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# ENGAGING YOUTH IN SPORTS FOR HEALTH AND DEVELOPMENT: A GENDER FOCUS IS NEEDED IN UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA

## IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN SPORTS

Youth engagement in sport supports positive youth development, building self-esteem, collaboration, and kinship,<sup>1</sup> as well as promotion of gender equity ideologies and behaviours for boys<sup>2</sup> and girls.<sup>3</sup> Youth engagement in sport also supports short and long-term health benefits, including reduction in non-communicable diseases (NCDs)<sup>4</sup> and mental health concerns.<sup>5</sup> For these reasons, youth sport and physical activity should be prioritized for national health and development.<sup>6</sup>



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## INDIA'S INVESTMENT IN YOUTH SPORTS

Recognizing these benefits, the National Youth Policy for India,<sup>7</sup> (est. 2014) emphasized the value of sport for health and development. Since then, investments by national and state governments have been made to improve sports infrastructure, including the building and maintenance of sports facilities and coaching in both rural and urban areas through programs such as the Khelo India Scheme<sup>8</sup> and the National Playing Fields Association of India.<sup>9</sup> India's Right to Education Act<sup>10</sup> committed support for school-based playgrounds and recreational facilities. These efforts carry through to the Directorate of Youth Welfare and Sport<sup>11</sup> in Uttar Pradesh. The reach and effectiveness of these sports programs as vehicles of change need to be robustly examined.

## THE UDAYA STUDY: UTTAR PRADESH

To provide further insight into this issue, we analyzed data from the *Understanding the Lives of Adolescents and Young Adults* (UDAYA) study on adolescent health and development conducted in 2015-2016. We examined differences in sport engagement by sex, urban/rural residence, and school enrollment across a representative sample (n=10,161) of youth from Uttar Pradesh. We focused on the following subpopulations: males 10-14 (n=1072) and 15-19 (n=2064), unmarried females 10-14 (n=889) and 15-19 (n=4338), married females 15-19 (n=1798).

## RESEARCH QUESTION AND ANALYSIS

Using these data, we asked:

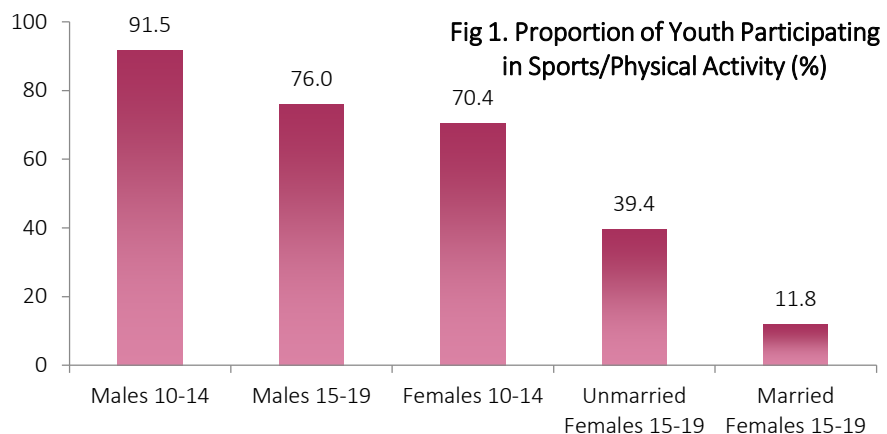
- 1) What percent of youth participate in a sport or games, or other physical activities, by subpopulation of focus?
- 2) Whether participation in sport or physical activity differed on the following characteristics, within each subpopulation of focus?
  - a) rural/urban residence
  - b) in/out of school

Chi-square tests were used to test significant differences in gender, age, rural/urban residence, and in/out of school.

## FINDINGS: PARTICIPATION IN SPORT/PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Our analysis found that the majority of boys and younger girls (aged 10-14) in UP reported engaging in sports or physical activity (see Fig 1).

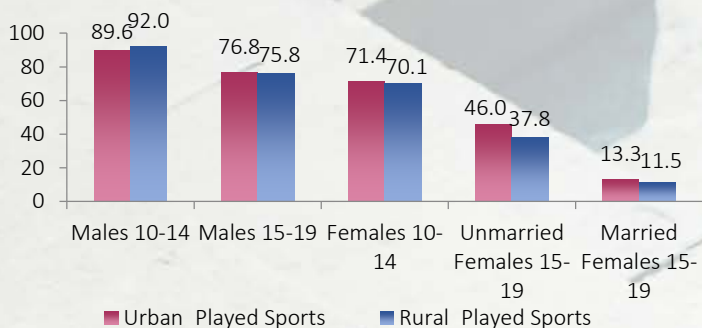
- Girls were less likely than boys to engage in sports/physical activity (p<0.05)
- Older adolescents were less likely than younger adolescents to engage in sports/physical activity (p<0.05)
- Married girls were least likely to be physically active (11.8%).



## WHO ARE WE REACHING AND WHO ARE WE LEAVING BEHIND? FINDINGS FROM UTTAR PRADESH, INDIA

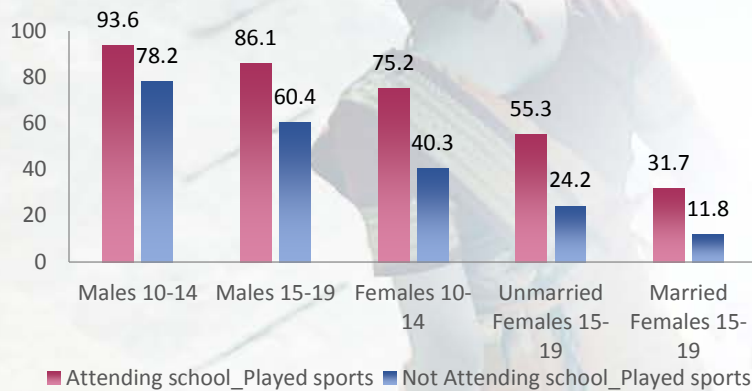
**Urban/Rural Differences:** We saw no dramatic differences in sport/physical activity participation by urban/rural residence for our population subgroups, but sport/physical activity participation was significantly higher for urban relative to rural unmarried females ( $p < 0.01$ ) (see Fig 2).

**Fig. 2 Proportion of Youth participating in Sports/Physical Activity by Geographical Location (%)**



**School Enrollment Differences:** Across all subgroups, those in school were significantly more likely than those out of school to report engagement in sport or physical activity ( $p < 0.05$ ), with these differences being even greater for female relative to male participants in this study (see Fig 3).

**Fig 3. Proportion of Youth participating in Sports/Physical Activity by School Attendance (%)**



## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Sport and physical activity among youth is less than anticipated given the government initiatives in place, particularly for females, and this engagement declines with age and marriage.
- Older adolescent girls, and especially married adolescent girls, are least likely to be reached and engaged in sport or physical activity efforts. Studies suggest that this may be due to deeply entrenched norms against girls' sport engagement and greater domestic responsibilities constraining their availability for sport.<sup>12</sup>
- Youth groups need to leverage existing adolescent health schemes and programs such as the RKSK in other ministries to expand reach through sport and use that reach to support health, particularly for girls and for rural and out of school youth.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you would like more information about this study, or to collaborate with us on its success, please contact Principal Investigator of this research at UC San Diego, or visit

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