MAKING THE CASE FOR YOUTH SPORTS

GIRLS AND SPORTS
IMPORTANT TRENDS

• Girls are participating in sports at a significantly higher rate than before Title IX was enacted in 1972. Currently, 1 in 3 girls are active through sports participation.\(^1\)
• However, one third of girls barely meet minimal physical activity standards and the remaining third are completely sedentary.
• Girls are twice as likely to drop out of sports as boys.\(^2\)
  o Girls drop out of sports at younger ages.\(^3\)

KEY FACTS AND STATISTICS

Education
Studies\(^4\) report a number of encouraging academic findings including:
• Girls who participate in sports are more likely to achieve academic success than those who do not play sports.
• Female high school athletes expressed a greater interest in graduating from both high school and college.
• Female athletes from ethnic minority groups reported better school grades and greater involvement in extra-curricular activities than non-athletes, and in some cases are considerably less likely to drop-out from school.
• Sports participation can help undermine traditional gender stereotyping in terms of academic aptitude, by demonstrating an association between girls’ engagement in sports and improved performance in science and math.

Violence and Gang Involvement
• For, girls, being on a sports team and being physical active is significantly associated with decreased violent behavior, carrying a weapon, and being in a gang.\(^5\)

Physical Health
• “Evidence suggests a positive relationship between physical activity and a host of factors affecting girls’ physical health, including diabetes, blood pressure and the ability to use fat for energy. Second, physical activity could reduce the risk of chronic diseases in later life.”\(^6\)
• “Regular activity beginning in childhood helps to improve bone health, thus preventing osteoporosis, which predominantly affects females.”\(^7\)
“Obesity is particularly prevalent in girls from highly urbanized areas, some ethnic minorities and the disabled.”

The greater the level of physical activity among high school girls, the greater the impact on healthy body mass indices. Of high school girls who played on three or more athletic teams, 80% had a healthy BMI compared to 75% of moderately involved athletes and 60% of non-athletes.

Mental Health
- Moderate levels of exercise and/or sports activity helped protect girls and women against depression.
- Female high school/college athletes were less likely to consider, plan, or attempt suicide.
- Adolescent females tend to have higher self-esteem than non-participant females.
- Physical activities may help them develop a sense of ownership of their bodies and access the types of activity experiences traditionally enjoyed by boys.
- Some female athletes report having a stronger sense of identity and self-direction.

Sex and Reproductive Health
- “Female athletes were less likely to have unprotected sex, sex with multiple partners, or sex under the influence of alcohol/drugs.”
- “Although there is a shortage of research in this area, early studies conducted in the US have found that adolescent girls who participate in sports tend to become sexually active later in life, have fewer partners, and, when sexually active, make greater use of contraception than non-sporting girls.”

Drugs
- “Female athletes who participated on one or two school or community sports teams were significantly less likely to smoke regularly than female non-athletes. Girls on three or more teams were even less likely to smoke regularly.”
- “Two nationwide studies found that female school or community athletes were significantly less likely to use marijuana, cocaine, opiates, tranquilizers, prescription drugs, or “club drugs” like ecstasy or GHB.”
The Center for Research on Women and Girls in Sports lists the following as barriers girls face when participating in sports:

- Interpersonal - Due to cultural traditions or stereotypes and gender appropriate activities, many girls experience low family support for being physically active.

- Psychological – Having little experience playing sports successfully and connecting their confidence to their body image, many girls are not confident in their athletic ability and have low physical self-efficacy.

- Time-based - Girls are many times responsible for chores and babysitting younger siblings making it difficult to complete their homework and attend practice or games after school.


