



Sport Participation in Canada

Chapter 1

1.0 Highlights

National Sport Participation Rate 1998

Canadians exhibited a dramatic shift in their involvement in sport. Fewer Canadians reported participating in sport in 1998 than six years earlier. In 1998, one-third (34%) of the Canadian population (aged 15 and over) participated in sport on a regular basis, down almost 11 percentage points from the 45% reporting participation in 1992.

Male and Female Rates

Male participation rates continue to be higher than that of females. While the proportion of both adult males and females playing sports declined, males playing sports (43%) continue to outnumber females (26%).

Age

Sport participation levels decrease dramatically as we age. The younger the individual, the more likely he/she is to participate in sport. Unfortunately, this active lifestyle does not seem to continue beyond our 20's.

Provincial / Regional Variations

Regional and provincial differences in sport participation were observed, with rates increasing as we move from east to west. In 1998, residents of the Atlantic Provinces and Ontario reported the lowest levels of sport participation, while Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia reported the highest.

Education

The higher the level of education attained, the higher the sport participation rate. In 1998, nearly one-half (46%) of those holding a university degree regularly participated in sport, compared with less than one-third (29%) of persons with some secondary schooling or less.

Income

The higher the household income, the higher the sport participation rate. In 1998, fifty percent (51%) of respondents in households earning incomes of \$80,000 or more participated in sport compared to one-quarter of respondents in households earning less than \$20,000.

Mother Tongue

In 1998, little difference was observed between the rate of Anglophones (37%) and Francophones (38%) engaged in sport. Interestingly, respondents speaking multiple languages reported the highest rate of participation (41%) and persons speaking a language other than French or English showed the lowest (26%).

Labour Force Status

Students (either with or without employment) showed the highest rate of involvement in sport at 64%, almost twice the national average. This observation is consistent with the trend that it is young people between the ages of 15-24 that tend to be most active in sport.

It seems that persons with the least amount of free time are the ones participating in sport. That is, while 40% of full-time workers engaged in sport on a regular basis, the rate drops to 33% for part-time workers¹ and to 23% of persons not in the labour force.

*Most Popular Sports*²

Golf, hockey, baseball and swimming were by far the sports most frequently reported by adult Canadians in 1998. Golf has replaced hockey as the number one sport activity reported. Over 1.8 million Canadians reported playing golf on a regular basis in 1998 (7.4% of the adult population) compared to 1.3 million (5.9%) in 1992. Hockey ranked second with 1.5 million adult Canadians (6.2%) playing hockey.

Swimming, golf, baseball and volleyball (in descending order) were the sports of choice for women 15 years and older, while men preferred hockey, golf, baseball or basketball.

¹ Less than 30 hours per week.

² Respondents may indicate participating in more than one sport.

Children and Sport

Just over half (54%) of Canadian children aged 5-14 were actively involved in sport. Girls (48%) tend to be less active in sport than boys (61%).

Family income is key to children's involvement in sport. Just under one-half (49%) of children from households with earnings under \$40,000 were active in sport, compared with 73% of those from households earning over \$80,000.

Clubs / Community Leagues

Over half (55%) of 'active Canadians'³ belonged to a local club, community league or other local amateur sport organization in 1998. This represents a substantial 20 percentage point increase in the proportion of active Canadians belonging to sport clubs over 1992 (34%).

Surge in women belonging to sport clubs. While nearly half (46%) of active males belonged to a sport club or community league in 1998, almost three-quarters (71%) of active females belonged.

Competitions and Tournaments

Of Active Canadians, just over one-third (36%) competed in competitions or tournaments in 1998, comparable to the proportion competing in 1992 (33%).

A gender gap exists when it comes to competing in sporting events. Of the 3 million Canadians competing, over two-thirds were men.

Young active Canadians between the ages of 15-18 competed in greater proportion than any other age group.

³ Number of Canadians (15 years and over) having reported participating in sport on a regular basis over the past 12 months.

Coaching

The number of Canadians coaching amateur sport doubled from 839,000 Canadians in 1992 (4%) to 1.7 million in 1998 (7%). This increase took place across all age groups with the exception of older Canadians aged 55 plus.

Male coaches tend to outnumber female coaches, yet not to the extent that one might expect, 56% of coaches were men and 44% were women. The data reveal an increase in the number of women taking an interest in coaching over this 6-year span. While 203,000 women (2%) reported coaching in 1992, this figure more than tripled to 766,000 women (6%) by 1998.

When controlling for age, the data show that young adults aged 15-18 were involved in coaching amateur sport at a higher rate than any other age group. In 1998, sixteen percent of young adults aged 15-18 reported coaching – over twice the national rate.

Refereeing

The number of adult Canadians involved in amateur sport as referees, officials or umpires increased from an estimated 550,000 in 1992 to almost 940,000 in 1998.

As expected, male referees, officials and umpires outnumbered females 5 to 1 in 1992. But by 1998, the gender gap decreased to a ratio of less than 2 males to 1 female.

Administrator/ Helper

In total, 1.7 million adult Canadians (7%) were involved in amateur sport as administrators or helpers in 1998, down from nearly 2 million (9%) in 1992.

Males and females were involved as administrators / helpers in equal proportion in 1998. Not so six years earlier, when almost two times as many men were sport administrators as were women.

Spectators

More Canadians watched amateur sporting events in 1998 than in 1992. The number of spectators increased from 5.1 million or 24% of adult Canadians in 1992 to 7.6 million or 32% in 1998 – an increase of 8 percentage points. The number of men and women watching amateur sport were about equal.

Benefits of Sport

Active Canadians ranked 'health and fitness' (71%) and 'relaxation' (69%) as the most important benefits of sport.

'A sense of achievement' was rated as a very important benefit by nearly 6 in 10 (57%) adult Canadians. Both 'family activity' (43%) and making 'new friends/acquaintances' (41%) ranked last in relative importance.

Being active in sport is related to positive perceptions of health. In 1998, 70% of Canadians active in sport indicated a health rating of very good to excellent compared to 54% of non-active Canadians.

Possible Factors Influencing Sport Participation

Various social and economic factors offer possible reasons for the decrease in sport participation by Canadians including an aging population, economic pressures, limited leisure time and the wide range of other leisure activities vying for our attention.