

Sports Participation and Dropout among Adolescents in Co. Wexford

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**STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY AND OWNERSHIP OF WORK**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**CDC:** Centre for Disease Control and Prevention

**CSPPA:** Children's Sports Participation and Physical activity

**DOHA:** Department of Health and Ageing

**FAI:** Football Association of Ireland

**FCJ:** Faithfull Companions of Jesus

**GAA:** Gaelic Athletic Association

**HSE:** Health Service Executive

**SLÁN:** Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes and Nutrition in Ireland

**SPSS:** Statistical Package for Social Sciences

**WHO:** World Health Organisation

## ABSTRACT

### **Purpose**

To investigate the level of sports participation among teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18 in County Wexford and their reasons for sports participation and sporting inactivity. The concept of gender, age and school year affecting participation among Irish youths was also investigated.

### **Methodology**

A triangulation method of research was used in this study. For the quantitative piece of research a cross sectional survey was used and for the qualitative section, focus groups were used. Population sample consisted of 60 students from the FCJ Secondary School, Bunclody, Co. Wexford. Exactly 30 males and 30 females ranging from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> year between the ages of 12-18 were involved in the study. All 60 participants were given identical questionnaires and data was analysed using SPSS. For the qualitative section of this research 12 students were randomly selected from the previous questionnaire sample to participate in the focus groups. Two focus groups were conducted; one with sports participants and one with non-sports participants and were analysed using thematic content analysis.

### **Results**

Sports participation was high (80%); in regards to age and sports participation; 13-14 year olds had higher sports participation than 17-18 year olds; 30% and 15% respectively. Sports participation was mostly consistent among school year (15%) with the exception of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years (10%); there was no apparent gender difference. Playing sport for fitness and for the enjoyment of sport were the most popular responses from the questionnaires, while reasons such as for fun, something to do, for the love of the sport, for the challenge and for the social aspect of sport were the most common responses for sports participation from the focus group. Main reasons established from the questionnaire for non-sports participation included losing interest, alternative commitments and fear of lack of ability. Lack of time, coaches and fear of lack of ability were the main themes that arose as reasons for non-sports participation in the focus groups.

### **Discussion**

Sports participation was quite high among this population sample; gender had no apparent effect on sports participation while age and school year were seen to have some effect. Reasons for sports participation and non-sports participation were consistent to those established by previous authors. Upcoming interventions to promote sports participation among teenagers should focus in the area of recreational and individualised sports. Education of the benefits of sports and physical activity in relation to academic performance should also be included as many stated being busy with school work as a preventative to sports participation.

# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

Sport has an important role to play in adolescents lives. Sport is an integral part of growing up; it allows youths the opportunity to socialise, to work as part of a team, teaches them to handle success and failure, develops individual health and fitness and promotes a positive attitude towards exercise and healthy living, it improves self-confidence and a positive self-image (Irish Sports Council, 2013). Despite these benefits of being actively involved in sport, research has shown that participation among teenagers is decreasing and that drop out from sport among the Irish population group is becoming a worrying trend (Woods et al. 2010; Kremer, 1997). Although many studies have been conducted around the area of adolescents and sport, the reasons for participation and for non-participation in sport, the majority of these were carried out within an urban, city setting leaving a gap in research within more rural locations. In this piece of research the focus is placed on adolescents, their participation levels in sport, their reasons for sports participation, sporting inactivity and drop out from sport. An investigation into gender, age and year of school will also be made to establish is there a link between these concepts and sporting participation, reasons for participation, for not participating and for drop out from sport. This study will examine and discuss similar literature on adolescent sport involvement. The researcher's main attention is focused on the sports participation of adolescents in Ireland, in particularly in County Wexford.

# **LITERATURE REVIEW**

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Health and Obesity:**

Levels of obesity worldwide have nearly doubled since 1980; 5% of men and 8% of women were obese in 1980 compared to 10% of men and 14% of women in 2008 (WHO, 2003). The SLÁN Survey which was carried out in 2007 examined the lifestyle, attitudes and nutrition among Irish adults. It found that 36% of their sample reported themselves as being overweight and 14% as obese. Males were seen to be more likely to report being overweight and obese (59%) compared to females (41%). Self-reports of overweight in Ireland have increased from 31% in 1998 to 39% in 2013 (SLÁN, 2007; Department of Health, 2013). Childhood obesity is now becoming a major worrying epidemic and overweight and obesity is now the most common childhood disorder in Europe (WHO, 2003). One in ten 5-12 year old children is now considered to be overweight while a further one in ten being obese. Currently approximately 22% of 5-12 year olds in Ireland are overweight or obese while one in five teenagers between the ages of 13-17 are overweight or obese (19%). Since 1990 there has been a significant increase in teenage obesity; male levels of obesity have risen from 1% to 8% and female levels have risen from 3% to 6% (Irish Universities Nutrition Alliance, 2006, 2008; HSE, 2008). This increase in levels of overweight and obesity may be a direct result of non-sports participation and a reduction in active travel compared to previous generations. Lifestyle behaviours such as healthy eating and regular involvement in physical activity and or sport minimise the risk of becoming obese among children and adults.

### **Importance of Physical Activity and Sport**

Physical activity is defined as “any bodily movement produced by the skeletal muscle that requires energy expenditure” (WHO, 2013). Physical inactivity has been highlighted as the fourth leading cause for global mortality and causes approximately 3.2 million deaths globally. Physical inactivity has been linked to approximately 21-25% of breast and colon cancer burdens, 27% of diabetes burden and 30% of heart disease burden (WHO, 2010). Regular involvement in physical activity has substantial benefits for an individual; it not only has the potential to control the previously mentioned worrying obesity epidemic among Irish adolescents but also reduces the risk of developing cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, some cancers, and musculoskeletal ailments later on in life. It can also reduce the incidence of depression, improve mental health and mood, and improve abilities to complete activities of daily living and increases chances of living longer (WHO, 2013; CDC, 2011). It is

recommended that Irish adults engage in at least 30 minutes of physical activity at least 5 days of the week (Get Active Ireland, 2013).

Physical activity is just as important to children and teenager's current and future health as it is to adults. Physical activity not only has the same benefits to a child as it does to an adult, it also helps a child as it teaches them how to achieve a healthy energy balance and avoid becoming overweight or obese. Physical activity stimulates growth; weight bearing exercises are especially important to them as it is important for bone functioning and remodelling. As outlined above, physical activity reduces incidence of depression but also anxiety; this can be especially helpful for shy children; it enhances mood, self-esteem, and quality of life. Physical activity participation has also been seen to reduce rule breaking, reduce stress, improve attention span and classroom behaviour which results in positive effects on academic performance (Woods, et al, 2010). Children and teenagers are recommended to engage in at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day of the week (Get Active Ireland, 2013).

Sport is defined as an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment (Oxford Dictionary, 2013) and as such is a form of physical activity. Sports can play a vital role in the development of a child/teenager's social life and the advancement of their social interaction skills. Sport is seen to be a medium where peer status and peer acceptance is established and developed. During this important period in their lives, it provides an ideal opportunity to positively influence and change attitudes and participation levels towards physical activity (Woods et al, 2010; Coaching Association of Canada, 1996). Sport provides the same benefits to an individual as physical activity. Involvement in sport has benefits to motor skill development and performance and educational potential for children and teenagers (Sport and Dev, 2013). By being involved in sport it teaches key values such as, honesty, team work, fair play, respect for themselves and, others and rule adherence. It teaches adolescents how to win and lose which is transferable to all aspects of life. Involvement in sport teaches healthy habits which are likely to last a lifetime. Sport has been found to influence improvements in learning performance; encourages school attendance and a desire to succeed (Sport and Dev, 2013). Despite these many benefits of sport, improvements and increases have still to be seen among teenager participation levels in sport as participation levels still remain low.

### **Sports Participation**

Unfortunately adolescent sports participation can be quite low; this was seen by The Australian Sports Commission (2010) who carried out interviews with teenagers in Australia to investigate participation in club based physical activity within the 12 months prior to the interviews. It was found that 16.8% of the study sample were involved in a club based activity at least once per week while only 2.1% were involved 5 times a week or more. A total of 74.3% of this study sample were not involved in any club based physical activity. The most common club based activities engaged in among this study population were golf, football, netball, Australian Rules football and tennis (Australian Sports Commission, 2010). The research shows that within this Australian population group that they're sports participation was very low; this may have an association with Australia's increasing levels of childhood obesity and overweight which has doubled in recent years to 25% (DoHA, 2008).

In comparison to the above study de Róiste et al., (2005) found sports participation was quite high among their population group at 88%. A study conducted by Woods et al. (2010) called The CSPPA Study, aimed to provide a national data base of physical activity, physical education and sport participation levels of children and youth in Ireland, to assess their health and fitness and to investigate factors that influence their participation. This study used a cross sectional research design which involved self-reported surveys and qualitative interviews to assess participation in physical activity, physical education, extra-curricular and extra school sport among 10-18 year olds in Ireland. A total of 53 primary schools (1275 students) and 70 post primary schools (4122 students) were involved in this study. The research showed that 63% of primary school students and 73% of secondary school students in Ireland are involved in sport at least one day per week which was very high in comparison to the Australian Sports Commission, (2010). The most popular sports engaged in among this population were Gaelic games, soccer and basketball. Early participation in sport was common among this study sample; 37% indicated that by the age of 4 they were a member of a sports club, at age 7, 80% were a club member and at age 9, 93% were involved in a club. The level at which sport was played was assessed in this study; 18% were involved at a basic level (for recreational purposes), 57% at a competitive level (club competitions) and 25% at an elite level (regional or national standards). It was found that there was little change between the 2004 study and the 2009 study which suggests that interventions that had been put in place to increase sports participation have had little effect (Woods et al., 2010).

Delaney, (2013) carried out research within Waterford City among adolescents within seven different secondary schools to understand their sport and recreation participation and lifestyle behaviours. Results from this research showed that 72% of participants were involved in sport and recreational events at least at one stage within the previous month. Teenagers who live in urban areas were found to be more involved in sporting activities than those who live in rural settings. From this research it was found that soccer was the most popular sport among these participants (25.3%), hurling/camogie was the second most popular sport (18.4%) and Gaelic football was seen as the third most popular sport (14.14%) (Delaney, 2013). Fahey et al., (2005) found that 79% of participants were involved in sport; 34% participated 2-3 days per week with 18% participating 4 or more days per week. Gaelic football was found to be the most popular sport among this group (21%), followed closely by soccer (20%) which was similar to the results found by Woods et al., (2010), (Fahey, et al., 2005).

### **Factors Influencing Sports Participation**

Levels of sporting participation are easy to measure but the factors which influence an individual's participation or non-participation in sport is essential to understand if sports participation is to increase. In Northern Ireland, during the 1990's, Kremer (1997), carried out interview surveys with 2,400 students between the ages of 7-18. The aim of this study was to establish which sports were being played, at which level each individual played that sport, involvement and aspirations and reasons for involvement and drop out. When reasons for playing their top sports were examined it was discovered that family influences (37%) was the most common answer, 'because of school' (26%), and peer influences (21%) also largely contributed to participation. Research found that the motivators to continue playing sport were winning (33%), to get better (78%), enjoyment (69%), and feeling good (67%), keeping fit (65%), making friends (63%) and the overall excitement of the sport (63%), (Kremer, 1997). This study also showed that soccer was thought to be the most popular sport with 529 youths naming it as their most important sport, followed by swimming (256 youths), netball (129 youths) and Gaelic football (127 youths). When level at which sport was played was assessed it was established that 49% of the study sample played their sport at a basic level (recreation, family, school), 34% at a competitive level (club level, selected school teams) and 2% at an elite level (county, regional, national), (Kremer, 1997). Bearing in mind that the majority of these participants played sport at a basic level emphasis should be placed on interventions to assess and improve upon recreational sporting activities.

Connor (2003) conducted research between 1996 and 2000 to examine life style patterns of Waterford adolescents and, in particular, the place of sport and physical activity within those lifestyles. This piece of research consisted of a questionnaire based survey and interviews. During this study, the author investigated the reasons for participating in sport among this study sample. It was found that 37% played for the enjoyment of it, 28% because their friends played 21% to keep fit, 5% because there's nothing else to do, 3% to lose weight and 1% because their parents wanted them to (Connor, 2003).

Belanger et al, (2011), aimed to understand motivators for physical activity. To do so they carried out questionnaires and focus groups with 515 Canadian Students who were between the ages of 15-18. Reasons for participation in physical activity and sport included it being a stress reliever, feeling good, having more energy and being healthier. It was also reported that being good at the sport/physical activity kept them involved as does wanting to have a lean and muscular body figure and enjoying the activity itself. Parental and family support influenced participation as the maintainers revealed that their parents provide moral support, purchased their necessary equipment and bring them to where they need to be. The media was seen as a source of influence to the maintainers; seeing their role models on television or in papers was found to be motivating. Maintainers found that performing well motivated them to maintain their sports participation. It was also noted that having easy access and transportation positively influenced participation (Belanger et al. 2011).

Delaney (2013) also investigated reasons into why adolescents are involved in sport. The most common answers for this included "I enjoy sport", "I want to keep fit", and "I enjoyed playing sport in PE". Seeing a sport on TV, friends, family, having nothing else to do and weight loss were also common reasons for participating in sport (Delaney, 2013).

From the above research it can be seen that reasons for participation in sport was quite similar among all the authors (Kremer, 1997; Connor, 2000, Belanger et al. 2011, Delaney, 2013); common reasons among these authors were peer and family influences, for the enjoyment of it, to keep fit and feeling good. It appears that reasons for participation have not changed much over time as there was a gap of 16 years between Kremer's and Delaney's study which showed similar findings. A link can be made between these population samples and the sample being used in this piece of research which investigates sports participation among adolescents' in Co. Wexford. As four of these studies were carried out within the island of

Ireland, (Kremer, 1997; Connor, 2000, Woods et al. 2010, Delaney, 2013) it's easy to make a link between the adolescents used in these three studies and adolescents in County Wexford.

### **Sporting Inactivity and Dropout from Sport**

Despite the popularity of sport across the world increasing, several studies have shown that after the age of 14, sports participation dramatically lowers as dropout from sport becomes more frequent (Cambell, 1988; Seppanean, 1982; Stensaasen, 1982). de Róiste et al., (2005) established that sports participation declines among both genders as age increases. Regardless of the developments within the area of youth sport such as initiation of many sporting clubs and an increase in availability of sports to adolescents, it does not appeal to all teenagers. This results in dropout rates increasing and participation in sport among adolescents decreasing with rising age.

Woods et al, (2010), also found that sport participation was found to decrease with increasing age. It was noted that more females between the ages of 16-18 (30%) are not participating in sport compared to 12-13 year old females (14%) and 14-15 year old females (20%). This drop in participation was also associated with year group; it was seen that as students' progress through secondary school their sports participation dropped; 25% of 6<sup>th</sup> years never engage in sport while only 12% of 1<sup>st</sup> years do not (Woods et al. 2010). Woods et al, (2010) also investigated reasons for not participating in sport. They found that not being good enough at sport, not liking sport, no suitable activities offered, transport difficulties, don't know about local clubs, time pressures, never been asked and the sport being too expensive were common reasons for not participating in sport. It was reported that 7% of the post-primary sample had a physical or learning disability that prevented their participation in physical activity or sport (Woods et al. 2010). de Róiste et al., (2005) found that 73% of their sample had previously dropped out of a sporting activity and that females were more likely to drop out of a sport than males. Losing interest, lack of time, not liking the leader (coach), friends dropping out, age and cost were the most common reasons cited for dropping out of sport.

As has been outlined above, as individuals grow older, drop out from sport and physical activity is more prominent due to increasing age (Belanger, et al., 2011) Belanger et al, (2011), also wanted to understand reasons for sporting inactivity among their Canadian adolescent group. The results of this part of their study included that lack of access and transport hinders participation as does a lack of social support from family/friends; "my

parents never come watch my games”, “I was just tired of asking them (parents) for lifts so I just quit.” Feeling too much pressure, lack of fun, low self-esteem and gaining new priorities also influenced decline in sport. Lack of parental/family support could contribute to inactivity as could being placed under pressure by friends and coaches and the focus being on winning instead of having fun. Non-participants reported that they didn’t believe in their ability which also negatively affected their participation (Belanger et al. 2011).

Kremer (1997), found that losing (8%), lack of time (10%), lack of enjoyment (35%) lack of family support and injuries (28%), lack of knowledge/opportunities (51%), not knowing anyone involved (39%) and lack of equipment necessary (24%) were considered to be inhibitors to sports participation. They found that 17% of those who ever attempted sport dropped out of sport most commonly after the age of 12. In terms of participants who had a favourite sport (“top sport”) only 4% of them had discontinued their involvement. It was established that a loss of interest, school commitments, time consumption and peers ceasing participation were seen to be the top reasons for this drop out from sport (Kremer, 1997).

The Women’s Sport and Fitness Foundation (2008), found that drop out from sport is a major concern for teenage girls. This concept was originally identified by the Wolfenden Report in 1957 and has not improved much since then. Reasons for drop out among this grouping include peer group/societal values: ‘none of my friends play anymore,’ ‘people think it’s weird and they tease me,’ ‘I don’t like playing in the adult team.’ The group of girls involved in this research also reported losing interest in the sport, having other things to do, the sport being time consuming and being too competitive/boring/repetitive, dirty changing rooms and too much travelling for training/competition as incentives to drop out of playing sport. Other factors such as not liking the gear they have to wear, lacking confidence in their abilities and becoming more body conscious also resulted in teenage girls ceasing involvement in sport. Society leads people to believe that sport isn’t feminine. It was also outlined in this research that there are not enough female role models for teenage girls to look up to so they lack motivation and inspiration. Limitations of this research include that information was received from a fact sheet which gave little insight into how research was conducted or about the study sample as the methodology wasn’t clear (Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2008).

Molinero, Salguero and Teuro (2006) also investigated drop out from sport. Their focus was placed on Spanish athletes who had dropped out of their preferred activity. A self-reported questionnaire was distributed to assess reasons for drop out and found that some of the

reasons were quite similar to the results from the Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2008). Having other things to do was the most common reasons for drop out. Other reasons for drop out among this study included a dislike for the coach, perception of failure, lack of team atmosphere, not having enough interest or finding the sport boring (Molinero, Salguero, & Tuero, 2006).

Delaney (2013) also examined reasons for sporting inactivity and what the participants perceived to be barriers to participation. Common reasons for sporting inactivity included "I don't have enough time", "I have other interests", "I'm too lazy", "I'm not good enough at sport" and "I have too much study to do" (Delaney, 2013).

Having reviewed the research the reasons for not participating in and drop out from sport was quite similar among all the authors (Woods et al. 2010; Belanger et al. 2011; Kremer, 1997; Women's Sport and fitness Foundation, 2008; Molinero, Salguero & Tuero, 2006; Delaney, 2013). The most common reasons for not participating in sport discovered by these authors were feelings of not being good enough, transport difficulties, time pressures, lack of family or peer support and not enjoying the activity. Interestingly, what is considered to be a motivator for sports participation for one individual can be seen as a reason to negatively affect participation for another; this can be seen with parental, peer support, enjoyment and lack of/ease of transport. A link can be made between these population samples and the sample being used in this piece of research which investigates reasons for sporting inactivity and dropout from sport among adolescents' in Co. Wexford.

### **Gender and Sports Participation**

It has been established from the above studies that boys tend to be more involved in sport than girls (de Róiste et al., 2005; Australian Sports Commission, 2010; Woods et al, 2010). The studies revealed that females were more likely to have never participated in sport compared to males (40% females versus 28% males). Feelings of not being good enough at a sport was the most prevalent reason for female sporting inactivity compared to having different interests among males. It was also noted that more females between the ages of 16-18 (30%) are not participating in sport compared to 12-13 year old females (14%) and 14-15 year old females (20%). The Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation (2008), found that drop out from sport is a major concern for teenage girls (Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2008). Connor (2003), similarly to the above researchers found that teenage boys engage more in sport than their female counterparts; 64% boys, 46% girls. Soccer was the most

participated sport among boys (36%) and basketball was the most common among girls (34%) (Connor, 2003). Woods et al. (2010) reported that soccer had the highest participation among boys, while Gaelic football was the most popular for girls while de Róiste et al., (2005) found that soccer, Gaelic football and hurling are the most popular sports for males and basketball, Gaelic football and swimming are the most popular sports for females. In terms of the level of which sport was played at, males reported higher involvement at an elite level while females reported basic level (Woods et al, 2010). Kremer (1997) found that boys placed more emphasis on winning than females. Feelings of not being good enough at a sport was the most prevalent reason for female sporting inactivity (Woods et al, 2010). This information could help with setting up new sporting programmes and interventions suitable for males and females of all ages, interests and abilities.

### **Interventions to Increase Adolescent Involvement in Sport**

In light of the above information, many interventions have been developed to target adolescents and their sports participation. The Irish Sports Council introduced the idea of Local Sports Partnerships whose aim would be to promote participation in sport at a local level. As has been mentioned above female adolescents have a lower level of participation in sport than males. The Irish Sports Council designed a programme to increase female participation in sport. The Women in Sport Programme was established in 2005 to raise overall physical activity levels among women and to support women's role within sports organisations. The Irish Sports Council in conjunction with Local Sports Partnerships have involved women and teenage girls across Ireland in various different sporting activities such as camogie, ladies football, baton twirling, ladies soccer, basketball, athletics, water sports, swimming, athletics circuit training, cycling, hockey, golf and many more. As a result of the Women in Sport Programme, female participation in sport has increased (Irish Sports Council, 2005). Limerick Sports Partnership carried out a programme which aimed to increase physical activity opportunities across the schools completion programme, engage more girls in physical activity, increase awareness around the benefits of physical activity and nutrition to participants' general health and encourage participants to engage in additional physical activity and sport programmes when available at school and in the local community. The programmes were linked to the schools homework clubs aiming to encourage participation in both. Results of this programme showed that attendance at the homework clubs increased due to their link to physical activity, and that teachers reported a significant increase in pupil attention span. From involvement within in this programme many students

joined different sports clubs outside the school setting which shows that the programme did increase physical activity and sport involvement (Irish Sports Council, 2011).

The GAA have implemented many different initiatives in order to increase sports participation among children and teenagers across Ireland. Such initiatives include the GAA GO Games, the Super Touch Programme, Camán Abú & Peil Abú and The Cúl Camps. Participation in such programmes have been seen to have an overall increase in sports participation among children and teenagers (GAA, 2013). The Soccer Sisters was a programme set up by the FAI with the aim to increase the number of girls playing soccer and utilising facilities countrywide. The Soccer Sisters consists of an 8 week programme which is aimed to help establish new clubs and promote an interest in soccer among young girls and the Soccer Sisters Camp. In the last six years there has been an increase in girls playing soccer in local clubs from 12,500 to 23,000 (FAI, 2013).

Despite these developments, Woods et al. (2010) saw little improvements in the level of participation from their study in 2004 to their recent study in 2010 showing that despite the introduction of interventions to promote sports participation there are still many advances to be made. Although the above interventions and programmes may appear to be more recreational than competitive activities; participants are encouraged to join new sporting clubs to further develop their newfound skills.

### **Conclusion**

The above literature shows some positive and negative outcomes in relation to health. Despite Ireland having one of the highest physical activity and sporting participation within Europe, much still needs to be done in order to maintain this and prevent drop out from sport. Adolescents need to be introduced to a wide variety of sports and perhaps different adaptations of such sports and made more aware of programmes to attract larger interest and maintenance in such sporting activities (Mulligan, 1999). Sport is extremely important to young people for many improvements among many different aspects of their lives such as social interactions, learning key values which are paramount in everyday life, learning how to win and lose and all the physical benefits which are associated with physical activity and sport etc, (Woods et al, 2010; Coaching Association of Canada, 1996; Sport and Dev, 2013). Whilst much research has been carried out relating to the area of teenagers and sport; further developments need to be made. Sport participation is on the increase, yet reasons for drop out from sport and sporting activity remain the same. This research was carried out on quite a

large level and is difficult to relate to a local setting. Further research needs to be done to localise the idea of sports participation among teenagers which can be applied to real life settings. This study will attempt to investigate the level of sports participation among teenagers at a local level in Co. Wexford. Their reasons for sporting activity, sporting inactivity and drop out from sport will also be assessed as will whether there is a link between participation and inactivity between gender, age and school year. The opinions of adolescents in relation to sport and are they involved in any other activities will also be explored.

### **Rationale**

Previous research has shown that approximately 73% of secondary school students are involved in sporting activities at least once a week, revealing reasons for activity and inactivity that vary among age and gender groupings (Woods et al, 2010). However dropout rates have been seen to become more prominent with increasing age and are more prominent among the female gender (Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, 2008). Despite this research, sporting inactivity and dropout still remains prevalent among both male and female teenagers. Why is this still happening? Have reasons for activity, inactivity and drop out changed over time and what are the opinions of adolescents in relation to sport?

### **Aim of Research**

The aim of this research was to investigate the level of sports participation among young teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18 in County Wexford and their reasons for sports participation and sporting inactivity. The concept of gender and age affecting participation among Irish youths was also investigated.

### **Research Questions:**

1. What is the level of sports participation among 12-18 year olds in Co. Wexford?
2. What are the reasons for sports participation and non-sports participation?
3. Is there a link between gender/age/school year and sports participation?

# **METHODOLOGY**

## METHODOLOGY

### **Research Design**

To investigate this piece of research a triangulation method of research was used; this included both quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative research generalises results from a sample to the population of interest. It involves numbers and the counting and measuring of data. Qualitative research includes collecting, analysing and interpreting data by observing what people do or say. For the quantitative piece of this research a cross sectional survey was used and for the qualitative section the researcher carried out two focus groups. These research methods were chosen because they were seen as the combination for this piece of research as they both established reasons for and against sporting activity and the decisions behind each individual's choice, with the focus group having the potential to understand reasons for and against sporting activity in more depth.

### **Study Population and Sampling**

This study population consisted of 60 student teenagers (30 males and 30 females) from the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ) Secondary School, Bunclody, Co. Wexford. All these students were between the ages of 12-18 years. The researcher chose this school as it has a co-education group of students who not only as a school have high sporting achievements but also would be very involved in drama, music and other extra-curricular activities. This school is also in close proximity to the researcher which minimised time and cost factors. For the quantitative part of this research the researcher used convenience sampling with students from 1<sup>st</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> year being selected to take part in the study. The Vice Principle of the school randomly selected ten students from each school year to take part in the research. For the qualitative part of this research, 12 students were randomly selected from the previous questionnaire population to participate in the focus group. The focus groups were divided between sport participation and non-sports participation.

### **Variables/Concepts**

For this research the researcher measured the percentage of teenagers between the ages of 12-18 years in a school in County Wexford who currently play sport, who currently do not play sport and who have dropped out of sport. The researcher also assessed reasons for sports participation and non-sports participation and compared these to the level of sports participation among this group in relation to their, gender, age and year of school. These concepts were measured through use of self-reported questionnaire and a focus group.

Sport: Sport is defined as an activity involving physical exertion and skill in which an individual or team competes against another or others for entertainment.

Sports participation: Being currently involved in an activity that involves physical exertion and skill in which as an individual or team they compete against another or others for entertainment.

Sporting inactivity: Currently not being involved in an activity that involves physical exertion and skill in which as an individual or team they compete against another or others for entertainment.

Drop out from sport: Having once been involved in an activity that involved physical exertion and skill in which as an individual or team they competed against another or others for entertainment.

### **Data Collection Methods**

The questionnaire (*see appendix C*) which was used in this research was a modified version of the CSPPA questionnaire (Woods, et al, 2010) which was previously used in Ireland to provide a national database of physical activity, physical education and sport participation levels of children and youth in Ireland, to assess their health and fitness and to investigate factors that influence their participation. The modified version the researcher used consisted of 18 questions that are relevant to the current study. Questions 1-7 consisted of demographic related questions such as gender, age, nationality and school year. Questions 8-12 investigated whether or not they play sport, if yes, what sports they play, at what level they play their sports at, at what age they first tried sport and why they play sport. Questions 13-16 related to those who do not currently play sport; it asks did they ever play sport, if yes, what sports they played, what age they stopped playing at and why they stopped playing sport. Question 17 related to those who had never played sport and asked why they never played. Here they are asked to tick the relevant box. Question 18 asked do the subjects participate in any other form of physical activity. All questions were answered by ticking the box, filling in the blank or circling the relevant answer. A pilot study of this questionnaire was initially carried out it was found that the questionnaire was easy to understand and took approximately 10 minutes to complete. When the questionnaire was distributed to the participants of this study it took approximately 15 minutes per year group for an explanation of the research, distribution of questionnaire, completion and collection. The researchers reason for choosing this method of measurement is that it is cost effective and can be quick and easily distributed

to a large sample, questionnaires are familiar to most people and are quick and easy to complete, they reduce the incidence of bias and questionnaires are relatively easy to analyse.

Another pilot study was carried out to test the effectiveness of the focus groups. From this it was established that each focus group took roughly 20 minutes. When carrying out the focus groups with the participants of this study the focus groups lasted approximately 20-25 minutes and gained a greater more in-depth knowledge of the reasons for sports participation, sporting inactivity and drop out from sport. The focus groups consisted of two groups of six. Each group had 3 boys and 3 girls, from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> year ranging in ages from 13-17 years. A semi-structured focus group topic guide was used (*see appendix D*) during the focus groups. Reasons why they play sport, why they do not play sport and why they dropped out from sport were assessed. The conversation was left to develop and a discussion to arise among the students. The same structure was used for both groups.

### **Procedures**

Firstly the researcher made contact with the principle and vice principle of the FCJ Secondary School, Bunclody and arranged a meeting to discuss the possibility of carrying out this piece of research within the school. Permission was then granted to carry out this piece of research within the school. Information sheets and informed consent forms (*See appendix A and B*) were then emailed to the school for distribution. Since the students are under the age of 18, the researcher required their parent/guardians consent for their child to be involved in the research. This research was divided into two sections; a questionnaire and a focus group. Firstly, the researcher distributed the questionnaires during school time ensuring they have consent for the chosen participants. This distribution of questionnaires occurred on two dates; Friday 31<sup>st</sup> of January 2014 and Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> of February. With the assistance of the schools vice principle and a volunteer all questionnaires were distributed and returned within these two days. Before completion of these questionnaires all participants were further informed of the aim of the study. It took approximately 15-20 minutes to explain, administer and collect the questionnaires among each year group. Once all questionnaires were completed the researcher and volunteer collected them and moved to the next selected class until all the questionnaires were filled out. In total this process took approximately 3 hours.

The focus groups were carried out on Monday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March and each group with students who completed the questionnaire as these students had already received consent to participate in the research. Each group was assigned a time and classroom for the focus group to be

carried out. Times and groups depended entirely on the school schedule and availability. The focus group was recorded on a Dictaphone in full for each group; they were asked questions and given time to answer and allow for discussion to arise. Once the focus group was over, recording was stopped and students returned to class. All focus groups and distribution and completion of questionnaires were carried out on school grounds during the school day.

### **Data Analysis**

For the quantitative data the researcher entered the data into S.P.S.S. (Statistical Package for Social Science). To answer each of the research questions the researcher used descriptive statistics; frequencies and cross tabs. Descriptive statistics help to simplify results/data. Cross-tabs were used to assess the relationship between sport participation and dropout among gender, age and school year. Research question one was answered through frequencies, research question two also through frequencies and research question three through cross-tabs. For the qualitative part of this research, two focus groups were conducted. The focus groups were recorded on a Dictaphone and transcribed into Microsoft word. The transcripts were analysed using thematic content analysis, repeated reading and summarising sentences using a coding system which including both pre-determined and emerging codes. An example of a pre-determined code includes 'reasons'; this related to sports participation, sports inactivity and drop out from sport. The transcript was coded using various different pens and highlighters to indicate codes.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since this research was conducted in a school setting, permission from the school was necessary; information sheets were provided to the school principle and at request were given to other school staff members. As the participants of this research are minors, parental consent was required for their involvement. It was required of the researcher to send information sheets and informed consent forms to the participant's parents asking their permission for their child to be involved in the research (*See appendix C*)The participant's anonymity is guaranteed throughout the research. Only the researcher analysed the data and results were kept secure.

# **RESULTS**

# **CHAPTER**

## RESULTS CHAPTER

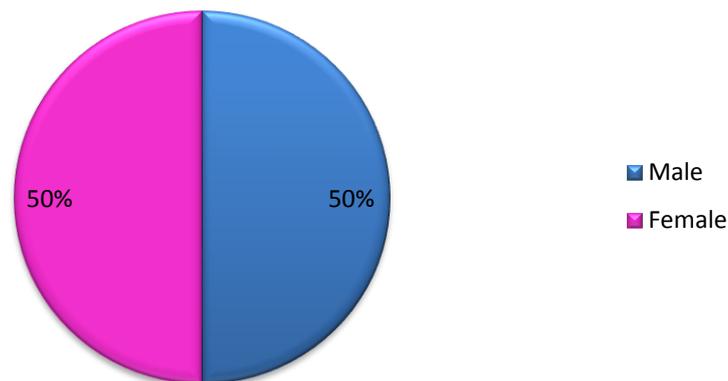
### Quantitative Results

For the quantitative part of this research questionnaires were used to assess sports participation. Gender ratio of this research was equal; 30 males and 30 females were involved. The mean age of participants was 15 years and 98% were of Irish Nationality with the remaining 2% representing English nationality. The majority of participants lived in village/rural areas (73%), 18% live in a town and 7% live in suburbs/large town. Three students said they have an injury/physical disability that inhibits their sports participation; however two of these continue to play sport.

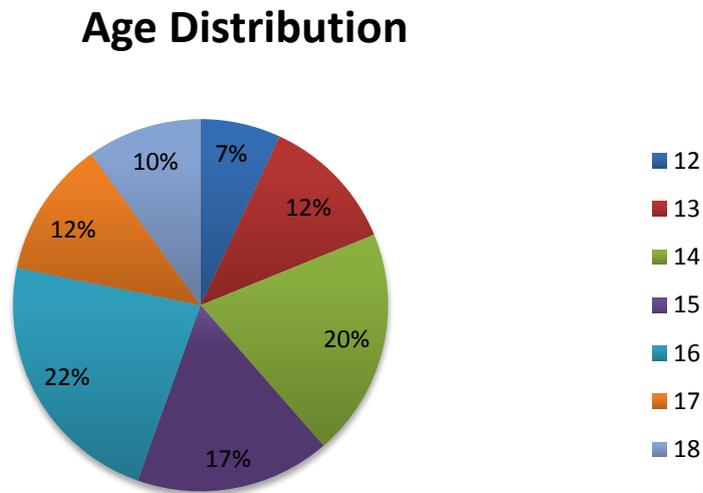
### Demographic Results

**Figure 1: Gender Distribution**

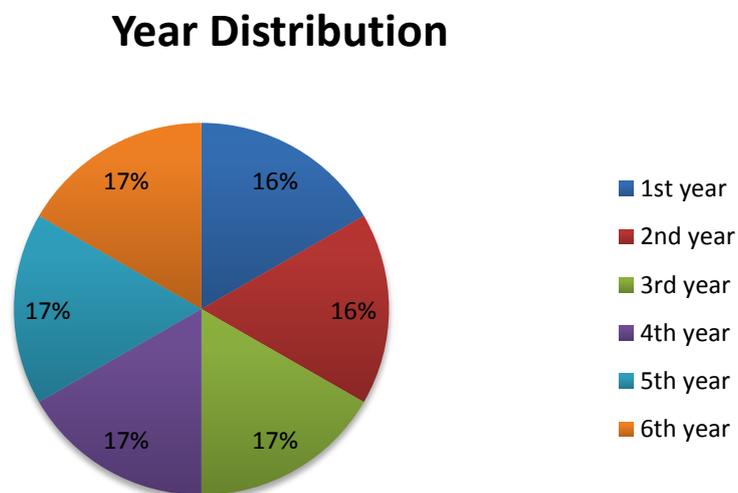
### Gender distribution



As mentioned above, gender ratio of this piece of research was equal; 30 females and 30 males were involved equating to 50% females and 50% males.

**Figure 2: Age Distribution**

The age of 16 had the higher number of participants compared to any other age (22%). This was closely followed by 14 year olds at (20%). The mean age for this population sample was 15 years with a standard deviation of 1.702.

**Figure 3: Year Distribution**

Similarly to gender distribution, year distribution was also equal, this can be seen in figure 3. For this research 10 students from each year were selected to participate; this equates to 16.7% of students coming from each year grouping.

### Sports Participation Results

**Figure 4: Sports participation**

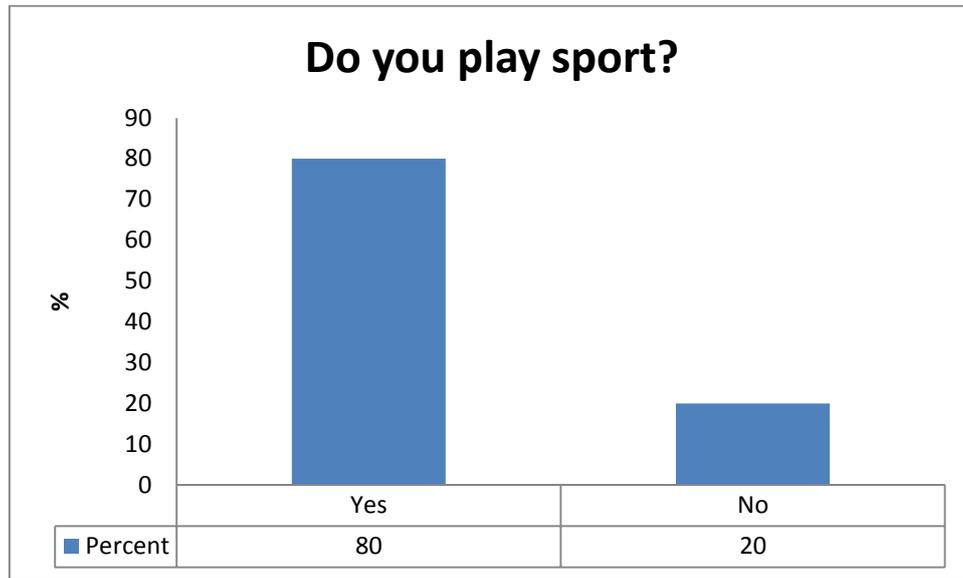
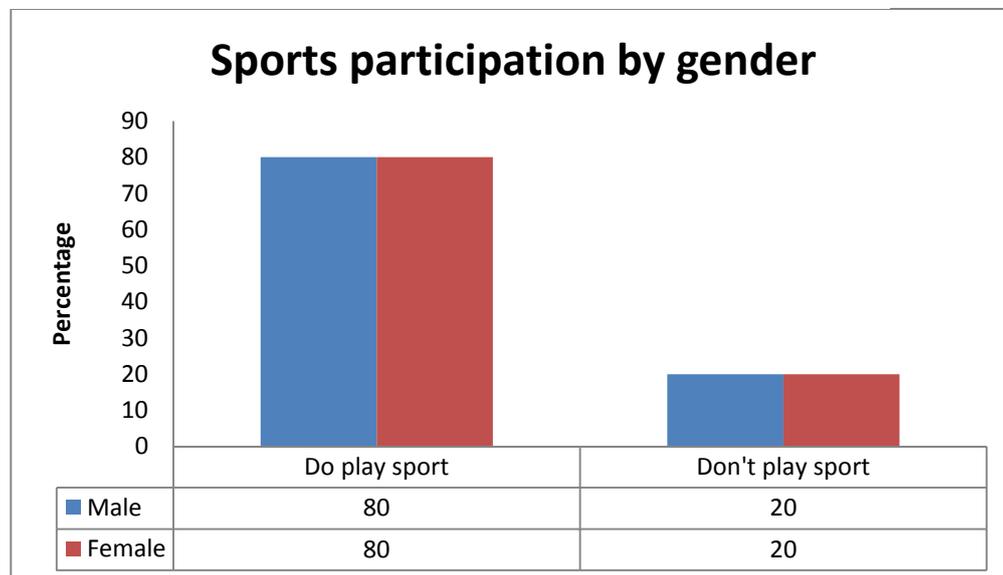
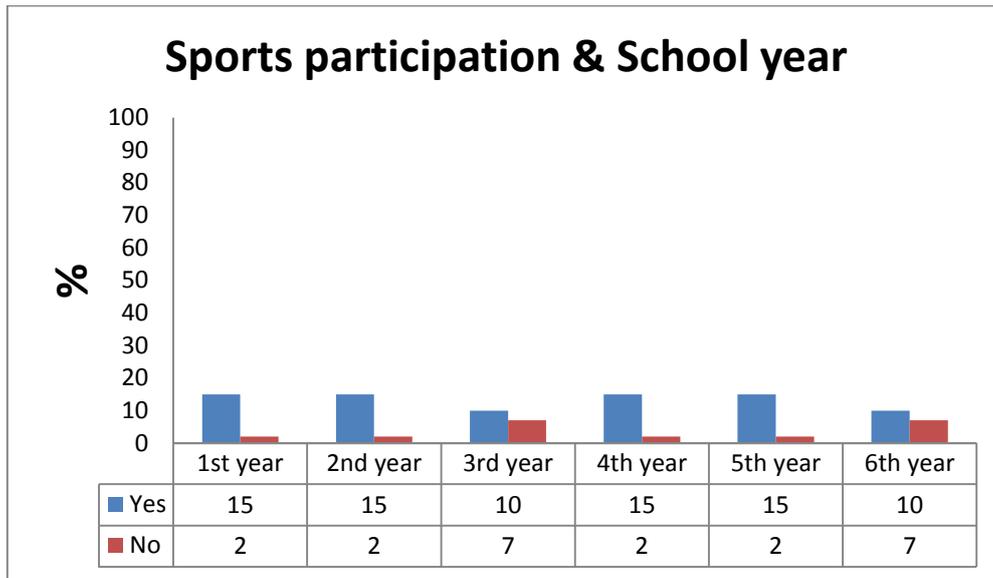


Figure 4 shows the percentage of participants who currently play sport; 80% of the participants currently play sport while 20% currently do not play sport.

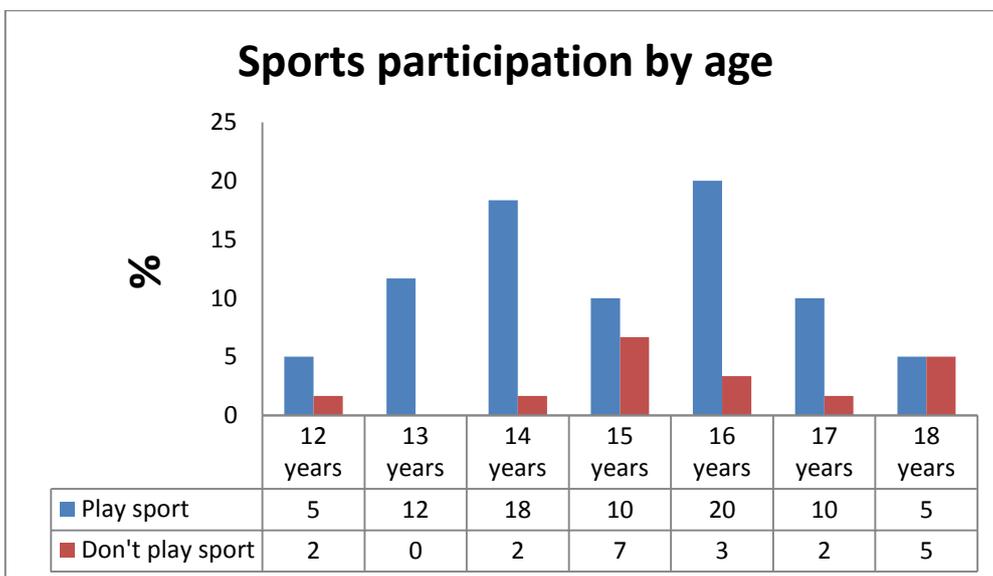
**Figure 5: Sports participation by gender**



It was found that 80% of both males and females play sport. Distribution of sporting participation was equal among both genders.

**Figure 6: Sports participation and school year**

As can be seen from Figure 6 there was a 15% involvement in sport among all years apart from 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year where participation was at 10% for both years.

**Figure 7: Sports participation by age**

The ages of 13-14 had a higher combined percentage of involvement in sport; 30% compared to 17-18 year olds whose combined percentage of involvement in sport was 15%. More students who lived in village/rural areas had a higher involvement in sport than other examined areas.

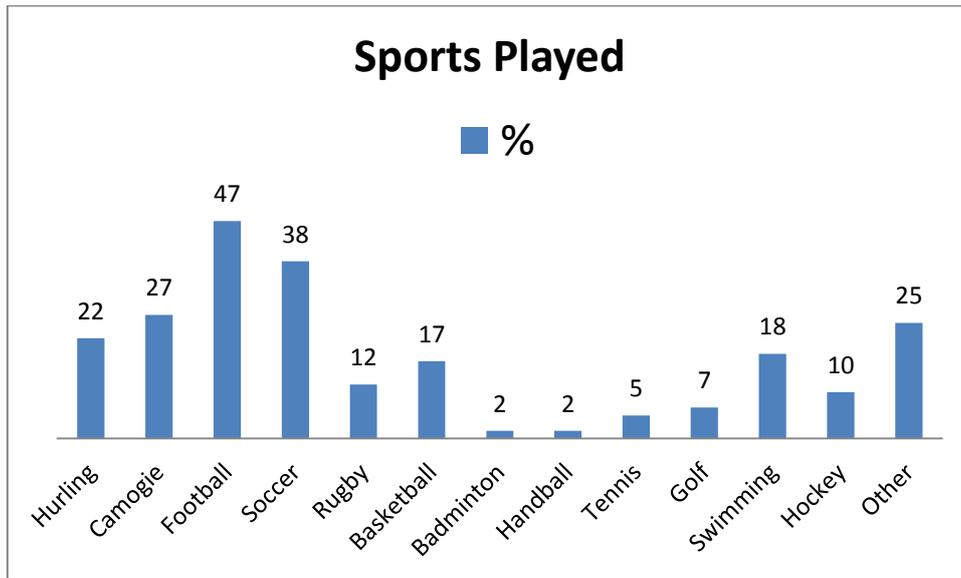
**Figure 8: Sports played**

Figure 8 shows the various different sports these students participated in. Football was the most popular sport (47%) followed by soccer (38%), camogie (27%) and then hurling (22%). Individual sports such as badminton, tennis, handball and golf had low participation levels.

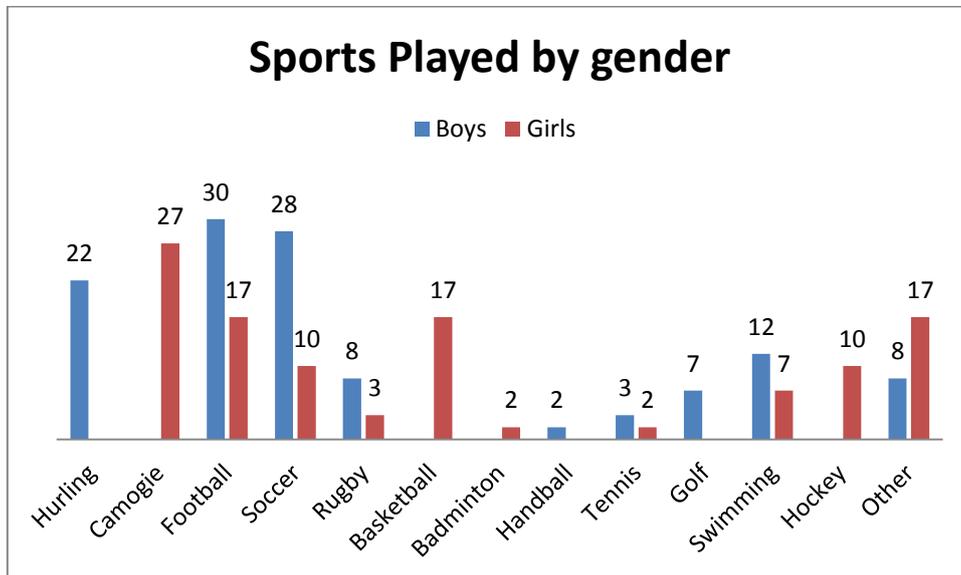
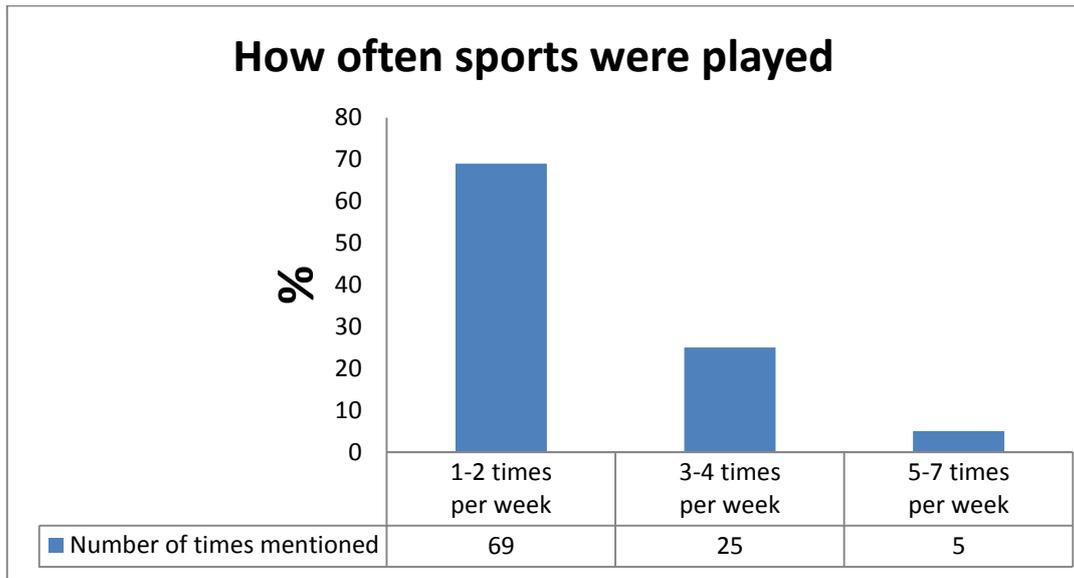
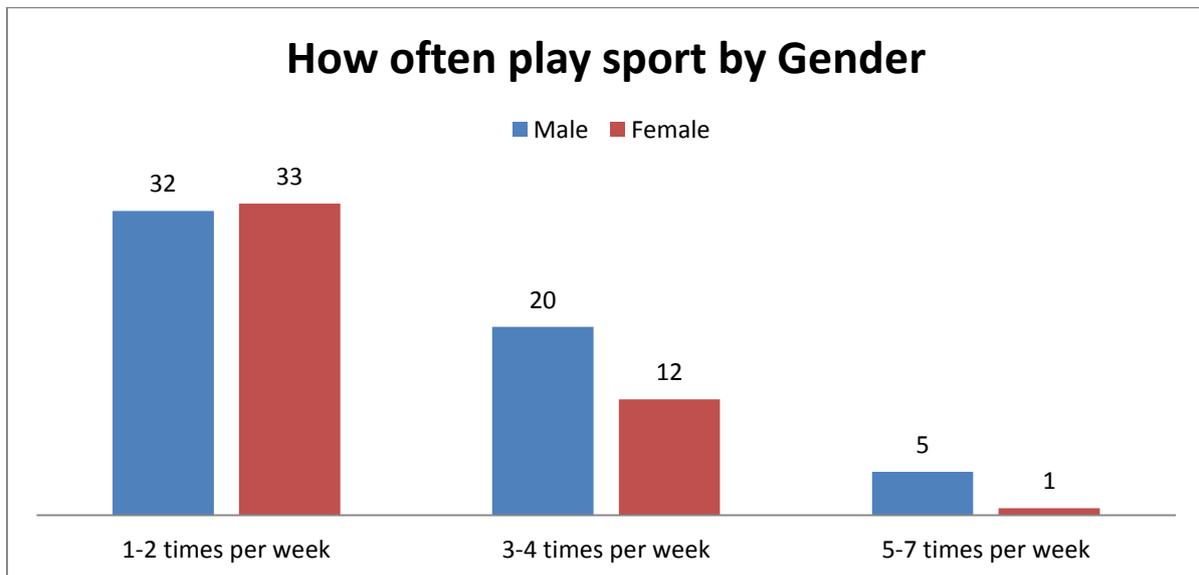
**Figure 9: Sports played by gender**

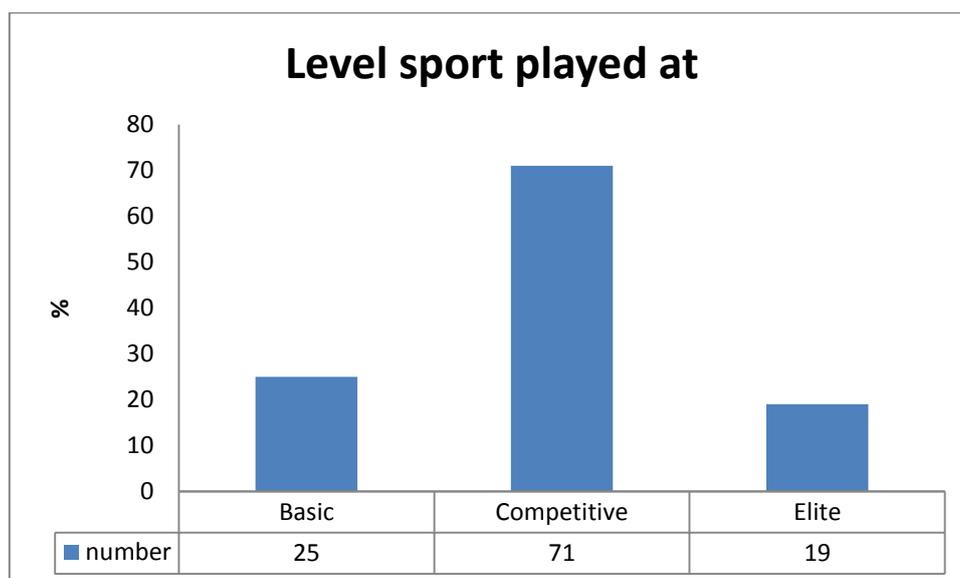
Figure 9 displays what sports were played among each gender. Football and soccer were seen to be the most popular sports among boys while camogie, basketball and other sports were more popular among girls.

**Figure 10: How often sports were played**

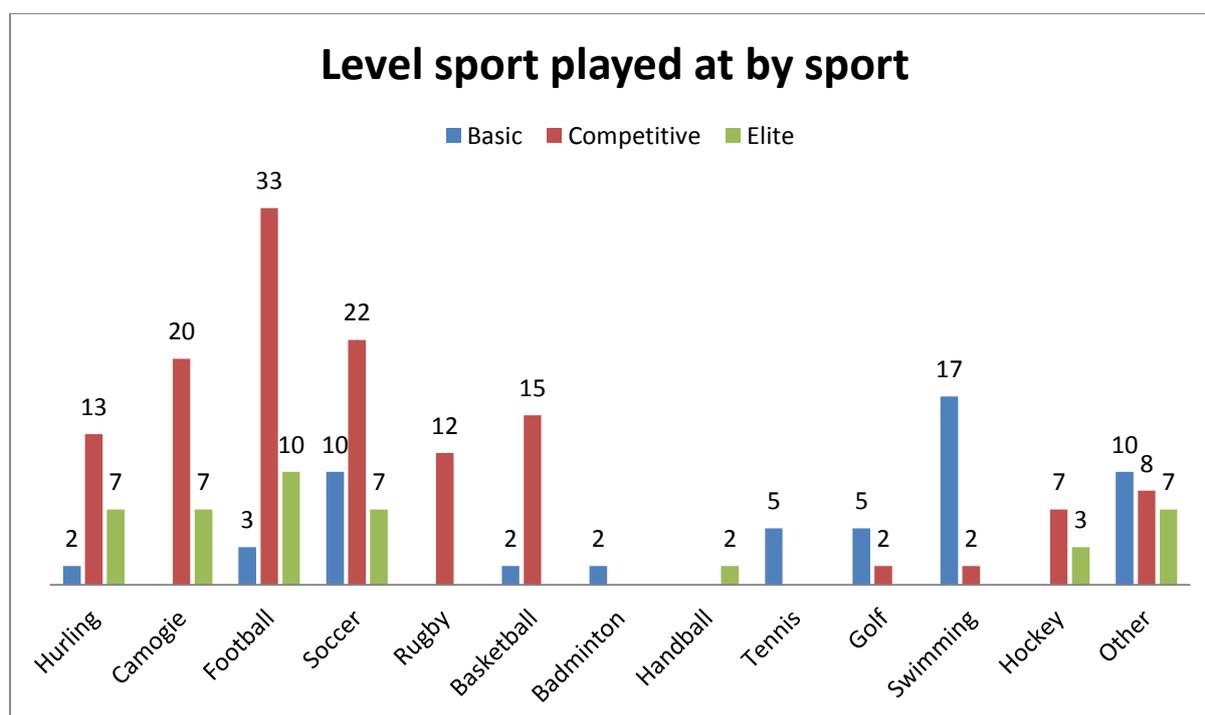
Results showed that these students were involved in sport more often at 1-2 times per week (69%). As involvement days increased, participation decreased; this can be seen in figure 10.

**Figure 11: How often play sports by gender**

Girls were seen to be more involved in sport on 1-2 times per week while boys were more involved in sport participating more on 3-4 times per week and 5-7 times per week.

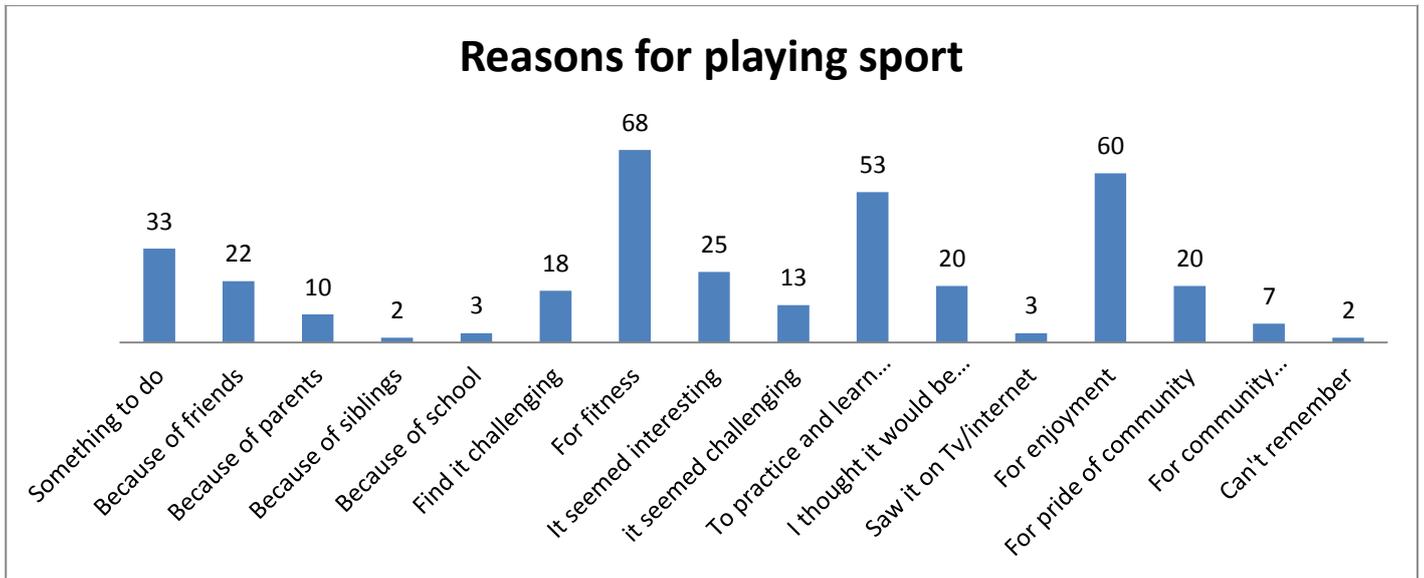
**Figure 12: Level sports played at**

The majority of students are involved in sport at a competitive level (71%).

**Figure 13: Level sport played at by sport**

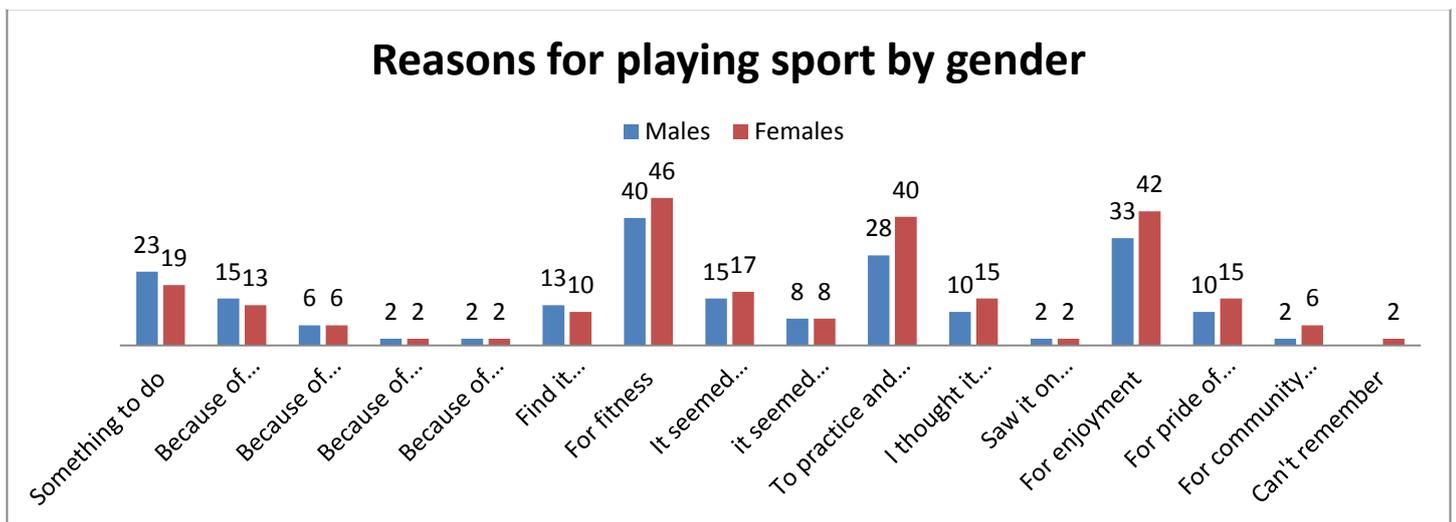
Individuals involved in sport at an elite level included sports such as football (10%), hurling (7%), camogie (7%), soccer (7%), other sports (7%), hockey (3%) and handball (2%). Other sports played at an elite level include boxing, mounted games and surf lifesaving.

**Figure 14: Reasons for playing sport**



Reasons for involvement in sport are recorded in figure 13. Playing sport for fitness and enjoyment were the most common responses, followed by to practice and learn new skills and for something to do.

**Figure 15: Reasons for playing sport by gender**



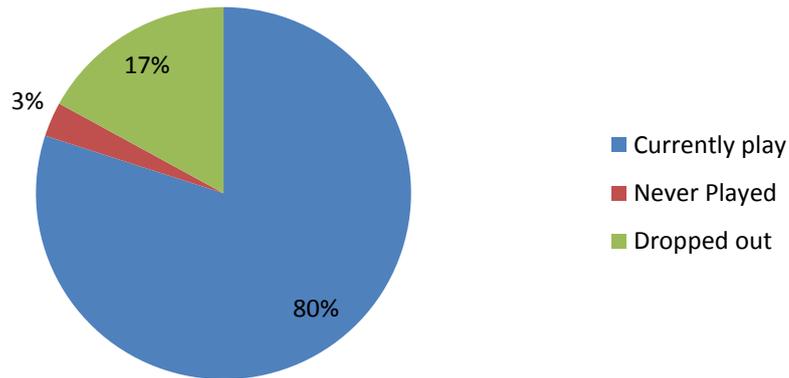
Playing sport for fitness and enjoyment were the most common responses among gender. Playing for something to do and practicing and learning new skills were more common for

males while learning and practicing new skills was more common for females along with for the pride of the community.

**Non- sports participation results**

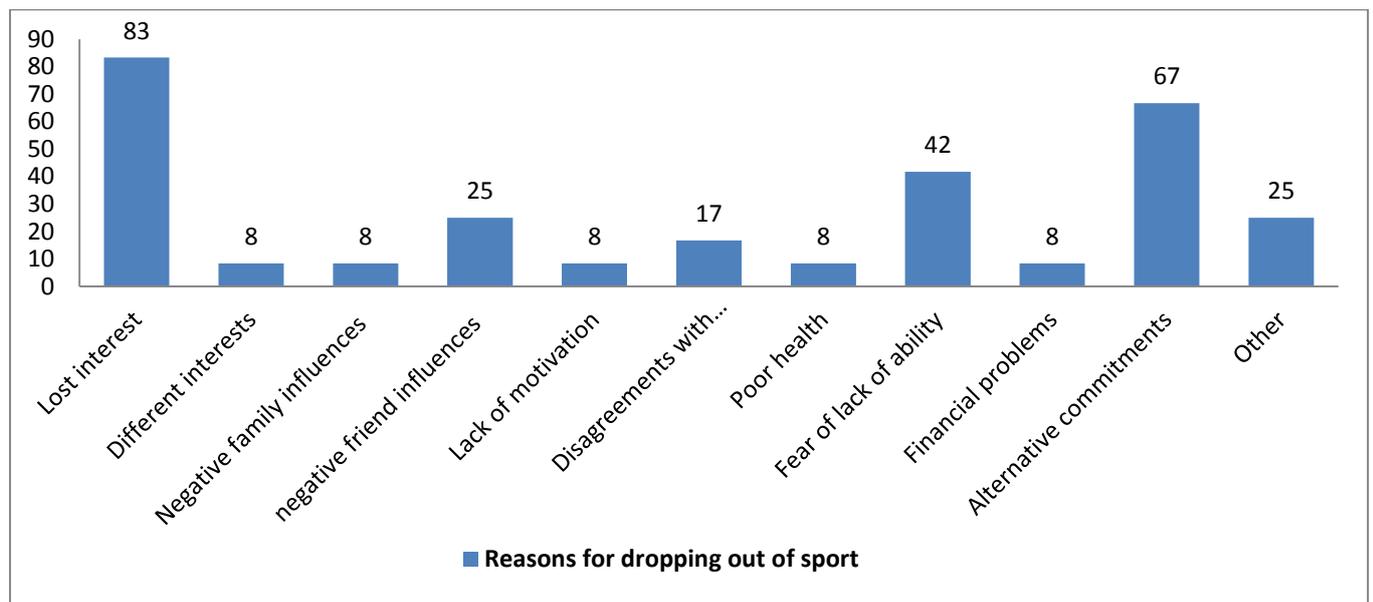
**Figure 16: Sports participation**

**Drop out from sport**



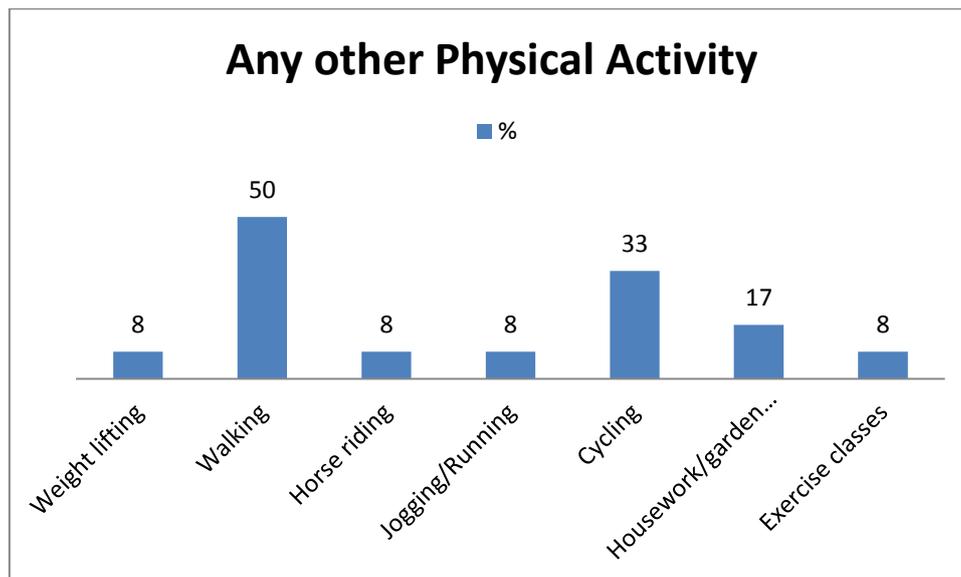
As previously mentioned, 20% of the participants currently do not play sport. Of these 20%, 3% never played sport while the remaining 17% did at one stage play sport but currently do not so therefore are considered as drop outs. More girls used to play sport and currently do not compared to boys; 54% and 46% respectively. Mean age of dropping out of sport was 13 years.

**Figure 17: Reasons for dropping out of sport**



Reasons for dropping out of sport were assessed and findings can be seen in figure 17. It was found that losing interest was the most common reason for dropping out of sport (17%) followed by alternative commitments (13%) and fear of lack of ability (8%). Not liking sport and having no interest in it were the only reasons given for never taking part in sport. Losing interest was most common among boys compared to girls whose most common answer was a fear of lack of ability.

**Figure 18: Involvement in any other physical activity**



Involvement in others types of physical activity among the non-sports participants was also examined and found that walking was their most preferred choice of physical activity with 50% of the non-sports group taking part in walking as their form of physical activity, followed by cycling at 33%.

## Qualitative Results

The purpose of this section is to present the results of the two focus groups. Both focus groups were carried out in the FCJ Secondary School, Bunclody, Co. Wexford. The first focus group carried out was with the sports participation group, the second with the non-sports participation group. These groups were characterised by current sports participation.

### Population sample

The population group for the focus groups consisted of 12 students from the FCJ Secondary School, Bunclody. These 12 students were divided among their sporting participation; 6 students currently do not play sport while the remaining 6 currently do play sport. Each group consisted of 3 girls and 3 boys totalling to 6 boys and 6 girls who were all between the ages of 13 and 17 years and were from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> year

Below is the coding system for each focus group.

### Sports Participation Group

**Figure 19: Sports participation codes**



As can be seen from figure 19, 3 main codes are evident. These were predetermined codes which include reasons for playing sport, positive aspects of sport and negative aspects of sport. These pre-determined codes were sub divided into emerging codes which can be seen above.

### **Reasons for playing sport**

When participants were initially asked why they currently play sport their immediate responses included the top reasons which are indicated in yellow in figure 19. This included reasons such as for fun; “I play because it’s fun”; something to do; “I play to keep ya from being bored. It keeps you occupied by giving you something to do” and for the love of the sport “I enjoy playing for the sport that they are themselves”. Playing sport for the challenge was also common among immediate responses; “I play sports because it’s challenging like”.

“I like sport for the challenge as well, I started out doing boxing just for fun so I would be able to defend myself like. But now I’m fairly into it because I find the challenge enjoyable and I’m training with the Leinster team and all now so”.

The social aspect of sport appeared to have a major impact on participation which positively influenced participation and was mentioned many times throughout the focus group; “I play sport because I get to meet new people”; “When I first started I only knew like two people and the team so now I know a quare lot more people who play”. Playing solely because of the social aspect of sport was also mentioned; “Some people just play sport because of their friends, they mightn’t take the sport seriously, but they all just go and have a laugh at training and stuff like that”.

Codes such as school, family and coaches which can be seen in grey in figure 19 were also mentioned as reasons for playing sport. However these codes arose less often than those above. These three codes were also found to have a positive influence on sporting participation among these participants; “In PE like say if you were doing camogie or hurling or anything for PE, it might influence people to play it outside of school as well”. In relation to family influences one girl mentioned that “A sporting background definitely helps. Like if you’re parents aren’t interested or bothered in sports you’re not going to bother either.” When coaching influences were brought up, one male student revealed that “My trainer (coach) would always be there mixing the session up every time just so you wouldn’t get bored like... it’s encouraging”. As can be seen, there are many reasons for playing sport. To dig deeper the following two sections were asked; positive and negative experiences of sport.

### **Positive aspects of sport**

When asked about the positive aspects of playing sport common themes arose such as winning, achievements, improvements/progress and sporting highlights. Winning was found to be the most enjoyable thing about sport which can be seen in figure 19 in yellow.

“Say if you won a match, yeah like usually when you win. A game isn’t really that fun if you’re getting trashed, say in a soccer game, 10 nil or something. It wouldn’t be fun at all. You’d be just hoping that it would end soon”

Sporting highlights and achievement which are outlined in figure 19 in pink varied among this group fluctuating from winning titles; “I’ve won two All Irelands in boxing and next Sunday, I’m boxing in the Leinster final and if I win that I’m through to the All Irelands again”; beating your rivals; “Beating Carlow, I play with Tullow so it’s always great to beat your rivals”; progressing onto to competitions “Well I’ve three All Irelands in boxing so, like winning All Irelands is a major achievement for me. And like with surf life saving we’re going to Worlds in France in September so that’s great”. In a similar vein the following quote illustrates the importances of personal achievements also;

“Well I play with Kildavin in the Carlow league and we always get knocked out in like the semi finals so no real achievements.... When I was younger I wasn’t that great at sports, but now I’m much better so. I’ve improved a good bit so I suppose you could call that an achievement even though we haven’t won anything”

One male participant outlined that “Achievements like these encourage you to keep playing, training and trying your best,” stating that these elements were considered a motivator to continue playing sport. A female participant revealed that although she can sometimes have negative experiences from playing sport but at the end of the day it’s all worth it;

“like somedays you feel like ugh, I don’t know why I bother to do this, I don’t really like it or I want to give up. But then when you win or achieve something you’re like why was I ever thinking that way?”

### **Negative sporting experiences**

When asked about their negative experience of sport common themes arising were coaches, school, and the physical aspect of sport. As can be seen from figure 19, Coaches were mentioned as the top answer for negative influences which have an effect on participation and enjoyment of sport; the following quotes highlight this particular theme; “Yeah it (coaches) has an effect all right. Like if you don’t get along with your coach you’re not going to want to train with them then are you?”; “I was being bullied by a coach last year and I ended up transferring to a different club” and “If you don’t like the coach you don’t want to go no matter how much you like it (the sport)”. One girl revealed from past experiences that some

coaches can be too focused on winning and not on improving and developing upon the skills of the team as a whole.

“a lot of younger children like under 10’s and 12’s, sometimes their coaches are obsessed with winning and not all the little kids end up getting runs, and they really get disheartened and then they don’t want to play when they get older”.

As can be seen from figure 19, in blue school was outlined as a second most mentioned negative part of playing sport due to the expectation to always be in class and not taking time out to play sport for the school and also during PE situations; “They (the school) give out to you for playing sport and telling you not to play. Like matches and stuff... You get given out to for playing the sport”. Similarly, “In PE like say if they don’t think you’re good enough at it it’s like they make you feel that you’re not good enough to play sport”

The physical aspect of sport was also seen to be a negative aspect of sport as can also be seen in blue in figure 19. It was found that they didn’t always enjoy training due to the expected fitness requirements and physicality that is involved in sports.

“I don’t always enjoy training. Not everybody always will enjoy it, most people won’t. But then in matches, you’ll usually enjoy matches more than training. I’m the same with boxing. I’d rather fight 10 times more than train. I hate training”

When asked what they found to be the least enjoyable thing about playing sport one girl stated that “ There’s a lot of running and fitness involved” while another admitted that she didn’t enjoy “Getting belts” which was said in the context of getting hit with hurls and the physicality of being involved in sports which included pushing, shoving, shoulder etc. When asked if these elements would discourage an individual from playing sport the group disagreed saying they would encourage you to continue to play; “No like, with the running, even though you might hate it you know you’re getting something out of it. You can see the benefits”.

## Non-Participating Group

Figure 20: Non-sports participation codes



As can be seen from figure 20, this section is split into two pre-determined codes; reasons for not playing sport and positive experiences of sport. Many themes developed throughout the focus groups and will be illustrated in the following section.

### Reasons for not playing sport

When asking the non-sport participation focus group for reasons why they currently do not play sport, the main codes which emerged which can be seen in orange in figure 20 included a lack of time, coaches and fear of lack of ability. Lack of time was found to inhibit three participants in the non-participating focus group. School work was found to be a major contributor to this; “I just don’t have the time... school work (takes up my time). I’m in third year now so am quite busy with homework and study so haven’t much spare time so play sport”. Similarly the following quote highlights the same point; “I found that it (sport) was taking up too much of my time”.

“I’ve no time either. School work and home work takes up my time. At the weekends I’m still studying and finishing off homework because I don’t get it all done during the weekend so haven’t the time to play sport”

Coaches were found to have a massive influence on these participants which negatively affect sports participation. Interestingly coaches were mentioned in the previous section in both a positive and negative light. In this instance reasons for not playing sport because of coaches included coaches not being nice to the players or taking the sport too seriously cursing and

shouting at children; “Coaches like especially when I was young, taking it too seriously. Like cursing on the side lines I think when I was under ten’s;” likewise another participant had a similar experience;

“Well like if you have a bad coach you’re not going to want to go. My soccer coach as a child, I just hated him. He was not a nice person. He was not nice to us despite us being so young, even in manner and that would have turned me off going back to play”

Fear of lack of ability was very common among all participants in this non-sports participation focus group. This resulted in participants dropping out of sports, never starting to play sports and from returning to sports; “I didn’t feel like I was good enough to play. Like I don’t have any hand eye co-ordination so like when that comes into play you just think I can’t play this sport because I can’t do it”; another participant stated that “I just didn’t think I’d be good enough to go back playing. If I went back I don’t think I would be” and similar to the previous two quotes one girl revealed “Like I tried everything and didn’t think I was good enough at anything so just stopped”. Coaches and other players on your team were also seen to have an influence on belief of ability in sport; “Coaches and people on your team can influence your perception of your ability. Like if they’re eating the face off you if you don’t score or you miss or something”.

Other less common emerging codes for reasons for not playing sport which can be seen in grey in figure 20 included injury/poor health; “I hurt my wrist so I couldn’t play for a while. And then I just didn’t go back to play it anymore. I kind have just forgot about playing even after it healed”, one male stated that “I don’t know if I’ll go back playing sport after I finish my exams because I’ve developed a breathing condition so I don’t know”. finding it boring or having no interest in sport also arose for reasons for not playing sport; “Well I found it to be boring”; “I just wasn’t that interested in it” and “I have no interest in sport anymore” and moving location was mentioned by one male as his reasons for not playing sport anymore;

“I moved to a different place so I never really got back into playing after that. I was going to look for another club but then never bothered after that. I used to play hurling in Oilgate. I was going to change clubs but kind of found it hard to get in contact and find out about different clubs so I just gave up”

Perceived reasons for why other people may not play sport among these participants included, different interests; “Some people, they’d rather sit down and read a book,” self-esteem issues; “There could be a problem with weight or fitness or something, might feel self-conscious,” friends; “Like if your friends didn’t play you probably wouldn’t be bothered either” and players and coaches “If you didn’t like the people on your team or the coach or something you won’t play.”

### **Positive experiences of sport**

When this focus group were asked about what they did enjoy most about their time playing sport it was found that the main code that emerged which can be seen in red figure 20 was the social aspect of sport; “I just mainly liked going out on Saturday’s to play your match and having something to do, go to your friends houses then in the afternoon after the match”; “I enjoyed being part of the team and playing matches and stuff like that” and “Seeing your friends and hanging out”.

Highlights of their sporting careers were mentioned briefly and included improving enough to get new equipment and getting through to finals and tournaments. When asked about involvement in any other activities instead of sport it was found that the group had little involvement in sport and physical activity outside school but had taken on activities such as playing music, Zumba and walking.

# DISCUSSION

## **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this research was to investigate the level of sports participation among young teenagers between the ages of 12 and 18 in County Wexford and their reasons for sports participation versus reasons for sporting inactivity.

### **Sports Participation**

The results of this piece of research showed that the majority of participants were currently involved in sport (80%). This finding differed dramatically to the Australian Sports Commission, (2010) results who found that only 26% of their population sample was participating in sport. Although precise comparison is not possible due to cultural differences, in relation to previous Irish research conducted on a similar topic this finding was quite alike. Fahey et al., (2005); Woods et al., (2010); and Delaney, (2013) found that 79%, 73% and 72% respectively of their study sample were involved in sport. Woods et al., (2010) saw little change between their 2004 study and the 2009 study suggesting that interventions that had been implemented to increase sports participation proved of little effect. This may be due to increasing peer demands, lifestyles changes and school demands. There was no gender difference between sports participation within this research with 80% of both boys and girls being involved unlike a significant difference between participation and gender in the Australian Sports Commission, (2010) who found that more boys play sport than girls and that females were less likely to ever play sport than males.

### **How Often Play**

The Australian Sports Commission, (2010) discovered from their study sample that 17% played sport at least once per week and only 2% played 5 times per week. Fahey et al., (2005) found that 34% of their participants played sport 2-3 days per week while 18% played 4 days per week. These findings differed from the results found from this piece of research where 69% of participants were involved in sport 1-2 times per week, 25% 3-4 times per week and 5% 5-7 times per week. This difference in results may be due to the fact that there was a higher percentage involved in sports within this research compared to Fahey et al., (2005) and The Australian Sports Commission, (2010).

### **Sports Played**

As sports participation among this study sample was quite high, the types and ranges of sports participated in became very interesting and similar to previous research conducted within this area. Gaelic Football was the most popular sport among this group. Soccer,

camogie, hurling and other sports followed closely after this. Other sports participated in included horse riding, dancing, taekwondo, boxing, table tennis, mounted games, kite surfing, martial arts, surf lifesaving, sailing and surfing. Interestingly these findings are similar to that of Kremer, (1997), Fahey et al., (2005), The Australian Sports Commission, (2010), Woods et al., (2010) and Delaney, (2013). Involvement in Gaelic games (Hurling, football and camogie) was also very high among these Irish authors which reinforce the results found within this piece of research. Girls were found to participate more in football, basketball and other sports while boys were more involved in football and soccer. Connor, (2003) found that boys were more involved in soccer while girls participated more in basketball. These results are similar to those found within this research. There was little involvement in individual team based sport such as badminton, tennis, handball etc. Stemming from this, improvements within the area of individual or small team sports such as an increased awareness and availability of such clubs/societies must be implemented. Many youths may not like the idea of conventional team sports that involve collision and physicality and prefer a less invasive choice of sport. Ireland needs to move away from the conventional idea of dominant sports (i.e. Hurling, football, soccer, rugby) and move towards a multi-sport approach among all age groups. However this may be difficult through a school setting as they may find it harder to facilitate individual sports compared to team sports.

### **Level Sports Played At**

The majority of participants in this study played sport at a competitive level (71%), 25% play sport at a basic level while 19% are involved at an elite level. In Woods et al., (2010) study 57% of participants play sport at a competitive level, 18% at a basic level and 25% at an elite level. Kremer, (1997) found that more participants were involved in sport at a basic level compared to competitive level (34%) and elite level (2%). The high involvement of sport at a competitive level in this research may be due to the large range of competitive sporting clubs located within the surrounding areas of this study population location.

### **Factors Influencing Sports Participation**

Reasons for playing sport have been widely examined by authors such as Kremer, (1997); Connor, (2003); Belanger, (2011) and Delaney, (2013). Within this research the main reasons for playing sport included for fitness, for enjoyment, for something to do, to practice and learn new skills, because of friends or family and for pride of community. These findings were similar to the above authors who found enjoyment, to keep fit, the overall excitement of

sport, peers, to make friends, feeling good, having something to do, family, winning and being good at the sport were the most popular reasons for playing sport (Kremer, 1997; Connor, 2000, Belanger et al. 2011, Delaney, 2013). From the qualitative part of this research which examined reasons for sport participation in a more in depth manner it was established that playing sport for fun, for the challenge, meeting new people, because of friends, school, family and coaches were common responses. These findings were similar to the results found from Belanger's, (2011) focus group.

### **Sporting Inactivity and Drop Out**

Sporting inactivity and drop out was assessed through use of questionnaires. From these questionnaires it was established that 20% of this study sample currently did not play sport and that 3% of these never played sport. These findings were consistent to other Irish studies which found that non-sports participation ranged from 21-28% (Fahey et al., 2005; de Róiste & Dinneen, 2005; Woods et al., 2010 and Delaney, 2013).

### **Age Dropping Out**

Many studies have consistently showed that participation in sporting activities tends to decrease as individuals progress through adolescence (Cambell, 1988; Kremer, 1997; Connor, 2003; Fahey et al., 2005 and Woods et al., 2010). Woods et al., (2010) discovered that 30% of 16-18 year old girls do not play sport compared to 14% of 12-13 year old girls. Similar to these studies it was discovered from this study that those 15 years of age had the highest non-sports participation percentage. However, only 8% of girls between 15-18 years in this study currently do not play sport. This percentage differs greatly to that of Woods et al., (2010) probably due to small sample size and a high involvement in sport as a whole. Boys had a similar result of current non participation in sport showing no difference between drop out from sport and gender.

### **Year Dropping Out**

Sports participation was predominately equally distributed among school year (15%) with the exception of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> years whose participation lowered to 10%. This may be due to the fact that these years are exam years for both the Junior Cert and Leaving Cert. This finding is similar to that of Woods et al., (2010) where it was found that 25% of 6<sup>th</sup> years never play sport compared to 12% of first years. The benefits of exercise and sport in terms of academic performance and stress relievers should be considered among exam year groups. The consequences of being physically inactive are very worrying among these non-sports

participants. As mentioned previously physical inactivity increases risk for all cause morbidity from non-communicable diseases and mortality simply by living a sedentary lifestyle.

### **Reasons for Not Playing Sport**

Reasons for non-sports participation have also been widely examined; Kremer, (1997); Connor, (2003); Molinero et al., (2006); Women's Sport and Fitness Foundation, (2008); Belanger, (2011) and Delaney, (2013) found that fear of lack of ability, not liking the sport/not having any interest, having different interests, sport being too competitive, dislike of the coach, lack of time, losing, focus being on winning, injury/health problems, school, peers and lack of access/transport as well as lack of social support influenced their population samples to drop out of sport or not play sport at all. From the quantitative part of this research it was found that common reasons for dropping out of sport were losing interest, alternative commitments, and fear of lack of ability and negative influences from friends which are similar to those of the above authors. Coaches were not seen to have a major influence on sport participation from the questionnaire, however during the focus groups they were mentioned as having an important influence on sports participation. One participant in the sport participation focus group revealed that he finds his coach very motivating and encouraging. On the flip side of this other participants from the same focus group stated that coaches were the main example of the negatives of sport for them. Collectively their statements outlined that coaches have an effect on whether one keeps playing sport, whether one continues to play with the same team and under the same coach and how a team performs under a coach they do not like or get along with. Worryingly one participant bravely revealed that she was being bullied by a coach and in the end had to change clubs because of this. Coaches' emphasis on winning was also outlined as a negative aspect of sport revealing that the emphasis on winning removes the fun from sport especially for younger children. During the non-sports participation focus group it was discovered that lack of time due to schoolwork and study resulted in dropping out of sport as did finding the sport boring or having no interest in it anymore. Injuries and health problems also contributed to reasons for dropping out of sport among three individuals. Coaches were found to have a massive influence on these participants within the non-sports participation group. As a group they stated that they did not like coaches shouting and giving out to someone especially when they were much younger. One girls stated that because her coach was "not a nice person" it completely turned her off going back to play sport. Fear of lack of ability and an apparent lack of confidence

was also a major contributor to dropping out of sport among this group. The above reasons for not playing sport are very similar to those found by Kremer, (1997); Connor, (2003); Belanger, (2011) and Delaney, (2013). Clubs tend to seek talented individuals to play their sport which further hinders the concept of not believing in one's ability. This needs to be tackled and strategies put in place for clubs/societies to welcome people of all abilities to their clubs and provide adequate training, coaching and encouragement to allow one progress to their full potential within that sport. More emphasis needs to be placed on the part of the coach within a club and with this in mind potential coaches need to attend coaching courses. These coaching courses need to give direction to coaches in how to encourage all abilities to partake in sports. The GAA have made progress into this system with the introduction of the Go Games which encourage all abilities and it takes the competitiveness out of sport until after 12 years of age. The importance of exercise, health and involvement in sport should be outlined in theory and practice not only within pre-existing clubs and societies but also within the schools education system where incorporation of different form of activities during PE or lunch times could have a positive influence on involvement in sporting activities outside of the school. Exercise and sport need to be integrated into all education systems so that in the future sport and exercise are well integrated into all lifestyles.

### **Gender and Sports Participation**

de Róiste & Dinneen, (2005) found that there was a significant difference between gender and sports participation; males (91%) and females (86%). Similar to this the Australian Sports Commission, (2010) stated that boys tend to be more involved in sport than girls as did Connor, (2003). However, this representation was not apparent within the study sample used in this research. Gender distribution in this study was equally distributed (50% males and 50% females) and interestingly sports participation was also equally distributed among gender (Males 80%, females 80%). Gender inequality was not evident among this study sample unlike that to Woods et al., (2010). In terms of sports played girls were found to participate more in football, basketball and other sports while boys were more involved in football and soccer. Connor, (2003) also found similar results within his study. There was no difference between boys and girls in terms of drop out from sport. Boys had a similar result of current non participation in sport to girls (10% boys' currently not playing sport and 10% girls currently not playing sport). The Australian Sports Commission, (2010) also stated that feelings of not being good enough at sport was the most common reason for not playing sport compared to different interests among boys, this was also apparent among Woods et al.,

(2010). When reasons for playing sport and gender were assessed it was found that female's main reasons for playing sport included for fitness and for the enjoyment (22% and 20% respectively). Boys were also seen to play for these factors (19% and 16% respectively) however playing for something to do was more popular among boys than girls as was playing because of friends. Losing interest in sport was the most common reason for not playing sport among boys and fear of lack of ability was the most common among girls. Girls were found to be more involved in sport 1-2 times per week compared to any other duration (33%, 12% and 1% respectively). Boys were more active on 3-4 times per week and 5-7 times per week.

### **Involvement in Any Other Physical Activity**

Involvement in other types of physical activity among the non-sports participation group was quite limited and low. Roughly half of participants reported walking as a form of physical activity they engage in while one third reported cycling as a form of physical activity that they're involved with. A true representation of involvement in other types of physical activity was difficult to determine as not all participants answered the question and some wrote notes alongside saying "from time to time", "occasionally", "sometimes during the summer" proving that not all participants were regularly active within these non-sport related forms of physical activity. Others revealed that they didn't do much physical activity apart from P.E in school. Such low involvement in regular physical activity among this age group is worrying and could be problematic for them in the future. With the growing and worrying trend of obesity in Ireland much more emphasis needs to be placed on the importance of physical activity and sport amongst this group.

Finding the sport boring or having no interest in it is a reason for not playing sport, on the flip side of this enjoyment and playing sport for fun were noted as reasons for playing sport among the sport participation group.

## **Limitations**

There are a number of limitations in regards to this piece of research. Firstly, through use of a self-reported questionnaire, researchers expect participants not to accurately and truthfully answer all relevant questions. This especially relates to this study where the population sample was adolescents between the ages of 12-18 who may have over-exaggerated or in fact under-reported their true current involvement in sport. Often individuals perceive an idea of what the researcher or society wants to hear and therefore answers accordingly. Also by using a cross-sectional design it only captures a snapshot in time and may not portray full sporting participation/inactivity throughout the year/lifespan. The time of year where questionnaires were distributed (January, February) may also have an effect on the way questions were answered; individuals tend to be more active during the summer months compared to winter. Secondly, the questionnaire used for this research was a modified version of the CSPPA questionnaire, (Woods et al., 2010) so therefore is not validated. This limits the ability to compare and contrast between previous research carried out and this current piece of research. Thirdly, this study was quite limited in terms of sample size, sixty students does not give a true representation of sporting participation within a school of over 700 students. An earlier start of data collection would have perhaps allowed for a larger sample size which would have largely benefited the quantitative section of this research. The author due to time constraints was limited to surveying one school in County Wexford; a further larger study would have captured a more diverse group of students.

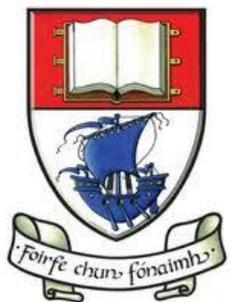
## **Further Research**

A greater depth of information may have been obtained by using a larger sample size within the school and carrying out more focus groups or perhaps solely focus groups. This may also be achieved through starting data collection at an earlier date. An investigation into sports participation among adolescents throughout County Wexford would also be a possible area of further research. Assessment of sports participation of adolescents in Co. Wexford using a non-modified version of the questionnaire or in fact a completely different questionnaire such as Kremer, (1997); Connor, (2003); and the Australian Sport Commission, (2010) would also be interesting to consider.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to investigate the level of sports participation among adolescents between the ages of 12 and 18 in Co. Wexford and whether gender, age and school year had an effect on it. This research also set out to examine the reasons for sports participation versus reasons for sporting inactivity. These factors were examined through use of self-reported questionnaires and focus groups. From this research it was found that 80% of participants play sport, of the outstanding 20%, 17% had previously dropped out of sport while the remaining 3% had never played sport. Gender appeared to have little impact on sporting participation among this population group as roughly 80% of both girls and boys stated they play sport. Year of school was seen to have a small impact on sports participation despite most research showing that sports participation among adolescents' decreases as individual's progress through secondary school and through increasing age. However in this case sports participation was only seen to falter among 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year students which is presumably down to school and study commitments. Participation levels stayed relatively consistent among the other year groups. In terms of age and sports participation 15 and 18 year olds were seen to have the highest level of sporting inactivity among all age groups. Football and soccer were seen to be the most popular sports among boys while camogie and football were most common among girls. Individual or small team sports had an overall low participation levels. Approximately 69% of participants were involved in sport 1-2 times per week compared to a mere 5% who are involved in sport 5-7 times per week. Females were seen to be more active 1-2 times per week than males; however males were more active than females in regards to 3-4 times per week and 5-7 times per week. The majority of participants were involved in sport at a competitive level while 19% play sport at an elite level. Football was seen to be the most common sport for both competitive and elite participation, while swimming was the most common sport for basic/recreational participation. Reasons for playing sport were assessed and found that playing for fitness and for enjoyment were the most common answers followed by to have something to do, to practice and learn new skills and because of friends. There was no real difference among gender and reasons for playing sport despite a small percentage of more girls stating they played for fitness and enjoyment more so than boys. Reasons for not playing sport/dropping out of sport were also examined; main reasons established from the self-reported questionnaire included losing interest and alternative commitments. However reasons such as injury/poor health, fear of lack of ability and coaches influences emerged from the focus groups.

# APPENDICES



## *Appendix A: Informed Consent Form*

### **INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

Hi,

My name is Nicola Kirwan and I am a 4<sup>th</sup> year student studying Exercise and Health Studies in Waterford Institute of Technology. As part of my dissertation I am carrying out a questionnaire and a focus group to examine sports participation and drop out among adolescents in Co. Wexford. I would like your child to answer a few questions in relation to this topic. After the questionnaires have been analysed a small group of students will be randomly selected to participate in a short focus group to elaborate on information received from the questionnaire. Please do not feel obliged to allow your son/daughter to take part in this study as participation is completely voluntary. The results of this questionnaire will be kept entirely confidential. Please find attached an information sheet about this piece of research. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions.

Please return this letter if you **GIVE CONSENT** for your son/daughter to be involved in my research.

I **GIVE CONSENT** for my child \_\_\_\_\_ to be involved in this study.

(Insert child's name above)

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## *Appendix B: Information Sheet*

### **Information Sheet**

#### **Sports Participation and Dropout among Adolescents in Co. Wexford**

**Purpose:** The purpose of this study is to establish the level of sports participation and drop out among young people in Co. Wexford.

**Content:** The questionnaire includes 18 questions to assess sport participation among young people in Co. Wexford.

**Anonymity:** Your name is not required for this piece of research, however gender, age and year group are necessary.

**Confidentiality:** The results of the questionnaire are entirely confidential; only my college supervisor and I will see the results of this questionnaire

**Commitment required:** This questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete. You may be randomly selected to participate in a short focus group/interview after the results of the questionnaire have been analysed. You do not have to complete this questionnaire and can stop doing so as you wish.

**Contact:** Nicola Kirwan  
4<sup>th</sup> Year Student  
Exercise & Health Studies  
Waterford Institute of Technology  
086 3666761

*Appendix C: Questionnaire*  
FCJ BUNCLODY SECONDARY SCHOOL,  
BUNCLODY, CO. WEXFORD

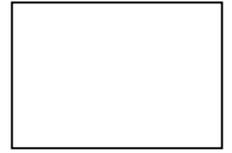


# Sports Participation and Dropout among Adolescents in Co. Wexford

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Dissertation Study

**Nicola Kirwan**  
**Waterford Institute of Technology**  
**Student**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Year**  
**Exercise and Health Studies**



Dear Student,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the time out to participate in this piece of research

Yours sincerely,

Nicola Kirwan

**Declaration of consent**

*Please circle appropriate answer*

**I have given the informed consent form to my parents/guardians**

YES

NO

**My parents/guardians have given consent for me to take part in this research study**

YES

NO

**It has been explained to me that this study will involve me completing a sport related questionnaire and the possibility of being involved in a focus group**

YES

NO

**I know that I am free to decide not to take part in this study or change my mind if I wish**

YES

NO

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**Demographics:**

--

*Please fill in the blanks and circle relevant answers*

**1. Gender**

Male

Female

**2. Age**

\_\_\_\_\_

**3. Date of birth**

\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

**4. Nationality**

\_\_\_\_\_

**5. Area of residence**

Suburbs/large town

Town

Village/rural area

**6. What year are you in?**1<sup>st</sup>2<sup>nd</sup>3<sup>rd</sup>4<sup>th</sup>5<sup>th</sup>6<sup>th</sup>**7. Do you have any injury, physical disability, a learning or sensory disability or special education need that affects your capacity to participate in certain sports?**

YES

NO

**If yes, please specify:** \_\_\_\_\_

**8. Do you play sports? If no go to question 13**

*Please circle relevant answer.*

YES

NO

**Sports participants**

9. What sports do you play? How often per week do you play these sports? If you play an unlisted sport please list in the spaces provided.  
Please tick relevant ans.

Sport	How often per week you play					
	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Hurling	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Camogie	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Football	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Soccer	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Rugby	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Basketball	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Cricket	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Badminton	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Handball	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Tennis	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Golf	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Swimming	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
Hockey	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	
	1-2 times		3-4 times		5-7 times	

10. At what level do you play sport? Please specify which sport and what level you play at. *please fill in blanks*

- 1- Basic, family, recreation, play, school, open clubs, P.E  
2- Competitive, club level, selected school team  
3- Elite, county, regional, provincial, national

Sport	Level at which you play at

--

**11. Why do you play sport? Please tick relevant box(es)**

Something to do	<input type="checkbox"/>	To practice new skills	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of my friends	<input type="checkbox"/>	To learn new skills	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of my parents	<input type="checkbox"/>	I thought it would be good	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of my siblings	<input type="checkbox"/>	Saw it on the TV/internet etc	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of school	<input type="checkbox"/>	Enjoyment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Challenging	<input type="checkbox"/>	Pride of community	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fitness	<input type="checkbox"/>	Community involvement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seemed interesting	<input type="checkbox"/>	Can't remember	<input type="checkbox"/>
Seemed challenging	<input type="checkbox"/>	Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other: <i>please specify</i>			

**12. At what age did you try sport for the first time?**

*Please circle relevant answer*

4 or under

5-7 years

8-9 years

10-11years

12 or older

**Non-sports participants**

13. Did you ever play sport? *Please circles relevant answer*

YES                  NO

*If no go to question 17*

**Sports Drop Outs**

14. What sports did you play? If you played an unlisted sport please list in the spaces provided *please tick appropriate box(es)*

Hurling		Cricket	
Camogie		Badminton	
Football		Handball	
Soccer		Tennis	
Rugby			
Basketball			
Hockey			
Golf			
Swimming			

15. At what age did you stop playing sport? *Please fill in the blank*

\_\_\_\_\_

16. Why did you stop playing sport? *Please tick the relevant box(es)*

Lost interest		Lack of transport	
Different interests		Injury	
Negative influences from family		No enjoyment	
Negative influences from friends		Not getting enough game time	
Lack of motivation		Fear of lack of ability	
Disagreements with coaches/players		Financial problems	
Poor health		Alternative commitments	

--

No previous sporting history

17. Why did you never and still not play sport? *Please tick relevant box(es)*

I don't like sport/no interest	<input type="checkbox"/>	I don't know about local clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>
I haven't got enough spare time	<input type="checkbox"/>	No local clubs	<input type="checkbox"/>
I'm not good enough at sport	<input type="checkbox"/>	Negative influences from family	<input type="checkbox"/>
I've never been able to take part	<input type="checkbox"/>	Negative influences from friends	<input type="checkbox"/>
I've never been asked to take part	<input type="checkbox"/>	No enjoyment	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transport difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/>	Too competitive	<input type="checkbox"/>
Too expensive	<input type="checkbox"/>	No particular reasons	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other <i>please specify:</i>			

18. Do you participate in any other physical activity?  
*Please tick relevant box(es)*

Weight lifting	<input type="checkbox"/>	Gym training	<input type="checkbox"/>
Exercise classes e.g. aerobics, spinning etc.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Jogging/running	<input type="checkbox"/>
Walking	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cycling	<input type="checkbox"/>
Horse riding	<input type="checkbox"/>	House work/gardening	<input type="checkbox"/>

### ***Appendix D: Focus Group Topic Guide***

#### ***Running session:***

Refer back to previous notes

Takes notes during and after session

Try and get everyone in the group involved

Try make everyone as comfortable as possible

Avoid using why

Use open ended questions

At the end of the session ask each individual to offer final reflections

#### ***Introduction:***

Hi, my name is Nicola and as I'm sure some of you already know I'm a past student of the FCJ and am carrying out my dissertation here in the school to find out about sports participation and drop out among adolescents. You have already completed a questionnaire in relation to this research and this focus group is just to develop on what was found from the questionnaires. This conversation will be recorded.

#### ***Informed consent:***

Your parents/guardians have already given their consent for you to take part in this piece of research. However, if you do not wish to participate you are free to leave at any time.

#### ***Confidentiality statement:***

The information received from this piece of research will remain entirely confidential. Only WIT and the researcher will have access to the study data and information. There will not be any identification of names on the tapes and participant's names will not be available to anyone. The tapes will be destroyed at the research is complete.

#### ***Repeating reasons of meeting:***

The purpose of this focus group is to develop upon reasons for sports participation, drop out and sporting inactivity collated from the questionnaires.

**Questions:**Participating group

- Why do you play sport?
- Why do you think other people play sport?
- What is the most enjoyable thing for you while playing sport?
  - Does this help keep you involved in your sport? OR, what keeps you involved in sport?
  - Is there anything you find not enjoyable about playing sport?
- Do the coaches/managers have an influence on whether you play sport or not?
- Do your family/friends have an influence on you playing sport?
- Any highlights in your sporting career?

TRANSPORT	ENJOYMENT
SUPPORT	FRIENDS
FAMILY	SCHOOL
COACHES	FELLOW PLAYERS
FITNESS	

Non-participating group

- Have you ever played sport?
- Why don't you play sport anymore?
  - What influenced you to stop playing sport?
  - Did coaches/managers/fellow players have anything to do with you stopping playing?
  - Did friends/family have anything to do with you stopping playing?
- Did you ever enjoy sport?
- What did you enjoy about it?
- Do you participate in any other activities/clubs/hobbies instead of sport?
- Do you have any sporting highlights from when you played sport?
- Do you have any negative memories from when you played sport?

**Prompts to help:**

<i>"are there any other ways to look at this?"</i>	<i>"anyone else have an idea?"</i>	<i>"let me see if I'm understanding you correctly.. (Rephrasing)"</i>
<i>"think back to..."</i>	<i>"please tell me more about that" "could you explain what you mean by..."</i>	<i>"can you tell me something else about...."</i>

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