



Healthy Weights
CONNECTION™

January 2017

Sport Participation Among Indigenous Children and Youth

Fact Sheet No. 10



Introduction

The concept of health is holistic among Indigenous populations, which means that to achieve good health, it is important to focus on all entities, including physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects. Sports and physical activity are important in promoting the health of Indigenous peoples as well as in bringing communities together.

This fact sheet focuses on the health and activity levels of Indigenous youth, predictors of sport participation and benefits of organized sports in addition to how service providers can help in promoting participation.

Health of Indigenous Populations in Canada

Indigenous populations are at an increased risk of numerous chronic conditions; physical activity has been shown to help reduce some of these conditions. In fact, it is well established that the obesity rate among Indigenous youth is almost double compared to the rate of obesity amongst non-Indigenous youth in Canada. The 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey showed that prevalence of obesity for Indigenous children and youth was 15.8% compared to 8% in non-Indigenous children and youth¹. In addition, Indigenous populations have increased rates of childhood diabetes and heart disease.

Indigenous Youth Activity Levels

A study using the 2005 Canadian Community Health Survey with a sample of people 12 years and older found that Métis and First Nations populations living off-reserve had a higher likelihood for being active during their leisure time compared to non-Indigenous populations, with their activity rates being 39%, 37% and 30% respectively². Furthermore, this study reported that approximately 20% of First Nations peoples living on-reserve participated in moderate-to-vigorous activities for at least 30 minutes². A study that examined the rates of Indigenous children's sport participation between the ages of 0 to 14, using data from the Aboriginal Peoples Survey 2001 found that Métis and Inuit children had higher rates of participation in sport than First Nations children³. It was also found that First Nations children who lived off-reserve had greater rates of sport participation than those who lived on-reserve³, similar to the findings from the Canadian Community Health Survey. This study found that most Indigenous children (65%) participated in sport similar to non-Indigenous children (64%)³.

Although there are high levels of physical activity among off-reserve Indigenous peoples, their reported health was still poorer with a higher prevalence of obesity and diabetes, along with other chronic conditions. This may be due in part to the holistic definition of health, which includes physical and mental components as well as spiritual and emotional aspects, which means that traditional activities may be significantly associated with the health of Indigenous peoples². This tells us that not only do we need to increase the rates of physical activity, but we also need to have programs which are tailored to Indigenous populations.

Predictors of Youth Sport Participation

Age plays a factor in predicting participation in sport³. As children became adolescents they were less likely to participate in sports, and adults were even less likely to participate in sport than adolescents³. Indigenous females were also less likely to participate in sport compared to males³. Furthermore, children who lived with two parents and parents who were more educated had higher chances of participating in sports³. In addition, children who participated in sport were more likely to come from a family with a higher income and fewer

Box 1: Predictors of Obesity

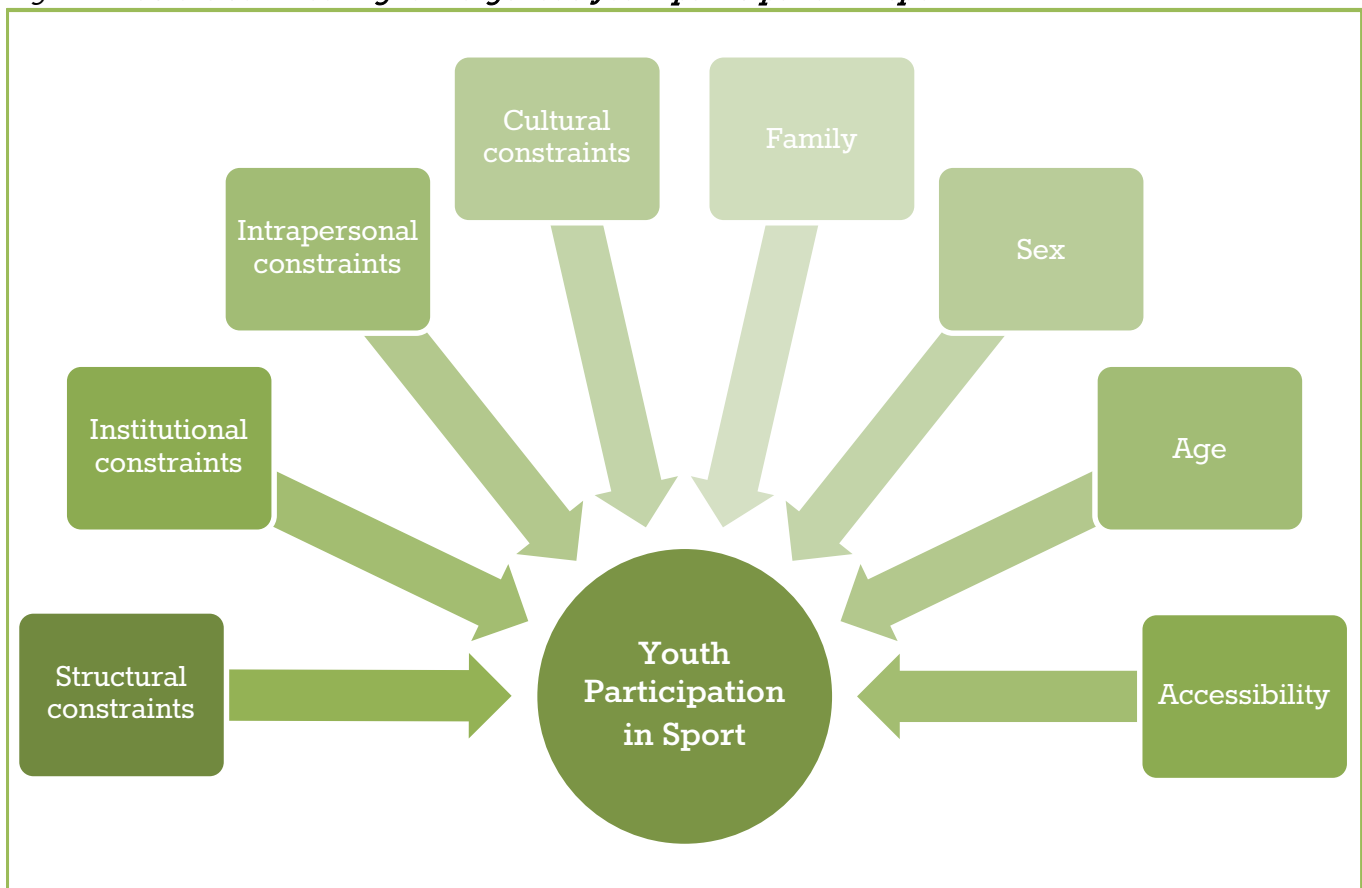
For more information about the predictors of obesity among Indigenous youth, please refer to our previous fact sheet at:

<http://www.healthyweightsconnection.ca/ModuleFile/resource?id=3506>

siblings compared to those who did not participate³. Parental support, which can include providing transportation or attending practices/games, plays a large factor in children’s participation³.

Decreased access to sport due to limited facilities or access to programs specific to Indigenous populations can be major barriers to participation⁴. Accessibility due to environmental conditions, financial constraints or aspects of the child’s culture or background can also be limiting factors to participation⁵. Other barriers may include structural constraints, such as resources, transportation and equipment; institutional constraints, such as facilities and programs; intrapersonal constraints, such as lifestyles, personal responsibilities and substance abuse; as well as cultural constraints, such as racism and traditional gender roles⁶.

Figure 1: Factors contributing to Indigenous youth participation in sport



Implications for Service Providers

It is important for service providers to not only target children for increased opportunities for participation in organized sport, but more importantly adolescents because this is when people make life-long habits. It is important for them to make sport a part of their life and not just something they are forced into participating in. Service providers need to understand the importance of sport participation from the Indigenous point of view. Sport participation is important to Indigenous populations, as they view participants to be representative of the larger Indigenous community⁴. Primarily service providers should focus on making sport programs which are



specific to Indigenous populations. In addition, they may also consider making sports programs targeted specifically to Indigenous females. It is important to make these programs accessible, through location and low costs. Partnering with school boards or community centers may increase availability of these programs. Finally, it would be helpful to consider training and hiring Indigenous coaches to run these programs.

Box 2: Benefits of Organized Sport

There are numerous benefits to participating in sports for Indigenous youth. Sports are a way to be physically active and there have been many studied benefits to being physically active, some of which include:

- ✓ Those who are physically active have decreased rates of obesity, diabetes and other health problems⁷.
- ✓ Indigenous youth who participate in sports have been found to have an increased self-esteem, and self-concept^{3,8}.
- ✓ Youth who participated in sport were less likely to engage in smoking behaviours compared to those who were not active⁹.
- ✓ Children who participated in sport were also more likely to participate in other activities such as music, clubs and community events³.

Physical activity has numerous benefits, the ones listed above are just a few. In fact, sport can also be used for preventive care. Many health concerns can be addressed through increased levels of physical activity.

For additional resources on other topics please visit www.healthyweightsconnection.ca/resources

References:

1. Katzmarzyk, P. T. Obesity and Physical Activity Among Aboriginal Canadians. *Obesity* 16, 184_190 (2008).
2. Findlay, L. C. Physical activity among First Nations people off reserve, Métis and Inuit. *Health Reports* 22, 47_54 (2011).
3. Findlay, L. C. & Kohen, D. E. Aboriginal Children's Sport Participation in Canada. *Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* 5, 185_206 (2007).
4. Thompson, S. J., Gifford, S. M. & Thorpe, L. The social and cultural context of risk and prevention: Food and physical activity in an urban Aboriginal community. *Health Education and Behaviour* 27, 725_743 (2000).
5. Mills, D. Sport in Canada: Leadership, partnership, and accountability - Everybody's business. *Sixth report of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage* (1998).
6. Mason, C. & Koehli, J. Barriers to physical activity for Aboriginal youth: Implications for community health, policy, and culture. *Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health* 10, 97_107 (2012).
7. Coble, J. D. & Rhodes, R. E. Physical activity and Native Americans. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 31, 36_46 (2006).
8. Kickett-Tucker, C. S. School and sport self-concept of urban Aboriginal school children: Teacher influences. *Paper presented at the AARE-NZARE National Conference, Melbourne, Australia, November 29* (1999).
9. Reading, J. A global model and national network for Aboriginal health research. *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 94, 185_189 (2003).