

Sports Insight

Young Asian Pakistani Females (16-24)



Introduction

Our latest consumer research, conducted in partnership with the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester looks specifically at the young Asian Pakistani female market (16-25). The research was carried out using focus group techniques and one-to-one interviews and has been supplemented with information drawn from other research carried out by Sporting Equals and desktop research. It provides valuable insight which sport providers can draw upon to make sport more inclusive for this segment and help increase participation.

Background^{1,2}

The Pakistani community is the second largest of the three South Asian communities in Britain, with a populations estimate of around 1.17million. Around 90 per cent of Pakistanis in Britain identify themselves as Muslim³. Whilst a large proportion of the community is concentrated in London, it is more evenly spread across the country than most other Muslim populations, with major settlements in the Midlands, Yorkshire and the North West.

Pakistanis encompass a number of distinct regional and linguistic groups including Pathans, Punjabis, Mirpuris, Sindhis and Balochis. There are no accurate figures available but it is estimated that 60 per cent of the Pakistani population is from the Mirpur District of Kashmir and settled mainly in Birmingham, Bradford, Oldham and surrounding towns. In London the community is more mixed.

The Pakistani population, which makes up the majority of the UK's Muslim population, is still relatively disadvantaged in education and employment. However, this is gradually changing, with considerable regional variations in employment and education outcomes for Pakistanis. In addition to a growing middle class, new migration has seen an influx of Pakistani migrants who are well educated, in professional jobs and economically solvent.

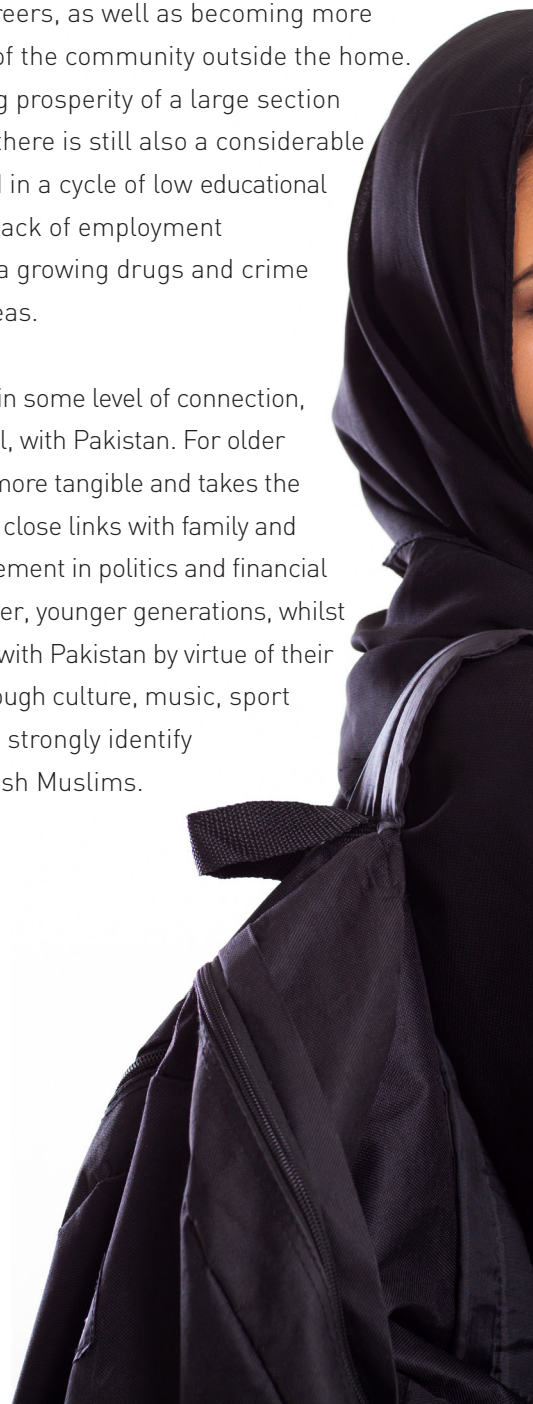
Whilst family and cultural pressures in the personal and social sphere still maintain an important and often restricting influence, growing numbers of Pakistani women are also going into higher education and high profile careers, as well as becoming more involved in the life of the community outside the home. Alongside the rising prosperity of a large section of the community, there is still also a considerable underclass trapped in a cycle of low educational underachievement, lack of employment opportunities, and a growing drugs and crime culture in some areas.

All generations retain some level of connection, real or psychological, with Pakistan. For older generations this is more tangible and takes the form of maintaining close links with family and relatives, and involvement in politics and financial investments. However, younger generations, whilst retaining an affinity with Pakistan by virtue of their family links and through culture, music, sport and entertainment, strongly identify themselves as British Muslims.

1. The Pakistani Muslim Community in England Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities, Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2009

2. Focus Group Research carried out during the course of 2013/14

3. 2011 Census, Office for National Statistics



In common with other established South Asian populations in England, many are navigating their way through multiple identity paradigms influenced by their culture and values.

At the time of the 2011 UK Census, the distribution of people describing their ethnicity as Pakistani was as follows:⁴

Distribution of Pakistani population and Pakistani Muslim population by region (Source: 2011 Census)				
Region	% of Pakistani Population who are Muslim	Pakistani Muslims	% of total Pakistani population in England	Pakistani Muslims as % of total regional Muslim population
West Midlands	94	213,613	20.5	71.2
London	92	205,893	20.1	20.9
Yorkshire & Humber	93	210,079	20.3	69.9
North West	92	174,281	17	54.2
South East	91	90,313	8.9	47.6
East of England	93	61,631	6	45.3
East Midlands	94	46,003	4.4	35.2
South West	84	9,762	1	24.6
North East	94	18,641	1.8	51.3

Local authorities with largest Pakistani populations (Source: 2011 Census)				
Local Authority Area	Pakistani Population	Pakistani Muslim Population	% Pakistani Population Muslim	Pakistani Muslims as a % of total local authority Muslim population
Birmingham	144,627	134,503	93	72
Bradford	106,614	100,217	94	74
Manchester	42,904	40,329	94	69
Kirklees	41,802	39,711	95	71
Oldham	35,500	33,370	94	
Redbridge (London)	31,051	28,566	92	45
Newham (London)	30,307	28,185	93	42
Luton	29,353	27,591	94	72
Nottingham	26,771	24,629	92	68
Waltham Forest (London)	26,347	24,239	92	47
Slough	24,869	23,128	93	81
Rochdale	22,265	20,706	93	69
Sheffield	21,990	20,010	91	52
Pendle	15,320	14,094	92	68
Derby	14,620	13,450	92	58

Birmingham, Bradford and Manchester are the Local Authorities with the largest Pakistani communities, however it must be noted that all cities are very different in the context of facility provision, outdoor spaces and qualified coaches which also have an impact on access to opportunities in local areas.

4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Pakistanis [accessed 24.08.15]

Pakistani Women

Pakistani women in the UK have a wide number of experiences that are informed by culture, religion, education, class, age and location. It is clearly evident that things are changing for young women in relation to education and employment. In research carried out by CLG⁵ Pakistani young women reported that unlike women of their mother's generation who were largely restricted to the home, most young women have the expectation of working and developing their professional careers. They highlighted the fact that Pakistani women are becoming more visible in all walks of life, corporate, media, political and community based, and that leadership is being demonstrated through a growing number of women who are taking a leading role in politics and other arenas as councillors, mayors, journalists, and by women in high profile jobs in the public sector.

The CLG report suggested that young Pakistani women are in the process of acquiring power and status; through local and national politics, extensive networking, businesses and skilled professions.

However, women stressed that they still have to reconcile these aspirations and goals within the framework of a patriarchal culture – 'to be someone in a man's world'. Respondents from outside London suggested that the experiences of women in the smaller more close-knit communities in some northern towns differ compared to those in the larger urban areas. Women in smaller towns are believed to have fewer opportunities to enable them to play active roles in society resulting in higher health inequalities. Alongside this many women still have to juggle work and home life responsibilities and have conflicting priorities on time.⁶

These findings provide a useful context in light of identifying with young Pakistani women as many of these women facing educational, employment and economic challenges alongside cultural barriers which are interrelated and impact on personal life choices.

5. The Pakistani Muslim Community in England Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities, Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2009

6. The Pakistani Muslim Community in England Understanding Muslim Ethnic Communities, Department for Communities and Local Government, March 2009



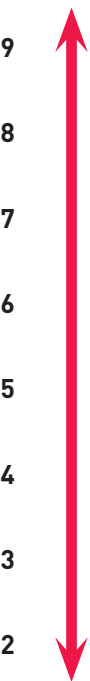
Lifestyle Choices

Eight young Asian Pakistani women were identified for this research in Bradford who were ‘interested but inactive’. Alongside this, two further one to one interviews were conducted over the telephone. All of these women identified themselves as Pakistani Muslim.

These young women had all declared a prior interest in sport or physical activity and in being fit and healthy, however for most of them sport was low priority and the majority were inactive. When asked how important, on a scale of 1-10, being fit and healthy was to each of them, the participants rated this issue highly – generally between 7-8 on the scale provided, and recognised the link with being active, sport and health.

However, finding the time, the right sort of motivation and the support they felt they required for pursuing their interest in sport and physical activity meant there were limited opportunities only for these women to pursue their interest in these areas.

10 – High Priority



Health (average score - all)

Sport (average score - all)

1 – Low Priority



Barriers

Prioritising sport – finding the time

As for many young people, finding the time to do sport was a considerable problem for these busy young women, who often had work, college and/or family commitments. Prioritising their own interest in physical activity was often difficult.

Safiya: *'Sport doesn't really fit into my priorities and say I'd like to keep fit but I don't think it's really important to me.'*

Khatibha: *'I work in schools, I'm a supervisor. I'd say I don't have the time for sport.'*

Hannah: *'I think sport is wonderful but I don't do it because there's not much to do.'*

Faizah: *'I'm a student and sport like tennis is good and I try running but I'm busy with exams, and I'm trying to make time.'*

Farah: *'Yeah, now like I don't get time to do sports.'*

Sana: *'My mom is always pushing me and telling me to keep fit and sometimes it can be awkward that not many girls can do it.'*

Kauthar: *'I would do more sport but find it hard to find places which are female only.'*

And finding the facilities and the motivation...

Allied to the time problem were questions of maintaining personal motivation. These were often closely tied up with the perceived lack of appropriate local facilities and, as discussed later, a general lack of appropriate coaching or trainer support for young women from their faith background.

Safiya: *'We think it [sport] is important but I'm lacking a little a bit of motivation to get involved.'*

Farah: *'I've always wanted to be fit and healthy and I want to do more sport- but I don't actually do it.'*

Hannah: *'Sport was compulsory at school, but I was doing classes last year I went to yoga and that was because my wedding was coming up, that's how I got motivated. But it's like I had a lot of problems, like with a sport centre. I wanted to learn how to swim and I was on the waiting list and they just never got back to me. And I told them how important it was.'*

Khatibha: *'I don't have the time and I don't have the facilities round here really.'*

Faizah: *'Because of where we live, there's not many facilities.'*





Early Experiences

A good start in school sport?

Most of these young women agreed that it had been 'quite easy' to get involved in sport at school. None, for example, raised problems around the sort of kit required for involvement in school sport, sometimes an issue for Muslim girls - 'Our school were alright with that. We were allowed to wear tracksuits or trousers.' Being educated in a single-sex school could allay potential parental anxieties around school sport, but a number of our participants did raise problems around their experience of single-sex schooling and sport, where lack of facilities, suitably trained staff and a focus on other priorities were all raised as likely barriers:

Safiya: 'Yeah, my parents were supportive because it was all girls anyway, so there was nothing for them to worry about.'

Farah: 'Being in an all-girls was difficult because there wasn't any resources or facilities. Even the teachers weren't qualified for that stuff as well.'

Khatibha: 'I think in a single sex school like all-girls school..... I think there's more [non-sport] priorities over a mixed school. And a mixed school has more teachers and they had big sports halls and facilities. And then you could get more involved and be a part of the teams.'

At mixed-sex and some single-sex schools, it was clear that these Asian girls were encouraged to be

physically active. But the context for some sports activities was not always an attractive or enjoyable one:

Safiya: 'You could do anything there [they were] quite actually supportive and they would push you. When we did summer athletics they pushed us for that and you basically have to come up with a good excuse to get out of sports activity. The school I went they really pushed sport. Even in Ramadhan, when we were fasting, we could slow down the pace but we would still have to participate. That's how it was.'

Faizah: 'Because it gets you active and it's fun.'

Interviewer: 'What things did you like, or the things didn't you like?'

Hannah: 'I think it would have to be rounders - because we were always with our friends, and netball.'

Farah: 'I didn't like to high jump, and I felt it was embarrassing because sometimes you couldn't do it and everyone was watching.'

Khatibha: 'It wasn't that, I think it was on sports day and they used to be so many people there watching you.'

Kauthar: 'Most of the sport we did was outdoors and often in freezing conditions, I often caught a cold and didn't enjoy these activities.'



It was also clear that not all sports were made equally available to boys and girls at mixed-sex schools. This clearly fed into a more general view that boys and young men had rather more freedom and were encouraged to develop a more 'natural' aptitude and a passion, especially for specific competitive team sports. These sorts of early gendered experiences in school, in which there was more opportunities and more support provided for male team sport, were also seen to offer a better chance for continuity in physical activity later:

Hannah: *'I don't think I would have wanted to play rugby [at school] but I didn't have the choice.'*

Faizah: *'Yeah, like girls did gymnastics and boys did like football.'*

Interviewer: *'Didn't you girls get the chance to play like football or cricket?'*

Katibah: *'Yeah we did, but they weren't that serious. And, really, it was just the boys that were competing with the other schools. We did dance and netball teams with other girls.'*

Safiya: *'I think as a group of friends if we knew that, ok, we're going to play netball. It's like how the boys play football at the weekend at set times and they hire out the sports hall and go every week. But it's harder for girls.'*

Hannah: *'Something like football, I don't even think we're at that level that we could even compete. We need help, but I think it would be good if it was like PE where loads of girls could come, so like someone could be teaching you. And boys do sport from when they're little, whereas we've just started. Because you kind of forget [how to do it] and lose your confidence.'*

Farah: *'Girls have more commitments than boys. If there's a group of them and they will say "I've got this going on today." I think with swimming we used to go and after a couple of your friends go, you get that motivation.'*

Safiya: *'I think if there was a mix like that, kept us motivated and something different - and if we did it every week. But boys, they're very passionate about football, and we lose interest.'*

Alongside this some girls felt preconditioned to focus on 'image' rather than get involved in something which would make them sweaty and non feminine.

Kauthar: *'We didn't really want to get sweaty and dirty playing sport, it was seen as a male activity, us girls were more into image and make up.'*

Drop off

The transition problem into sport and physical activity after school

Many of these young women traced their relative lack of sporting and physical activity after they left full time education to their lack of coaching and confidence about getting involved in sport and exercise in unfamiliar surroundings and without adequate information and support. Sport and physical activity for them should be well resourced, 'fun', capable of providing suitable facilities and be a social activity. This was not always easy to find – or to organise:

Hannah: *'I went to the women only sessions [at a gym], I had a trainer: I wouldn't mind either just to get some confidence I don't know what happened they made excuses and they're going to ring me back. After I went to university in Newcastle I came back and I wanted to start gym again and there was no short memberships so I just didn't bother. When I signed up they said there was a women's gym, so I thought we'd get to choose the normal gym stuff. But when I came it was just a little room with a little bit of stuff. It was ok. I still used to do it, but then I stopped going because of the lack of equipment.'*

Farah: *'They had a ladies section but they got totally rid of it and we have swimming once a week, we even put a complaint form for more equipment for women and there was just a lot of equipment for men.'*

Safiya: *'If we had an option to do like badminton or even netball we all would play, and have the chance to do that rather than going to the gym. But there isn't really any options for us locally.'*

Hannah: *'Like my friend, maybe a year or two ago when she was 17 she'd been doing it [female gym class] since they were teenagers. They had this women that was running it and she'd push them to come. So they would always come on the weekend and I think it's important if you have a coach.'*

Khatibah: *'If I'm enjoying a sport, then I will tell my friends. I think a lot of it would be word of mouth really. If you're enjoying it and experiencing it, I say to my mom she should come swimming. And she says "I don't know how to swim" and I just say "Come" and she just won't come at all. The lessons are really hard and there's not enough women's only sessions.'*

Saiqa: *'I don't know where to go now as I wouldn't really venture into a sports club, that's a bit daunting' there's nothing locally I can do so I go to the gym instead and occasionally do swimming.'*

Although interest exists, many of these women don't make the transition from school sport to wider sport initiatives in the local community. This may be a reflection of the 'place', lack of facilities in the local area and lack of accessibility in engaging with this market as current offers are not visible and not meeting local need. It is clear more needs to be done through joint collaboration with schools and sports providers to help reduce this drop off.

Feeling 'intimidated' by sport – and needing encouragement

Having often had relatively limited involvement only in sport at school and having picked up only a few transferable skills in this area and often identified sport with boys, this meant that continuing sport and physical activity later became more difficult for many of these young women. They lacked confidence and encouragement in their own capabilities. In college and other post-school settings, for example, it was often claimed that support was not tailored to the needs of all students. Instead it was offered most to team sport and to people (usually males) who had existing sporting experience and expertise.

Safiya: *'If I was to play football on a field right now then the next girl will come it will be awkward and I will be just: "Forget it." Because I feel intimidated, and it's just having that encouragement.'*

Hannah: *'One thing that puts me off, I'm not good at sports but I like doing it. And if I got better at sport, I think if people are motivated to do sport, then a lot of people would do it and if sport was promoted as well.'*

Sana: *'Colleges do need to promote that, only because its 18 & 19 year olds and they would think sport is for a child unless they sort of push it and promote it in a better way. And to encourage them – "Come do this" and "This is happening at lunch time."'*

Farah: *'I think at college and especially at my college they had enrichment and you have to join something. And a lot of the people at college had been involved in sport since a young age and have been doing it consistently from a young age and they have a few sports to their name.'*

Khatibah: *'So your experiences for those that have left school for the ones that have went out to college, the college wasn't receptive to your own needs, and I don't really think they pushed you.'*

Kauthar: *'I would feel really conscious doing sport with other people as I don't know how to play a lot of sport.'*

Some women expressed a view that sport was a male dominated area and sport was often viewed by families as an activity for males rather than females. Very little support was given to females to get involved particularly in school activities with a more direct push for girls to focus on academic studies.

Kauthar: *'Sport is seen more for males rather than females and this culture within the community puts me off doing sport'.*

Saiqa: *'My parents didn't encourage me, the boys got to do all the 'fun' stuff after school and I was told to focus on my studies.'*



Women only sessions/coaches

For many of these young women, having sports and exercise opportunities, run by women for women, was clearly a critical factor in securing their own engagement in such activities. There was more local demand than opportunities, often with waiting lists for female gym activities and female only swimming sessions. There was also an argument made here that males routinely had sporting activities effectively organised by and for them – why not for women? Not all these women wanted their sport or physical activity out of sight of males or for Muslims only – just more female support and expertise. They were willing to pay £3-£4 per session for suitable provision. There was also confidence that if opportunities were provided to train more female coaches and instructors, then more women would come forward to challenge even potential objections from male family members:

Hannah: *'I think it would be nice if we had a female coach that can organise events for women. And if it did happen I think a lot more people would enjoy it and a lot more people would join in. Like for boys they have those big tournaments, like from different towns, and we don't have anything.'*

Farah: *'I think its word of mouth and more females would come and just need to be encouraged more and become, like, gym instructors.'*

Safiya: *'I like badminton and tennis. We could just do that. I think if there's no instructors then I don't know how long it would last and you would probably go a few times.'*

Hannah: *'I think if there was training and stuff they would be people interested.'*

Sana: *'Could you access like a local school where you could access their facilities so you're quite comfortable using the schools? Then, what about shopping malls inside?'*

Hannah: *'Like if we are going swimming late my husband we'll be like: "You shouldn't be going late", and I wouldn't bring him with me because in swimming I like to be on my own.'*

Saiqa: *'There are no local facilities available which are women only except the swimming.'*





Triggers for Sport

It was argued that achieving more opportunities for Asian women to connect with sport and physical exercise might include getting key figures in the community involved in provision and instruction and improving local networks and channels of communication for Asian women. Successes were identified in other parts of the UK, often involving the use of social media to get more female trainers and to get the message 'out there.' These young Asian women wanted role models and a stronger stress on sport and physical activity as 'sociable', 'fun' – not just as an intensely serious or an inevitably competitive enterprise:

Hannah: *'I go to Leicester, I have a lot of family over there. And there's this women and she's made herself quite popular in the community and she does a lot of fitness. She runs her own classes and gym and a lot of my family go to her classes and stick to it. And they've got her on Facebook, and she's always motivating them. I went as well and she made it really fun, and Zumba and stuff. But we've got nothing like that here.'*

Interviewer: *'How would sport and physical activity need to change to appeal to you?'*

Farah: *'It's sort of what we said before - that fun and being with our friends and, like, figures or role models.'*

Safiya: *'It's just the training and getting more women involved in training and, like, knowledge. Because a lot of Asian women just let it go, and don't know how much it [physical exercise] can help. They don't really seem to get on.'*

Hannah: *'I think once you're into it then you will get into it. And I think if there was a lot more women in training, then a lot more people would be interested. And it's the lack of interest, I think that's why no one chooses it or does anything because they think they would even want to.'*

Sana: *'Also you don't even know what's out there. It's like we always think of doing fun things.'*

Khatibah: *'I think what would help is there are a few women's gym as well in this area and a lot of women go there, so we can spread the word. So you want to get the benefits from the bigger gyms.'*

Marketing & Communications

Sporting campaigns

These women were interested in media campaigns around sport and a number of them could identify key campaigns and the names of some commercial sponsors. They were less convinced that these campaigns were directly addressing people from their own communities. More important perhaps was 'spreading the word' within their own localities. This might involve the use of mosques as new sporting and information hubs. Sporting bodies needed always to be passionate about their messages – and to use the correct channels of communication.

Khatibah: *'They need to engage and need their spokesperson, so someone to spread the word and to be quite passionate about it.'*

Faizah: *'Even if it's not a woman from our community, but then she's like telling us that we've got this opportunity. And even if it was like people we follow on Instagram, and there was someone on our Instagram page and in our area who would see that.'*

Zaynah: *'Even we could spread the message.'*

Hannah: *'I come across a lot of girls that would be interested in doing activities outside the mosque, but then like a year ago a mosque, for one day they weren't learning and went outside. And considering even if you think they're strict Muslims, they still want them to do activities. And I think there's more facilities and a spokesperson there to tell them [young people] what's going on.'*

Saiqa: *'I think sport needs to market the social, health and fun aspects to encourage more women to get involved.'*

The social aspect of the sport appealed to the women with many saying that information had to be packaged to highlight the 'social and fun' elements of sport. Many of these women see sport as a recreational pastime which they could do with friends and family and would be more inclined if more opportunities were made available locally.

Social Media

Most of these women were IT savvy and engaged in social media as a communication medium and used Facebook/twitter/emails/texts/instagram as a key means of engaging with family/friends. Most felt word of mouth was important and if friends were involved they would also get involved.

Saiqa: *'I regularly use Facebook to engage with my friends and would use this as a medium to organise activity.'*

Kauthar: *'I would like to see posters in mosques however nowadays most girls access information through the web or social media as well.'*



Sport by Sport Trends



TEAM SPORTS (FOOTBALL, CRICKET, HOCKEY) – it was felt younger girls would be more interested in team sport if it was facilitated by a female coach. There was however a need for someone to teach you the rules and skills of team sports for women to get more involved. The women expressed a view that there needs to be encouragement and a push and some would get involved in tournaments to keep up the social and fun aspects of team sports to enable long term involvement.



RACQUET & PAIRED SPORT (TENNIS, BADMINTON, BOXING) – the girls would be more engaged and sustain activity if the sessions were supported and they had an instructor who could encourage and give them support. Products like 'boxfit' would be something they would get involved with provided they had someone encouraging and supporting them.



INDIVIDUAL SPORTS (SWIMMING, ATHLETICS) – for swimming confidence was a particular issue particularly for those who had not learnt to swim at school or couldn't swim very well. There is a need for more women only coaches and women only swims to be offered in the local area. Other sports such as athletics were not so popular although girls had tried athletics, long jump at school they did not see any value in pursuing this activity out of school.

Kauthar: *'I would be encouraged to do more team sport if I have a female instructor supporting and organising things, I often don't understand all the rules.'*

Focus Group Respondent:⁷ *'The accessibility isn't there, there is only one female cricket club in Bradford and that's quite far out, it's a big commitment when there are few and far between sports clubs and they are quite gender specific'.*

For all sports it was important to have places where women could feel comfortable carrying out sport. Places need to be more accessible for social and recreational sports activity which these women would engage with. Role models were also identified as an important aspect of attracting women into spaces where sport was offered, they wanted women they could relate to.

7. Focus Group Respondent, Sports Insight, Young Muslim Females, February 2015

Top Tips

- Get more women involved by introducing more female instructors/activators and offering sport in local accessible settings.
- Help develop greater accessibility through supporting transitions in colleges/higher education to avoid drop off after girls leave schools.
- Help build confidence amongst this group through supported sessions and role models to enable wider engagement in sport.
- Use social media platforms to engage and raise awareness of local opportunities and use the 'fun' 'social' and 'health' focus to help promote sporting activities.
- Use mosques, gps, community centres as communication avenues to help promote campaigns through targeted marketing.
- Promote sport to the community alongside wider health messaging around health and being active to help break down barriers around sport being a 'male' activity.
- Promote sport through BME role models to help change the face of sport and make diversity more visible.



References and Acknowledgements

This research is from findings from a focus group on sport and physical activity involving eight young Pakistani women in their late teens/early 20s from the Bradford area. The research was undertaken by a female Muslim researcher/convenor from Sporting Equals on 29 July 2015. Alongside this two one to one telephone interviews were conducted with two Asian women from the Bradford area. The analysis was undertaken in partnership with academics from the Department of Sociology at the University of Leicester. The research is supplemented by previous focus group research conducted by Sporting Equals with Asian women during the course of 2012-15 and additional desktop research.

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during 2014/15

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