

Women and Leadership

A Discussion Paper – Henny Oldenhove

Introduction

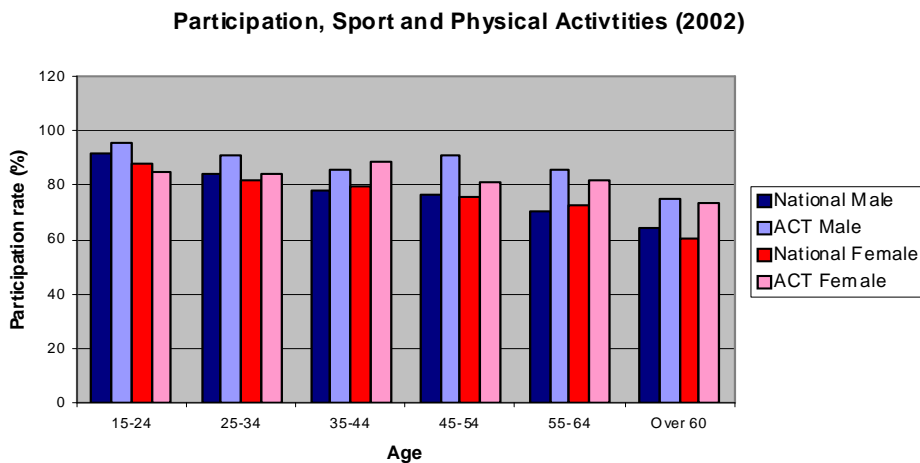
Women have been and are still under-represented in most facets of sport, particularly at the governance, administration, coaching and officials level.

Whilst participation levels of women and girls have been gradually increasing and are getting closer to the level of men and boys, there is still a significant gap in their representation in the leadership roles in sport.

Background

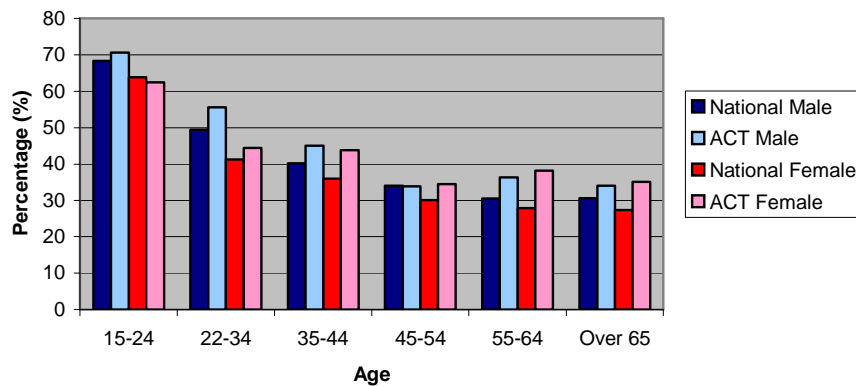
Available data provides a comparison of male/female participation and involvement and indicates where significant differences still remain.

1. Participation Data



The latest Exercise, Recreation and Sport Survey (ERASS) estimate the total participation rate of women to be 77% while the participation rate of men is 79%. Whilst participation rates for both males and females in the ACT are above the national average, the participation rates for women are slightly less than that of men except in the 35-44 year age group.

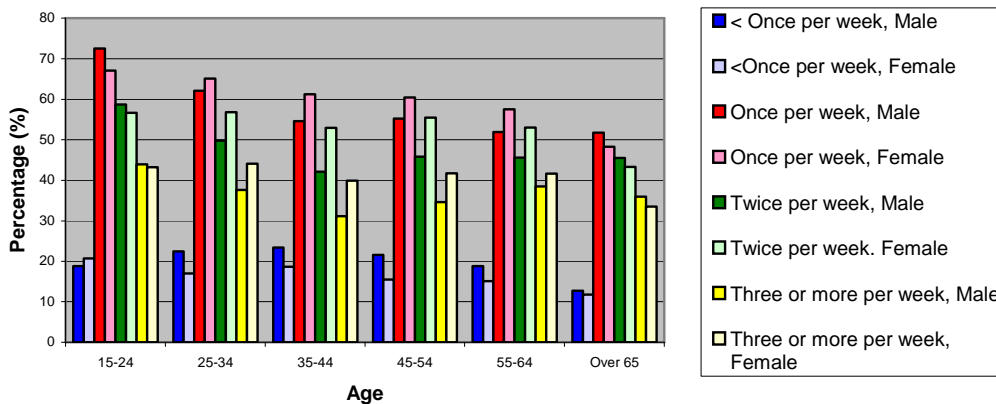
Participation, Organised Sport and Physical Activities (2002)



While participation rates in non-organised activities are similar for men and women, more men (44%) than women (38%) undertake organised activity. Furthermore, only 22% of women undertake activities organised by a club or association, compared to 33% of men. Women appear to prefer different types of activities to men, with a greater proportion of women choosing recreational activities such as walking and aerobics.

In the ACT, participation rates for women in organised sport and physical activity are significantly lower than that of men in the 15-24 and 24-35 year age groups but are higher than that of men at the age of 44 and over.

Frequency of Participation (Australia 2002)



This data indicates that women are active at a greater frequency than men from age 25. Increased frequency is likely to confer greater health benefits although the evidence suggests that women are less 'vigorous' in their participation compared to men.

Data for children's participation in organised sport collected by the ABS in 2000 for the age group 5-14 years showed:

- Male participation 66.1%
- Female participation 52.3%

A summary of all this data indicates that:

- Participation levels of men and women in physical activity generally are not significantly different, but differ in the nature of participation.
- There is a significant difference in participation of men and women in organised club and organisation activities.
- A significant difference in participation levels exist in children aged 5-14 years.

2. Involvement Data

ACT data from 2003 grants applications for involvement in sport and recreation in leadership and coaching positions shows that women are significantly under-represented in management, administration and coaching.

Board Representation (ACT)

	Male %	Female %
Peak Sport Associations	72	28
Peak Recreation	59	41
Umbrella Organisations	59	41

Executive Directors (paid, ACT)

	Male %	Female %
Full time Executives	66	34

Coaching Accreditation (ACT)

	Male %	Female%
Level 1	66	34
Level 2	77	33
Level 3	90	10
ACTAS Coaches	94	6

Intervention Impact

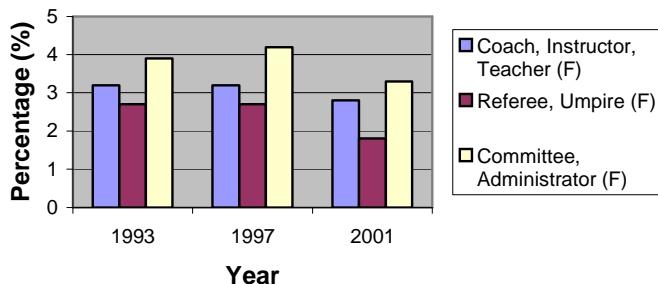
Over the past 10-15 years a number of special measure programs and initiatives have been conducted for women aimed at increasing the number of women in leadership and coaching roles.

These programs include:

- women's leadership training programs and workshops.
- mentoring programs
- coaching scholarships
- women's coaching workshops

A time series data collection conducted by the ABS in 2001, "*Involvement in Organised Sport and Physical Activity*" indicates that there has been little progress in increasing the involvement of women as coaches, referees and administrators.

**Non-Playing Involvement of Women:
National data 1993,1997,2001**



Given the investment to special initiative programs for women and the lack of progress to date, it maybe that a different approach is required.

An audit of national sporting organisations, academies and institutes conducted by the Australian Sports Commission in the lead up to the *Sport Needs More Women Forum* held in May 2003 indicated that the number of women in senior management and coaching positions had not changes since 5 years ago.

Issues

Whilst special measure programs are a legitimate means of empowering and providing skills to women it does not address the systemic impediments that women continue to face. These special measure programs also result in heightened expectations by women that they will have increased access to leadership positions as a result of participating in the programs.

These programs also have an underlying assumption that somehow women are deficit in their skills and attributes and they require 'training' before they can assume leadership positions. This assumption needs to be reconsidered as it reinforces a 'victim' mentality where the onus is on women to solve the issues facing women. It also assumes that men have the requisite skills that women do not.

The crux of the issue for women's representation is that the sport system itself needs to be influenced to increase the participation of women. To do this, the traditional male structures of sport need to be the focus of change for women. A new paradigm of attacking the issues facing women is required.

Generally change can be brought about in two ways, policy/legislation or influence. Both methods have their pros and cons and need to be carefully considered.

In respect to policy, one example is that of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) that has mandated that International Federations affiliated to the IOC must have at least 10% of Board members as women. Some State Government's have now mandated that Government Boards must be 50% male/female. One National Sporting Organisation as a result of an amalgamation, have constituted that of the 8 Board members at least 3 must be of one gender and that the position of President and Vice President must be of separate genders. Gradually these constitutions are permeating to state level organisations and are being adopted.

These examples represent clear systemic responses to the issue. It should also be noted that to have any cultural effect on boards and committees there is a level above tokenism that needs to be achieved. One study indicates that:

- 10% of representation is tokenism
- 20% of representation means a voice is present
- 30% of representation means a voice or position will be heard, and
- 40% of representation brings about real influence and involvement.

If policy or legislation is not the chosen method for behavioural change then the change is likely to be a lot slower. Change will require the good will of the organisation and that decision currently rests with predominately male dominated organisations and their members.

One defence for the slowness of change is that there are not sufficient women to undertake the board, committee and coaching positions even when they are on offer. This argument often places the responsibility back on women rather than the system and can often generate another batch of 'leadership programs for women' thus starting the vicious 'victim' cycle again. Organisations should be actively encouraged to succession plan for all its members, male and female, and embark on programs and initiatives that would promote succession planning. Organisations considering change should also acknowledge that having one woman sit on a predominately male board is quite intimidating as would most men feel somewhat out of place on an all female board.

Increasing women's leadership role in sport must also acknowledge and deal with the impediments that many women face in being able to undertake leadership roles when they are on offer. These factors are often not as significant factors for men and include:

- Recognising that for women, leadership and coaching positions often represent the "third job" as they juggle work and are still generally responsible for childcare.
- Being recognised by the sport system and gatekeepers that women make good leaders and coaches. Particularly for women coaches there are outdated stereotype images of coaching that influence many male and female athletes' perceptions of what makes a 'good' coach.
- Overcoming false perceptions of women coaches and administrators who choose a coaching or administration career over traditional family lifestyles. High levels of homophobia still exist in many sporting organisations.

The Way Forward

There are a number of possible options that the sport and recreation sector can embrace to improve the role and involvement of women in sport leadership. Some of the options for consideration could include:

1. Government departments consider making it a requirement that sporting organisations that receive government funding must have 10 or 20% of board members as women by 2005 and that this percentage gradually increase over the next 10 years.
2. Sporting organisations that meet a self-imposed system of increasing the representation of women on boards receive incentive or bonus funding from government departments.
3. Constitutions of sporting organisations be amended to enshrine the rights and representations of their members, male and female, to ensure the ongoing systemic change to the expectation and culture of organisations.
4. Provide succession training for potential or new board members on the provision that organisations must nominate both men and women in order to participate.
5. Organisations to structure and conduct meetings to be more “women friendly” in terms of when they are held and how long they run.
6. Provide assistant coaching positions to women for all the male institute/academy programs coached by men so that more women will become eligible for paid positions in the future.
7. Undertake a media campaign that aims to change the stereotype of women coaches as soft or more “touchy feely” particularly aimed at athletes that still believe men coaches to be tougher, stronger and more results orientated.
8. Sporting organisations to target or talent ID potential women coaches/officials and negotiate a development program that is realistic and achievable.

Conclusion

Increasing the participation of women in all facets of sport and recreation benefits the organisation, the community and the individual. This responsibility rests with the industry as a whole and is not just the responsibility of women or women’s units. Systemic change and action is required.

Previous initiatives have derived little change and a new way of addressing the issue is now required.