

Sport Participation in Canada

Chapter 4

4.0 National Trends in Sport Participation, 1992 and 1998

4.1 Fewer Canadians Participating in Sport

According to the latest information released by the General Social Survey, fewer Canadians (aged 15 and older) 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.

In 1998, 8.3 million Canadians or one-third (34%) of the adult population¹ participated in sport on a regular basis, down almost 11 percentage points from the 45% (9.6 million) reporting participation in 1992. This drop in the sport participation rate was widespread, cutting across all age groups, all provinces, both sexes, across education levels and income brackets.

In order to determine whether or not this decrease is statistically significant, a statistical test called the t-test was calculated. It was found that the drop in the sport participation rate from 1992 to 1998 is indeed statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. (see Appendix for details). Despite the recent emphasis on physical fitness, sport and health, Canadians exhibited a real decline in their rate of sport participation.

This downward trend is not to say that Canadians are not engaging in any physical activity. It is recognized that many Canadians engage in regular exercise through various physical fitness programs or classes, others enjoy jogging, gardening, power walking, etc. *The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute* recently reported that rates of physical activity have in fact been on the rise. Similarly, the *National Population Health Survey* reports that most of us are active, with over 9 out of 10 Canadians either walking for exercise, swimming, exercising at home, jogging, playing hockey or engaging in some form of physical activity. Canadians are indeed physically active but whether or not they are active in *sport* is the real focus of this report. The current paper analyzes data specific to participation in sport rather than physical activity in general. It examines but one component within the sport continuum - that of sport participation, and excludes other forms of physical activity from high performance and professional sport at one extreme through to physical fitness at the other end.

¹ 'Adult population' refers to the population surveyed by the GSS – specifically those aged 15 years of age and older.

4.2 How does Canada compare with other countries?

Although Australian and American statistics on sport participation are not comparable to the Canadian data in terms of definitions and methodologies used, it is still interesting to note that both the Australian and American rates are relatively similar to ours.

Australia

Australian statistics must be viewed with caution. Several definitional changes took place over the years. Initially, their sport participation data was categorized as either competitive or social. In 1996-97 the survey became compulsory resulting in a 10-percentage point increase in participation. Then in 1997-98 the survey cycle saw a broadening of the definitional scope of sport participation to include participation in organized and non-organized sport plus physical activities, resulting once again in significantly higher participation rates.

In order to confidently compare data across the years, participation data on organized sport and physical activity needs to be isolated and analyzed separately. The latest Australian participation rate for organized sport and physical activity was 30%,² comparable to the Canadian rate of 34%. Despite the methodological changes, the Australian participation rate has remained fairly steady since 1993 hovering between 28% and 30%.

USA

Few American studies have consistently measured trends in physical activity and sport. Those that do exist employ different methodologies, different target populations and sample sizes and date back to the mid-1980s and early 1990s. The data that does exist indicates that participation in sport and physical activity among adults has changed very little. Over 60% of American adults do not engage in sufficient levels of physical activity to provide health benefits, and more than 25% are not active at all. The latest United States Surgeon General's report on *Physical Activity and Health*³ indicates that 22% of adult Americans engaged in regular sustained physical activity, well below the Canadian rate of 34%.

² www.abs.gov.au/ausstats

³ www.cdc.gov/nccdphp/

Rates of sport participation in Canada are at par, if not higher than those reported in the U.S. and Australia. Nevertheless, the reduced level of sport participation in Canada, coupled with recent changes in our demographics, suggest that this downward trend may continue as our population ages. The Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute suggests that recent technological advancements have lead to increasingly sedentary lifestyles in Canada. As more of us continue to purchase computers and spend more of our leisure time surfing the Internet, fewer hours will be available for the pursuit of sport and physical activity. Surfing the net may be seen as a relatively inexpensive alternative leisure activity, compared with sport given the increasing cost of transportation, sport equipment, and registration fees. Physical inactivity is becoming a major public health issue that will likely impact on our already over-burdened health system.

4.3 More Men than Women Participated in Sport – The gender gap widens

Male participation rates continue to be higher than that of females; however, the proportion of both adult males and females playing sports

A substantial difference in sport participation rates continues to exist between the sexes. While the proportion of both males and females participating in sport declined from 1992 to 1998, the male participation rate continues to be higher than that of females. In 1998, 43% of adult ⁴ males reported playing sports on a regular basis compared with 26% of adult females.

The difference between male-female sport participation rates seems to be widening. In 1992 the data indicated a spread of 14 percentage points between the sexes, by 1998 the gap widened to 17 percentage points.

Another observation is the notable drop in the rate of females engaging in sport over this six-year period. In 1992 over one-third of adult females (38%) indicated being involved in sport. By 1998, this figure dropped 12 percentage points to just over one-quarter (26%) of adult females regularly participating in sport.

⁴ 'Adult' refers to persons 15 years of age and older.

Table 1.

Profile of Adult Canadians Regularly Participating in Sport by Sex, 1992 and 1998					
	1992		1998		net change
	000s	%	000s	%	
Male	5,454	52.3	5,140	43.1	-9.2
Female	4,141	38.1	3,169	25.7	-12.4
Total	9,594	45.1	8,309	34.2	-10.9

Participation rates were calculated using total Canadians 15 years and older within each gender category, thus providing gender-specific rates.

Source: General Social Survey, 1992 and 1998.

4.4 Sport Participation Decreases with Age

Youth most active in sport

Sport participation levels decrease dramatically as we age. The younger the individual, the more likely he/she is to participate in sport.

Recent trends reveal that levels of sport participation decrease rather 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. The youngest age group, 15-18 year olds reported the highest sport participation rate with seven out of ten (68%) involved in sport at least once a week in 1998 - twice the national rate (34%). This rate drops to 5 in 10 for persons aged 19-24, to 4 in 10 for the 25-34 age group, and to 2 in 10 for persons aged 55 and over.

Compared with the 1992 data, sport participation rates in 1998 dropped across all age groupings, but most notably for those between 25-34 and 35-54 years of age (decreases of 14 and 12 percentage points respectively). It is not surprising to see lower levels of sport involvement for people between the ages of 25 and 54. Adults in this age group are in the midst of the busiest point in their lives, occupied with university, career, family and child rearing, thus leaving little time for engaging in sport.

Table 2.

Age Profile of Canadians Regularly Participating in Sport, 1992 and 1998

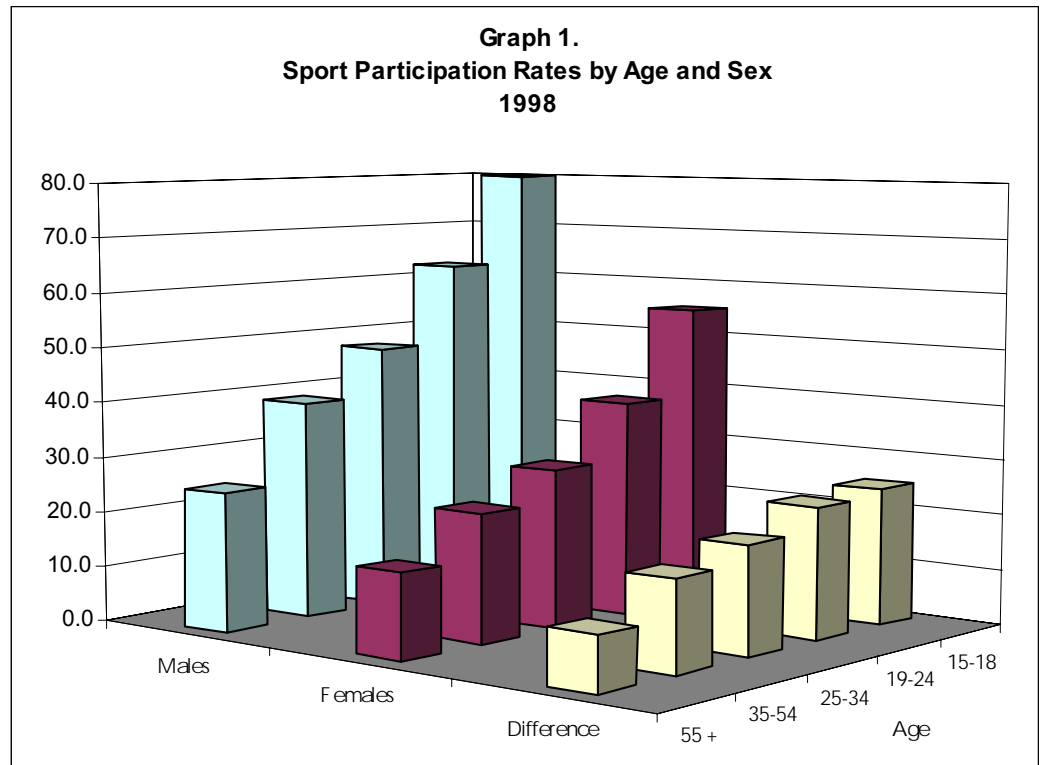
	1992		1998		Net change
	000s	%	000s	%	
Total	9,594	45.1	8,309	34.2	-10.9
Age group					
15-18	1,185	76.8	1,121	68.2	-8.6
19-24	1,375	61.3	1,235	51.1	-10.2
25-34	2,483	52.8	1,781	38.6	-14.2
35-54	3,196	43.0	2,937	31.4	-11.6
55 and over	1,355	25.3	1,234	19.8	-5.5

Participation rates were calculated using the total number of Canadians falling within each age category, thus providing age specific rates.

Source: General Social Survey, 1992 and 1998.

Chart 1 shows that while the gender gap in sport participation rates persists across all age groups, the gap decreases with age. The largest difference between rates of males and females participating in sport is observed in the two youngest age categories of 15-18 and 25-34 years of age – both showing a difference of 25 percentage points. This difference gradually decreases for the remaining age groups with older men and women (persons aged 55 and older) showing the smallest spread in participation rates.

Canada's population is aging. The baby boom has made a significant impact on the age distribution and structure of the general population. Current population projections point to the fact that the number of seniors living in Canada will increase notably over the next 20 years. This demographic change will likely have important consequences for the sport sector. As our society ages, with 'baby boomers' entering their fifties and sixties, the current level of sport participation will likely decrease even further.



	15 - 18	19 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 54	55 +
Males	80.0	63.0	48.3	39.5	25.1
Females	55.2	39.3	28.8	23.2	15.3
Difference	24.8	23.7	19.5	16.3	9.8

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998

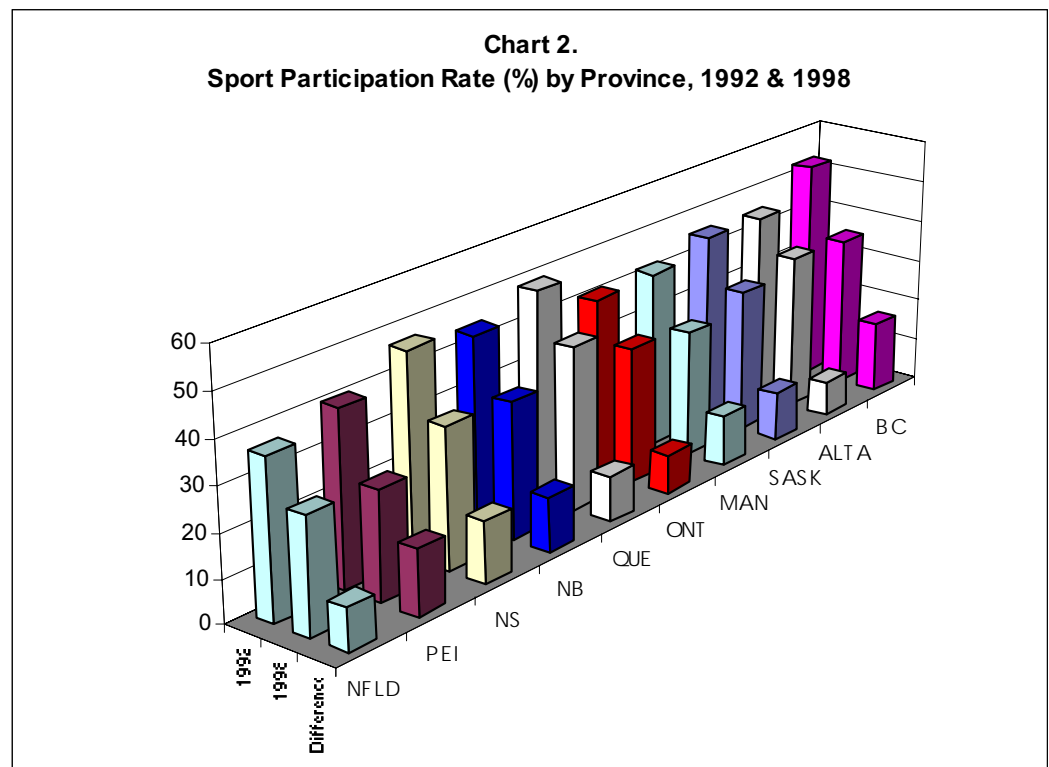
4.5 Provincial/Regional Trends

Quebec, Alberta and B.C. boast the highest sport participation rates

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.

Regional and provincial disparities in levels of sport participation observed in 1992 persist in 1998. East-to-west differences in sport participation were observed, with rates of participation generally increasing as we move from east to west. Residents of the Atlantic Provinces and Ontario reported the lowest levels of sport participation, while Quebec, Alberta and British Columbia reported the highest.

In 1992, British Columbia reported the highest participation rate with over one half (53%) of its population regularly participating in sport, followed closely by Quebec (49%) and Nova Scotia (47%). Each of these provinces boasted participation rates above the national average. By 1998, the proportion of sport enthusiasts in British Columbia dropped 17 percentage points to 36%, placing it in third position after Quebec (38%) and Alberta (37%). Quebec now boasts the highest rate of sport participation with nearly four in ten persons in Quebec engaged in sport on a regular basis.



	NFLD	PEI	NS	NB	QUE	ONT	MAN	SASK	ALTA	BC
1992	36.4	40.3	46.8	44.1	48.7	40.9	41.5	45.3	44.9	52.7
1998	26.6	25.2	32.6	31.6	38.1	31.8	29.1	33.9	36.8	35.8
Difference	9.8	15.1	14.2	12.5	10.6	9.1	11.8	11.4	8.1	16.9

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1992 and 1998

Table 3.

Sport Participation, Canada and the Provinces, 1992 and 1998

	1992		1998		net change
	000s	% participating	000s	% participating	
CANADA	9,594	45.1	8,309	34.3	- 10.8
Newfoundland	160	36.4	119	26.6	- 9.8
Prince Edward Island	40	40.3	27	25.2	- 15.1
Nova Scotia	333	46.8	248	32.6	- 14.2
New Brunswick	251	44.1	194	31.6	- 12.5
Quebec	2,655	48.7	2,288	38.1	- 10.6
Ontario	3,234	40.9	2,921	31.8	- 9.1
Manitoba	349	41.5	265	29.7	- 11.9
Saskatchewan	335	45.3	267	33.9	- 11.4
Alberta	869	44.9	833	36.8	- 8.1
British Columbia	1,368	52.7	1,147	35.8	- 16.9

Participation rates were calculated using the total number of Canadians aged 15 and older within each province.

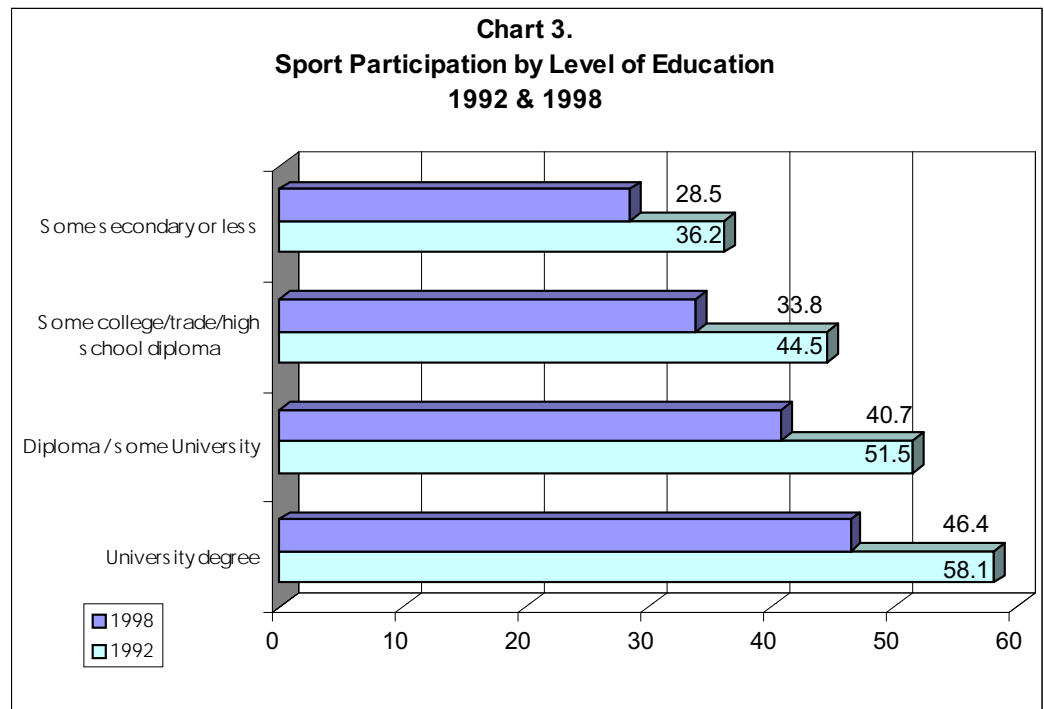
Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1992 and 1998

The higher the level of education attained, the higher the sport participation rate.

4.6 Sport Participation Increases with Education

Trend data indicate that the higher the level of education attained, the higher the sport participation level. In 1998, nearly one-half (46%) of those holding a university degree participated in sport compared with less than one-third (29%) of persons with some secondary schooling or less. A number of factors could help explain this relationship. It could be said, for instance, that the more educated a person is, the more aware he/she will be of the benefits of being active in sport. Alternatively, age may be an influencing factor since younger people tend to participate in sport at a higher rate, and in general, have attained higher levels of education than their older counterparts.

This education-participation trend observed holds for both men and women. Whether one is male or female, higher sport participation goes hand-in-hand with higher education.

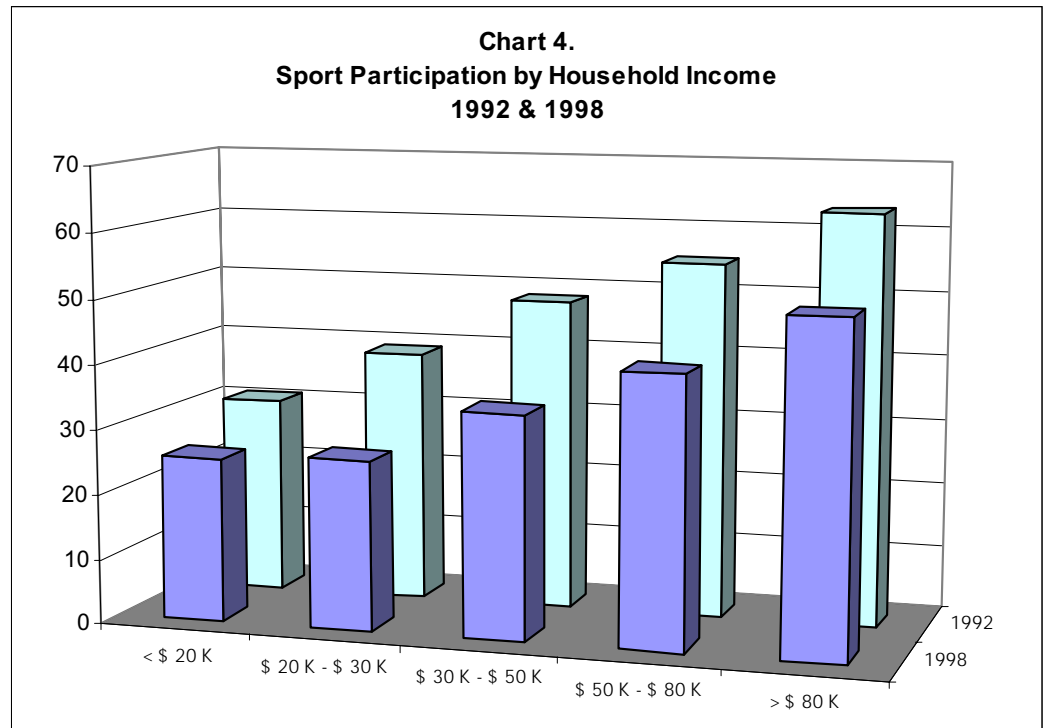


Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1992 and 1998

4.7 Sport Participation Increases with Household Income

The higher the household income, the higher the sport participation rate.

A similar trend holds true for household income and sport involvement. The higher the household income, the higher the sport participation level. In 1998, just over half of respondents (51%) in households earning incomes of \$80,000 or more participated in sport compared to one-quarter (25%) of respondents in households earning less than \$20,000. Admittedly, financial resources are required to buy the necessary equipment to engage in many types of sport. On the other hand, sports such as soccer, swimming and basketball can all be enjoyed with minimal, if any, cash flow. Thus economics cannot be the only factor at play. Persons from higher income households also tend to have higher levels of education, thus education may also be playing a role.



	< \$ 20 K	\$ 20K - \$ 30K	\$ 30K - \$ 50K	\$ 50K - \$ 80K	> \$ 80 K
1998	25.2	26.2	34.4	41.5	50.6
1992	30.5	39.2	48.2	54.8	63.2

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1992 and 1998

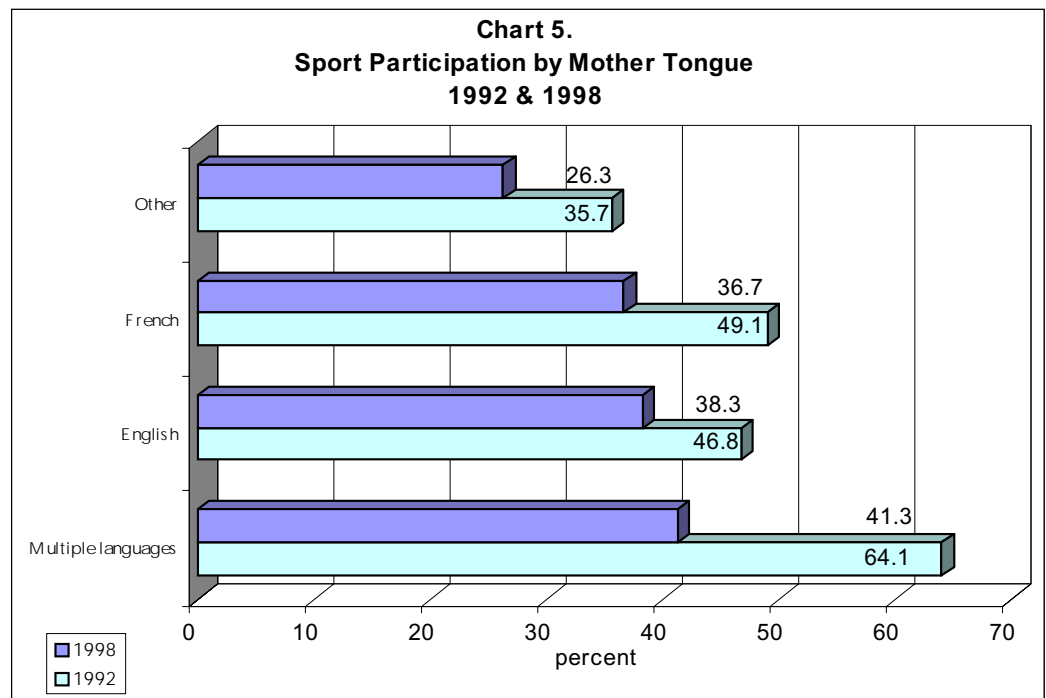
4.8 Mother Tongue

Persons Speaking Multiple Languages Most Active in Sport

In 1998, the rate of Anglophones and Francophones engaged in sport was similar. Respondents speaking multiple languages reported the highest rate of participation (41%)

The impact of mother tongue (i.e. first childhood language) on sport participation rates reveals some interesting patterns. In 1992 and again in 1998, little difference was observed between rates of Anglophones (37%) and Francophones (38%) engaged in sport. Interestingly, respondents speaking multiple languages reported the highest rate of participation (41%). Persons speaking a language other than French or English showed the lowest rate (26%) - ten percentage points lower than either the Anglophones or Francophones rates.

Comparing the 1992 rates with those of 1998, a drop of approximately 10 percentage points was observed for each linguistic category, with one exception. The rate for persons speaking multiple languages decreased by 23 percentage points over this 6-year period, from 6 out of 10 participating in sport in 1992, to 4 in 10 by 1998. It is difficult to say why this dramatic decrease occurred.



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1992 and 1998

4.9 Labour Force Status

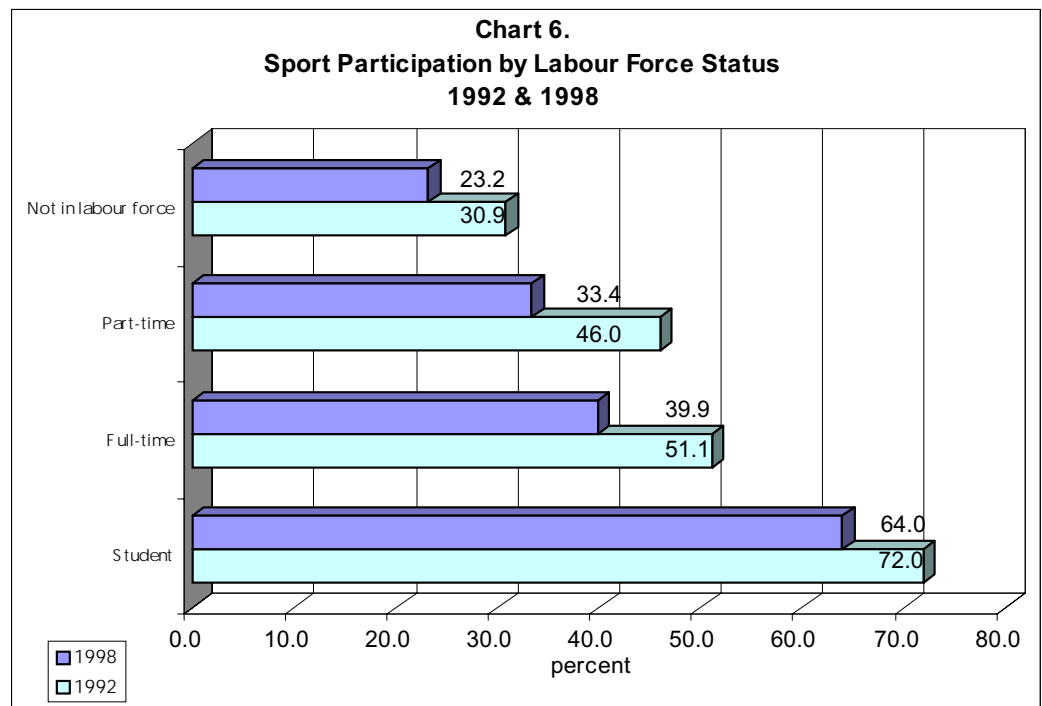
Students most active in sport

Students showed the highest rate of involvement in sport at 64%, almost twice the national average.

The General Social survey revealed differences in sport participation rates amongst the various types of employment activity. Students (either with or without employment) showed the highest rate of involvement in sport at 64%, almost twice the national average. This observation is understandable given the trend that it is young people between the ages of 15 - 24 that tend to be most active in sport and most likely to still be attending school.

Persons with the least amount of free time are the ones participating in sport.

As for the remaining employment categories, it seems that persons with the least amount of free time are the ones engaging in sport. That is, while 40% of full-time workers reported participating in sport, the rate drops to 33% for part-time workers,⁵ and to 23% for those not in the labour force.



Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1992 and 1998

⁵ Working less than 30 hours per week.

Table 4.

Profile of Canadians (aged 15 + years) who regularly participate in Sport, 1998						
	Total		Male		Female	
	000s	%	000s	%	000s	%
Total participating	8,309	34.2	5,140	43.1	3,169	25.7
Age group						
15-18	1,121	68.2	688	80.0	433	55.2
19-24	1,235	51.1	760	63.0	475	39.3
25-34	1,781	38.6	1,121	48.3	660	28.8
35-54	2,937	31.4	1,852	39.5	1,085	23.2
55 and over	1,234	19.8	719	25.1	516	15.3
Level of education						
Some secondary or less	1,794	28.5	1,115	36.0	679	21.3
Some college/trade/high school	2,049	33.8	1,262	44.3	787	24.5
Diploma/some University	2,522	40.7	1,529	51.7	993	30.6
University degree	1,900	46.4	1,210	53.0	690	38.1
Family income						
Less than \$20,000	581	25.2	278	29.9	303	22.0
\$20,000 to \$29,999	479	26.2	274	32.9	205	20.6
\$30,000 to \$49,999	1,465	34.4	849	41.9	616	27.5
\$50,000 to \$79,999	1,833	41.5	1,260	52.2	572	28.5
\$80,000 or more	1,602	50.6	1,136	57.3	466	39.3
Province of residence						
Newfoundland	119	26.6	78	35.3	40	17.7
Prince Edward Island	27	25.2	17	32.7	9	16.4
Nova Scotia	248	32.6	162	43.7	87	22.3
New Brunswick	194	31.6	115	38.2	78	25.0
Quebec	2,288	38.1	1,329	45.2	959	31.3
Ontario	2,921	31.8	1,861	41.3	1,060	22.7
Manitoba	265	29.7	163	37.0	102	22.5
Saskatchewan	267	33.9	177	45.5	90	22.6
Alberta	833	36.8	532	47.0	301	26.7
British Columbia	1,147	35.8	705	44.6	442	27.3
Labour force participation						
Full time	4,544	39.9	3,249	47.0	1,295	28.9
Part time	539	33.4	174	47.7	364	29.1
Student with/without employment	1,515	64.0	917	76.3	598	51.3
Not in labour force	1,562	23.2	732	29.9	830	19.3
Mother tongue						
English only	4,347	38.3	2,766	48.8	1,580	27.8
French only	1,586	36.7	908	45.0	678	29.4
Other only	620	26.3	410	33.9	210	18.2
Multiple languages	1,719	41.3	1,029	49.9	689	32.9

The participation rate is calculated using the total Canadian population 15 years and older for each designated category.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1998