

Savanta:

Sport England

Identity, sport and physical activity

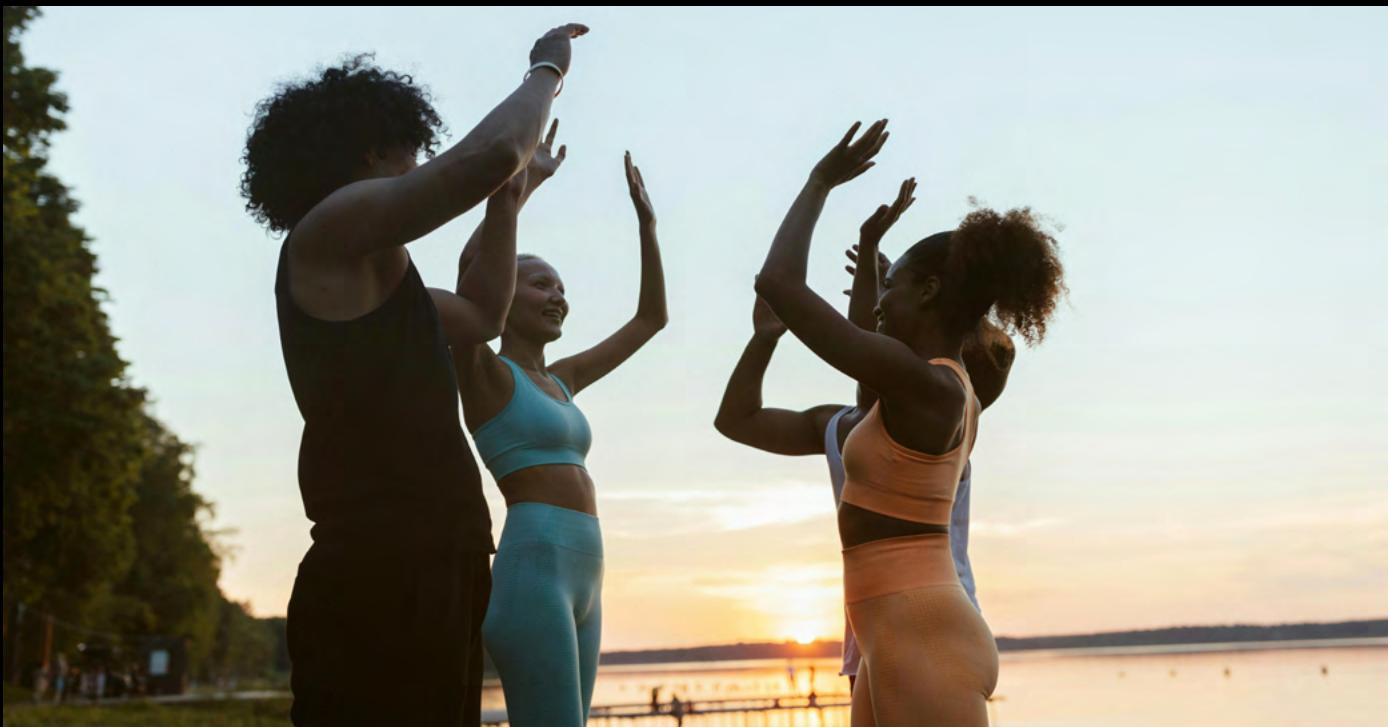


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O1

Background and objectives

Recent data shows that attitudes towards Sport & Physical Activity (SPA) varies across demographic sub-groups. Whilst 1 in 4 young adults say that sport and physical activity is “for” people like them, males (30%) are more likely to agree with this statement whilst those from lower socio-economic groups are less likely to think this (14%).¹ One in five (20%) adults say that they have strong emotional connections to SPA, again this is felt more strongly by males (24%) than females. When looking at ethnicity, 22% of those who identify as White British also agree with this statement, a significantly higher proportion compared to those from different ethnicities such as Black and Asian.

Integrating SPA into one’s identity is a multifaceted process, influenced by various intersecting factors. These influences stem from broader societal factors, community-specific factors, and individual characteristics. While current literature provides some understanding of these factors and their impact on an individual’s behaviours and connection with SPA, there is limited knowledge on how these levels interact to shape SPA participation and a person’s identity in relation to SPA.

This research aims to explore how aspects of people’s individual, social and cultural background interact to shape their relationship with SPA, focusing on those from Black African and South Asian communities in England. This will include assessing the mechanisms by

which SPA becomes part of a person’s identity, and how levels of participation in SPA can be impacted by cultural background and identity.

This research forms part of a broader piece of work by Sport England who are looking to help support the sector to engage with and promote SPA among underrepresented communities, thus fostering greater inclusivity and diversity in the sector. This includes breaking down barriers to participation and driving equality within the sport and physical activity sector. It will also feed into a collaborative doctoral research project, in partnership with Sport England and Brunel University London, exploring the multi-level influences of inequality and community sport and physical activity participation.

The findings in this report relate to qualitative research which was conducted in the first half of 2024. These findings will be supported by additional quantitative research from an upcoming wave of the Sport England activity-check in tracker research. The quantitative research phase will further explore and quantify the key themes across a broader population, ensuring the insights are robust and actionable.

¹ Sport England Activity Check-in 2022-24

Research objective

The qualitative phase of this research has three main objectives:

- Identify and understand the influencing factors of SPA engagement at three levels: individual, social/community, and wider cultural, as well as how these factors interact.
- Provide context-specific insights into the barriers and facilitators of SPA participation for South Asian and Black African communities.
- Contribute to the literature and inform future research into SPA level and attitudes within these communities.



Approach

Participants

The Asian population in England consists of just over 5.4m people, and just over 2.3m people identify as Black.¹

- Within the Asian population 29%(c.1.5m) are Pakistani and 12%(c.600k) are Bangladeshi.
- 63% of those within the Black population in England are Black African (c.1.4m).

While the activity levels of the White British population have increased 2.1% from November 2015-16 to November 2022-23, Asian and Black individuals in England have not seen a long-term increase across the same period. Black and Asian individuals record the lowest levels of physical activity of all ethnicity groups, with just over half (55%) doing at least 150 minutes activity per week as of November 2022-23. In comparison, over two in five (65%) White British people are doing at least 150 minutes of activity per week.

Within the Asian population Pakistani adults are the least likely sub-group to be active (48%), followed by Bangladeshi (52%).² Due to the lower levels of engagement with SPA amongst these groups, Pakistani and Bangladeshi individuals were chosen as the population of focus for this research. These groups are also predominantly Muslim (92% Bangladeshi, 93% Pakistani), which is not the case for other South Asian sub-groups and provides an additional layer of analysis for this research.

Levels of activity amongst Black African (56%), Black Caribbean (56%) and other Black background (55%) individuals are equally low compared to the general population. For the purpose of this research the decision was made to focus on the Black African community as the majority of England's Black population consists of individuals with African heritage. Whilst research with those of Caribbean heritage would be beneficial, the difficulty in recruiting such a small subsection of the population made it unfeasible to include this sub-group within the current research. It was decided that combining Black African and Black Caribbean participants into the same group would not be appropriate due to potential differences in culture and lived experience between these two groups.

In total, 24 adults from England took part in this qualitative research and were allocated to 4 groups, split by ethnicity:

- Black African
- South Asian (including Pakistani & Bangladeshi)

It is important to note that this research specifically examines the perspectives and experiences of these two ethnic groups within England only. As a result, any references to Black African or South Asian communities throughout the report should be understood

as pertaining exclusively to these groups within this context. Where findings are relevant across both groups, they are discussed in a general context. However, the report also distinguishes between the experiences and

¹ England Census 2021

² Sport England Active Lives Survey

insights that are unique to or particularly significant for each subgroup.

For example, in instances where the Pakistani and Bangladeshi participants' perspectives differ substantially or offer unique viewpoints, these distinctions have been pulled out to provide a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing SPA engagement among these populations.

To gather a range of perspectives, the groups were also split between those who had strong positive attitude towards SPA and those who had less positive attitudes. Attitude towards SPA was measured as part of the recruitment screening process, where participants were asked in a randomised order to answer (on a 5-point agreement scale), how much they agreed or disagreed with a battery of statements, which included (amongst 5 statements in total) the following:

- I find exercise enjoyable and satisfying.
- I feel that I have the ability to be physically active.
- I feel that I have the opportunity to be physically active.

Participants who "strongly agreed" (a score of 5 on a 5-point scale) with at least one of the statements were categorised as having a more positive attitude towards SPA, while those who did not were categorised as having a less positive attitude. This method of categorisation was validated during the focus groups, where clear differences emerged between the two groups. Participants with strong positive attitudes considered SPA a key part of their life, proactively making time for it and associating it with positive sentiments, such as enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment. They took pride in their ability to consistently engage in SPA, viewing it as a source of personal fulfilment and self-improvement.

"Now that I'm older and I'm working out and I'm doing things that people wouldn't expect of you, it almost makes me really proud that I can say, 'I lift weights at the gym.' I was telling my friend, for instance, yesterday, I class myself as a gym babe girl, because I lift weights."

Female, 24, Black African, Strong positive attitude

In contrast, those with less positive attitudes tended to view SPA as more of a task or something they do casually for social enjoyment, rather than an integral part of their lifestyle.

"I do sport for enjoyment, but I wouldn't say I do physical activity for enjoyment. I feel like I need to do it because I want to keep in shape. I don't necessarily enjoy going to the gym. I hate it, but I enjoy doing sports with the right people."

Male, 25, South Asian, Less positive attitude

Throughout this report these groups will be defined as "strong positive attitudes towards SPA" and "less positive attitudes towards SPA".

Each group also had a representative mix of gender, socio-economic status and religion.

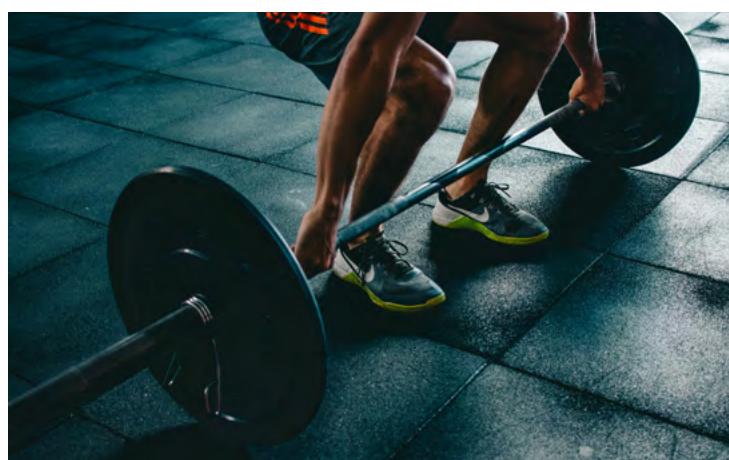


Table 1: Participant demographic breakdown

Focus Group	Gender	Ethnicity	SEG	Religion	Attitudes towards SPA
1	4 men 3 women	7 black African	4 ABC1 3 C2DE	5 Christianity 1 Islam 1 No religion	7 strong positive attitudes
2	3 men 3 women	7 South Asian (4 Pakistani, 2 Bangladeshi)	3 ABC1 3 C2DE	4 Islam 1 Hinduism 1 No religion	6 strong positive attitudes
3	3 men 3 women	6 black African	2 ABC1 4 C2DE	5 Christianity 1 Islam	6 less positive attitudes
4	2 men 4 women	6 South Asian (4 Bangladeshi, 2 Pakistani)	3 ABC1 3 C2DE	5 Islam 1 Prefer not to say	6 less positive attitudes

Peer researchers

A key priority in designing the research was ensuring it captured different cultural perspectives sensitively and inclusively. Peer researchers are individuals who share similar characteristics or lived experiences with the research participants and are involved in the research process as collaborators and advisors. To align with focus group participants, South Asian and Black African peer researchers were recruited and trained to contribute to the research design and analysis. The involvement of peer researchers was extensive and included reviewing the research materials such as the discussion guide, observing focus groups, engaging with participants, and contributing to the interpretation of findings.

Building on the success of an existing Sport England work, such as "Addressing Physical Inactivity Among Underrepresented Young People" conducted in 2023, where peer researchers played a key role, this study continues to demonstrate the value of involving individuals with shared lived experiences in the research process. By leveraging the strengths of peer researchers, we were able to design and implement a research process that was both inclusive and effective. This method not only enhances the credibility and relevance of the findings but also ensures that the research is conducted in a manner that is respectful and attuned to the nuances of specific cultural groups.

Table 2: Peer researcher profiles

Gender	Ethnicity	SEG	Religion	Attitudes towards SPA
3 women 1 man	2 Black African 2 South Asian (1 Pakistani, 1 Bangladeshi)	1B 1 C1 1 C2 1 E	2 Islam 1 Christianity 1 Prefer not to say	2 strong positive attitudes 2 less positive attitudes



Fieldwork

Fieldwork consisted of four 2-hour, in-person focus groups conducted in April and May 2024.

London is a popular hub for Bangladeshi (c.350k), Pakistani (c.300k) and Black African (c.700k) communities.

Birmingham also has a significant population of Bangladeshi (c.50k) and Pakistani (c.200k) individuals whilst around c.50k Black Africans live in Manchester. Therefore, these cities were chosen as locations to conduct this research.

Table 3: Focus group breakdown

Date	Location	Ethnicity	Attitudes towards SPA
Monday 29th April 2024	London	Black African	Strong positive attitudes
Tuesday 30th April 2024	Birmingham	South Asian	Strong positive attitudes
Wednesday 1st May 2024	Manchester	Black African	Less positive attitudes
Thursday 2nd May 2024	London	South Asian	Less positive attitudes

The in-person setting facilitated an open, interactive environment and allowed moderators to observe non-verbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions. Groups were moderated by researchers from Savanta, supported by a peer researcher and observed by a representative from Sport England.

Prior to the focus groups, participants completed a pre-task involving reflection on their personal experiences with SPA and how their cultural background and identity might influence their engagement. This pre-task primed participants to think deeply about the topic, enabling more meaningful discussions during the focus group sessions. The pre-

task involved participants considering their relationship with SPA throughout their life, from childhood to the present day. They were asked to reflect on key moments or experiences that shaped their attitudes towards SPA, as well as any barriers or facilitators they encountered along the way. Participants also considered how their cultural background and identity influenced their experiences and perceptions of SPA. The insights gathered from the pre-task were then explored further during the focus group discussions.

During the focus groups, various interactive tasks and activities were used to engage participants and elicit deeper insights:



BRING AN OBJECT: Participants were asked to bring an object which means a lot to them and represents their heritage or culture. Participants were asked to tell the group about their object and what it means to them at the start of the session as an ice breaker



PUZZLE TASK: Participants received cut-out pieces of paper, each featuring a different factor influencing their engagement with SPA (e.g., cost, time, cultural norms, gender, religion). They also had blank pieces to capture additional factors. Using these puzzle pieces, participants created visuals representing their personal barriers and facilitators to SPA engagement.



PERSONAL IDENTITY MAPPING: Participants were given a blank sheet of paper to draw themselves or write their name in the centre. They then drew arrows extending from the centre, indicating aspects of their life that are important to them, factors that have shaped their identity, and how SPA fits into their personal identity.

At certain points during the focus groups, participants were separated into breakout rooms of 2 or 3 participants based on their identified gender. This separation allowed for a more intimate and comfortable setting where men and women could openly share their perspectives on the specific barriers and facilitators they face when engaging with SPA. The breakout rooms provided a safe

space for participants to discuss potentially sensitive topics and allowed researchers to delve deeper into gender-specific issues and experiences. Participants were also given notepads to write down thoughts they might not feel comfortable sharing with the entire group. These were collected for analysis at the end of the sessions.

02

Influences on relationship with SPA

Analysis framework

Before delving into the analysis of the factors that shape SPA attitudes and engagement among South Asian and Black African communities, it is essential to establish a clear understanding of various terms that will be used throughout this report and the analysis framework which has been used. First, we will explain the three levels of influence: individual factors, social & community factors, and cultural factors, which the research findings have been explored against. Although sector research that explores intersectionality is limited, its potential is significant. By applying an intersectional lens, researchers can probe deeper into the experiences of South Asian and Black African groups, recognizing them as complex populations facing broader social and health disparities beyond SPA. This method provides a more holistic analysis of inequalities in SPA participation, investigating beyond single-factor barriers to piece together the multifaceted challenges and intricate experiences faced by marginalised groups.

Individual factors

Individual factors refer to personal characteristics and personal experiences that shape an individual's self-concept, interests, and motivations, influencing their likelihood of participating in SPA. These factors vary but can include gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, life stage and migration status. They are considered individual because they pertain directly to personal identity and individual circumstances. For example, an individual's gender can influence their self-perception

and interests in certain types of sports, while socioeconomic status might affect access to SPA opportunities.

Social & community factors

Social and community factors encompass the influences of family, friends, community organisations, events, and broader community expectations on an individual's SPA engagement. These factors are classified as social/community because they involve interactions and relationships within one's immediate social environment. Understanding how participants define "community" helps clarify the scope of these influences.

Cultural factors

Cultural factors include broader societal norms, values, gender expectations, and attitudes towards SPA that shape participation and identification with these activities. These are considered cultural because they extend beyond the immediate social environment to encompass wider societal influences. For instance, cultural norms about gender roles can dictate which sports are deemed appropriate for men and women, affecting participation levels. The distinction here is that cultural factors operate on a broader, societal level, whereas social/community factors are more localised and immediate.

The intersectionality of factors

Individual, social/community, and cultural factors do not exist in isolation; they are embedded within each other as well as broader social and community contexts. Throughout this report, we apply the concept of intersectionality to understand how these factors interact and shape individuals' experiences and perceptions of SPA. Intersectionality recognises that individual factors, such as gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or life stages are interconnected with each other and with social and cultural factors, creating a complex web of influences.

Stereotyping

This report discusses the role stereotyping, as it is a factor that cuts across all three levels of influence. Stereotypes are oversimplified beliefs about the characteristics, behaviours, and abilities of members of a particular group. In the context of SPA, stereotypes can be based on gender, ethnicity, cultural background, or other social categories, and can create expectations and norms that influence individuals' perceptions of themselves and others, as well as their attitudes towards SPA participation.

By examining the individual, social/community, and cultural factors through an intersectional lens and considering the impact of stereotyping, this report aims to provide a comprehensive understanding what shapes SPA participation, attitudes towards SPA, and identity among Black African and South Asian communities in England.



Defining sport and physical activity

What is “sport”?

There was a strong consensus across all groups that “sport” and “physical activity” are separate concepts with different meanings. Sport is generally perceived as being structured, competitive, rule-based and professional. It is usually done in groups or teams. Sport is often seen as being social in nature due to being played in teams or as part of groups.

The motivation for taking part in sport is generally about fun or enjoyment. It is worth noting that sport is usually compulsory for people in childhood, through physical education or school games. It is not until adulthood that taking part in sport becomes a choice, where a person decides whether they want to spend their time doing it or not. Their experiences with sport in childhood often have a strong influence on whether it is something they choose to do in later life.

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What is “physical activity”?

The definition of physical activity generally varies more than that of sport, but there was consensus that it is distinct from sport. Physical activity is informal and often individual. It serves specific purposes; health improvement, self-care, and overall wellbeing –including better mental health. Typically, it involves less structured pursuits like walking, jogging, or gym sessions. Unlike the organised nature of sport, physical activity is often seen as more spontaneous and self-directed.



In terms of sports, I think it's more regulated, you have more rules that define it, but when it comes to physical activity, for example, like, hiking or walking, you can just move. You get up and go."

Female, 37, South Asian, Less positive attitude

Sports, it's more like you want to do it together with people, like, 'Oh, let's go play football,' assuming I wouldn't go on my own. Sport seems like more of a group effort, in my opinion."

Female, 29, Black African, Strong positive attitude



"If I think of physical activity, it's something that I do to take care of myself, if that makes sense, and for sports, it's more like you want to do it together with people"
Female, 29, Black African, Strong positive attitude

Physical activity can extend to any behaviours where movement (or a conscious increase in movement) is chosen. This results in everyday activities such as housework, manual jobs or parents playing with their children being classified as "physical activity".

"Physical activity, I'd say it's like a lifestyle choice. Like, I walk instead of taking the bus because it's just a 90-minute walk, right, where a sport would be if someone was into running or something, but I think physical activity is the everyday habits that you would do every single day."

Female, 24, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

Activities can be classified as either sport or physical activity, depending on the context in which they occur.

"You could put down physical exercise as, like, weightlifting. Because it kind of goes in between sports and physical activity but it's more physical activity, depending on what type of weightlifting you do."

Male, 33, South Asian, Less positive attitude

"Jogging, I think it goes in the middle because with the whole marathon going on, it can be considered a sport because people are doing it more often and there are like competitions they are doing in teams. And it's also a physical activity because you're getting your heart rate up and moving up and down and sweating."

Female, 23, Black African, Less positive attitude

"Even swimming, swimming almost more like a physical activity rather than a sport, but if you're taking it professionally, then it becomes a sport."
Female, 34, South Asian, Less positive attitude

Participants with less positive attitudes towards SPA often see exercise as a necessity—something they must do to stay fit or in shape whether they like it or not. This contrasts sharply with sport, where the game's excitement and social aspects can make the exercise element of it feel incidental. For these individuals, physical activity isn't inherently enjoyable; it's simply a task to tick off, lacking the intrinsic pleasure others might find in it.

Physical activity can be perceived as more accessible, flexible and adaptable than sports, especially when looking at activities such as walking or running, which are frequently categorised as physical activity. Unlike organised sport, there is no need for specific facilities and equipment or people to do these activities. However, it is important not to conclude that all activity is necessarily "accessible" to all. There remain barriers relating to accessibility and opportunity, which is especially true when considering facilities that require memberships, such as gyms, fitness centres, and sports clubs.

"Sports are fun. It doesn't feel like you're exercising. I'm really just enjoying myself. But physical activity is a side benefit to it. Whereas when I'm doing physical activity, I'm doing it mainly for the actual health benefits."

Male, 25, South Asian, Less positive attitude



I think there are probably more barriers to sport, as opposed to physical activity, because with physical activity you can do it any time, any place, you're not restricted, whereas with sport, if it is team-based sort of thing, then it's a bit harder to play all on your own."

Male, 32, South Asian, Strong positive attitude



Therefore, based on participants' views, sport can be classified as organised, structured and something that an individual chooses to engage in, whereas physical activity covers a broader range of activities and movement which is done to increase or maintain health, fitness and well-being.

Talking about sport, physical activity and identity

Due to the distinctions between "sport" and "physical activity" – and the differences between what "physical activity" means for individuals – it's important to consider that when talking about SPA in relation to identity, people may be referring to sport, physical activity or both.

Amongst the participants, those with less positive attitudes towards SPA often describe it broadly as 'physical activity' – a term they apply to any movement-based activity.

This perception extends beyond the formal definitions like those set by the CMO, which classify being 'active' as engaging in at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity per week, including activities such as sport, exercise, and brisk walking or cycling for recreation or travel. In contrast, those with positive attitudes towards SPA typically recognise a variety of activities, encompassing both organised sports and structured exercises such as gym training, aligning more closely with the CMO's guidelines.

These differences are important highlight, especially when considering recommendations for making SPA more inclusive and accessible. For some, increasing positive attitudes and engagement with SPA may involve boosting physical activity levels and movement. For others, it will be about breaking down barriers where they feel excluded from specific sports or organised activities.

Key individual identity factors

We begin by looking at individual identity factors and their impact on SPA. Individual factors refer to the distinct and inherent attributes that contribute to the uniqueness of each person's identity and can include, but are not limited to, gender, ethnic identity and migration status. Individual identity factors are particularly significant because they influence not only how individuals engage with SPA, but also how they interact with different communities and social structures. These factors can act as either barriers or facilitators in accessing and participating in SPA, impacting everything from individual motivation to community support and institutional accessibility. Throughout this section the social/community and wider cultural factors which interplay, combine and influence individual factors will also be explored.

Gender

One of the most influential factors on a person's relationship with SPA is their gender. Within gender, there are individual sub-factors that intersect with broader social, community and cultural factors, creating a multifaceted relationship with SPA that individuals need to navigate. Traditional gender norms and cultural expectations often set specific roles and priorities for men and women, adding another layer of complexity to this relationship with SPA. Understanding the impact of gender on SPA involvement requires exploring both the common challenges and the distinct differences shaped by these cultural norms and expectations among men and women. By exploring these nuances, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how gender influences SPA participation and identify potential strategies for promoting greater inclusivity and equity.

Gender & SPA: Individual factors

Individual factors relating to gender and SPA can be specific to men or women. For women, personal safety and menstrual cycles emerged as gender-specific factors significantly impacting their ability to be active in certain locations or at particular times, as well as their motivation to engage in specific sports or activities.

Regarding safety, some women's participation in SPA is restricted to daylight hours and familiar locations, potentially causing them to miss sessions further from home or scheduled later in the day. Likewise, when they do participate, feelings of unease or danger could markedly affect their enjoyment levels. This lack of enjoyment might discourage their motivation to be active at all, subsequently leading to decreased activity levels.

"A woman jogging down a main road is not the safest thing. I'm always having to look around. I can't even have my headphones in because at the end of the day, if anything happens, whose fault is it? Mine."

Female, 29, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

Menstrual cycles can also affect women's motivation and capacity for SPA, with some women needing to adapt their routines based on their body's needs.

"One thing I've taken acknowledgement of and respect of for my body is understanding my menstrual cycle. When there are certain periods, I know when my body feels weak, I know when I feel strong and I know when to push myself and when not to. Because you need to listen to your body and hear what it's telling you."

Female, 24, Black African, Strong positive attitude

Nonetheless, some participants noted that they had found ways to navigate these challenges and maintain consistency in their routine. By understanding their cycles, they acknowledged the need to tailor their activity levels based on what their body was telling them, showing that SPA can still be effectively integrated into their schedule. This was particularly the case for women who have strong positive attitudes towards SPA and wanted to proactively find a way to maintain their structured exercise schedule.

"Sometimes you know you have to go work out, but you're not in the space to do so, or your emotions are all over the place. And then someone introduced cycle-syncing to me. It's made such a difference because you're giving your body what it wants, rather than just doing something that you have to do. You're catering to your body in a way that it needs to. So, it'd be okay to sit at home for a week."

Female, 29, Black African, Strong positive attitude

For men, engagement in and enjoyment of SPA tends to be influenced by broader societal expectations and stereotypes about male physical appearance. These expectations focus on body image and masculinity. For instance, feeling pressured to bulk up due to feeling "too small" compared to perceived norms, or embarrassed due to feeling judged by others at the gym. This can create an unwelcoming environment for those trying to increase their activity levels.

"When I first joined the gym, it took me ages to get my head around going to the gym because you just have this image of these alpha males judging you. Slightly chubby, I wasn't sure what I was doing. So, there was definitely a barrier."

Male, 42, Black African, Less positive attitude

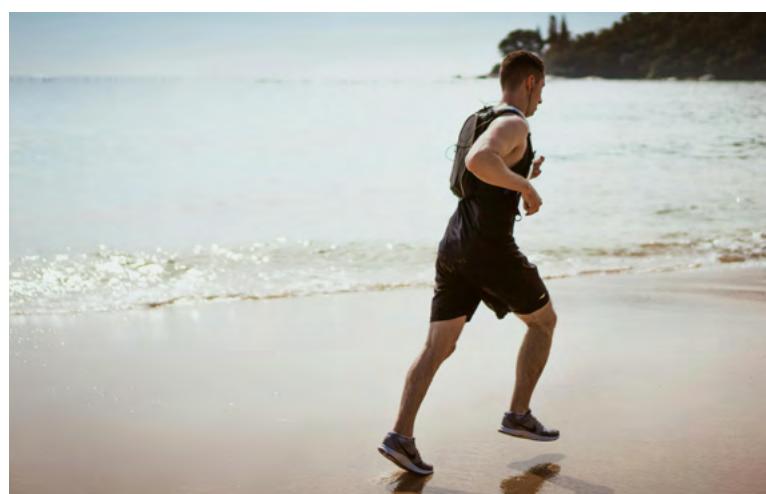
These expectations are further exacerbated by external factors such as social media, which may serve as a barrier to activities frequently

associated with the idea of achieving an ideal male physique. The gym was the most common example, with several participants raising concerns that seeing idealised images on social media served as a demotivating factor. This was particularly prevalent among those with less positive attitudes, who generally felt discouraged by the fact that this ideal vision may be unattainable and can lead to setting unrealistic personal goals.

"Social media influence. I think that is a very big one for me. I'll just see everything online, it's, like, 'Oh, I need to do this, I need to do that. I don't want to go but I need to look like this'. I put personal health goals as a bit of a challenge as well, because I feel like sometimes, I will set myself really high, unrealistic goals to the point that it is detrimental and then I'll get discouraged if I don't see results after going to the gym for 20 minutes."

Male, 25, South Asian, Less positive attitude

When these factors are combined, there is a risk that men's SPA engagement is being driven by perceived expectations of masculinity, rather than by activities they might inherently enjoy. This is particularly pertinent for physical activity, where external factors such as judgment from others and unrealistic images on social media can act as a demotivating factor.



Gender & SPA: “What will people think?”

While individual gender-related influences are largely universal across both the South Asian and Black African communities, it is important to note that there are some differences between the two groups when it comes to specific social expectations and cultural norms. An example of this concept is the mindset of “what will people think” and how it manifests differently in Black African and South Asian communities.

The “what will people think” mindset is a pervasive cultural attitude, which often prioritises the opinions and judgments of others over individual desires and well-being. Male and female participants from both South Asian and Black African backgrounds highlighted the scrutiny and criticism they receive from extended family members and the wider community concerning their actions and choices around SPA.

This constant surveillance and pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations can severely limit their ability to freely engage in activities of their choice, including SPA. This acts as a powerful barrier, especially for women.

In the Black African community, participants shared experiences that emphasise how the “what will people think” mentality can be experienced in subtle yet impactful ways. One participant recounted how her aunties discouraged her from pursuing sprinting due to concerns about her weight and appearance, despite her parents’ support and encouragement:

“I used to do track and sprinting, but my aunties said, ‘You should probably stop because it’s not good for you. You’re going to get slimmer.’ Eventually, I decided to stop, which I regret because I really enjoyed sprinting.”

Female, 29, Black African, Strong positive attitude

This experience underscores how the opinions and judgments of extended family members and their expectations of gender “norms” can shape decisions to engage in or withdraw from SPA, even when immediate family is supportive.

For Black African men, expectations around what sports were for them is often driven by informal family activities starting from a young age. The idea that boys should play football is common and promoted by close family members and their peers.

The “what will people think” mentality appears to be especially prominent for women from a South Asian background. Participants shared numerous examples of how this attitude restricts SPA participation and limits freedom to make independent choices. Fear of societal judgment and disapproval is often intergenerational, with parents projecting their own experiences and fears onto their children.

“Sometimes parents, because they didn’t necessarily get to do things, then they may not want their children to do it. Because they may think, ‘Oh, society’s going to think badly of them’ or they may think, ‘It’s not a woman’s place to be doing sport.’ They may encourage their male children, but they may not encourage their female children as much or at all.”

Female, 37, South Asian, Less positive attitude

Moreover, the pervasive nature of this mentality extends beyond the immediate family to the wider community including neighbours and other members of the South Asian community.

If you've got South Asian neighbours, that is it. If your parents haven't seen you, your neighbours will tell them. A woman jogging down a main road isn't seen as safe, and if anything happens, it's seen as her fault -'Why did you go in the first place?'

Female, 29, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

The fear of community gossip and judgment can act as a powerful deterrent to women's participation in SPA, particularly in outdoor settings. The notion that a woman jogging down a main road is seen as unsafe and that any negative consequences would be blamed on her further underscores the deeply entrenched gender inequalities and the societal policing of women's behaviour.

"Even a couple of years ago when I was jogging, the old women were staring at me through their windows. I knew they were giving me looks but I thought, 'You can't please everybody.'

Female, 22, South Asian, Peer researcher

The "what will people think" mentality operates across multiple levels of influence, including individual, familial, and societal, to create a powerful barrier to SPA participation, particularly for South Asian women.

Historically, South Asian culture has placed women's roles primarily within the domestic sphere, emphasising their responsibilities in household chores, childcare, and family management. This cultural norm has often been misinterpreted as a religious dictate, blurring the lines between cultural practices and religious beliefs.

"I think especially in the South Asian culture there's a blurred line between religion and culture, where it ends up getting mixed in and you're hearing things that are supposed to be a culture thing but then you're getting told it's a religious thing..."

Female, 22, South Asian, Peer researcher

Consequently, women's participation in SPA has been viewed as a deviation from their prescribed gender roles, leading to disapproval and discouragement.

"I remember the first time I did go to the session, and I came home and I mentioned it out loud and my dad was like, 'What do you need to go boxing for?' You know, like, 'You're a girl. You don't have to do boxing.'"

Female, 29, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

Women who pursued activities such as going to the gym or jogging faced questioning and resistance from family members, particularly fathers, who believed that such activities were unsuitable for girls. The lack of encouragement and support from family and community members has led some female participants to experience feelings of isolation and a sense of missing out on opportunities to engage in team sports and physical activities.



"I think it's quite sad looking back and realising actually how isolating it can be as a young child wanting to do particularly a team sport, and maybe having those internalised misogynistic thoughts in your head of, 'That's not really something that girls do.'"

Female, 24, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

These cultural norms not only limited opportunities for girls but also perpetuated the idea that SPA was primarily for males.

One participant noted the limitations imposed by her role as a caregiver and the fear of potential dangers.

"Family also affects it because my kids are not yet at the age where I can leave them alone. I wouldn't want to go walking in the dark, even if I was in a relatively safe area, I still wouldn't want to in case something was lurking in the dark."

Female, 39, Black African, Less positive attitude



CASE STUDY

Ayesha | 27

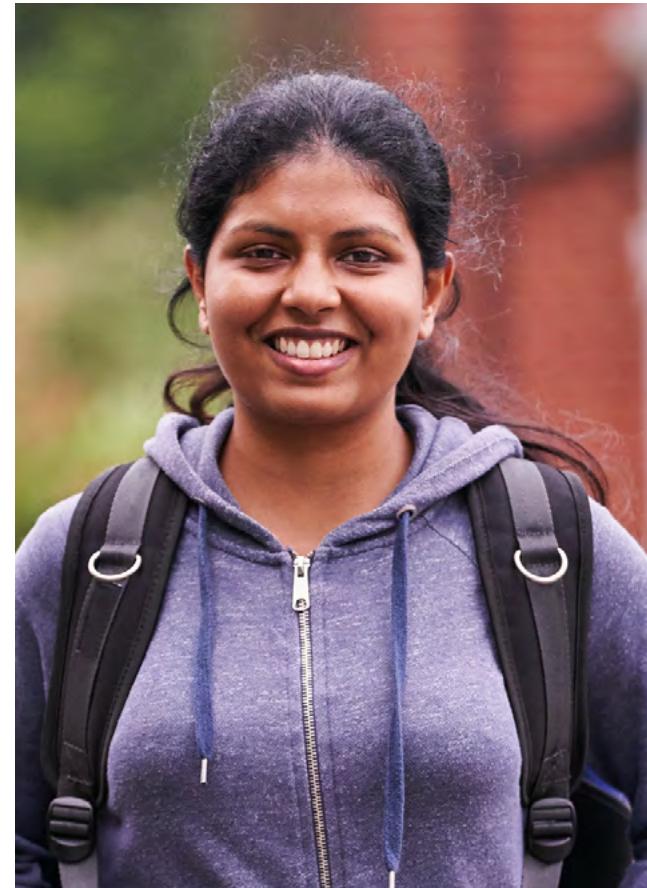
Pakistani | female

Full-time university student

Strong positive attitude to SPA

Ayesha does weight-lifting at the gym twice a week and boxing once a week, as well as playing sports recreationally with her friends in the park. When possible, she also likes to go on walks and hikes with her friends at the weekend, with all of this activity scheduled around her full-time university studies. She enjoys the autonomy of keeping herself in shape as part of a well-rounded healthy lifestyle but is also aware of the mental health benefits of being active.

Ayesha faces some opposition from close family, particularly her father, around being active. This is especially focused on her participation in perceived "masculine" activities such as boxing, with her brother given more freedom to do the activities he wants to without question. Similarly, she feels a cultural pressure on women in her family to play the traditional role of homemaker, with little or no time made for leisure activities.



Given that we're trying to break certain barriers as women, and we're trying to go out and do the things that women weren't really doing 30, 40 years ago, I think the biggest difference for us is, 'Yes, you can fight for women's rights, but don't forget your role in the house too.' Whereas, with men, it's more of a, 'Women are now being able to do certain things that they're allowed to do.'

Similarly, men in South Asian communities face cultural barriers when it comes to participating in certain activities that are considered feminine or unsuitable for their gender. Participants discussed the potential cultural reservations if their sons wanted to pursue ballet dancing. They also acknowledged that there would be concerns about the viability of making a living from such a career choice, reflecting the stereotype that men need to be providers.

"I can see where there'd be cultural reservations towards, you know, certain things [about his son potentially dancing ballet], but I guess more it'd be about individual-, how can you? Okay, you want to dance? Fine. How can you make a career out of that? Make a living out of it? How are you going to support yourself?"

Male, 32, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

Reaction to societal and cultural gender expectations

Despite challenges relating to gender expectations, there appears to be a growing awareness among South Asian women about the importance of SPA for their well-being, with some female participants asserting their right to participate in activities of their choice.

"I remember back home, when I was in school or I was in college, I was pretty good at sports, but I was never encouraged because it was never considered as something I would need. But my love for physical activity and activities that I do now are some things that I have taken up on my own journey, I wasn't prompted by anyone else."

Female, 34, South Asian, Less positive attitude

This demonstrates how some women are breaking free from limiting expectations and pursuing their individual interests, paving the way for future generations.

Despite these positive changes, progress is gradual, and women still face significant challenges in balancing their participation in SPA with cultural expectations of their domestic responsibilities. The unequal distribution of household chores and childcare duties often hinders women's ability to dedicate time and energy to their physical well-being.

"I think it's also the invisible mental note that women have to do, right? Before I left the house today, I remembered that the tea towels needed washing and that the dishwasher needed unloading, so I've got to fit those things in before I go out for the day. Or if I'm up early in the morning to go to the gym before work, I'm doing the dishwasher, right? Whereas, when my brother comes down, the dishwasher's done, the washing load is done, the food is cooked."

Female, 24, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

There is also a gradual shift in mindset among some South Asian men who recognise the need to challenge gender roles and support women's aspirations in SPA.

"I don't have a daughter, but if I did, I would like her to be involved in sport and play for England, because 20 years ago, I don't think professional football teams had females. Sort of, that was pushed and then now you've got it quite popular now. So, if it was now to be able to, kind of, break that cultural, first Asian female to get into the team and play for England or captain England."

Male, 32, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

This sentiment reflects a growing recognition of the need to challenge traditional gender roles and support women's aspirations in SPA. However, South Asian women still face significant challenges in balancing SPA participation with cultural expectations of domestic responsibilities.

When exploring gender expectations around SPA, a connection was noted between participants' attitudes and their responses to societal and cultural pressures. For example, Black African females with strong positive attitudes towards SPA viewed participation in strength-based activities like weightlifting as a means of challenging traditional gender roles and asserting their independence.

66

"Now that I'm older and I'm working out and I'm doing things that people wouldn't expect of you, it almost makes me really proud that I can say, 'I lift weights at the gym.'"

Female, 24, Black African, Strong positive attitude

This sense of pride and empowerment suggests that engaging in activities traditionally associated with masculinity can be a transformative experience, allowing them to redefine their identities and challenge societal expectations.

Moreover, the motivation behind strength training for these women extends beyond mere physical appearance, reflecting a deeper desire for practical empowerment in their daily lives.

"Gym, I just like to feel strong, you know, the perfect woman. I want to be able to carry those heavy boxes myself, you know."

Female, 22, Black African, Strong positive attitude

Some Black African women with strong positive attitudes showed a preference for exercising alone. This preference might underline the importance of engaging in SPA to achieve their goals independently, breaking gender stereotypes and asserting their strength and capability.



"I do the gym sometimes with my boyfriend, but I don't like working out with people. (...) In my head, there are, like, certain goals and ambitions I have when it comes to working out, and I don't want someone to tell me how to get there. And I want to be able to say I did it."

Female, 29, Black African, Strong positive attitude

These insights suggest that for women with strong positive attitudes, SPA is not just about fitness but also about breaking gender stereotypes and achieving a sense of autonomy and strength in their everyday lives.

CASE STUDY

Michelle | 22
Black African | female
Second-year university student
Strong positive attitude to SPA

Michelle does gymnastics twice a week, plays tennis with friends on the weekend and schedules time to go to the gym between her activities, university work and socialising with friends. When she goes to the gym, she makes sure she does weight training twice a week and cardio on the other days. She enjoys the activities she does and feels good when doing it.

While her parents' financial constraints and focus on education limited her early exposure to sports like gymnastics, she discovered a passion for activities that challenge gender stereotypes, such as weight-training, which only her brother was encouraged to do growing up as it was seen as an activity only for men.

Although her boyfriend introduced her into weight-training, she prefers doing it alone so that she can focus on what she needs to do to reach her goals at the gym.

While swimming was also another interest of hers when she was younger, the need for specialised hair care for Black hair made her do it less as she grew older, as the time and cost of maintaining her hair was too much.



"Especially when swimming or when you go to the gym and you're sweating. If I have my wig on, you don't want your lace to come off"



Given that we're trying to break certain barriers as women, and we're trying to go out and do the things that women weren't really doing 30, 40 years ago, I think the biggest difference for us is, 'Yes, you can fight for women's rights, but don't forget your role in the house too.' Whereas, with men, it's more of a, 'Women are now being able to do certain things that they're allowed to do.'

The discussions also revealed a growing awareness among South Asian women about the importance of SPA for their overall well-being. They are increasingly challenging cultural stereotypes and asserting their right to participate in activities of their choice. One female participant shared their story of participating in less conventional activities like boxing, highlighting the importance of breaking away from restrictive cultural norms.

One participant's mother started exercising at the age of 51, defying societal expectations of women's roles. Another participant's mother played a crucial role in promoting fitness and physical activity within her community, helping to shift perceptions and encourage participation.

"Like, when you're surrounded by the same people, it's, kind of, like crabs in a bucket mentality, really, isn't it? Like I said, my mum is doing sports now at 50-odd because we moved away from people who told us that, no she couldn't you know."

Female, 24, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

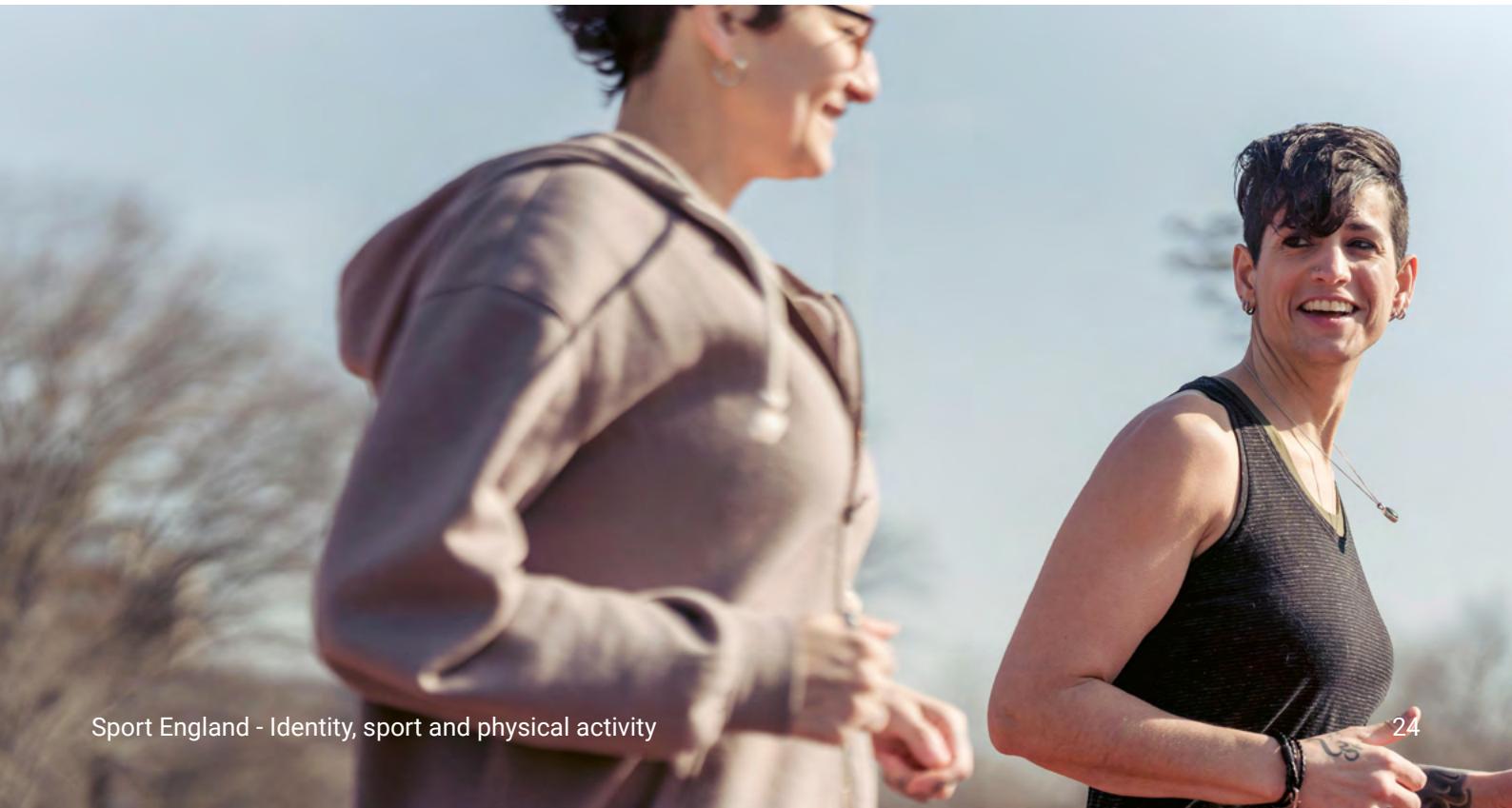
Some men are also recognising the need to support gender equality and women's

aspirations in SPA. One male participant recounted how he is trying to support his sisters to be active, whilst acknowledging that men do not face the same barriers. This included standing up to older family members, who may continue to push cultural stereotypes around women's participation in SPA.

"I put gender roles a lot lower, but respectfully, I don't think I face the barriers that a lot of you do and I see, like, my sisters go through that sometimes and I'm always the first one trying to scream at my dad, like, 'If you don't want to go to the gym, why is it weird they want to go to the gym,' and so, as much as I have never experienced this, I've had the adjacent thing where it's gym for one thing, but so much more. It's, like, if they want to go, let them go, kind of thing, but personally I put that a bit lower for myself."

Male, 25, South Asian, Less positive attitude

Addressing these gender-related barriers through culturally sensitive environments, and challenging traditional expectations will be crucial in promoting inclusive and equitable SPA participation.



Ethnicity

Ethnicity is another individual factor where preconceptions and stereotypes, which are often shaped by identity-related experiences, affect how individuals engage in SPA. These influences can impact available opportunities and shape perceptions of appropriate activities based on a person's beliefs and attitudes.

When considering ethnicity, practical factors come into play, such as heightened risks to certain health issues and extra costs associated with conforming to 'mainstream' cultural expectations. These obstacles, while unique to Black African and South Asian populations, pose similar challenges in engaging with SPA.

Ethnicity & SPA: Stereotypes and participation

Preconceptions around what SPA looks like for certain groups of people, either from specific national or ethnic backgrounds, can impact not just their opportunity to SPA, but their feelings of belonging. Such preconceptions frequently develop early in life, notably during school years when options for activities are more limited and peer influence is strong. Social expectations based on ethnicity can significantly influence how individuals participate in SPA, including the activities they engage in and the roles they assume within those activities. A stark example of this was provided by one Black African participant who reminisced about being forced to play on the wing in rugby because it was believed by his peers that this is where he "should" play, due to his ethnicity.

"I used to play rugby and it was a very, it kind of still is, it was a very white sport, I suppose. So, they used to chuck me on the wing and, sort of, call me Jonah Lomu basically because I was the only minority on the team."

Male, 42, Black African, Less positive attitude

Due to these imposed stereotypes, he was assigned to a position by default, with no consideration of how he wanted to engage with the sport. The notion of stereotyping or assigning individual roles within SPA based on their background can even be specific within ethnic groups, focusing on a person's nationality. For example, one female participant of Kenyan heritage explained how she was expected, in her youth, to excel in running and long-distance events.

This expectation was based on stereotypes surrounding elite long-distance runners from Kenya, which left her feeling unhappy as running was not her personal interest.





[There are] stereotypes about Kenyans and their long-distance runners - some of the best in the world. That actually lived with me in my childhood, and I was pushed to do track. I didn't like it. So, I, kind of, rebelled against school, sort of, stereotypes from school, and I just did the extreme of what people might have expected of me."

Female, 24, Black African, Strong positive attitude



In this instance, this participant mentioned rebelling against these expectations later on. Upon completing school, she transitioned from running to more individual activities such as rowing and gym fitness. However, this is not the case for all who experience stereotypes in relation to their ethnic identity.



I think often at times, the reason why we sometimes might feel like, 'Oh, we cannot do a sport,' is because we just didn't see it done."

Female, 29, Black African, Strong positive attitude



Representation can play an important role, especially for younger ages. Not seeing people of the same ethnicity or heritage participating in a particular sport or activity can lead to developing negative attitudes, driving the idea that SPA is not "for people like me".

"I did rowing competitively and one of the reasons I stopped was because I felt, not marginalised, but the entire team was predominantly white European British and I was the only black female. I didn't feel connected to my teammates."

Female, 24, Black African, Strong positive attitude

Sports which do have more diversity and representation can have a particularly strong positive impact, which was noted by Black African male participants. This was largely owing to the visibility and prevalence of role models in male-dominated sports such as football, with the presence of successful role models providing encouragement and inspiration for individuals from similar

backgrounds. Such role models create aspirational figures and a sense of pride, potentially leading to higher levels of participation in sports where their ethnicity is well-represented.

Like with gender, perceptions of ethnicity-related stereotypes are connected to attitudes towards SPA, with those having strong positive attitudes more likely to rebel and find their own path in SPA.

In contrast, those with less positive attitudes toward SPA were more likely to be discouraged by past negative experiences. This would often lead to a reduced interest in activities, especially organised sports, later in life.



"I pretty much grew up just watching I'd say Didier Drogba for example. I loved the way he played football. I loved the fact that he was an African player. I took the time to look at different players and I was like, 'Oh, you've got people like George Weah for example.' First Ballon d'Or winner only African Ballon d'Or winner."

Male, 18, Black African, Less positive attitude



"I would say it makes it easy to rebel, because, for instance, I did the swimming, I did the track. I didn't do cricket, because I didn't like that, but I still play basketball. I'm 5'3", it didn't make sense, but it was something that wasn't the norm. It's almost like trying to find your identity in sports within the culture. Everybody's doing this, and it's like, 'I don't want to do-' you, kind of just want to go against the grain, just because you can."

Female, 29, Black African, Strong positive attitude



Ethnicity & SPA: specific factors

For South Asian participants, common health issues that are specific to their community emerged as an influencing factor on their relationship with SPA. These groups were aware of the prevalence of certain health issues among South Asians, and the impact that these can have on their wellbeing. For example, participants with less positive attitudes spoke of how the prevalence of diabetes in South Asian countries, such as Bangladesh, is influenced by a complex interplay of genetic, lifestyle, and environmental factors.

"Yes, we store fat. Basically, the idea is that because of the trauma that the population has experienced, we actually hold onto more fat and that is directly related to why we have so much diabetes in our community. And so, movement and stuff like that is why sports is so much more ingrained in me because my mum doesn't want us to end up like that. She doesn't want us to end up like her parents. My dad has diabetes, my aunt has diabetes."

Female, 24, South Asian, Less positive attitude

This also suggests that for those from a South Asian background, engagement with SPA can be driven by considerations of health concerns, rather than enjoying the process of exercising itself. Several participants spoke of how seeing members of their community suffer from poor health, particularly due to a lack of exercise, motivates them to be active due to fear of encountering these issues in later life. This was particularly prevalent among younger participants, whose parents had pushed them to exercise because of health concerns, or who had interacted with people from other communities where SPA is the norm.

"I think, the older I've gotten, I can't get away with that [eating lots] anymore. And so that's another reason why I think I've gotten into it a lot more while I'm older, but I've not gotten that more from my culture, I've got it more from people who I've met from other cultures, where it's not as weird to be exercising or anything like that... Sometimes you'll see people in your own culture, like waste themselves. And you'll just think, 'Oh if you just ate a little bit healthier, you'd be so much happier.' Or they will complain about certain things to you, where you're like, 'Well, you're not doing anything about it.' And that, sort of, pushes me to sometimes exercise because I'm like, 'Oh, I don't want to be someone who complains about feeling groggy and bloated and all of this all the time, but I'm not doing anything about it.'"

Male, 25, South Asian, Less positive attitude



Findings also highlight how a seemingly common obstacle to participating in SPA, such as cost, can be influenced by underlying identity-related factors like ethnic background. For example, for some of the Black African female participants, engaging in SPA can be significantly influenced by hair care considerations.

The challenges of finding hair products and swim caps tailored to their hair textures, coupled with the additional time and expenses required for hair maintenance after exercise, contributes to a reluctance in engaging in with certain types of SPA. Swimming was given as a prime example.

"Most Black girls don't want to because of our hair. We don't want to mess up our hair. Especially when swimming or when you go to the gym and you're sweating. If I have my wig on, you don't want your lace to come off. And if I don't have my wig and just have my natural hair, when I get sweaty, my hair gets so puffy..... You know how crazy it is to take care of your hair, get it ready, put it up, and then you say, 'You know what, I'm not going to do this"

Female, 39, Black African, Less positive attitude

For this participant, engaging in swimming posed complex barriers. Not only did she need to consider the expenses associated with the sport, such as facility fees and travel expenses, but also the time and money required to manage hair after swimming or to obtain appropriate equipment for protecting hair during the activity.

This intersection of multiple influencing factors demonstrates how cultural considerations to 'practical' challenges around SPA should be considered when discussing tackling barriers across communities with lower engagement. For example, following this discussion, participants expressed interest in receiving more personalised hair-care

guidance from providers tailored for their specific hair-care needs. This may include recommendations on hairstyles or braiding techniques that can endure swimming without the need for a cap.

"This specific swimming cap that's meant for Afro hair and that really helped me and made me feel confident in going in the pool. So, I think just having advice that actually applies to you would be good. Because a lot of the time, if you go on websites like Adidas and try to find a cap, it's going to be for people with straight, naturally straight or shorter hair."

Female, 22, Black African, Less positive attitude

The peer researchers provided more context around the relationship between ethnicity and SPA. They highlight that individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds can encounter stereotypes, unconscious bias, and racism in various aspects of their lives.

SPA, along with other areas, is frequently a space where such stereotyping occurs. This consideration is key when reflecting on the obstacles encountered by people from South Asian and Black African backgrounds, as SPA barriers can be just one of the multiple challenges they face in their daily lives.

"It's very difficult for people of ethnic minorities. Black people associate their background with barriers, because for them that can become normalised. You only know what you know."

Male, 34, Black African, Peer Researcher



Migration status

Migration status can also influence behavioural and attitudinal differences around how a person engages with SPA. These differences are likely shaped by whether somebody was born elsewhere and moved to England later in life (first-generation migrant), or if they are a child/grandchild of those who migrated from a different country but grew up in England themselves (second or third-generation migrant).

Migration status & SPA: Access & opportunity

Where somebody grew up has a direct impact on SPA opportunities at a practical level. This could be a positive influence for somebody who comes from a country with strong SPA infrastructure and inclusive opportunity to take part. However, for the first-generation migrants who took part in this research, it was more commonly cited as a barrier. For example, a male participant who grew up in Africa explained how access to swimming pools in his home country was restricted to hotels, which are expensive and exclusive. Even though he would have wanted to swim, he was unable to do so as there were no publicly available options open to him.

How individuals react to new circumstances when moving to England and being exposed to activities that are not widely promoted in their home country will vary from person to person. Some will relish the chance to take part in something they had always wanted to do but haven't been able to, whilst others are put off by lack of experience and a feeling that this activity isn't for them. However, it is fundamental to recognise that the way an individual in England interacts with SPA today is likely shaped by the opportunities and experiences they encountered in their

country of birth, particularly if they are a first-generation migrant.

Migration status & SPA: Priorities

Moving to a new country comes with pressure and challenges which can result in SPA being pushed lower down on the list of personal priorities. This could be the result of entering a mindset where the immediate priority is securing financial security and familial safety in a new country. This ordering of priorities can have a lasting impact into the next generation, where children of first-generation migrants are raised with SPA being a lower focus of everyday life with their parents continuing to remember, and be influenced, by the priorities they had when moving to England.

"It was just survival they were going through. Whereas when I'm growing up and I'm like, 'I want to go to drama club after school, I want to go and do football club after school,' I think they were a bit like, 'Why?' I was quite lucky and I got to do all this kind of stuff, but I think there was a bit of a disconnect in them thinking that you need this, why do you want to do this, kind of thing."

Male, 25, South Asian, Less positive attitude



"My family is very big on education before everything else. So, it was kind of like, 'Your football is stopping your education.' So, yes, there wasn't really a sporty-, any sort of encouragement when it comes to sports in my family."

Female, 22, Black African, Strong positive attitude

Even if "survival" isn't necessarily a primary focus, others may move to England for the purpose of enhancing their education or career, or to secure a better future. Again, this can push SPA down the pecking order of importance, where studying or work impacts motivation and time available to be active. There is an underlying motivation to "succeed" in the new country they have moved to, and engaging with SPA is not always seen as a primary way of achieving this.

For Black African participants, the prioritisation of education and work was evident. Participants highlighted how their parents emphasised the importance of academic success and financial stability, often at the expense of engaging in SPA. This cultural attitude was particularly prevalent among first-generation immigrants who sought to establish themselves in a new country and provide better opportunities for their children. In the context of SPA, these attitudes often prioritise academic and professional success, as well as familial obligations, over SPA. This prioritisation can be seen as a reflection of the communities' broader goals and aspirations, particularly in the context of socio-economic advancement and stability.



Farhan | 25
Pakistani | male
Working full-time
Less positive attitude to SPA

Farhan, who mostly works from home, uses this flexibility to go to the gym at lunchtimes when possible but prefers spending his free time with friends. He has recently combined socialising with fitness by taking spin classes with his friends. He enjoys physical activities more when they are social and casual, like playing sports with friends or family.

However, he feels that going to the gym is a necessity to stay in shape, making it seem more like a chore than a pleasure. Despite not enjoying the activity itself, Farhan acknowledges the mental and physical benefits he experiences afterward. This motivation to stay active developed during his university years, in stark contrast to his parents' focus on survival after immigrating to the UK, which left little room for leisure. Farhan's drive for physical fitness is influenced mainly by his social circles, unlike his family, who did not emphasise the importance of staying active. This external influence also made him realise the health neglect within his own community, pushing him to avoid similar issues later in life.



"Compared to when you're younger, I started noticing people around me are always exercising and you feel obligated to do it yourself."



It was just survival for them. Whereas when I was growing up, I wanted to do drama and football club after school, and they didn't understand why. I think there was a disconnect; they didn't see the need for these activities. Similarly, with physical activity, like when I started going to the gym a few years ago, my family never pushed me to go. The pressure came from social circles, never from the family side."

Migration status & SPA: Closeness to heritage

When exploring the impact of migration status on SPA, it is also important to consider that second and third-generation migrants have likely absorbed the culture and traditions of their family heritage. This is through direct and indirect influences from their parents, grandparents, and surrounding communities. This is in addition to the cultural influences of the country where they were raised, such as England or another country distinct from the birthplace of their parents or grandparents.

"For me, personally, I grew up in 3 different countries, so when people ask me sometimes, 'Where are you from?' It's, kind of, hard to answer that question because I'm, like, 'Are you asking that based on the fact I'm black, my accent?' So, for me, the concept of my community and culture in and of itself is, like, 3 different things alone."

Female, 29, Black African, Strong positive attitude

This relative distance from the source of culture and traditions could explain why second and third generation migrants appear more likely to challenge expectations around the importance of SPA and their understanding that personal enjoyment of being active or playing sport is a valid reason to take part, even if it isn't directly linked to economic or academic achievement.

"Sports weren't really encouraged in my family. I think they saw exercise as something that you would have to only do as a professional sport, and they saw me and my siblings as people who wouldn't really be able to get to that professional level. I don't think they realised that you can actually just do exercise for the fun of it."

Female, 22, Black African, Strong positive attitude

Generational differences in understanding and valuing SPA are evident, with older generations often placing less emphasis on leisure activities. This is common to both Black African and South Asian communities. However, second and third-generation migrants, who have grown up absorbing the culture and traditions of their family heritage alongside the cultural influences of the country they grew up in, appear more likely to challenge expectations around the importance of SPA. They often have a better understanding that personal enjoyment of being active or playing sport is a valid reason to participate, even if it isn't directly linked to economic or academic achievement.

Key social & community factors

This section looks at some of the key social and community factors which influence relationship with SPA. Due to the interconnected nature of individual, social/ community and cultural factors influencing SPA we have already begun to explore how family, in particular older relatives such as parents, grandparents and aunts, can influence relationship with SPA by perpetuating cultural expectations. We now look closer at the other ways peers, including friends as well as family, can influence an individual's relationship with SPA. We also discuss how the various demands of being a family member can influence an individual's relationship with SPA.

Family, friends & SPA: Support network

Having a support network, such as friends or family, to be active with, can be a positive influence on participation in SPA. This sense of enjoyment from the social aspect of sharing experiences and the sense of encouragement from doing SPA with someone else rather than alone can help encourage SPA engagement.

"With sports, it's a bonding thing as well. When my cousins and stuff come over, I do it just to keep them busy and also to spend time with them."

Female, 24, South Asian, Less positive attitude

Having peers who encourage SPA can positively influence engagement, as they become a driving force encouraging participation and even fostering a sense of accountability.

"What has helped me with the discipline is having a sense of accountability, where either my boyfriend or one of my best friends will track my Apple Watch."

Female, 24, Black African, Strong positive attitude

Peers can also provide guidance, reassurance and general direction, which is especially important for those with less positive attitudes towards SPA. Engaging in SPA with friends can also help individuals with less positive attitudes build confidence in the SPA they carry out. Initially, some individuals might feel intimidated or out of place in SPA settings, for example when doing a sport for the first time or joining the gym and not knowing how to use the equipment. However, starting this journey with a group of friends can alleviate feelings of fear and being out of place. Over time, as they become more familiar with the setting and

gain experience building the skills within that activity, these individuals might grow more comfortable and confident.

"My friend is really into gym. Because we live together, I saw how she was doing, and she didn't make it seem as bad as I thought it would be. So, following her helped me because now I've joined her at the gym."

Female, 22, Black African, Less positive attitude

This progression demonstrates the influence social networks can have. With the support of friends and family, these individuals are not only introduced to SPA but also become more likely to engage consistently and confidently over time. It also highlights an opportunity for SPA programs to leverage the power of group dynamics to create environments that are welcoming for newcomers, which could enhance long-term engagement and enjoyment in SPA.



Those with less positive attitudes towards SPA may find that their engagement influenced by the participation of a friend, housemate, or close relative. Rather than being self-motivated, decisions to engage in activities for participants with less positive attitudes, can be dependent on their peers' involvement. These participants tend to rely on their friendship groups for organising group sport activities, such as badminton or football, to be active. Having a friend who they know and can see regularly exercising can drive these individuals to do the same and can sometimes be the sole reason they exercise.

The dependence on more active peers for SPA engagement among those with less positive

attitudes suggests that, for them, the act of participating in SPA is rooted in the social experience and connection it facilitates. Relying on friends and family members can be a positive experience, but also hinder individuals in taking part on their own or building a personal relationship with SPA.

"To actually do something long-term, realistically it's got to be fun. Fun is important to me. The idea of things like jogging, trying to get a better time than your friend, tennis...it's the fact that it's also a little bit competitive and you can do it with friends."

Female, 22, Black African, Less positive attitude



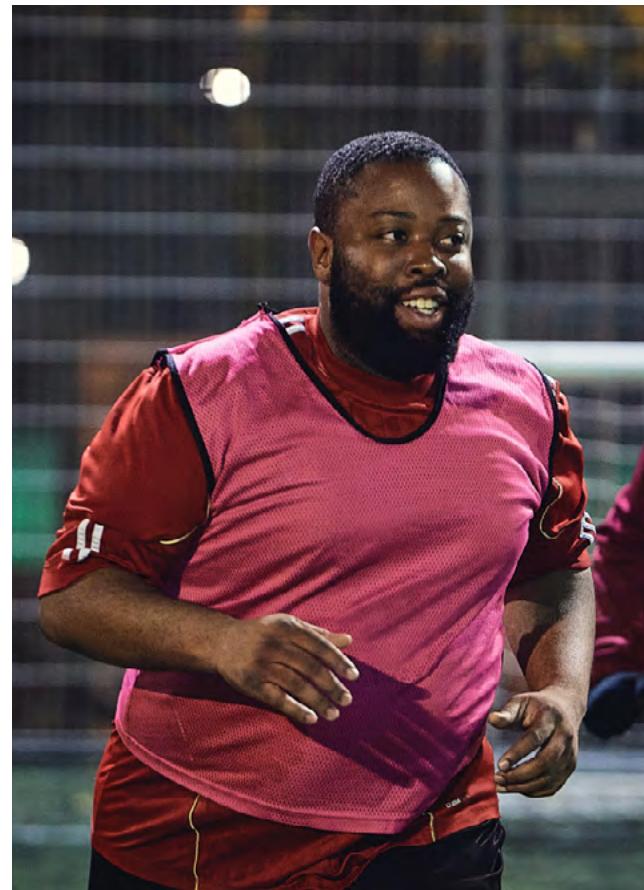
CASE STUDY

Joe | 29
Black African | male
Working full-time
Less positive attitude to SPA

Joe finds that he has no time to do anything during the week outside of work and instead, prefers to take time for himself to wind down after a long day.

Joe finds that he has no time to do anything during the week outside of work and instead, prefers to take time for himself to wind down after a long day.

Joe is signed up to the gym but lacks the motivation to go, so he mainly exercises by playing football with friends. He enjoys going to church as the majority of attendees in his local church are Nigerian and are from the same tribe as his family, so he feels a sense of belonging. As a church group, every now and again, they organise events where they do activities that involve SPA.. Growing up, Joe preferred watching rugby to playing it due to a lack of relatable role models. However, he found role models in football which gave him a sense of representation that he didn't find in rugby.



"If there was a gym opposite my house then that would give me the incentive to go I think, so mentally it's having the desire to go. I wish I would do more exercise, but I just cannot be bothered, but if there was a gym 30 seconds walk from my house then I'd have no excuse or if I had a treadmill in my garden, I'd have no excuse"



"I tried to go to the gym, but it wasn't really my thing. It's still not really my thing but I still always have it in my mind to do it"

Family, friends & SPA: family responsibilities

Parenthood can act as both a barrier and a facilitator to SPA. In some instances, parenthood can increase involvement in SPA through activities centred around children, such as walking to parks or playing sports with their children as a way to stay active.

"The time that I probably would have spent playing sports by myself has translated to playing sports and being physically active with my children. Taking them out to the park, playing football with them."

Male, 32, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

As people age, the importance of maintaining health through SPA increases, with walking becoming a frequent activity. This preference often stems from a desire to spend quality time with family, aligning physical activity with family gatherings.

"Once you get to a certain age, it's not that you lack ambition it's just there are more important things. I'd rather hang out with my mates than work every hour that God sends. [Also], I mean, family walking. If I go hang out with my niece and nephew, we'll go to a play centre or walking."

Male, 32, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

For South Asian participants, the central role of family in their lives and the expectations placed on them to prioritise family responsibilities over personal interests like SPA was highlighted. The focus on family responsibilities among South Asian participants is not merely a practical barrier to SPA engagement due to time constraints. It also reflects a deep-rooted cultural attitude that places family obligations at the centre of

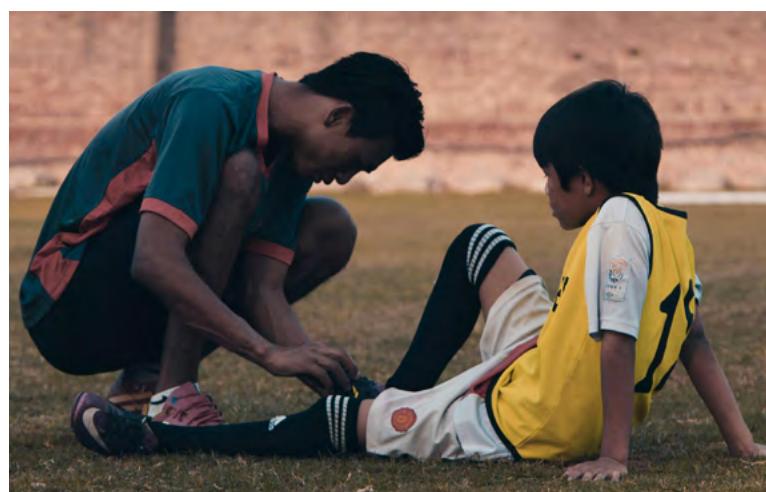
an individual's life. This cultural expectation is reinforced by the experiences and beliefs passed down through generations, which can make it challenging for individuals to prioritise personal interests like SPA.

Once again, we see intersection with other individual identity factors such as gender. For example, one female participant felt restricted in her ability to be active despite working full-time, due to prioritizing education and home responsibilities, especially when compared to the expectations of her brother.

"I wouldn't be shocked if other women in my culture said this, my brother can go outside and do whatever, like, if he wants to go play football then, 'it's fine, he's really hard-working,' when I was working full-time my dad never said that, all he thought was, 'Home and education,' I'm like, 'That's not fair, I'm not going to get time to do that."

Female, 23, South Asian, Less positive attitude

This highlights the practical impact of family responsibilities on SPA engagement. However, it is important to recognise that the limited time for exercise is not solely due to the demands of childcare and work but also a result of the cultural expectation that family should come first.



Defining community

Across both ethnicity groups, “community” was defined by participants as entities that provide a sense of belonging, where people share common interests, backgrounds, religious beliefs, experiences, values and geographical location. Examples of the types of communities’ participants are part of included:

-  ETHNICITY GROUPS
-  RELIGIOUS GROUPS
-  NEIGHBOURHOODS
-  SPORT AND ACTIVITY GROUPS
-  COLLEAGUES
-  THOSE WHO SHARE A SIMILAR UPBRINGING

As can be seen from these examples, “community” is a broad concept that centres around togetherness and shared experiences.



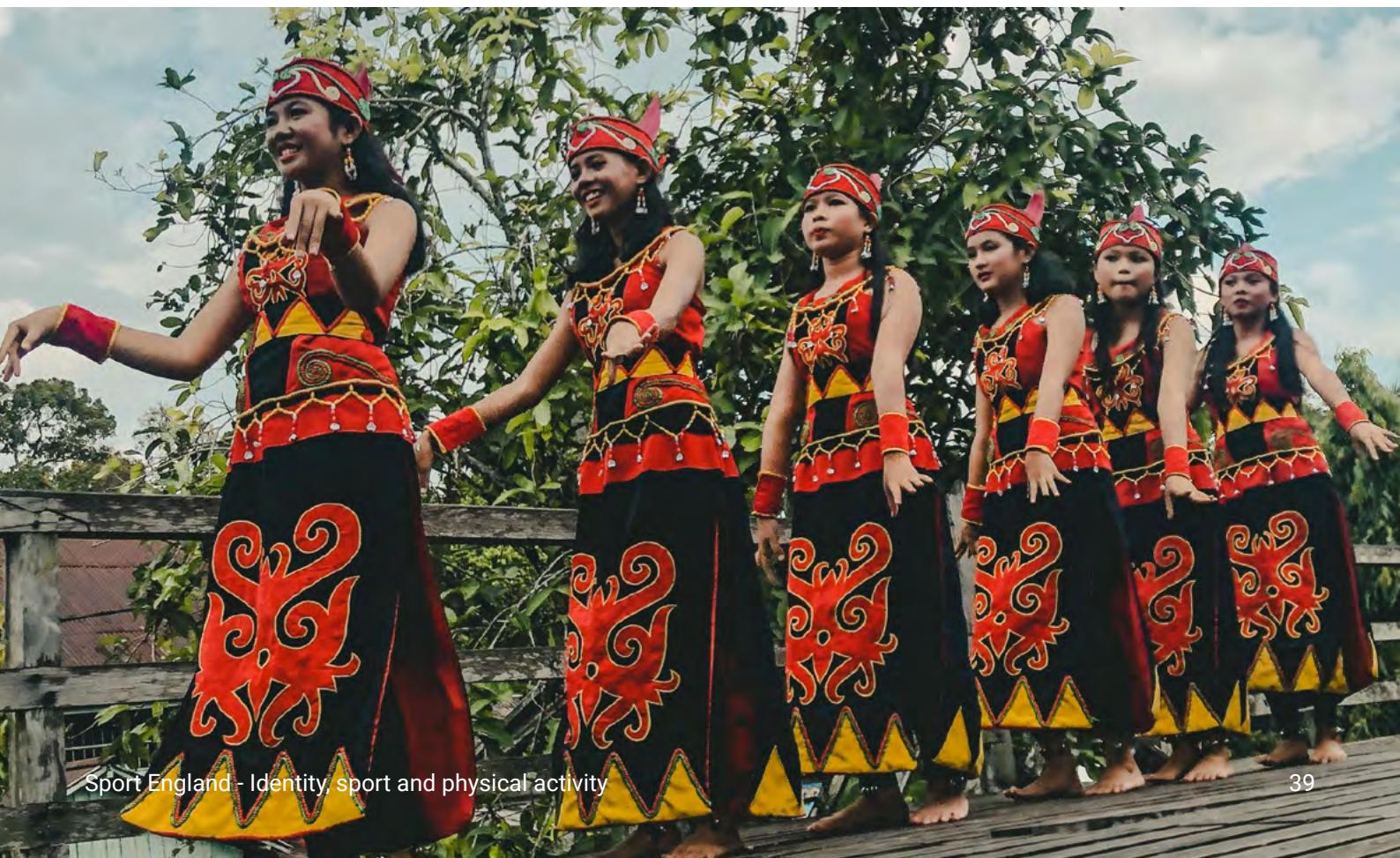
Community & SPA: engagement

Participants expressed that being part of various communities allowed them to connect deeply with others, where individual differences often become secondary to a shared passion. This connection fosters a strong sense of unity. This can encourage many aspects of their life, including engagement in SPA. Since SPA is not always a visible or prominent part of home life, finding a supportive group elsewhere can greatly enhance access and enjoyment. Engaging in SPA with those who share similar interests offers a source of motivation and pleasure, making the activities more appealing. However, this often relies on SPA being a core interest of the community itself, otherwise it may not be promoted or could even be discouraged.

For many participants from the Black African and South Asian communities, the cultural

alignment of local community centres, particularly those affiliated with religious institutions can significantly influence their access to and experiences of SPA. For instance, South Asian participants noted that community centres often integrate physical activities within spiritual or communal gatherings. Facilities like mosques might offer segregated gym facilities with specific times for men and women, accommodating cultural norms around modesty and gender-specific interactions, thus allowing individuals to engage in SPA without compromising their cultural or religious principles.

Cultural events and gatherings in South Asian communities also play a crucial role acting as important social occasions that encourage SPA engagement. Although these gatherings are often centred around food and can promote sedentary activities, they also provide opportunities for engaging in physical activities like dancing and games, which are integral components of these cultural celebrations.



Culturally or demographically appropriate facilities and initiatives

Linked to community is the influence of culturally appropriate facilities, which can play a crucial role in SPA engagement. Individuals find strength and motivation in group activities with people they identify with through shared physical appearance and cultural background. The availability of spaces that acknowledge and cater to specific cultural needs can greatly enhance the feeling of belonging and willingness to participate. This shared identity within SPA settings fosters a supportive environment that encourages consistent engagement and a positive experience.

The focus group discussions highlight the importance of distinguishing between facilities that cater to specific cultural needs and existing facilities becoming more inclusive. While both approaches aim to create a more welcoming environment for

diverse communities, they operate differently. Facilities catering to specific cultural needs designed for a particular demographic, such as setting up a female-only fitness class to accommodate religious or cultural preferences for gender segregation. On the other hand, existing facilities can become more inclusive by implementing changes that make them more accessible and welcoming to a broader range of users, such as hiring more diverse staff or introducing new safety policies. Both approaches are valuable in promoting SPA engagement among Black African and South Asian communities.

The concept of culturally appropriate facilities and initiatives is more salient for female participants from both Black African and South Asian communities compared to their male counterparts. Women's experiences and needs were at the forefront of conversations about cultural sensitivity, safety, and inclusivity in SPA settings. The emphasis on female-only spaces, accommodating religious dress codes, and addressing cultural barriers such as hair care highlights the gendered nature of these concerns.



If I was suggesting a physical activity, I'd want to do it in an environment where I feel comfortable and safe. Whereas I feel like you guys never have to think about sexual safety in the gym."

Female, 24, South Asian, Strong positive attitude



"I don't know if you guys have ever heard of "Black women can Hike" and things like that where they do things specifically for Black women. Their goal is basically to get people who look like you and to make it more relaxed. So, it's not very stressful when you go and do it and then you actually enjoy it more and want to do it regularly."

Female, 22, Black African, Less positive attitude



For South Asian Muslim women participants, the presence of culturally appropriate facilities is key in determining their participation in SPA. Female-only spaces and classes are not merely a preference but a necessity for some as it aligns with cultural and religious practices. These dedicated environments provide a sense of security and comfort, allowing Muslim women to engage in physical activities without compromising their values, such as the choice to wear a hijab, as mentioned by some participants.

"Female-only spaces, like, women's exercise classes or women's fitness classes... especially if you're Muslim, you might not want to be dressed a certain way in front of men or you might wear a hijab while you do something, so I feel like I would be more comfortable, I know a lot of people would be more comfortable with just female-only spaces."

Female, 23, South Asian, Less positive attitude

Discussions also touched upon modesty and the need for female-only spaces for reasons extending beyond religion. Participants mentioned wanting these safer environments to exercise free from fear and reduce interactions and the risk of harassment from men in shared gender spaces. The consideration of dedicated times for women in shared facilities emerged as a potential solution.

"You see there's a rise of girls-only gym spaces for example, it's becoming quite huge. There are women who are sick of sexual assault. If I was suggesting a physical activity, I'd want to do it in an environment they feel comfortable and safe."

Female, 24, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

In contrast, male participants did not explicitly discuss the need for culturally appropriate facilities or initiatives tailored to their specific needs. This may indicate that men perceive these issues as less relevant to their own SPA engagement, possibly due to different cultural expectations and gender norms. However, it is important to note that the limited discussion of male-specific barriers and facilitators in the focus groups does not necessarily mean that culturally appropriate facilities are not important for men. It may simply reflect a lack of awareness or articulation of these needs among the male participants.



03

Summary of key findings

This research explored the multi-level factors that influence an individual's relationship with SPA, focusing on South Asian and black African communities in England. Intersectional and socioecological frameworks underpin the study, building on current literature that explores how interconnected factors shape a person's engagement and connection with SPA. This multi-level approach helped identify the key social and individual factors that influence SPA patterns within unique socio-cultural contexts. The following section will discuss prominent findings from the study, drawing greater focus on their context, implications, and the need to further explore these outcomes in further research.

Individual identities: a focus on gender and migration status

As with wider sociological research, gender emerged as a key factor which impacted life experiences and, in turn, SPA-related engagement and attitudes. Discussions among female participants, notably from South Asian backgrounds, revealed a conflicting relationship between SPA and the cultural expectations placed on their gender identity. Not only did these women face collective barriers around menstruation and personal safety, but for those whose primary roles centre around the family, they faced clashes with their identities as mothers, carers and homemakers. For some female South Asian participants with less-positive attitudes, partaking in SPA was not necessarily disliked; rather, it was seen as misaligning with the culturally prescribed behaviours expected for their gender, especially if pursued as enjoyment or leisure.

This gives insight into the role of gender norms as barriers, which can serve as both intrinsic and extrinsic deterrents to building a relationship with SPA. Gender norms can become internalised as part of a woman's identity. This creates an intrinsic struggle where women recognise the importance of exercise for their health or enjoyment but feel compelled to prioritise other responsibilities that fulfil their social identities. Moreover, gender norms are often reinforced by family and surrounding social structures, resulting in robust external pressure to adhere to these values. Engaging in SPA could not only cause internal variance for women, but also risk disrupting their family dynamics or exposing them to unnecessary judgement and marginalisation.

Women-only breakout groups revealed themes of empowerment, where women felt enabled to question, work around, or sometimes defy imposed social expectations. By engaging in SPA, these women not only gained confidence in their physical abilities but also transformed their involvement into a form of social liberation. As observed by some younger female participants, this shift in attitudes could indicate a cultural movement away from traditional norms and towards a more balanced life for women. More research is required to understand changing attitudes specifically regarding gender equality; however, sport bodies should generally aim to collaborate with community leaders to outline best practices to engage women moving forward. This would promote positive behaviour change for these groups, while also adapting SPA to align with their existing cultural values.

Migration status was also identified as a key influencing factor. The nature of its influence varies largely on context, as migrants are not a

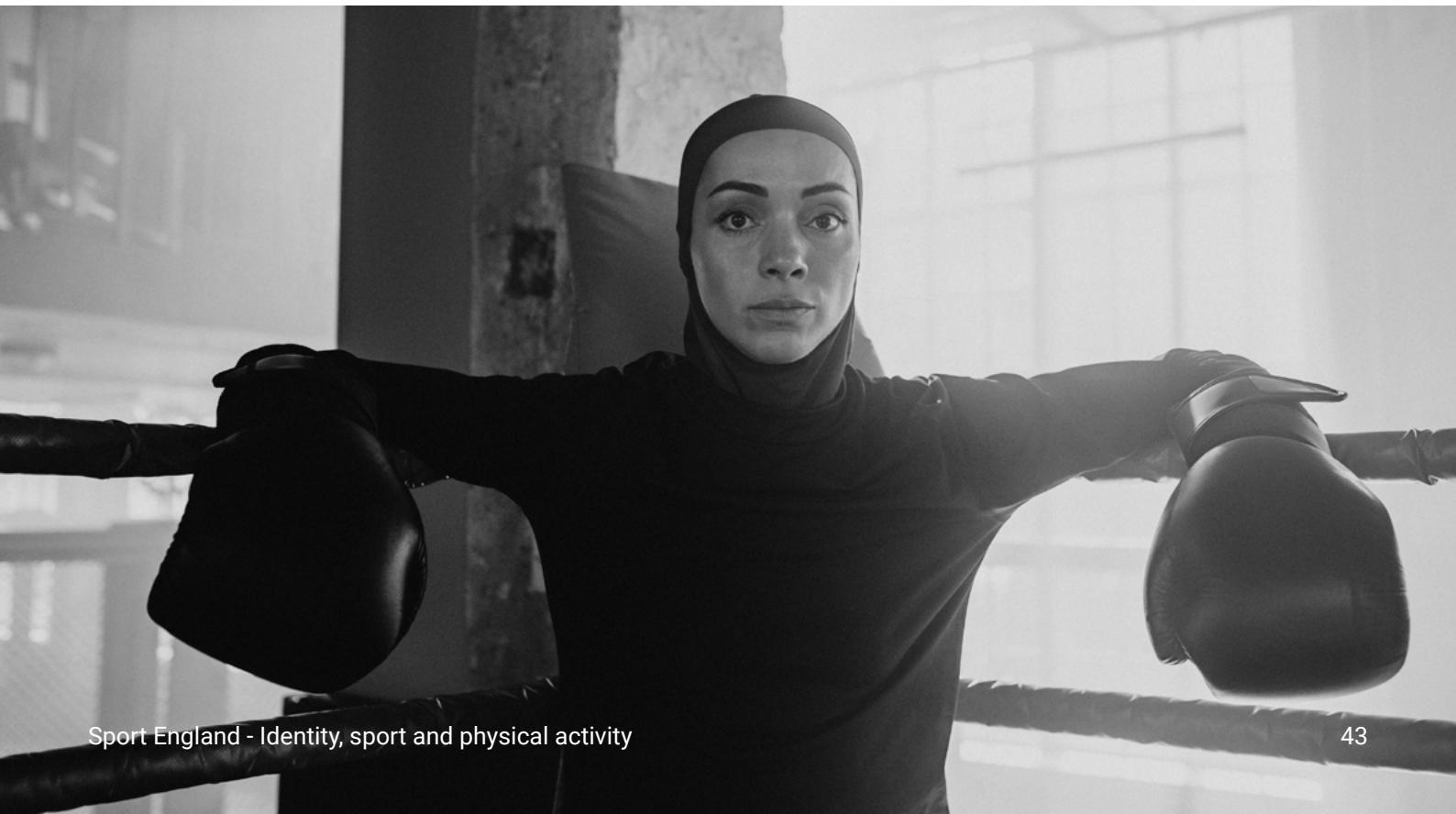
homogeneous group. Instead, they encompass a wide range of experiences shaped by different circumstances, such as whether they are first or later-generation immigrants, their age at arrival, reasons for relocating, the available support networks in their destination country, and so on. Although migrant stories differ, a common experience of recent migrants encompasses the strenuous process of adaptation and integration. Adaptation is perceived as a journey of convergence, where individuals seek to close opportunity and social gaps observed between themselves and native-born groups. Alternatively, integration is the extent to which immigrants possess the knowledge and ability to build success and fulfilment across their life domains.

Migrant identities often face intersectionality which prevent fair adaptation and integration opportunities, impacting status, rights, and prospects. These inequalities can persist across generations, particularly in families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

For individuals with strong positive attitudes towards SPA, continuing their preferred sport after migrating might be challenging

due barriers related to financial constraints, discrimination, existing health conditions, and factors which impact accessibility. This is in addition to wider barriers faced by migrants around participation, such as feelings of exclusion (especially in programs catered to White culture, lack of confidence, language proficiency issues, insufficient knowledge about program opportunities, and lack of social connections for engaging in activities. This collation of barriers may risk leaving migrant populations behind in SPA contexts, even if a person is motivated to participate.

Whilst it's evident that migration status plays a role in SPA attitudes and behaviour, this relationship is complex and largely dependent on individual circumstance. For example, for several participants, migrating to England offered new opportunities to engage in SPA, specifically in activities that were not widely available in their home countries. Given this variability, drawing immediate conclusions on how to increase SPA participation among migrants would be premature. However, this insight remains valuable as it highlights the importance of considering migration status in future research addressing inequalities.



Social identities: a focus on family and faith

Social identities¹ encompass the value, knowledge, and emotional significance attributed to a person's social memberships. Individuals from rich ethnic and cultural backgrounds likely balance multiple social identities simultaneously, depending on their scale of community involvement and exposure to different environments. In our sample, family was identified as one of the most prominent social groups influencing participants.

The centrality of the family was a common experience among both South Asian and Black African ethnicities, placing family obligations and normative beliefs at the forefront of lifestyle choices and priorities. Participants report that family responsibilities are an integral part of their identity, a view shared by both men and women. In South Asian communities, women are generally expected to stay at home, while men are expected to provide financial support. Here, engaging in SPA instead of fulfilling more immediate family obligations could be seen as damaging to personal reputation and family honour.

Surrounding social structures, such as those imposed by extended family members or respected elders, often Families may also feel the need to prioritise education or career opportunities over physical activity, which could be related to wider socioeconomic inequalities disproportionately affecting these ethnicities. This highlights a possible interplay between structural and functional social influences, where social support networks (functional influences) could either exacerbate or outweigh the negative impact of structural disadvantages in relation to SPA participation.

In addition to family, religion also constituted a prominent social identity across both ethnic groups. For participants with strong ties to their religious identities, decisions around partaking in SPA extended beyond practical matters; rather, required specific considerations around dress codes, prayer times, gender mixing, and religious holidays like fasting. Whilst religion has substantial impact on these participants' behaviour and attitudes, the nature of its influence is not definitive.

For some, their religious identities had no impact or even served as a facilitator to SPA. One Muslim participant noted that her faith promoted physical activity, observing that daily prayer was sufficient exercise for her lifestyle. However, South Asian Muslim women were more likely to cite religious restraints as a barrier. This is primarily due to the lack of inclusive facilities and programs available to suit their religious needs. This concept aligns with established literature, where the absence of culturally tailored spaces limits the ability to engage in SPA comfortably and securely. Further investigation is needed to understand how social identities interact not just with each other, but with other individual traits. By dissecting this relationship, we can begin to map the relative influence of each identity, such as which take precedence over others, to better understand how behaviours and attitudes around SPA are formed.



¹ Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). *The social identity theory of intergroup behavior*. In S. Worchel & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7–24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.

Cultural identity: interactions between ethnic

Cultural identity broadly encompasses the dynamic relationship between a person's heritage and exposure to surrounding cultures. Cultural expression is thought to evolve over time, context, and across generations of migration; nevertheless, it is widely regarded as an essential part of influencing how individuals behave and feel. There is limited evidence on how minority ethnic identities in England navigate their relationships with the multiple cultures they inhabit. Although not conclusive, the findings from this research may help in improving current understanding. Study outcomes support that participants' cultural identity (comprised of both their heritage and broader British culture to varying degrees) significantly impacts their interactions and attitudes towards SPA.

From our sample, it was noted that participants with stronger ties to their heritage adhered more closely to the expectations of their ethnic identity. This often translated into a preference for engaging in SPA that catered to their specific socio-cultural needs and values. Conversely, participants with greater integration to wider British culture, either from longer exposure or greater receptiveness, appeared more open to SPA activities that might not be traditionally practiced by members of their community. This interplay of cultural identification was particularly relevant for younger participants. Likely as part of their identity formation process, they experienced challenges in reconciling their ethnic heritage with those aligned with British norms. For some, pursuing non-traditional activities could be met with judgment or pressure from members of their family or ethnic community.

The extent to which cultural identity influences individual decisions around SPA remains complex, warranting further exploration. Future research should investigate how a person's cultural identity is shaped, focusing on the

varying degrees of closeness to heritage and the integration of surrounding cultures. This approach could provide a better understanding of why some individuals adhere to certain cultural expectations, while others choose to contest or adopt new ones.

Evolving attitudes

The research found evidence for a shift in perspectives which is particularly evident among younger generations and those further removed from the initial migration experience.

This shift involves questioning and redefining societal expectations, leading to a more inclusive and supportive environment for participation in SPA. Several factors contribute to this change, including exposure to diverse cultural influences, increased access to education and resources, and a growing awareness of the importance of personal well-being and self-expression. As younger generations navigate the complexities of their cultural identities in an increasingly globalised world, they are more likely to embrace new experiences and challenge traditional norms that may limit their opportunities for growth and fulfilment.

Among the Black African participants, the evolving attitudes to the perception of SPA between the older and younger generation was evident. Younger generations, particularly those within immigrant families, are actively redefining the value placed on SPA beyond the transactional mindset of older generations. While previous generations may have prioritised immediate "survival needs" and practical life goals such as education and career, often influenced by their cultural norms and experiences of migrating, the younger generations are recognising the intrinsic value of SPA for enjoyment and personal development.

This shift in mindset highlights a growing awareness among younger Black Africans of the holistic benefits of SPA, not just for physical health but also for mental well-being and personal growth. By embracing SPA as a means of self-fulfilment and enjoyment, they are challenging the traditional narrative that prioritises practical needs over personal interests.

Despite a strong emphasis on education and career advancement, young individuals are integrating SPA into their lifestyles, regardless of their family's attitudes. This integration signifies a shift towards a more balanced approach to well-being, where physical activity is seen as complementary to academic and professional success, rather than in opposition to it. It is important to note that while the focus group discussions indicate a shift in attitudes and a growing recognition of the holistic benefits of SPA among younger Black Africans, this may not yet be reflected in the quantitative data on overall participation rates. The process of cultural change is often gradual, and there may be a time lag between the initial shift in attitudes and the translation of these attitudes into sustained changes in behaviour.

Moreover, younger generations may still face significant barriers to SPA participation, such as lack of access to affordable and culturally appropriate facilities, time constraints, and competing priorities. These barriers may limit their ability to fully integrate SPA into their lifestyles, despite their growing awareness of its importance.

For those with strong positive attitudes toward SPA, the transition from living with parents to gaining independence, usually when moving out or working for personal allowance, has been pivotal. Moving out has often led to an increase in SPA engagement or a change in attitude whereby attitudes towards SPA grew stronger and became more positive, as the pressures from family expectations eased and individuals gained the freedom to pursue their interests. This independence allows them to embrace SPA on their terms, without the constraints of parental influence.



"I didn't actually do many sports growing up. But I started pole dancing classes when I was 19-20 years old, and I've been doing those since. That, I think, was a gateway into my fitness exercise journey."

Female, 22, Black African, Strong positive attitude



However, it is important to note that while there is a shift in attitudes among younger generations, not all individuals within this demographic are actively engaging in SPA. For those with less positive attitudes towards SPA, gaining independence does not automatically lead to more involvement. This highlights the complexity of attitude formation and the importance of early positive experiences and exposure to SPA in shaping long-term engagement.

The changing attitudes among younger South Asians reflect a growing recognition of the importance of personal autonomy and self-expression. As they navigate the complexities of their cultural identities in an increasingly globalised world, they are more likely to embrace diverse experiences and challenge traditional norms that may limit their opportunities for growth and fulfilment.

Another participant acknowledged the difficulties older generations face in adapting to new ways of thinking but emphasised the importance of making incremental changes for future generations.

"One of the biggest things that I've learned through that is how much culture actually shapes our psychology and our cognition. Having to break out of that...if that's all you've ever known, anything else is just going to be alien to you. Especially at their ages now, like, trying to adapt a new way of thinking and stuff. Sometimes I'm, like, 'You know what, just do what you got to do.' As long as we can make it better for the next lot, I guess."

Female, 29, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

This recognition of generational differences highlights the ongoing efforts to create a more accepting and supportive environment for SPA within the community.

Younger generations are also actively challenging cultural norms and encouraging more inclusive attitudes toward SPA. One participant noted the clash between traditional expectations and the reality of living in a different cultural context, where younger individuals are more inclined to embrace diverse experiences:

"I almost think being in a new culture and being minoritised makes them latch onto their identity even more. So, it becomes more secular and becomes more isolated. Whereas for me, I see something different, I'm, like, 'Oh, I'm interested in it.' Whereas for them, I think it's, like, 'Oh, I have to protect what I have because then I lose it if I assimilate."

Female, 24, South Asian, Strong positive attitude

This perspective illustrates the tension between preserving cultural identity and adapting to new cultural environments, which can impact individuals' willingness and ability to engage in SPA. Nonetheless, the growing momentum for change among younger generations suggests that there is potential for greater inclusion and participation in SPA within South Asian communities in the future.



04

Limitations and future research

This research is exploratory in nature and requires further investigation with larger samples to confirm its findings. Due to our sample size, which consisted of 24 participants and four peer researchers, generalising the results to the broader population is impractical. Although these findings are supported by established research, our sample may not fully represent broader opinions and risk potential bias. Further exploration is essential to increase sample variability and capture a wider range of experiences, behaviours, and attitudinal patterns more comprehensively.

This qualitative approach enabled researchers to conduct an in-depth analysis of inherently complex topics; however, additional research is necessary to explore the derived themes and sub-themes more thoroughly. To address these limitations regarding sample diversity and enhance the scope for comparative analysis, a subsequent Activity Check-In quantitative study will be conducted to investigate the findings on a larger population scale. This follow-up study aims to support current findings by enhancing their reliability and

accuracy, while also mitigating the limitations of a small focus group sample. Through this follow-up study, we aim to gain a wider understanding of the extent to which identified factors serve as barriers or facilitators for these ethnic communities.

Both studies will also lay the groundwork for a more extensive doctoral research investigation into community sport and inequalities. In collaboration with Sport England, Brunel University London and the Grand Union Doctoral Training Partnership, the project aims to adopt a mixed methods approach to develop a comprehensive framework for understanding SPA inequality at macro (societal), meso (community), and micro (individual) levels. Outcomes of the PhD are expected to make a notable contribution towards Sport England's commitments outlined in their Uniting the Movement Strategy and Implementation Plan, aiming to address inequality in sport and physical activity through collaboration, provide opportunities to marginalised communities, remove barriers to participation, and develop a shared understanding of its root causes.

