

Gender balance in sport vital to improving public health

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In Australia women are still about 30 per cent less likely than men to meet physical activity guidelines. Credit: University of Queensland

Increasing women's participation in sport is important for improving physical health globally, but also offers significant benefits for mental, social, political and economic health.

That observation has been made by three University of Queensland School of Human Movement and Nutrition Sciences researchers, led by Professor Wendy Brown.

"Of the 146 countries for which we have data, 137 have a male population which is more active than the female population," Professor Brown said.

"What is not considered though is that men are much more likely to experience activity in a leisure setting, whereas [women](#) will experience activity through occupational or family chores.

"Gender differences are not confined solely to low and [middle income countries](#).

"Some of the highest levels of physical inactivity for women occur in affluent Middle Eastern countries."

Professor Brown's commentary for leading medical journal *The Lancet* was made with UQ colleagues Dr Tracy Kolbe-Alexander and Gregore Mielke, a visiting PhD Scholar from Brazil.

They noted that the 2012 London Olympic Games was the first Olympics to have women competing for every nation represented.

The percentage of total athletes who were female in London was 44.2 per cent, a marked improvement on the 2.2 per cent of Olympians who were female prior to 1920.

Australia woke to news on Wednesday that its 2016 Olympic squad would be more than 50 per cent female for the first time, following a late call-up for the women's rowing eight crew.

"However, even in high-income countries where there are fewer cultural barriers to female participation, there are still surprisingly high differences," Professor Brown said.

"In Australia women are still about 30 per cent less likely than men to meet physical activity guidelines."

Earlier this year the Australian Government launched the 'Girls make your move' campaign, to encourage greater participation of girls and women in sport.

The Lancet has issued four major research publications on physical inactivity to coincide with the Rio de Janeiro Olympics – and two of the papers feature UQ researchers.

Professor Brown also contributed to a study on the amount of physical exercise needed to offset the effects of prolonged sitting.

Dr Kolbe-Alexander contributed to research on the global economic cost of non-communicable diseases from [physical inactivity](#).

More information: Gender equality in sport for improved public health. DOI: [dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)30881-9](https://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)30881-9)

Provided by University of Queensland

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