

**Sport and Physical Activity among those aged over 16
in County Donegal**

By

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November 2015

Executive Summary

Active Participation in Sport

- 44.5% of respondents are regular sports participants, the equivalent of over 54,000 adults aged 16 and over.
- Men and younger people are most likely to take part in sport.
- Individual activities are more popular than team sports due to their flexible nature.
- More women play team sports than nationally (7.3% vs. 4.6%).
- Exercise is the most common activity for participants followed by swimming.
- Participation in soccer in Donegal is higher than that nationally. Soccer is the most popular sport among men and is also relatively popular among women.
- Gender differences in Gaelic football are less pronounced than nationally.
- The two fastest growing sports nationally, running and cycling, are not yet as popular in Donegal.
- Adults who take part in sport are likely to participate more than once a week, for longer than half an hour and with sufficient intensity to benefit their health.
- Time is the most cited barrier to participation.

Broader Physical Activity

- Recreational walking is the most popular form of activity with 63.4% of adults taking part.
- Recreational walking has a broad appeal to both men and women, all age groups, socioeconomic statuses and to those who have an illness/disability.
- Fewer Donegal adults walk for transport or cycle for transport than nationally.

Social Participation

- Overall 45.2% of Donegal adults took part in some form of social participation, with club membership the most common form (31.4%).
- 15.7% volunteered for sport and 17.4% attended a sporting event.
- Volunteering and events are strongly associated with team sports while individual sports are also popular among club members.
- More than twice as many men as women are club members.

Sport and Health

- 28.1% of respondents are highly active, similar to the national figure.
- 16.1% are sedentary. The sedentary figure almost reaches statistical significance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The National Physical Activity Guidelines¹ recommend at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity activity on 5 or more days a week for adults. The 30 minutes can be accumulated in bouts of 10 minutes or more over the course of a day. Being active confers significant health and related benefits² and participation in sport and active leisure plays an increasingly important role in adult physical activity levels worldwide³. The benefits from activity can be gained at any age. The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing⁴ tracked participants whose average age was over 65 for 8 years and found that participants who took up activity in those 8 years also saw health benefits despite being previously inactive.

This report provides evidence on the sport and recreational exercise activity of adults (aged 16 and over) in county Donegal. The analysis aims to be of interest and assistance to those involved in the promotion of sport in Donegal, particularly Local Authorities, Donegal LSP, sports clubs and volunteers.

Scope

The figures in this report are based on the results of the 2011 and 2013 Irish Sports Monitor (ISM) surveys. The data from both years were combined into one dataset of 590 respondents to try to reduce the error margin within the results. Based on this sample size the error margin around key high level results is 4%. So if we report a participation rate of 44.5% in the report we would expect that the true participation rate for Donegal lies somewhere between 44.5% – 4% and 44.5% + 4% i.e. between 40.5% and 48.5%⁵. Where the sample has been divided into further sub-samples by gender or age, the error margin is increased. **So, the results are only an indication of sports participation in Donegal and should be treated with caution.**

The ISM asks interviewees about their active and social participation in sport in the previous 7 days. Further details of the aims and methodology of the ISM can be found in ISM Annual Reports (available

¹ <http://www.getirelandactive.ie/guidelines-resources/how-much-physical-activity-is-required/>

² <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1402378/pdf/20060314s00023p801.pdf>

<http://www.health.gov/paguidelines/guidelines/chapter2.aspx>

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs385/en/>

³ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3401184/pdf/nihms389131.pdf>

⁴ Regular physical activity in later life boosts likelihood of 'healthy aging' up to sevenfold, November 5th 2013, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/11/131125185600.htm>

⁵ This is known as a 95% confidence interval for the statistic in question. We would expect this interval to contain the true proportion 95% of the times that the survey was undertaken.

at http://www.irishsportscouncil.ie/Research/The_Irish_Sports_Monitor/). The ISM is designed to be representative of Ireland's population as a whole rather than the population of any individual county. Therefore it was necessary to re-weight the data for this report so that the sample more closely reflected Donegal's current demographic profile. Gender, age and employment status were considered in this re-weighting exercise. The Appendix compares the demographic profile of the dataset used for the report with the profile of Donegal recorded by the Central Statistics Office in the 2011 Census of Population.

A feature of the ISM is the inclusion of periodic flexible modules on particular topical policy issues. These modules are included over a number of months and therefore only include a sub-sample of annual survey respondents. Thus it is not always possible to carry out a meaningful analysis of these issues beyond the national situation. During 2011 and 2013 flexible modules were included on issues such as gender and sport, interest in playing more sport, motivations for playing, barriers to participation, perceptions of health and wellness and engagement in other behaviours (smoking, drinking alcohol etc.) which might influence health and wellness, and knowledge of the sports policy environment nationally and locally. These issues are reported on in the relevant annual report to which the reader is referred. However, where respondent numbers allowed and where findings of local interest emerged these issues are explored in this current report. Readers are reminded of the statistical limitations within such analysis and to regard such references as indicative only.

Statistical Analysis

In this report, the charts and tables generally show percentage participation rates in a given activity by a particular group (e.g. the percentage of women who play team sport). Where this is not the case the report highlights the basis for the participation rates. The report includes certain national figures for comparison purposes. In the main such national figures are composite averages from 2011 and 2013. Exceptions to this approach are noted.

ISM Definition of Sport and Physical Activity

The primary justification for public investment in sport is to increase physical activity and hence to improve health⁶. Consistent with this aim (and with the *Irish Sports Council Act, 1999*), the report

⁶ <http://www.dttas.ie/corporate> - High Level Goal for sport "To contribute to a healthier and more active society by promoting sports participation and by supporting high performance and the provision of facilities."

defines “sport” broadly, to include recreational exercise (e.g. swimming, gym, dance classes, yoga, etc.), as well as field games (e.g. soccer, Gaelic football). The ISM also records recreational walking, walking and cycling for transport, allowing sport to be set in the context of more general physical activity.

Limitations

All statistical surveys are approximate. In the case of the ISM, measurement error may be caused by people recalling activity inaccurately, respondents wishing to paint themselves in a good light (social desirability bias), failure to survey hard-to-reach groups, mistakes made by interviewers, and so on. For example foreign nationals are underrepresented in the overall ISM and Donegal samples. Previous research has suggested that their participation rates are lower than those of Irish nationals thus suggesting that participation rates in this report are likely to be over-stated in this respect. All participation rates have margin of errors and small differences should not be over-interpreted as meaningful particularly where the sample size is relatively small. So, when looking at the figures below it is important to remember that they are at best an approximation.

2. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

2.1 Overall Physical Activity

Table 1 compares participation in Donegal with the national average. It captures regular⁷ participation through sport, recreational walking and active travel i.e. walking and cycling for transport. In the tables below the “highly active” are those who meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines⁸ while those who are “sedentary” don’t take part in sport, do no recreational walking and don’t walk or cycle for transport. Based on the 2011 Census data the 44.5% participating in sport is equivalent to approximately 54,000 adults aged 16 and over taking part in regular sporting activity in Donegal.

Table 1: Summary of Physical Activity – Donegal and National

	Donegal	National
Sporting Participation	44.5%	46.0%
Recreational Walking	63.4%	64.3%
Walk for Transport	32.3%	40.0%
Cycle for Transport	5.2%	10.1%
Highly Active	28.1%	30.3%
Sedentary	16.1%	13.2%

Participation in sport and recreational walking in Donegal is on a par with the national picture. There are fewer highly active and more sedentary individuals in the county than nationally; in the latter case the difference almost reaches statistical significance due primarily to the significantly lower proportions walking and cycling for transport in the county. As a largely rural⁹ county, Donegal tends to favour less active forms of travel. Looking at active commuting across the urban/rural divide, those living in urban regions are more likely to walk for transport (37.1% and 30.5% respectively) while cycling for transport is slightly more popular in rural areas (6.2% and 2.6% respectively). Urban residents are also slightly more likely to play sport than rural residents (47.1% and 43.5% respectively).

⁷ The ISM asks respondent about their participation in the previous 7 days so “regular” can be regarded here as being equivalent to participation at least once a week in each type of activity

⁸ For adults to be highly active requires that they take part in at least 5 sessions of physical activity per week of at least 30 minutes duration at a moderate intensity or greater. Moderate intensity is considered sufficient to raise the person’s breathing rate.

⁹ Based on the 2011 Census of Population Donegal is the 3rd most rural county in Ireland behind Leitrim and Roscommon

Table 2 below looks at these behaviours by gender. Both nationally and in Donegal men are more likely to take part in sport and cycle for transport while women are more likely to take recreational walks. The proportions of those who are highly active, sedentary and who walk for transport are similar among men and women in Donegal. Rates of sedentarism are higher among men and women than nationally although the difference is not statistically significant in either case.¹⁰

Table 2: Summary of Physical Activity by gender –Donegal and National

	Donegal		National	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Sporting Participation	48.8%	40.3%	51.5%	40.9%
Recreational Walking	55.9%	70.6%	58.0%	70.3%
Walk for Transport	33.2%	31.5%	39.1%	40.9%
Cycle for Transport	8.4%	2.2%	14.6%	5.7%
Highly Active	28.8%	27.3%	29.9%	30.7%
Sedentary	15.6%	16.5%	13.3%	13.0%

2.2 Most Popular Sporting Activities

Figures 2.2 to 2.4 show the most popular sports in Donegal and nationally, overall and by gender. Sports with an overall participation rate of 2% or more are shown. Individual sports dominate accounting for 6 of the 8 most popular activities shown. This is also reflected at a combined level where 38.3% of all active participants in Donegal take part in individual sports compared to 12.3% in team sports, these are broadly similar to the national figures. One other feature of the figures is the strength of soccer in Donegal with 8.9% of residents participating regularly compared to 6.1% of adults nationally.

¹⁰ Statistical significance refers to the likelihood that a finding or result is caused by something other than chance. It should be noted that statistical significance does not always indicate practical significance.

Figure 2.2: Top Participation Sports in Donegal and National – Overall¹¹

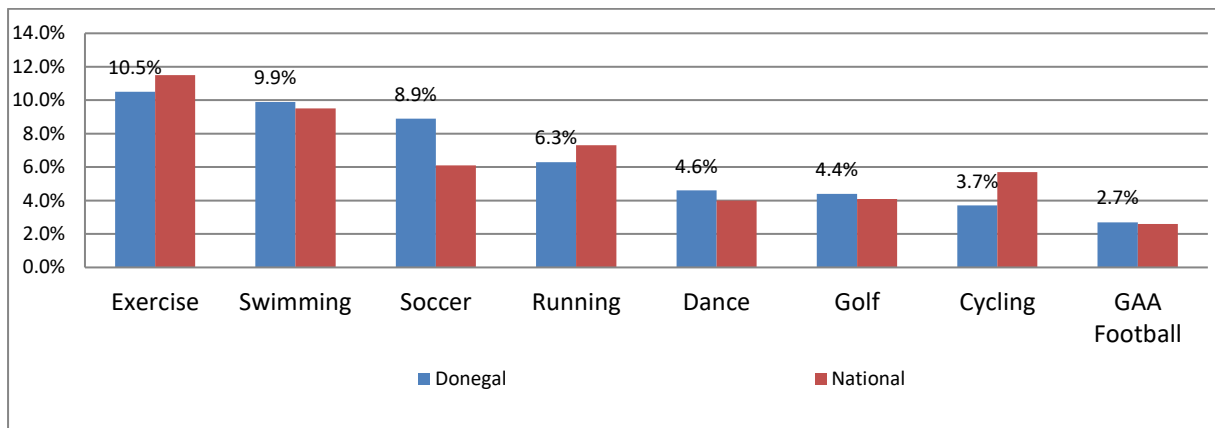


Figure 2.3: Top Participation Sports in Donegal and National – among men¹²

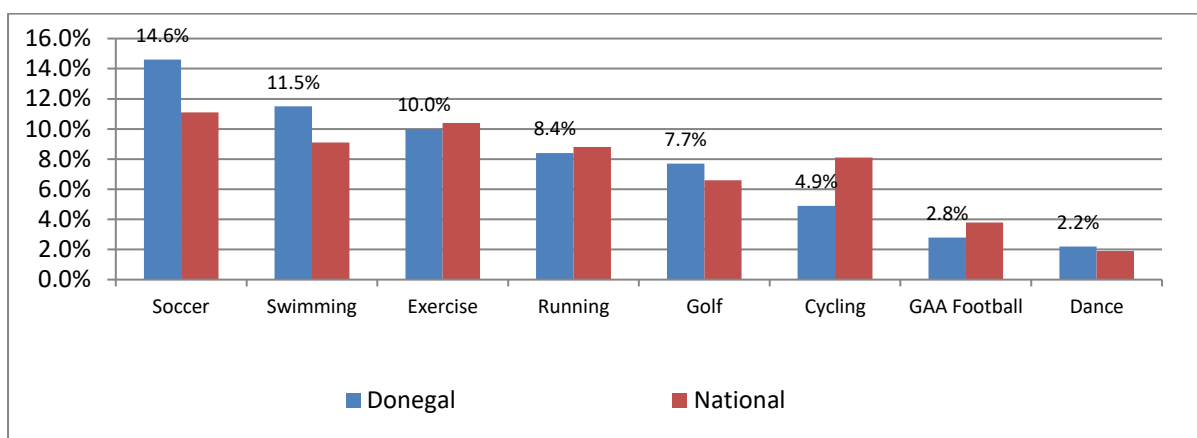
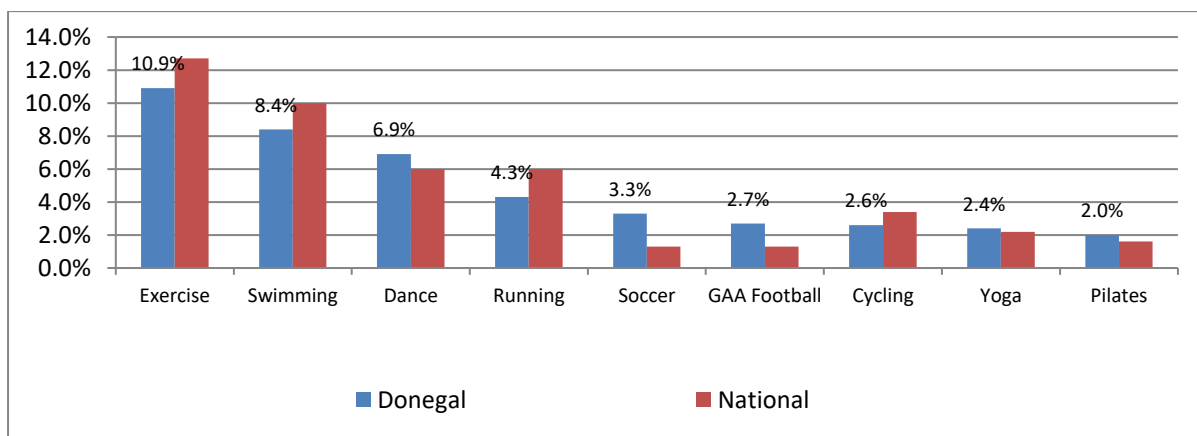


Figure 2.4: Top Participation Sports in Donegal and National – among women¹³



¹¹ Sports with participation of 1% - 2% overall are rugby, weights, pilates, yoga, hill walking and hurling / camogie

¹² Sports with participation rates of 1% - 2% among men are rugby, weights, basketball, martial arts and hill walking

¹³ Sports with participation rates of 1% - 2% among women are horse riding, rowing, rugby and weights

Two particular features stand out in relation to participation by gender, namely the relative strength of soccer and the relative weakness of sports such as cycling and running which are the fastest growing nationally. It is highly unusual to find a team sport being the most popular activity as is the case here for soccer among men. This strong soccer “culture” in the county is not just confined to men - participation among women is also very strong at least relative to the comparable national situation. The strength of soccer along with that of Gaelic football contributes to more women playing team sports in Donegal than nationally (7.3% vs. 4.6%). So, where nationally we see over eight times as many women playing individual sports as team sports in Donegal this ratio is only 5:1.

On the other hand, cycling and running which are the two fastest growing sports nationally do not appear to be as popular in Donegal as elsewhere. With cycling this is particularly so among men whereas for running the gap is most noticeable for women.

Given the small scale of the Donegal ISM sample, readers are again cautioned about over-interpreting the above differences. They are perhaps suggestive of some cultural and structural factors affecting participation which is not capable of being examined with the limited data available here. However, for those involved in sports development and promotion in the county they are worthy of further examination.

2.3 Participation and Social Gradients

While the ISM has shown that the gender gap has narrowed over the years, social gradients continue to strongly impact on all aspects of active and social participation with higher income earners and those with higher educational attainments significantly more likely to play sport, be club members, volunteer for sport and attend sporting events. While income and education are closely correlated they have also been shown to be strong influences on participation separately. Social gradients have been a consistent feature of sports participation research in Ireland for over a decade and have been relatively resilient to policy efforts which have sought to address them in the intervening period.

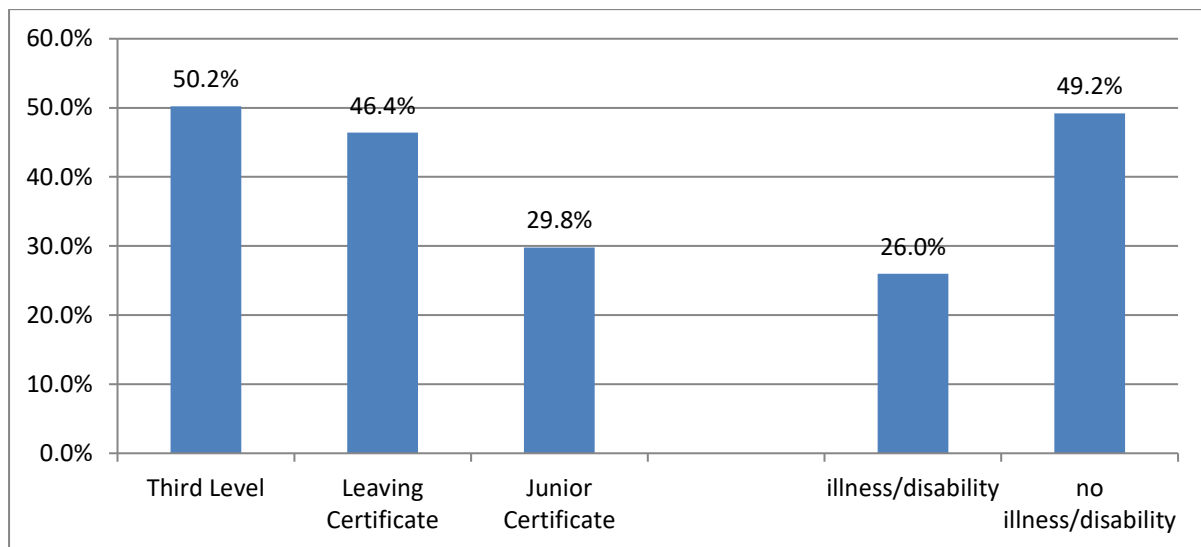
The available evidence suggests that social gradients are as strong in Donegal as elsewhere in the country. For example 50.2% of those with a third level education play sport regularly compared to 29.8% of those whose highest educational attainment is the Junior Certificate or lower¹⁴.

¹⁴ This includes respondents whose highest educational attainment is the Junior Certificate, Primary school or who have no formal education.

2.4 Participation and illness/disability

The ISM asks respondents whether they have any long-term illness, health problem or disability that limits their daily activities. Those who answer “yes” to this question are also asked whether this problem prevents their participation in sport or exercise. 20.4% of Donegal based respondents answered yes to the first question with over 16% of these also answering yes to the second question. These figures are slightly above the national figures¹⁵. Those with an illness/disability are significantly less likely to take part in sport at 26% compared to 49% of those without a disability taking part. Those with and without an illness/disability were equally likely to play sport as a child suggesting that the onset of the disability may have been a key factor in the decision to stop participating among many.

Figure 2.5: Participation and educational attainment and illness/disability

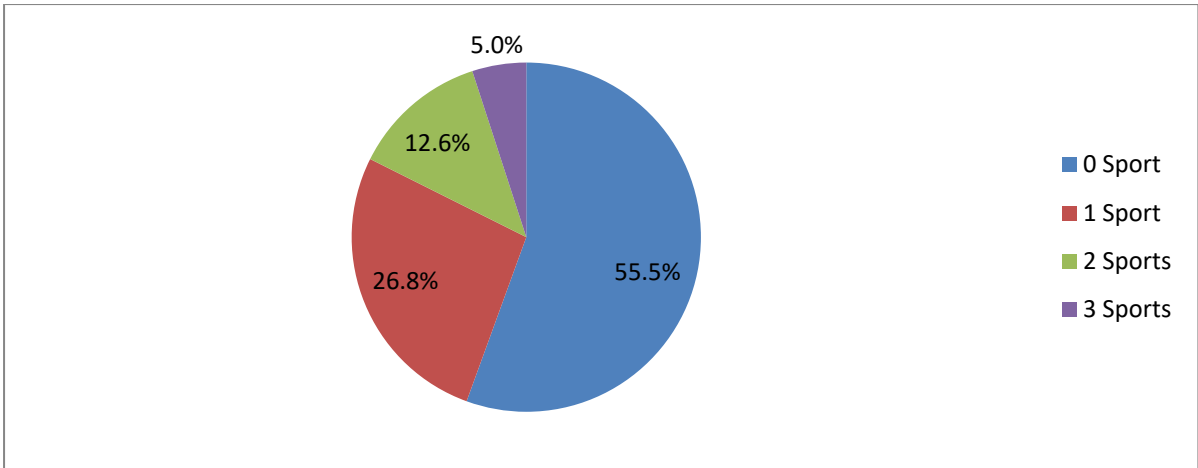


2.5 FITT Analysis

The ISM asks respondents about how often they play sport, for how long, at what intensity and in what context. This allows us to conduct an F (Frequency), I (Intensity), T (Time) and T (Type) analysis on participation patterns. Before looking at this aspect of participation we look at the distribution of participants by number of sports played in **Figure 2.6**. More than one in six Donegal adults played at least 2 sports in the previous 7 days while one in twenty took part in 3 sports or more.

Figure 2.6: Proportion playing none, one, two and three sports

¹⁵ Nationally the ISM reported that 18.3% had an illness/disability with 13.7% of the population indicating that this prevented participation.



In **Figures 2.7 – 2.10** we look at the FITT of participation. **Figure 2.7** shows that more than one in ten Donegal participants took part in a sporting session at least every day in the previous week. The mean number of sessions was 3.55 per week, equivalent to one sporting session every 2 days.

Figure 2.7: Number of sporting sessions of participants in previous 7 days

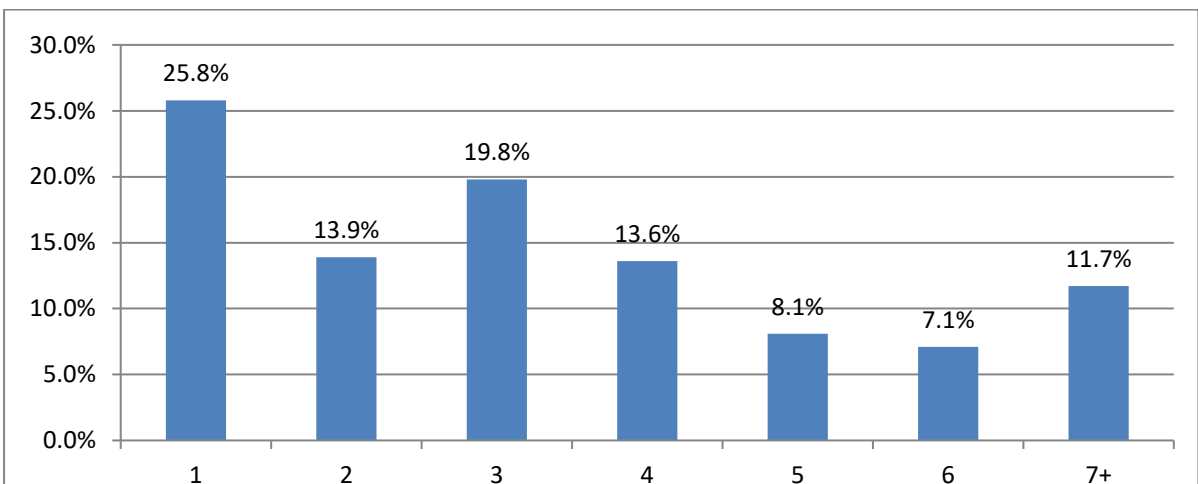
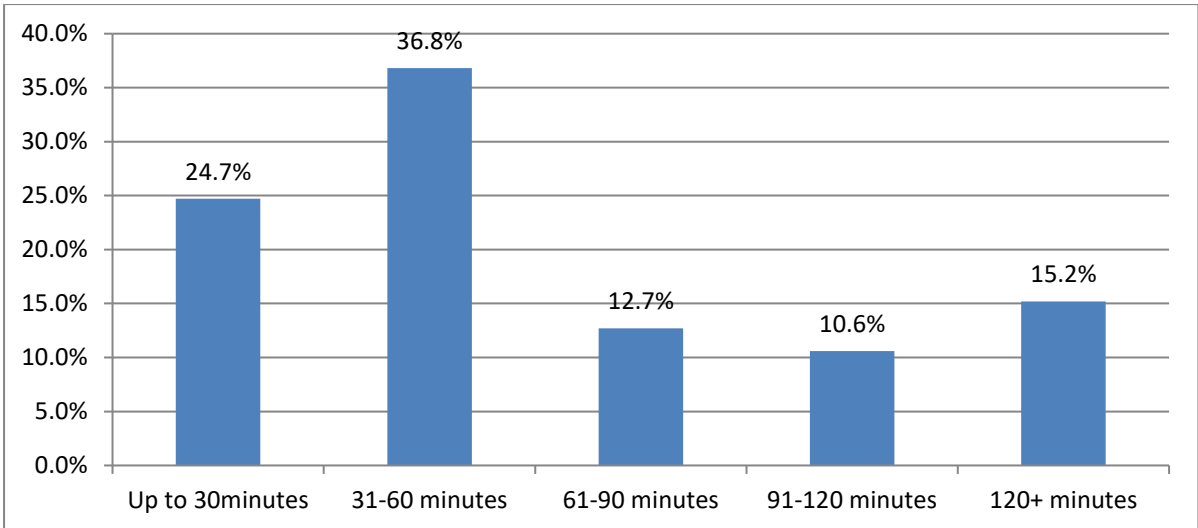
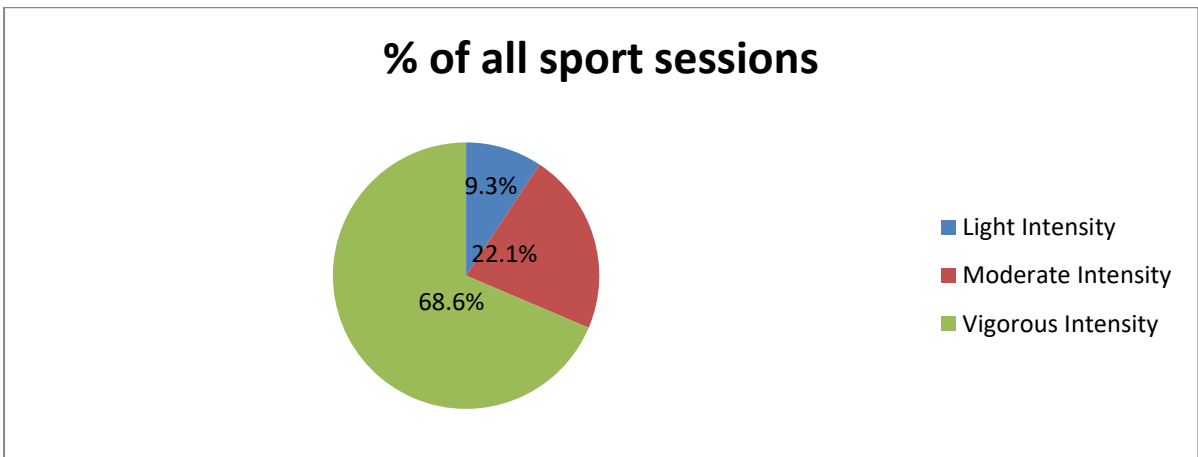


Figure 2.8: Proportion of all sporting sessions by duration in previous 7 days



In **Figure 2.8** we see that over 75% of all sporting sessions are upwards of 30 minutes in duration. The average sporting session lasts just over 85 minutes with sports such as golf (where sessions of 4 hours or more are the norm) having the effect of pulling up this figure. Men take part in more sporting sessions (4 vs. 3 respectively) which last longer on average (91 minutes vs. 77 minutes respectively). Team sports generally involve longer sessions while individual activities are played more often reflecting the fact that they can be fitted around other time commitments whereas team sports are less flexible in this regard. In contrast to these general patterns, soccer players participated 4 times a week on average, reflecting the popularity of the sport in Donegal.

Figure 2.9: Proportion of sporting sessions by participant intensity



From **Figure 2.9** over 90% of all sports sessions are of sufficient intensity to raise participants' breathing rate noticeably with almost 70% of them resulting in participants being out of breath or sweating. Playing team sports involves slightly higher levels of intensity which makes sense in the

context of the younger age of team sport participants. However, even for individual sports nearly 89% of the sessions still involve sufficient effort to raise participants' breathing rate noticeably.

Figure 2.10: Proportion of sporting sessions by context of participation by gender

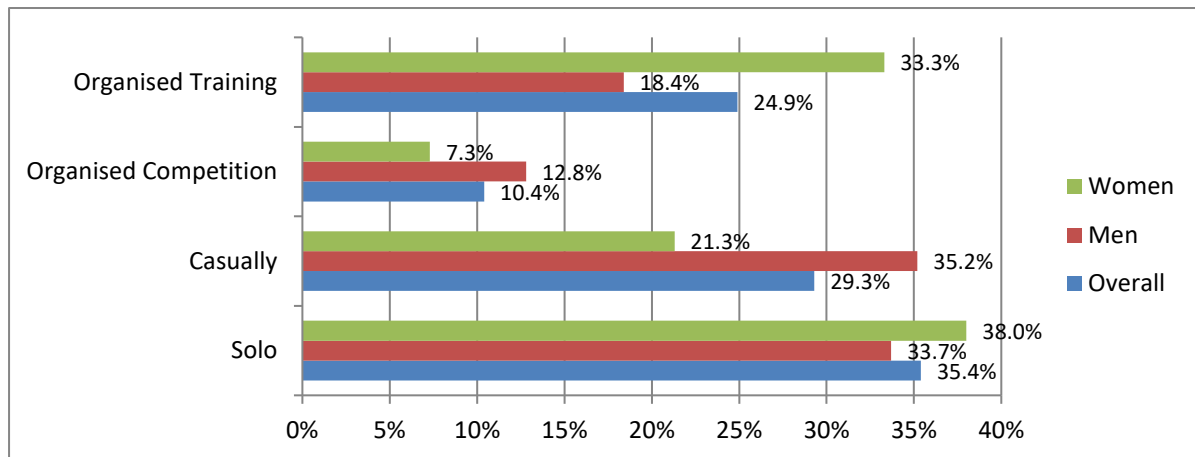


Figure 2.10 shows that informal sport¹⁶ is preferred by most adult participants with just over 65% of them taking part on their own or with family and friends. Most of the sport played in an organised context involves training / coaching sessions rather than competition. Women are significantly more likely than men to take part in organised training and coaching sessions while men are more likely to take part casually with family or friends and are also more attracted to competitive sport than women. Looking at individual vs. team sports, as might be expected there is a greater proportion of team sports participated in an organised context compared to individual sports with organised competition featuring strongly in this regard (nearly 18% of team sport participants take part in organised competition compared to 7% of individual sports participants).

One other interesting feature here is the effect of residential location on context of participation. Urban dwellers are significantly more likely to take part in sport in a solo context than their rural counterparts while the opposite is the case for organised training sessions. It doesn't appear to be associated with the type of sport played (urban and rural residents play team and individual sport in similar proportions).

Overall then the analysis presented above shows that adults engaged in sport or exercise activity are likely to participate more than once a week, for longer than half-an-hour and with sufficient intensity to raise their breathing rate / be out of breath or sweat. Thus, most participants are likely to be getting

¹⁶ Informal sport in this context is sport played either solo or casually with family or friends.

some degree of health benefit from their participation. Research¹⁷ shows that the biggest disparity in health status is between those who do not participate in any sport or physical activity and those who are active to any extent. In this context and in light of the above analysis it is clear that the primary focus of national and local policy should continue to be on getting people, who do not actively participate in sport and exercise, to take up some form of activity.

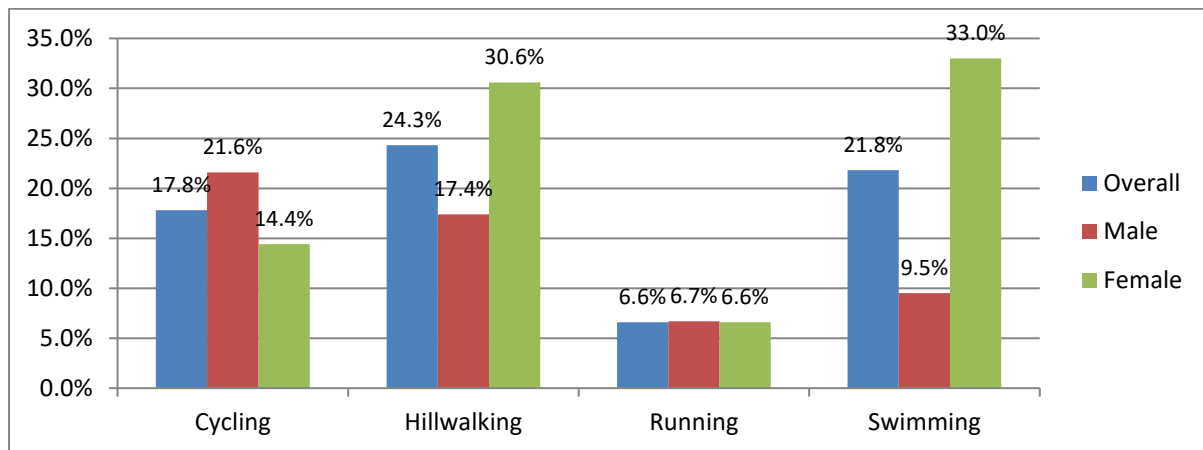
Nevertheless, the findings with respect to the context of participation are also noteworthy as regards policy that aims to increase participation. The majority of sporting activity is occurring outside of formal sporting structures suggesting that policy mechanisms that rely on pre-existing sporting bodies are less likely to be successful unless those bodies can reach out beyond the existing sporting and social networks with which they currently engage.

2.6 Interest in doing more sports

In 2011 ISM respondents were asked whether or not they were interested in doing more sport or exercise, if so which sport they would like to do more of and, if not, what were the reasons preventing them from engaging in more activity. Encouragingly over half (55.5%) of participants in Donegal are interested in increasing their sporting activity with non-participants more likely to express an interest in doing (more) sport than current participants (59.8% and 50.6% respectively).

Figure 2.11 displays the preferences for more sport in Donegal which are broadly similar to those reported at national level, although there is slightly more interest in hill walking and cycling in the county than nationally. When looked at by gender, women are more interested in doing more swimming and hill walking while men are more interested in more cycling. Compared to sports participants those who currently don't participate have a strong preference for hillwalking as the activity of choice.

Figure 2.11 Interest in doing more sport – by sport (Base: All interested in doing more sport)¹⁸



Time is the greatest barrier to participation, cited by nearly six out of every ten individuals wishing to increase their participation. For those with an illness or disability, health is a significant barrier. Neither financial issues nor lack of facilities feature particularly strongly as barriers to increasing participation. This echoes previous research findings (Fahey et al 2004, CSO 2007). Other barriers that feature relatively prominently include pregnancy and child minding responsibilities. Overall, the analysis suggests that the major factors limiting people’s ability to participate in (more) sport lie outside their immediate control but may be capable of being influenced by the provision of more convenient, accessible offerings which they can fit into their time-pressed lives.

Include graph on the barriers to participation?

3. BROADER PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

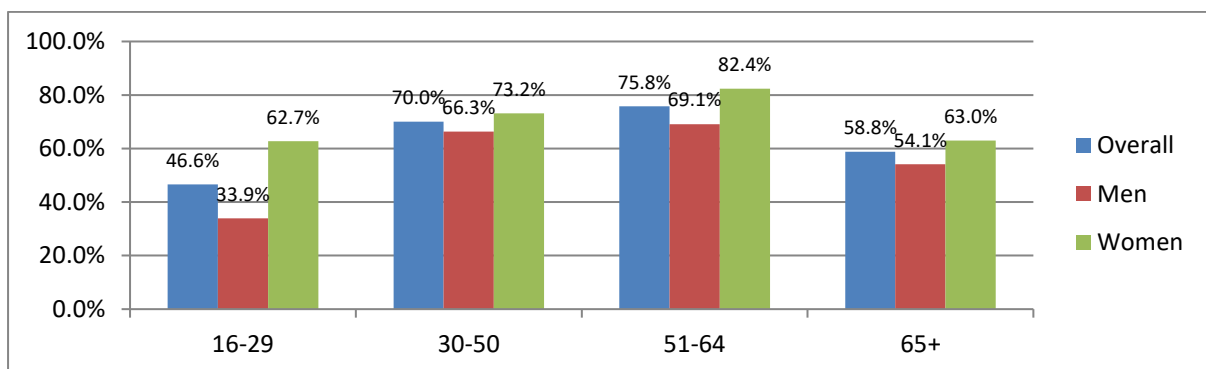
As well as looking at participation in sport and exercise, the ISM also looks at participation in broader physical activity including recreational walking, and walking and cycling for transport. This section looks at these issues and at the extent to which, through a combination of sport and these physical activities, respondents meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines or avoid being sedentary.

3.1 Recreational Walking

Recreational walking is an important source of physical activity for the majority of adults. It can provide health and other benefits to older age groups who do not play sport. As a low load-bearing activity that can be undertaken at various intensities, it overcomes one of the main disadvantages identified by older people to physical activity, namely that it is easier to injure yourself.¹⁹

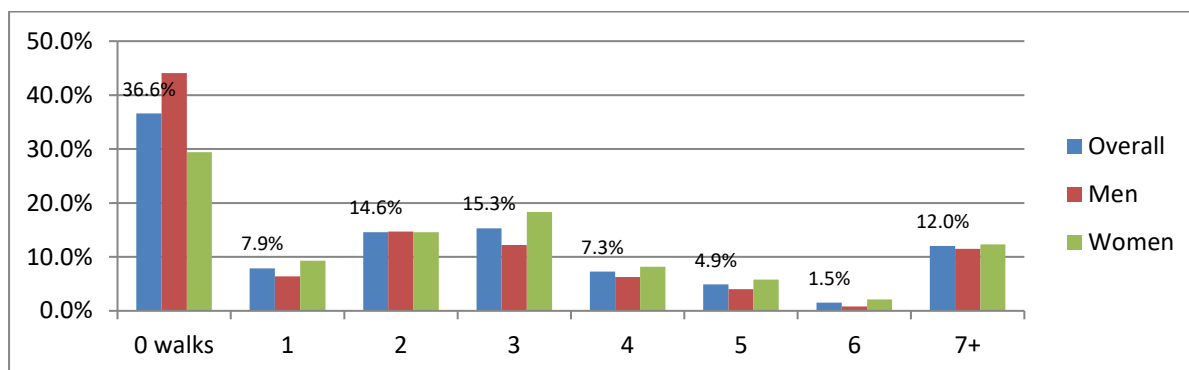
The ISM records information about walking habits of Irish adults including the number of walks in the previous 7 days, the duration of each walk and the usual walking pace. Recreational walking is the most popular activity with over 63% of Donegal adults taking part in at least one walk in the past 7 days. Walking is significantly more popular with women (70.6%) than men (55.9%) and, with the exception of younger men who are more likely to take part in more strenuous sporting activities, recreational walking is highly popular across all age groups (**Figure 3.1**). While sport has large differences among those with different educational attainments and ability, recreational walking is appealing to all educational groups and those with an illness/disability (59.2%).

Figure 3.1: Recreational Walking by age and gender



Almost half of Donegal adults take part in either no recreational walking (36.6%) or walk every day (12%) as can be seen from **Figure 3.2** overleaf.

Figure 3.2: Recreational walking by number of walks in the previous 7 days

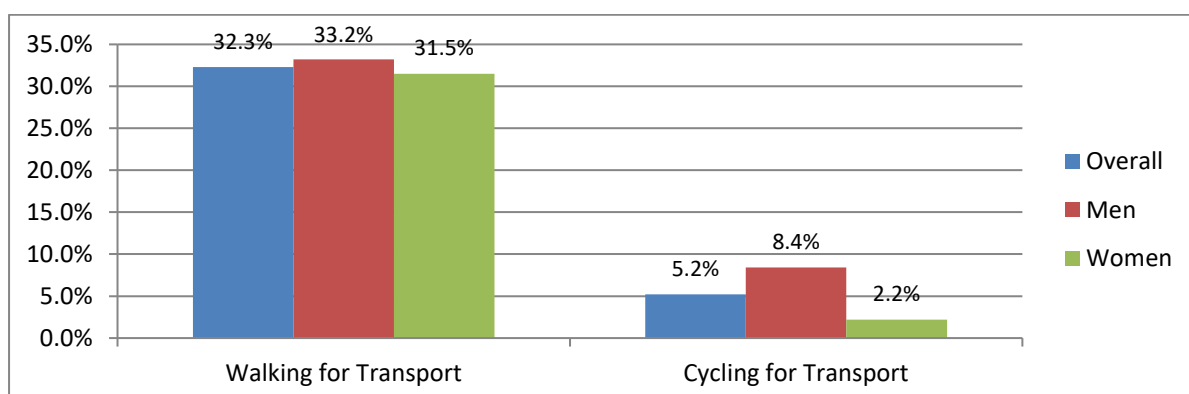


On average walkers walk about 4 times a week for a total walking time of just over 2.75 hours per week. Thus the average walking duration is just less than $\frac{3}{4}$ of an hour. While women are more likely to walk than men, men who walk tend to do so slightly more often than women. Men who are married are more likely to walk than single men. Only 4% of walkers report walking at a slow pace while at the other end of the scale 9% report walking at a fast pace. For the other 88%, the pace is split relatively evenly between a brisk and a steady pace. Thus, the vast majority of walkers engage in walking at a moderate intensity or greater conferring on themselves considerable health benefits in the process. Given the nature of the activity it is perhaps not surprising that recreational walking has a broader appeal than sport.

3.2 Walking and Cycling for Transport

The ISM asks respondents if they walked or cycled for transport in the previous 7 days. While walking for transport is equally appealing to men and women (albeit to a far lesser extent than elsewhere in the country as we have already seen) over twice as many men as women cycle for transport – see **Figure 3.3** below. Both activities are most popular among students.

Figure 3.3: Walking and cycling for transport by gender and overall



3.3 Overall Activity Levels

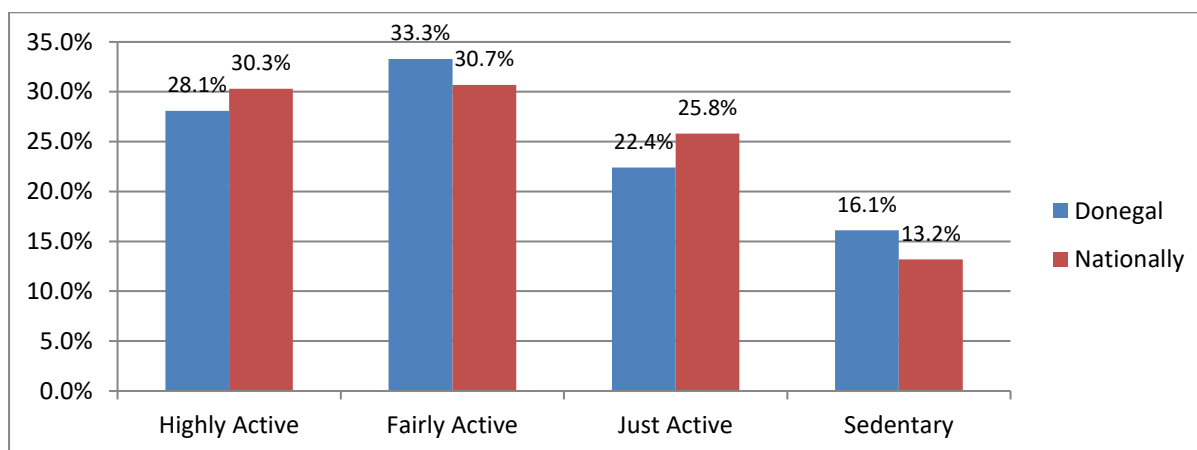
The ISM allows an approximate²⁰ analysis of adult activity levels against the National Physical Activity Guidelines based on a four-category classification system shown in **Figure 3.4**. The system is bookended by “sedentary” and “highly active” categories which are the main focus of this section.

Figure 3.4: Activity Spectrum Categories and Definitions

Highly active	Participate in 30 minutes moderate ¹ physical activity at least five times during the previous seven days (i.e. meet the National Physical Activity Guidelines)
Fairly Active	Participated in 30 minutes physical activity at least twice during the previous seven days
Just active	Participated in a sporting activity or recreational walking for 20 minutes at least once during the previous seven days, or regularly walks or cycles for transport (at least once a week)
Sedentary	Did not participate (20 minutes) in sporting activity or recreational walking during the previous seven days and does not cycle or walk regularly for transport.

As shown in **Figure 3.5** the proportion of those who are highly active is slightly lower than nationally while there is also a slightly higher rate of sedentarism in Donegal. This is primarily a function of the lower levels of walking and cycling for transport in the county due to the rural nature of the county.

Figure 3.5 Population by activity category - Donegal and National

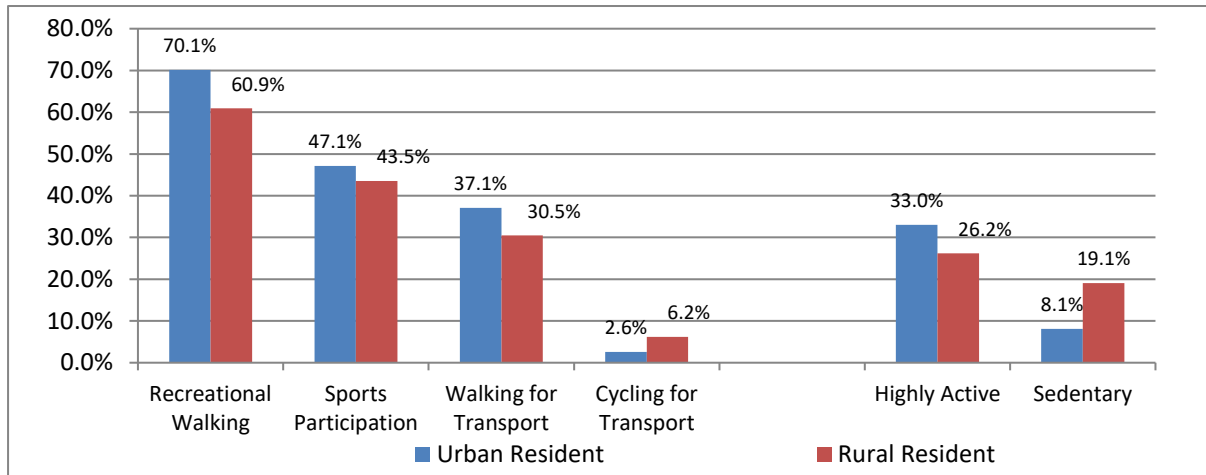


Living location is a particularly important influence on whether or not an individual is likely to be highly active or sedentary in Donegal as can be seen in **Figure 3.6** overleaf. With the exception of cycling for transport where activity levels are low in any event, activity levels in all other respects are lower

²⁰ This analysis can only be regarded as approximate as it does not take account of physical activity undertaken in the workplace or in the home.

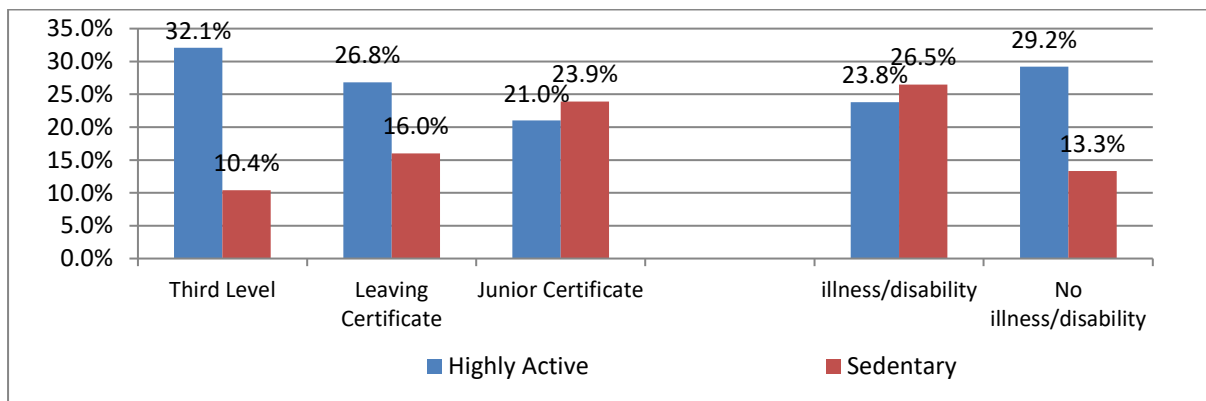
among rural than urban residents in Donegal, particularly so in the case of recreational walking. The effect of this on the proportions of highly active and sedentary is very clear from Figure 3.6.

Figure 3.6 Participation in activity and activity status by living location



Educational attainment and disability also have a strong impact on activity levels as can be seen in **Figure 3.7** below. Individuals with a third level education are more likely to be highly active and less likely to be sedentary.

Figure 3.7 Activity by Educational Attainment and Illness / disability



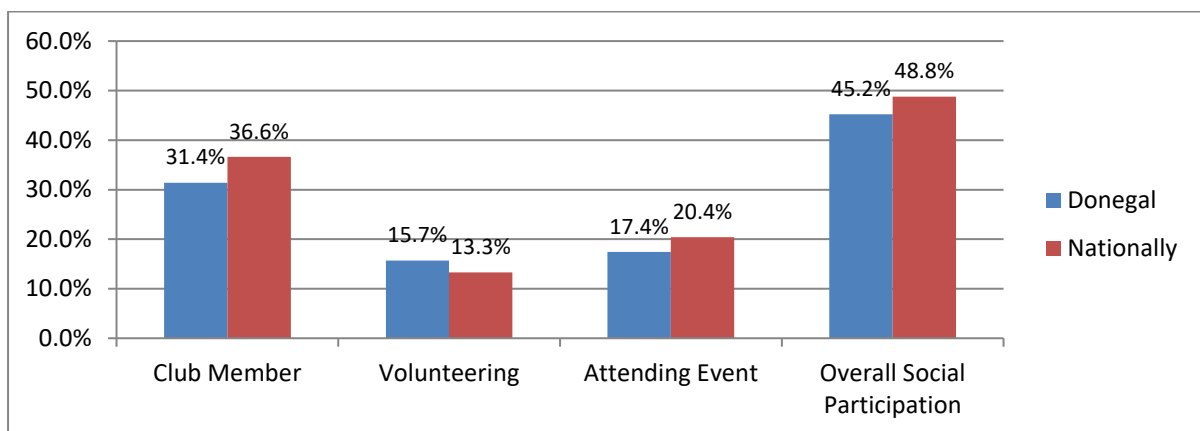
4. SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

4.1 Overall Social Participation

The ISM looks at social participation in sport through club membership, volunteering and attendance at sports events. In 2013 it also looked at perceptions around gender and sports administration locally and nationally as well as the reasons for participating in sport outside the club environment. These issues are examined in depth in the 2013 ISM Annual Report to which the reader is referred for further detail. That report also examines the demographics of social participation in some detail.

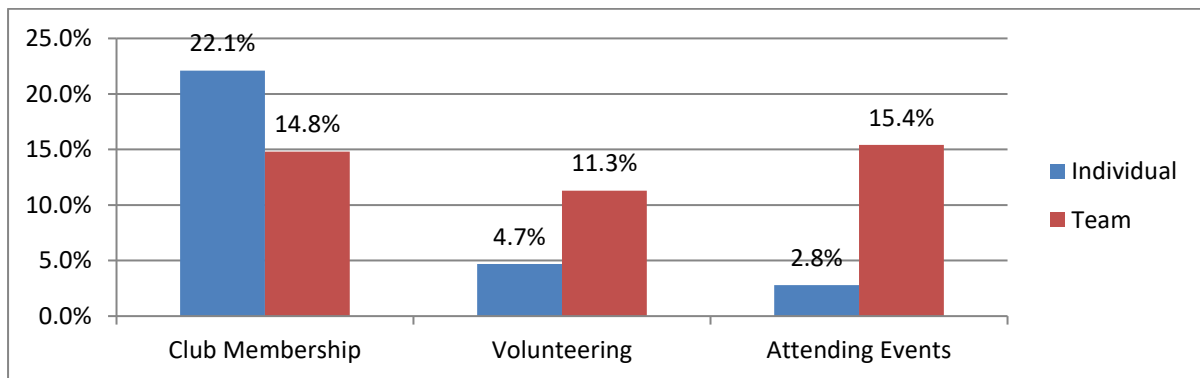
Before looking at each of the different forms of social participation in turn we compare the overall levels of social participation in Donegal with the national situation in **Figure 4.1** below. Social participation is generally lower in Donegal than nationally with club membership being statistically significant. This will be looked at in more detail below. Overall 45.2% of Donegal adults report their regular involvement in some form of social participation in sport underscoring its importance in generating social capital in the county.

Figure 4.1: Levels of Social Participation Donegal and National



While active participation is dominated by individual sporting activities the situation is more mixed when it comes to social participation as we can see from **Figure 4.2** overleaf. The overwhelming majority of volunteering and attendance at sporting events is associated with team sports, in all likelihood most of this being connected with children's participation. Over 5 times as many events attended are team based while there are nearly 3 times as many volunteers for team sports as for individual sports. On the other hand, club membership favours individual sports reflecting to some extent the dominance of those types of sports which are preferred by active participants. We will look at these more closely below. These patterns are in line with the national situation.

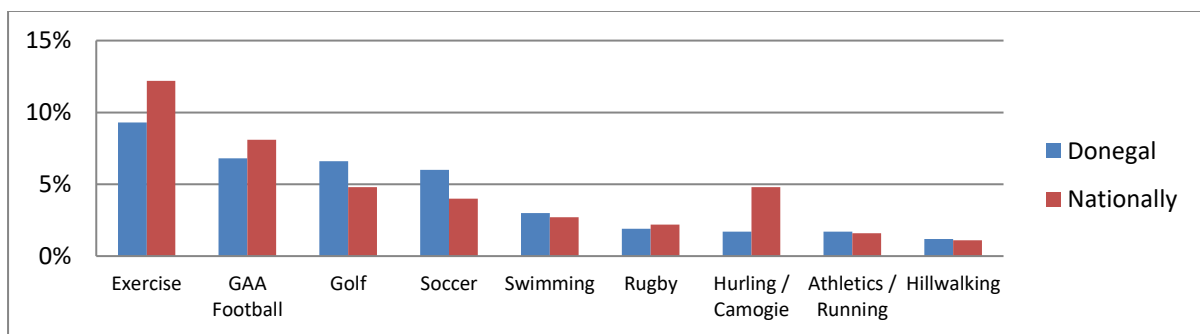
Figure 4.2: Social Participation in Sport by type of sport



4.2 Club Membership

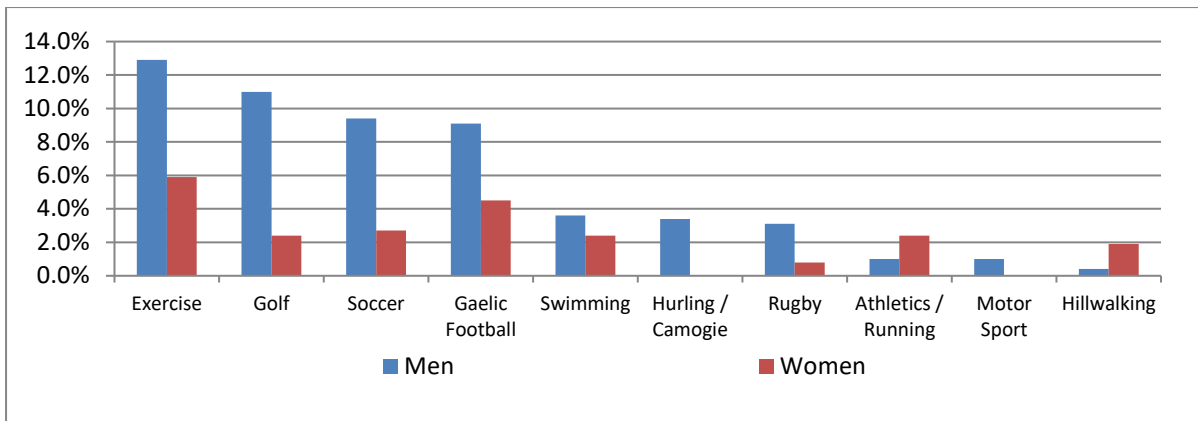
There is a good mix of team and individual sports among members seen in **Figure 4.3**. The strength of soccer in the county is again evident while golf membership levels are also relatively high. On the other hand hurling / camogie and gyms have lower levels of membership than nationally.

Figure 4.3: Club Membership by sport - Donegal and National



More than twice as many men as women are members of sports clubs in Donegal – 42.6% and 20.7% respectively. This gap is larger than nationally. One feature in **Figure 4.4** below helps explain this. While nationally, gym membership is relatively even among men and women in Donegal men are more than twice as likely to be gym members.

Figure 4.4: Club Membership by sport by gender



4.3 Volunteering

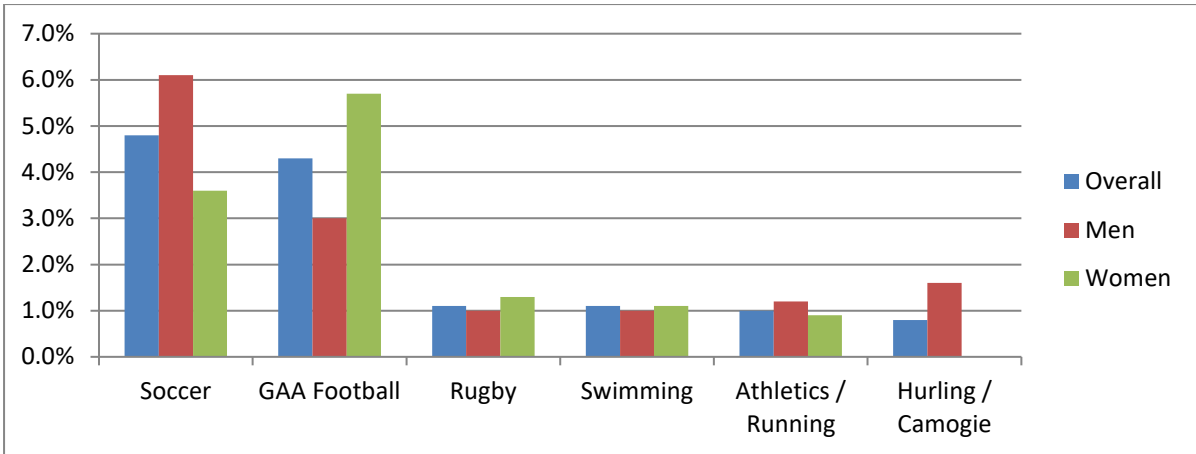
A strong volunteer base is an essential prerequisite for much of sport to take place, particularly that involving children. It is a key component of organised sport in Ireland and, according to official sources, sport features as the single activity involving the greatest amount of volunteering in the country. The 2006 Census of Population²¹ identified that 33% of all volunteers were involved in sport only slightly behind the much broader category of “social / charity” at 35%.

Volunteering rates in Donegal are slightly higher than nationally. Just less than one in 6 Donegal adults volunteered at least once in the previous 7 days during 2011 – 2013. Men were more likely to volunteer than women. Team sports dominate the volunteering landscape as seen in **Figure 4.5** below. Soccer once again features strongly. Only sports with an overall volunteering rate of 1% or more in Donegal are shown in the figure.

Figure 4.5: Volunteering by sport by gender

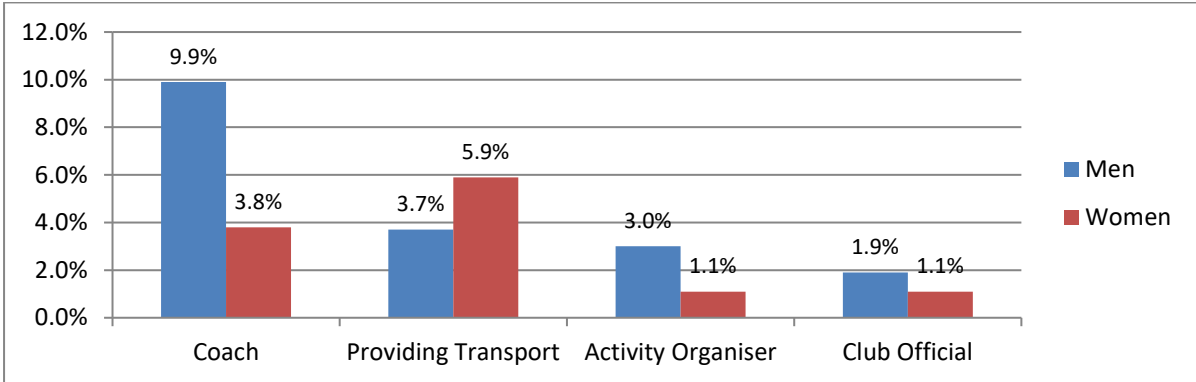
²¹

<http://www.cso.ie/px/pxeirestat/Statire/SelectVarVal/saveselections.asp>



Those who volunteer spend just less than 4 hours per week on average volunteering with men volunteering for longer than women (4.1 vs. 2.7 hours). The type of volunteering roles carried out also varies by gender as can be seen from **Figure 4.6** below. This may explain the difference in volunteering hours as coaching duties generally take more time to complete than providing transport. The nature of these roles tends to reinforce the highly gendered nature in the administration of Irish sport as perceived by ISM respondents during 2013. The reader is referred to the ISM Annual Report in this regard.

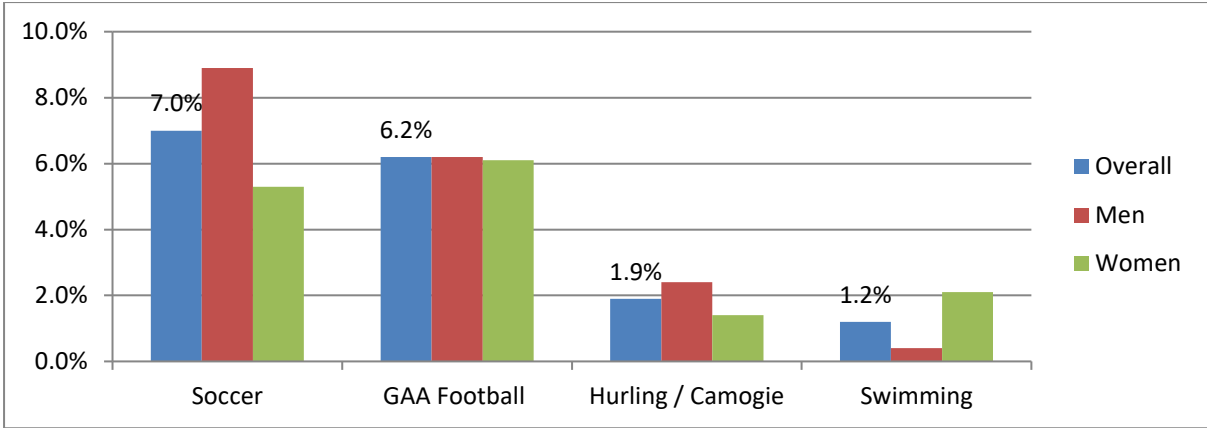
Figure 4.6: Volunteering Roles by gender



4.4 Attendance at Sporting Events

Just over one in six adults in Donegal regularly attend some form of sporting event whether involving adults or children. Even more than volunteering, attendance is dominated by team sports with over 5 times as many adults attending such events as those involving individual activities. This reflects the importance of children’s activities to attendance patterns. **Figure 4.7** below shows attendance by sport by gender during 2011 – 2013 in Donegal. The strength of soccer and GAA Football are apparent.

Figure 4.7: Attendance at sporting events by sport by gender



5. Policy Implications

This briefing report has provided descriptive information on participation in sport and physical activity in Donegal. Donegal has much in common with the rest of the country in terms of participation patterns but some notable differences have also emerged as a result of our analysis. Age, socio-economic status and the presence or absence of a disability all play important roles in whether or not individuals within the counties are likely to be active through sport and physical activity. Policy responses to these issues have been looked at in the context of previously commissioned Sport Ireland research such as the Sporting Lives, Fair Play?, Keeping Them in the Game and Irish Sports Monitor reports; all available at www.irishsportsCouncil.ie. The reader is referred to these reports for further exposition on these issues and some suggestions on how to deal with them.

This section therefore focuses on issues where Donegal might be slightly different to the rest of the country or those which have not necessarily been covered in depth in the previous research reports; women's participation in team sport, increasing participation and club membership.

a) The strength of soccer in the county

Soccer is the most popular sport in Donegal among adult men which is a very rare situation in a modern context where individual sporting activities tend to be favoured among men and women. However its popularity in Donegal goes much deeper than this, with women's active participation being relatively strong also. Furthermore soccer features very strongly as a source of club membership, volunteering and attendance. Given its importance to both active and social participation among adults in the county soccer should be promoted by policy makers as a source of considerable physical and mental health and well-being to the county's residents.

b) Increasing Participation

16.1% of Donegal residents are sedentary representing 19,600 residents who are at risk of heart disease, diabetes and other non-communicable diseases. A significant majority of those residents already have an illness/disability or are from a low socio-economic group (or both). Over half of respondents in Donegal were interested in taking part in more sport with hillwalking and cycling the most common sports referenced. However not having enough time is the most common barrier for participation. Recreational walking offers a free, easy and adaptable form of physical activity for those

who are sedentary. As a low load bearing activity walking is a perfect gateway activity for those who are currently inactive. As a county recognised for its hill walking opportunities it might be worthwhile for local policy makers to consider promoting this activity more broadly among current non-participants.

c) Club membership among women

Club membership in Donegal is much lower than nationally due primarily to low levels of membership among women in the county. Overall more than twice as many men as women are members of sports clubs with gym membership being the location of the greatest gender gap in this regard. There may be merit in policy makers engaging with gyms to try to develop offerings which seek to engage more women members given the possibilities this might have in terms of increasing women's participation in gym-based activities such as exercise, swimming, pilates, etc.

d) Sedentary levels among rural residents

Nearly one in five rural residents are sedentary compared to less than one in twelve of their urban counterparts. They are significantly less likely to walk for recreation, and they participate in sport and walk for transport less than urban residents. In the context where the greatest health benefits are to be gained from getting the inactive active, rural residents are clearly a priority group for policy attention.

Appendix

	2011 Census	2011+2013 ISM combined
Gender	16 years plus	16 years plus
Male	49.5%	49.0%
Female	50.5%	51.0%
Age		
16-19	6.7%	6.7%
20-24	7.6%	7.6%
25-34	18.0%	18.0%
35-44	19.3%	19.3%
45-54	16.5%	16.4%
55-64	14.3%	14.3%
65+	17.6%	17.6%
Working Status (Census 2011 includes those under 16)		
Employee/Self Employed	43.5%	43.1%
Unemployed	14.3%	13.7%
Retired	15.5%	14.3%
Homemaker	10.6%	11.2%
Student	10.7%	12%
Unemployed-illness/disabled	5.4%	5.7%