

Unequal Play: Gendered Barriers to Sports Access and Participation Among Hong Kong Teenagers

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the social and urban factors shaping disparities in teenage girls' and boys' access to sports facilities and participation in Hong Kong. The findings highlight persistent gendered disparities in access to sports in Hong Kong and shed light on the many barriers that have limited girls' involvement in sports. An anonymous survey of over 50 teens aged 13-18 (evenly split by gender) used multiple-choice, scale, and open-ended questions to gather data. The responses were analyzed via descriptive statistics, graphs, and thematic coding. Key findings reveal that 42% of females reported a 3 (out of 5) for how easy it is for them to access sports facilities, whilst over 90% of men reported a 4 or 5 (out of 5). Moreover, the biggest barriers to participation for both genders were distance and lack of time. However, females reported safety concerns more often than males, while males were slightly more likely to cite cost as a challenge. Females often faced longer travel times to sports facilities, which reduced participation as families were less willing to let them travel far. Both girls and boys reported noticing differences in how women and men are treated in sports settings, noting how females are often seen as inferior and given less access to resources. These results reveal systemic obstacles that prevent equal participation, showing the need for change and inclusive intervention. This paper calls for immediate action to promote sports participation in Hong Kong's female youth by amplifying these ignored voices to help build a truly equitable future.

Keywords: Gender Disparity, Sports Facilities, Teenagers, Safety Concerns, Hong Kong, Urban Barriers

1. INTRODUCTION

Sports have proven to be an important asset in improving children's emotional and physical well-being. Statistics on the benefits of youth sports highlight numerous facets of physical well-being that demonstrate the positive impact of sports on children's development (University of San Diego, n.d.). A few positive outcomes found were lower recorded instances of drug abuse, improved sleep, and greater self-confidence and self-esteem (University of San Diego, n.d.). While these outcomes showcase the transformative power of sports, many still face barriers to participation. "The article 'Barriers to Youth Participation in Physical Activity and Sport' reports that many children face obstacles such as unequal access, time pressure, and high costs." While sports are framed as something all children should

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participate in, in reality, because of these factors (and many more), not all children have the opportunity to do so. Moreover, these challenges do not affect all children equally, as participation rates often differ between boys and girls, reflecting broader disparities in opportunity. United States Human Kinetics posits that youth are frequently pushed into 'gender-appropriate' sports. Moreover, female athletes are often sexualized, resulting in many negative results, such as girls dropping out of sports at double the rate of boys (UN Women, 2026). However, these are only a few of the barriers that explain why girls' and boys' participation rates in sports differ, and they point to larger systemic issues that this paper will examine to understand why these disparities persist. This matter deserves greater attention because, in a city that prides itself on inclusion, ongoing gender inequities in access to sports run counter to those values and diminish opportunities for healthy development for young people. Therefore, this paper explores the social, cultural, and urban barriers that contribute to unequal participation in and access to sports facilities for teenage girls and boys in Hong Kong. The purpose of this paper is to systematically analyze how teenage girls' and boys' access to sports facilities and participation rates differ in Hong Kong, and what social or urban factors explain these disparities. Its scope will be to look at this topic in the contexts of sports, schools, and public facilities. This paper begins with context and background information, then presents a literature review synthesizing existing research on this topic, followed by a methodology and results section detailing the survey setup and findings. Finally, it will conclude with a discussion of the findings and their implications, and a summary of contributions and future directions for discussion.

1.1 Literature Review

Definitions:

Before reviewing existing research, it is important to define the main terms used in this study:

- **Safety concerns:** Fears related to harassment, unsafe routes or other hazards that discourage participation
- **Gender stereotypes:** Socially constructed ideas about what behaviors and sports are 'appropriate' for girls versus boys
- **Gender bias:** Unequal treatment or expectations based on gender
- **Cultural expectations:** Community or family norms that influence behaviour

1. Gender differences in sports participation

Currently, there are many articles and existing research on this topic. UN Women highlights that interest in women's sport is gaining massive traction worldwide, with nearly 50% of the global population following women's sports in 2024. However, despite this massive increase in viewership, participation in girls' sports hasn't seen as much positive growth. Despite progress, there remain massive gender gaps in pay, safety, and investment. Moreover, girls drop out of sports at twice the rate of boys by age 14, mostly due to social expectations, lack of investment, and limited access to quality programs (UN Women, 2026). According to the NFHS, 'more than 3.2 million girls participated in high school athletics last year, compared to 4.6 million boys'. However, while this number might signal near equality, this number has

continued to plateau for the past decade. One of the primary barriers to female participation in sport is societal and cultural stereotypes (Pennepacker, 2026). Societal expectations often discourage girls from participating in sports that are labeled as "masculine." Cultural norms can also weigh heavily, with many girls facing subtle pressure to avoid aggressive or competitive sports. Instead, they are often encouraged to choose activities that align with more traditional ideas of femininity, even when those are not the sports they truly want to play. Finally, the lack of female role models and coaches is a big factor. The Women's Sports Foundation conducted a survey asking over 3,000 boys and girls questions related to gender disparities in sports. The survey found that 68% of current players reported having a male coach. In addition, parents offered little encouragement to their daughters to look up to sports figures (Women's Sports Foundation, 2020). Getting more females involved as coaches for girls teams and encouraging parents to cheer and follow professional women athletes with their daughters can go a very long way in influencing girls' participation in sports.

2. Urban/structural factors affecting access

While social and cultural barriers play a central role in affecting female participation in sports, urban and structural factors also play an integral part in affecting access. The World Health Organization published an official document outlining the urban and structural barriers limiting access to safe environments and facilities. Hong Kong, by design, is an extremely dense and highly urbanized city. This has led to unevenly distributed sports facilities, often concentrated in certain districts. Boys are more likely to travel farther, but girls often face safety concerns or heightened parental restrictions on traveling alone and are more affected by limited local access.

Furthermore, there is often high competition for indoor facilities (WHO, 2024). This favors boys' sports, as they are often prioritized by schools and teams, resulting in girls' sports receiving fewer time slots and reinforcing participation gaps. According to Farzaneh et al. (2021), a major barrier to women's participation in sports is unsafe travel routes to facilities. This document notes that "harassment by others on the way back and forth is the most important obstacle mentioned by women", showing how this fear reduces females' ability to travel to many sports facilities. Also, the study explains that the proper design of environments plays a large role in increasing sports participation (especially among females) (Farzaneh et al., 2021). Hong Kong has very little open space, heavily car-dominated streets, and sports facilities concentrated in just a few districts; children (especially girls) end up with far fewer safe and accessible places to be physically active.

3. Hong Kong-specific youth or gender research

Alicia Liu from WISE explains how, while women in Hong Kong may seem more equal than in other countries, many hidden stereotypes and biases still need to be addressed. Liu notes that Hong Kong's gender context is unique, with highly context-specific gender norms. Girls may be more empowered academically or professionally, but remain disadvantaged in sports spaces (Liu, 2023). It is also worth mentioning that even professional female athletes in Hong Kong still face barriers and misogynistic attitudes (Tang, 2021). Not only do they receive far less media coverage than their male counterparts, but

they also face inequality daily. Whether it be lower salaries, lack of access to adequate training facilities, or something else, the gender bias is still real and thriving in Hong Kong (Tang, 2021). Finally, aside from gender differences, participation in sport for both boys and girls remains a problem in Hong Kong. More than 94% of Hong Kong students fail to meet the UNESCO's recommended 60 minutes of daily physical activity, with girls even less likely to meet this target (UNESCO, 2024).

4. Research gaps

Finally, a common phenomenon among many of the articles and papers available was that there are a lot of gaps in the research available on teenage girls' and boys' access to sports facilities and participation rates in Hong Kong, particularly when examining social and urban factors. The Hong Kong Sports Institute archives have participation surveys from the late 1990s and early 2000s, but there is a gap in recent, comprehensive surveys on youth sports participation and facility access. Also, a Springer study notes that knowledge of teenagers' physical activity levels in Hong Kong is limited and calls for more systematic data collection on this topic.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aim

This study aims to examine how teenage girls' and boys' access to sports facilities and participation differ in Hong Kong, and to understand the social, urban, and cultural factors that explain this disparity. From this analysis, conclusions can be drawn about the extent to which gender bias affects sports participation and how school programs and policy initiatives might reduce these disparities and encourage more equitable participation. Within this broader aim, there are some key objectives to be reached.

The objectives of the research are as follows:

1. Collect data via Google Forms from teenagers and use Google Sheets to analyze and quantify it.
2. Perform a quantitative comparison of the data collected between males and females
3. Perform a qualitative comparison of the short text-based answers given by the teenagers

2.2 Research Design

To analyze the social, urban, and cultural factors affecting teenage girls' and boys' sports participation in Hong Kong, a structured online survey was conducted. Responses were collected from the target demographic (male and female teenagers in Hong Kong) to understand their experiences of participating in sports and their beliefs about the factors affecting the participation disparity between girls and boys. The survey contained questions on access to sports facilities, perceptions of safety, and gender bias in sports. It was distributed via Google Forms to the target demographic through community networks and social media platforms.

This survey was designed with six sections: demographics, access to sports facilities, participation in sports, perceptions of safety, social and cultural factors, and gender bias in sports. In the survey, multiple-choice, open-ended, and multi-select questions ensured both quantitative comparability and qualitative depth. The survey was distributed over three weeks, with 51 valid responses collected. This enables a wide analysis of patterns found in the data.

2.3 Participants

The following participants were approached to respond to the survey.

Gender

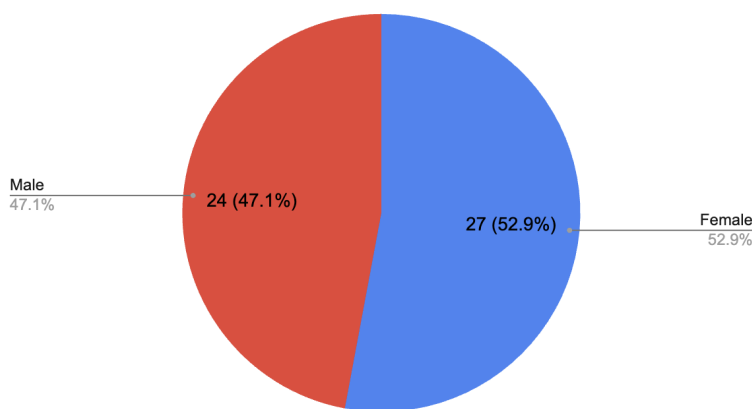


Figure 1: Gender Distribution of Survey Respondents (N=51)

In the graph above, the gender of the surveyed teenagers is shown. Although not shown in the graph, all of the teenagers are ages 13-18. The graph shows an almost even split between female and male participants.

2.4 Survey

To collect data from the teenagers, a form was sent out. This form first collects key demographic details about the teenagers, such as their gender, age, and the district they live in. It then asks how accessible sports facilities are to them and which sports they participate in. It also asks more nuanced questions about whether they believe gender stereotypes influence participation in sports and what differences they have noticed between female and male participation and treatment in sports. To collect accurate and relevant data, the following questions were asked:

1. Student Demographics

What is your gender?

How old are you?

What district do you live in?

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2. Access to Sports Facilities

Which facilities do you use most often? (Select all that apply)

How easy is it for you to access sports facilities?

What makes it difficult to access sports facilities? (Select all that apply)

3. Participation in Sports

How often do you participate in sports or physical activity?

What type of transport do you use to get to sports facilities?

How long does it take you to travel to the sports facilities you use most?

What sports do you participate in?

4. Safety Perception

How safe do you feel using sports facilities in your school?

How safe do you feel using public sports facilities?

How safe do you feel traveling to and from sports facilities?

Have safety concerns ever stopped you from participating in sports?

If yes or sometimes, what safety concerns do you have?

5. Social and Cultural Factors

Does your family encourage you to participate in sports?

Do you feel your gender affects how much freedom you have to participate in sports?

Have you ever changed your behaviour or avoided sports because of cultural or family expectations?

How acceptable is it in your family to participate in sports after school or at night?

6. Gender Bias in Sports

Do you believe boys and girls have equal access to sports facilities in Hong Kong?

Have you noticed differences in how boys and girls are treated in sports settings?

If yes, what differences have you noticed?

Do you think boys and girls receive equal encouragement to participate in sports?

2.5 Data Analysis

2.5.1 Qualitative - Thematic Analysis

To perform thematic analysis of the results, all written responses were consolidated into a single spreadsheet. From this spreadsheet, key themes were then extracted, including the finding that safety concerns are a major barrier to female participation in sports, and that the majority of teenagers, regardless of gender, believe that gender stereotypes and bias influence how individuals are treated in sports settings and the level of access to facilities they receive. The responses were coded manually by a single researcher, who grouped similar ideas into categories.

These categories were then reviewed to identify recurring patterns, and from these patterns the final themes were derived.

2.5.2 Quantitative - Descriptive stats

To analyze the statistical data, the number-based and multiple-choice answers were collected, then used to create graphs and pie charts. Google Sheets was used to create charts and spreadsheets from the data.

2.6 Ethics

As the survey's main demographic group was teenagers, it was even more vital that ethical considerations were taken into account. This topic can be very heavily stigmatized and can even be triggering for some. Not only that, but because issues of gender and access to sports facilities raise sensitive themes such as inequality and exclusion, it was essential to ensure that participants felt safe and supported throughout the process.

There were many ethical considerations during data collection. Firstly, at the start of the form in the introduction, it was explicitly stated that participation is completely optional; if they ever feel uncomfortable, they can skip the question. Moreover, the form did not collect respondents' email addresses to ensure anonymity. Also, the first question asked whether they agreed to participate in the survey, ensuring their consent. Finally, no directly identifying information was asked for (names, contact details), and the survey questions used neutral phrasing to minimize bias.

3. RESULTS

From the data collected, there are some clear trends shown that help answer the original research question.

Access to Sports Facilities

When analyzing responses among males and females regarding how easy it is for them to access sports facilities, a clear difference emerged. Females reported a mean score of 3.7 out of 5 for how easy it is for them to access sports facilities, compared to 4.1 out of 5 for males. 42% of female respondents rated it 3 out of 5 for how easy it is for them to access facilities, indicating it is neither extremely easy nor extremely hard. However, males tended to report a 4 or 5, indicating that, for them, it is often far easier to access these facilities.

Difficulty Accessing Facilities

Barrier	Number of Mentions	% of Respondents
Distance / long travel	17	63
Lack of time	11	41
Cost	5	19
Facilities full / unavailable	6	22
Safety concerns	5	19
Not allowed to go alone	2	7
Family restrictions	2	7
Nothing	1	4

Table 1: Reported barriers to accessing sports facilities among Female teenage respondents (N=27)

One of the questions asked was "What makes it difficult to access sports facilities? (Select all that apply)". The table shows that, among female respondents, the most frequently reported barrier was distance, with 63% selecting this option. Moreover, lack of time was also highlighted as a major barrier (41%), followed by unavailable facilities (22%). Safety-related concerns such as not being allowed to go alone, family restrictions, and poor supervision were also reported, though less frequently (7-19%). It is also important to note that only 4% of female respondents reported facing no barriers.

Barrier	Number of Mentions	% of Respondents
Distance / long travel	12	50
Lack of time	9	38
Cost	5	21
Facilities full / unavailable	3	13
Safety concerns	2	8
Not allowed to go alone	2	8
Family restrictions	1	4
Nothing	1	4

Table 2: Reported barriers to accessing sports facilities among Male teenage respondents (N=24)

As shown in Table 2, the primary barriers for male respondents were also distance (50%) and lack of time (38%). However, compared to female respondents, fewer boys reported facilities being full (13%) or safety concerns (8%) as large barriers. Social concerns like family restrictions and not being allowed to go alone were rare (4-8%). Similarly to females, only 4% of all males reported no barriers at all.

Both male and female respondents identified distance and lack of time as the most prevalent barriers, showing that urban barriers affect teenagers' access to sports regardless of gender. However, girls reported safety-related issues like family restrictions more frequently, while boys were more likely to report cost as a challenge. This indicates that while both groups may face structural barriers, girls and boys may differ on the other barriers to sports participation.

Participation Frequency and Transport

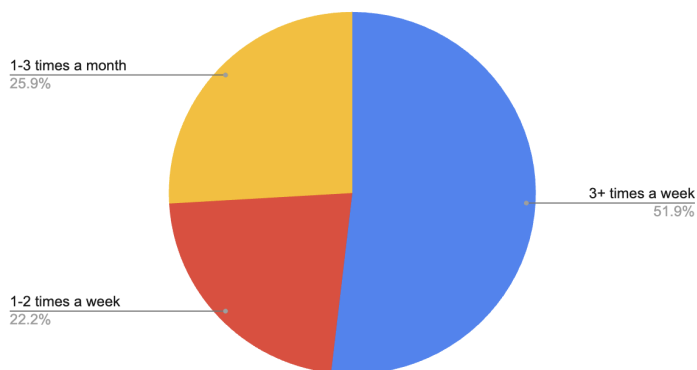


Figure 2: Frequency of sports participation among male teenage respondents in Hong Kong (N=24)
Respondents were asked how often they participated in sports. They were given 3 choices: 1-3 times a month, 1-2 times a week, or 3+ times a week. Additionally, if none of the listed options reflected the respondents' experiences, they could write their own response. The results show that a majority of male respondents (51.9%) participate in sports 3 or more times a week. 25% indicated participating 1-3 times a month, and 22% indicated participating 1-2 times a week.

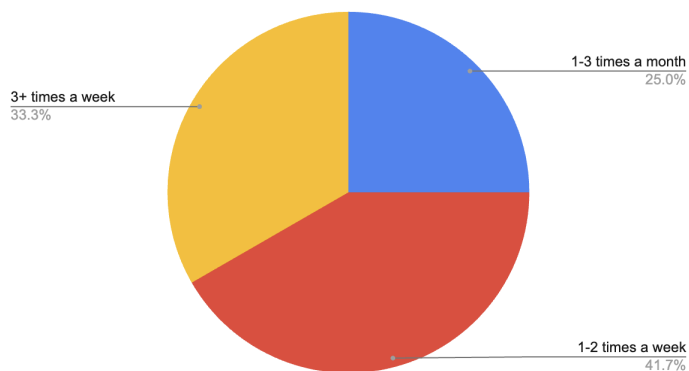


Figure 3: Frequency of sports participation among female teenage respondents in Hong Kong (N=27)

While both male and female responses showed regular participation in sports, females still had lower participation. Compared with 51.9% of males who reported participating in sports 3 or more times a week, only 33.3% of females reported doing so. Most female respondents participate in sports 1-2 times a week (41.7%), and 25% participate 1-3 times a month.

Time taken

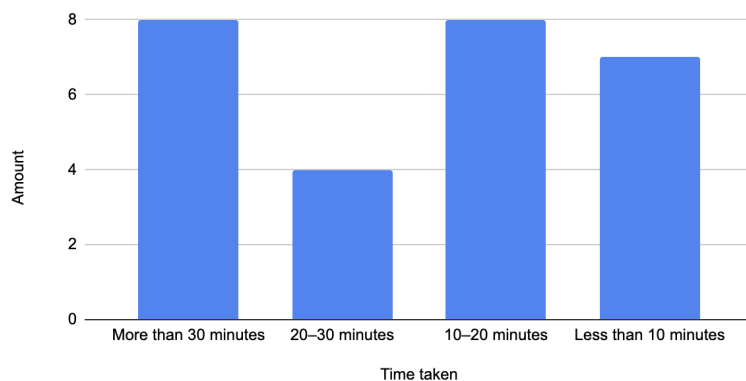


Figure 4: Distribution of travel times to sports facilities among female teenage respondents in Hong Kong (N=27)

Figure 4 shows the distribution of travel times to sports facilities among female teenagers. The data indicate that access is uneven: 30% of female respondents take more than 30 minutes to reach sports facilities, while another 30% take 10-20 minutes. Around 26% travel less than 10 minutes, while a small minority (14%) take 20-30 minutes to reach the sports facilities. This data suggests that while some girls have short commutes (10-20 minutes or less than 10 minutes), a significant proportion also face long travel times, which could reduce participation frequency. The teenagers were also asked what type of transport they use to get to the facilities. The responses showed that females rely heavily on public transportation and taxis. This reliance on public and private transportation may contribute to the longer travel times reported by female respondents.

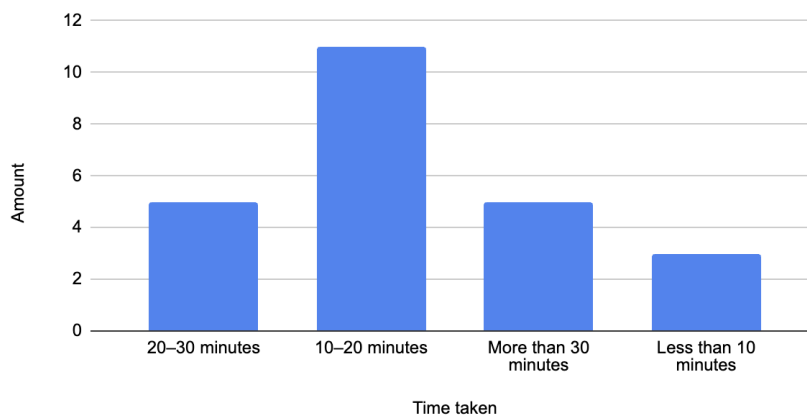


Figure 5: Distribution of travel times to sports facilities among male teenage respondents in Hong Kong (N=24)

Figure 5 shows the distribution of travel times to sports facilities among male teenagers. The data is in stark contrast to that collected from female respondents. The majority of male respondents (46%) take 10-20 minutes to go to sports facilities. 21% indicated they take 20-30 minutes, and another 21% indicated they take more than 30 minutes. Compared to female respondents, boys usually take less time to reach sports facilities, suggesting that distance and transport barriers are less significant barriers to male participation. This difference also demonstrates how longer commutes might be a factor restricting girls' opportunities to play sports. Aside from this, males respond very differently to the transportation they take to sports facilities. The data revealed they use a wider mix of modes than girls do: walking, public transportation, and cars. Moreover, a large majority (45%) said they usually walk to the facilities. This pattern reflects their shorter commute time, as walking is only feasible if the facilities are nearby. As a result, boys benefit from greater accessibility, with shorter commute times and more direct routes, allowing for greater participation. However, it is important to note that the differences between the male and female responses are not just gender differences. Proximity to facilities, district of residence, and available transportation also influence travel times and the type of transportation used, suggesting that some of the disparity between male and female respondents may be explained by urban geography rather than gender alone.

Type of Sport played

Sport	Number of Mentions	% of Respondents
Soccer	9	33
Rugby	3	11
Netball	6	22
Swimming	9	33
Baseball/Softball	2	7
Basketball	3	11
Running	7	26
Tennis	2	7
Pilates	1	4
Rowing	2	7
Volleyball	2	7
Squash	3	11

Field Hockey	1	4
Weight Training	1	4
Badminton	1	4
Table Tennis	1	4

Table 3: Types of sports played by female teenage respondents in Hong Kong (N=27)

The survey asked students which sports they participate in. Female responses were very diverse, and most respondents played more than one sport. The most common sports played by female respondents were soccer and swimming, with 33% reporting they play soccer and 33% reporting they swim. This was closely followed by netball (22%) and running (26%) alongside a range of other sports reported at lower frequencies.

Sport	Number of Mentions	% of Respondents
Basketball	12	50
Soccer	11	46
Baseball/Softball	4	17
Swimming	3	13
Running	2	8
Tennis	2	8
Squash	2	8
Volleyball	3	13
Badminton	3	13
Table Tennis	2	8
Field Hockey	1	4
Rugby	1	4
None	1	4

Table 4: Types of sports played by male teenage respondents in Hong Kong (N=24)

Compared with female respondents, male respondents participate in a far less diverse range of sports. 50% of male respondents play basketball, 46% play soccer, and 17% play baseball. In contrast to the

female dataset, the male responses were dominated by one or two activities. Other sports were reported at much lower levels (8% or less), underscoring that male participation is concentrated within a narrow set of team sports rather than across a wider variety of sports. Moreover, the sports with the highest participation were Basketball and Soccer, 2 of the most popular sports in Hong Kong. While many females indicated that they participate in soccer, a large number also reported playing sports such as netball. Netball facilities are far more limited than those for soccer or basketball, which might contribute to lower female participation, as the infrastructure for their preferred sport is often unavailable.

Safety perceptions

3 questions were asked of the respondents regarding safety: how safe they feel when using sports facilities at school, when using public sports facilities, and when traveling to and from sports facilities. Both females and males reported feeling safest using sports facilities in school, with the average safeness for females being 4.4 (out of 5) and for males 4.7 (out of 5). However, in the other two questions asked to respondents regarding safety, female and male responses differed. The average rating of how safe females felt using public sports facilities was 3.8 out of 5, and 4.0 for how safe they felt traveling to and from sports facilities. Comparatively, for males, the averages were 4.4 and 4.5 (out of 5) for the 2 questions. This indicates that safety perceptions could play a large role in shaping access and participation. As female respondents reported feeling less safe when using public sports facilities and when traveling to and from them, these concerns may serve as an additional barrier to participation. In contrast, male respondents expressed higher levels of perceived safety across all contexts, suggesting that safety concerns are less likely to restrict their participation.

Safety Concerns

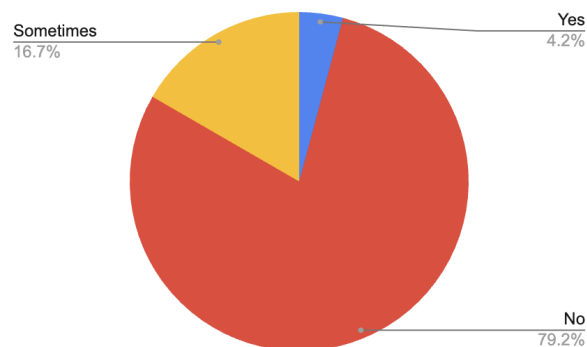


Figure 6: Male Sports Participation Stopped by Safety Concerns (N=24)

As shown in Figure 6, when asked whether they had ever refrained from participating in sports due to safety concerns, 79.2% of male respondents said 'no'. Only 4.2% said 'yes' and 16.7% said 'sometimes'. This demonstrates that safety concerns are not a significant barrier to male participation in sports.

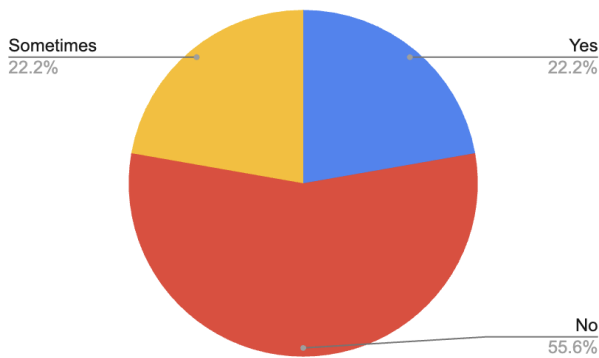


Figure 7: Female Sports Participation Stopped by Safety Concerns (N=27)

On the other hand, when asked whether safety concerns ever stopped girls from participating in sports, 22.2% said 'yes,' and another 22.2% said 'sometimes.' Still, the majority of respondents (55.6%) indicated that safety concerns had not prevented them from participating in sports. The difference between the male and female percentages that said 'yes' to this question suggests that safety concerns are more likely to act as a barrier for girls, helping to explain lower female sports participation rates.

Social and Cultural factors

Question	Yes	No	Sometimes/Maybe
Family encouragement to participate in sports	20	0	4
Perception that gender affects freedom to participate	8	7	9
Behavior change or avoidance due to cultural/family expectations	3	16	5

Table 5: Male Respondents' Answers to Social and Cultural Factors Survey (N=24)

Question	Yes	No	Sometimes/Maybe
Family encouragement to participate in sports	21	2	4

Perception that gender affects freedom to participate	15	5	7
Behavior change or avoidance due to cultural/family expectations	12	10	5

Table 6: Female Respondents' Answers to Social and Cultural Factors Survey (N=27)

Tables 5 and 6 present the answers of male and female respondents to questions on family encouragement, gender freedom, and cultural expectations. Regarding family support, both males and females reported high levels of encouragement, with 20 out of 24 males and 21 out of 27 females answering 'Yes'. When it comes to how gender affects freedom, differences appear. Male responses varied: 8 said "Yes," 7 said "No," and 9 said "Maybe." Females were more likely to report restrictions; 15 said "Yes" and 7 said "Maybe." This indicates that gender expectations have a bigger impact on limiting female participation. For behavior change due to cultural or family expectations, the difference was even clearer. Only 3 males reported "Yes," while 12 females reported "Yes". Most males (16) stated that cultural expectations had not influenced their participation. Female responses were more divided, with 12 saying "Yes," 10 saying "No," and 5 saying "Maybe."

Gender bias

Question	Yes	No	Maybe
Do females have equal access to sports facilities	9	16	2
Have you noticed differences in how boys and girls are treated in sports settings	21	4	2

Table 7: Female Respondents' Answers to Gender Bias Questions (N=27)

Question	Yes	No	Maybe
Do females have equal access to sports facilities	6	7	11
Have you noticed	14	2	8

differences in how boys and girls are treated in sports settings			
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Table 8: Male Respondents' Answers to Gender Bias Questions (N=24)

Tables 7 and 8 present the answers of male and female respondents to 2 gender-related questions. Female respondents were more likely to believe that females do not have equal access to sports facilities (60% said 'No') and noticed differences in how boys and girls are treated in sports settings (78% said 'Yes'). In contrast, male responses were more varied, with only 26% saying 'no' and 41% saying 'maybe' to the question of whether females should have equal access to sports facilities. Moreover, as with females, most males reported noticing differences in how boys and girls are treated in sports settings, with 52% saying 'yes' and 30% saying 'maybe'. This shows that gender bias is perceived more strongly among female respondents, and together, this data highlights that teenage girls in Hong Kong face greater social and cultural barriers to participation in sport, helping to explain disparities in overall participation rates and access to facilities.

Qualitative gender differences in open-ended responses

In the short-answer question on gender bias in sports, female and male respondents described broadly similar patterns but with notable differences in emphasis and tone. Female respondents frequently supplemented their responses with personal experiences, describing how they often felt as if they were given less access to facilities because they were viewed as 'inferior', or were often objectified while playing sports, leading them not to want to participate. Male respondents often acknowledged similar ideas to the female respondents, citing how they believe gender bias is prevalent in sports, and boys often have more access to facilities and are treated with more respect in sports settings. However, they did not include any personal examples, rarely situating themselves as direct victims of gendered mistreatment. Males tended to describe the issue in more detached, analytical terms. The biggest similarity between male and female responses is that both groups pointed to social norms as a major barrier to female participation, noting that girls are often perceived as 'inferior' in sports and receive less encouragement to participate, underscoring a shared recognition across both genders that restrictive social norms remain a significant barrier to equal sports participation.

4. DISCUSSION

The survey results reveal how disparities in access to sports facilities and participation rates among teenage girls and boys in Hong Kong are shaped by both urban and social factors, with gender bias, safety concerns, and distance emerging as key barriers to equal participation, directly addressing the core research question on gendered differences in sports participation and the influences behind them.

The survey results revealed that female respondents often reported lower ease of access to sports facilities than male respondents. 42% of females reported a 3 out of 5 rating of how easy it is for them to access facilities, indicating that their experience might not be entirely impossible or straightforward, but is consistently constrained. Males consistently reported a 4 or a 5, indicating that, for them, it is far easier to access the facilities. This aligns with previous research on urban inequalities in sports access. The WHO explains how Hong Kong's sports facilities are often concentrated in certain districts. Boys are more likely to travel farther to the facilities, but girls often face restrictions that do not afford them the same ease. This helps explain why female respondents reported lower ease of access to sports facilities.

Although males also cited distance as a barrier, it did not appear to limit their participation to the same extent, as they still reported greater overall ease of access. The data collected is consistent with studies noting that urban design can be a significant barrier to women's sports, particularly through unsafe and lengthy travel routes (Farzaneh et al., 2021). 46% of males report taking 10-20 minutes to arrive at sports facilities, while females reported taking over 30 minutes, highlighting how distance and travel routes play a major role in reducing participation. The fact that only 4% of both boys and girls reported no barriers to participation at all suggests that access challenges are widespread, but their nature is gendered: boys face structural inconveniences, while girls encounter compounded social and safety constraints.

Safety concerns

While females and males had similarly high ratings for how safe they felt using sports facilities, the low ratings females reported for traveling to and from sports facilities (4.0 out of 5) and for using public sports facilities (3.8 out of 5) are concerning. Comparatively, males consistently had higher ratings in both domains with 4.4 and 4.5 (out of 5), respectively. This echoes research that found that fear and safety concerns often reduce females' ability to travel to many sports facilities. As Hong Kong has very little open space and sports facilities are often concentrated in just a few districts, many girls end up with fewer safe places to be physically active, lowering their sports participation (Farzaneh et al., 2021). Moreover, when looking at whether female sports participation was ever stopped due to safety concerns, 22.2% of female respondents said 'yes', highlighting how safety fears can directly interrupt participation. This finding is in line with research showing that gendered perceptions of harassment reduce girls' willingness to access recreational spaces (ScienceDirect, 2026).

Cultural Expectations

With 15 females believing that their gender affects their freedom to participate in sports and 12 females reporting behavior change due to cultural and family expectations, compared to 8 males and 3 males respectively, shows how cultural norms weigh more heavily on girls. This suggests that cultural expectations can constrain female participation in sports, echoing findings in gender studies that show parents offering little encouragement to girls to participate and stereotypes limiting girls' participation (Women's Sports Foundation, 2020).

Unexpected Findings

An interesting finding from the survey results was that differences in the sports females and males play might influence sports participation. Female respondents reported participating in a wide range of sports, with 22% indicating that they play netball. On the other hand, male responses were dominated by 1-2 sports, with 46% playing soccer and 50% playing basketball. According to research, there is already a high competition for facilities, and males are often prioritized, resulting in girls getting less access to facilities and reducing participation (WHO, 2024; Liu, 2023). Furthermore, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) lists only a few netball courts across Hong Kong, with many being multi-purpose pitches shared with soccer or basketball (LCSD, 2026). Since many female respondents reported playing netball, the limited availability of facilities for the sport likely contributes to lower participation rates among girls.

Gender Bias

The data on gender bias reveals that 60% of females believed they do not have equal access to sports facilities and 78% noticed differences in how boys and girls are treated in sports settings, with clear themes emerging around women's perceived inferiority, objectification, and restricted behavioral expectations. This aligns with extensive gender studies literature documenting how sports remain a highly gendered domain where women face systemic disadvantages, including fewer opportunities, less media coverage, and differential treatment (Cooky & Messner, 2018; Fink, 2015). Furthermore, Pennepacker explains how societal expectations often discourage girls from participating in sports deemed 'masculine', and many girls are instead encouraged to choose activities that align with more traditional ideas of femininity, aligning with many of the survey responses.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper investigated the social and urban factors that explain the disparities in male and female teenagers' participation in sports in Hong Kong, and the results show a clear and troubling problem. Through the data collected, it is evident that girls consistently face compounded barriers such as long travel times, cultural restrictions, and safety concerns, while boys benefit from greater accessibility and fewer barriers. These findings suggest that lower female participation is not due to a lack of interest but rather to structural and social constraints that reduce opportunities and perpetuate inequality. It is important to keep in mind some limitations of this paper as well. This study is limited by a small sample size, meaning the findings cannot be generalized to all teenagers in Hong Kong. In addition, while the survey instructions asked all respondents to be truthful, there is no guarantee that all participants were truthful in their responses, as some may have been uncomfortable disclosing certain experiences. Future studies could expand on this work by using larger sample sizes, conducting in-depth interviews, or comparing data between Hong Kong and other urban contexts. They could also examine the perspective of athletes and policy-makers to identify systemic barriers.

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