



Improving Sport Experiences for Women & Girls through Quality Sport, Long-Term Athlete Development and Physical Literacy:

Written Submission for the Study on the Participation of Women and Girls in Sport

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Submitted By:

Francesca Jackman, Manager of Strategic Initiatives, Sport for Life

778-433-2066 | francesca@sportforlife.ca

On behalf of Richard Way, CEO, Sport for Life

100-4636 Elk Lake Drive, Victoria, BC, V8Z 5M1

Recommendations

1. Entrench action in Quality Sport to optimize safe and inclusive sport environments for girls and women;
2. Consider Long-Term Developmental stages and Athlete Development Matrices to refine approaches to safe and inclusive sport environments for girls and women throughout the lifespan; and
3. Incorporate Physical Literacy development into approaches to increase women and girls participation in sport to improve long-term engagement in physical activities.

Using Quality Sport to Foster Social Connection and Engagement

In The Rally Report 2022 (Canadian Women & Sport), lack of *quality* experiences was the second most reported barrier to sport participation among 13 to 18-year-old girls and among the top five most reported barriers for 6 to 12-year-old girls. In contrast, social connection has been identified as the primary motivator for girls and women to participate and stay engaged in sport (Keeping Girls in Sport, Canadian Jumpstart Charities et al., 2018). **Sport for Life therefore recommends the use of quality sport as an approach to address issues associated with the mistreatment and participation of women and girls in sport.**

The goal of quality sport is to create positive experiences in supportive environments. Ultimately, if sport participation and physical activity isn't fun, progressive, positive, or welcoming, children, youth, and adults alike will turn to other activities that may not promote overall health and well-being. To drive experiences that lead to long-term participation in and enjoyment from sport and physical activity, quality sport necessitates: good people (i.e. trained and knowledgeable leaders), good programs (i.e. participant-centered with developmentally-appropriate programs and meaningful competition), and good places (i.e. safe, fun and welcoming environments). Achieving quality sport means achieving safe, inclusive and encouraging sport environments.

In a recent Sport Canada-funded pilot initiative, Sport for Life, in partnership with Canadian Women & Sport, have applied quality sport as a framework to optimize social connection, thus contributing to the engagement and retention of girls and women in sport. An output of the pilot initiative was a Quality Sport for Social Connection Checklist, which can be used by sport and physical activity leaders and practitioners to improve the treatment and participation of women and girls in sport.

Participant-Centered Approaches to Long-Term Development

Science, research, and decades of experience all point to the same thing: children and adults will get active, stay active, and even reach the greatest heights of sport achievement if they do the right things at the right times. Sport for Life's Long-Term Development (LTD) Framework describes what athletes should be doing at specific ages and stages to develop within a sport or activity throughout the lifespan, while its Athlete Development Matrix (ADM) outlines the physical (i.e. physical capabilities), technical (i.e. sport-specific competencies), psychological (i.e. feeling, thinking, doing) and life skills (i.e. community and social connection) that are

developed as a participant moves through the stages of LTD. Both the LTD Framework and the ADM identify age and stage distinctions between girls/women and boys/men, recognizing that growth and maturation will differ between sexes and genders.

As these materials continue to evolve based on emerging research to address challenges identified within the Canadian sport system, Sport for Life has begun to examine more heavily the impacts of growth and maturation on psychological and life skills in particular, as they pertain to safety and inclusion. From participant-centered and developmental perspectives, safe and inclusive environments that engage girls and women in quality sport experiences will look very different from one stage to another. Body image is a critical factor that influences sport participation and psychological safety for adolescent girls in particular (Koulanova et al., 2021).

Sport for Life therefore recommends the consideration of long-term developmental stages and athlete development matrices, particularly the development of psychological and life skills, to inform developmentally-appropriate approaches to safe and inclusive sport environments for female participants as they grow and mature.

Physical Literacy

Developing physical literacy – that is the fundamental movement skills (e.g. running, jumping, throwing), confidence and motivation to remain active throughout the lifespan, contributes to increased physical activity levels, improved mental health and well-being (Dudley et al., 2017; Jurbala, 2015; Whitehead, 2013) and thus a preventative measure for chronic diseases (Cairney et al., 2019). Physical literacy has been successful as a gateway to increased physical activity and wellness, in part due to its innate human-centered approach. Confidence, physical competence and intrinsic motivation are unique to each individual, but quintessential to long-term engagement in sport and physical activities.

Physical Literacy is therefore an important component to Sport for Life's approaches to fostering inclusion and engagement in sport for women and girls. **As such, Sport for Life recommends physical literacy development be incorporated into approaches to increase the participation of women and girls in sport and physical activity.**

About Sport for Life

Sport for Life is a nationally registered non-profit organization whose mandate is to create, share and mobilize. Sport for Life's purpose is to improve the quality of life for as many people as possible through sport and physical literacy. Sport for Life's primary activities include project management, resource development and knowledge mobilization. Over the past 15 years, Sport for Life has worked with Sport Canada implementing Long-Term Development of Sport and Physical Activity with all of the 60+ National Sport and Multi-Sport Service Organizations it funds. The organization serves diverse populations in more than 130 Canadian communities, and has collaborated with more than 100 organizations, to improve quality sport and physical literacy development for a diverse range of populations. Learn more at www.sportforlife.ca.