



Sport Participation in Canada

Chapter 3

3.0 Objectives

Few studies have provided information on trends in sport participation in Canada. Limited information does exist on the patterns of physical activity as released by the *Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute*¹ and on exercise frequency through the *National Population Health Survey*² produced by the Health Statistics Division at Statistics Canada. However, these studies take a broader view looking at various types of physical activities rather than focusing their research on sport. Little information is available on levels of sport participation by Canadians. Furthermore, comparisons between surveys can be misleading. Each study produces different estimates as a result of variations in the questions asked, the definitions used, scope and methodology. For example, the *National Population Health Survey* defines exercise to include vigorous physical activities such as calisthenics, jogging, racquet sports, team sports, dance classes or brisk walking for a period of at least 15 minutes. This definition includes a wider range of physical activities than the definition of sport used in the General Social Survey. For these reasons, this report focuses its analysis on the 1992 and 1998 sport supplements to the General Social Survey (GSS).

The two sport supplements to the General Social Survey provide a unique opportunity to describe and track patterns and changes in sport participation rates of Canadians over time. This rich data base allows researchers to identify key socio-demographic variables thought to have an influence on participation levels such as age, sex, level of education and household income, mother tongue and labour force status. Involvement in sport is not limited to active participation. Indirect involvement in amateur sport as a coach, referee or umpire, administrator or helper and as a spectator will also be explored. Additional questions asked of respondents included the benefits of sport, reasons for non-participation, and perceived level of life satisfaction, health status and sense of belonging to ones community.

¹ See their web site at www.cflri.ca

² Data is available through the Statistics Canada web site www.statcan.ca under Canadian Statistics or through Catalogue No. 82F0075XCB.

The purpose of this report is to produce timely and relevant research on the magnitude of, and changes in sport participation in Canada. It will further our understanding of the possible factors contributing to these changes, thus helping to meet the increased demand for relevant quantitative and qualitative data on sport.

The final section presents some social and economic factors that may help explain changes in sport participation rates. Possible reasons for these changes lie on a number of fronts including an aging population, the rising cost of sport equipment and registration fees, current economic pressures, limited leisure time and changing consumer tastes.

Admittedly, only two years of data are analyzed in this report – 1992 and 1998. It is difficult to draw conclusions based on only two years of data, and this report does not assume that any trends revealed will continue over the years. It would be interesting to see what patterns emerge over a much longer period of time. Nevertheless, this report provides a window on the lifestyles of Canadians in relation to sport in 1992 and 1998.

3.1 Definition of Sport

The General Social Survey determined ones involvement in sport by asking the question:

“Did you regularly participate in any sports during the past 12 months?”
‘Regularly’ meant that the respondent participated in a sport at least once a week during the season or during a certain period of time. For example, although bowling is not a seasonal sport, the respondent was to include bowling if it was played on a regular basis during a period of the year.

Guidelines for determining whether a physical activity fell within scope as a ‘*sport*’ were determined by Sport Canada. Specifically, a sport is an activity that involves two or more participants engaging for the purpose of competition. Sport involves formal rules and procedures, requires tactics and strategies, specialized neuromuscular skills, a high degree of difficulty, risk and effort. Its competitive mode implies the development of trained coaching personnel and does not include activities in which the performance of a motorized vehicle is the primary determinant of the competitive outcome.

Based on these general guidelines, a list of sports was provided by Sport Canada. In addition, a number of physical and leisure activities were excluded such as aerobics, dancercise, aquafit, bicycling for recreation or transportation, body building, car racing, fishing, hiking, jogging, lawn bowling, motorcycling, skate boarding, snowmobiling and walking. Further details about the GSS survey design, the survey questions, the list of sports included and those excluded are all contained in Chapter 16 and the Appendices.

3.2 Calculation of Rates

Participation rates can be calculated in a number of different ways. The participation rates in most of the tables use the total Canadian population aged 15 years and older as the denominator (TP= total population). Participation rates were also calculated using the total number of males 15 years and older (MP= male population) and total females 15 years and older (FP= female population). This allows one to view the proportion of sport participants within the total population, as well as within the male and female populations.

A second set of percentages were calculated using the population that actively participates in sport as the base, thus giving us a rate of '*Active Canadians*' (Active TP, Active MP, Active FP). This allows for comparisons within the active population. Footnotes at the end of each table indicate which sub-population was used in the calculation of the rates.