



Original article

Are we leveling the playing field? Trends and disparities in sports participation among sexual minority youth in Canada

Marion Doull ^{a,*}, Ryan J. Watson ^b, Annie Smith ^c, Yuko Homma ^d, Elizabeth Saewyc ^a

^a *Stigma and Resilience Among Vulnerable Youth Centre, School of Nursing, University of British Columbia, T222-2211 Wesbrook Mall, Vancouver, British Columbia V6T 2B5, Canada*

^b *Department of Human Development and Family Studies, University of Connecticut, 348 Mansfield Road, U-1058, Storrs, CT 06269*

^c *McCreary Centre Society, 2552 East Hastings St., Vancouver, British Columbia V5K 2A7, Canada*

^d *School of Nursing, Mukogawa Women's University, 6-46 Ikebiraki, Nishinomiya, Hyogo, Japan*

Received 4 February 2016; revised 24 June 2016; accepted 9 August 2016

Available online

Sports participation and physical fitness are widely beneficial for young people, yet activity levels among young people are declining. Despite growing popular media attention on the participation of sexual minority (e.g., lesbian, gay, and bisexual) youth in sports and various campaigns to improve the often homophobic climate of sports, there is limited evidence that sexual minority youth participate in sports. In fact, existing evidence suggests that there are disparities in sports participation between sexual minority and heterosexual young people. This study examines trends in sports participation among sexual minority and heterosexual young people from 1998–2013 using population-level data from British Columbia, Canada ($n = 99,373$). We found an overall decline in sports participation and physical activity (PA) for all youth. Sexual minority students were less likely to participate in formal sports (with a coach) and informal sports (without a coach) compared with their heterosexual peers. The disparity in participating in informal sports between heterosexual and sexual minority youth has narrowed over time for some sexual orientation groups, whereas the disparity in participating in formal sports has widened over time in some cases. This study provides a comprehensive examination of sports participation among sexual minority youth over the past 15 years. Despite changing societal attitudes and laudable efforts to reduce homophobia in sports, results suggest that there are continued barriers to participation for sexual minority youth. Further research is needed to understand the factors that limit sports participation for these youth and to inform program development. PA is critical to lifelong health and well-being, and thus continued efforts are needed to increase the sports participation of sexual minority youth in particular. © 2016 Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. on behalf of Shanghai University of Sport. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Keywords: Canada; Disparities; Physical activity; Sexual minority youth; Sexual orientation; Sports participation

1. Introduction

Sports participation and physical fitness are widely beneficial for young people. Regular physical activity (PA) is important for the health and mental well-being of young people; has long-term health and cardiovascular benefits; has positive effects on academic performance; reduces stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms; and improves self-confidence and self-esteem.^{1–4} Research has also shown that participation on sport teams has benefits above and beyond those seen with PA because of the social nature of sports and the resultant benefits for self-esteem and social interaction.² In a systematic review of studies that

examined the benefits of sports participation for young people, Eime and colleagues² reported that active participants saw improvements in self-esteem, social skills, confidence, and competence and reported fewer depressive symptoms compared with nonparticipants. Overall the studies included in this review reported benefits in over 40 psychological and health outcomes for young people participating in sports.² It is important that for sexual minority (i.e., lesbian, gay, and bisexual) youth, who are disproportionately represented in reports of youth depression and suicidality, research has shown that those who participate in sports report less hopelessness and less suicidality.^{5–7} *Sexual and gender minority* is an umbrella term used primarily to describe young people who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender.⁸ Lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth are defined as sexual minorities based on their sexual orientation and in reference to the majority heterosexual population. Transgender

Peer review under responsibility of Shanghai University of Sport.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: mariondoull@hotmail.com (M. Doull).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jshs.2016.10.006>

2095-2546/© 2016 Production and hosting by Elsevier B.V. on behalf of Shanghai University of Sport. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

young people are individuals whose gender identities, expressions, or behaviors do not always align with their sex at birth.⁸ In this study, we will use the term *sexual minority* to refer only to young people who identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. This study does not include young people who identify as transgender, and the limited data on the health and wellness of transgender youth are a critical research gap in this area.

1.1. Prevalence of sports participation

Despite the wide-ranging benefits of PA and sports participation, research from the national Youth Risk Behavioral Survey in the United States indicates that rates of participation in sports teams have remained largely unchanged from 1999–2013.⁹ Comparable data from Canada suggest that sports participation has declined over time; only about 50% of Canadian young people regularly took part in sports.¹⁰ Overall, 26% of the Canadian population (aged 15–54 years) participated in sports in 2010; among this larger group, Canadian young people between the ages of 15–19 had the highest participation in sports at 54%, but their participation declined 23% from 1992–2010.¹¹ Participation among younger children (aged 5–12) was 74% in 2010–2011, highlighting that participation declines with age.¹² Sports participation also differs by sex; prevalence is higher for boys (81%) than girls (70%).¹² In British Columbia, Canada's most westerly province and the site for this study, rates of participation are slightly higher than the national average, with 88% of adolescent boys and 81% of adolescent girls participating in at least 1 type of PA in 2008.¹³

Canadian guidelines recommend that young people aged 12–17 years engage in 60 min of moderate to vigorous activity daily, including vigorous activity at least 3 days per week.¹⁴ Although the type of activity is not specified, national Canadian data from the General Social Survey in 2005 found that boys participated in sports 2.7 times per week and girls 2.5 times per week,¹⁰ which suggests that Canadian youth do not meet recommended activity targets. The Canadian Health Measures Survey (2007–2009) found that only 4% of Canadian children and young people engaged in 20 min of vigorous PA at least 3 days a week, and 7% engaged in at least 60 min of moderate to vigorous activity at least 6 days per week.¹⁵ Thus, very few children and young people are meeting the recommended activity guidelines. We have no information about subgroups of young people within these studies, outside of some data on income levels, language, and immigration status. Because sexual minority youth report higher rates of mental distress and suicidality,¹⁶ outcomes that are negatively associated with sports participation, it is timely to examine the participation of sexual minority youth in sports.

1.2. Disparities in sports/PA participation for sexual minorities

An important gap in the evidence base is data that describe the participation rates for sexual minority young people. There have been few studies that have examined the participation of sexual minority young people in sports (both recreational and

competitive) and their experiences of sports participation, and even fewer that examine outcomes for lesbian, gay, and bisexual teens separately.^{17–19} Recently, the topic of sports participation by individuals who identify as sexual minorities has been prominent in the popular press and the media.²⁰ For example, popular media campaigns and projects to increase participation by sexual minorities in sports as well as to deal with homophobia in amateur and professional sports have been widely discussed (for example: www.youcanplayproject.org).^{21,22} However, there have been very few professional sports role models for young sexual minority athletes. This too is slowly changing; for example, recently the first openly gay football player was drafted into the USA's National Football League. Additionally, Magrath et al.²³ detail the story of Robbie Rogers, the first openly gay man to play at the elite level on a USA professional soccer team, whose "coming out" was received positively by the media, his teammates, his team, and fans. Magrath et al.²³ state that this positive response aligns with an increased climate of inclusivity documented in the academic literature, in which research has focused on the opinions of heterosexual athletes. However, research has outlined the often homophobic climate within professional and competitive sport realms.

Estimates from the USA suggest that sexual minority young people are about half as likely to participate in school-based sports compared with their heterosexual counterparts.²⁴ The research on issues of sexual orientation and sports is primarily focused on homophobia in sports, more specifically in male sports. An exception is a study by Calzo and colleagues¹⁹ that analyzed the PA participation rates of sexual minority vs. heterosexual young people in the Growing Up Today Study, a national cohort study of adolescents ("waves" 1999–2005). This study reported that activity rates declined as youth got older equally for sexual minority and for heterosexual youth. However, most sexual minority groups had lower activity rates to begin with—gay and bisexual males reported fewer hours per week of exercise and less sports team participation as compared with "completely" heterosexual males, and lesbian, bisexual, and "mostly" heterosexual females engaged in less activity than "completely" heterosexual females.¹⁹ A second, much older cross-sectional study that examined rates of PA participation for sexual minority young people used data from the Add Health study (wave 1, 1994–1995).¹⁸ In contrast to the findings reported by Calzo and colleagues,¹⁹ this study reported that participation rates for sexual minority and heterosexual young people were largely similar and that both groups participated in similar sports; however these data are over 2 decades old.¹⁸ In summary, data from 2 national studies that allow for analysis of comparisons by sexual orientation have resulted in contradictory conclusions about participation in sports by sexual minority young people. Given the strong evidence about the benefit of sports participation and the increased awareness and social acceptance of sexual minorities in sports, as noted in the media, it is clear that more research is needed to document participation rates for sexual minority youth. The few studies that have assessed PA and sports participation among sexual minority young people rely on older waves of USA-based data and focus primarily on males. There have been no studies that have documented trends over

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7521040>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7521040>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)