

Young and active? New Zealand study finds big differences in physical activity among 18 to 24-year-olds

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Fewer than 40% of young Kiwi adults (18- to 24-year-olds) are meeting the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations for physical activity, a new study has found.

The [WHO guidelines](#) recommend [adults](#) do at least 2.5 hours a week of moderate intensity [aerobic activity](#) as well as muscle-strengthening activity on at least two days each week.

"Our research suggests just 37% of [young adults](#) are meeting both these recommendations," says Justin Richards, study co-author and associate professor in physical activity and well-being at Te Herenga Waka—Victoria University of Wellington.

The study found significant differences in physical activity based on gender, with young men more likely to meet the WHO's recommendations than [young women](#).

It also found women's participation in physical activity was associated with ethnicity, and their employment and socio-[economic status](#).

"Women living in the most deprived areas were 32% less likely to meet the recommendations compared with women in the least deprived areas. In contrast, there were no differences among men based on socio-economic status," Associate Professor Richards says.

Young women who weren't in full-time work and those from Asian and Pacific communities were also less likely to meet the recommendations.

Co-author Dr. Oliver Wilson, a lecturer in physical activity and well-being at Victoria University of Wellington, says the findings indicate many young adults are not doing enough physical activity to benefit their health.

"Taking part in physical activity has important long-term health and well-being implications, including reducing the risk of cardiovascular disease and poor mental health. Physical activity generally declines over a person's lifetime—and young adults tend to over-report how much activity they do—so our findings raise public health concerns," Dr. Wilson says.

"The results also suggest a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to promoting physical activity among young adults would be short-sighted, given the differences identified between different groups. Effective promotion of [physical activity](#) has to be tailored to the needs of these groups," he says.

The study was based on data from Sport New Zealand surveys carried out between January 2017 and December 2019. Responses from 4,190 adults aged 18 to 24 were used to assess the proportion of young people meeting the WHO's recommendations for both aerobic and muscle strengthening activity.

Researchers from the Auckland University of Technology, University of Auckland, and the University of Otago also contributed to the study, published in *BMC Public Health*.

More information: Oliver W. A. Wilson et al, Differences in physical activity participation among young adults in Aotearoa New Zealand, *BMC Public Health* (2023). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-023-15063-6](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-023-15063-6)

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