

Sports Insight

Young Muslim Females (16-25)



Introduction

Our latest consumer research looks specifically at the young Muslim female market (16-25) drawing on Sporting Equals past research supplemented by additional focus groups and interviews with young Muslim women. It provides a valuable insight which sport providers can draw upon to make sport more inclusive for this segment and help increase participation.

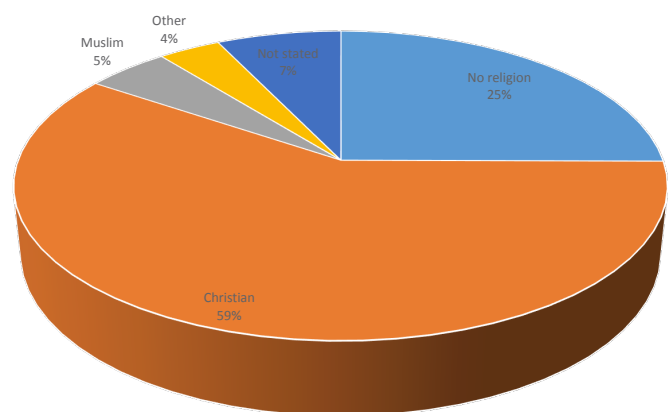
Background¹

In the 2011 Census, Christianity was the largest religion, with 33.2 million people (59.3% of the population). The second largest religious group are Muslims with 2.7 million people (4.8% of the population). Between 2001 and 2011 the census identifies that the number of Muslims has significantly increased (from 3.0% to 4.8%).

Muslims in the UK are ethnically diverse. Two-thirds of Muslims (68%) are from an Asian background, with Pakistanis making up 38% of the total Muslim population. Just over half of all Muslims (53%) in 2011 were born outside the UK and the numbers of foreign-born Muslims have almost doubled from 828,000 in 2001 to 1.4 million in 2011. Half the Muslims in England and Wales were born in the UK and almost three-quarters (73%) identify themselves as British. Two-thirds of Muslims are ethnically Asian and 8% are white.²



Data for Religious Affiliation, 2011 Census (ONS)



Three-quarters of the Muslim population are concentrated in London, the West Midlands, the North West and Yorkshire and Humber. Nearly half (46%) of the Muslim population resides in the bottom 10% of the most deprived Local Authority Districts in England.³

A recent report produced by the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB)⁴ reveals that despite an increased level of education over the 10 years, Muslims have a higher rate of unemployment than the average. The report also highlights how a greater proportion than average of Muslim women are not in the labour market and look after the home or family.

1. Religion in England and Wales 2011, Office for National Statistics 11.12.12

2. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/11/muslim-population-england-wales-nearly-doubles-10-years> [accessed 02.03.15]

3. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/02/12/british-muslims-facts_n_6670234.html [accessed 02.03.15]

4. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/02/12/british-muslims-facts_n_6670234.html [accessed 02.03.15]

5. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-31435929> [accessed 01.03.15]

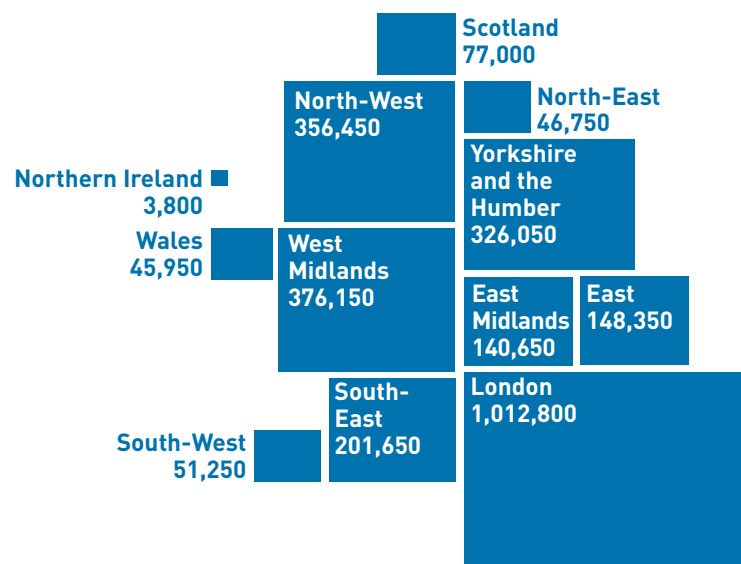
A snapshot of British Muslims⁵

2.7m Muslims in England and Wales

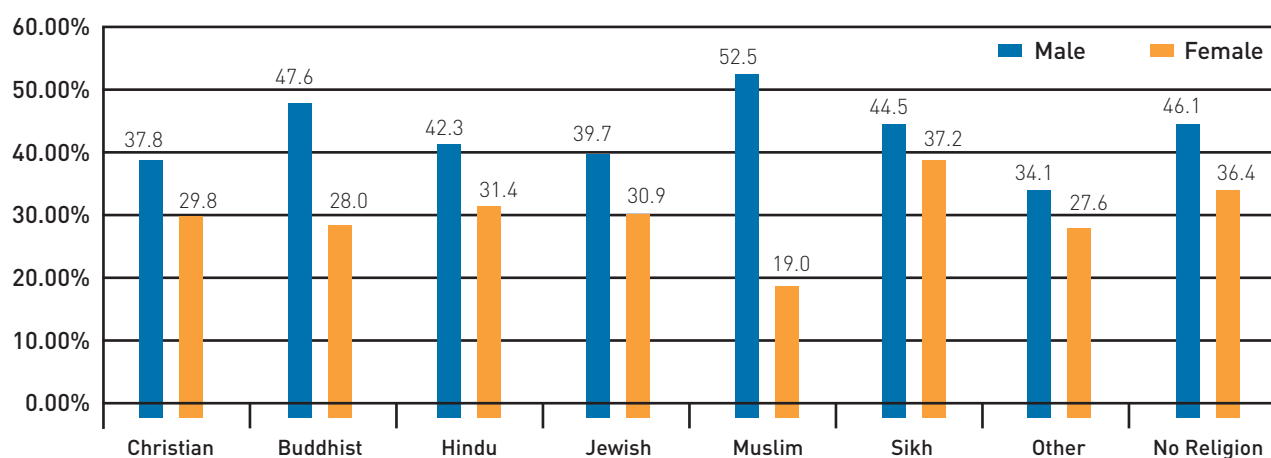
4.8% of population **33%** aged 15 or under **68%** of Asian descent
8% are of white ethnicity **47%** born in Britain, **36%** in the Middle East and Asia
6% say they are struggling to speak English **37%** of Muslims live in London
20% are in full-time employment (compared to **35%** of the general population)
29% of Muslim women between the ages of 16 and 24 are in employment, compared to approximately half the general population.

Britain's Muslims By Religion

There are 2.8 million Muslims in the UK
 (Source: Census 2011, MCB)



APS8 Sports Participation by Religion



Sport England Active People 8 data when broken down by religious groups and gender suggests that Muslim females have the lowest sports participation rates compared to other groups.

These findings provide useful context in light of identifying with young Muslim women as they often face educational, employment and economic challenges alongside other cultural barriers such as language and the role of women which are all interrelated and impact on personal life choices.

Identity

For many young Muslim women religious beliefs and values give meaning to the ways in which they structure and approach their life.

Islam is a fundamental aspect of the identity for Muslim women and their approach to sport is often determined by religious, cultural and ethnic factors. In general, Islam promotes good health and fitness and encourages both men and women to engage in physical activity to maintain healthy lifestyles.

However, there are aspects of the religion which affect how sports can be practised, for example; women following their faith cannot engage in mixed gender sports and the environment and dress code also requires consideration. Due to religious misinterpretations or simply a lack of awareness, many Muslim women have been prevented or not felt able to participate in sports. For many, apprehension about taking part stems from a fear of discrimination or of facing negative attitudes from service providers in relation to their religious and cultural needs.⁶

Muslim women's attitudes to sport will be shaped by a number of factors including social class, religious orientation, culture, gender norms and family support. For many barriers to engagement include; dress codes, attitudes toward the body related to privacy and modesty, mixed gender classes and cultural norms.⁷ However with such a diverse range of young Muslim women living in the UK and each having different needs and pressures shaping their lives it is important to understand the reasons that prevent them from taking up an active lifestyle and more importantly how to practically engage them.

'It's a culture thing. There's more restrictions and the girls are more protected. I think it depends on which part of the country you are from and it also depends on our parents as well',

focus group respondent

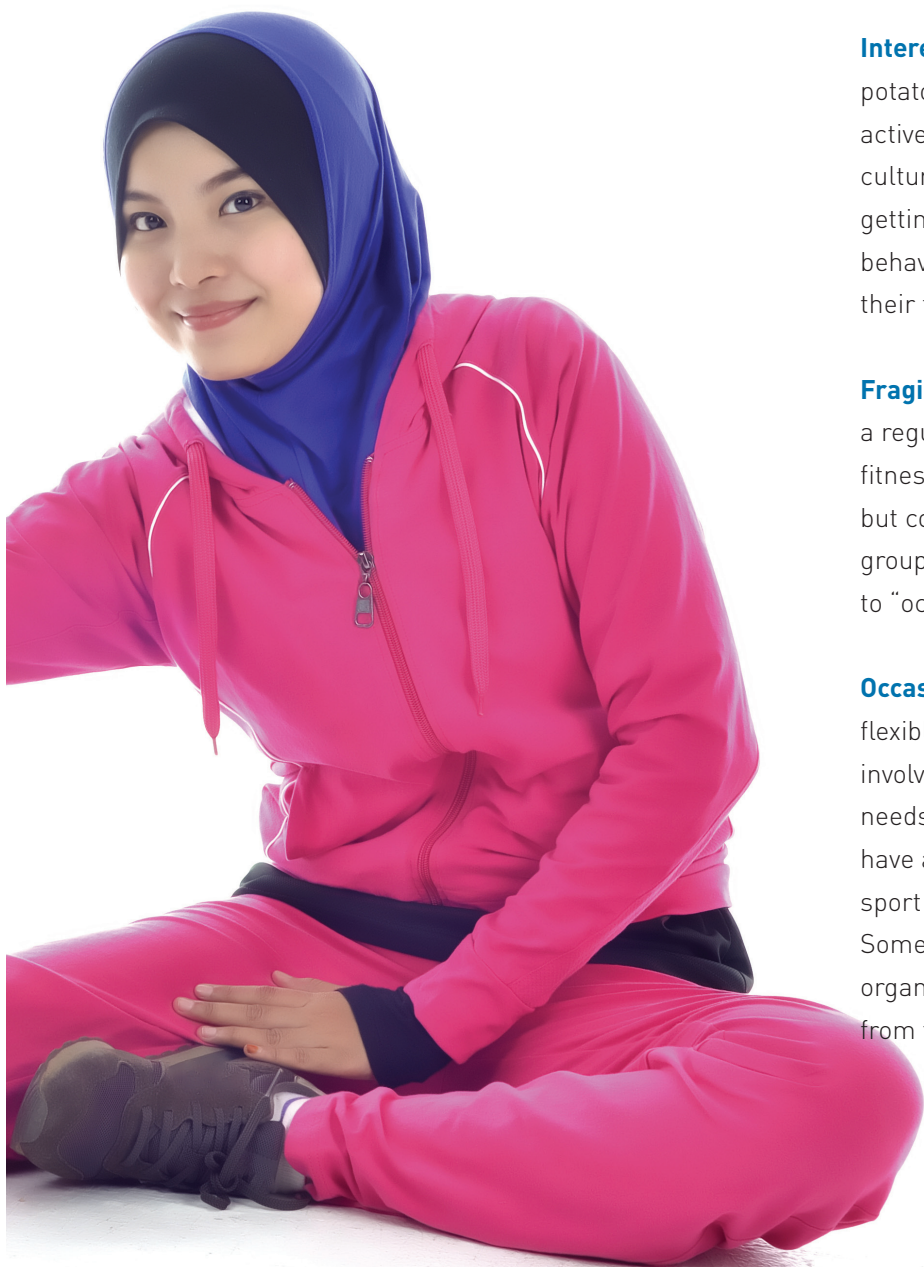


6. Muslim women in sport, Sporting Equals and Womens Sport Fitness Foundation, January 2010

7. Hewett, Heather. "Senegal women tackle taboos to play sports. (Cover story)." Christian Science Monitor. 16 July 1999: 1. Academic Search Premier. EBSCO. Web. 16 July 2010

Social Norms⁸

The research identifies that many Muslim women feel that they face difficulties and challenges compared to other groups in light of their religious norms, social values and parental influence. Often a clear role differentiation exists between boys and girls in Muslim households which creates challenges within the family structures. Many fathers and brothers are protective of girls in this age bracket (as they are considered adolescent's) which heavily influences how young women behave, where they allowed to go and who they are interacting with.



8. Asian Adolescents, Paula A. S. Ghuman

The research identified that many young Muslim women identify with the Sporting Equals archetype model and most fall into the culturally excluded' or 'interested but inactive' archetype.

Culturally Excluded; There is a significant latent demand from this group. These women have fears and concerns around dress, privacy, segregation and often lack the confidence to get involved in sport. They are unlikely to take up sports unless they are confident that their needs will be met. These women are more inclined to want to do sport in familiar community based settings interacting with family and friends.

Interested but inactive; these are essentially couch potatoes who may be sports fans but are not physically active. This group have similar issues faced by culturally excluded but the emphasis here is about getting the interested but inactive to change their behaviour so it is important to understand their triggers.

Fragile Regulars; this group participate in sport on a regular basis . This activity is very likely to be gym/ fitness based and are likely to want female only spaces but could be encouraged to do a variety of sports. This group is about those who are at risk of dropping down to "occasional with potential".

Occasional with potential; these women have a more flexible, liberal approach to life. They would get more involved in sport if 'offers' were pitched to meet their needs. They still conform to Muslim practices but have a relatively flexible approach and are likely to do sport but lifestyle dictate how time is prioritised. Some may be very competitive and interested in organised competition but often face cultural barriers from families.

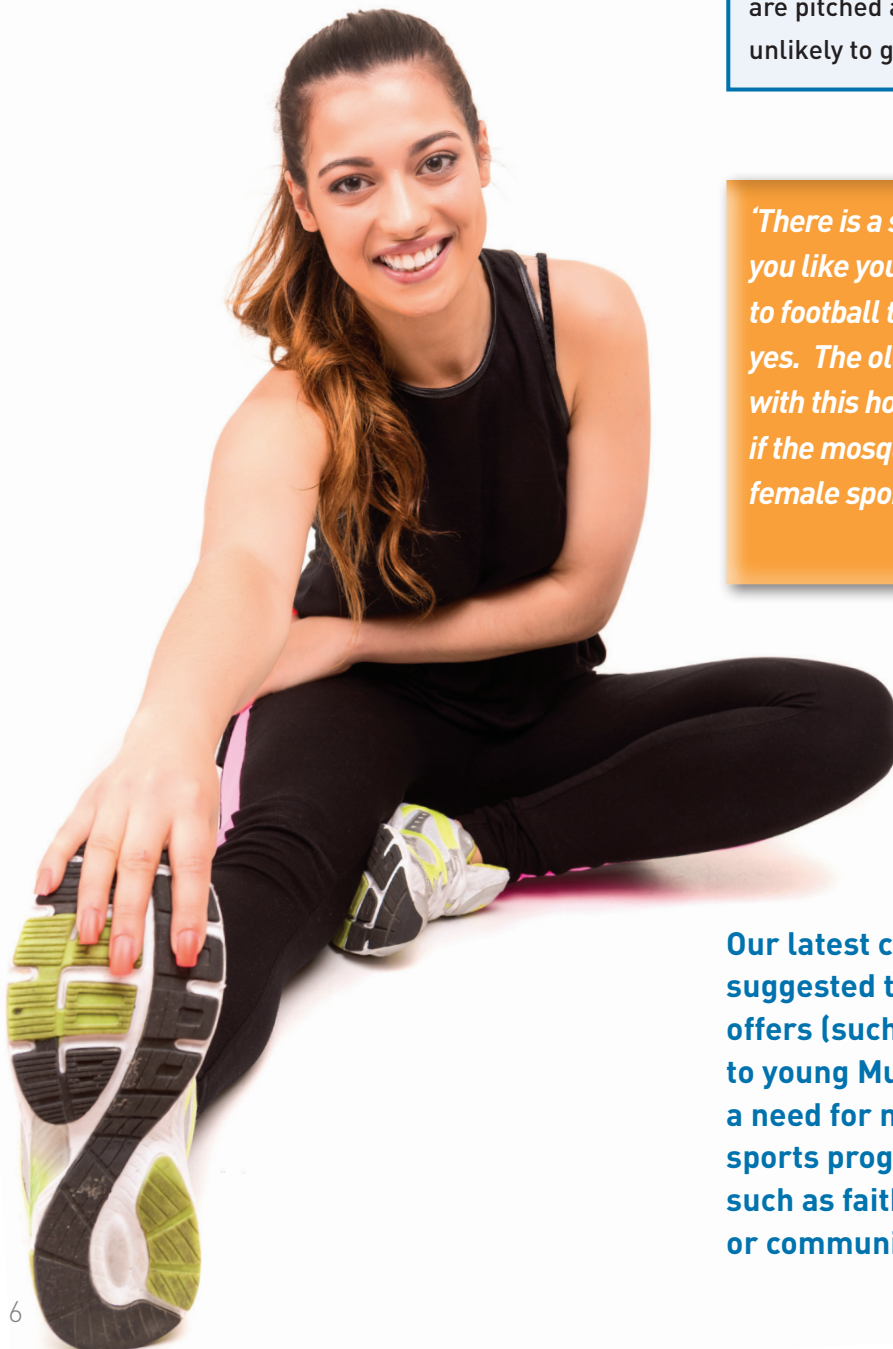
Although many women may fall under the archetype model there are however differentiations between families in light of background and upbringing, for example, those who have parents from a rural background may hold traditional views of Muslim girls staying at home, looking after the family and have a large influence over how women spend their time. However 2nd and 3rd generation migrants who are more established within the UK may have a more relaxed attitude in light of western values and norms and are likely to support young women to use sport as a diversional, recreational and health related activity provided they feel comfortable that the girls are in safe spaces and will not be directly influenced by bad behaviour or be associating with males.

Many communities are using spaces within community based settings to enable Muslim women to get involved in sport related activity as Islamic principles dictate sound, body and mind and encourage physical activity. E.g the Mauth Trust in Bordesley Green, offers football for women in a community based venue linked to the mosque. Health is a big concern within the Muslim community and advice from doctors and community workers also supports the concept of sport/ physical activity being used to support physically active lifestyles. However many young Muslim women have cultural concerns and conflicting priorities and unless sporting offers are pitched according to their needs they are unlikely to get involved.

‘There is a stigma surrounding sport – would you like your wife or sister twice a week going to football training? If it was just female then yes. The older generation may have an issue with this however it would be more accepted if the mosques were involved, especially with female sport’,

Interview Male Muslim parent’

Our latest consumer research has suggested that traditional, formal sports offers (such as sports clubs) do not appeal to young Muslim women, and that there is a need for more informal or social based sports programmes in familiar settings such as faith centres, schools or community centres.



Lifestyle Choices

For many young Muslim women family influence, timing and confidence are the main issues around which influence lifestyle choices and often sport is given low priority.

Feedback from the research suggested that for many Muslim women the key drop off point was after school, many participated in school sport however once they were not required to take part in compulsory PE many stopped taking part in sport as they felt nothing was on offer for them. Poor experiences of school sport was cited as one reason for drop off however some women did enjoy school sport but felt that mainstream provision wasn't accessible.

For married women, one of the key reasons for drop off was marriage and family commitments, the women felt that once they were married they were expected to be a 'wife' and priority is often given to the family rather than the individual.

Married housewives identify that their lifestyle choices are based on their husband and children's need, they have a limited amount of free time, however they would engage more in sport if children were involved, if childcare was available and if activities were available whilst they were already 'out and about', e.g after school drop offs/ pickups.

Many single young Muslim women want to do sport however they felt that parental influence is the biggest barrier. Sport is perceived as a male dominated space and parents often don't see the value in girls taking part.

Many young Muslim women want to do activities which keep them slim, fit and healthy and offers have to be tailored to highlight the health benefits of sport.

'Many young Muslim women want to do activities which keep them slim fit and healthy. We wanted female sessions but none were available',

focus group respondent

'Its just making the time to do sport, I don't really get the time. The only problem even with the female only swimming sessions is the windows at leisure centres are see through, so people can see. That's something I would really love to do – go swimming but I can't – its never appropriate for my needs!'

focus Group respondent



Accessibility to Sport and Barriers

For many Muslim women accessibility to sport is often related to barriers they may face in light of religious observance and cultural norms.

Family Influence – parents and families have a strong influence on young female participation and more work is required to help educate parents about the benefits of sport and provide reassurance to parents that girls are in safe spaces.

Facilities – facilities should be considered in terms of privacy in changing and showering areas, room or private area for prayer and the ability to run female only sessions away from cameras and windows.

Support – some Muslim women/girls may need support to help break down barriers due to poor experiences at school and to help build confidence. The easiest way to do this is through offering taster session and group activities which can be done with friends and family.

Timing – it is important that timing is flexible to fit around home and other priorities.

Dress – many women have cultural concerns around dress particularly for sports such as swimming, gymnastics and netball. There is a need for greater flexibility to enable women to wear clothing which allows them to cover the arms and legs and some may not want to remove the hijab (head scarf).

‘When I was younger, I always wanted to take part in sport, but I always had to attend mosque so my mother always said no, I was always quite active but as I got older I was told I had to start doing the usual things and not ‘tom boy’ things’.
one to one interview female respondent’

Other barriers for young muslim women include; lack of female coaches, fears around racism/ discrimination, childcare and cost.

Triggers

- Body Image
- Health & Fitness
- Fun and Social Aspect
- Diversion/ Release
- ‘ME’ Time

The key to engaging young Muslim women is around making sport a social and recreational activity which supports an active and healthier lifestyle.



Motivators

BODY IMAGE

A lot of women in this age group are very body conscious. The influence of western culture and slim models means many women aspire to be slim and a key motivation for sport and fitness is to lose weight. Many women who are involved in sport identified health and fitness as key reason for attending sport sessions and felt that they had experienced positive changes as a result.

SOCIAL ASPECTS

Many women suggested that knowing other women in the session helped motivate them to attend and made the sessions more enjoyable. They also enjoyed having fun, social time for themselves.

Women with children in particular used sport and fitness as social 'me' time for themselves and keeping fit along with making friends was often a rewarding experience.

SAFE SPACES

The participants in the research identified that spaces to do sport or fitness were required where women did not feel embarrassed about their appearance or their ability. They wanted to feel comfortable that coaches and other participants were non-judgemental about appearance, ability and clothing.

Physical safety was also a concern particularly for those 'culturally excluded' less experienced women.

PARENTAL INFLENCE

Concerns were raised about parental influence on sport being considered a 'male activity', however if sport is done with other women and as groups activities this would make parents feel more comfortable and relaxed and allow younger Muslim women greater flexibility.

CLOTHING

Flexibility with clothing was raised as a key issue, some women wanted to be fully covered or wear clothing they felt comfortable with. Some Muslim women would only do sport in 'women only' environments due to religious beliefs and these sessions need to be facilitated by a female coach or instructor. The ability to participate in sports with other women who had similar values and norms was also important.

'I do fitness to lose weight, keep slim and healthy',

focus group respondent



Sport by Sport Trends



FOOTBALL – many young Muslim women would like to take part in recreational football however a lot of women are put off as football activities tend to be offered in male dominated environments and spaces are often not accessible for women only activity.



CRICKET – cricket is also a popular sport for Muslim women however similar to football, green spaces are often dominated by males and venues need to be more accessible to female only matches and teams.



TENNIS – is perceived as an expensive sport and accessible more to the elite White British upper classes. Finding venues to meet the needs of young Muslim women around privacy can be difficult so opportunities need to be provided in community based settings.



BOXING – boxing is often perceived as a male, macho sport, however spin off programmes such as 'Box Fit' which emphasise the fitness aspect of boxing is appealing to many young women and BME female role models such as Ambreen Khan and Nicola Adams are helping to change the image of the sport.



Swimming – although many women want to get involved and high latent demand exists for swimming, many Muslim women feel that unless service providers are receptive to their cultural needs around privacy and female only sessions they are unable to get involved.



Golf – perceived to be 'posh' sports exclusive for 'white upper class', clubs are thought to be inaccessible although some women indicated that they had tried and enjoyed playing mini golf and don't see a problem in getting involved if the sport was more inclusive

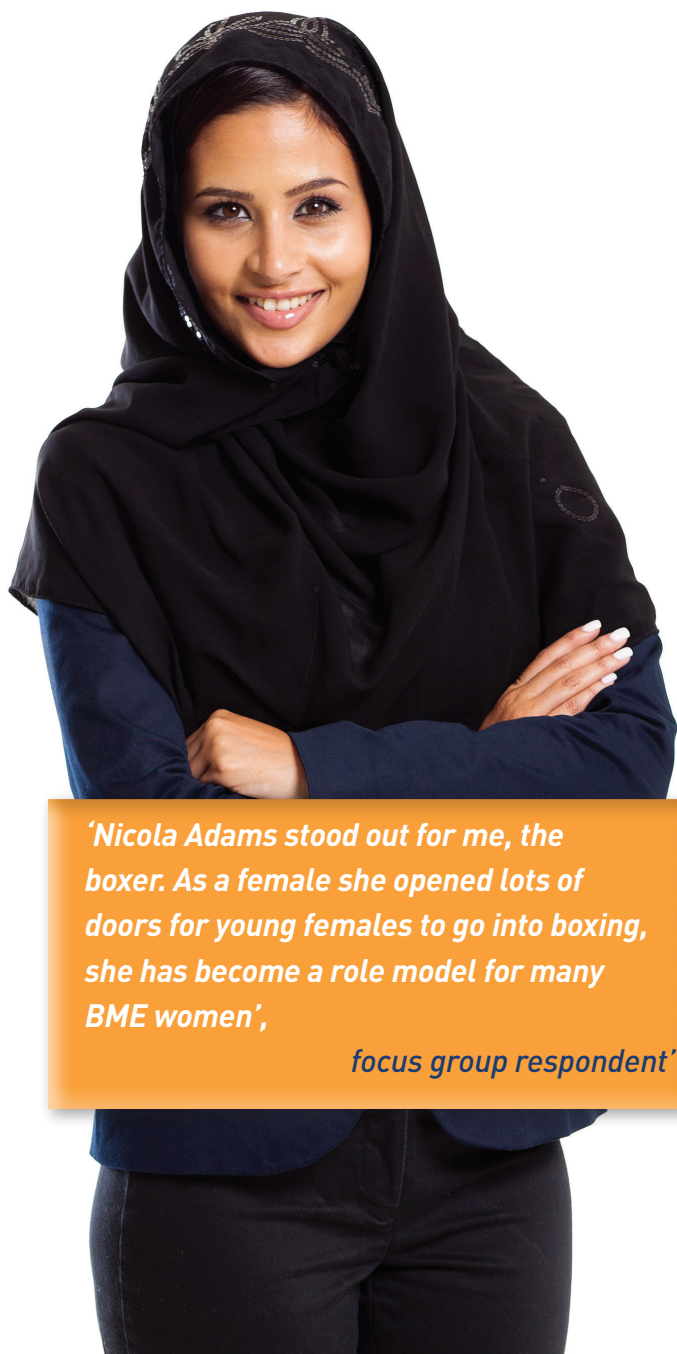
In all cases more flexible spaces are required to give young Muslim women the opportunity to play without having concerns around privacy and being observed by males.

*'When I started it was all-female boxing club, then it was changed to a mixed club. When my family found out, I had to leave. I lied to the family for a while so I could stay. When I did leave I wanted to go back as I enjoyed boxing but nothing is around',
one to one interview respondent*

*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',
focus group respondent*

'We need more qualified coaches, especially women in football, badminton, netball and Jiu Jitsu', this will make the environment more receptive to women and girls particularly those who wear the hijab',
focus group respondent

Clubs are often considered male dominated areas and unless single sex activity is provided some clubs are inaccessible to a lot of 'culturally excluded' women',
one to one interview respondent



'Nicola Adams stood out for me, the boxer. As a female she opened lots of doors for young females to go into boxing, she has become a role model for many BME women',
focus group respondent'

Top Tips

1. Schools and service providers need to be flexible around clothing, such as allowing tracksuits to be worn instead of shorts and leggings/top for swimwear etc..
2. There is a need to offer more single sex provision with female coaches and instructors.
3. Consideration should be given to activities being flexible particularly during periods of fasting such as Ramadan.
4. Facilities should consider whether they have sufficient privacy in changing and showering areas to meet the needs of Muslim women.
5. Offer sport in informal settings such as schools or community and faith centres to encourage young Muslim women particularly the 'culturally excluded', who are more receptive to engage with sport in familiar, comfortable settings rather than accessing sports club.
6. Try offering group activities such as mums session so women can attend together, they are more likely to keep an activity up if they have somebody else attending and families are often more comfortable knowing that other women will also be doing activities.
7. Participants expectations of coaches may be different than in other settings and emphasis should be on engagement and being culturally receptive e.g. clothing and privacy – try and encourage participants to become coaches which will help develop long term sustainability of groups.
8. Keep marketing and information simple with an emphasis on fitness, fun and social aspects. Campaigns such as 'This Girl Can' need to ensure they touch and impact on Young Muslim Females, especially with the use of imagery and sensitivity to messaging.
9. Advertise opportunities in a range of places. Consider who you are trying to reach and where they are likely to see your messaging. Use community and faith based venues to promote activity.
10. Make use of social networking opportunities, use group emails, add to the 'sociability' and 'inclusiveness' of the offer, and enable participants to 'keep in touch' even if they miss a week.

References and Acknowledgements

3 focus groups took place in Birmingham, London and Bradford in faith based settings with young Muslim women. Qualitative interviews were also carried out at the Global Peace and Unity event in London Excel on Sunday 24 November, 2013 and a selection of interviews over the telephone with individuals.

Our thanks to;

Bradford Connection
Bradford Council of Mosques
Global Peace and Unity Foundation
Salma Bi, Sporting Pathways

References

Club membership insight paper, Sporting Equals, March 2012

The role of faith centres in the provision of sport and physical activity, Sporting Equals, June 2012

The role of faith centres in helping drive growth in sports participation, Sporting Equals, December 2011

Facilities insight paper, Sporting Equals, June 2011

Muslim women in sport, Sporting Equals and Womens Sport Fitness Foundation, January 2010

Toolkit for BME engagement, prepared for England Athletics by Sporting Equals, September 2010

The challenge of growing youth participation in sport, Sport England, 2014

A Portrait of Modern Britain Policy Exchange, 2014

Double Loyalties: South Asian Adolescents in the West Paul Ghuman, 2003

The role of faith centres in helping drive growth in sports participation, Sporting Equals, December 2011

Asian Adolescents, Paula.A.S. Ghuma,
<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/distributed/D/bo5533436.html>

©Sporting Equals March 2015



Sporting Equals
Promoting ethnic diversity in sport & physical activity

Sporting Equals

Building 300, Trinity Park, Bickenhill Lane,
Birmingham International Airport B37 7ES

Tel: 0121 777 1375 Email: info@sportingequals.org.uk

www.sportingequals.co.uk

Company Number: 5853520 Charity Number: 1119365