

## RESEARCH STUDY: RETAINING THE MEMBERSHIP OF WOMEN IN SPORT



**Report to the Government of Australia – Office for Sport – Department of Health**

**December 2013**



**Australian Government**

## **Confederation of Australian Sport**

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CAS will continue to foster and promote its key properties being:

- Australian Masters Games
- Australian Sport Awards

## **Acknowledgements**

### **Contributors and Reviewers**

Grateful thanks are given to the generous and insightful contributions made by:

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### **Organisational Support**

Thank you to the following organisations for their generous support of this project.

Australian Government - Office for Sport – Department of Health  
 Australian Womensport and Recreation Association; Australian Sports Commission  
 Sport and Recreation Victoria; SportInfo

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### **Citation**

Confederation of Australian Sport (CAS). *Retaining the Membership of Women in Sport*, Canberra, CAS 2013.

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Published by the Confederation of Australian Sport

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## Executive Summary

The multi-dimensional and highly demanding lifestyles of women in Australian society today place many challenges and obstacles in the way of a woman's continuation or adoption of sporting pursuits during her adult life stages.

This study provided insights from 1,121 Australian women masters sport competitors on the motivations, challenges, needs and issues that they face in the decision to continue playing sport throughout their adult life.

The study used an on-line survey emailed to 7,400 Australian Masters Games female participants from the past four Australian Masters Games held from 2007 – 2013. It was supplemented by 21 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with female competitors from the 14<sup>th</sup> Australian Masters Games held in Geelong in October 2013.

The aims of the research are outlined below:

- (a) **Challenges:** To identify the issues that Masters aged women face as challenges to their continuing participation in sport;
- (b) **Strategies:** To ascertain the personal strategies that women employ to enable them to continue with the required regular commitment;
- (c) **Motivation:** To learn 'why women want to participate in sport' and,
- (d) **Solutions:** To determine what could be done to make continuing in sport more accessible, doable and desirable for women throughout Australia.

Many of the responses were inspirational and uplifting as the essential elements and benefits of playing sport were effusively relayed. Clearly the women surveyed have succeeded in continuing their participation in sport and active recreation to varying degrees and the insights they provided on how they maintain regular participation will be useful to sporting organisations, to government officials, health promotion organisations and to other women themselves who may be confronted with similar issues and challenges.

The major challenges that Masters aged women face to their continuing participation in sport are principally around juggling the many and diverse roles they have with family and work commitments. There is a 'balance' and 'sacrifice' required with family and work obligations to allow sufficient time to participate regularly in sport. The individual situations may fluctuate for women over time to meet their differing needs during stages of family growth and/or career development.

The balance required is not simply of time commitments, but also of attitude and levels of encouragement (or discouragement) as women struggle with gender and age stereotyping. There seems to be a perception that women have a lesser right to time for exercise, physical activity and sport than other members of the family unit, such as their spouse or children.

The need for attitudinal change in the community about a woman's entitlement to time for personal sport and active recreation presents an opportunity for those involved in policy and health promotion.

Availability, access and awareness of sporting opportunities on the local level and affordability are also challenges to women's participation.

The study reveals the personal strategies that women employ to enable them to continue with regular commitment in sport or active recreation. These strategies stem from the personal desire and commitment to make sport a priority for a range of individual reasons including health, enjoyment, wellness, personal space and by valuing the social connections and friendships.

Some flexibility in work and home commitments is central to a successful strategy, as indicated by 52% of those surveyed, while having a supportive partner to share family workloads was shown to be key in 43% of cases. Support networks to share child minding commitments were mentioned as ingredients of success, while additional facilities and services provided by the sport club or organisations themselves were appreciated in the limited cases where they exist.

Survey results showed the following in regard to the major motivations for participating in sport:

- For 85% of respondents, participation in sport is for the physical factors – fitness and feeling healthy.
  - For 71% of survey respondents, social factors are a major reason for participating
- Playing sport:
- Gives a sense of achievement - it gives me confidence
  - I love being part of a team - I enjoy the camaraderie - it makes you feel great afterwards
  - A sports club makes it easy to get together with friends.
- For 51% of respondents, the competitive factors were important with the thrill of competition and the desire to improve personal and team performances mentioned.

A range of measures were identified that would make continuing in sport more accessible, doable and desirable for women throughout Australia. Investigating and taking some or all of the steps outlined in this report may increase the participation of women in sport and active recreation significantly because 65% of women surveyed said that they would like to spend more time than they currently do playing sport.

Pursuing and promoting the right for women to spend time exercising and enjoying sport is something that external parties may be able to influence through education to change community attitudes. Encouragement of employers to increase flexibility of work hours may assist businesses by providing healthier, committed female employees, is just one example.

Linked to attitudinal change is the opportunity to promote women as sports players and organisers. Levels of media promotion of women's sport lags behind that of men's sport and this issue should continue to be addressed by government and national sporting organisations in the future.

Establishing and encouraging the lifelong habit of sport and physical activity in girls through the education system and broader community is essential. The characteristics of sport that women and girls tend to respond to most (i.e., social, friendship, enjoyment) should be used as part of the specific encouragement for female participation.

A range of practical issues were raised in this study that would facilitate greater women's participation in sport:

- Provision of child care facilities;
- Increasing affordability – reducing costs of participation in sporting competition and events;
- Scheduling of sporting competitions – insights were provided about the structure and timing of sporting competition;

- Access and availability of local sporting facilities;
- Access and availability of sports officials and;
- Promotion of local sporting opportunities – improved advertising and promotion.

Results and insights from this study will provide greater understanding of those participating in masters aged women's sport and may prompt structural changes in the delivery of women's sport that will improve opportunities for access. It is hoped that this will lead to an increase in the numbers of women participating regularly in sport, increased time allocated to weekly sporting endeavours, enhanced enjoyment, greater retention and longevity in sport over the long term.

The results of this study provide encouragement for the work of the Australian Womensport and Recreation Association, the Australian Sports Commission, State and Territory Governments and indeed the Confederation of Australian Sport to actively pursue greater opportunities for building on women's participation in sport.

For National Sporting Organisations this study will provide feedback on structures or initiatives that they already have in place or that are planned for implementation. The study also provides insight and some guidance on retention strategies worth considering and pursuing.

Finally, this study provides encouragement and incentive for all interested stakeholder groups to do much more to support Australian women's continuation in sport because 65% of women surveyed said they would like to play more sport than they currently do.

## Chapter 1: Introduction and aims of the study

The multi-dimensional and highly demanding lifestyles of women in Australian society today place many challenges and obstacles in the way of a woman's continuation or adoption of sporting pursuits during her adult life stages.

The benefits gained by individuals from participating in sport and active recreation from the physical, social and emotional perspectives are well documented. Success in sporting competition at any level and the lifelong participation in sport as part of an active, healthy lifestyle is generally encouraged and applauded throughout Australian society by governments, by the sports industry, by public opinion and through the media.

It is concerning that according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) the Participation Rate<sup>1</sup> for adult Females in 2011-12 ranged between 70.4% in the 25-34 age group and down to 48.1% in the 65+ age group.

This study principally uses the dataset of females who have participated in the Australian Masters Games over the past 8 years in seeking to ascertain the barriers and challenges that they face in pursuing their personal sporting objectives and to determine reasons 'why women participate in sport'. This study further seeks to learn of the personal strategies women employ to enable their continuing participation in sport and whether, given the opportunity and differing circumstances, women would increase the level and extent of their sports participation. In other words, this study is focused on determining the challenges, strategies, motives and needs of adult Australian women in community-level and Masters sport.

### Aims of the Study

- (a) **Challenges:** *To identify the issues that Masters aged women face as challenges to their continuing participation in sport;*
- (b) **Strategies:** *To ascertain the personal strategies that women employ to enable them to continue with the required regular commitment;*
- (c) **Motivation:** *To learn 'why women want to participate in sport' and,*
- (d) **Solutions:** *To determine what could be done to make continuing in sport more accessible, doable and desirable for women throughout Australia.*

This study used an on-line survey which was emailed to 7,400 Australian Masters Games female participants (1,100 surveys were completed which is a 15% response rate) and 21 in-depth, face-to-face interviews with female competitors at the 2013 Australian Masters Games held in Geelong in October.

Results and insights from this study will be provided directly to National Sporting Organisations, Government and will be made widely available to the broader sports sector. The goal is to provide greater understanding of those participating in masters aged women's sport and to prompt structural changes in the delivery of women's sport that will improve opportunities for access. It is hoped that this will lead to an increase in the numbers of women participating regularly in sport, as well as increased time allocated to weekly sporting endeavours, enhanced enjoyment and longevity for Australian women in sport over the long term.

<sup>1</sup> ABS 4177.0 - Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation, Australia, 2011-12



## Chapter 2: Brief Literature Review by Dr R. A. Dionigi

Research into Australian women's experiences in community-level and Masters sport, from the perspective of the women themselves, is embryonic. Recent research by Dionigi (2010; 2013) that focuses on the experiences of older Australian women in Masters sport has found that through their sporting practices these women resisted traditional stereotypes of ageing and gender and experienced a sense of personal empowerment in the form of identity management, belonging, engagement and bodily competence. Similarly, studies by Litchfield and Dionigi (2012; 2013) on Australian middle-aged and older field hockey players have found that women experienced team bonding, social connections, enjoyment, as well as feelings of community, inclusiveness and empowerment that extended beyond just playing the sport. At the same time, these women had to negotiate many barriers, such as those associated with family and work commitments, as well as gender or age stereotypes, in order to maintain their participation in sport.

Recent Australian literature on women's (especially mothers') participation in sport and physical activity has argued that women's involvement is often constrained by a combination of personal, structural and ideological influences (Brown et al., 2001; Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Miller & Brown, 2005).

Ideological influences include restrictive gender expectations and narrow stereotypes of the 'good' mother (Lo Cascio, Thomas, Conolly, Finney Lamb, & Sainsbury, 1999). Structural constraints include: the workload and multiple responsibilities of motherhood; lack of discretionary time and energy; lack of social support from partners, friends and family; and lack of childcare. For low income women, constraints also include lack of private transport and the cost of equipment, memberships, attendance at facilities and childcare (Brown et al., 2001; Cody & Lee, 1999). [Therefore] Women's decision making about physical activity is influenced and shaped by their multiple roles and responsibilities in families, workplaces and communities. (Lewis & Ridge, 2005, p. 2296)

Literature bases in both sport sociology and leisure studies (across North America, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and Australia) have been useful in explaining how women negotiate barriers (or constraints) affecting their participation in sport or active leisure/recreation. For example, in 1995 an article by Lenskyj, entitled 'What's sport got to do with it?', drew attention to the 'maternal ethic of care' dilemma faced by women – that is, women in Western societies are often made to feel guilty about taking time out for self-care (as opposed to being there for their family) which often leads to a perceived lack of entitlement to leisure among women. For example, New Zealand research by Palmer and Leberman (2009) examining how athletes who were mothers negotiated their multiple identities and roles found that:

The women managed their multiple identities and negotiated constraints such as guilt, lack of time and limited organisational support by emphasizing how integral sport was to their sense of self. They highlighted the mutual benefits of motherhood to their sport aspirations and vice versa, by utilizing time/space management strategies, and by creating and accessing strong support networks which sometimes included organizational support. (Palmer & Leberman, 2009, p. 241)

Similarly, an Australian study by Lewis and Ridge (2005) argued that rather than see these dominant Western beliefs about what it means to be a 'good' mother or wife solely as barriers to women's involvement in sport, they can be negotiated and resisted by women which can create



opportunities, such as family benefits. This idea is supported by a sport researcher in the United States who argued that:

Some of these barriers [such as lack of time, money, and energy], however, can be overcome with social support from family (especially one's spouse or partner) and friends (Brown et al., 2001; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Miller & Brown, 2005). Therefore, variables such as life stage (particularly age of children), marital status, and social class must be considered when examining women's perceived barriers toward sport and physical activity. (Dixon, 2009, p. 37)

Leisure studies researchers have also highlighted that gender is a key factor affecting women's participation in sport, leisure and physical activity:

...which has led to a number of studies specifically designed at understanding how and when different women do and do not participate in physical activity and how they view it within their life contexts (e.g., Brown et al., 2001; Freysinger, 1994; Henderson, 1990a, 1996; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991; Jackson & Henderson, 1995; Shaw, 1991, 1994; Thomsson, 1999). These studies have demonstrated that, for example, women tend to place a lower priority on physical activity and leisure participation than do men, putting their family's needs and wants ahead of their own in order to be considered a "good mother" (Gilligan, 1982; Henderson, 1996; Henderson & Bialeschki, 1991; Miller & Brown, 2005). (Dixon, 2009, p. 36)

Prominent gender and leisure researcher, Susan Shaw, developed a useful theoretical frame in 1994 for analysing women's leisure that has been applied over the years to interpret women's participation in physical activity and sport. This framework has been useful in examining the ways women use strategies to negotiate (and resist) constraints to leisure (such as time, money, facilities, and the social expectations of 'good' wives or mothers) to allow for greater control of their leisure choices, including sport and physical activity.

At the same time, the history of male dominance in sport, as both participants and administrators, can act as a barrier to women's sustained involvement in sport (Linskyj, 1995). More recently, Australian (e.g., Fullagar & Toohey, 2009) and British (e.g., Anderson, 2009) sociologists have highlighted that gender equity issues remain an issue because traditional notions of masculinity are institutionally embedded within sport, both on and off the playing field. Further research is needed to determine ways in which this structural barrier can be addressed.

Finally, the research that does exist about women in sport has been criticised for its overwhelming focus on 'white' women, especially those born in Australia or Britain (Cortis, Sawrikar & Muir, 2007; Sawrikar & Muir, 2010). These authors have highlighted that women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience a range of factors (some similar to those discussed above and others unique) that impact on their participation in sport and physical activity, such as:

...socio-cultural issues (racial and cultural constraints or freedoms and levels of comfort in certain social settings); access (recreation provision, information, skills and transport); levels of appeal and meaningfulness; physiology (physical capacity and age); resources (time and money); and interpersonal contacts (having or not having someone to participate with). (Cortis, Sawrikar & Muir, 2007, p. 74)

Given the lack of qualitative research specifically focused on Australian women's experiences in community-level and Masters sport, this study used an on-line survey (in addition to semi-structured interviews) to determine the challenges, strategies, motives and needs of a group of Australian women who were already involved in Masters sport. Gaining insights from such women can inform ways to make sport and active leisure more accessible, achievable and desirable for other women across Australia.

### Chapter 3: Methodology

This study used two methods to compile quantitative and qualitative insights into the womens' sporting history and current sport participation regimes.

**Definition of Sport Participation:** For the purpose of this study 'sport participation' means personal involvement in an organised fixture, match or competition of "a human activity capable of achieving a result requiring physical exertion and/or physical skill, which, by its nature and organisation, is competitive and is generally accepted as being a sport." (Australian Sports Commission)

**Target Respondents:** The principal target group for this study are those females currently participating in sport who are of an age that would satisfy the minimum age requirement for Masters sport in their particular sport of choice. Sport participation may be in any sport, at any level and to any extent including one-off events or irregular involvement in a local sporting group or competition.

#### Method 1: On-line Survey of Female Masters sport participants

*"7,400 surveys were emailed to participants from the 4 previous Australian Masters Games – 1,100 surveys were completed representing a 15% response rate."*

Questions for inclusion in the on-line survey tool were developed through consultation with representatives of the Confederation of Australian (CAS), Australian Womensport and Recreation Association (AWRA), the Australian Sports Commission Research Department, the Australian Government - Office for Sport and the School of Human Movement Studies at Charles Sturt University. Questions were derived from the key criteria driving the overall study and were guided by findings of recently released studies such as *The future of Australian Sport – Megatrends shaping the sports sector over coming decades*<sup>2</sup>(CSIRO, 2013) and *Market Segmentation for Sport Participation*<sup>3</sup> (ASC, 2013).

The survey questions were reviewed, refined and formatted for SportInfo who built the on-line tool and managed the distribution, retrieval of responses and result tabulation. The *Retaining the Membership of Women in Sport Survey Tool* is available for review upon request.

The principal target group for this survey were females who had attended any of the previous three Australian Masters Games (11AMG Adelaide 2007; 12AMG Geelong 2009 and 13AMG Adelaide 2011) or who were registered to compete at the 14AMG held in Geelong in October 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Hajkowicz, S.A., Cook, H.,Wilhelmseder, L., Boughen, N.,2013. The future of Australian sport: Megatrends shaping the sports sector over coming decades. A Consultancy Report for the Australian Sports Commission. CSIRO, Australia

<sup>3</sup> Market Segmentation for sport participation, March 2013 - Australian Sports Commission, Canberra

Responses were also welcome from any other females who met the “Target Respondents” criteria above and who were provided access to the survey via their National Sporting Organisation or other means.

During October 2013 invitations to participate in the survey were emailed to 7,400 individuals from the four most recent Australian Masters Games (including the 2013 Games). 1,100 surveys were completed by the closing date. This represented a response rate of 15%. In addition the survey was forwarded to National Sporting Organisations with the offer for them to invite members to complete the survey.

The response to the question “How many AMG’s have you participated in” indicates that over 1,000 of survey respondents were Australian Masters Games competitors.

## **Method 2: Face-to-Face Interviews with Female Masters sport participants**

Interviews were held with 21 women aged 31-66 ( $M=48$  years) who were regularly involved in team sports (16 netball, 4 basketball, 1 baseball). Most women were from Victoria (13), with a couple of women each from SA, Tasmania and WA and one woman from QLD. Within the sample there were 15 married (including one defacto), three divorced and three single women. Twelve of the women had at least one child living at home, six women had older children (or a child) who were no longer living at home and three women did not have any children. The women were interviewed by a student research assistant for approximately 20-30 minutes each during the 14th Australian Masters Games in Geelong, 2013. The women were asked about their sporting background, any breaks in their participation, their motives and barriers to participation, how they managed to (return to and/or) maintain their regular sport participation, as well as their general opinion on women in sport. For a complete list of topic areas and questions, please see Appendix 2 - Interview Guide. The 21 interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim by an online transcription service.

Analysis of the face-to-face interviews was undertaken by collaborating partner Dr Rylee Dionigi (PhD *UNewc*; BSocSc *CSU*) from the School of Human Movement Studies at Charles Sturt University who used qualitative methods to assess the responses from an individual and sociological perspective, as explained in Chapter 5.

## **Limitations of the study**

Best efforts were made to canvass a broad cross-section of women’s sport in terms of ages, sports participated in, life-stages, demographics and jurisdiction of home residence. The responses received are weighted somewhat to women residing in Victoria and South Australia because the four surveyed Australian Masters Games held between 2007 and 2013 were staged in Geelong and Adelaide (twice each). Moreover, 97% of the sample spoke English at home, indicating that these women were not from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds. This latter finding highlights the need to make sport more accessible, doable and desirable for women from diverse backgrounds because Masters sport participation in Australia is dominated by people who are white and primarily from middle-class backgrounds (Dionigi, 2008).

## Chapter 4: Results of On-line Survey of Female Masters Sport Participants

This section shows the results received from the 1,100 on-line surveys.

### 4.1 “About You” - Demographics of Respondents:

Table 1: A snapshot of the 1,100 respondents to the online survey is as follows:

Category	Highest response	Next highest responses
<b>Age</b>	38% are 51-60 years	29% are 41-50 years
<b>Home Location</b>	34% live in Victoria	31% live in South Australia and 18% in NSW
<b>Indigenous background</b>	97% do not have an indigenous background	2% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds
<b>Language other than English spoken at home</b>	97% speak English at home	3% speak a language at home other than English
<b>Marital Status</b>	63% are married	10% defacto; 9% single, 9% divorced
<b>Family Structure</b>	31% live in an older family (children over 21);	27% single/couples – no children
<b>Education- Highest level achieved</b>	65% - hold some form of tertiary qualification 22% hold a Bachelor degree	17% Post-graduate degree; 15% Year 12
<b>Disability or physical condition</b>	82% do not have a disability or physical condition	14% do have a disability or physical condition
<b>Personal Working situation</b>	45% Full time employed	25% Part-time employed; 16% Retired or pension
<b>Self-employed</b>	86% are not self employed	14% are self-employed
<b>Description of Occupation</b>	46% Professionals	24% Administrative/clerical workers, 17% Managers
<b>Working Hours per week</b>	58% work 38 hours or more per week	33% work 20-37 hours per week
<b>Work Day structure</b>	81% work regular business hours 9-5pm	
<b>Favourite pastimes outside sport</b>	Socialising with friends 61%;	Socialising with family 59%; Reading 54%; Gardening 43%.
<b>Social Media</b>	57% Don't use social media at all	39% Use Facebook

### 4.2 Sports participation in the past 12 months

This sequence of questions was designed to provide an overview of sports participation by respondents over the previous twelve months.

Figure 1 and table 2 show that 65% of respondents had participated in both sport and exercise/active recreation in the previous 12 months. Figure 2 indicates that 78% of respondents said they played more than one sport during this period with 2 sports (29%), 3 sports (23%) and more than 4 sports (26%).

Figure 1: Participation in sport over the previous 12 months

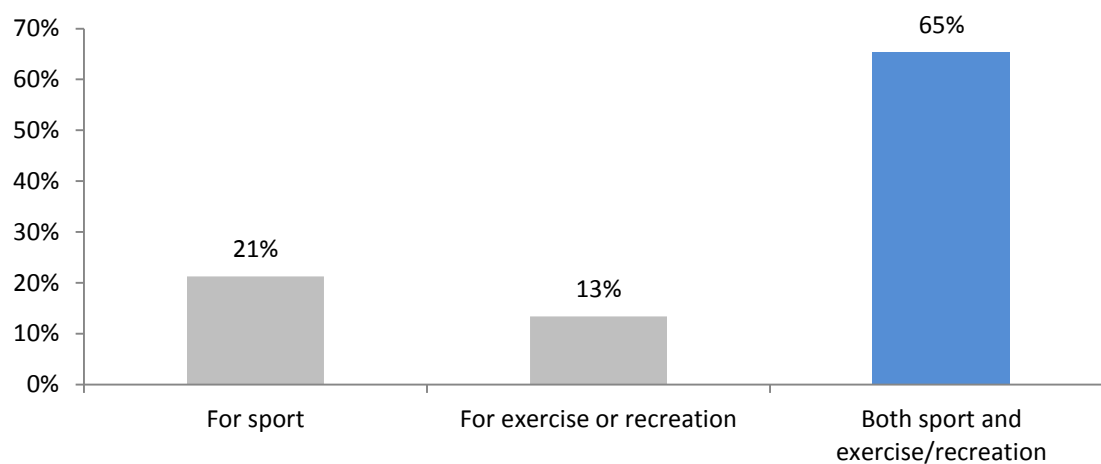
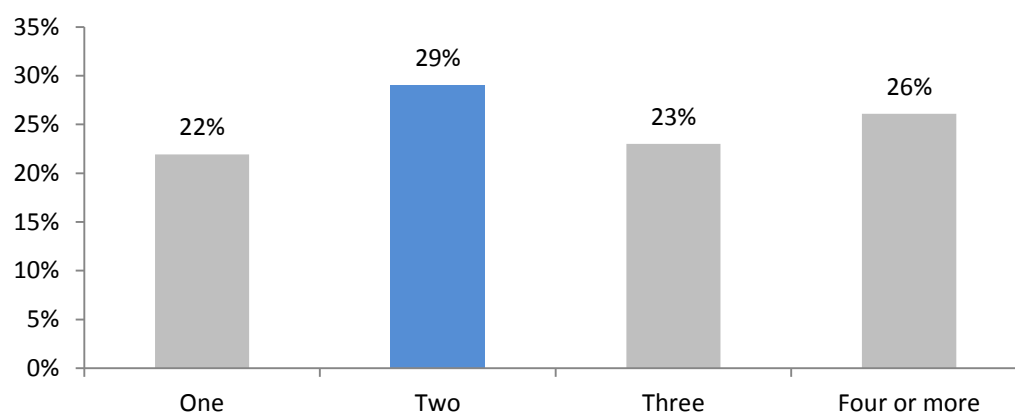


Table 2: Data participation in sport over the previous 12 months – showing age breakdown

Question: "In the last 12 months, did you participate in any physical activities...?"		Age Segment					
	Overall	21 - 30 years	31 - 40 years	41 - 50 years	51 - 60 years	61 - 70 years	71 years and over
<i>n =</i>	1100	16†	88	316	416	215	49
For sport	21%	13%	18%	17%	21%	25%	41%
For exercise or recreation	13%	13%	9%	13%	15%	14%	6%
Both sport and exercise/recreation	65%	75%	73%	70%	64%	60%	53%

†Small sample size: Results are indicative only.

Figure 2: The number of sports played over the past 12 months



**The Main Sport:** Respondents were asked to indicate what they considered to be their main or primary sport. This was the sport that they had competed in most over the previous 12 months.

Figure 3: The main sport participated in during the previous 12 months

The top 10 sports only are shown below.

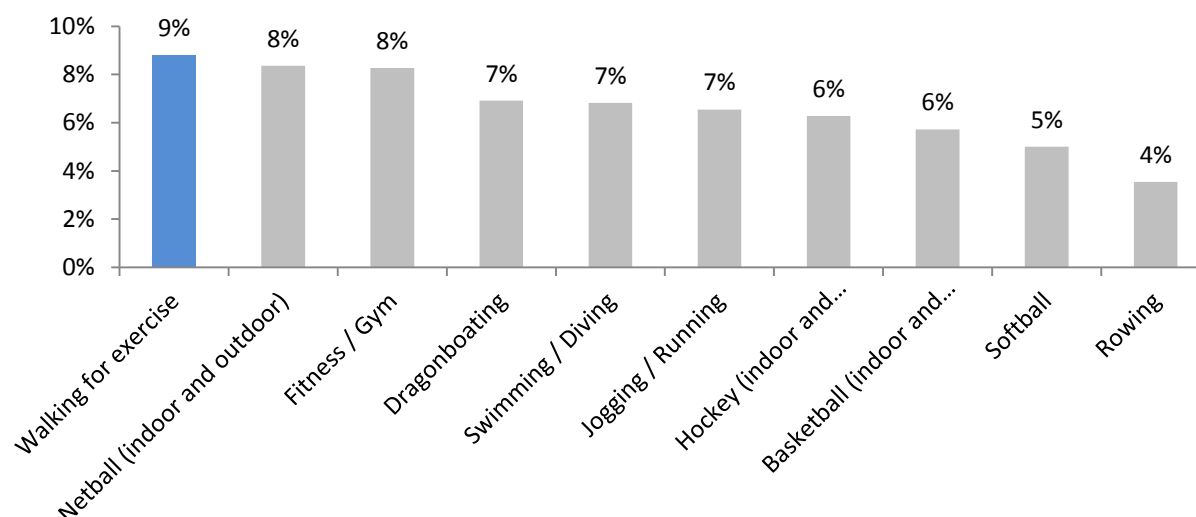


Table 3: The main sport participated in during the previous 12 months – including age breakdown

Main Sport			Age Segment					
	Overall		21 - 30 years	31 - 40 years	41 - 50 years	51 - 60 years	61 - 70 years	71 years and over
<i>n =</i>	1100		16†	88	316	416	215	49
Walking for exercise	9%		6%	2%	9%	10%	10%	4%
Netball (indoor and outdoor)	8%		0%	15%	10%	9%	5%	0%
Fitness / Gym	8%		6%	5%	10%	9%	7%	6%
Dragonboating	7%		0%	1%	0%	7%	20%	8%
Swimming / Diving	7%		13%	8%	6%	5%	8%	18%
Jogging / Running	7%		13%	11%	8%	6%	2%	4%
Hockey (indoor and outdoor)	6%		0%	6%	7%	7%	5%	0%
Basketball (indoor and outdoor)	6%		0%	0%	9%	7%	2%	2%
Softball	5%		6%	5%	9%	5%	1%	2%
Rowing	4%		13%	1%	2%	4%	5%	4%

**Organised or casual sport participation:** Figure 4 indicates that 59% of respondents only participated in organised sport, 23% participated in some organised and some casual sport while 17% of people only participated in casual sporting activity.

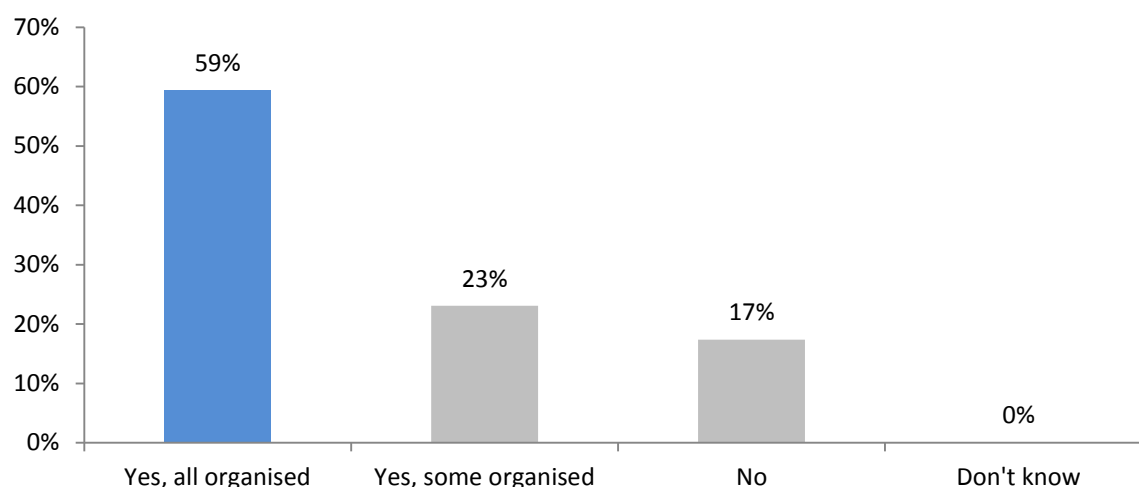


Figure 4 shows the comparison of organised versus casual sport participation.

### Who organised the sport?

An overwhelming 83% of respondents participated in sport organised by “sports club or association that required the payment of fees, membership or registration.”

**Roles in sports participation:** Respondents were asked to share the role that they participated in their main sporting interest. Multiple roles were common with the majority of people (95%) participating as players/competitors with roles in coaching/teaching/instructing (25%), administration (23%) and Umpiring/officiating (16%) also popular.

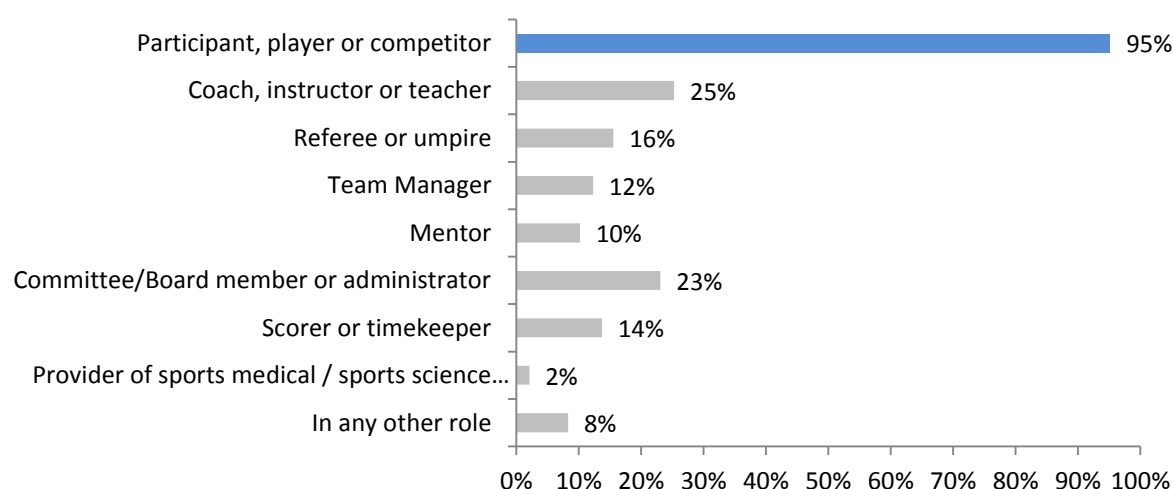


Figure 5: Roles in sports participation



**Volunteer contribution to sport:** 564 responses in the previous question indicated the unpaid, volunteer contribution they make to sport in areas other than playing. The largest contributions were to administration (44%) through board or committee membership or administration support; or to coaching (41%) as coach, teacher or instructor.

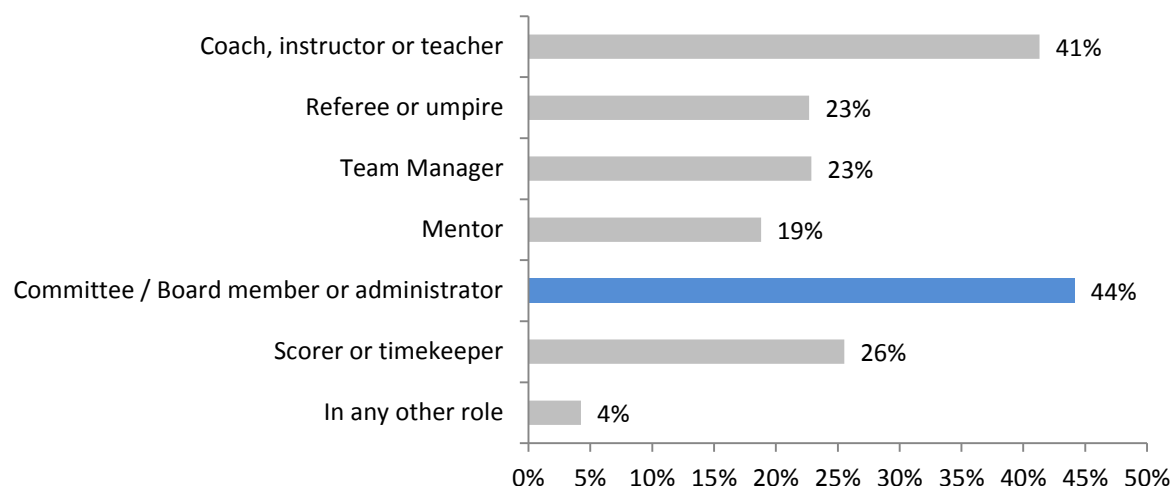


Figure 6: Volunteer roles in sport

**Frequency of involvement with their main sport:** Respondents were asked to indicate the number of times that they had participated in their main sport during the previous 12 months, including training and practice sessions.

73% said that they had participated in their sport on more than 51 occasions during the year and of these 34% participated more between 101-200 times and 17% participated on more than 200 occasions.

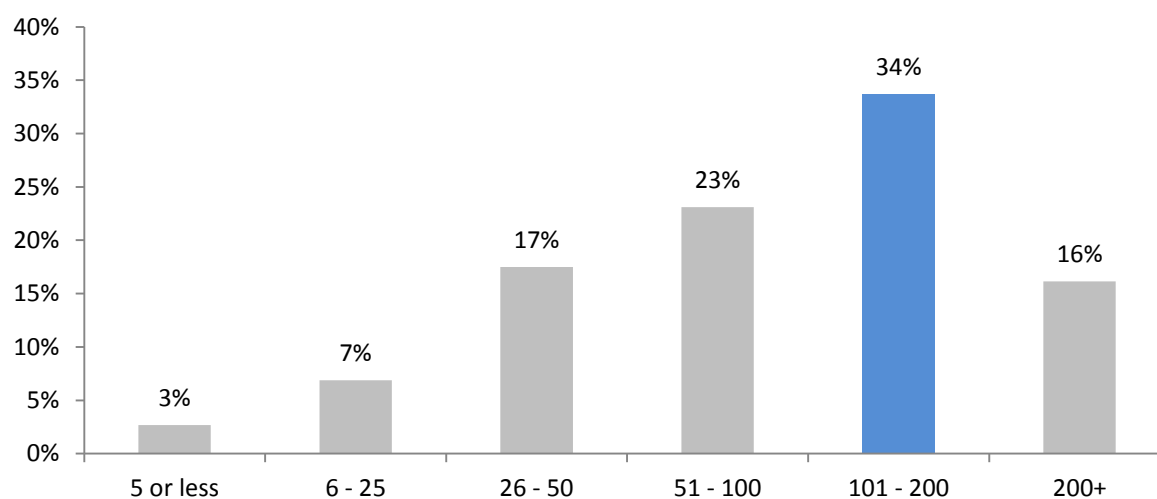


Figure 7: Number of times main sport was participated in

Interestingly 84% of respondents said that they participated in their main sport 'all year round' while 14% said they participated seasonally. 82% of respondents said that they had participated with other people while 18% had participated by themselves.

55% of respondents indicated that they participated both competitively and on a recreational basis during the previous year. 21% said they competed only on a competitive basis while 24% said they participated only on a recreational basis where the main purpose was for relaxation, socialising, health or fitness rather than competition.

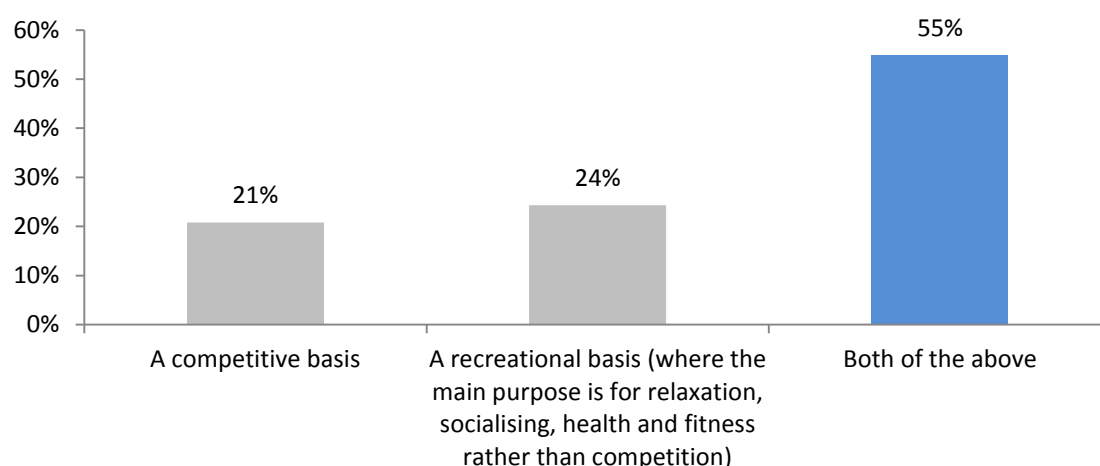


Figure 8: Competitive or recreational basis for sports participation

### 4.3 Attitudes to Sport and Clubs

This question seeks to identify the reaction and response that respondents have to a series of statements and descriptors about why they participate in sport. This question aligns to the Australian Sports Commission study released in March 2013 "Market Segmentation for Sport Participation"<sup>44</sup> in identifying the different motivations, attitudes and needs.

Respondents were asked why they play sport and what motivates them to continue.

The sense of belonging, kinship and team; the positive psychological and emotional effects of sports involvement were common across the most highly ranked responses.

<sup>44</sup> Market Segmentation for sport participation, March 2013 - Australian Sports Commission, Canberra – Summary page 1

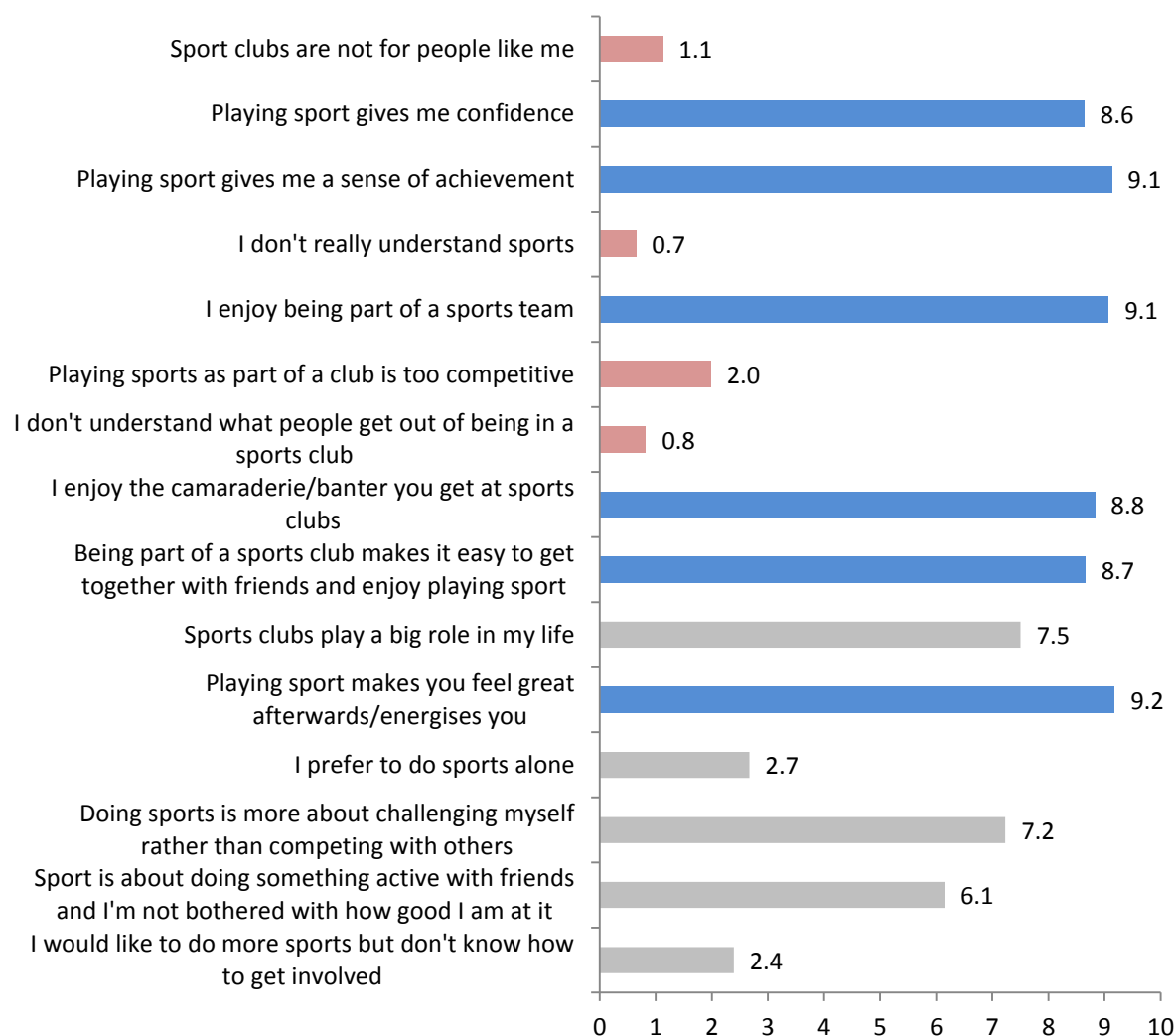


Figure 9: Indicating responses to the attitudinal statements from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (10).

Table 4: Question - "Below are some things that people have said about sport, physical recreation, sports clubs or associations. Please indicate, for each of them, whether you agree or disagree using the scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is strongly disagree, and 10 is strongly agree. It doesn't matter if you do sport or take regular physical recreation, we are still interested in your opinion."

			Age Segment					
	Overall		21 - 30 years	31 - 40 years	41 - 50 years	51 - 60 years	61 - 70 years	71 years and over
<i>n</i> =	1100		16 <sup>†</sup>	88	316	416	215	49
Sport clubs are not for people like me	1.1		0.7	1.0	1.0	1.2	1.1	1.4
Playing sport gives me confidence	8.6		8.8	8.9	8.5	8.6	8.7	8.7
Playing sport gives me a sense of achievement	9.1		9.3	9.2	9.1	9.1	9.1	9.5
I don't really understand sports	0.7		0.4	0.3	0.5	0.7	0.7	1.2
I enjoy being part of a sports team	9.1		9.3	9.2	9.1	9.1	9.0	9.1
Playing sports as part of a club is too competitive	2.0		1.8	1.6	2.1	2.0	1.8	2.1
I don't understand what people get out of being in a sports club	0.8		0.4	0.6	0.7	0.9	0.9	1.6
I enjoy the camaraderie/banter you get at sports clubs	8.8		9.0	8.4	8.8	8.9	8.9	9.3
Being part of a sports club makes it easy to get together with friends and enjoy playing sport	8.7		8.4	8.9	8.5	8.7	8.7	8.8
Sports clubs play a big role in my life	7.5		6.4	7.8	7.4	7.4	7.7	7.9
Playing sport makes you feel great afterwards/energises you	9.2		9.1	9.4	9.1	9.2	9.3	9.1
I prefer to do sports alone	2.7		4.4	2.7	2.9	2.6	2.2	3.2
Doing sports is more about challenging myself rather than competing with others	7.2		7.8	7.0	6.9	7.3	7.5	8.3
Sport is about doing something active with friends and I'm not bothered with how good I am at it	6.1		5.1	6.0	5.8	6.3	6.2	7.3
I would like to do more sports but don't know how to get involved	2.4		2.1	2.7	2.2	2.3	2.6	2.9

<sup>†</sup>Small sample size: Results are indicative only.

Scale: 0 = Strongly Disagree, 10 = Strongly Agree

### Why women play sport:

Respondents were asked what motivates them to play sport. 85% of respondents say that physical fitness is an important motivator in the decision to play sport. Social factors (friends and fun) 71% and competitive factors such as enjoyment of competition, opportunity to improve performance and strive for personal best was a factor for 51%.

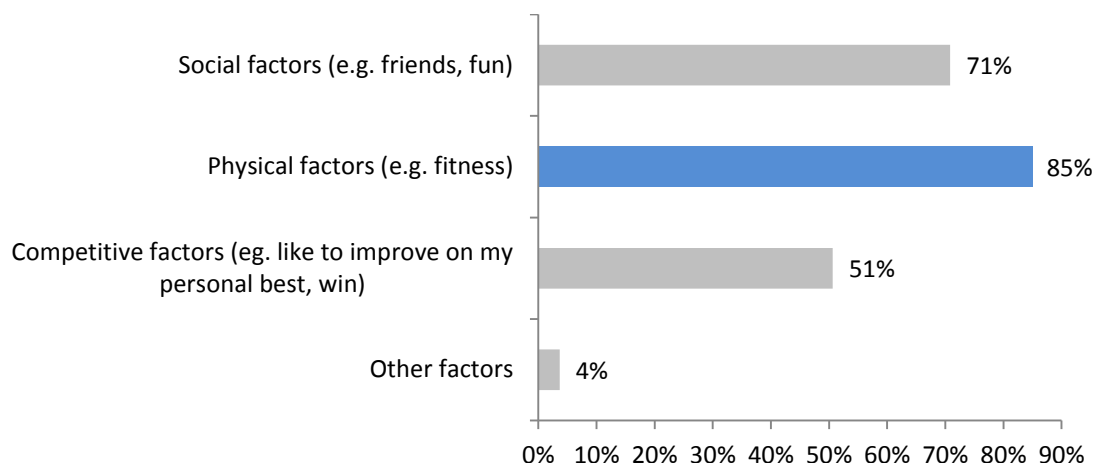


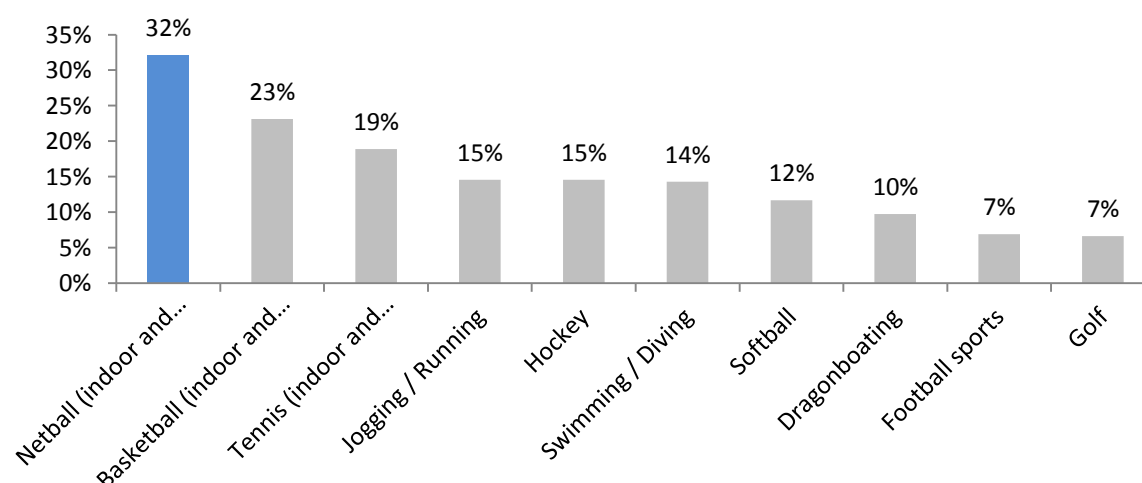
Figure 10: Reasons why women play sport.

### 4.4 Personal history of competitive sport participation

This section of the survey seeks to reveal the nature of the competitive aspect of the respondent's sporting career. It looks at when they first became involved in competitive sport and whether this continued and expanded during their lives.

Of 1,100 respondents 99% said that they participated in sport competitively during their lives. These 1,086 respondents were asked to list which sports they had played competitively with Netball (32%), Basketball (23%) and Tennis (19%) being the highest ranked sports.

The top 10 listed sports are shown in Figure 11 below.



\*Note: Top 10 sports listed only.

### Was the sporting career continuous?

Respondents were asked whether their sporting career was continuous throughout their lives or whether they had taken a break from sport at some point. 36% said that they had played competitive sport continuously throughout their lives while 30% said that they took a break from competitive sport but still maintained a recreational sporting involvement. 34% of respondents said that they had taken a break from all forms of sport at a point in their lives.

Of the 699 respondents who had taken a break from competitive sport during their lives 46% had taken the break as a young adult (18-29 years old) and 38% took a break during their 30-49 years.

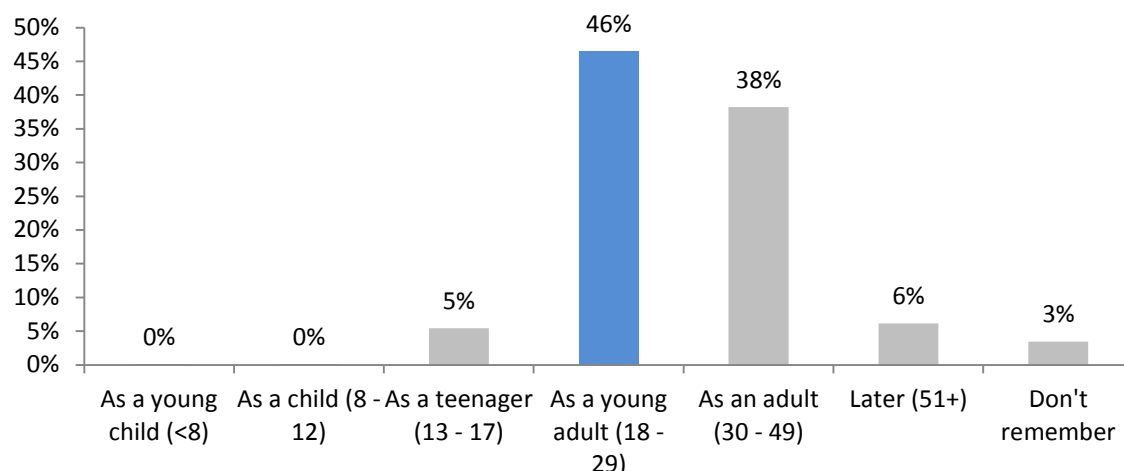


Figure 12: Ages of taking a break from competitive sport.

### Time devoted to sports participation – playing and training:

The 1,086 respondents who engage in competitive sport were asked to estimate the amount of time each week on average they devote to practice or participation, including matches/competition, team and personal training. 890 (82%) of respondents spend 3 or more hours on their sports participation each week. 37% of respondents spend 3-5 hours per week while 31% spend 6-10 hours.

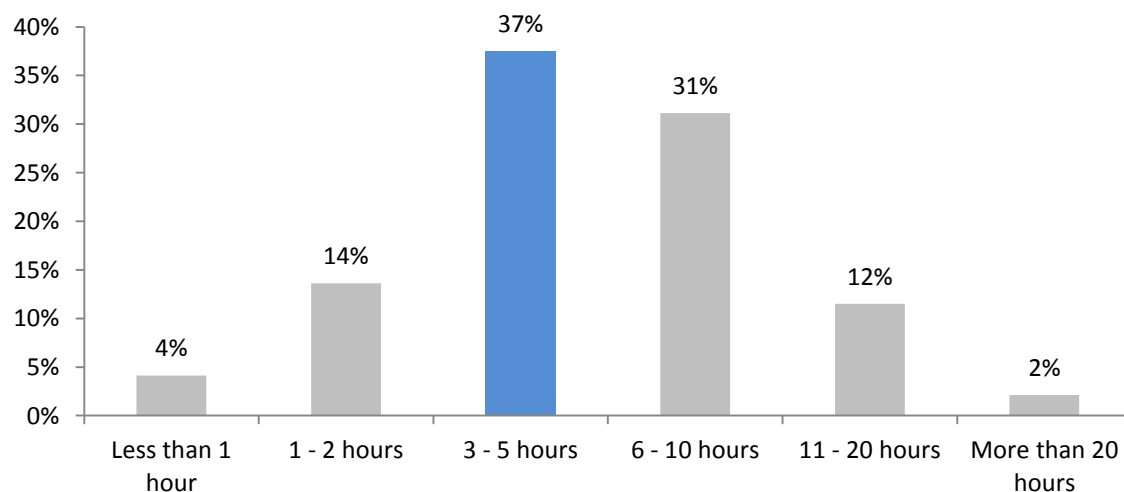


Figure 13: Time devoted to weekly sports participation.

### Socialising through sport:

Respondents were asked how much time each week on average they spend in socialising with team mates, fellow club members or colleagues connected to their sport outside of the actual physical participation of the sport or activity. 41% of respondents spend between 1-2 hours socialising while 29% spend less than one hour per week socialising through their sport. 30% spend more than 3 hours per week socialising.

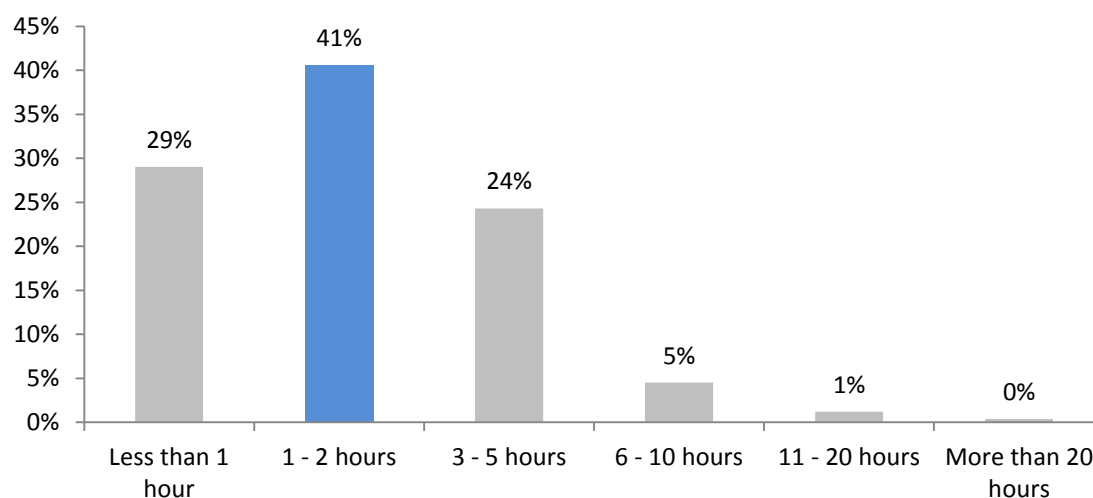


Figure 14: Time spend socialising with sports colleagues

### Time devoted to sports volunteering:

Respondents were asked to estimate the average time spent each week outside of the competitive and social aspects mentioned previously, on additional volunteer support for other community sports/activities (e.g. children's school club or sport)?"

67% of respondents volunteer for up to 5 hours per week on supporting community sports or activities. 10% of respondents volunteer for 6 or more hours each week. 25% volunteer for 1-2 hours, 25% for 1 hour or less and 17% volunteer for 3-5 hours per week.

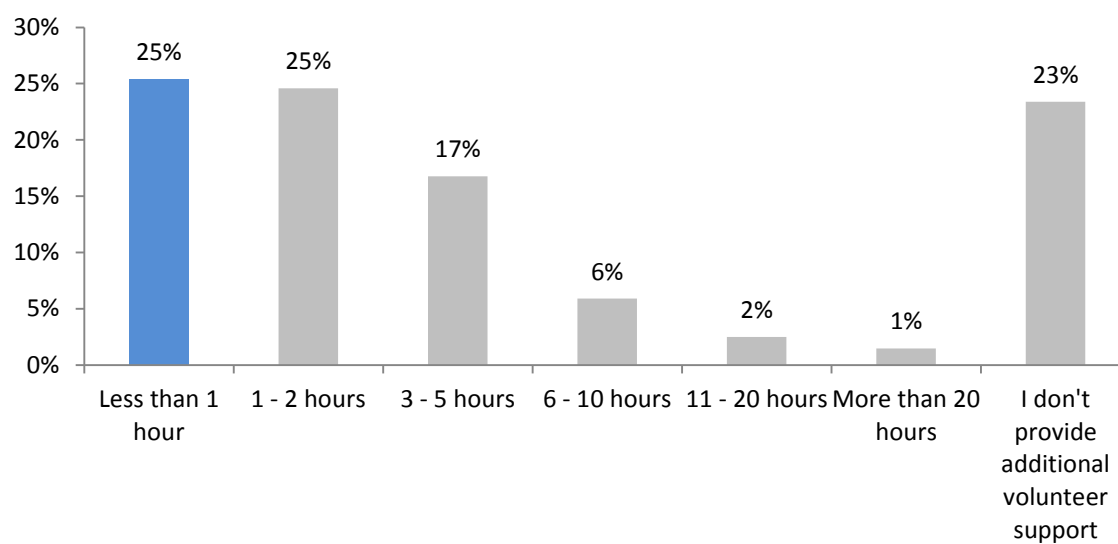


Figure 15: Time devoted to sports volunteering each week.



### Competitive Sport Achievements:

Respondents were asked what the highest level of elite competition that they had competed at in sports was. 26% of competitors had reached national or international level while 24% had reached state level and 23% regional level competition.

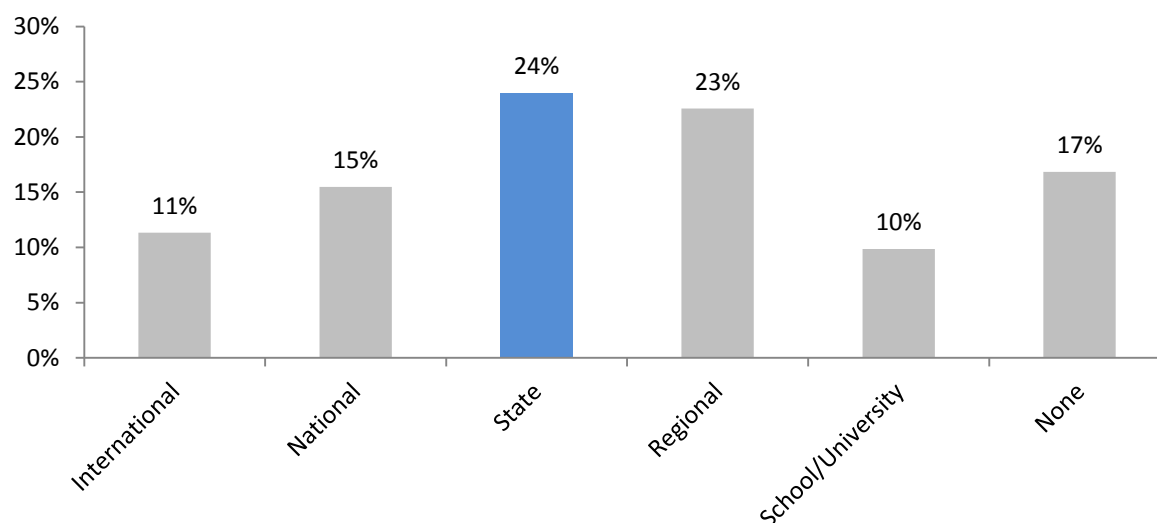


Figure 16: Highest level of sports competition reached

### Masters Sporting Experience:

The highest levels of achievement in Masters Sport mirrored those of overall competitive sporting achievements in the 1,086 respondents. 11% of competitors had reached international level, 15% had reached national level while 24% had reached state level and 23% regional level competition.

977 (90%) of respondents had competed at the Australian Masters Games. 45% had competed at three or more Australian Masters Games while 34% had competed at one Australian Masters Games.

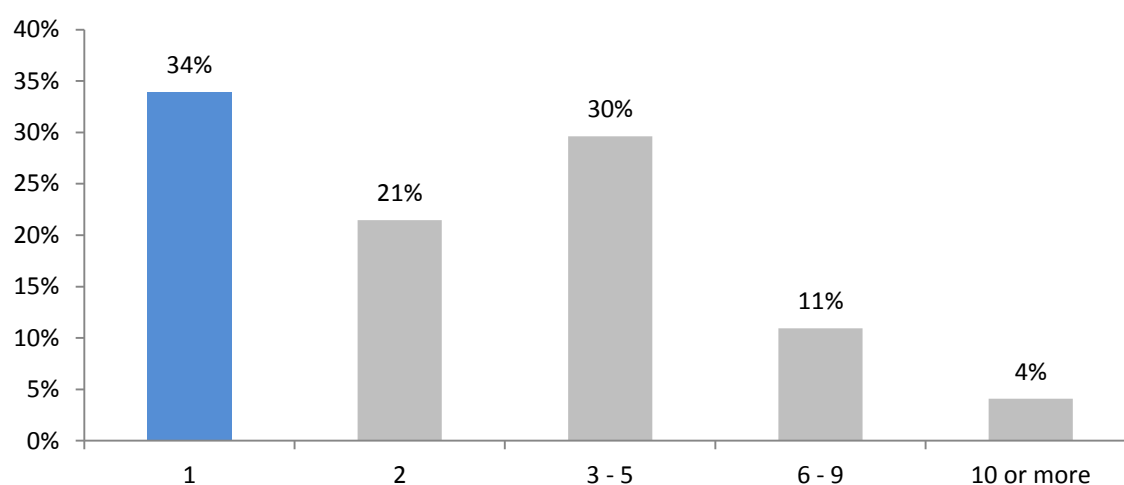


Figure 17: Number of Australian Masters Games competed at

84% of those interviewed said that they intended competing at a future Australian Masters Games.

## 4.5 Barriers to participation in sport

This section of the study is devoted to ascertaining the challenges and barriers that women face when choosing to participate in sport and active recreation.

Earlier in the survey 696 respondents had indicated that they had stopped playing or participating in sport (completely or just competitively) at one point in their life. This group was asked to what extent the following issues played a role in their decision to stop sport/activity at that point in time.

The three factors with the highest impact were family constraints (3.86), pregnancy (3.54) and work constraints (3.31) – figures scaled to 5 with largest impact.

Costs of participation and facilities issues had a moderate impact around the level of 2. While other issues had a lower impact

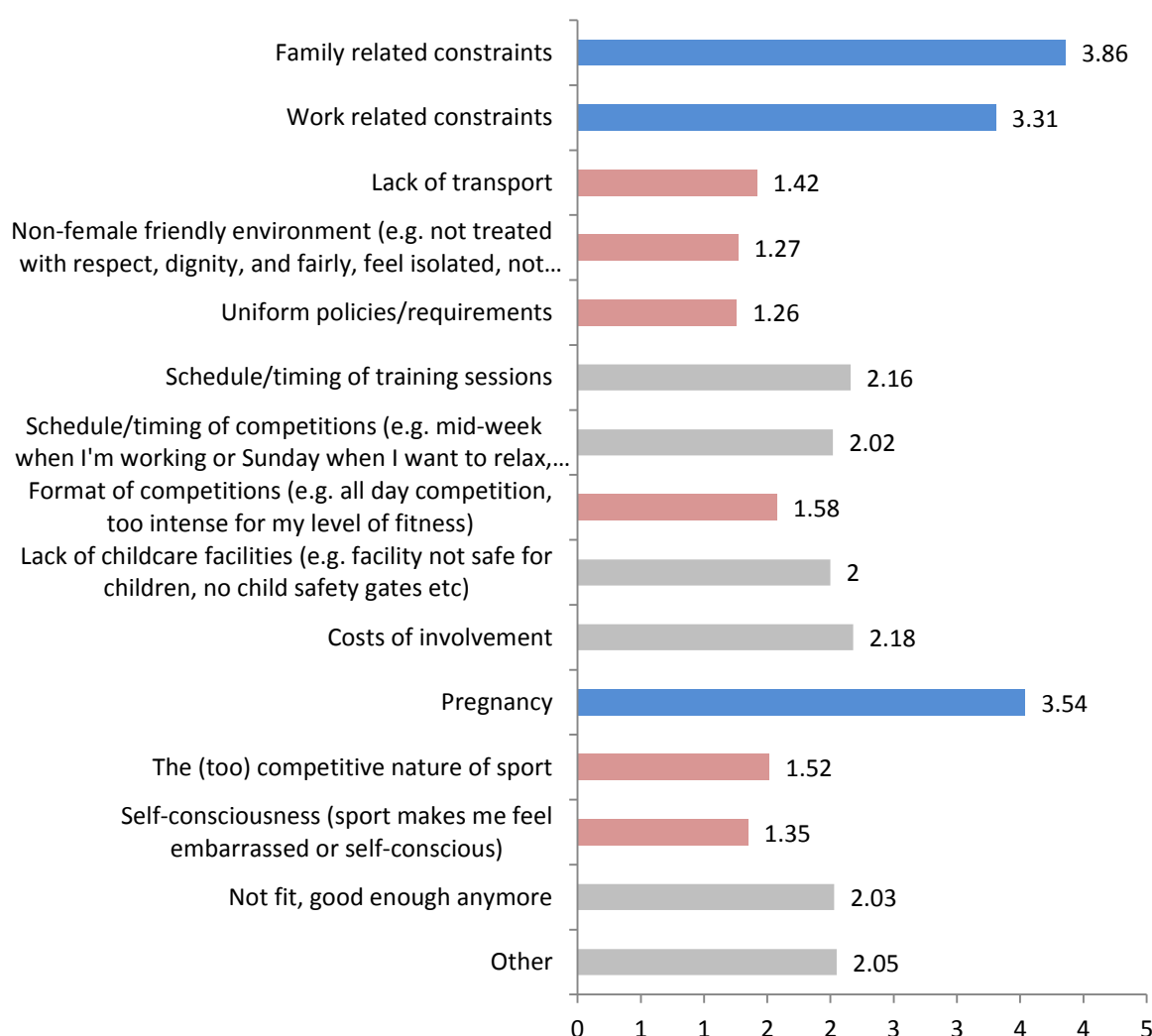


Figure 18: Extent to which barriers had impacted the decision to stop sport participation. No impact (0) – large impact (5).

### Barriers impacting future participation in sport:

Respondents were asked how a list of factors would impact on their future participation in competitive sport and on their general sports participation. The responses to the list of barriers were largely the same and the figures for impacting on General sport participation are shown below in figure 19.

Work constraints (2.5), family related constraints (2.3), concerns over personal fitness/ability levels (2.2) and cost of involvement (2.0) were the highest scoring factors.

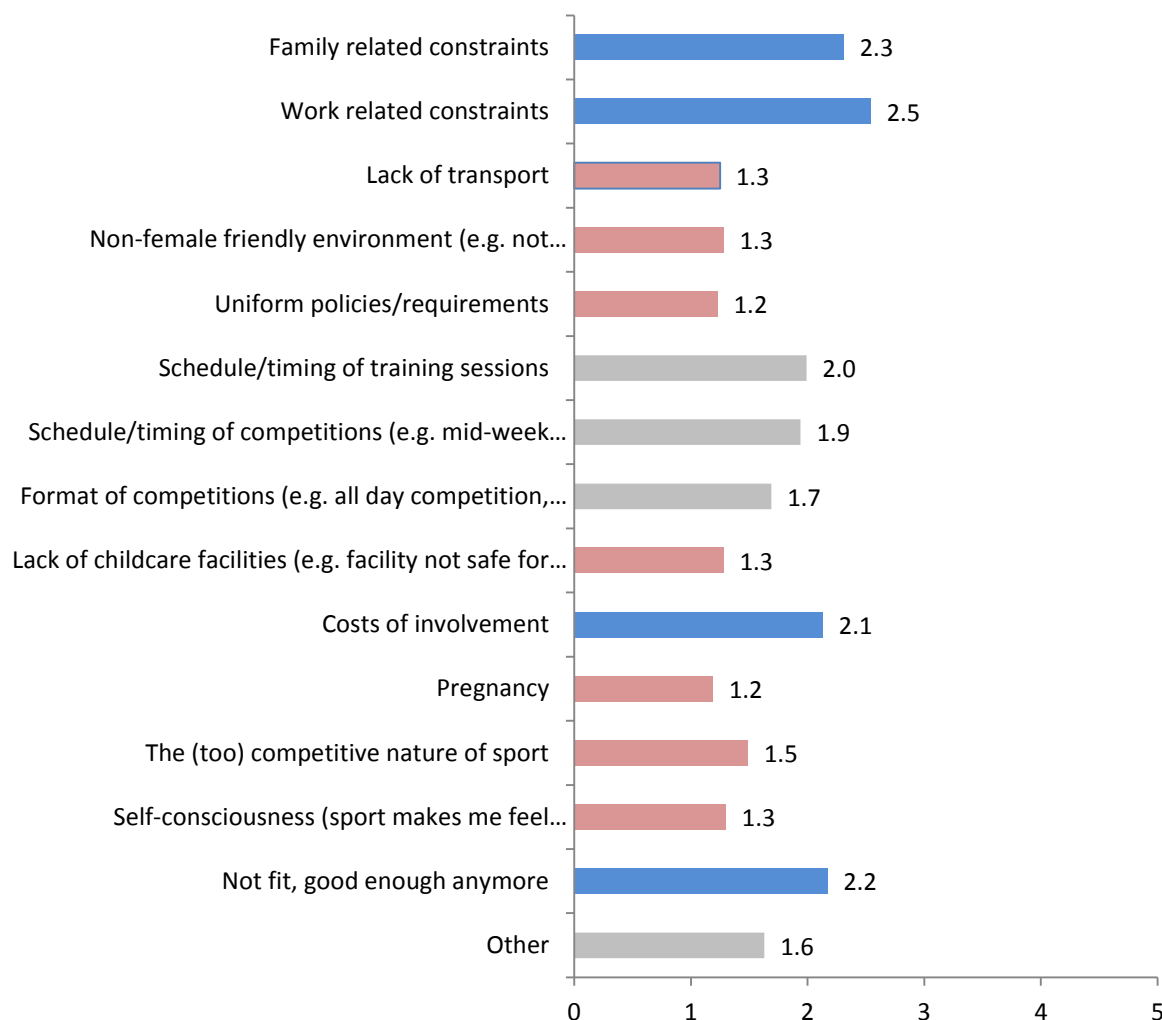


Figure 19: Extent to which barriers would impact the decision to continue sport participation in the future. No impact (0) – large impact (5).

### Personal Strategies employed to allow participation in sport:

Respondents were asked what personal strategies they used to allow their continuing participation in sport.

52% said that they had sufficient flexibility in work and home life to allow participation in sport, 49% said sport was a priority to them and other commitments were fitted around sport. 43% of respondents had a supportive partner who undertook tasks to allow for their participation and 37% had to juggle their commitments to make the time.

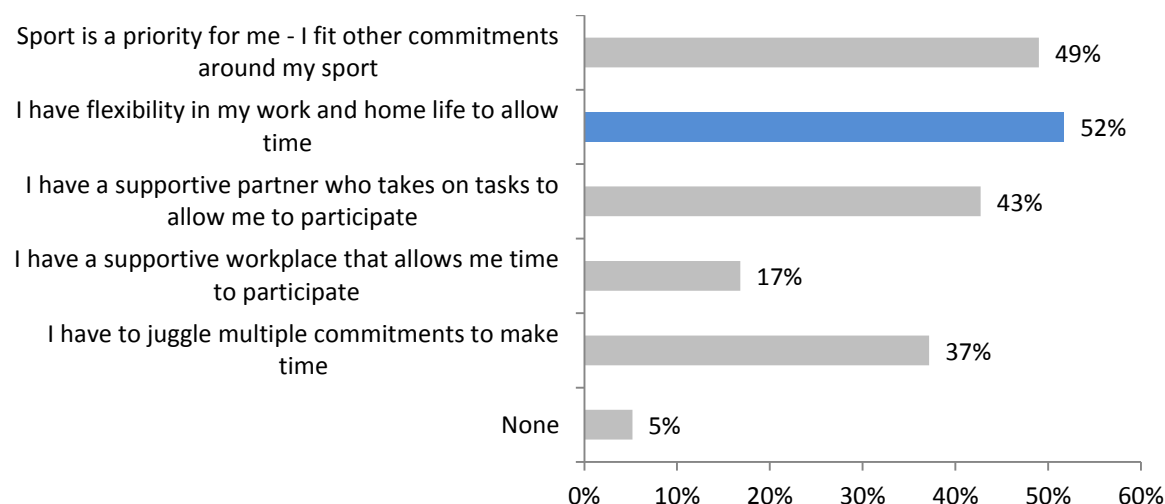


Figure 20: Personal strategies employed to allow sport participation

## 4.5 Future participation in sport if the barriers were removed

### Would they like to play more sport?

Asked whether they would like to play more sport than they currently do? 65% said Yes “if the barriers to participation were removed”.

35% said they were happy with current levels of participation.

### Motivations to participate in more sport than currently

Of the 715 women who said they would like to play more sport 69% would like to improve their skill levels; 69% would increase the amount of time devoted to their current sport(s); 52% said they would like to try new sports; and, 34% said they would like to increase the level of competition that they play at.

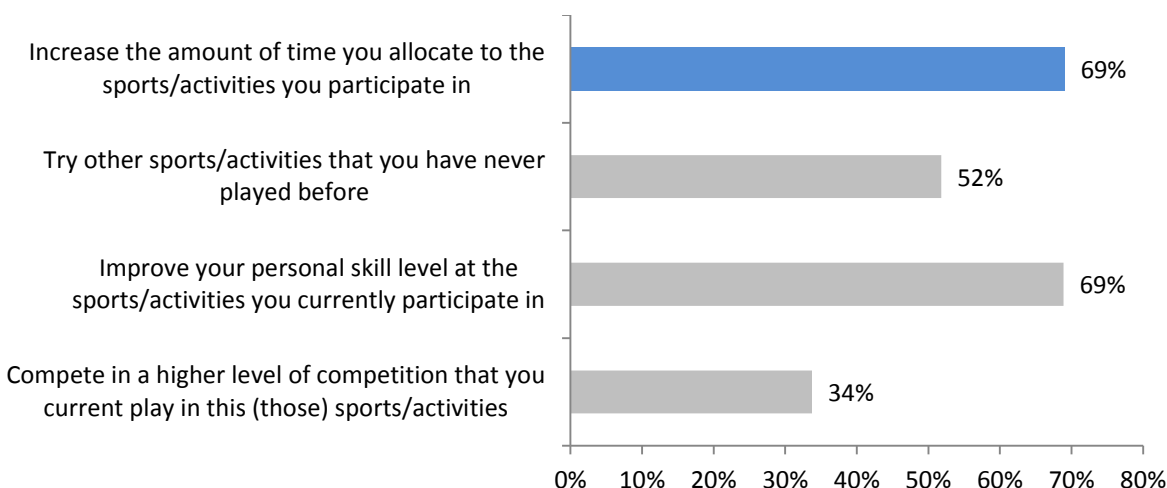


Figure 21: Motivations if additional time was available to play sport

### What sports or active recreation would you undertake?

The 373 respondents who said they would like to try new sports or activities were asked to nominate these.

Figure 22 shows the highest responses were Pilates (27%), Golf (26%), Yoga (21%), Bushwalking (20%), Tennis (20%); and Cycling (20%).

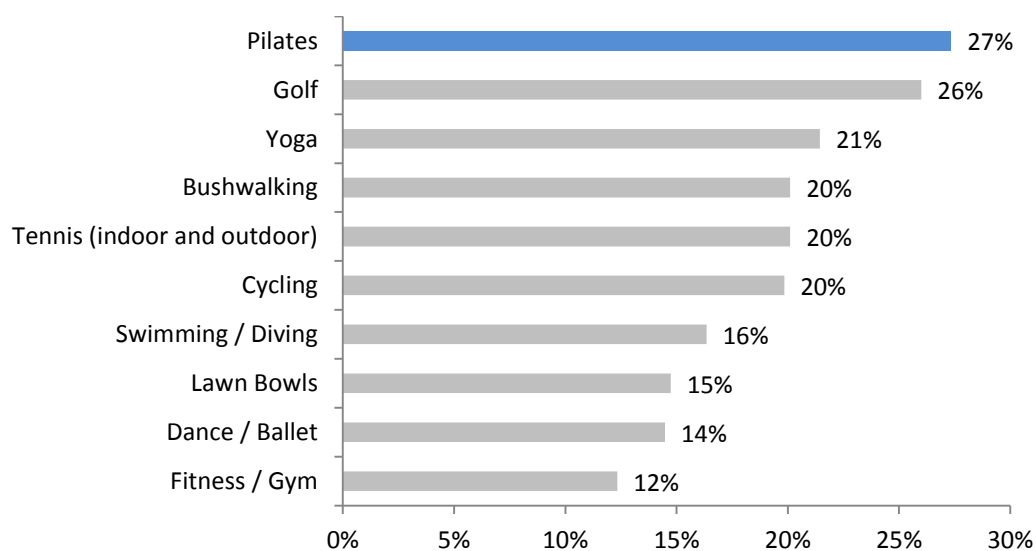


Figure 22: What sports or active recreation would you like to try?

### Changes required of current life situation to allow more sport participation

Respondents were asked what changes were required in their current life situation to allow for greater participation in sport.

Figure 23 shows that 47% said they would need to spend less time working each week; 38% said they needed to plan and organise their time better; 29% said they needed more local sporting opportunities; and 16% said more help with home duties was needed from family.

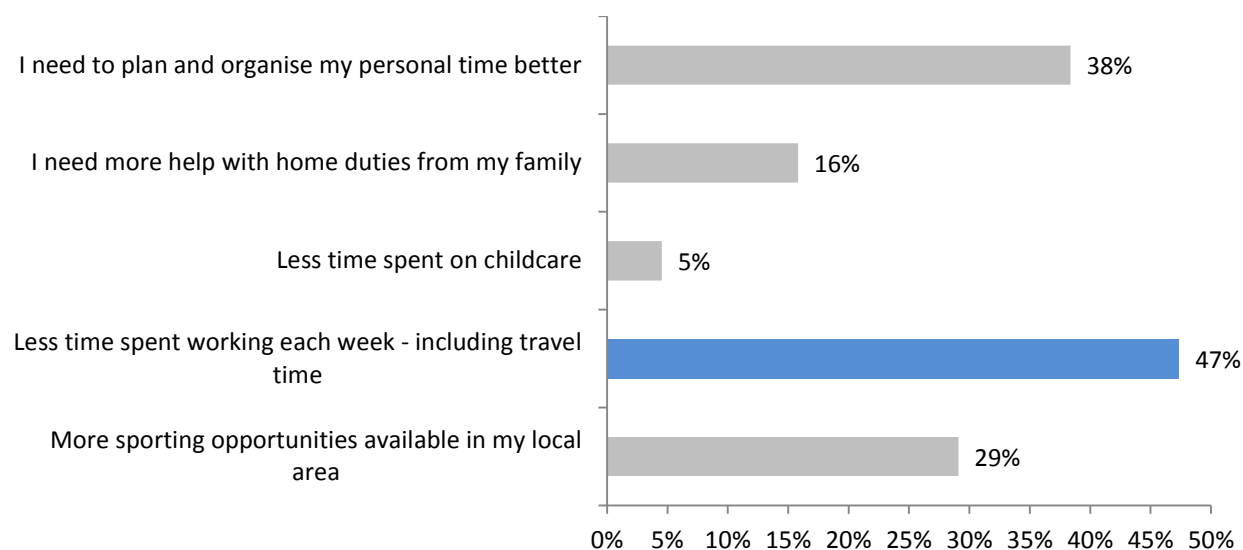


Figure 23: Changes in life situation required to allow greater participation in sport

## Chapter 5: Analysis of Interview data by Dr R.A. Dionigi

### 5.1 Face-to-face Interviews

#### Participants

Interviews were held with 21 women aged 31-66 (M=48 years) who were regularly involved in team sports (16 netball, 4 basketball, 1 baseball). Ten women had full-time work, eight part-time or casual employment, two were retired and one woman was not employed. Fourteen of the women reported no disabilities/conditions affecting their participation in sport, while seven women did report at least one (e.g. breast cancer, arthritis, kidney disease, chronic back pain, chronic foot pain, diabetes, hip replacement). For thirteen of the women in the sample, it was the first time that had participated in a Masters Games event. The remaining women's Masters Games experience ranged from participation in 2 games to over 10 events. Please refer to Appendix 1 for a detailed summary of participant demographics.

All of the women (except the baseball player) started playing sport as a child (between the ages 5-12, with most aged around 8-10 years). The baseball player started sport at age 32 as she was raising her daughter since the age 16. Only three of the women had never stopped playing – two of these women (aged 36 and 49) had a step child (i.e. they were never pregnant) and one was aged 31, she was single and did not have any children. The remaining 18 women had a break from sport at some stage in their earlier life. Most of the sample had breaks during **pregnancy**, five women had a break due to **work or schooling**, four due to **injury/illness** and three due to **relocation or going overseas**. At the same time, about a quarter of the sample expressed a **combination** of these reasons when explaining why they had a break from sport.

#### Data analysis

The interview transcripts were analysed for key themes related to the aims of the study. That is, the focus was on determining the challenges, strategies, motives and needs of the women in regard to their ongoing community (including Masters) sport participation. The first stage of analysis involved coding each individual interview transcript for 'raw data themes' (i.e., preliminary and descriptive categories were identified within each interview; Strauss & Corbin, 2008; van Manen, 1990). Some of the codes included: motives; barriers/challenges; personal strategies; needs; gender and; age.

The second stage of analysis involved developing common raw themes across the data set (i.e., cross-case analysis to determine the most relevant categories across all 21 interviews; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Some common raw data themes were: family, work and time commitments; negotiating barriers; gender and age stereotypes; support and friendship; health and fitness. The third stage of analysis involved identifying relationships and patterns within and across these raw data themes/ preliminary categories to determine 'higher order themes' (i.e., more refined concepts that best represent the findings and best address the research aims; van Manen, 1990). In so doing, the analysis moves beyond a simplistic list of 'barriers, motives and needs' to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges, sacrifices, tensions, opportunities and dilemmas which women experience with regard to sport participation.

Two broad key themes (each with various sub-themes) emerged from analysis to best represent the challenges, strategies, motives and needs of the participants. They were: 'Negotiation of constraints' and 'Needs' (please refer to Appendix 3 for a summary of these themes and their dimensions). Each theme is described in turn below. Describing these themes will help sports organisers understand the different ways in which women make sense of sport participation within the contexts of their



everyday lives. Gaining such insight can assist sports organisers in developing effective strategies to support women's sport and physical activity participation throughout their adult life.

## 5.2 Findings

### Negotiation of constraints

The first theme, negotiation of constraints, describes the challenges faced by these women and how they manage these barriers (i.e., personal strategies) so that they can continue to participate in sport. The main challenges facing the participants were: **family** (including partner/spouse and/or child/ren); **work** (including paid and unpaid responsibilities); **time**; **maintaining friendships with other women**; **affordability**; **the body** and; **gender stereotypes**. For the women in this study, many of these challenges overlap and interact with each other through the course of their daily life.

In the discussion below, I will show how these women negotiate these constraints to continue regular participation in community sport. This process of negotiation will be described across the following sub-themes of personal strategies: balancing family, work and sport; time management and prioritising; ignoring/resisting the (stereotyped) opinions of others; valuing friendship; fundraising and sponsorship and; maintaining physical activity levels through, and outside of, sport participation.

#### *Balancing family, work and sport*

One of the key strategies women used to maintain their sport participation was attempting to 'balance' or 'juggle' their family, work and time commitments. This almost always involved negotiation with family members or work colleagues and often resulted in 'sacrifice' or 'trade-offs' on the part of the women. By working, many women could support their family and their own sporting pursuits. At the same time, some women saw that playing sport and working can contribute positively to family relationships. As argued by Lewis and Ridge (2005) women's participation in sport, particularly those who are mothers, can create tensions as well as opportunities – not necessarily one or the other, as will be shown below.

Before presenting the findings, it is important to recognise that the maternal ethic of care (i.e., the culturally endorsed belief that women are primarily responsible for their children) and dominant traditional roles associated with motherhood and being a wife (such as childrearing and domestic responsibilities) prevail in western cultures (Brown et al., 2001; Dionigi, Fraser-Thomas & Logan, 2012; Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Lenskyj, 1995; Miller & Brown, 2005; Shaw, 1994). These stereotypes and ideologies affect women's participation in sport and this finding was a common theme running through all of the sub-themes presented below. As stated by Lewis and Ridge:

“Whether women are active or not, the ethic of care is absolutely central to women's decision-making and it is the underlying principle which they use in weighing up the effort against the rewards to be gained from being physically active” (2005, p. 2304).

In other words, these ideologies around motherhood and being female can make women question their right to take time out for themselves (also known as questioning their 'entitlement to leisure'; Lenskyj, 1995; Shaw, 1994). The findings below, however, highlight that rather than see these dominant beliefs as barriers to women's involvement in sport, they can be negotiated (and in some cases resisted) by women and create opportunities “which move beyond a focus on the self to encompass the flow-on, family-oriented benefits associated with mental wellbeing, family and

social connection” (Lewis & Ridge, 2005, p. 2304).

Emily describes the ethic of care and ideology of motherhood (explained above) that affects women’s decision to participate (and/or prevents their participation) in sport:

Look, I think for women, when they’ve got a family, they put their own needs last, so it’s more important to take the kids to their sport sometimes. And you know, certainly, when our boys were smaller, there was less time spent on our sport, my husband and I, than on theirs. So I think, for women, it’s, **they just put themselves last when it comes to exercise**. They make sure everyone else is okay first. *(Emily, age 49, from Melbourne, started netball at age 9, continuous, married (step children), full-time work)*

For some women, it was clear that ‘family [not sport or exercise] always comes first’, as Helen explains:

Work and family commitments [are the hardest things about maintaining involvement in sport] ...Well because I work casually you get called in at all hours. And work a lot, like I get a lot of work, that’s with disabilities, so it’s full on. And then I have a family and my mum who’s 87 and she’s got Parkinson’s and that so she’s, you know, there’s a lot that you have to help mum with. And then my daughter, I sort of baby sit for her so that she can go and play netball or have a night out or you know, so yeah. But I still meet up with some of the girls from netball and some of the girls from work and we’ll have a coffee and have a chat about things just to catch up. Yeah so that’s most of it...**Family always comes first**. If I can’t work myself around the family then you know, whatever ever it is has to wait, it gets put off. Yeah and that’s just the way it goes. That’s the most important thing. Netball unfortunately comes in after that. *(Helen, age 58, divorced, has older children)*

Other women found ways to balance both their own sporting needs and their children’s. For example, Louise, age 45, from Tasmania, (who is married with adult children) managed to play state level netball herself, as well as support her daughter because she had family support:

A lot of women give up a lot of their time that they want to play sport for their children...I’ve got a daughter who is an Australian netball squad member, so I’ve given up a lot of time for her to do what she wants to do... I mean, if you haven’t got a **good family support** that you can ... I mean, you just can’t cart the kids along to a night game and things like that. So I guess, yeah, if you’ve got the support there ...

Emily spoke about the stereotypical view that it is a woman’s role to care for her children and how this can prevent women’s sport participation:

I think often it was the thought that the children are the woman’s responsibility, you know, so we take the kids to their sport and go and watch Dad play his sport, and if you don’t get to play, well, too bad, someone’s got to mind the kids... when it comes down to the crunch of who’s gonna mind the kids while someone plays sport, it’s **Mum minds the kids and Dad plays sport**. *(Emily, age 49, from Melbourne, started netball at age 9, continuous, married (step children), full-time work)*

Mary explains how this expectation and ideology around what it means to be a ‘good’ wife or mother can make women feel guilty about playing sport, being with friends and having time away from their family. This dilemma of feeling that one does not have ‘entitlement to leisure’ or a ‘right

to self care' (as explained above) is common among women who feel compelled to accept/buy into/hold on to these stereotypical views associated with the 'maternal ethic of care':

Oh it's just, you know, organising to go away and you sort of think, 'Oh, you know, **it's a really selfish thing to spend all that money and time away** and hubby to take time off and all that just so I can have a week away with my girlfriends...but no one's really said anything ... I've implied it on myself. (*Mary, age 46, married, from Perth, involved in Masters Games since 2006, started netball at age 12 and played state level until age 42*)

As I get older **sometimes I feel a bit guilty with family**, with children, my husband. If I'm maybe just scheduling it at night time when everyone's home, I feel a bit guilty sometimes. I work during the day. **It's just trying to get that balance right**. Perhaps I could try and change to playing at a different time. Sometimes I might go for a walk or do something during the day hours when they're at work and school and I'm free at home at night. So I just balance that out, though ... one week I think I'm doing too much at night or I'm doing things for me. It's sort of balancing the time of day that you're playing it or doing sport or your own activities. (*Nicole, age 42, from Geelong, married with young child, part-time work, started sport at school, sport not a priority when growing up, when married took she took it up, her 1st Masters Games, she found a team on the Games' website*)

On the other hand, many women, including mothers and younger and older women with families, said that they came back to sport easily, without feeling guilty. These women were expressing their right to play sport, their entitlement to self care and some believed that doing so led to benefits for the whole family. For example, Mary (although she expressed feeling guilty above) simultaneously expressed the flow-on family benefits associated with her involvement in sport. She said that the only time she stopped playing competitive sport was when she was pregnant:

Yep, just babies...All my kids grew up in prams on the side of the court sort of... Watching sport, yeah, which is good because now they're all involved in sport and I think it's a really healthy, positive thing for kids to be involved in and especially like with our family I mean **now it's a family thing** we all go to Little Athletics and we're all involved, it's great...usually the places where you play socially they have crèches and things like that so you just, you know, pop the kids in the crèche for a hour and run like crazy and then, you know, you've had your break and away you go. (*Mary, age 46, married, from Perth, involved in Masters Games since 2006, started netball at age 12 and played state level until age 42*)

Interestingly, many of the women first said they played sport continuously, then, later in their interview, they mentioned stopping sport during pregnancy as an afterthought! For example, when asked, "How were you able to come back to sport after pregnancy?" Dianne (who has played netball since age 10 and her team has been going to the Masters Games since they were in the over-40s division) simply replied, "...you just started again [laughing]...because I'd known people that I played with, I came back to the same team, just took some time off, yeah [and came back]...Because you enjoy it, it's fun" (*Dianne, age 60, from Melbourne, divorced, older children*). Veronica only stopped when she had children and returned straight after, she said:

I'm a fairly strong person and it was important to have something I could do away from the kids and husband and it was a commitment and that's just, it's just black and white for me. [Why did you want to come back after a break?] 'Cause I needed that **thing for myself** and it's a short time. It's only like an hour and a half by the time you get in the car, drive and come

back, yeah, so it's a short time... **I'm self centred and that's it** [laughing]. (*Veronica, 64, married, cares for grandkids, basketball, Brisbane*)

Again we see women framing their participation as selfish, because society tells them that a 'good' wife or mother should not be taking time out for themselves at the expense of time with their family (Lenskyj, 1995). These findings also highlight that many of these women were highly invested in sport and identified themselves as sportswomen (similar to those in the New Zealand study of athletes who were mothers by Palmer and Leberman, 2009) – so their responses need to be examined in light of these characteristics because not all women feel competent in sporting contexts. Margaret said:

...I've never been made to feel guilty, nor do I feel guilty. I mean, like, if one of them [her children] is sick or something and I'm going, then obviously I do feel a bit of guilt there but I've made a commitment and I think it's important, regardless of whether you have kids or not, **to do something for yourself...** (*Margaret, age 41, married with young children*)

Likewise, Rachael has not felt guilty (and was not aware of other women that she knew being made to feel guilty) about playing sport, as she explained: "I think different generations now. Like, women got equal opportunity so they just, they do what they want to do" (*Rachael, 31, married, no children, full-time employed, netball, club/association, started playing at age 8*). Veronica, age 64, who is married with older children, said, "It [playing basketball at night] gets me out of the house like at certain times so someone else has to get the dinner." In a sense, these women were resisting stereotypes and traditional gender roles of housewife or caregiver through their participation in sport, as will be elaborated in the 'ignoring/resisting the (stereotyped) opinions of others' sub-theme below. In addition, such resistance was made easier for those women who had supportive partners and friends.

Having a supportive partner, other family members and/or friends helped many women maintain the balance between sports participation, work commitments and child care:

... being women, you know, we're mum's and we're professional people so some of us have got our own businesses and, you know, **it's a big juggle to get away** because of, you know, especially with hobbies and kids and like my, my situation, my hubby always takes annual leave so I can come away. **So he basically, yeah, assumes my role.** (*Mary, 46, married, part-time work, from Perth, Masters Games since 2006, started netball at age 12 and played state level until aged 42*).

...when you work full time and you've got a household to look after and stuff it's really hard to commit to you know, more than a couple for days a week. It's difficult when you've got to cook and clean and do washing and that's an excuse, but it's not an excuse it's actual reality, and trying to find the time to do as much as you would like to is not always easy... Obviously **having a supportive partner helps...** Like he'll come and watch me play sport or like I said little things like cook dinner while I go out and do you know, personal training session or go for a run or, you know, whatever needs to be done that I need to do for a night. So it definitely helps having that support from your partner. (*Christine, 36, defacto, one step daughter, netball, started age 6, always played, WA*)

Well I think you **need someone to look after your kids**, and that's the other thing; if the husbands are working we all look after each other's kids so we can play. So just, like we've got a young girl here with a five year old daughter; we'll, while Mum's playing we're watching

her daughter, because she didn't have a family where she had someone who could come and babysit. So you just do it. (*Patricia, 50, married, older children, full-time self employed, from Bendigo*)

Well, I suppose it's just you need to have **a good support base** to be able to do it... How do I manage the factors [of having young children]? Just with outside help, like parents and husband and childcare and stuff like that. [What would you need to change in your life to allow you to participate more fully in sport?] Well, it would just be really hard – well, it's just the children that stop me from playing whenever I want really so when they're older it will change. (*Jan, age 36*)

The last quote above points to the finding that women at different life stages (such as those with young children or older children) and as family structures change, participation in sport can become easier to 'juggle' for some women. When Mary was asked, "What is the hardest thing about maintaining regular participation in sport at this point in your life?" she replied:

Probably just a balance of time and family and work and just everything else...**it probably would be easier [in 10-20 years time] because as the kids grow up**, you know, it'll be don't have to worry so much about, you know, like my husband won't have to take time off for me to go away and all this kind of stuff because the kids will be older and, yeah, so it'll probably get easier I'd say. (*Mary, 46, married, part-time work, from Perth*)

Evidently, many women shared support for their children with their spouse and supported their children in their pursuits, as well as their own. These examples of reciprocity can strengthen family relationships and promote family togetherness (see Dionigi, Fraser-Thomas & Logan, 2012). For some women this involved playing the same sport with their children (or being a manager/coach of/involved in same club in some way). While several women expressed that their family's needs comes before their own sport participation, many other women described ways in which they can balance their family, work and sport commitments. It also appears that life stage plays a key role in allowing these women to prioritise sport and manage their time, as will be further elaborated in the next sub-theme.

### *Time management and prioritising*

Ensuring a well structured/planned lifestyle and placing importance on sport allowed many women to fit family, sport and work into their daily life. In other words, many women had to prioritise, plan and organise aspects of their lives in order to negotiate time constraints, overcome resource barriers and allow for the sport, family and work balance detailed above. As the online survey data for this study indicated, many women 'have to juggle multiple commitments to make time' (37% survey data). Many participants jokingly said that the thing they would need to change, to play more sport, would be to stop working so they have more time (but then they admitted that they would not have the money to afford it!). For example, in an ideal world Louise (age 45) would "give up work and play sport for enjoyment". Below women describe how they manage their time to allow for sports participation, and they highlight how challenging it can be:

Finding the time, because **we're so busy**. [How do you manage these factors to allow for your continued sports participation?] Just make time, otherwise you never get time to do anything...I just don't book my clients in when I'm playing netball... choose my own hours which means I had more time to...play sport (*Rachael, 31, married, no children, full-time employed, netball*)

Currently I'm engaged in home duties. [Do you find this can sometimes affect your participation in sport?] Look, it can, but it also allows me to be more flexible with when I play sport...I think basically I run a pretty structured household, so as long as we stick to the structure I think it's pretty easy to get out and get done what you want. ... I think that, given that I've got the kids, **there's an element of sacrifice**, so I wouldn't really say that I would rather put them in care more often just to play sport. *(Margaret, age 41, married with young children)*

Sally, age 36 (married with young children), despite having kidney disease (early stages), works part-time and is heavily involved in her netball club as a coach and official. Her biggest challenge is:

**Time commitments, like ferrying kids here, there and everywhere, like the logistics of it all.** Yeah, and relying on other people to help out with that 'cause my husband's 39 and still plays football. ... Yeah, that's probably the biggest challenge. It's not money or anything like that, like I pay for sport regardless of the cost. But it's more that, yeah, the logistics of who's going to have the kids, who's going to pick them up, can I get there at that time, yeah...And sacrifice too, like I sacrifice a bit to give back to my club. Like this year I missed my daughter's netball game every time to coach other people's kids. So that's hard. So the sacrifices sometimes hurt, but I know it'll all be good in the end. *[Sally expressed in her interview that she is very much in favour of 'healthy' competition and the positive life skills that sport can teach you, such as coping with winning and losing, maintaining friendships and developing teamwork skills.]*

Barbara recognises the added difficulties faced by many women with families, but in her case, time management was still an issue:

I think it's harder in some ways for women to keep playing...**I'm single so I can suit myself.** Like I go with my grandson's footy and my son when he used to play sport and that. But I can still play mine during the week and theirs would be the weekend type things and that sort of stuff. Yeah. But I think for a lot of people who have sort of got a family unit... it's a bit more difficult for them to just drift in and out...I suppose the only one [barrier] in my case would be basically sometimes **timing**. Yeah, with work. Sometimes you know, you can't make it to the early scheduled games on time and that sort of stuff. So that would be one of the things. Apart from that I've been very lucky, we've got lots of competitions around our area. *(Barbara, 62, divorced, no children at home, from Melbourne, full-time work)*

By making sport a priority and by valuing the social connections and friendships (as will be shown in the next sub-theme) these women found ways to find time for sport:

I know I want to play so I try and find people that can play and I just make sure I've got time. I make sure that everyone knows in my family that I'm playing netball on a Monday night. So I sort of just make the time. I try and keep fit so I can play well. [So a priority?] That's right, yes...I love it because **I love being part of a team. I love playing.** I just like that fitness and I like that time to myself where I can just get out there. **It gives me a good feeling**, the endorphins and all that sort of stuff, when you get out there... it's just fun and just having a chat to other people...the social side of it as well, just getting to know other people. I enjoy it for all those reasons. *(Nicole, age 42, from Geelong, married with young child, part-time work, She started sport at school, sport was not a priority when growing up, so when married took she took it up. It was her 1st Masters Games, she found a team on the Games' website)*

I just go from one thing to the other. I love it....[in regards to managing my time and work]... because my children are adult and my husband, he's very busy too, so **there's little responsibility there**. So Monday, for example, I would work. If it's an early game I would go straight from work to the game...Well, financially we're all fairly, at our age we're fairly okay. Time-wise, again, it's in our school holidays, which I was a bit miffed about really, not really. So that panned out quite well. So we'll go back next Sunday and then I'm back at work on Monday. So, but that's okay...and going to regular Masters, we get to know people. We get to know other teams now and personalities. Yeah, it's good to connect. *(Joan, 55, from Perth, married, two children over 21, one at home, full-time in education, basketball, walking, and tennis and running, started competitive tennis age 10, basketball age 20, 3<sup>rd</sup> Masters)*

Older women in the sample who had older children expressed less concern over family commitments, but they still had to negotiate their work commitments in the past. For example:

See, I'm lucky I'm not working, so I can pick and choose whether I have time off or not. But if I go back to the days when I was working it's the planning, and you think, "Alright, well this tournament's on," so **you make sure you've got the time to get off work**. I'm sort of not the person to, see, I just say to my husband, "I'm going away for a week." [laughs] But see, he's into hockey too, so we do the both...and sometimes we've come together; he's played hockey, I've done netball. Okay, so present circumstances are pretty accommodating for [sport]... Yeah, and I'm lucky my children are older; I've got a 27 year old and a 20 year old. *(Patricia, age 50, full-time self employed, from Bendigo)*

Patricia, like some of the other women in the group, clearly expresses her right to play sport. The following sub-theme elaborates on this notion of resistance to stereotypes.

### *Ignoring the (stereotyped) opinions of others*

The above findings describe ways in which the women negotiate gender and/or age stereotypes (i.e., social-cultural barriers). While many women were expressing this resistance in general terms and often in subtle (or unintentional) ways, this theme shows how women were candid in discussing their outright resistance to the opinion of others – usually a family member. Ignoring the stereotypical opinions of significant others allowed many women to continue sport participation with minimal feelings of guilt. Having a supportive network of other sportswomen (as shown in the next sub-theme on friendship) reinforces to them that they have 'a right' to play sport as they age.

Louise, who says she will not stop sport until she drops, was asked, "Have you ever been discouraged from playing sport?" She replied, "Yes, my husband probably discouraged me when I was trying to do 10,000 things at once, trying to fit in work and when the kids were little. [but I] Just ignore him...We're still married, by the way." *(Louise, age 45, Tasmania, started sport age 12, state level netball)*. Cathy, who was being interviewed with a couple of her teammates, laughed with them about their respective partners (or not):

- I: What would you need to change in your life to allow you to participate more fully in sport?  
 Cathy: Get rid of the husband [laughing].  
 P2: I already got rid of mine [laughing].  
 P3: And I don't have one so [laughing].  
 I: Have you ever been discouraged from playing sport?



Cathy: I don't class it as discouragement but when I was playing and had three kids and trying to find babysitters my mum wouldn't, she said you had them you look after them, so I was lucky enough that my father would look after them.

I: Yeah. So did that make you feel a bit guilty spending time on your sport?

Cathy: No [laughing]...**you just ignore it.** (*Cathy, age 66, married, older children, retired, netball, played continuously since age 10, from Latrobe Valley*)

Several participants were aware that traditional gender roles and expectations could create issues for many women with regard to their ongoing sport participation, even though they had not personally experienced it. For example, when talking about the fact that sport participation has not always been encouraged amongst women, particularly as they have gotten older, Barbara, age 62, who is divorced and has older children, said:

I think that's, somewhat sometimes of a male thing. They don't like, yes, they don't like their **wives going out and being independent**, a lot of people, or there's family commitments and they think they should be there and sometimes with the scheduling they think they should be home to make the meals and all that sort of stuff.

Helen explained that her mother made her question herself about playing sport at an older age:

My mum who's 87, **she thought I was crazy**, she said 'what on earth do you think you're doing?' And I did sort of stop and think for a minute, 'well gee am I crazy?' and I thought no, no this is what I love doing. (*Helen, age 58, divorced, has older children, she has arthritis (but said it is manageable), casual work, netball, her 1<sup>st</sup> Masters Games*)

Sally, age 36, is married with young children, is in the early stages of kidney disease, works part-time, plays netball and basketball, as well as goes to the gym and she is also "a coach. I umpire. I'm on a committee. I score and time-keep as well" she explained. Below she describes how work colleagues and other people in general have judged her for being so heavily involved in sport:

Not guilty from within my family and within my close people. I think there's **people that judge me** outside of that, like people at work that go, 'where do you find time for your family? You're always so busy.' And 'why are you on that committee, you don't need to be? What about your family?' Like so probably people who don't understand sport and don't understand my background in sport and my mum...my mum's happy to support me because that's what her mum did, and my mum thinks it's healthy for my daughter and my son to see that.

Sally continues to explain that people who are judging her do not understand the benefits of sport for herself and her family and she resists their views by being 'judgemental back' at them:

I just think it's how, like if you don't have that competitive spirit you don't kind of get it...So they mightn't of ever had that [competitive spirit]. Or they've hit a point where they go, no [to sport], you know? ...**they judge me for what I do and sometimes I guess I'm judgmental back in saying your life doesn't have to be all around your kids**, that some things that you do actually lead by example. Like I get made to feel guilty for going three mornings a week to the gym and putting my son my crèche for an hour. He loves crèche, and I go to the gym and he knows I'm going to the gym and I think that's a great example to set...but the people who don't get it they think it's a great example for them to sit in a coffee shop and

drink coffee, whereas, you know, they're judging me I'm judging them to say, well I think the example I set's better than sitting in a coffee shop.

Having a supportive network of friends through ongoing sport participation and companionship with like-minded women, from various working and social backgrounds, helps these women resist stereotypical views about what it means to be a 'good' mother or wife and feel empowered among a group of compatible women (Heuser, 2005; Lewis & Ridge, 2005; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2013; Theberge, 2000).

### *Valuing friendship*

Sport helps the women maintain friendship and support outside of family. Having friendships with other women also helps them negotiate family constraints (e.g., friends can watch their children while they play a game – a common finding, as shown above, due to all of the women being involved in team sports, such as netball). Therefore, the value these women place on friendships with other women, especially as part of a team sport, allows them to negotiate interpersonal barriers that they may encounter, such as lack of social connections due to a busy working life, relocating to another town, change in marital status or raising a family. In particular, sport was seen as a structured way to socialise with others, for example:

Well often with people's lifestyles and family commitments and that, it's hard to get together. Sometimes sport is a great way. You know what time you're getting together for one hour, type of thing, **at a certain time at a certain place**. And everybody knows what they're doing, so from that point of view it's been good too. (*Barbara, 62, divorced, no children at home, from Melbourne, full-time work*)

Joan is a teacher, she changed the school where she was working and wanted to maintain contact with her colleagues whose friendship she valued, so she formed a basketball team and that allowed her to maintain social contact with her colleagues. She said:

I think we have quite a cohesive team. A big thing would be if there was some cracks in that...if there were any fractures in that **cohesive team bonding kind of thing**, I think that would be the biggest discord. (*Joan, 55, from Perth, married, two older children*)

Friendships were a key motive for these women's ongoing sport participation. The fact that all participants were involved in team sports makes this finding more prominent than if they were individual athletes; although, other studies have shown that even women in individual sports, like swimming and track and field, value the camaraderie they experience, especially as part of a Masters club (for example, see Dionigi, 2010; 2013). Below are examples of camaraderie across the three sports represented in the sample of the current study:

The team thing, it's about the team thing, and the socialising and being part of that team. So I think that's the key to it for me... We socialise as families. And, yeah, it's just, it's gorgeous, yeah... I think there's **a common interest and a common passion for the game**. Even watching it, and being involved in the club and the friendships I have, from not just playing but actually game night I'll know lots of people there. And some you just are acquaintances. Others you actually socialise with, have coffee. We'll go out for dinner together. We'll, yeah, do a lot of things together. (*Joan, age 55, from Perth, married, two older children, basketball*)

Patricia (age 50) who was involved in netball, referred to her team and club as 'a sisterhood': "Yeah, and we've got an over 45's team and over 35's, so we're supporting them and vice versa. But they'll

be our age soon, and we might be hopefully still playing with [them]. It is, **it's like a sisterhood** in a sense."

Women in team sports often talk about their team and their club members as 'a big family' and/or 'sisterly' (Heuser, 2005; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2013; Theberge, 2000). Having other women to talk to and spend time with (on and off the sporting field) gave the women in the current study support as they got older, especially when their children had grown up or their husband had other interests or if they were single. Donna (age 49) said that she did not start sport until she was 32 years old because "I was just a single mum and I was working all the time, so I never really got into any sport really. [She had her daughter at age 16]". Donna explained how she got involved in baseball and how important it is to her now:

It was through a woman that was actually working with me ...she said did I want to come down and have a play. And so I went down. I knew nothing about baseball. Had never done anything like it before, and I just loved it...I just like the people really, the people I've met through it. It was just fun to play and I wasn't really doing anything at that time as far as physical activity so it was really good...We're pretty friendly with everyone that we play...Well most of the friends I have now are baseball people. So that's become close people. And it's almost like you become like a family really. Yeah. We're all pretty close. We're supportive of each other. We've had people diagnosed with cancer and we stick by each other and we help each other out, and raise money. Yeah. It is like a big family, **we even call each other a big family**. [Laughing]

Likewise, Barbara, age 62 (divorced with older children), who plays basketball said:

I love competing, just the actual physical playing of the sports and that sort of stuff. And I love the friendships, you know, and they're enduring and you meet new people and all that sort of stuff and you stay in contact with them a lot of the time. And for me, you know, like the world Masters last year, or this year, that was fabulous. We all got together and we went away as a group and did stuff beforehand, cruises and things like that. Yeah, so I mean that was an opportunity I probably never would have done...I suppose it's, **in the end it all boils down to people. You enjoy being with people** or whatever else, yeah...This is just part of my life, it always has been, always will be...

For some women, participation in the Masters Games was an opportunity to maintain friendships with others who no longer live in the same area as them. For example, Christine, age 36, had moved away from where she grew up, so the Masters Games is a chance for her to catch up with friends every year:

Well...with us it's the team [that brought me to the Masters Games], obviously it's a bonding thing for us. I'm not actually living in Karratha myself anymore, so for me it was more of an **opportunity for me to get back together with the girls** that I've been with, some of them for 10 years so it was a great opportunity. They were putting a team together so I got invited to come along, so for me that side of it was social side catching up with everyone and obviously this is my first Masters so it was the experience of being here and experiencing the whole event. So it's been great we've had a great time so far.

Finally, participating in sport with like-minded women who are committed to and passionate about their sport helps reinforce to them that they are not the only ones who play sport during adulthood. It enables them to feel empowered by a group of compatible women which is part of the resistance

to gender and age stereotypes about what are considered 'appropriate' leisure activities as women age (Dionigi, 2010; 2013; Litchfield & Dionigi, 2012; 2013). Nicole, age 42, who found her netball team on the 2013 Masters Games website, explained:

As I've gotten older, people are more interested, so I've found more like-minded people... as you get older...you find things that you really love doing. I've realised I love netball and I want to keep playing for as long as I can. I've found some people ... I'm always on the lookout for players and stuff. Whoever I meet, "Do you play netball?" It's a bit embarrassing but it's **nice to meet this group of people because they are all a bit crazy about it too**. So as you get older you want it to be part of your life and just make a commitment to play and you find people that are interested. So it just works.

Helen, age 58, described older sportswomen as role models to younger people when she spoke about the importance of camaraderie, fitness and travel in sport:

Oh I think the camaraderie first, that's a big thing. The physical part of it you know, you have to keep fit and that's the main thing I think. And different places that you visit, different people that you meet. Yeah and not only that it encourages the young ones, you know **if the young ones see you out there at 58 and you're still playing netball they go wow!** They might go wow look at those old people but when you're that age and you see that happening they just wow, well they can still do it...I feel like it's an encouragement to younger people if they see somebody of our age out there still doing it. Or myself, I feel encouraged when I see people of 70, 75 and they're playing I'm, I think wow! That's, to us it's encouraging so it's just a chain reaction. It goes down the line.

### *Fundraising and sponsorship*

Affordability was raised among these women as a challenge to maintaining regular participation in sport. In particular, in order to attend the Australian Masters Games many women said they had to raise money, gain sponsorship or 'save' to make their participation more affordable.

**It's certainly not a cheap event that's for sure. We've done a lot of fund raising** to try and accommodate a lot of the costs and you know, sponsorship here and there, we've got quite a few sponsors that have helped us out [she has a brother who's got his own business], you don't realise just how much goes into it with air fares and accommodation and uniforms and shoes and cars and fuel and food and it all adds up. So it has become quite an expensive event but when you've got supporters on side with sponsorship and fundraising and you know, trying to do as much as we can to bring the costs down it helps. But it's worth it, it's all worth it...God they've done all sorts from selling raffle tickets to working in bars at events, social events or oh God, I couldn't even tell you what they've done up there to be honest, they've done a huge amount of fund raising so it's been great. (*Christine, 36, defacto, one step daughter, netball, started age 6, always played, from WA*)

Friends were selling raffle tickets at the Hawks, one of the Hawks games in town, in Launceston I should say. And I happened to ask them what they were doing and they said that they were doing it to **raise money to come to the Masters Games** and they both suggested that I should come and I convinced myself that yes I could do it... They sort of needed players. They had a few at the start that thought they could come and then dropped out, so no, they were quite happy for me to join...We've had to pay a little bit for accommodation. .. so we're sharing accommodation costs, food costs. We've very generously been donated a bus, so all we've got to pay for is the diesel for that. Yeah, and then so it's just

our own airfares. Yeah, they did also raise some money through gate duty in the netball association in town, like working on the gate for finals and stuff, so that all helped. (*Anna, 39, married with a young family, netball, she is a, "Player, coach, umpire, [and] secretary for the club."*)

Given that the majority of the women in this sample were working or seemingly from middle-class backgrounds, women from low socio-economic backgrounds would experience even greater resource barriers, such as lack of finances to commit to sport, let alone attend a Masters event.

Cathy, age 66, explained that the cost of playing regularly at the community level was also expensive, especially in regard to insurance fees:

The money, the cost of playing....Yeah registering and insuring, injuries... And sports injury **insurance isn't cheap**...And you don't get much back from the body, the sports body that you're paying all this money to, you don't ... You don't get it back from them [Medicare or the government] unless it's a really serious injury. If you've like broken your hand you only get like a third. You don't get anybody come in to help you, you've got to have two broken legs...And you've got to struggle doing that. So if you have a really serious injury ...[P2: So you've still got to do your housework, you've still got to do work, you've still got to mind your kids.] Yeah... And that's what a lot of the stadiums are out to do that run the sports. The stadiums themselves run the sport, they're out to make money. Because we play a couple, a game a week in a stadium that's play at your own risk... So the insurance is a big factor. (*Cathy, 66, married, older children, retired, netball, played continuously since age 10, Latrobe Valley, Vic, 1<sup>st</sup> Games*)

The above quote highlights the concern of injury that many women have, especially as they get older, in particular it shows that the 'maternal ethic of care' issue prevails. As Dianne, age 60, explained, "Oh well sometimes families feel they don't want mum to go out and, you know, not be available for them. Or if she's injured how are we all going to survive?", which leads to the final sub-theme about the importance women place on keeping the body 'fit', not only for their own sake, but also their family's well-being.

#### *Maintaining physical activity levels through, and outside of, sport participation*

This sub-theme shows how the women negotiated physiological barriers by keeping physically active so 'the (aging) body' can continue to compete in sport. At the same time, they maintained their ability, health and fitness levels by playing sport regularly. For many women it was about maintaining fitness and activity levels outside of sport (such as going to the gym, walking, swimming) so that they can continue with the physicality of sport as they get 'older and slower'. In other words, keeping fit and active was a key motive for their involvement in sport, as well as the social and mental outcomes they experienced.

...you just get a lot of enjoyment out of it and it has a lot of benefits, like mentally and physically. **It just is a healthy thing to do for yourself** and it also allows you to make friends...Just enjoyment, stress release, something that I do for myself and that I feel I benefit from. And it's a nice social activity (*Margaret, 41, married with young children, home duties, diabetes, netball (club), social touch and tennis*)

Despite these benefits, when the women were asked what was the hardest thing about maintaining sports participation or what was a barrier that would stop them playing, 'injury' and 'age' were recurring responses:

**Injury ... and old age.** ...I don't mind, in the sense that I'm not out there playing, I just want to play. But I do get concerns about injury, because some of them are pretty full on in the way they play, and they're getting, younger people are getting bigger. Not just taller, but heavier ... (Emily, 49, Melbourne, started netball age 9, continuous, married (step kids), full-time work)

...when you get to 45, obviously, your knees and things, when you've been playing for over 30 years, the knees are a bit dodgy... **I'm not giving it up until I have to** because I think if I stop then I'd probably never come back because of my knees and things and injuries. [I: So you're just going to keep going until something bad happens.] Yeah, until I drop. (Louise, age 45, Tasmania, married, adult kids, started sport age 12, state level netball)

... there hasn't really been too many barriers. I suppose the only one really is injury. That would be me. [In an ideal sort of a world, would you be playing more?] Probably if the body would hold up and that sort of stuff. So I suppose, there's another barrier. **It depends on your physical capabilities to be able to continue**...we were talking about the next Pan Pacs and then the next World Masters, so that's four years now until the next one, so we're sort of thinking ahead... Most of us, we were just talking about it last night, there's three of us or four of us who are around the 63 mark, one who just turned 61 and everybody sort of is keen to keep it going for as long as we can. (Barbara, 62, basketball divorced, no children at home, from Melbourne, full-time work)

Injuries. Injuries I think are a massive factor of it as well. I think it's a lot easier – it's obviously a lot easier – to hurt yourself when you're older and so I think that participation is obviously not encouraged as much when you do reach a certain age. But having said that, I do also think that **it is important to keep it up so that you can maintain a basic fitness level to reduce the amount of injuries** that one would possibly acquire otherwise from not partaking in regular activity. (Margaret, 41, married with young children, involved in netball (club), social touch and tennis)

The two latter quotes point to the importance these women place on continuing to play sport as they age to maintain ability and fitness levels in hope to avoid injuries, as Nicole (age 42) said, "I think sometimes as you get older, if you sort of stop, if you get injured, so it's just trying to keep going..." Likewise, Dianne, age 60, spoke about how hard it is to come back or recover after an injury, especially as you age:

...as you get older less people are still playing...Because somebody hurts a knee, an ankle, you know we had one girl that played, snapped an Achilles, she never came back. You know it's just **harder to find older people that are still active in sport**...at some point it'll, we won't be able to put a team together and we're already trying to decide when we're not fit enough to play netball what other sport we can do together. We were thinking about darts [laughing]...No the problem is we realise that **as you get older you get injured easier and you don't recover as quickly** so you've had to temper what you think you can do. So you don't necessarily want to play against the 35 year olds who are still really fit and bounce up, if they fall down they bounce better [laughing]. (Dianne, age 60, from Melbourne, divorced, older children)

However, it was not only the older women in the sample, but also women aged in their 40s, who spoke of the challenge of managing the body, for example:

... trying to keep my body in [a state] where I can actually keep playing...Because of the arthritis [in her back] and a few other things, yeah, it's just actually **being able to keep participating**. [Well what are the things that help you keep participating?] Pain medication...Yeah. [Laughing] Doctor's orders...That's just for my general life but it helps me play baseball as well. I try to go to the gym and I try to keep moving really. (*Donna, 49-years-old, began playing baseball at age 32 and has not stopped*)

The findings so far highlight the various ways in which these women negotiate barriers and address their own needs so that they can continue to participate regularly in community-level and Masters sport. While personal strategies are important, this study was also interested in how sporting organisations could make sport more attractive for women.

## Needs

This theme on 'needs' describes what these women said they need from sporting organisations and/or government bodies to make community sport participation more accessible, doable and desirable for themselves and/or other women across Australia. Many of their expressed needs were related to the challenges identified in the previous theme, such as child care and affordability (i.e., access barriers), time management/scheduling (i.e., resource and access barriers), maintaining friendships (interpersonal barriers) and gender stereotypes (i.e., socio-cultural barriers). In addition, however, these women also highlighted the need for sporting organisations and/or government bodies to promote and value women's involvement in sport (as players and coaches etc), to advertise sport at the local level, to provide more facilities and officials in some areas, and create positive sporting spaces for girls and young mothers, which can encourage them to continue sport as they age. Each of these factors is discussed below, followed by a conclusion (Chapter 6) and a list of recommendations (Chapter 7) arising from the findings.

### *Child care - Onsite affordable crèche*

As shown above, family commitments were important to most of the women, so having affordable (or free) child care offered through sporting clubs would assist mothers of young children. Having crèche facilities and qualified staff onsite would allow women to play sport while their child/ren is in care. Having sporting organisations offer discounts or rebates on child care costs for members with children could encourage women to return to sport. The summary quote provided by Cathy (in the 'scheduling' sub-theme below) and the comment made by Jan in the final sub-theme, as well as the numerous times 'child care' was listed under 'needs' in the on-line survey data (also collected as part of this study) point to the necessity of addressing child care issues if sporting organisations want to make community sport more accessible and desirable for mothers. Part of this process also involves breaking down the stereotype that you are a 'bad mother' if you leave your child in care while you play sport. Lewis and Ridge (2005) and Palmer and Leberman (2009) argue that this attitudinal change can be achieved by reframing sport as being of benefit to family relationships, as well as to women themselves.

### *Affordability - 'Needs to be cheaper'*

As shown above, some women find community sport expensive, so while they work and/or fundraise and gain sponsorship to support their pursuits, they suggest that clubs could lower their costs and/or seek government funding for community sport.

I think one [change] is to make them [sports] **more economically accessible**, because they can be quite expensive...I think [the cost of participation] probably has affected me more so in

the past than currently; like, back when I was a student in my early 20s, I would say that it was definitely a factor that I couldn't afford to do a lot of things. (*Margaret, 41, married with young children, involved in netball (club), social touch and tennis*)

Cathy (age 66) believed that sport needs to be more affordable, not only for younger women, but also for retirees, especially because of the cost of insurance (as detailed in the 'affordability' sub-theme above). Below she details how much money she spent to attend the Australian Masters Games, while also admitting that she can afford it:

**It needs to be cheaper. For even retirees**, they can't continue on doing all their sports because like the [netball] dress is \$100.00, registration \$196.00, you know. It's just very expensive...[For these Masters Games]...we roughly worked it out. It would be maybe between \$500.00 and \$700.00. But every time you turn around it's, 'oh you need this and you need that' and it's more money. So I'd say all up it's cost us all about \$1,000.00 each to come down for the week... I think it's been worth it, yeah...I mean we're at the age where we can [afford it], if we know we're going to come down and play we can put money aside. It's not all out of one pay... It's coming, like \$20.00 a week out of your pension instead of going down the pub or buying some chocolates or something. That money is sport.

At the same time, while many women want sporting organisations to cut costs, they also want to see more sporting and recreational facilities, more umpires and officials, as well as better quality facilities in their local area. These women are aware that such upgrades require funding and local council approval, as described below.

#### *More facilities and officials*

Some women, particularly those from small towns, expressed the need for more facilities to cater for a growing interest in sport. For example, Cathy, age 66, from Latrobe Valley in Victoria said:

...I like swimming but it costs now to travel to a pool and they're usually short course pools and they're crowded with kids and people doing water aerobics or ...arthritis clinics. And you haven't got the space...**We've got no facilities near where I live**...I travel 18 [kilometres] to play [netball] and that, because there's 200 people in our village. We've got a football ground and netball courts but that's it [laughing].

Patricia (age 50, married with older children), from Bendigo, said that in an 'ideal world' she would like to:

Have indoor [netball] courts. [laughs] And see, we still have asphalt, and it comes down to **community money, what the council can provide** to have better courts for your physical recovery...and the environment and stuff. Yeah, **we've been fighting with the council** for six months; we've had the paint donated and we just want the lines painted, and because it's OH&S [an occupational health and safety issue] we can't get anyone to do it. The council has to approve it, and you think, 'We just want the lines painted, for God's sake how hard is it?'

The above obstacles, however, were not only evident in small communities because women from the city expressed similar needs:

...I find in our area, we've just joined the Ivanhoe Netball Club [in Melbourne] and with our Council, we're struggling to, we've got 200 participants in the Ivanhoe Netball Club already



and that sort of happened in two years. We might have x amount of boys playing football but they have x amount of football ovals...We're lucky if we've got a goal ring. We've just been told that we can use some of the courts that used to be basketball courts but with, with 200 young girls starting at about, I think grade 3 right through to our age, there's all those teams, **200 girls and women playing and we don't have a home ground and to get it out of the Council is like something unbelievable**...we have to go to all the Council meetings and try and push them for something and it's not like the old days like where everyone used to chip in money all the time. Everyone expects grants and they expect all this sort of thing. It's very hard...because there never was an Ivanhoe Netball Club even though there's an Ivanhoe Football Club and it's getting very hard because these kids need somewhere to train and they need somewhere to play and that sort of thing and we just don't have it. They're all over the place...One court would be nice. *(Betty, 55, married with older children, has been involved in Masters since 1997)*

The above quote also highlights the priority given to sports for boys and men, over girls and women, that was expressed by several women when they spoke about sport in their area (as will be shown below in the sub-theme on the need to 'promote women's sport'). In addition, some women said they need more umpires and officials, as well as better transport, to cater for the expansion of sport participation in their area. For example, Cathy, age 66, (quoted at the start of this sub-theme) explained:

**We'd need public transport. We'd need officials.** There's very few officials. We've got good quality courts now but the cost is expensive to just go and play for a couple of hours. You've got to pay for the court because the schools also use those courts so you've got to book well in advance, we book 12 months in advance to use that court every Wednesday so the school doesn't have it but if there's a school competition we're kicked off.

Not only does the above quote further indicate the lack of priority given to women's sport in Cathy's experience, but it also highlights the difficulties around scheduling (an access issue).

### *Scheduling*

Given that many women have to prioritise and plan, as well as balance family and/or work commitments to maintain sport involvement, having games scheduled at different times can cater for women of different ages and with differing needs. Some women suggested having daytime competitions for retirees or 'stay-at-home mums', as well as night time and/or weekend competitions:

Well, see for my age, it is, yeah it would be and we used to have a lot of participation in Adelaide in **daytime competition**, that was netball. I used to do basketball as well, wasn't as much basketball, but there used to be a lot of netball, in the mornings, yeah. *(Veronica, 64, married, cares for grandchildren, basketball, from Brisbane)*

The differences among women of varying life stages, family structures and work schedules highlight the difficulty for sporting organisations attempting to cater for the complexity of everyday life. The following quote from Cathy (age 66) summarises this complexity by describing women's need for flexible scheduling, affordable child care, affordable membership rates, as well as the need to establish positive youth experiences for girls (see the final sub-theme), if sporting organisations are to make sport more attractive for masters-aged women:

...the non-participation of **younger people coming through** has stopped a lot of it [netball competitions] because you can't get full teams and you can't get competition... Most of them are still concerned with raising families and there's no **babysitting facilities for women** to leave their children **at a low cost** and go and play. So that's a big stopper....What we have to encourage is more women to come back after they've had their children. After their kids are at school. Make competitions maybe **during the day** so the stay-at-home mums can come and [make it] **affordable** for them. And because there's a lot of part-time workers, a lot of full-time workers can't play. They'll play at night, but there's nothing for mothers that stay home.

On the other hand, some women expressed satisfaction with the scheduling of sports in their locale; for example, Rachael (age 31, no children) from Hoppers Crossing in Melbourne said:

There's nothing really [needed to improve access and enjoyment of sport] because there's a lot of places around that we can play [netball] and they're all different times. So you've got like a 9.30 game slot, so it's pretty good. Like, **it accommodates everyone**.

#### *Better advertisement*

Several women spoke about the importance of knowing where to find a sport, a team or a club when relocating or when returning to sport after a break because this information makes the transition back into sport easier for them. Therefore, women suggested that sports organisations could provide better advertisement at the local level, through the phone book, Internet, magazines and flyers to inform women about what is available. For example:

**Better publication of information on how to get involved**, you know, like, they've only, sort of, gone online in the last couple years...there wasn't phone numbers of [netball] teams up there that you could contact, you know, so getting and publishing the team, or...publishing how to get involved. There was no numbers in the White Pages for those old enough to look up that, there was nothing on the internet. And yet, there's this thriving competition that we stumbled across by just seeing a netball centre and walking in there and asking, you know. (*Emily, 49, from Melbourne, married with step children*)

Perhaps just good promotion of [local] sport. Like really get out there what there is available and how good it can be for anyone to participate. Like I said, if you find the right sport and the right group of people, yeah. **It's just a matter of promoting it**. (*Anna, 39, married with a young family, from Tasmania*)

On the other hand, some other women (especially those who are heavily involved in sport as players, coaches, administrators etc) feel that there is not much else sporting organisations can do. These women believe that there is information out there, but women just have to want to play sport and look for it:

**...if people want to do it they'll do it**...everywhere you go there's...lists of, you know, whatever sport you want to play, you can always go and find, you know, your local club and all that sort of stuff, so I mean you can. (*Mary, 46, married with children, part-time employed, from Perth and played state level netball until age 42*).

No, we've got access to a lot of sport in Geelong...and there's great media and they utilise Facebook and social media really well to let you what's coming up. There's holiday programs

for kids. There's **always new competitions sort of advertised and encouraged** and, no I think there's plenty around, yeah. (*Sally, 36, part-time employed, married with young children*)

Well there's just **so many opportunities out there now to play sport**. So it's really just look in the phone book or Google, talk to people, go down to your local sporting complex and see what's on. There's so much around it really is not impossible to you know, to not play sport. It's around you, it's everywhere, it's on TV, in newspapers, magazines, **there's just so much media advertising you can't not find a way to play sport these days**.

There's really no excuse not to be able to find something...You want to step out of a box and actually have a look around you, there's actually a lot more than you probably realise. (*Christine, 36, defacto, one step daughter, netball, started age 6, always played, WA*)

However, there is an assumption in this type of thinking that individuals have the information literacy skills to find what they are looking for and that they have the requisite knowledge to make informed choices – which may not always be the case. Teaching individuals how and where to search for legitimate information and how to make use of that information is important when trying to promote behaviour change. Also, there is an assumed motivation level on the part of the participant – that is, these women imply that if costs are reduced, scheduling is more flexible, facilities are more available and convenient then more women will participate (Dixon, 2009, p.46). Although structural and cultural change is necessary to make sport more accessible and enjoyable for many women, these changes will not necessarily equate to behavioural change. Moreover, deeply embedded socio-cultural stereotypes of 'appropriate leisure activities' for women (Dionigi, 2010; 2013) and what it means to be a 'good wife' or 'good mother' (Lewis & Ridge, 2005), as well as the male-dominance in sporting contexts (Anderson, 2009; Fullagar & Toohey, 2009), ultimately affect women's decisions to seek out and engage (or not) in sport (Lenskyj, 1995). Breaking down such stereotypes is not an easy task, as discussed in the next theme.

#### *Promote women's sport – as players, coaches and officials*

Several women spoke about the need to break down gender stereotypes and the male-dominance of sport. They expressed the need to give more status to women's sport in the media, as well as at the local level in regard to use of courts (as described above in the 'more facilities' sub-theme) and the promotion of important matches, like the women's final. Examples of this need, from women across the three sports represented in the sample, are provided below:

I don't think we [women] get enough **coverage through the media** and particularly in Tassie. I think we put so much into [playing sport], the equivalent to what men do, but the media coverage is sadly lacking. (*Louise, 45, married with older children, a state level netball player*)

There could be more coverage of sport, women's sport especially. I didn't even know the New Zealand/Australian [netball] game was on television the other night, it wasn't well advertised. You don't hear that the Australian girls' cricket team is the world champions, you don't hear anything about women's sport. It's men's sport. Women's sport have got maybe a quarter of a column...**Oh the pay situation's shocking. It should be equal pay for every game**. (*Cathy, 66, married, 4 children have left home, retired, netball, played continuously since age 10, Latrobe Valley, Vic, 1<sup>st</sup> Masters games*)

I manage a SBL [state basketball league] team...the women play first, the men play afterwards. The crowd and the [spectators], we don't have a lot of people there...that [lack of] promotion and pathway for women's sport...pathways are put in place for men's

sport...because they are a good spectacle. But I don't know. I find women's basketball far more strategic to watch...Yes, promote it better. Give it some kudos in, if it's a grand final, for example, the smoke, and the streamers and the dancing girls come out for the men. But **the women have nothing. So there's not a spectacle there. There's no kudos.** So it's saying women's sport is not as important as men's. So I actually think they've got to promote it. I mean, on the international stage I think they do. *(Joan, 55, from Perth, married with older children, basketball player)*

Joan also highlighted the need to encourage more women to be officials and coaches, while also recognising the challenge of achieving this goal in a 'male-dominated' context:

I think there's probably many things [that could be done to better promote women's sport]. **Promotion of it by male-sports figures maybe**, well known male sports who show an interest. Honestly, there would be 100 ways, but I don't know. I really don't know. I think it's one of those things that people have tried countless ways to try and promote that, and particularly women. For example, the club that I'm in, we're trying to promote more women coaches in our women's program. So that's been male-dominated.

The low status given to women's sport generally can lead to poorly organised competitions at the community level, as Donna, age 49, a 'single mum' who started playing baseball at age 32 when her daughter was 16 years-old, explained:

I think it [baseball] is enjoyable and accessible, but unfortunately it tends to be stereotyped as a men's sport. So it's always been a hard battle to get them [the club] to actually fully support the women's [competition]...in summer there's quite a decent sized women's league. There's, what, 18 teams of women that play in the summer. Yeah. Just a little bit more encouragement I suppose. **Show some support for the women instead of going or leaving them to the side...Just by organising the competition better than they do. Taking a little bit more time and care to organise it properly**...just making sure that teams play - we have three different divisions in women's league, and sometimes they just don't take care to put the right teams in the right divisions to make sure you're playing against the competitive level that you should be playing against.

On the other hand, Anna from Tasmania (who has played netball since age 8 and is currently "Player, coach, umpire, [and roster] secretary for the club") described the welcoming environment in her sporting club that encourages women of all ages and abilities to join in:

... our community, we encourage people to come and do whatever sport it is. Yeah, like basically we run around at netball. There is an indoor netball mixed comp just before, like in the weeks leading up to Christmas. So I mean people are always encouraged to get out and at least try... We did have this year a few [older] players come back to the club who hadn't played for a long time who really enjoyed it and had a great time and who want to play again. So I think it's just a matter of having the right environment... Yeah, and that's what we've tried to set up is that, yeah, **we want to be like a really happy club and good environment for families to come to.** And you know, whether you're a mum and your daughter or granddaughter or whatever [want to join], then yeah, you're welcome to come to our club and just participate in any way you can...*(Anna, age 39, married with a young family)*

In male-dominant sports, however, even though women can play, they may still feel intimidated and incompetent when competing with men; for example:

There wasn't really anything stopping me. Well because I suppose at the club ball level though it's nearly all men. So that's a little bit of a deterrent I guess. Like I don't know if I want to be the only girl playing in the team...I just feel that I wouldn't be as good or nowhere near as good as they are. It wouldn't be them. They would never discourage, well not where I play they wouldn't discourage the women from playing. **But it's more feeling that you're not quite up to the levels that they are...** I suppose the men just are, they throw harder, they hit harder, so it's thinking are you capable of handling that? (*Donna, 49-years-old, began playing baseball at age 32 and has not stopped. Before that she said she was 'just a single mum...working all the time'*)

Another way to work towards breaking down stereotypes and the male-dominance of sport is to create environments for girls to enjoy sport. Doing so in school, community and family contexts can encourage more women to continue playing sport as they age (which also allows for the maintenance of friendship and support networks outside of family and work).

#### *Positive youth/school sporting experiences*

All the women (except one, Donna) played sport from a young age. They were (for the most part) encouraged to play by their parents and school teachers and had positive experiences of sport during their school years. This finding points to the importance of creating positive experiences for girls in sport (at school and in their local community) as one way to encourage women to reconnect with sport, as well as have the support mechanism available (such as affordable child care) at the clubs for mothers who want to return. This idea was reflected across women of different ages; for example, Jan, age 36, and Rachael, age 31, respectively, said:

[I play sport] To keep fit and just because I enjoy them. I think because I started it from a young age, **it's just what I'm used to...**[I was able to come back after pregnancy because] there was a child care facility there at the stadium. (*Jan*)

Just runs in the family. My auntie was a coach so she started coaching us...I love netball. I've **just always grown up with it** [began at 8 years old]. (*Rachael, married, no children, full-time employed*)

Margaret, age 41, who is married with young children, explained:

**I started when I was in high school and I just really enjoyed the social aspect of it.** I liked the team. I like to be in a team and I enjoy the game...I don't like contact sport, so I enjoy that [non-contact] element of [netball]. And I find that it's something that you can play whether you're old or young.

Some women believed that promoting the participation side, rather than focusing on the competitive side and winning from a young age, can affect participation in adult life. For instance, Emily, a 49-year old from Melbourne (married with step children and full-time employed), started playing netball at age 9 and has never stopped, but she explains why other people might stop:

I've been with kids teams, where the adults take the attitude that the team has to win, so some kids spend a lot of time on the bench, and then they just don't want to go anymore...You know, that attitude of, "if you can't be a winner, then you shouldn't be playing," you know? [And do you think that is affecting people's participation later in sport?] Absolutely. Because

it's hard to start later in life. **And if you start when you're a kid, and the coach makes you feel like you're hopeless and you might as well not be playing, it'd be very hard to come back...** When I was in high school, I got discouraged because there was a lot of that attitude of, "if you can't be in the top team, I don't know why you're bothering," kind of thing. As opposed to, "let's get everyone to just give this a try," you know?...if I look back at my high school friends, who I still know, I'm one of the few still playing...I think that's a big part of it, because they, you know, just always felt, you know, embarrassed and humiliated playing sport ...

Emily highlights the importance of inclusiveness for girls in sport, regardless of ability. Louise, age 45, said, "I went to Flinders Island School. I lived on Flinders Island in Bass Strait and it was a very small community and everybody ... we played everything. The sports were a huge part of the community." This sentiment was echoed by other women in the sample who came from small towns. Later she said, "[before I had kids I was] Always working but still managed to play. I think a lot of it's got to do with **how you're brought up** and if you're brought up in that sporting environment." Barbara, age 62, said:

I love it. I've always played it since we were kids. **The family is basically all sports minded**, both parents were very good athletes and that sort of stuff. So it's sort of come down the generations and the next ones are following in our footsteps for the most part...Mum used to play cricket. But I know my dad played, he was a very good athlete and sports and football in particular were the ones, yeah, he did athletics as well, he was a runner...I suppose we were always encouraged, we were always outside playing cricket... and all that sort of thing as well with all the kids around...So yeah, it was always there if, we wanted them [my parents] to [help with transport] they would help you out...I just loved [playing sport when I was younger]. **I'm still friends with girls that we went to primary school with and we used to play**, through our teenage years and that sort of stuff we continued on...so we played [netball] together for long periods of time in the same group.

Therefore, sporting organisations and schools (through the formation of partnerships) can focus on supporting enjoyment in sport for girls through school, families and the community, which can play a key role in their continuation of sport into adulthood. For example, Christine, age 36, who is in a defacto relationship with a step daughter, has played netball since the age of 6 because:

Oh, really just **family** I suppose. All my family's always been sport oriented. Always. So pretty much as soon as we could throw a ball we were thrown into some kind of sport. So yeah just grew up with it pretty much. [And they were supportive?] Absolutely. Both my parents played sport, my brother plays sports and we were always going from game to game to game of some sort. Always been around it...**I think I've just always known it.** It's, as you're getting older it's kind of more of a social, you know, been a social activity side of it as well, keeping in contact with friends and yeah. Obviously your health and fitness as well you need to kind of maintain some kind of exercise and health. Yeah it's just something I've always enjoyed...I couldn't really imagine not being around sport full stop.

These findings also relate to building a sense of community and a network of friends around sport, which can facilitate the continuation of, or a return to, sport, as detailed in the first major theme, 'negotiation of constraints', under the 'valuing friendship' sub-theme. In addition, reframing sport promotion messages and the benefits of sport participation to focus on mental and social well-being and friendship networks, rather than individual fitness and body image, not only among girls during schooling years, but also during motherhood, can help encourage women to return to sport and physical activity, especially after pregnancy (Lewis & Ridge, 2005).

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

This study provided insights from 1,121 Australian women masters sport competitors on the motivations, challenges, needs and issues that they face in the decision to continue playing sport throughout their adult life.

Through the collection and analysis of responses from 1,100 on-line surveys and 21 in-depth, one-on-one interviews information was gathered to answer the key questions posed by this research. Many of the responses were inspirational and uplifting as the essential elements and benefits of playing sport were effusively relayed. Clearly the women surveyed have succeeded in continuing their participation in sport and active recreation to varying degrees and the insights they provided on how they maintain regular involvement will be useful to sporting organisations, to government officials, health promotion organisations and to other women themselves who may be confronted with similar issues and challenges. While the common thread of participation in this study was playing a sport, significant contributions were being made by the majority of women through volunteering via coaching, officiating and administrative roles, not only to support their own sporting interests, but also those of other family members.

The aims of the research, followed by a summary of our findings in regard to each aim, are outlined below:

- (a) **Challenges:** To identify the issues that Masters aged women face as challenges to their continuing participation in sport;
- (b) **Strategies:** To ascertain the personal strategies that women employ to enable them to continue with the required regular commitment;
- (c) **Motivation:** To learn ‘why women want to participate in sport’ and,
- (d) **Solutions:** To determine what could be done to make continuing in sport more accessible, doable and desirable for women throughout Australia.

**(a) Challenges:** The major issues that Masters aged women face as challenges to their continuing participation in sport are principally around juggling the many and diverse roles they have with family and work commitments. There is a ‘balance’ and ‘sacrifice’ required with family and work to allow sufficient time to participate regularly in sport. The individual situations may fluctuate for women over time to meet their differing needs during stages of family growth and/or career development.

The balance required is not simply of time commitments but also of attitude and levels of encouragement (or discouragement) as women struggle with gender and age stereotyping. There seems to be a perception that women have a lesser right to time for exercise and sport than other members of the family unit, such as their spouse and/or children. This questioning of a woman’s ‘entitlement to leisure’ comes primarily from external sources but also from many women themselves as they combat competing feelings about taking time out from other responsibilities.

The need for attitudinal change in the community about a woman’s entitlement to time for personal sport and active recreation presents an opportunity for those involved in policy and health promotion.

“So I think, for women, it’s, **they just put themselves last when it comes to exercise.** They make sure everyone else is okay first.” (*Emily, age 49, from Melbourne, started netball at age 9, continuous, married (step children), full-time work*)

Availability, access and awareness of sporting opportunities on the local level and affordability are also challenges to women's participation.

Maintaining the body relatively injury and illness free is a challenge for some women to provide the physical wellness foundation necessary to build further fitness, team and competition opportunities.

**(b) Strategies:** The theme termed 'negotiation of constraints' highlighted a series of personal strategies that women employ to enable them to continue with their regular commitment to sport.

These strategies stem from the personal desire and commitment to make sport a priority for a range of individual reasons including health, enjoyment, wellness, personal space and by valuing the social connections and friendships.

Some flexibility in work and home commitments is central to a successful strategy, as indicated by 52% of those surveyed, while having a supportive partner to share family workloads was shown to be key in 43% of cases. Support networks to share child minding commitments were mentioned as ingredients of success, while additional facilities and services provided by the sport club or organisations themselves were appreciated in the limited cases where they exist.

**(c) Motivation:** The high level of enjoyment that comes from participating in sport was most evident from the personal interviews conducted. For 71% of the on-line survey respondents, social factors are a major reason for participating because playing sport:

- Gives a sense of achievement - it gives me confidence;
- I love being part of a team - I enjoy the camaraderie - it makes you feel great afterwards'
- A sports club makes it easy to get together with friends.

For 85% of respondents a major reason that 'women want to participate in sport' is for the physical factors – such as fitness and feeling healthy. For 51% of respondents, the competitive factors were important with the thrill of competition and the desire to improve personal and team performances mentioned.

**(d) Solutions:** There are a range of measures that were identified in this study that would make continuing in sport more accessible, achievable and desirable for women throughout Australia. Investigating and taking some or all of these steps is likely to increase participation in sport or active recreation because 65% of women surveyed said that they would like to spend more time than they currently do playing sport.

Pursuing and promoting the right for women to spend time exercising and enjoying sport is something that external parties may be able to influence through education to change community attitudes. Encouragement of employers to increase flexibility of work hours may assist businesses by providing healthier, committed female employees, is just one example.

Linked to attitudinal change is the opportunity to promote women as sports players and organisers. Levels of media promotion of women's sport lags behind that of men's sport and this issue should continue to be addressed by government and National Sporting Organisations in the future.



Establishing and encouraging the lifelong habit of sport and physical activity in girls through the education system and broader community is essential. The characteristics of sport that women and girls respond to most (i.e., social, friendship, enjoyment) should be used as part of the specific encouragement for female participation.

Practical measures suggested through the survey and interviews that would facilitate greater women's participation in sport included:

- Provision of child care facilities – at sporting facilities and at affordable rates would assist mothers of young children.
- Affordability – the costs of participation in sporting competition and events should be considered to make them more affordable for low-income earners.
- Scheduling of sporting competition – insights were provided about the structure and timing of sporting competition that would enable greater participation of women at the varying stages of their adult lives.
- Access and availability of local sporting facilities requires consideration – particularly in regional areas to accommodate for growing interest in sport and active recreation.
- Access and availability of sports officials needs to be improved to sustain involvement.
- Promotion of local sporting opportunities – improved advertising and promotion of available sports offerings at the local level to increase awareness at the community level.

This study reaffirms previous research that has shown that through sporting practices women can resist traditional stereotypes of ageing and gender and experience a sense of personal empowerment in the form of identity management, belonging, engagement and bodily competence (Dionigi, 2010). The study found, similar to Litchfield and Dionigi (2012; 2013), that through sport (particularly Masters team sports) women can experience team bonding, social connections, support, enjoyment, as well as feelings of community, inclusiveness and a shared sense of empowerment that extended beyond just playing the sport.

Furthermore, this study provides encouragement for the work of the Australian Womensport and Recreation Association, the Australian Sports Commission, State and Territory Governments and indeed the Confederation of Australian Sport to actively pursue greater opportunities for building on women's participation in sport. Given the sample were primarily English-speaking women (97%) who were married (65%), the study indicates the need to survey and interview women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as women from low-income families and various family structures (such as single parents, same sex couples). Follow-up studies could target specific groups of women across Australia who do and do not play sport to determine their motives, challenges and needs in regard to ongoing sport and physical recreation participation.

For National Sporting Organisations this study will provide feedback on structures or initiatives that they already have in place or that are planned for implementation. The study also provides insight and some guidance on strategies worth considering and pursuing. Further this study provides encouragement and incentive to do even more because 65% of women surveyed would like to play more sport than they currently do.

## Chapter 7: Recommendations

Recommendations revealed by this study could be used by policy-makers, sporting organisations and health promotion agencies to make sport more attractive, achievable and accessible for women.

### **Recommendation 1: That education and information campaigns be developed and implemented to break down gender stereotypes that inhibit female sport participation.**

Promoting and protecting the right for women to spend time exercising and enjoying sport is something that external parties can positively influence through a change of community attitude.

- Educate women (and girls) about the social (friendship and community networks) and mental health (and family) benefits of sport, rather than focussing on sport and physical activity as a way to manage individual fitness or body size and shape.
- Educate sport organisations, through mediums such as formal training, about issues relevant to women and sport, in particular the male-dominance of sport (as players and non-players), so that organisations are aware that promoting sport participation is not only about targeting individual behaviours, but (more importantly) about breaking down embedded institutional values and structural barriers.
- Educate the general public about these issues through the media, particularly in regard to increasing the status of women's sport in general and making the participation of women (single women, mothers, working women and older women) in sport (from local to international levels and from recreational/social levels to the competitive levels) much more visible and 'socially/culturally acceptable' across Australia.

### **Recommendation 2: Greater provision of women-friendly sporting facilities and services to support families, mothers, retirees and singles.**

Consider implementation of the following measures:

- Affordable child care at sporting venues and/or sporting clubs offering discounts in child care costs if mothers have sporting club membership.
- Establish a buddy system, or 'bring a friend day' and ensure transitions are in place for the new person to remain involved.
- Flexible scheduling of games (and public transport) to cater for different life stages, work situations and needs of women.
- Seek funding to evaluate the effectiveness of current sports programs for women with a view to expand the programs being offered and build facilities to cater for growing interest and needs.

*"I think sometimes it's probably a bit intimidating to go alone, so grab a friend and go down to your local club and sign up and just give it a go, really." (Margaret, 41, married with young children, engaged in home duties, has diabetes, plays netball (club), social touch and tennis.)*

**Recommendation 3: Build Partnerships between sporting organisations and women's or seniors' organisations to establish supportive networks for ongoing sport participation.**

- Collaboration between sporting clubs and women and/or senior groups to lobby local councils for the provision of more facilities, funding and support for inclusive sporting spaces.
- Similarly, community sporting organisations can form partnerships with local schools to help create positive experiences and a variety of opportunities for girls in sport, which can encourage women to stay (or reconnect) with sport as they age.

**Recommendation 4: Include significant and meaningful input from women in the planning and policy development process.**

- Sporting organisations' policy development and promotion should include women (from varying ages, family structures, working situations, cultural backgrounds and socio-economic backgrounds) in the planning process.
- Sporting organisations must ensure that women have significant representation on boards, and as coaches and officials, and women need to be positively supported (emotionally, socially and in-kind) in these roles so that they remain in these positions on a long-term basis.
- Establish standards and strategic frameworks that address the challenges faced by many women in regard to sport.

"I think that socially it's really, really good and you make friends. And you get to interact with people, especially if you, I don't know, like a stay at home mum who doesn't maybe get to see a lot of people. I think it's a good thing...Because I think you become quite confined if you're just staying home all the time. Not interacting with other people...I don't think it would be [good to not interact], no...And it keeps you active I suppose...I would play as hard as you can, always. That's what I try to do anyway...As I say you're not always going to be the best. But you try to be the best that you can...we always say of course work and family have to come first. I mean that's just common sense really. But there's normally ways to work around it [if family, work, sporting organisations and the local community are supportive], and we encourage people to bring their kids down anyway." (*Donna, 49, single mum, full-time work, chronic back pain, Baseball started at age 32 and hasn't stopped*)

## Appendices:

1. Interview Participant Details
2. Face-to-face Interview Guide
3. Summary of Findings from the Interviews
4. Demographics of On-line Survey Respondents

### Appendix 1 – Participant Details

Pseudonym	Age	Family	Work	Reside	Physical condition	Sport	Started sport	Break	Masters Games
Rachael	31	Married, no children	Full-time hairdresser	Melbourne, Hoppers Crossing VIC	No	Netball (club)	Age 8	Age 19-26 due to work	1st
Margaret	41	Married, 2 children under 8	Home duties	Geelong, VIC	Diabetes	Netball (club) (also social touch football and tennis)	Age 10	10 month break in early 20s -glandular fever. Stopped competitive sport in 30s had children, resumed socially after a couple of years	1st
Cathy	66	Married (4 older children no longer at home)	Retired at 65 (was employed part-time)	Gippsland, Latrobe Valley, VIC	No	Netball (club)	1956 – age 10	2 years when moved to QLD	1st
Dianne	60	Divorced (children over 21 years)	Self-employed	Melbourne	No	Netball (club) & bushwalking with friends & gym - alone	Age 8	Pretty much continuous (time off when had children & last year when she was sick)	5 <sup>th</sup> (the team started in the over 40s)
Mary	46	Married (3 children aged 10-20)	Part-time/shift work	Perth	No	Netball (club) and the gym	Age 12; played state until age 42	Pretty much continuous (time off when had children)	Since 2006
Emily	49	Married (children aged 8-21)	Full-time	Melbourne	No	Netball, tennis, golf, gym	1973 - age 9 netball	No breaks (has step children)	1st
Veronica	64	Married (older children not at home)	Cares for grandchildren	Brisbane	No	Basketball, swimming, walking (netball only at games)	Age 10	Time off when had children	Started Masters age 40
Jacquie	31	Single (no children)	Full-time teacher	SA	No	Netball and tennis, gym	Age 5	No breaks	1st
Jan	36	Married (children under 8)	Full-time	Torquay, Victoria	No	Basketball, netball, running (clubs) (netball	Age 9	Only stopped when pregnant, and overseas, otherwise continuous	1st

		years)				at games)			
Louise	45	Married (18, 19 yr old children)	Part-time	Launceston Tasmania	No	Netball (club) an group Personal Training sessions	Age 12; played State levels in 30s	Only stopped when pregnant, otherwise continuous	1st
Joan	55	Married, 2 children over 21, one at home	Full-time in education	Perth WA	No	Basketball (club), walking, and tennis and running	tennis age 10, basketball age 20	Only stopped when pregnant, otherwise continuous	3rd
Barbara	62	Divorced/ No children at home	Full-time	Melbourne	Chronic foot pain	basketball, tennis, (clubs) walking, cycling	Primary school age	Only stopped when pregnant, and overseas, otherwise continuous	Not her first
Donna	49	Single mum (shared adult)	Full-time	Melbourne	Chronic back pain	Baseball (club), gym	Baseball at age 32	Continuous since age 32 [had her daughter at age 16, so she was not involved in sport until age 32]	1st
Patricia	50	Married (20 year-old child at home, 27 year-old away from home)	Full-time self-employed	Castlemaine, Victoria near Bendigo	No, but used to in the past had a hip replacement	Netball club	Played sport since age 12, state netball age 24, a hip replacement at age 40	Stopped when pregnant and for 6 years after hip replacement	Not her 1st games. Umpired & coached while recovering, back playing now
Helen	58	Divorced, 2 sons & 1 daughter grown up	Casual	Vic	Arthritis feet, fingers but keeps active to manage it	Netball (club) Swimming (club)	Primary school age	Stopped for 8 years due to work and family commitments	1st
Betty	55	Married. Older children, 1 at home	Casual	Melbourne	Breast cancer (she's 'in between surgery and chemo') and has had a mastectomy	Netball (club)	Age 11, Grade 5	16 months off while going through cancer treatment: "I think it's [sport and gym] the best way to recover," she explained.	Has been going with a team since 1997

Sally	36	Married 2 children under 8	Part-time	Geelong	Kidney disease (early stages, affects her fatigue levels)	Netball (club), Basketball, gym	Age 7 (basketball) State level as a teenager	Only stopped when pregnant, otherwise continuous	1st
Nicole	42	Married, one girl (age 11)	Part-time	Geelong	"No, I'm just getting old and slower"	Netball (no club) and then past 6 months fitness, walk, bike	8 or 9 years old	In and out due to university and parents into work, not sport	1 <sup>st</sup> , found a team on the games website
Annette	61	Single	Full-time Director for WorkCover SA	Adelaide	No	Netball and basketball (clubs)	10 or 11 years old	10 year break in late 30s (but played tennis) due to relocation	Started Masters age 50
Anna	39	Married, young family	Part-time	Winnaleah Tassie	No	Netball - club	Age 8	"Probably only a couple of years when at college, but no breaks", she said	Think it is her first
Christine	36	Defacto, a 9 year old step daughter	Full-time	Karratha, WA (put in Perth now)	No	Netball (club), softball	Age 6	"Always played sport", she explained	1st

## Appendix 2 - Interview Guide

Questions to participants – In depth response for these.	Topic area
<p>So how did you get involved in sport? (Try to determine whether they were always involved in sport or if they took it up later in life? If they don't say so, ask if they stopped playing sport at some point in their life?)</p> <p>You mentioned that you have played ___ sport earlier in the interview. Why do you play ___?</p>	Role of sport in life / sport-life trajectory / background factors that may have influenced their choices to participate in sport
<p>You said you stopped playing competitive sport at one point in your life (<i>I am assuming they said this above because I think most of the women would have</i>) – Why did you stop?</p> <p>What factors played a role in you stopping/having a break?</p>	Barriers to participation
How were you able to come back to sport?	Personal strategies
<p>Why did you want to come back after a break?</p> <p>In which sports? Why?</p> <p>(Get them talking about why they decided to continue, resume or begin sport at Masters level in general, especially given that most women their age are not involved in sport)</p>	Motivations/Why women want to participate in sport (build on their responses by seeking clarification and asking probing questions, such as why, how, what?)
How is it that you are participating at this particular event – the Australian Masters Games? (Also try and get a sense of what 'type' of athlete they are – regular competitor or is this a 'once off'? Trained or untrained?)	Class and other background factors that may have affected their participation in this event and the 'type' of athlete they are, given the varying levels of ability and fitness at such events
What is the hardest thing about maintaining regular participation in sport at this point in your life?	Barriers / issues that masters aged women face as challenges to their continuing participation in sport
<p>How do you manage these factors to allow for your continued sports participation?</p> <p>What strategies do you use?</p>	Personal strategies that they employ to enable them to continue with the required regular commitment
Sport participation has not always been encouraged amongst women, particularly as they have gotten older. Why do you think this is?	Sport and women, cultural attitudes and their reactions
<p>Have you ever been discouraged from playing sport? Or made to feel guilty about spending time on your sport?</p> <p>What was said or implied? Why didn't you take any notice?</p>	Sport and women, cultural attitudes and their reactions



Would you encourage other women to join in/play sport? Why? How? What advice would you give other women?	Sport promotion to others
In an ideal world, where there were no barriers to participation, would you like to play more sport? Why? What else would you do?	Future in sport
What would need to change in your life to allow you to participate more fully in sport?	Personal strategies
What would organizers of sport in your area need to change or do to improve your access to and enjoyment of sport?	Sport organisation
Well, – that covers all the areas I have been asked to enquire about. Thank you so much for your time. Your responses have been very interesting and thought provoking and I'm sure they will be hugely valuable.  Is there anything else you would like to say in conclusion?	

### Appendix 3 – Summary of findings from Interviews

Theme	Challenges	Strategies	Relationships between challenges, strategies and negotiations
Negotiation of constraints	Family (including partner/spouse &/or child/ren)	Balancing family, work and sport	‘Balance’ and ‘sacrifice’ to negotiate family, work and time commitments. Work to support family and sporting pursuits. Sport and work to support family well-being.
	Work (including paid & unpaid responsibilities)	Time management and prioritising	Prioritise, plan and organise to negotiate time constraints and allow for sport, family and work.
	Time	Valuing friendship	Sport helps maintain friendship and support outside of family.
	Maintaining friendships with other women	Fundraising and sponsorship	Raising money to compete in Masters and community sport to make it more affordable, especially given player insurance costs.
	Affordability	Maintaining physical activity levels outside of sport	Keeping physically active so ‘the body’ can compete in sport, and maintaining fitness by playing sport regularly. Avoiding injury so they can continue to support family, go to work and play sport.
	The body		
	Gender stereotypes	Ignoring/resisting the (stereotyped) opinions of others	Ignoring/resisting age and gender stereotypes to continue sport participation with minimal feelings of guilt. Having a supportive network of other sportswomen and a supportive family reinforces to them that they have ‘a right’ to play sport as they age.
Theme	Needs	Suggestions	Relationships between constraints, needs and suggestions
Needs	Child care	Onsite affordable crèche	As shown above, family commitments were important to most of the women, so having affordable (or free) childcare offered through sporting clubs would assist mothers of young children.
	Affordability	‘Needs to be cheaper’	As shown above, some women find community sport expensive, especially the Masters Games, so while they work and/or fundraise and gain sponsorship to support their pursuits, they suggest clubs lowering the cost and/or government subsidising community sport.
	More facilities and officials	Facilities to cater for growing interest in	Women expressed the need for more umpires, officials & facilities to cater for the expansion of sport participation in their area.

		sport, especially in small communities	
	Scheduling	Daytime competitions for retirees; night time and/or weekend competitions	Given than many women have to prioritise and plan, as well as balance family and/or work commitments to maintain sport, having games scheduled at different times can cater for women of different ages and with differing needs.
	Better advertisement	Advertise at the local level through phone book, Internet, magazines, flyers etc	Knowing where to find a sport when relocating or when returning to sport makes the transition back into sport easier for women. However, there is an assumption that having information out there means that there is 'no excuse' not to play, which can be problematic for women who do not have the skills to find or make use of the available information.
	Promote women's sport – as players and organisers	Break down gender stereotypes/male-dominance of sport	Give more status to women's sport in the media, at the local level in regard to use of courts and promotion of important matches, like the women's final. Encourage women to be officials, coaches etc.
	Positive youth/school sporting experiences	Create environments for girls to enjoy sport so that there will be more women continuing sport as they age (also allows for friendship and support outside of family and work)	All the women (except one) played sport from a young age. They were (for the most part) encouraged to play and had positive experiences. Therefore, a focus on supporting enjoyment in sport for girls through school, families and the community can play a key role in their continuation of sport into adulthood. This relates to building a sense of community and a network of friends around sport, which can facilitate the continuation of, or a return to, sport. Reframing sport to focus on mental and social well-being, rather than body image, not only among girls, but also during motherhood, can encourage women to return after pregnancy.

#### Appendix 4: Demographics of On-line Survey Respondents

**Question:** *"And how old are you?"*

Age Distribution Data	Overall
<i>n =</i>	<i>1100</i>
21 - 30 years	1%
31 - 40 years	8%
41 - 50 years	29%
51 - 60 years	38%
61 - 70 years	20%
71 years and over	4%

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