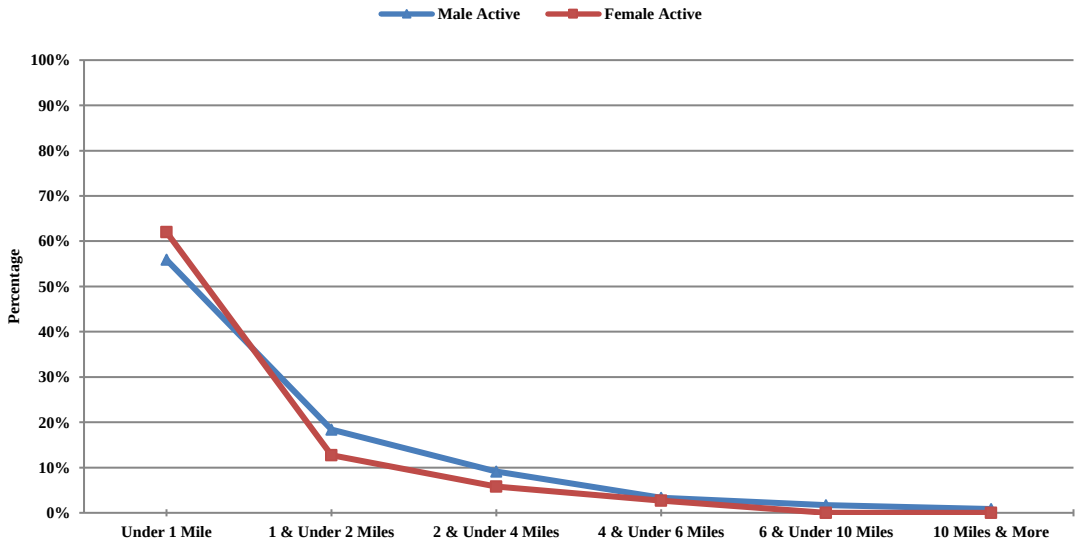
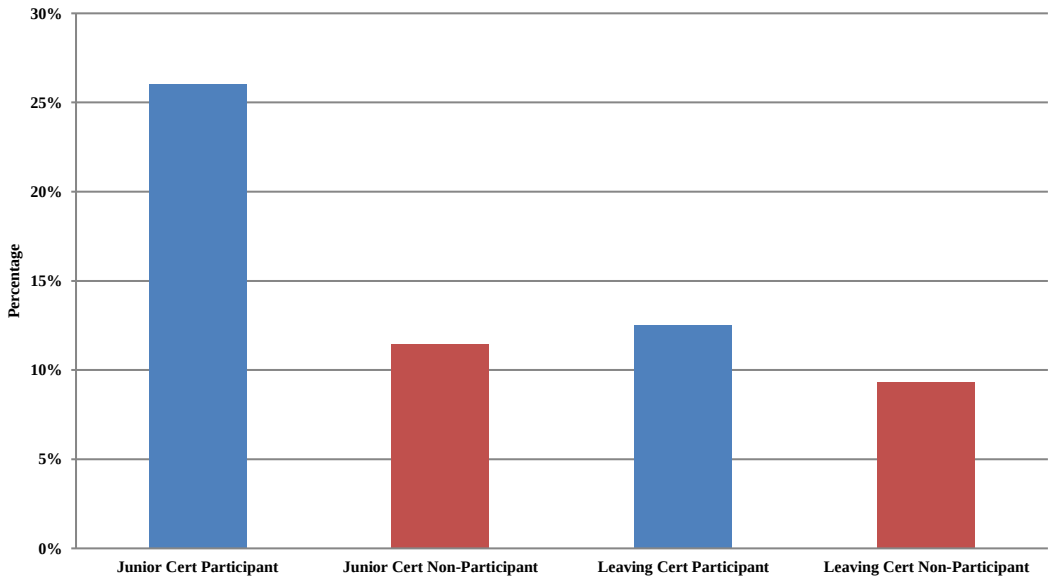


Figure 7.2 illustrates the percentage of those who used active travel that lived within one mile of their school and were both participants and non-participants in sport and recreation activities. As shown in the figure, those who were active in sport and recreation activities appeared to be greater users of active travel. In addition, the difference in active travel was higher among junior certificate active sport and recreation participants compared to leaving certificate participants.

Figure 7.2 **Percentage of Junior and Leaving Certificate Students who live within 1 Mile of School who Actively Commute by Sport and Recreation Participation Status**



7.3 Discussion

According to the CSO (2007b), 27% of teenagers aged between 13 and 18, use active transport as a method of travel to school each day. The CSO also report that 24% of adolescents from Waterford city and county use active transport. This finding is similar to that found in the present study. According to CSO data, Irish figures for active travel are quite low and have been dropping for quite some time. For instance, in 1986, 46% of students used active transport (CSO, 2007b). Presently as shown, this figure is much lower.

Distance appeared to be key barrier to using active travel. As shown in figure 7.1, the further students lived from school, the less likely they were to use active travel. This however is unsurprising given the time and structural barriers that would inherently affect those who live further away from their particular school. In respect of the influence of sport and recreation participation on active transport use, it would appear that those who are active participants in sport and recreation events are more likely to use active travel. This may perhaps suggest that a beneficial relationship exists between the use of active transport and sport and recreation participation. From a policy perspective, it is perhaps worth exploring the promotion of this relationship and advocating the health benefits associated therein. Having said this however, the difference observed among leaving certificate student groups in this research was small. This could possibly be the result of bags getting heavier as they move towards their leaving certificate years (Kirby and Inchley, 2009; Lodge, 2009). Therefore any policy implications considered should be mindful of this difference between junior and leaving certificate groups.

8 Lifestyle Behaviours and Sport and Recreational Activity

8.1 Introduction

This section will outline the level of smoking and alcohol consumption evident among the research sample. It will also seek to explore the influence of such behaviours on sport and recreation participation.

8.2 Main Findings

A total of 14% of the sample group smoke. A higher percentage of females claim to smoke regularly compared to males (17% versus 10%). A greater percentage of adolescents (44%) however report consuming alcohol on a regular basis. Again, females report greater interest in such lifestyle behaviours (49% versus 38%). Shown in figure 8.1, it can be seen that both of these lifestyle activities increase with age, but in particular alcohol consumption.

Figure 8.1 Percentage of Adolescents who Smoke and Drink Alcohol by Age

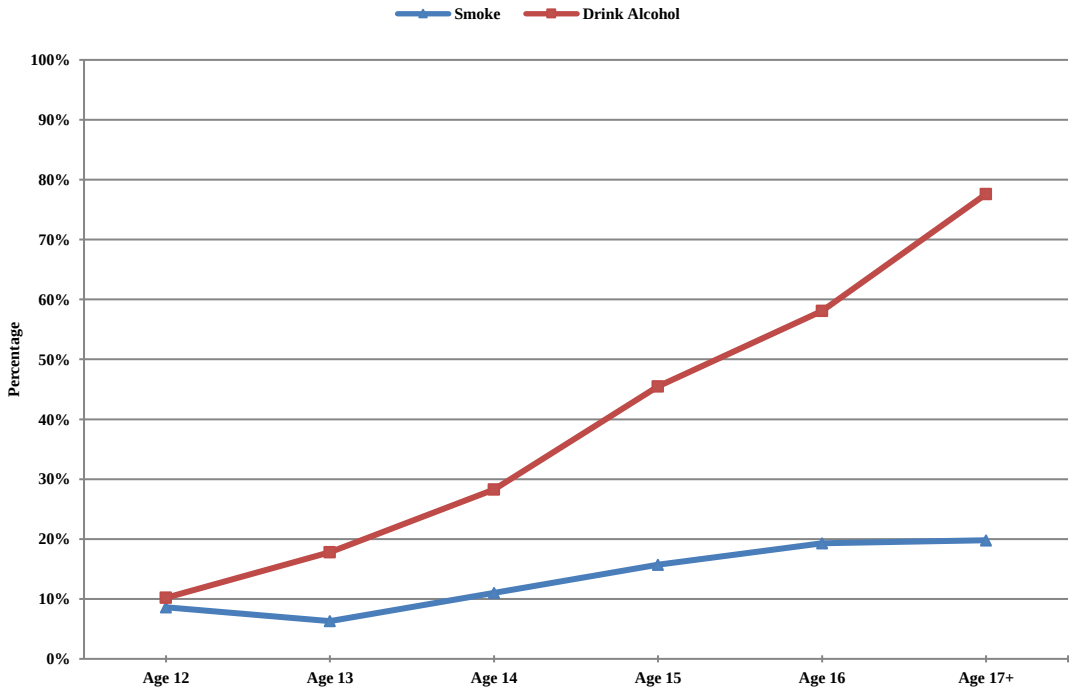
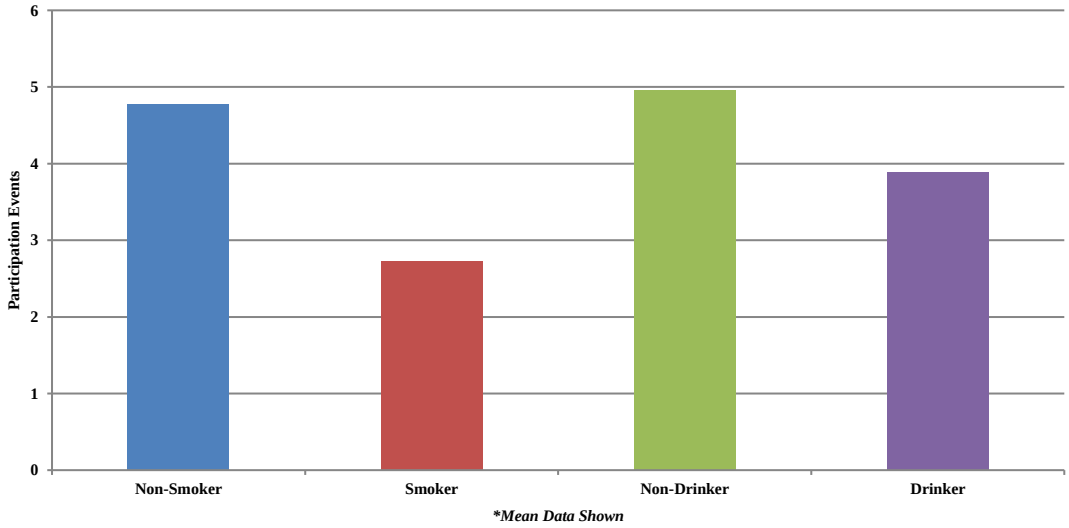


Figure 8.2 illustrates the mean number of sport and recreation participation events adolescents participate in based on their lifestyle activities. In both instances, those who choose not to smoke or consume alcohol regularly appear to have a higher participation in sport and recreation events per week. Specifically, there is 54% difference in sport participation between smokers and non-smokers and 24% difference between drinkers and non-drinkers. This suggests that sport and recreation participation may have a positive influence over adolescents' engagement in such lifestyle behaviours.

Figure 8.2 **Participation Events during Typical Week in Smokers and Non-Smokers and Drinkers and Non-Drinkers**



8.3 Discussion

The incidence of smoking and in particular alcohol consumption is increasingly becoming a problem among children in Irish society. This concern is echoed in the findings of this research. The level of smoking shown by the research sample falls in line with a similar study at the time of this research (Office of Tobacco Control, 2006). In a similar vein, the degree of alcohol consumption uncovered was broadly in line with an ESPAD survey at the time (Hibell et al., 2007). As shown in the findings above, individuals who do not smoke or consume alcohol had higher participation rates in sport and recreation events. This finding partially coincides with current research in the area. Lisha and Sussman (2010) for example, conducted a review of 34 peer-reviewed quantitative data-based studies on high school and college students. This research sought to examine the relationship between students sport participation and the use of alcohol and tobacco. Their analysis suggests that the majority of research found that participation in sports was negatively correlated to cigarette use. Conversely however, most studies pointed to a positive relationship between sport participation and alcohol consumption. Thus, as sport participation increased, so too did consumption of alcohol. While the present research conforms to the smoking findings, there would appear to be no apparent explanation for the difference in outcome with alcohol consumption.

9 Sedentary Behaviours and Sport and Recreational Activity

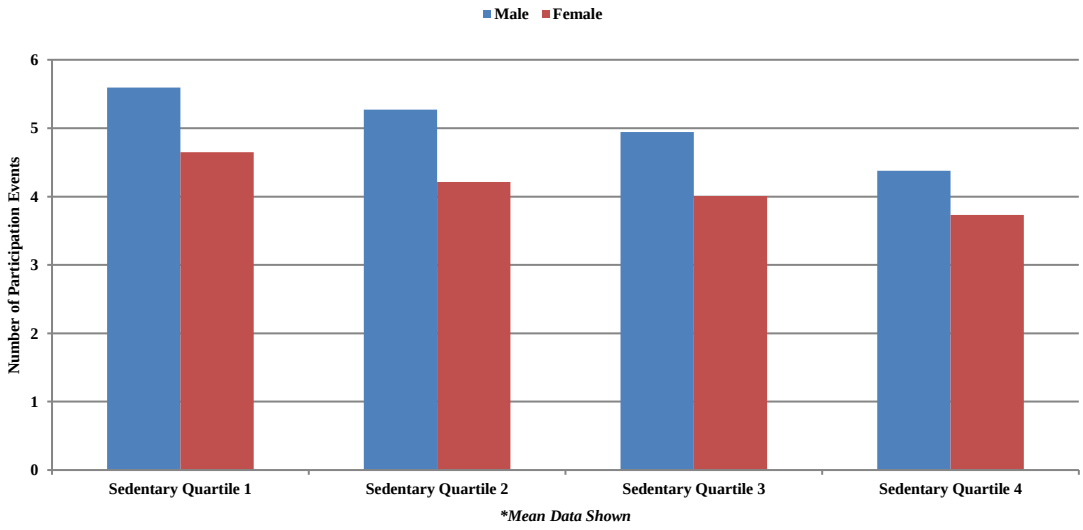
9.1 Introduction

It has been proposed by various academics that sedentary activities such as watching television, playing games consoles and using personal computers displaces time spent in sport and recreation activities. This section will explore that relationship and investigate differences between particular groups.

9.2 Main Findings

Figure 9.1 shows the difference in mean participation events across four sedentary index quartile groups. Quartile 1 represents the lowest sedentary index scores whereas quartile 4 represents the highest sedentary index scores. As shown in the figure, those individuals in the highest sedentary index quartile for both males and females have the lowest mean sport and recreation participation scores. This would appear to suggest that the more time spent using ICTs, the less an individual will participate in sport and recreation events. The percentage difference between quartile 1 and quartile 4 is 24% for males and 22% for females.

Figure 9.1 Sport Participation Events of Males and Females by Sedentary Index Quartile Group



9.3 Discussion

Various academics have attested to the relationship between time spent involved in sedentary activities such as watching television, playing games consoles and using personal computers and there displacement of sport participation and physical activity (Hager, 2006; Koezuka et al., 2006). While the present research did uncover a weak relationship between the two activities, the relationship was not strong enough to suggest that time involved in sedentary activities displaced time involved in sport and recreation events. This may be a result of methodological differences. For example, this research looked at sports participation, whereas other research has focused on the level of physical activity. Likewise, this research developed a sedentary index score

from a variety of ICT time related variables, whereas previous studies tend to use overall time as a variable.

10 Policy Implications of Research

The purpose of this study was both to depict the place of sport and recreation activity within the lives of Waterford city adolescents and examine the lifestyle pursuits of these teenagers. In addition to this, it was also sought to examine the influence of sport and recreation participation on adolescent lifestyle behaviours and vice versa. Having presented the key findings of this research, a number of policy recommendations will now be made with respect to specific areas covered in this report.

1. The findings on team and individual sport participation are unsurprising. The continued dominance of team sports and in particular soccer and gaelic games is evident in numerous studies to date. It could perhaps be argued that the dominance of these sports does not benefit increasing sport participation among individuals not interested in such activities. Future sports policy should perhaps look to enhance non-competitive sport and recreational opportunities aimed specifically at lower or non-participant adolescent groups.

2. The percentage of leaving certificate students, which acknowledge that study commitments act as a barrier to participation in sport and recreation activities is significant. As acknowledged earlier, various studies have found that participation in sport and physical activity is in fact beneficial for students' grades. It could thus be suggested that future policy should be focused at increasing awareness among parents and their children of the positive contribution which sport may provide to their academic success. Focused interventions in this regard may also yield greater participation in sport, particularly in late adolescence.

3. The popularity of walking as a recreational activity among female adolescents is noteworthy. Just over one fifth of all females surveyed went walking at least once in a typical week. Further research should examine the reasons for this interest in walking and explore the interest that females have in this recreational activity. Such knowledge may in turn be helpful in promoting other activities to female adolescents and direct future policy directives.

4. The views presented in this report on sports and recreational facilities in Waterford city are poor. Local government and perhaps the Waterford Sports Partnership should examine the issues outlined and look to inform facility owners of these concerns. State owned facilities could look to improve customer service and reward regular usage of facilities by adolescents and indeed other target groups.

5. As indicated in successive CSO reports, the percentage of adolescents who are using active transportation has been in decline since 1986. This is hugely

disappointing as an active adolescent may be more likely to use active transport particularly during their junior certificate years. To date, the government has been widely commended on the success of the cycle to work scheme. However, given the clear decline in adolescents using active travel to school, perhaps implementing a form of this policy in secondary schools may be worthwhile.

To conclude, this research has illustrated the state of sport and recreation participation in Waterford city prior to the current economic crisis. The research has examined the issues that surround participation and non-participation and depicted the lifestyle behaviours of a cohort of Irish adolescents. While many of the findings outlined have been referred to in previous studies, the data presented is relevant and useful from a sports development and sports policy perspective.

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