



Foster the Future

Strategies for Expanding & Sustaining Girls Hockey



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Girls in Youth Sports – U.S

- Less likely to have ever played sports (43.1%) vs. boys (34.5%)
- Dropout rates are significantly higher for girls (36.1%) vs. boys (30.4%)
 - Attrition rate is 2-3x greater for girls on a yearly basis
- **First major declines in participation occur around 12-13y.o**
- Disparities are greater for girls from minority and low-income families



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Girls in Youth Hockey – VT

- Girls made up 29.7% of USAH registered youth players in VT for '23-24 season
- Registrations increased 2.4% for girls vs. decreased 6.4% for youth since 2021
 - However, 6u registrations decreased 11% for girls in same timeframe
- **Largest dropout rates occurring at 10u to 12u (20.6%) and 14u to HS age (45.6%)**



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**Why is sport participation lower
for girls than boys?**



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Influences on Sports Participation

Stereotypes

Lack of support
from parents

Coach & team
environment

Lack of role
models

Cost



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Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes continue to prevail in sports – sports are seen as masculine and more important to boys overall

- Subsequently, girls are less encouraged and provided fewer opportunities
- Girls feel unwelcome and that they don't belong
- Girls experience teasing more often in adolescent years – this leads to greater likelihood of:
 - Depression / anxiety
 - Body shame
 - Low self-perceptions (Self-esteem, Self-confidence)
 - Decreased motivation for skill development
 - Decreased desire to stay in sports



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Lack of Parental Support

Parental support plays a huge role in sport participation for girls vs. boys

- Amount of support did not differ for boys who play vs. dropped out, whereas support is significantly greater for girls who play vs. dropped out

One third (32%) of parents endorse the belief that boys are better at sports than girls and that sport is more important to them

- Parents with limited finances will prioritize participation of their son over their daughter

Parents are unaware of the positive benefits of sports participation

- Physical
- Social / emotional
- Academic / leadership



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Coach & Team Environment

Girls are more likely to attribute negative coaching or team experiences as the reason for leaving sports compared to boys

- When environment is too competitive (winning at all costs), players become rivals instead of peers – lack of support between teammates
- When environment is not competitive at all (all about fun), players feel like their effort and achievements aren't important



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Lack of Female Role Models

Female role models in sports are few or minimally visible

- This perpetuates the stereotype that sports are not for girls – they cannot see a future past youth play

Only 27% of youth sport coaches are women

- For USA Hockey registered coaches, only 5.6% are women

Fewer than 15% parents encourage their daughters to watch women's sports and expose them to female role models



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Program Cost – a barrier for all

Cost is the primary barrier to entry into sport, as well as for retention of players, for both girls and boys

High costs disproportionately affects girls, especially from minority families

- Ties back to perception of sports being more important for boys than girls

More resources are devoted towards boys sports than towards girls sports

- Funding
- Ice time / availability
- Equipment
- Extra-curricular activities



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What can we do to improve participation in hockey for girls?



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Educate and Involve Parents

Parents who value on sports are more likely to have players who feel the same

- Host a pre-season “open house” to discuss your program with parents
- Provide information on the positive benefits of sports for girls
 - Make it easily accessible and understandable (website, brochures, flyers etc.)
- Encourage parents to be involved – support comes in a variety of flavors
- Encourage parents & players to attend/watch women’s sports



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Table 1: Benefits of Sport Participation

Physical Benefits

- Lower risk of obesity
- Lower blood pressure
- Higher levels of cardio-respiratory fitness
- Reduced risk of cardiovascular disease
- Reduced risk of breast cancer

Social/Emotional Benefits

- Improved psychological well-being
- Greater life satisfaction
- Stronger sense of belonging
- Improved self-esteem
- Reduced symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress

Academic/Leadership Benefits

- Improved academic achievement
- Higher high school graduation rates
- Higher college attendance and retention
- Greater involvement in extracurricular activities
- Opportunities for leadership and learning

From Staurowsky et al., 2020. Chasing Equity: The Triumphs, Challenges, and Opportunities in Sports for Girls and Women.



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Recruit Coaches for Positive Team Environment

Girls continue with sports when coaches create an enjoyable team culture

- Employ a “mastery-based” strategy to coaching
 - Balance of fun, skill development, & healthy competition
- Encourage individual & team goal setting throughout season
 - Reinforces that their effort matters & coaches care about their growth
- Incorporate team-building & community outreach to fulfill social needs
- Focus on recruiting female coaches / staff



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Expose Players to Female Role Models

Female role models increase feelings of social inclusion and belonging

- Connect / build relationships with older girls' & women's teams
- Recruit women to be visible members of your association
- Allow and encourage student volunteer coaching
- Provide opportunities for players to become role models themselves



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Challenge Gender Stereotypes

Girls & boys are psychologically similar – there are more differences within groups than between groups

- Use inclusive language in all association communications
- Increase inclusion of women in your association
- Institute policies that ensure equity in resources to youth & girls teams
- Highlight / recognize players for their efforts / achievements



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Mitigate Effect of Cost

Cost is the primary barrier to entry and retention in sport

- Incorporate alternative practice / training options for teams
- Offer lower commitment options for introductory / LTP programs
- Host equipment trade / resale events
- Apply for USA Hockey growth grants through VSAHA



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Assess & Reassess for Success

Program improvement requires regular reassessment for success

- Complete a needs-based or SWOT analysis as an association
- Analyze registration data trends
- Survey parents and players for feedback – current & past participants
- Interview coaches and volunteers for feedback



Resources

- Zarrett, N., Veliz, P., & Sabo, D. (2020). *Keeping Girls in the Game: Factors That Influence Sport Participation*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED603915.pdf>
- Zarrett, N., Cooky, C., & Veliz, P. (2019). *Coaching through a Gender Lens: Maximizing Girls' Play and Potential*. https://www.womenssportsfoundation.org/articles_and_report/coaching-gender-lens-maximizing-girls-play-potential/
- Staurowsky, E. J., Watanabe, N., Cooper, J., Cooky, C., Lough, N., Paule-Koba, A., Pharr, J., Williams, S., Cummings, S., Issokson-Silver, K., & Snyder, M. (2020). *Chasing Equity: The Triumphs, Challenges, and Opportunities in Sports for Girls and Women*. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED603936.pdf>
- Turner, K., Rodriguez, C., Souto, K., Vital, S., Williams, C. W., & Wright, E. M. (2022, June). Getting and keeping K-12 girls in sports and physical activity: Evidence-based best practices and keys. *Positive Coaching Alliance*. <https://positivecoach.org/gender-equity-initiative/>