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Abstract:

This report examines the obstacles girls face when playing sports in school in a school environment, focusing on high school and intermediate school levels. Applying social role theory and self-determination theory, the analysis uses qualitative and quantitative data from surveys and workshops to understand how gender roles affect how people view sports. To collect useful data, the study concentrated on two West Auckland Schools. In line with Sport Waitākere's objectives, the project sought to gather data for the improvement of physical and mental health, encouragement of inclusivity, and removal of obstacles to girls' participation. The results offer practical advice for creating initiatives that support women's empowerment and advance equality in sports.

Recommendations

Schools could better support girls' participation by:

- Educating coaches and teachers to recognise emotional barriers and provide targeted encouragement to build girls' confidence.
- Strengthening peer support systems can foster camaraderie and reduce fear of judgment. Actively promote girls' sports through visible campaigns and ensure equal resource access.
- Introduce recreational sports options that emphasise fun and participation, reducing pressure and making sports more accessible for all girls.

Summary of results

The results from the study show that girls face several barriers to sports participation, including fear of judgment, body image concerns, and lack of confidence. At Glenavon School, cultural pressures and limited sports facilities further reduce engagement, while at Green Bay High School, older students benefit from better resources and a more supportive environment. Both schools highlighted the importance of peer support, coach encouragement, and a positive atmosphere for increasing participation. However, disparities between boys' and girls' sports opportunities and encouragement remain a significant issue across both schools.

Conclusions

By creating inclusive environments and addressing these barriers, schools can help increase girls' confidence and physical activity engagement. The project shows that lack of resources, cultural attitudes, and societal pressures significantly hinder girls' participation in sports. The findings offer

important insights for developing policies and programs that promote equal opportunities for all girls, empowering them to succeed in sports and beyond.

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Introduction:

Co-op context

During my Co-Op placement with Sport Waitākere, I sought to investigate the issues related to sports participation and community engagement, with a focus on the difficulties faced by young girls in the west Auckland area. Sport Waitakere is a community-based organisation that works to improve health, wellness, and physical activity in West Auckland schools. To create programs and events that promote physical activity, especially among under-represented groups like women, youth, and ethnic communities, they collaborate with local schools, sports clubs, community organisations, and councils. Event management, community and youth development, training and workshops, research, and stakeholder partnerships are some of Sport Waitakere's primary initiatives. Through my work with Sport Waitākere, I have had the chance to make a significant contribution to the creation of initiatives and programs that aim to increase female and youth participation in sports at the grassroots level, promoting social cohesion and long-term community well-being. The mission of Sport Waitakere is to promote great inclusivity and sports participation that is in line with my interests and career aspirations.

Co-op project

I have investigated the reasons behind girls' low involvement in sports and physical activity, pinpointing the obstacles they meet and looking at the solutions offered by school communities. This is supported by several studies that highlight key barriers to participation. For example, gender stereotypes imply that sports are better suited for boys, which discourages girls from playing, according to a study by Bird et al. (2013). Girls find it more difficult to see themselves participating in sports when there aren't any female role models because they are less likely to do so in the absence of prominent female coaches or athletes. With focused actions, the significant issue of girls' low sports participation rates can be resolved. I suggest that girls' participation in school communities and grassroots sports can be increased through targeted efforts to strengthen support for them.

My goal in writing this report is to identify the obstacles that prevent girls from participating in sports, in relation and including societal norms, a lack of facilities, and insufficient support from educational institutions. Additionally, I will highlight the role of school communities in promoting inclusivity and equal opportunities for girls in sports. This analysis, which makes use of both qualitative and quantitative data, will offer a thorough grasp of the current situation and ways to make improvements.

A few things changed from the original project plan to my final report. Eliminating an objective and replacing it with three focused objectives allowed me to streamline the research and conduct a more

thorough analysis. This was one of the major changes. To make sure that the results are pertinent and useful to the neighbourhood, I also restricted the scope of my study to girls in the West Auckland region.

The three objectives of this research are as follows:

1. **Highlight instances where schools have successfully created an inclusive environment for females/girls:** This objective aims to highlight examples of schools that have taken proactive steps to foster an inclusive culture for female students in sports. By looking at these effective models, I hope to offer doable suggestions that other educational institutions can use to give girls access to opportunities like these.
2. **Examine the awareness among students, parents, and staff regarding gender equality in sports:** Understanding the level of awareness surrounding gender equality is crucial for identifying gaps and areas where further education or support is needed. Through workshops and questionnaires, I gathered both qualitative and quantitative data to assess the perceptions of various stakeholders within the school community.
3. **Explore attitudes towards female participation in sports and identify existing stereotypes that may hinder girls' involvement:** Attitudes and stereotypes can play a significant role in discouraging girls from participating in sports. By exploring these barriers, this report will identify prevalent misconceptions and suggest strategies to overcome them.

I used a mix of workshops and questionnaires in my research to accomplish these goals. Qualitative data from the workshops enabled participants to share their opinions and experiences in a more candid and engaged setting. The questionnaires offered quantitative insights, helping to identify broader trends and patterns regarding gender equality and female participation in sports. This two-way strategy guarantees that the study is thorough and based on the viewpoints of those who are directly involved.

I have kept ethical standards in mind when writing this research report, making sure that every participant is treated with respect, integrity, and consideration. My interactions with the students were guided by ethical considerations to ensure that their perspectives were fairly and accurately represented. My own experiences as a woman working in the sports and recreation sector have shaped this report. As a child, I participated in sports in all levels of school, and I faced many of the obstacles I work to remove in the future. My personal experience gives me a distinct viewpoint, and I'm deeply committed to discovering answers that will enable girls in the future to overcome these challenges and succeed in sports.

Significance to Sport Waitakere

Sport Waitakere views this project as highly significant as it supports their goal of increasing community involvement in sports and physical recreation. The project enhances organisational procedures while also supporting wider societal objectives of improving women's physical and mental health via active sports participation and enhancing community engagement in sports and recreation by removing obstacles that prevent women from participating.

In addition to the insightful information this project offers, Sport Waitakere is better able to create programmes and initiatives that specifically target these obstacles. For example, knowing how gender norms and cultural expectations affect sports participation can help schools and community sports programs create more welcoming and encouraging environments. Beyond just improving physical health, there are several other advantages to increasing female participation in sports. It helps participants improve their social ties, gain leadership abilities, and increase their sense of self-worth. This is in line with Sport Waitakere's overarching goals of fostering social cohesion and community development.

Literature review

Active recreation and sports participation are essential for maintaining a healthy lifestyle, building social relationships, and improving mental and physical health. However, obstacles prevent women and girls from participating in these activities. A Study by Dhirender Kaim (2016) "Barriers to Women's Participation in Sport and Active Recreation" illustrates how women and girls engage in these activities. Research over the years has demonstrated that women and girls who engage in these activities frequently experience depression because of different life challenges. To better understand these barriers, this review will be structured according to the socio-ecological factors, examining the individual, peer, community, environmental and policy levels.

At the individual level, Dhirender Kaim gives a comprehensive understanding of the factors that lead to lower participation rates by stressing the various issues that must be resolved at various stages of life. Sports participation is lower among girls and young women (ages 10–17) than among boys and young men, according to data from the Aktive Women & Girls Facility Guide (Sport NZ, n.d.). At age 12, 80% of girls say they would like to participate more, but by age 17, only 51% say the same. Additionally, 96% of young women are aware of the advantages of engaging in physical activity, and 69% of them wish to be active.

Psychological barriers are a major factor that keeps women and girls from participating in sports, according to Kaim's review. According to Kaim, women tend to avoid physical activity due to the

belief that they are unworthy and have a negative self-image. This fear is a result of the pressure to fit in with social norms and physical standards, which can be particularly detrimental during adolescence, a crucial time for forming lifelong habits.

Peer influences also play a significant role in shaping participation. Dhirender Kaim synthesises the research of Slater & Tiggemann (2010) and Allender et al. (2006) to propose that, despite perceptions about women's capacity to sustain themselves through sports participation, women are more likely to engage in sports activities as friends. Peer group dynamics and cultural conceptions of femininity affect how girls view sports and recreational activities, often leading to reduced participation.

At the community level, Kaim Highlights conflicting priorities, such as family and academic responsibility, as barriers. As girls grow up, social activities and academic pressures usually take precedence over physical activity. Women who manage childcare, housework, and employment often find themselves short on time, which makes it harder for them to play sports. Numerous studies, including those by Craike et al. (2019) and Caperchoine et al. (2009), provide evidence in support of this topic by showing how competing priorities cut down on the amount of time spent engaging in physical activity.

Environmental barriers, such as financial limitations, also hinder participation, particularly for women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Girls and women may be discouraged from participating in sports due to the expense of uniforms, sports equipment, and transportation. Kaim cites the research of Stalsberg and Pedersen (2010), which shows a connection between socioeconomic status and lower rates of sports participation. The lack of appropriate facilities and diversity in PE classes further exacerbates the issue. Kaim argues that PE classes often fail to meet the preferences of girls, especially those from minority backgrounds, leading to lower participation.

At the policy level, accessibility issues like childcare, inclusive programs, and suitable facilities are highlighted. Dhirender Kaim highlights that Sawrikar & Muir (2010) discussed how people with disabilities and women living in rural areas are disproportionately affected by a lack of resources. Addressing these barriers needs improving support, infrastructure, and safety in sports programs to make sure all women feel welcome and secure, regardless of their background. Research by Caperchoine et al. (2009) and Kowal & Fortier (2007) lends support to the conversation, highlighting how critical it is to give female athletes safe and welcoming environments.

Religious and cultural beliefs also contribute to the barriers girls and women face. Traditional gender roles undervalue women's participation in physical activities in many cultures. Religious practices can

also restrict opportunities; Pfister's (2010) research shows how local differences in participation rates are influenced by societal norms. Culturally sensitive approaches are essential in overcoming these barriers and ensuring that sports programs are accessible to women from all backgrounds.

While Kaims work effectively identifies barriers, it offers little information on potential solutions or strategies to address these issues. Providing more details on how to get past these obstacles would give a more useful viewpoint. Incorporating primary research or case studies could provide different viewpoints and improve the review's impact on the subject matter.

Kaim's report makes a substantial addition to my knowledge of the obstacles that prevent women from participating in sports and offers a strong framework for creating plans to increase female physical activity. Through addressing several variables, including conflicting priorities, views on PE, social influences, and access concerns, the paper provides insightful information about the difficulties that female participants faced.

Self-determination Theory and Social Roles Theory

Girls' involvement in sports is influenced by both internal and external factors, as explained by Self-Determination Theory (SDT). It names relatedness (connection), competence (skill), and autonomy (choice) as the main motivators. Girls are more likely to participate in physical activity and to retain positive attitudes towards it when these needs are satisfied, which can be achieved through having supportive relationships, feeling skilled, and having the freedom to choose activities (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Cox & Williams, 2008). To encourage girls to participate in sports, schools can create these encouraging environments.

Another Theory is Social Roles Theory (Eagly, 1987) which provides a framework for examining how gender roles and social norms affect young people's attitudes towards sports. This theory was used in Koivula's (1999) study, which discovered that cultural expectations significantly influence girls' participation in sports. Through this lens, I was able to pinpoint the main social and cultural obstacles that need to be removed to make sports more welcoming to girls.

Methods

During my research Project, I found a strong connection between me and the participants particularly as they were female interested in the sports. This connection made it easier to gather insights on the barriers girls face in sports and recreation because I could speak from experience as a secondary student, tertiary student, and coop student.

This project aimed to Investigate how Intermediate and High Schools parents, teachers and the wider local environment encourage an inclusive culture and equal opportunities for girls in sports. Additionally, what barriers hinder girls' participation in Sports within their schools and communities? Participants included students from Glenavon School (Years 7-8) and Green Bay High School (Years 9-10), with 40-50 students in each workshop.

Project objectives:

1. Highlight instances where schools have successfully created an inclusive environment for females/girls.
2. Examine the awareness among students, parents and staff regarding gender equality in sports.
3. Explore attitudes towards female participation in sports and identify existing stereotypes that may hinder girls' involvement.

The first objective was to Highlight instances where schools have successfully created an inclusive environment for females/girls. Jones, I. (2022) emphasise that research helps expand knowledge. Effective sports management strategies, such as female-specific programs and equal access to resources, have created inclusive environments for girls, increasing participation and fostering personal development (Hills, 2007).

The Second Objective was to Examine the awareness among students and parents regarding gender equality in sports. Raising awareness about gender equality among students, parents, and staff is crucial to ensuring that schools actively promote equal opportunities for girls in sports.

The third objective was to Explore attitudes towards female participation in sports and identify existing stereotypes that may hinder girls' involvement. Coakley, J., & Pike, E. (2014) mention that Stereotypes and traditional views can hinder female participation in sports. They suggest that addressing negative attitudes and promoting gender equity are essential steps in breaking down barriers and fostering girls' involvement in sports.

Questionnaire

I gave out questionnaires to students in both high school and Intermediate school, asking parents about their opinions and experiences with their daughters playing sports. The purpose of the questionnaire was to find out what obstacles were encountered, how interested their daughters were in various sports, and how inclusive they thought the school's sports programs were.

A fundamental understanding of the patterns and difficulties of girls' involvement in sports was made possible by this quantitative data.

Incubator Activity

The incubator activities at each school involved students from Glenavon School and Green Bay High School, allowing them to engage in a collaborative brainstorming process. The girls were invited to discuss the obstacles that prevent girls from participating in sports and to suggest viable solutions during this session. Participants felt comfortable sharing their opinions because of the open communication and sense of community this interactive approach promoted.

Fishbowl Activity

In the fishbowl activity, the group of students participated in a discussion with each other, answering questions that were received from a bowl that an individual student picked out. This approach made it possible to have a thorough discussion about their sports-related experiences and difficulties. The students were asked to share their perspectives writing them on the whiteboard presented in front of them, making sure that a variety of viewpoints were heard. In addition to encouraging open communication, this format pushed participants to actively listen to one another.

A thorough understanding of the factors influencing girls' participation in sports was made possible by the combination of these approaches. According to Knowles et al. (2001), who found that educational workshops encourage in-depth reflection and open communication, the workshops' facilitation of in-person student interactions produced a safe space for communication. All things considered, these qualitative observations, enhanced by the quantitative information, improved my comprehension of the difficulties girls encounter in sports and assisted in finding viable solutions.

Using open-ended questions, surveys, and questionnaires, I gathered varied viewpoints on obstacles, inclusivity activities, and school support for girls' physical activity from students, parents and caregivers. Comprehensive feedback on these difficulties was obtained through qualitative methods, which also captured the complexity of stakeholder experiences (Hammarberg et al., 2016). This in-depth knowledge was essential for creating methods that catered to the needs and behaviours of girls, making sure the methods were inclusive and successful in encouraging a diversity of sports participation.

However, a small adjustment in the methodology occurred when I didn't gather data from teachers; I only received input from parents and students. Despite this change, the questionnaires and surveys

provided valuable insights into the challenges women face when participating in physical activity, as well as the resources available in communities and schools. This in-depth knowledge was vital for developing strategies that considered the behaviours and experiences of the girls, ensuring that the initiatives designed were both practical and effective in promoting inclusivity and diversity.

Ethical decisions, such as the identification of the proper guidance and direction from the school's administrators, supported the project's commitment to upholding the study's integrity and safeguarding participants' rights. These steps were crucial to ensuring that ethical standards were followed in research that focuses on minors, parents, and caregivers. The British Educational Research Association's (*Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, Fourth Edition (2018)*, n.d.) ethical guidelines highlight the importance of obtaining informed consent and protecting confidential information, both of which this project strongly supports.

The project aimed to produce ideas for enhancing inclusive sports settings for women and girls. This strategy not only satisfies the research goals but also opens the door for recommendations for initiatives that will guarantee equal opportunities for girls' sports in West Auckland School. For example, the study on sports participation by Cairney et al. (2018) emphasises the significance of theoretically and ethically sound approaches for bringing about long-lasting changes in youth attitudes towards sports.

Results or findings

This section introduces the key findings from my study on girls' sports participation at Green Bay High School and Glenavon School. Data was collected through questionnaires, incubator sessions, and workshops. The workshops revealed social, cultural, and emotional factors impacting participation, while the incubator sessions focused on specific barriers. Questionnaires provided quantitative data on resources, encouragement, and participation rates. Charts and graphs will highlight trends, similarities, and differences between the schools. The analysis will explore the challenges girls face and how social dynamics and resources affect their participation, offering insights to improve engagement.

Questionnaire Results – Glenavon School

The Figures below show the 5 responses from the questionnaires that Glenavon School parents of girls in Years 7 and 8 filled out. These observations were extremely helpful in comprehending the elements influencing their daughters' athletic involvement. By analysing this data, we could better understand the perspectives of parents and pinpoint the supports and obstacles that affect girls'

participation in physical activity. This data was crucial to the first component of my research goal, which was to determine "How Intermediate and High School communities encourage an inclusive culture and equal opportunities for girls in sports."

Graph 1: Activities that Glenavon School has done to encourage girls in participation.

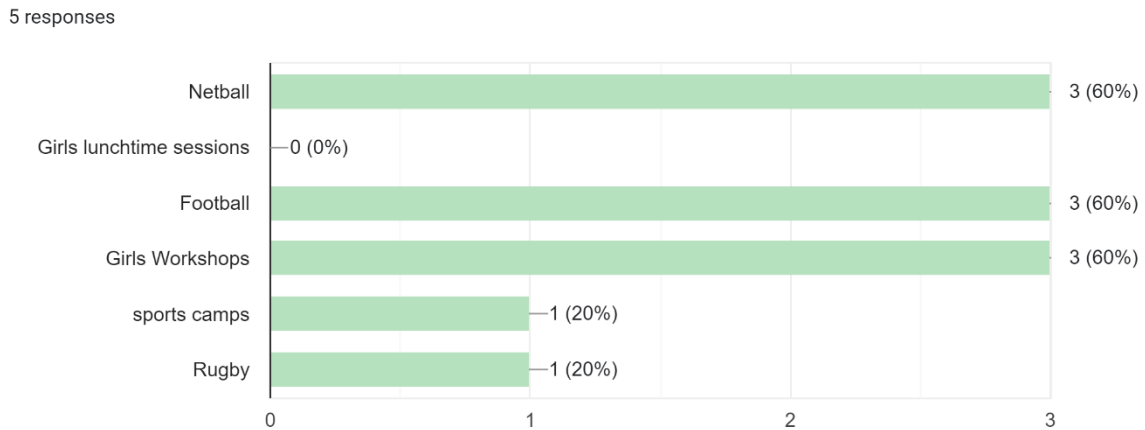


Figure 1: Activities Implemented by Glenavon School to Encourage Girls' Participation in Sports.

Explanation: With girls' football and netball being the most popular at 60%, the graph shows interest in sports. Girls' lunchtime sessions did not attract any interest. Just 20% of people attended rugby and sports camps, suggesting that they are not very popular. To find out why some activities are less popular, more research is required.

Graph 2: The Activities effectiveness.

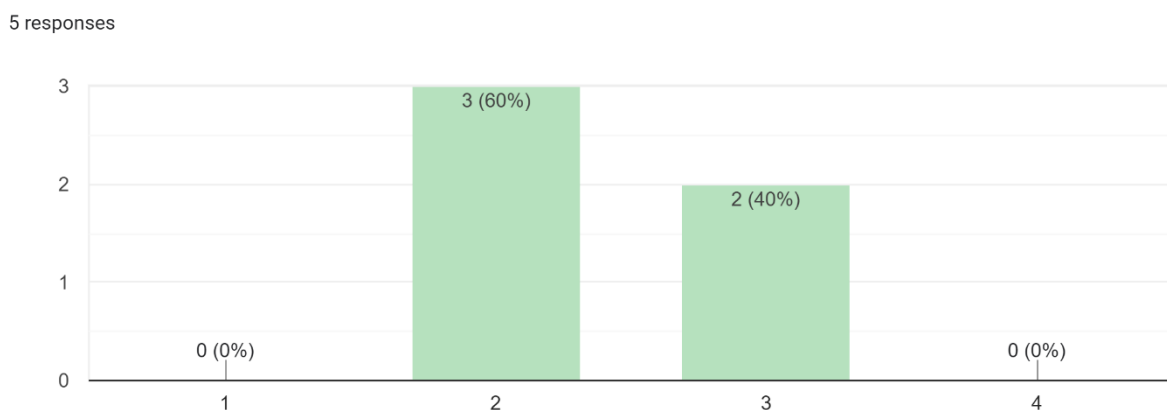


Figure 2: Effectiveness of Activities in Encouraging Girls' Participation in Sports.

Rating Scale: 1 – Being least effective, 2 – Somewhat Effective, 3 – Effective, 4 - Most Effective.

Explanation: The graph shows that 40% of participants gave the sport a 3 rating, indicating a moderate or neutral opinion, while 60% gave it a 2. Options 1 and 4 were not selected by any responders, indicating that participants thought the activities were "average" or lacked strong emotions. This suggests that the experience was adequate but not very fulfilling, pointing out areas where sports facilities or programs could be improved.

Examples of why parents selected their rating above:

- “No regular practice so no chance to get better nor participate in new (to them) sports.”
- “Because it helped but not much.”
- “Because it's effective.”
- “They keep them busy and active and make their mind more productive.”

Graph 3: Understanding the barriers stopping girls from participating in sports.

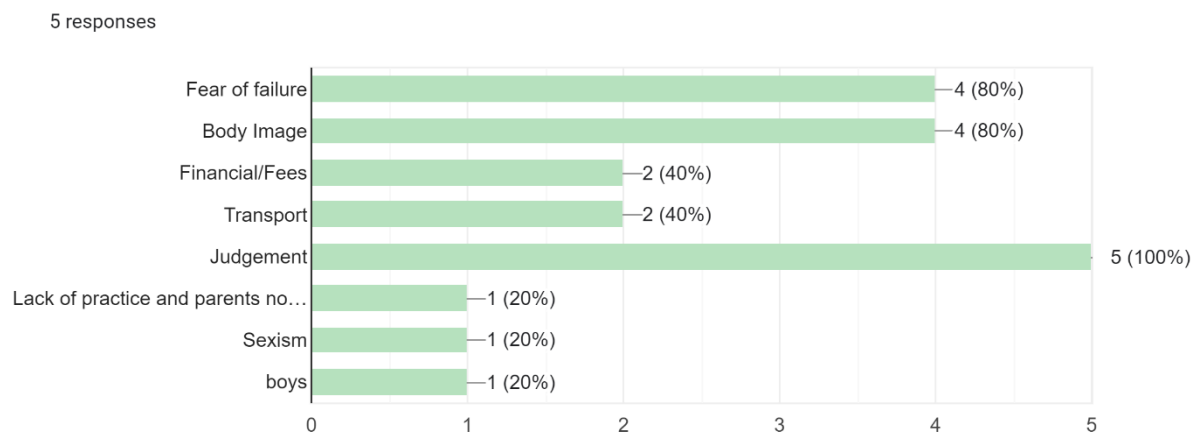


Figure 3: Responses of Barriers.

Explanation: This graph identifies the main obstacles that girls encounter when trying sports. The biggest barrier is judgement, which is mentioned by all respondents (100%) and reflects strong peer pressure that prevents participation to the fullest. Eighty percent of respondents mentioned body image issues and fear of failing, highlighting the psychological difficulties associated with self-worth and confidence. Within the barriers mentioned, 40% were practical, such as transportation and financial costs; only 20% mentioned lack of practice, sexism, or boys. This demonstrates that psychological and social factors are more important than pragmatic ones when it comes to preventing girls from participating in sports.

Incubator Results from Glenavon School and Green Bay School - Similarities

The graphs below show the incubator results from Green Bay High School and Glenavon School, highlighting the disparities in girls' sports participation between the two schools and important findings. The tables accompanying them go into more detail about the second aspect of my goal, which is to pinpoint the obstacles that prevent girls from participating in sports in their communities and schools. When combined, these graphic depictions offer a thorough understanding of the difficulties encountered by female students in both situations.

Table 1: Encouragement/support for participation in sports or physical activity

Category	Findings
Positive Environment	Importance of a supportive atmosphere characterized by encouragement, kindness, and sportsmanship from coaches, teammates and peers.
Friendship and inclusivity	A strong peer support network among girls encourages participation
Reassurance and Good Sportsmanship	Positive energy and reassurance from supportive teams or coaches significantly encourage participation

Figure 4: Summary of Encouragement and Support for Participation in Sports or Physical Activity.

Explanation: The findings (as demonstrated by the students' example below) demonstrate the significance of an encouraging environment in promoting girls' participation in sports. In a setting that encourages positive interactions between coaches and teammates, girls feel valued and motivated. Furthermore, since social connections provide greater support, friendships within the team increase participation. Encouraging girls to play sports requires emotional support, as demonstrated by the focus on delivering reassurance and modelling good sportsmanship.

Examples from the Students:

- "Knowing that there are people around the world to support us, girls, with whatever sport we do in life."
- "Sportsmanship and supportive teammates."
- "Getting encouragement from my parents and other people."
- "Knowing people are there for me and can know how I feel. Helping me make the most of it."
- "Encouraging me through it all!"

Table 2: Difference in Encouragement Between Boys and Girls.

Category	Findings
Boys receive more support	Boys are perceived to receive more encouragement and resources, leading to disparities between boys and girls.
Gender Stereotypes	There is a strong perception that boys are seen as stronger and more athletic, while girls lack belief and support in their abilities.
Unequal Media	Media coverage often favours boys' sports, highlighting disparities in encouragement and attention.

Figure 5: Responses of differences with gender

Explanation: This table (See examples from students below) highlights significant disparities in the encouragement received by boys and girls in sports. Respondents noted that boys receive more support, which perpetuates gender stereotypes that position boys as inherently stronger and more athletic. This differential treatment extends to resources and opportunities, exacerbating the challenges faced by girls. Additionally, the unequal media coverage of boys' sports reinforces these stereotypes and diminishes the visibility of girls' athletic achievements.

Examples from the Students:

- “Yes, because adults always believe in the boys.”
- “Yes, because there is a difference between boys and girls, which is why they always make everything competitive, and we don’t get enough encouragement.”
- “ Yes, because it makes me frustrated and want to quit.”

Table 3: Factors that increase interest in joining sports teams.

Category	Findings
Comfort and Favouritism	Importance of a supportive atmosphere characterized by encouragement, kindness, and sportsmanship from coaches, teammates and peers.
Friendship and inclusivity	A strong peer support network among girls encourages participation
More opportunities and less pressure	Suggestions for more trials, team formation opportunities and recreational options would reduce pressure and increase participation

Figure 6: Responses of increased interest.

Explanation: The factors that strongly influence girls' interest in joining sports teams are reflected in the data (see student examples below) found in this table. A strong desire to play on a team with friends emphasises how crucial social ties are in encouraging involvement. Girls need to be encouraged in an accepting and nonjudgmental environment, especially those who might feel intimidated or judged. More opportunities to participate without the stress of competition are needed, according to respondents, who also suggested that emphasising recreational options could increase engagement.

Examples from the Students:

- “By encouraging each other and helping each other.”
- “Have all-girls sports (no boys).”
- “Seeing the joy in others, seeing it in fun ways and mostly being inclusive to others. Have fun.”
- “Non-competitive.”
- “Girls on teams, please!!”

Table 4: Quitting sports due to treatment

Category	Findings
Sexism and Favouritism	Reports of sexism from male teammates or coaches lead many girls to consider quitting; favouritism by coaches is also a concern.
Pressure and Mistreatment	Excessive pressure to perform and negative treatment contribute to girls' dissatisfaction in sports.
Feeling "not good enough"	Negative experiences, including harsh criticism or favouritism, create self-doubt and feelings of being undervalued.

Figure 7: Responses of students quitting sports

Explanation: The reasons (See examples from students below) for quitting sports are deeply concerning and highlight systemic issues within the sporting environment. Many girls reported experiences of sexism, either from male peers or coaches, leading to a toxic atmosphere that diminishes their enjoyment of sports. The pressure to perform, coupled with negative treatment, contributes to a sense of dissatisfaction. This environment fosters self-doubt and feelings of inadequacy, causing many girls to reconsider their participation in sports altogether.

Examples from the Students:

- "Yes, I suggest women coaches instead of male coaches."
- "Yes, Because of how people treat you, it hurts your feelings."
- "Yes, because, I'm not fast at running or playing. Coaches sometimes judge and body shame you, I never played many sports because of this."

Incubator Results from Glenavon School and Green Bay School - Differences

The differences in girls' sports participation between Glenavon School and Green Bay High School are influenced by several important variables, such as age, school environment, resources, and cultural pressures. Girls are still forming their peer relationships and sense of self at Glenavon School, which educates students in years 7 and 8. They are reluctant to play sports, especially in competitive settings, due to strong cultural pressures that undermine their confidence. For instance, many participants in the incubator sessions reported feeling that their peers were criticising them when they tried to play sports, which deterred them from joining teams or attempting new things. Lower participation rates are also a result of the school's limited resources, absence of organised sports programs, and scarcity of extracurricular activities. Additionally, according to the incubator results, girls frequently feel that their teachers don't encourage them to play sports, with many expressing

that they are rarely encouraged to engage in physical activities. Furthermore, the school environment discourages girls from participating in sports, which further lowers their interest and involvement.

In contrast, Green Bay High School serves older students who are typically more self-assured and assertive when playing sports. Since many participants shared stories of encouraging coaches and teachers who actively encourage sports participation, the incubator results showed that girls at this school have more positive experiences with sports. In sports, these girls are more confident and ready to stand up for themselves. The school offers better facilities, a greater variety of organised sports programs, and a more encouraging atmosphere that encourages autonomous decision-making and self-expression. For instance, girls at Green Bay High School mentioned having access to multiple sports teams and regular competitions, which boost their engagement. Girls at Green Bay High School are more engaged and enthusiastic about sports because they have more access to a wider variety of sports activities and receive stronger support from peers and the school.

Fishbowl Similarities – Glenavon and Green Bay High School

Regarding the obstacles preventing girls from participating in sports, the answers from Glenavon School and Green Bay High School were strikingly similar. Students from both schools said they were afraid of being judged or criticised if they joined a sports team. "Boys think they are better and stronger," one Glenavon student said, while another said, "You might not be good at the sport, and people might judge you." A participant from Green Bay also mentioned that concerns were caused by "different skill levels."

Every participant from Glenavon confirmed that they had experienced exclusion because of their gender, a sentiment that was also expressed by many at Green Bay. Both schools reported a shared sense of exclusion. Students at Glenavon identified "boys' mean words" and "body-shaming" as major barriers, along with criticism and mockery. Students at Green Bay expressed similar worries about not feeling "good enough" and pointed out that there weren't many female teams.

Both schools agreed that more entertaining, non-competitive sports could increase involvement. "We will feel more encouraged because it's less competitive," a Glenavon student said, echoing the same response, by a Green Bay participant regarding boys picking sports that keep out girls. This feedback emphasises how inclusive sports programs are necessary to foster a friendly environment for female athletes.

Fishbowl Differences - Glenavon and Green Bay High School

Table 1: Understand the barriers girl face at Glenavon School

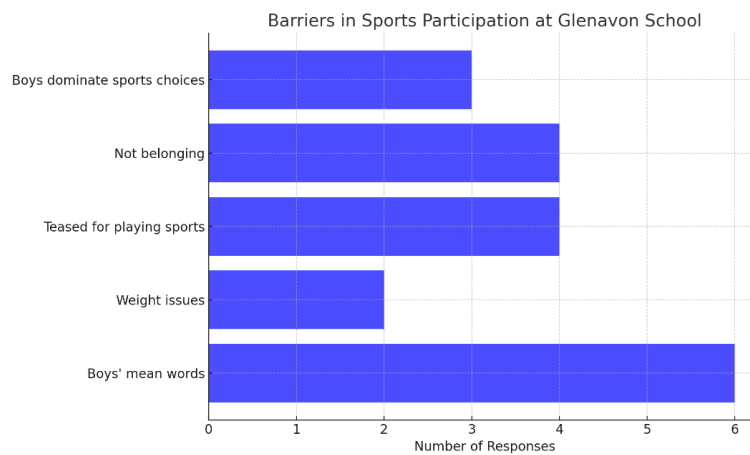


Figure 9: Glenavon Schools Differences

Explanation: This graph illustrates the difficulties that Glenavon School students encounter; major challenges include boys' cruel remarks, bullying, and a sense of alienation. Several girls felt even more excluded because of weight concerns and boys' predominance in sports choices. Another factor that was found to be present was the lack of support that some girls felt from their peers and teachers when it came to playing sports. These obstacles highlight how crucial it is to establish a more polite, inclusive classroom where all students are encouraged to participate in physical education.

Table 2: Understand the barriers girls face at Green Bay High School

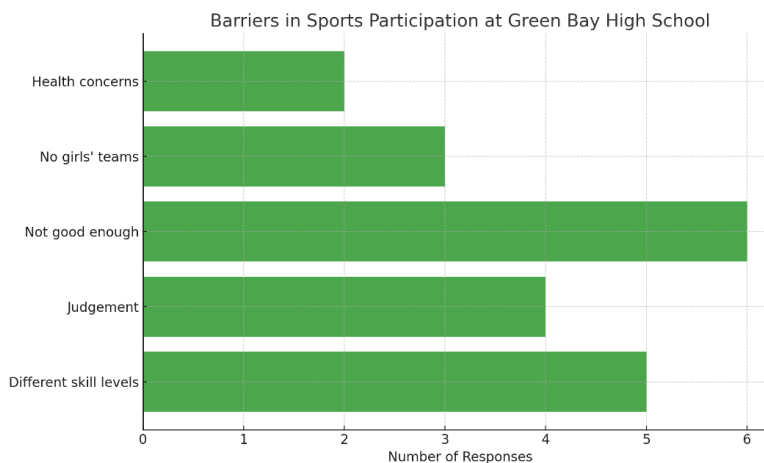


Figure 10: Green Bay High Schools Differences

Explanation: The barriers mentioned by the students at Green Bay High School are depicted in this second graph. These include the absence of female sports teams, feelings of judgement, and worries about skill differences. Furthermore, health issues—such as injuries or pre-existing conditions—were more prevalent at Green Bay, emphasising the physical difficulties that may deter people from participating. Targeted interventions are necessary to create a more inclusive and supportive environment, as many girls feel excluded or hesitant to participate in sports due to these barriers, social pressures, and limited opportunities.

These differences reflect the varied social and practical barriers girls face at different schools, suggesting tailored initiatives are needed to address the specific challenges in each environment.

Discussion

This research aimed to understand the barriers and factors influencing girls' participation in sports at Glenavon School and Green Bay School, particularly focusing on the social dynamics, cultural expectations and emotional factors affecting engagement. The findings from both qualitative and quantitative data offer valuable insights into how these barriers differ between age groups and educational contexts and align with existing literature on the challenges faced by girls in sports.

Key Findings and Interpretation

Social Barriers and Emotional Factors

The most prominent barrier identified at both schools was the fear of judgement, as shown in graph 3: All respondents 100% from Glenavon School and a majority from Green Bay High School indicated that judgement from peers, particularly boys, played a significant role in deterring girls from participating in sports. This finding aligns with the literature on social pressure in adolescent girls' sports participation. According to Hills (2007), peer judgement and fear of failure are two of the most common reasons girls drop out or avoid sports, as the need to conform to social expectations often supersedes personal interest in physical activity. This is particularly true during adolescence when self-consciousness peaks and the desire for social acceptance is heightened.

Furthermore, body image concerns and fear of failure were highlighted by 80% of respondents, further emphasizing the emotional barriers girls face in sports. This shows the world of Slater & Tiggemann, (2010), that adolescent girls' concerns about body image and performance anxieties were major deterrents to sports participation. The pressure to look a certain way or meet perceived athletic standards creates a significant psychological issue, leading to avoidance of physical activity.

Practical Barriers: Financial and Logistical Issues

While social and emotional factors were the most prominent, practical barriers such as financial constraints and transport difficulties were mentioned by 40% of respondents in [Graph 3](#). These issues, through High school, are still important and reflect wider socioeconomic challenges faced by many families. Limited access to resources, such as appropriate sportswear or transport to and from events, is a well-documented barrier, particularly for girls from lower-income families (Humbert et al., 2006). Schools with fewer resources, like Glenavon, face added difficulties in providing the necessary support, as indicated by the limited sports programs and facilities available at the school compared to Green Bay High School.

Cultural Expectations and Gender Norms

A recurring theme in the data from both schools was the influence of cultural expectations and gender norms. Girls from both Glenavon School and Green Bay High School felt that boys were more encouraged to participate in sports and were often seen as more capable or deserving of resources, as highlighted in [Table 2](#). These findings are consistent with studies on gender inequity in school sports, where boys are typically given more attention, support, and resources (Hemphill et al., 2010). The perception that boys are inherently more athletic perpetuates stereotypes that can undermine girls' confidence and motivation to participate in sports.

One participant at Glenavon commented, "Boys think they are better and stronger," reflecting a widely held belief that girls are less capable in sports. This mirrors findings from studies such as the one by Flintoff & Scaton (2001), which revealed that girls often feel marginalised in mixed-gender sports environments due to pervasive gender stereotypes. The unequal media coverage of boys' sports, noted by several respondents in [Table 2](#), exacerbates this issue by further normalising the idea that boys' athletic achievements are more valuable and deserving of attention.

Institutional Support and Encouragement

The incubator sessions from both schools underscored the importance of a supportive environment for encouraging girls' participation in sports. Positive energy, reassurance from coaches and a sense of camaraderie among teammates were all highlighted as key factors for maintaining girls' engagement in sports, as shown in [Table 1](#). This is consistent with research by (Sakalidis et al., 2023) who found that a supportive and inclusive sports environment can significantly increase girls' motivation and willingness to participate. Encouragement from peers and adults plays a crucial role in overcoming the barriers associated with fear of judgement or failure.

At Green Bay High School, girls reported greater confidence and participation. This suggests that in-school support - through both sports programs and the promotion of positive social interactions – can mitigate some of the emotional and psychological barriers girls face in sports. Schools with better resources, such as Green Bay are equipped to provide this support, which directly impacts participation rates.

Limitations of the Research

One major limitation of the study was the absence of data from parents at Green Bay High School. Parental attitudes toward sports, including cultural expectations and the level of support they provide, are critical factors in determining a girl's participation in physical activities. The lack of responses from Green Bay High School parents created a gap in the dataset, limiting the study to parent perspectives from Glenavon School. This imbalance introduced a bias toward a particular set of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, making it difficult to draw broader conclusions about how family environments influence girls' engagement in sports. While the student responses from Green Bay High School still offered valuable insights, the absence of parental input restricted the ability to cross-reference or confirm students' experiences with those of their families.

Additionally, the inability to access Avondale Intermediate and St. Dominic's Catholic College, as originally planned, further constrained the diversity of perspectives in the study. These schools may have provided valuable insights from different socio-economic, cultural, or religious backgrounds, which would have enhanced the generalizability of the findings. Without data from these institutions, the study was limited to insights from Glenavon School and Green Bay High School, reducing the representativeness of the findings across different communities. Despite these challenges, the study remained valuable by adapting its focus to the available data, ensuring that practical and meaningful insights were drawn from the accessible schools.

To clarify the range of the data collection, the research project included questionnaires, incubator sessions and workshops from both Glenavon School and Green Bay High School. 40 girls from years 7 and 8 participated at Glenavon, and 50 girls from years 9 and 10 participated at Green Bay High School. In addition, five parents from Glenavon School responded to my questionnaire regarding their daughter's involvement in sports and their opinions on inclusivity at their school. I got no response from the parents at Glenavon School. Despite these difficulties, I adjusted my focus according to the data at hand, ensuring that beneficial and important data could be drawn from the accessible schools.

Strengths of the Research

Despite these limitations, the study provides a contextual insight into the barriers girls face in sports participation through a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The use of the incubator sessions and fishbowl activities allowed for an in-depth exploration of the emotional and social factors that are often difficult to capture through questionnaires alone. The workshop provided rich qualitative data that emphasised the complicated nature of girls' participation in sports by creating an interactive space where participants could discuss their feelings towards the sport and share individual experiences. The questionnaires, provided a more comprehensive quantitative viewpoint, allowing the collection of data from a bigger sample size. This method made it possible to spot trends and patterns in the resources, support networks, and participation rates of girls in both schools. By comparing two schools with different resource levels and age groups, the study highlights how the school environment influences girls' participation in sports, offering a nuanced understanding of the issue. Additionally, the focus on both emotional and practical barriers provides a well-rounded view of the challenges girls face in the two schools. While the questionnaires offered quantifiable information that could be statistically examined, the workshops shed light on social dynamics and personal emotions.

The inclusion of parental perspectives from Glenavon school adds an important dimension to the study, as parents' attitudes and support are critical in shaping girls' sports experience. According to parent insights gathered from the questionnaires, their encouragement—or lack of—has a substantial influence on their daughter's desire to play sports.

Recommendations

Based on the findings the following recommendations are proposed for the two schools:

1. Increase emotional support in school: Schools should prioritise creating a supportive environment for girls in sports. Coaches and teachers need to be made aware of the emotional and psychological barriers girls face and provide the necessary encouragement to build confidence. Peer support systems should also be enhanced to foster a sense of camaraderie and reduce the fear of judgement.
2. Address gender stereotypes: Schools should actively work to challenge gender stereotypes that undermine girls' participation in sports. This includes promoting girls' sports more visibly within the school and ensuring equal access to resources and opportunities for girls' sports in mainstream media.
3. Non-competitive and Inclusive Sports Options: Many girls expressed a preference for non-competitive and inclusive sports environments. Schools should offer more recreational

sports options where the emphasis is on fun and participation rather than competition. This approach can help reduce the pressure girls feel and play sports more enjoyable for girls.

The research's recommendations can be helpful for schools. Schools can create a more positive environment that encourages girls to participate in physical activity by providing non-competitive, inclusive sports options, addressing gender stereotypes, and increasing emotional support. Not only will equal resource access, increased visibility of girls' sports, and the development of supportive peer relationships increase participation rates, but they will also benefit female students' general well-being. By putting these suggestions into practice, school sports programs can become more diverse, equitable, and inclusive, empowering all students—regardless of gender—to participate and succeed.

Reflection on Aim and Objectives:

The project's goals were accomplished in several ways. First, the study demonstrated how supportive environments promote inclusivity by highlighting Green Bay High School's strong support, which increased female students' confidence and participation. In addition, data obtained from students and parents (Glenavon) indicated a degree of awareness regarding gender equality. Lastly, the study discovered that perceptions of female athletes are still influenced by traditional gender roles, with girls frequently perceived as less worthy or capable. These results are consistent with the body of research on how stereotypes prevent girls from participating in sports (Sport, Stereotypes and Stolen Dreams: Why Girls Still Feel They Don't Belong in Sport - Women in Sport, 2024).

Conclusion

This project aimed to investigate how Intermediate and High Schools foster an inclusive culture and facilitate the development of abilities in sports, while also addressing barriers to their participation. Using both qualitative and quantitative techniques, such as questionnaires, workshops, and incubator sessions, I was able to gather valuable insights into the challenges that girls face in the sports industry.

The results showed that girls' participation in physical activities is impacted by societal pressures, cultural attitudes, and lack of resources. Peer dynamics and a lack of structured programs made younger girls at Glenavon School reluctant to play competitive sports, while older students at Green Bay High School demonstrated more self-assurance and resources. This disparity emphasises the value of customised strategies that consider the requirements of different age groups and educational settings.

In addition to highlighting the pressing need for deeper support, the project highlights how important community involvement is in removing obstacles to participation. Schools can encourage girls to play sports by creating a welcoming and inclusive environment, which will improve their mental and physical health.

This project is important because it has the potential to influence the development of policies and programs that increase girls' involvement in sports and guarantee that every girl has an equal chance to succeed in physical activity and sports. We can raise a generation of self-assured, active young women who are not only involved in sports but also empowered to follow their passions off the field by removing the obstacles that have been identified and encouraging inclusive practices.

Evaluation/Critical Reflection

Developing – Identification of the Issue and Development of the Aim

Identifying the problem of girls' low sports participation rates and creating a targeted goal was the first step in my action learning project. At first, I thought that the main obstacles stemmed from a lack of resources and facilities available to girls. However, as I delved deeper, I realised that cultural expectations and societal norms played a significant role. This insight was particularly reinforced by research findings I encountered in Dhirender Kaim's works, which highlighted how traditional gender roles can undermine girls' confidence and participation. This change in perspective was critical because it enabled me to reframe my goal to pinpoint obstacles and investigate how school communities could promote inclusivity.

Throughout my project, I interacted with parents and students, which broadened my viewpoint. Their real-world insights into the obstacles faced by girls in sports made their contributions significant. Having personally experienced exclusion and criticism, I was better able to comprehend the emotional areas surrounding girls' participation. The foundation for my research was laid by this collaborative approach, which highlights the significance of community voices in forming successful interventions.

Developing The Project Plan

I wanted to create a thorough plan for the project plan that integrated qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques. At first, I had a lot of objectives, but I soon realised that having too many

could make it harder to focus on certain aspects of my aim. I decided to simplify my objectives, which eventually improved the efficacy and clarity of my research. Looking back, I am happy I made this decision, it has allowed me to concentrate on the more critical parts of my research and gain deeper insights into the barriers girls face in sports participation.

At this stage, I thought it would be easy to get different schools to participate. Regretfully, I had trouble getting into Avondale Intermediate and St. Dominic's Catholic School due to unknown administrative Hurdles and scheduling conflicts. I shifted my attention to accessible schools to address this. This flexibility allowed me to continue moving my project forward and continue to collect insightful data from the communities I was able to reach. If I had taken a different approach, like reaching out to schools earlier in the planning process of my report, I may have overcome these barriers and included a broader range of perspectives in my research.

Implementing the plan

To collect data and enable participants to share their experiences in an open setting, the plan was implemented through workshops and questionnaires. The workshops gave participants a platform to freely share their experiences and produced an array of qualitative data. Through this experience, I learned the importance of managing participant engagement by creating a welcoming environment during workshops. Even though I had trouble getting Green Bay High School to respond to my questionnaire, I decided to concentrate on the information I had received from the other school. I was able to keep the integrity of my research intact by giving priority to the insights obtained from more responsive communities.

The significance of flexibility in research was highlighted by this experience. Rather than focusing on Green Bay High School's lack of data, I focused on analysing and reporting the outcomes from the workshops and other involved schools. I gained an understanding of the importance of the data I gathered and realised that not all outreach initiatives would be successful. With the help of this strategy, I was able to move my project forward and draw insightful conclusions from the available data.

Analysis and reporting

During the analysis phase, I carefully examined the data collected from the surveys and workshops. I organised the responses into tables and graphs to look for patterns and trends regarding the obstacles to participation. This process revealed that, in addition to insufficient facilities, barriers also included deeply ingrained cultural attitudes and stereotypes.

After gathering and visualising the data, I began to write about my findings, drawing links between the quantitative results and the qualitative insights that I had received during the workshops. This phase demonstrated how crucial it is to communicate data understandably so that interested parties can comprehend the complexity of the issues that female athletes face. I realised that to communicate effectively, information must be customised to emphasise its importance in being presented clearly. While using visuals such as tables and graphs can improve awareness, it's just as crucial to tell the story behind the data to make sure the audience understands the insights.

Overall conclusion

In conclusion, this action learning project offered a significant chance for both professional and personal development. I learnt more about the specifics surrounding girls' sports participation by thinking back on each stage of the project. The cooperative initiatives and various input from involved stakeholders proved to be extremely helpful in steering my comprehension of the matter and shaping my suggestions for promoting inclusivity. In addition to being in line with Sport Waitākere's goals, this project strengthened my resolve to fight for fair sports opportunities for female athletes of the future.

Overall, this research and experience served as a reminder of the value of hearing what the community has to say and the ongoing need to remove obstacles that prevent girls from participating in sports. I'm inspired to keep pushing for change going forward to give all girls the chance to succeed in athletics and physical activity.

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Appendices:

Figure 1



Workshop Agenda:

Time duration: 30-40 Minutes (Time may differ)

Participants: Girls who play and don't play a sport or physical activity.

Number of participants: The more the better

Introduction:

- Introduce myself, who I am
- Explain what I am doing and why - Identifying what barriers are stopping girls from participating in Sport and recreation and what their school and community are doing to encourage this participation
- Allow the girls to introduce themselves to each other - allowing them to get comfortable with each other, this allows them to feel comfortable enough to open up.

Disclaimer will be mentioned, stated below:

Please note that all answers will be kept anonymous. All data collected from this workshop will be stored securely and only accessed by the team involved in the research. Individual responses will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team. The information gathered from this workshop will be used solely for this research project. The findings will be public in a research paper through AUT, but no personally identifiable information will be disclosed.

Voluntary participation: Participation in this workshop is completely voluntary, the girls are free to decline to answer any particular questions or to withdraw from the workshop at any time.

Consent: By answering further questions, the girls are providing consent to participate in this study under the conditions outlined above.

The workshop will be voice-recorded.

Icebreakers:

Icebreaker 1: Wolf, Chicken, Grain Riddle

- The group will be split into group depending in the number of girls. Possible 4-5 groups

Figure 2

- They will be told the story, the first team who thinks they have got it will stand up with their hands up
- If they have got it correct, they are the winners

Tell the group: "A farmer is traveling with a wolf, chicken and bag of grain and comes to a river they need to cross. The boat only has room for the farmer and 1 other. The farmer can't leave the wolf alone with the chicken and he can't leave the chicken alone with the grain. How can he get them all across the river safely?"

Team members must work together to agree on an answer and explain their reasoning. For larger groups, it may be better to split the group into teams so that all teammates have a chance to participate.

The answer:

1. *The farmer takes the chicken over first.*
2. *He brings the wolf second and comes back with the chicken.*
3. *He drops off the chicken and takes the grain to the other side with the wolf.*
4. *The farmer makes one last trip to retrieve the chicken.*

Icebreaker 2: The floor is lava

The aim of the game is to get your group from one side of the classroom to the other, without touching the ground. Using the hula hoops, get your teammates to the other side. If you touch the floor, you have to restart.

A foot has to be touching a lily pad at all times

- Students will be split into 3-4 groups (depending on numbers)

Activities:

Activity 1: Different Version of a Fishbowl

- Have all the girls sitting in front of the whiteboard that has a bowl of questions in front of it
- Have one of the girls come up and pull one out, reading it to the group
- If they want to answer, 3 at a time will come up and write on the whiteboard
- Once everyone has answered, the next person comes up and pick a question out of the bowl, reading it to the group.
- After each question is answered, a photo will be taken of the answers, then erased for the next questions.
- This will be repeated until all questions are answered.

Figure 3

there will be 5 big pieces of paper

- Each paper will have a question written on it
- The girls will be asked to walk around to each piece of paper and write their honest opinion/answer.
- Once all questions are answered, they will be asked to sit down.

I will be disclosing once all questions are answered they are free to leave.

Type of Questions being asked during the workshop (DRAFT)

These are example questions.

- Do you feel that your school is actively encouraging girls to participate in sports/Physical Activity? Compulsory - If so, what have they done?
- What barriers e.g. judgement, confidence is stopping you from participating in Sports and active recreation in your school? (It could be anything)
- If you play a sport, have you ever considered quitting your sport because of the way you were treated? (yes or no)
- How do you think we can create a more inclusive environment for girls in sports in your community and school?
- Have you noticed any differences in how boys and girls are treated in sports in your community and school? If yes ..., what are they?
- Have you ever felt excluded from a sports team or activity because you are a girl? (Yes or no)
- For those who don't play a sport, do you feel like barriers are preventing you from participating in sports? What are these barriers?
- Have you ever been worried about being judged or criticized if you joined a sports team? (yes or no)

My goal from this is to:

- Shed light on the underlying issues that are still contributing to lower levels of sports involvement among girls in the West Auckland area.
- The data collected will be used to write a research report that highlights these findings, offering a deeper understanding of the problem.
- Provide actionable recommendations that can help schools and communities create more inclusive and supportive environments for girls in sports.

Your school will be supplied the Final Report - November 2024

Figure 4**Girls in sport within your school and community**

1. **My Question:** Investigate how Intermediate and High School communities encourage an inclusive culture and equal opportunities for girls in sports. Additionally, what barriers hinder girls' participation in sports within their schools and communities?

NOTES: This will take no more than 5 minutes

What is Sport: Sport is an organised competition.

What is Physical Activity: Physical activity is any movement of your body that uses energy.

Description:

To Parents, Teachers and Caregivers,
This project aims to investigate how Intermediate and High school communities foster an inclusive culture and provide equal opportunities for girls in sport. By gathering insights from parents, teachers and caregivers, I hope to understand girls participation in school sports and physical activity, identify successful initiatives and uncover the barriers that girls face within their schools and communities.

Your participation:

Your perspectives as parents, teachers and caregivers are invaluable for the research. By participating in this survey, you will help me gain a comprehensive understanding of the school environment, existing policy's, and community attitudes towards girls participation in sports and physical activity.

Your responses will directly contribute to help me develop my research plan and end results, as well as finding ways to promote inclusiveness and opportunity's for girls in sport in your community.

Disclaimer (MUST READ BEFORE MOVING ONTO THE SURVEY)

Please note that all answers will be kept anonymous. All data collected from this survey will be stored securely and only accessed by the team involved in the research. Individual responses will not be shared with anyone outside of the research team.

The information gathered from this survey will be used solely for this research project. The findings will be public in a research paper through, Auckland University Technology (AUT) but no personally identifiable information will be disclosed.

Figure 5Voluntary participation:

Participation in this survey is completely voluntary. You are free to decline to answer any particular questions or to withdraw from the survey at any time without any consequences (Do this by simply exiting the survey or writing N/A).

Consent:

By completing and submitting this survey, you are providing your consent to participate in this study under the conditions outlined above.

If you have any questions or concerns about this survey or the research project, please feel free to contact Holly Spargo, the Primary Researcher at community@sportwaitakere.nz.

Sincerely,

Holly Spargo

AUT student

Community@sportwaitakere.nz

Sport Waitākere

**Indicates required question*

1. Do you feel that your school actively encourage girls to participate in sports/Physical Activity?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

2. What activities have they done? *

Check all that apply.

- Netball
- Girls lunchtime sessions
- Football
- Girls Workshops
- Other: _____

3. Rate the activities effectiveness. *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Very Not Very Effective

4. Why did you give it this rating?

5. What are the main barriers to girls participating in sports? *

Check all that apply.

- Fear of failure
- Body Image
- Financial/Fees
- Transport
- Judgement
- Other: _____

6. In your experience, what would help support a change for girls in physical activity?

7. Rate Green Bay's cultural understanding for girls in physical activity/sport? *

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4

Low High Understanding

