

Understanding Barriers to Participation for Females in Club Sport

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Abstract

Aim

The aim of this paper is to gain an understanding of the barriers to participation for female participants in club cricket competitions, with particular focus on the continuation from junior, modified cricket into regular club cricket.

Theoretical Background

Participation in sport is associated with physical, psychosocial and economic benefits for the individual and the community, such as a reduction in cardiovascular disease risk factors, increased positive social outcomes and increased self esteem (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2006). Evidence also suggests that people who play sport during adolescence are much more likely to be physically active adults (Tammelin, 2005).

Community based sporting clubs are seen as an ideal setting for public health promotion, particularly in the promotion of physical activity. There are a wide variety of opportunities to participate in community club sport in Australia and the introduction of modified sport for juniors has enabled further physical activity opportunities for children. However, concern has been raised that increasing membership rates of juniors into modified club sport is not matched by associated increases in adult membership (Eime, Payne & Harvey, 2006). Also of concern is research which indicates that boys show higher participation rates in sport compared to girls and that young girls are increasing time spent in sedentary activities. In 2004-05, only 30% of Australian females aged 15-24 participated in levels of physical activity recommended in the National Physical Activity Guidelines (AIHW, 2006).

In order to better understand why these trends are occurring, research was undertaken with the Victorian Women's Cricket Association (VWCA). A series of focus groups with girls aged from 10 to 14 years were conducted to investigate the barriers to participation for female participants in the Victorian club cricket competition.

The research focused particularly on development and progression from the junior, modified cricket programs (such as Kanga Cricket), into a regular club cricket competition. The results of the study will allow sporting organisations to more effectively target junior development programs and develop pathways into adult sport in order to retain club memberships and promote lifelong physical activity habits.

Research Design

The study is qualitative in nature. Eight focus groups, involving one hundred female school students in years five, six, seven and eight were conducted following their participation in the 2006 Victorian schools cricket carnival.

Results

Limited awareness of existing female teams and clubs, negative attitudes of family and friends towards women's cricket (and therefore lack of support), societal perceptions of cricket as a 'boys' sport and concern over injury were identified as barriers to continuation of junior females into club teams.

Conclusions

There is a need to establish strategies to support the transition of youth females into adult competition. An increased female presence in the sport is required to demystify cricket as being 'male only'. This would include greater promotion of female role models in the media and in the community, provision of specific information regarding existing clubs and developmental pathways to schools and promotion of the social aspects of belonging to a club.

References

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