

# THE GIRLS GAME

*Understanding the motivators and preferences for exercise and sport in school and community settings, amongst young women aged 13–16 years.*

Research Report  
August 2021

Funded by:

**LONDON MARATHON**  
**CHARITABLE TRUST**  
  
INSPIRING ACTIVITY

  
**SPORTED**

# Executive Summary

## Research Aims

To understand the determinants of exercise and sport both in school and community sports, among young women aged 13-16 years.

In meeting this aim, the three key objectives the research aimed to explore were:

- The behaviours and attitudes of girls regarding exercise, sport and PE and how these compare in and out of school.
- The barriers to participating in school sport versus community sport.
- The differences in target groups such as lower socioeconomic status (SES) groups and those from diverse ethnic communities.

## Methodology

Sported utilised a third party organisation, Childwise, to conduct a 22-question survey with a range of young girls across the UK. Survey distribution focussed on targeting girls from lower socioeconomic status areas and those from diverse ethnic communities, with an aim to gather a range of experiences and views.

There were 434 responses to the survey. The findings presented are based on the full sample of 434 respondents, apart from the section – Preferences among respondents: school versus community sport. The findings in this section are based on a sub-sample of respondents (89) who identified that they had experienced both school and community sport. Due to the size of the sub-sample, it wasn't appropriate to undertake an analysis by SES and ethnicity.

Data in this report was analysed by Sported using Microsoft Excel software.

## Respondent Demographics

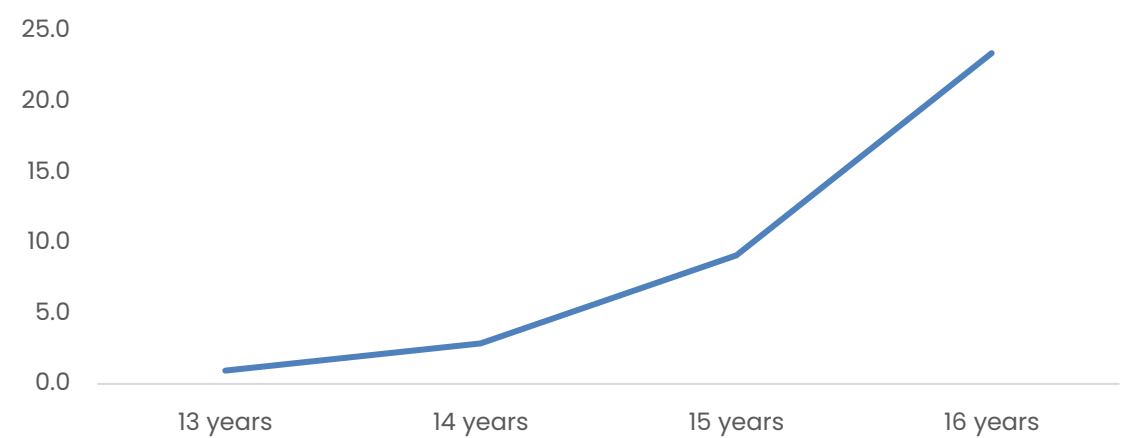
The demographic breakdown of the full sample of 434 respondents was as follows: 36.4% were from areas of low socioeconomic status – indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) areas 1-3; 14.5% reported to be from diverse ethnic communities; all respondents were age 13-16 with an even split across the four year groups.

## Key Findings

### Activity Levels and Frequency

- **43% of those from diverse ethnic communities reported being 'much less' or 'somewhat less' physically active compared to pre-pandemic**, compared to just 26% of white respondents.
- Those from areas of **low socioeconomic status (SES) and diverse ethnic communities** tend to do **more PE in school and active transport** (i.e. walk/cycle to school).
- Activities **outside of school** tend to be **accessed more by those from areas of higher SES**.

### % of respondents reporting to 'never' take part in PE by age



- **0.9%** of 13 year olds reported never taking part in PE rising to **23.4%** of 16 year olds.

### Activity Preferences and Motivators

- The **principal motivators for participation** are; to spend time with friends, to feel good and be healthy, and to have fun. Motivation to take part in exercise and sports across all areas (in school, out of school and at community sport/youth clubs) decreases with age.
- When asked to express a **preference between school and community sport**, 51% of the sub-sample that had experienced both community sport and school sport identified that they like both the same.; 37% prefer exercise and sport at a sports group outside of school; and 12% prefer exercise in school.
- The main reasons why the sub-sample of respondents prefer exercise at community/youth clubs are that they get the opportunity to choose the sport; they get the chance to play with their friends; and it is more fun.

*"I like the freedom you get and to be part of a team trying to achieve something"*

### Activity Barriers

- The most common barrier for exercise and sport in school for all respondents was 'when I have my period'. **Those from diverse ethnic communities are most affected by this, with almost 40% stating 'when I have my period' as a barrier for in school exercise and sport.**
- For those from diverse ethnic communities, main barriers include 'being watched by peers', 'getting hot and sweaty in school' and 'changing rooms not being private enough'.
- Barriers cited about taking part in activities in the community included 'time and conflicting priorities', 'motivation post-pandemic', 'lack of disability access' and 'parental issues (cost, disability)'.

*"I'm a young carer as [parent] is disabled and we can't afford much"*

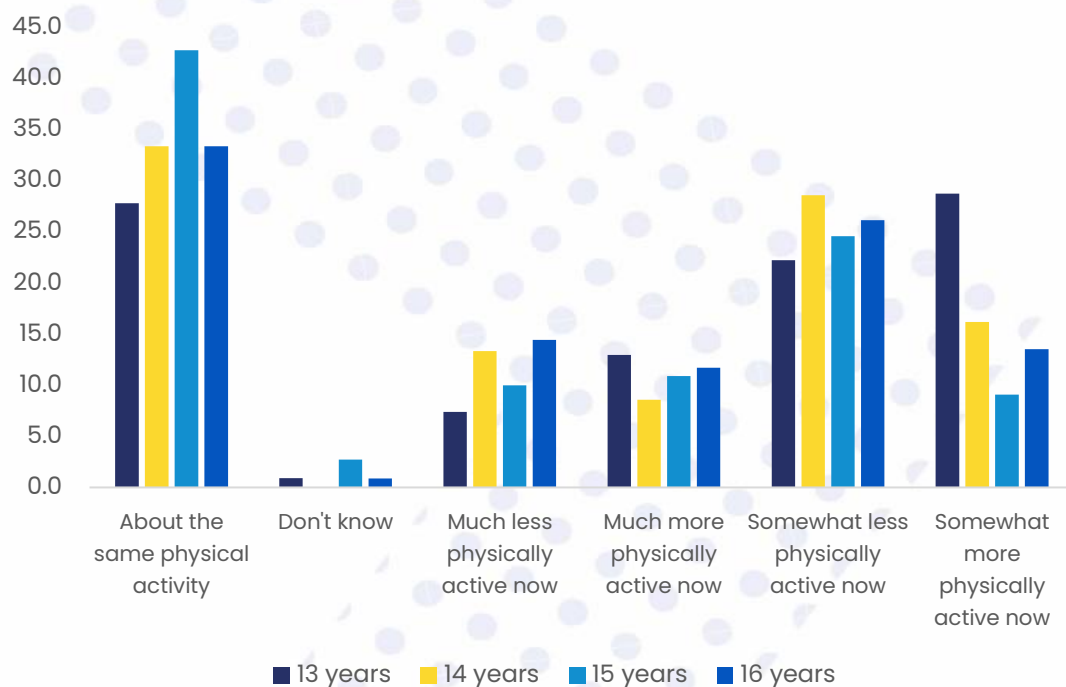


# Activity Levels

434 Responses

Girls were asked about their general activity levels and how this compared to pre-Covid 19 pandemic. Over 40% of respondents from areas of higher socioeconomic status reported being 'much less' or 'somewhat less' active compared to 31% of those living in areas of lower SES. Conversely, **43% of those from diverse ethnic communities reported being 'much less' or 'somewhat less' physically active compared to pre-pandemic**, compared to just 26% of white respondents.

## Post-covid physical activity levels by age

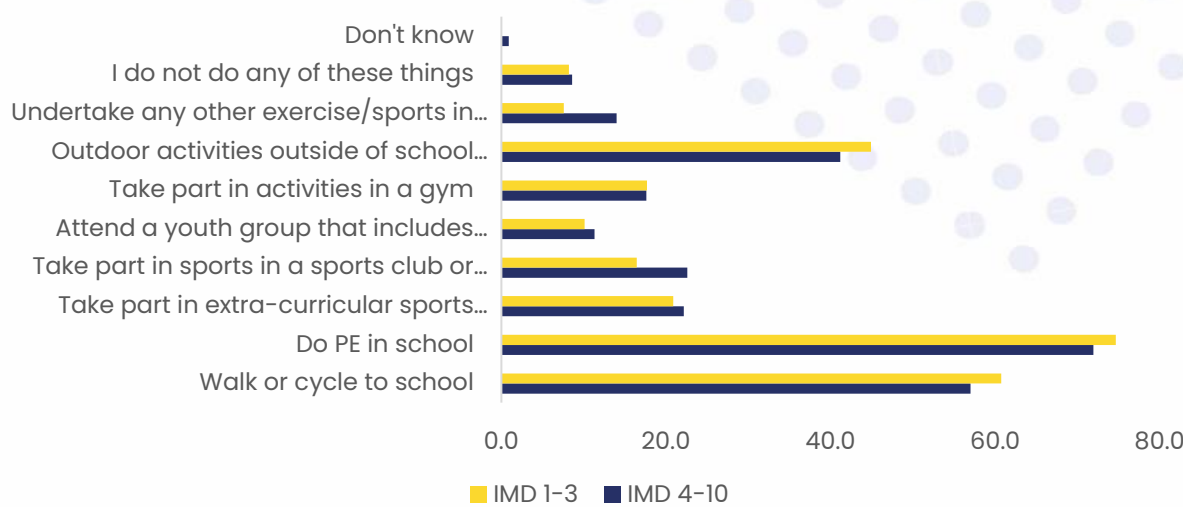


With age, those who are older (age 16) appear to have suffered the most, with reported activity levels dropping the most compared to pre-pandemic.

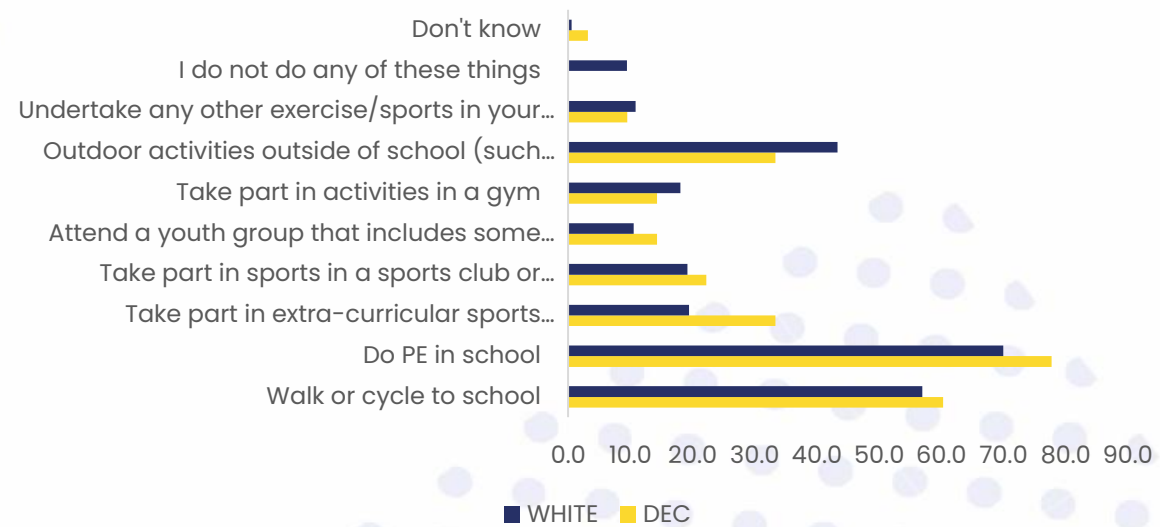
Those **aged 13** appear to have benefitted the most with **over 40% reporting to have increased their activity levels above pre-pandemic levels**, compared to just 25% of 16 year olds.

# Activity Types

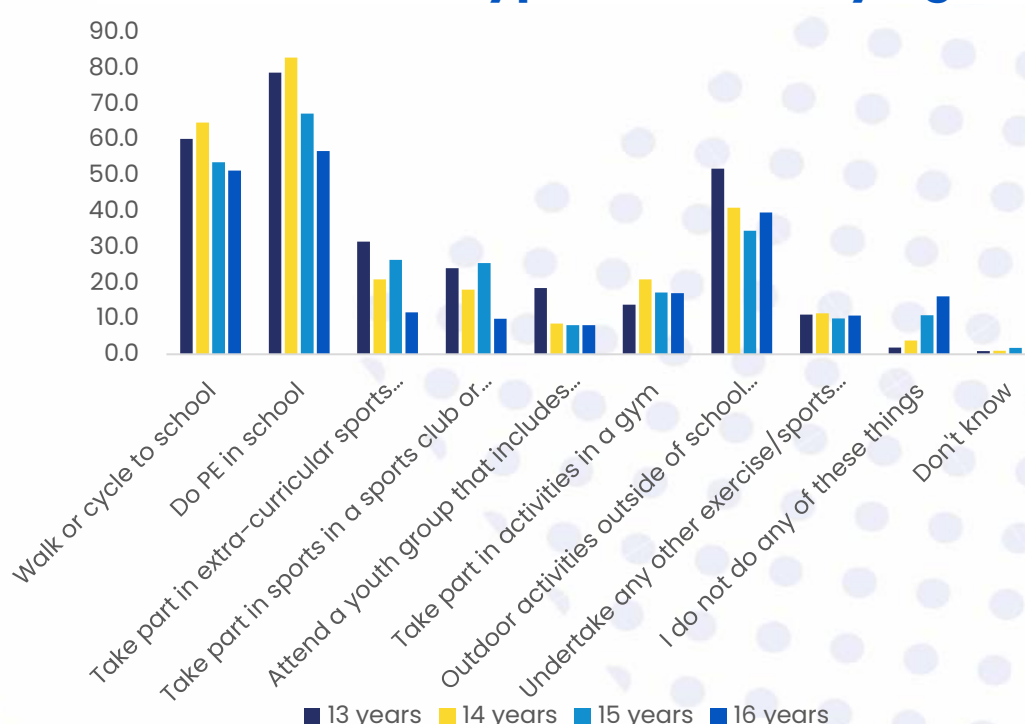
## Activities in a "typical week" by IMD



## Activities in a "typical week" by ethnicity



## Activities in a "typical week" by age

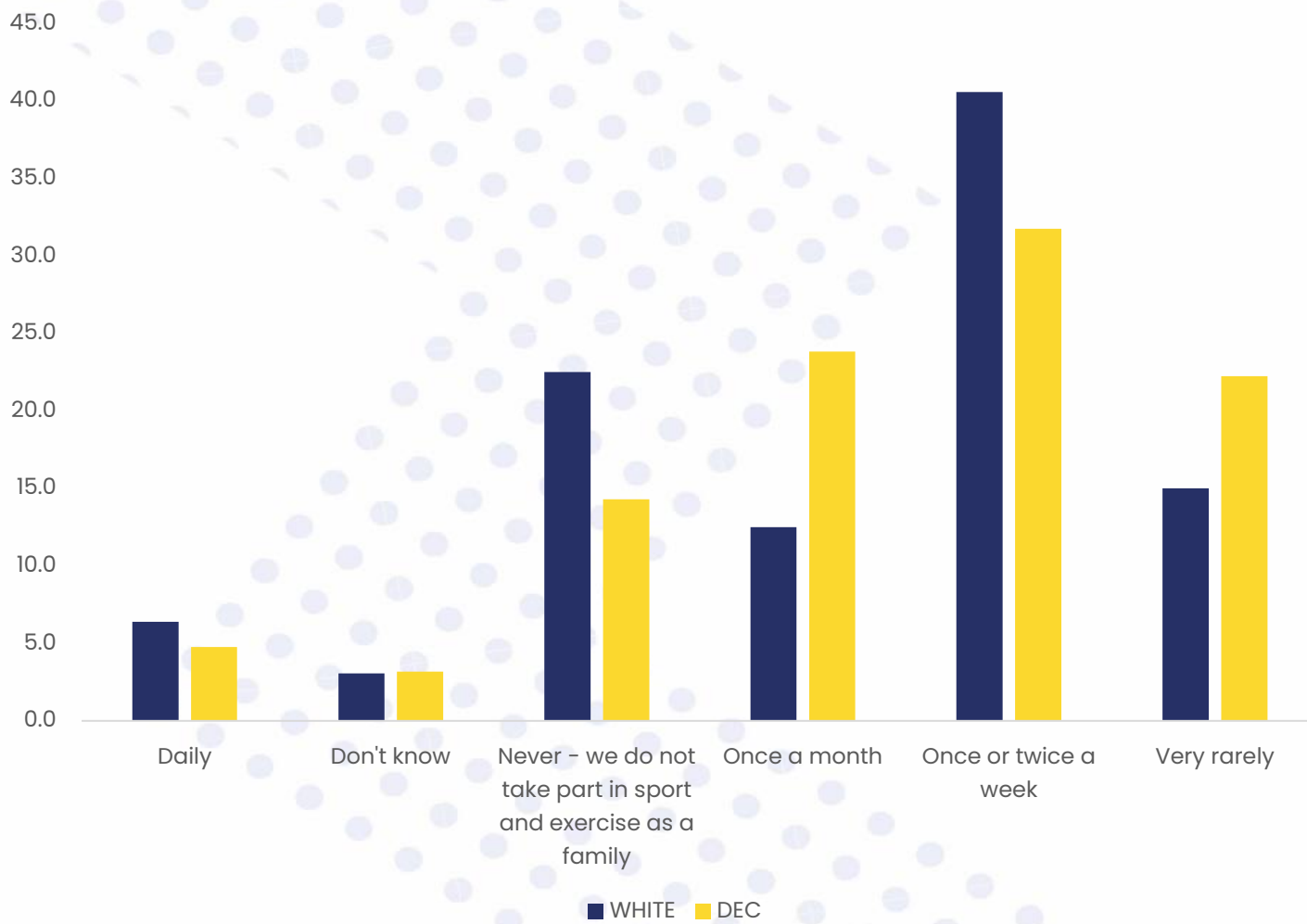


Those from areas of **low SES and diverse ethnic communities** tend to do **more PE in school and active transport** (i.e. walk/cycle to school)

Activities **outside of school** tend to be **accessed more by those from areas of higher SES.**

**Activity levels decrease with age.**

## Activity levels with family members by ethnicity



When asked about activity levels with other family members, **46% of white respondents said that they take part in exercise or sport as a family, daily or once or twice a week**, compared to 36% of those from diverse ethnic communities. The percentage comparison balances out between white and diverse ethnic communities when the 'once a month' activity is brought into this comparison.

**22.5% of white respondents said that they never take part in exercise or sport as a family**, compared to just 14% of those from diverse ethnic communities.

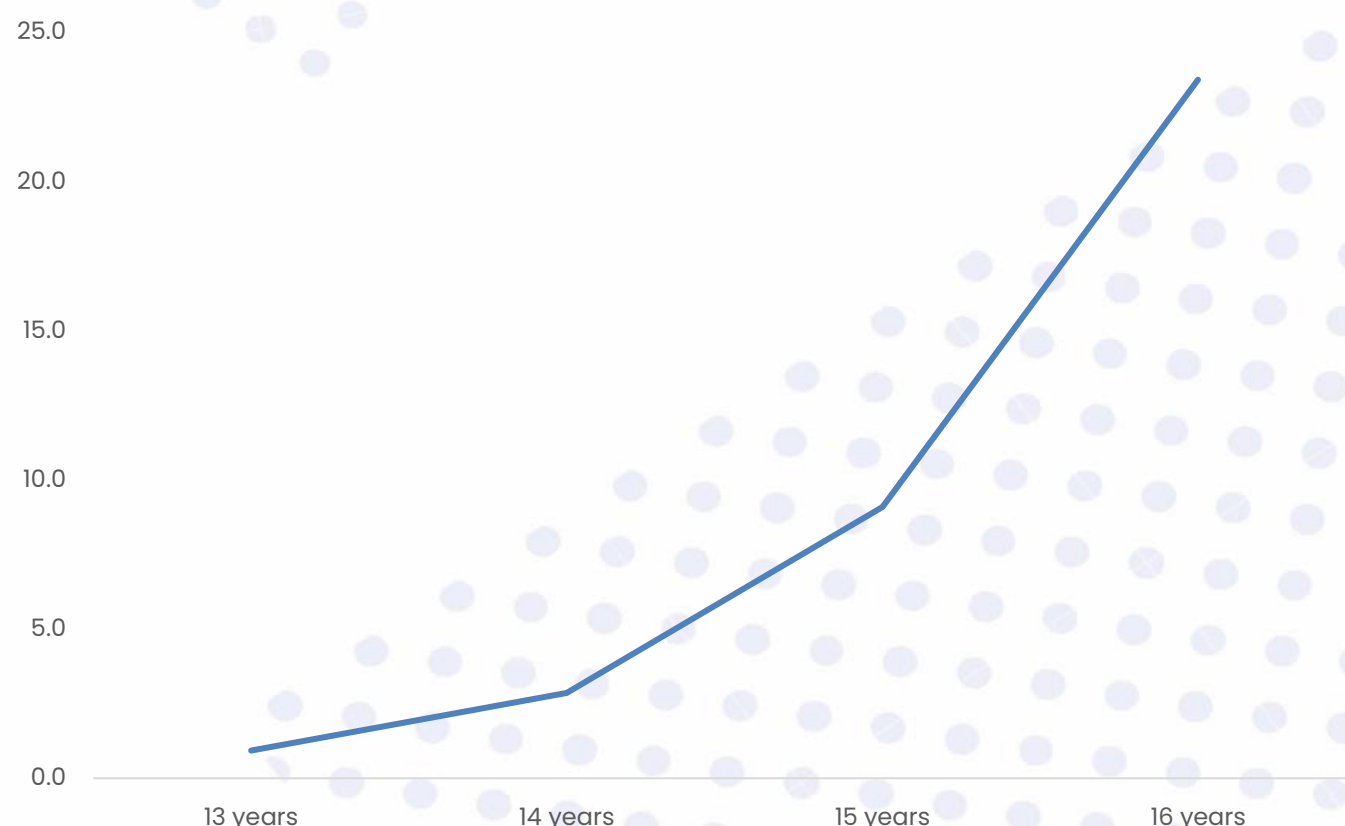
Additionally, in **those aged 16 years, 26.1% said that they never exercise as a family.**

## Activity Frequency

Almost **10%** of respondents from white backgrounds reported never taking part in PE in school, compared to only 4.8% of those from diverse ethnic communities. Additionally, **51.9%** of those from white communities reported that they never take part in any lunchtime/after school physical activity compared to just 36.5% of those from diverse ethnic communities.

**11.8%** of those living in high SES areas never take part in PE lessons in school.

## % of respondents reporting to 'never' take part in PE by age



**0.9%** of 13 year olds reported never taking part in PE compared to **23.4%** of 16 year olds.

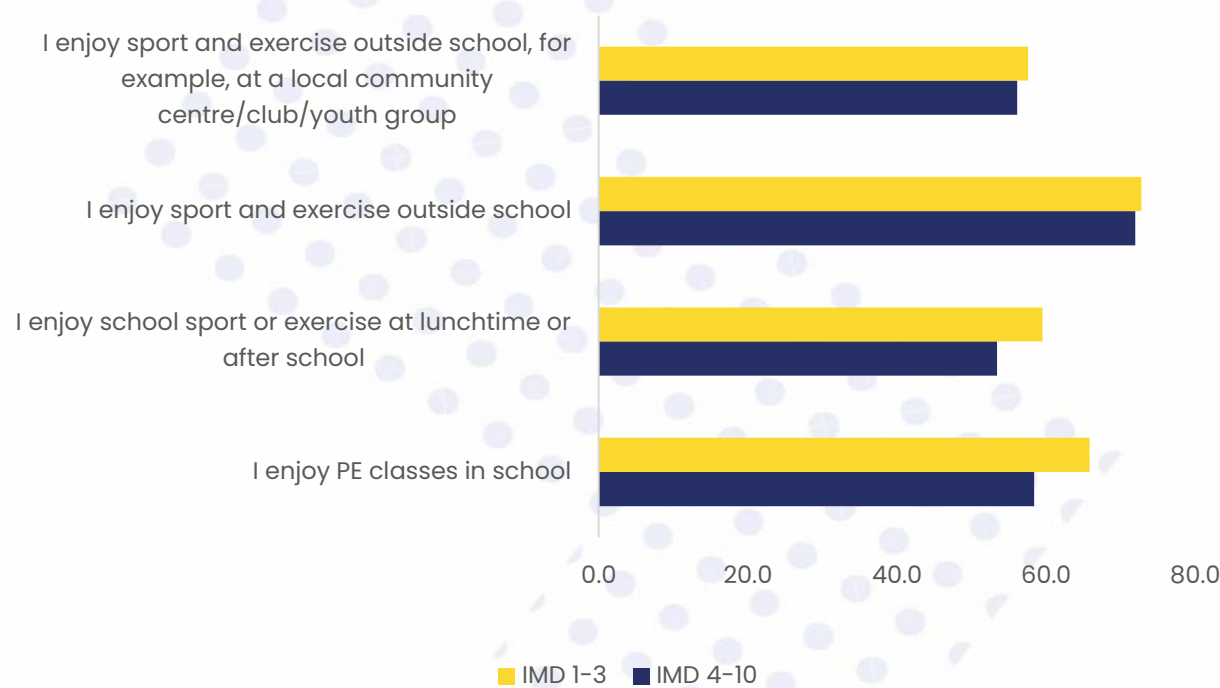


# Feelings and Preferences

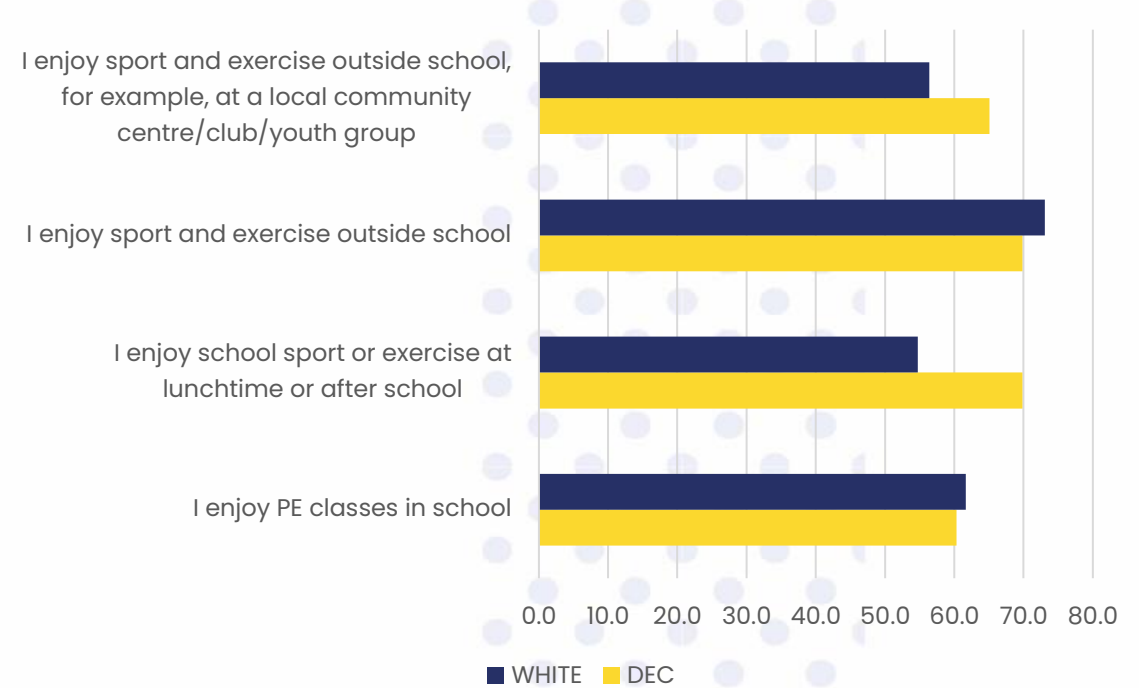
## Feelings- Enjoyment

Respondents from lower SES areas reported 'enjoying exercise', 'feeling confident when exercising' and 'finding exercise and sport easy' more often than those from areas of higher SES. Those from diverse ethnic communities also spoke more positively about their feelings about taking part in exercise and sports.

**Enjoyment of sport and exercise by IMD**

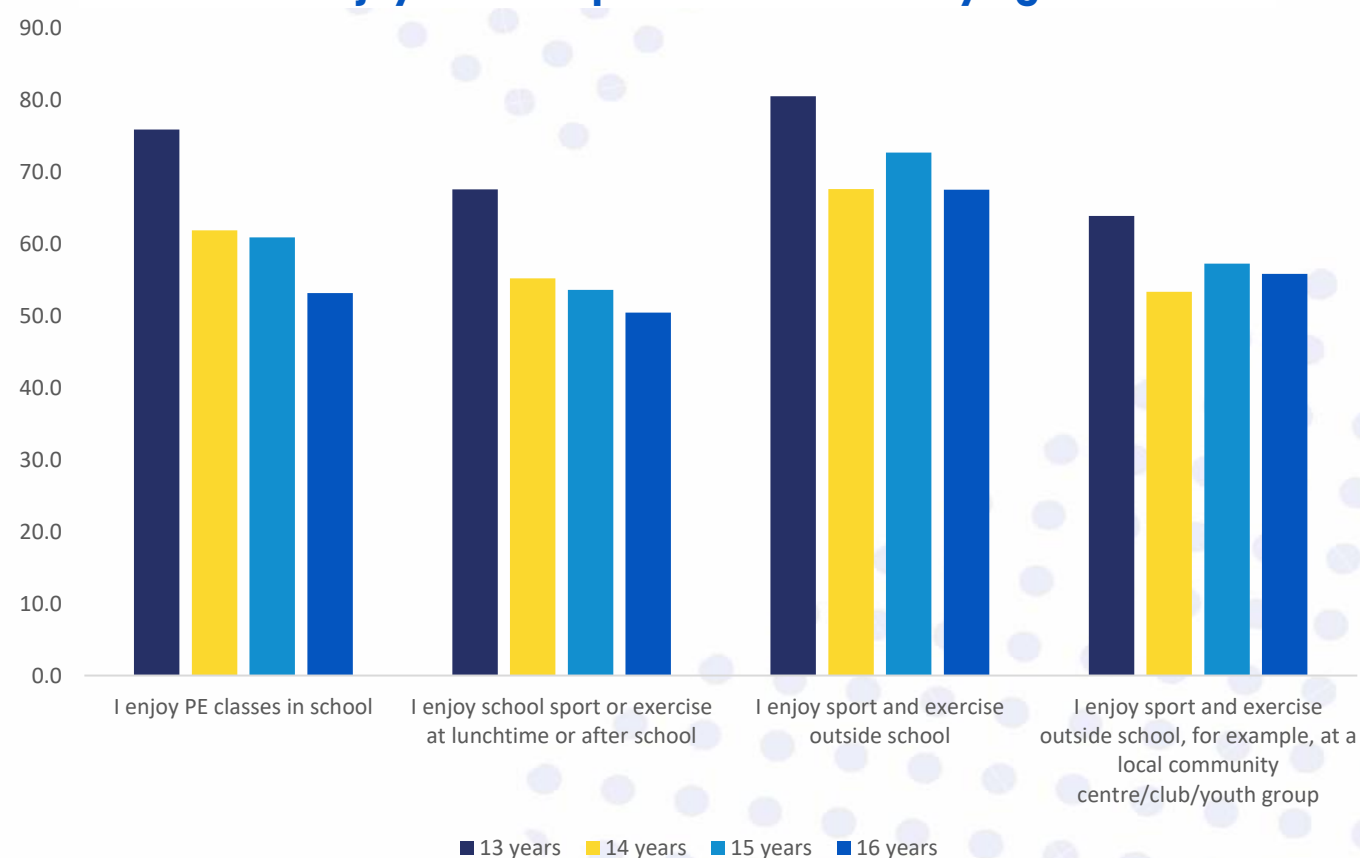


**Enjoyment of sport and exercise by ethnicity**



Those from areas of lower SES also appear to enjoy PE in school (65.8%) and school sports (59.5%) compared to their higher SES counterparts, 58.4% and 53.4% respectively. Enjoyment of sport and exercise in school declines with age. Although there is also a decline in enjoyment outside of school, this is less apparent.

**Enjoyment of sport and exercise by age**





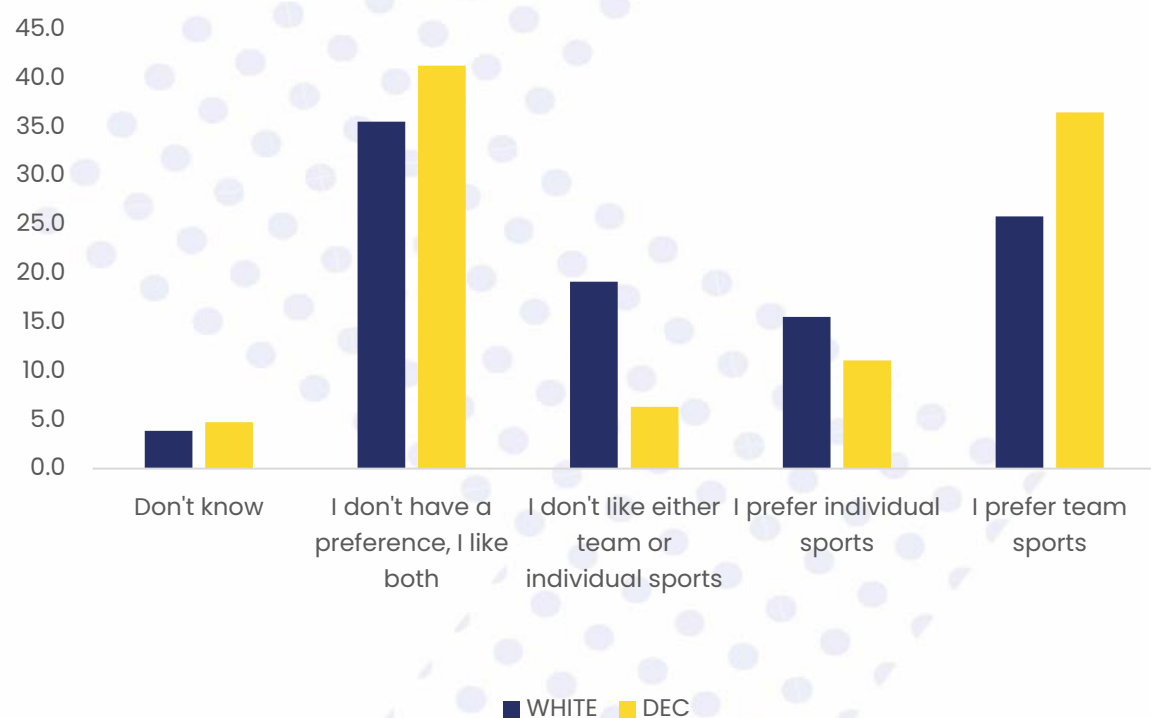


# Preferences among respondents

## Team v. individual sport

Those from diverse ethnic communities prefer team sports compared to those who reported from white background who prefer individual sports. In regard to age, younger girls reported to prefer team sports but this also switched by age 16, where individuals reported to prefer to play individual sports. There were no specific preferences reported by SES.

Team v. individual sport preference by ethnicity



Individual Sports

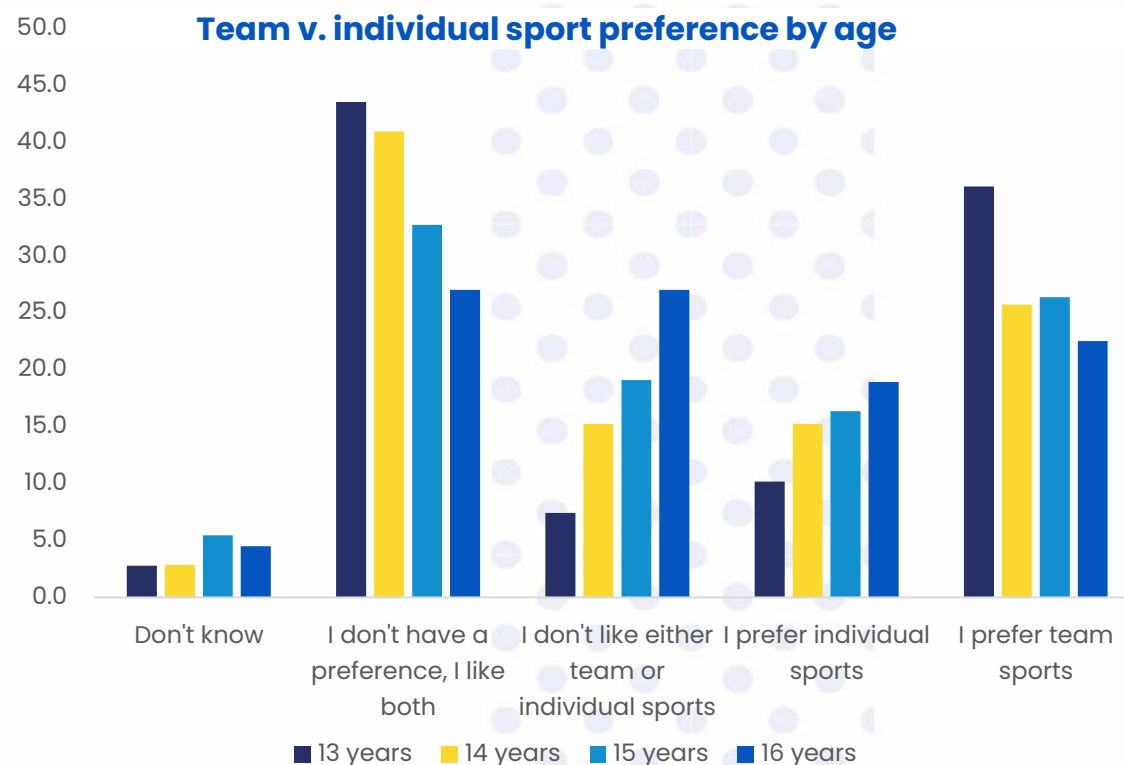
“easier to rely on myself than other people”

“I am not very good at team sports and get left behind so I probably prefer being on my own or in a sport that I know I can deal with”

“I don't like failing other people so individual sports take away that pressure”

“It's more independent and easier to focus without having to rely on others”

Team v. individual sport preference by age



Team Sports

“There is a much more exciting game when you play in a team”

“It's fun, you can have a laugh with friends”

“They require different mental discipline. Individual sports need more focus because you have no one to rely on unlike being in a team. If you make a mistake your team mate might bail you out.”

## Single v. mixed gender sport

Girls from higher SES areas have preference for single gender sports (33%) compared to 26% in lower SES areas.

Those from diverse ethnic communities prefer mixed gender sports (29%) compared to those from white backgrounds (11%).

Preference for mixed gender sports decreases with age, whereas preference for single gender increases.

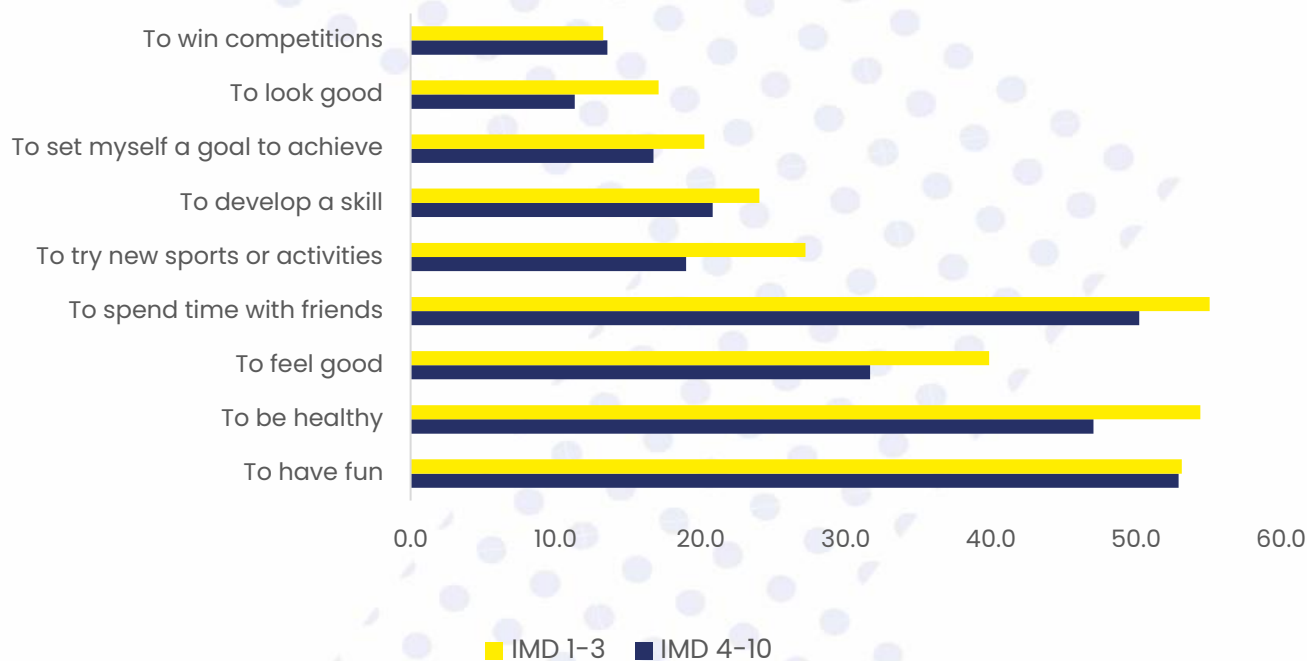
# Motivations – IMD

For all respondents, the most important two factors that encourage and motivate in school exercise and sport were **“to have fun”** and **“to socialise with friends”**.

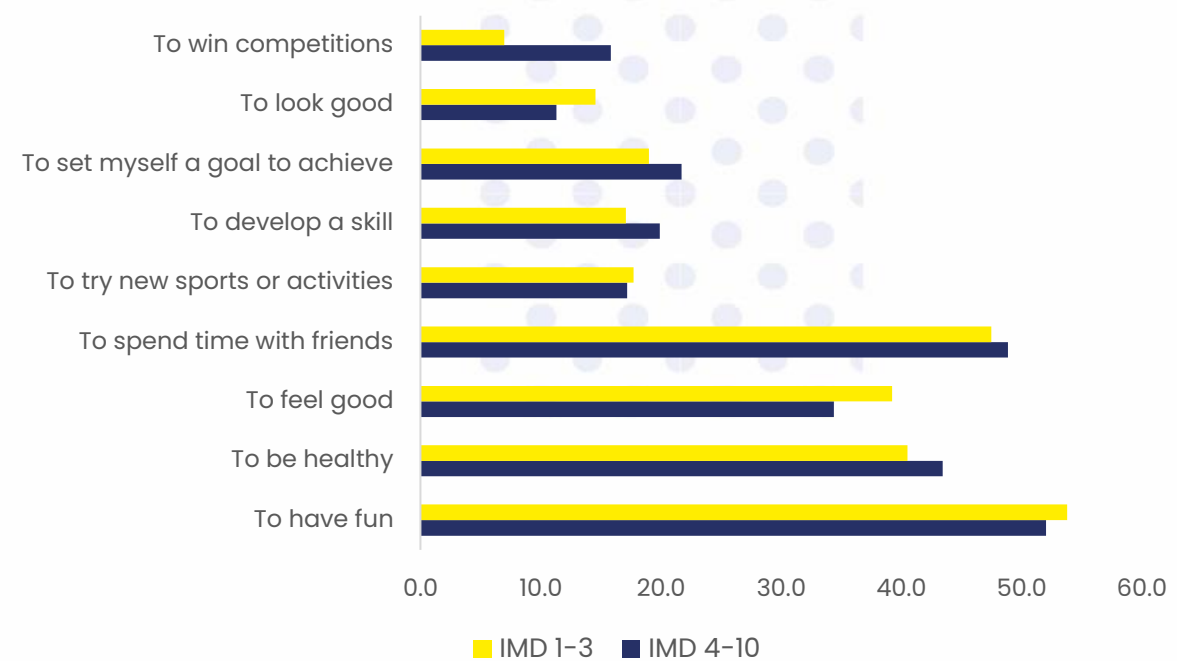
For respondents from areas of lower SES there was more of a focus on ‘*opportunity*’ as a motivator for in school exercise and sport; ‘trying new sports/activities’, ‘developing a skill’, and ‘setting myself a goal to achieve’ were strong motivators compared to those from higher areas of SES.

Outside of school, those from higher areas of SES appeared to see the ‘*opportunities*’ as a driving motivation for taking part more than those from lower SES areas.

Motivations for exercise and sport IN SCHOOL by IMD



Motivations for exercise and sport OUT OF SCHOOL by IMD



Motivations for exercise and sport AT COMMUNITY SPORTS/YOUTH GROUPS by IMD



Outside of school, only **7%** of those from lower SES said competition was a motivator to taking part, compared to **16%** from higher SES.

In school exercise and sport many participants commented ‘**I have to do it**’ highlighting the compulsory element rather than choice.

*‘I feel the odd one out all the time but I have some trustworthy friends too...I just wish I could find what I’m good at’*

Outside of school exercise and sport there were several comments about socialising and taking part with family.

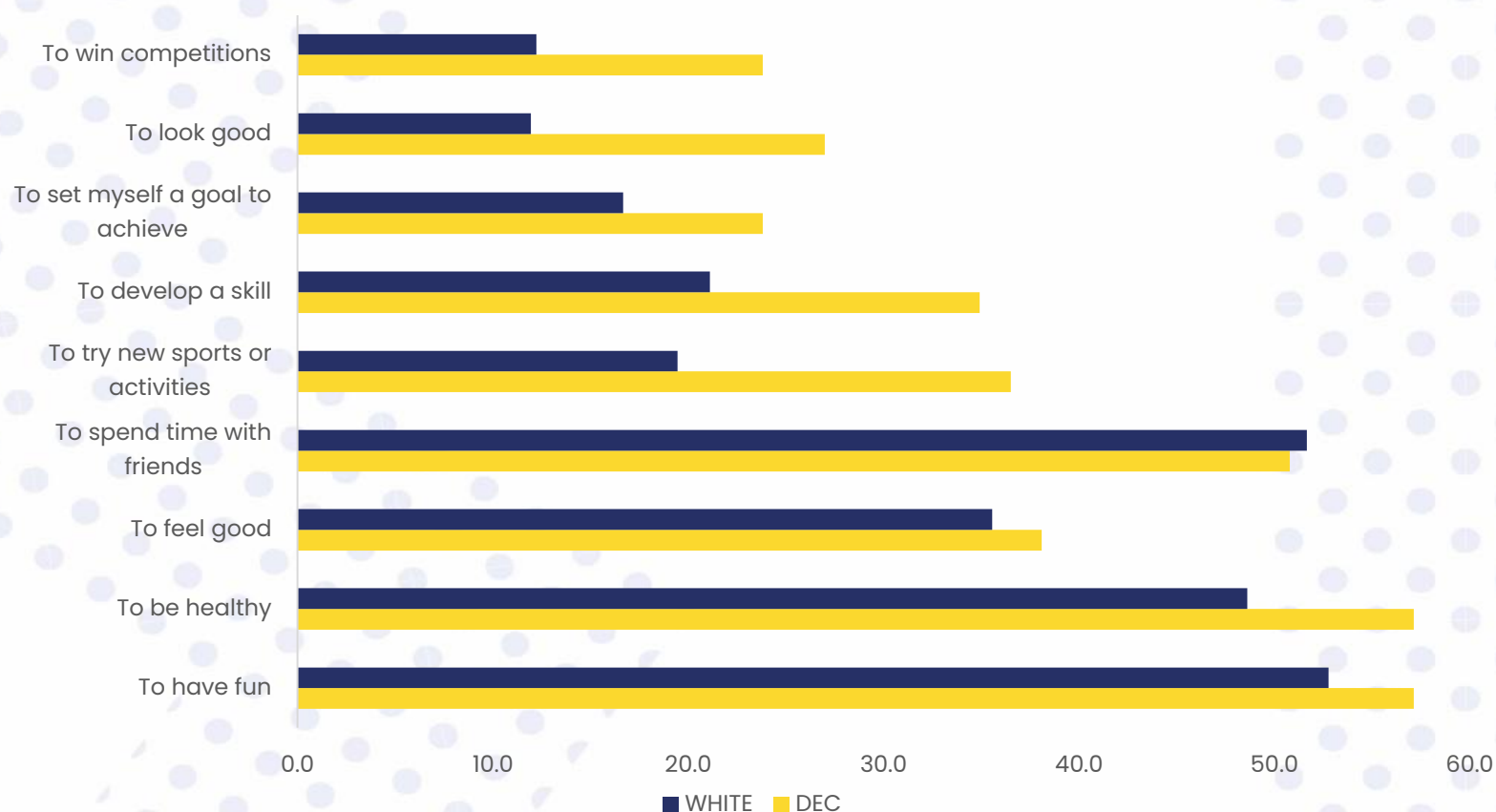
*‘I wish I could find a sport my friends like too so I can feel comfortable doing sport with them plus I need something free or cheap I can afford’*



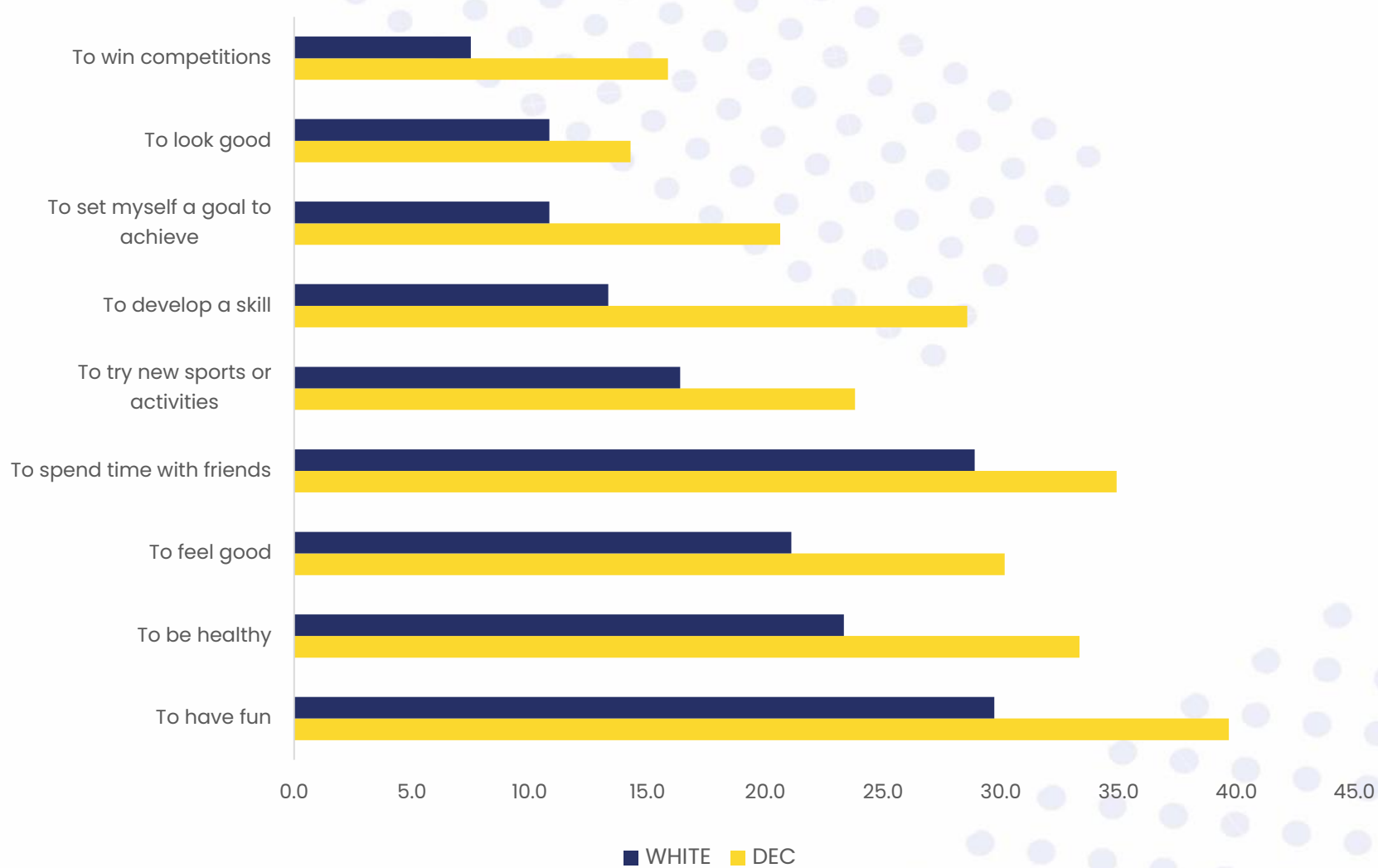
# Motivations – Ethnicity

Similarly to those from areas of lower SES those from diverse ethnic communities had higher aspirations in terms of what they could achieve from school sports compared to those from white communities. In addition, those from diverse ethnic communities reported that 'to win competitions' was something that motivated them in school sports.

**Motivations for exercise and sport IN SCHOOL by ethnicity**



**Motivations for exercise and sport AT COMMUNITY SPORTS/YOUTH GROUPS by ethnicity**

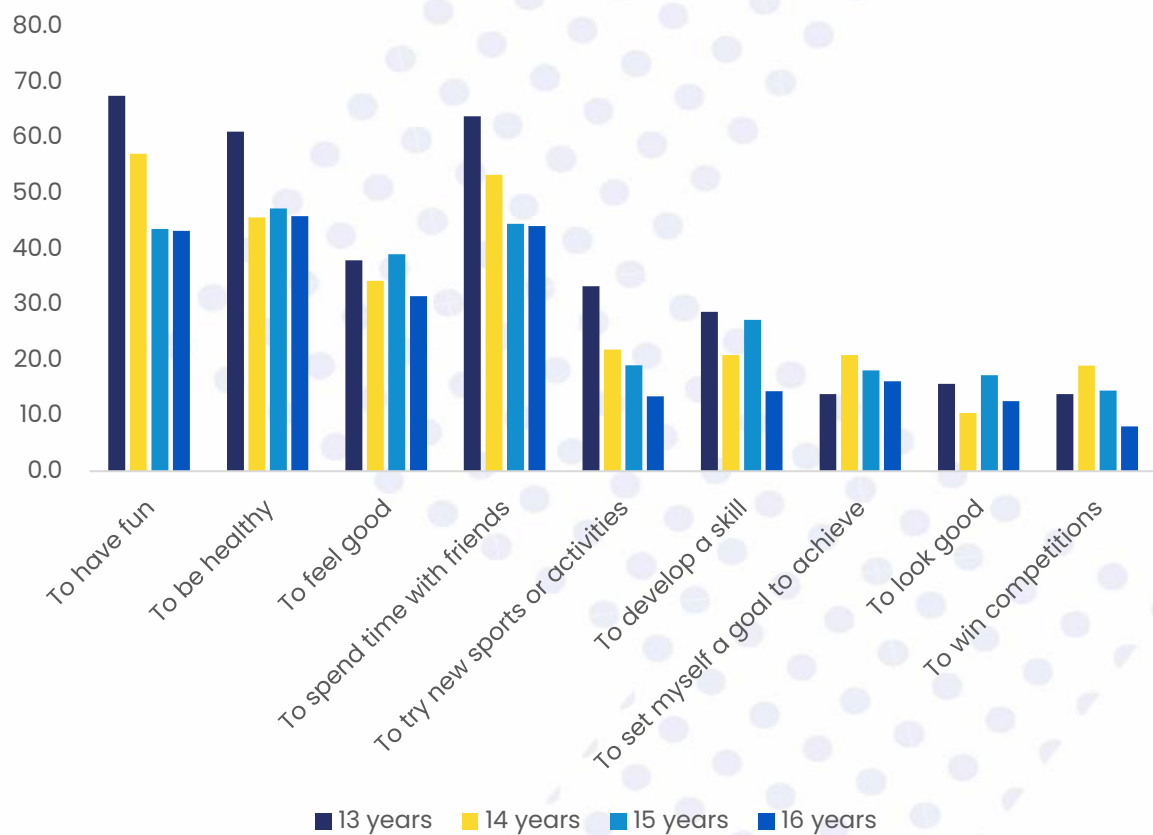


Across all areas, motivations to take part in sport at community sports groups is higher in girls from diverse ethnic communities compared to white respondents.

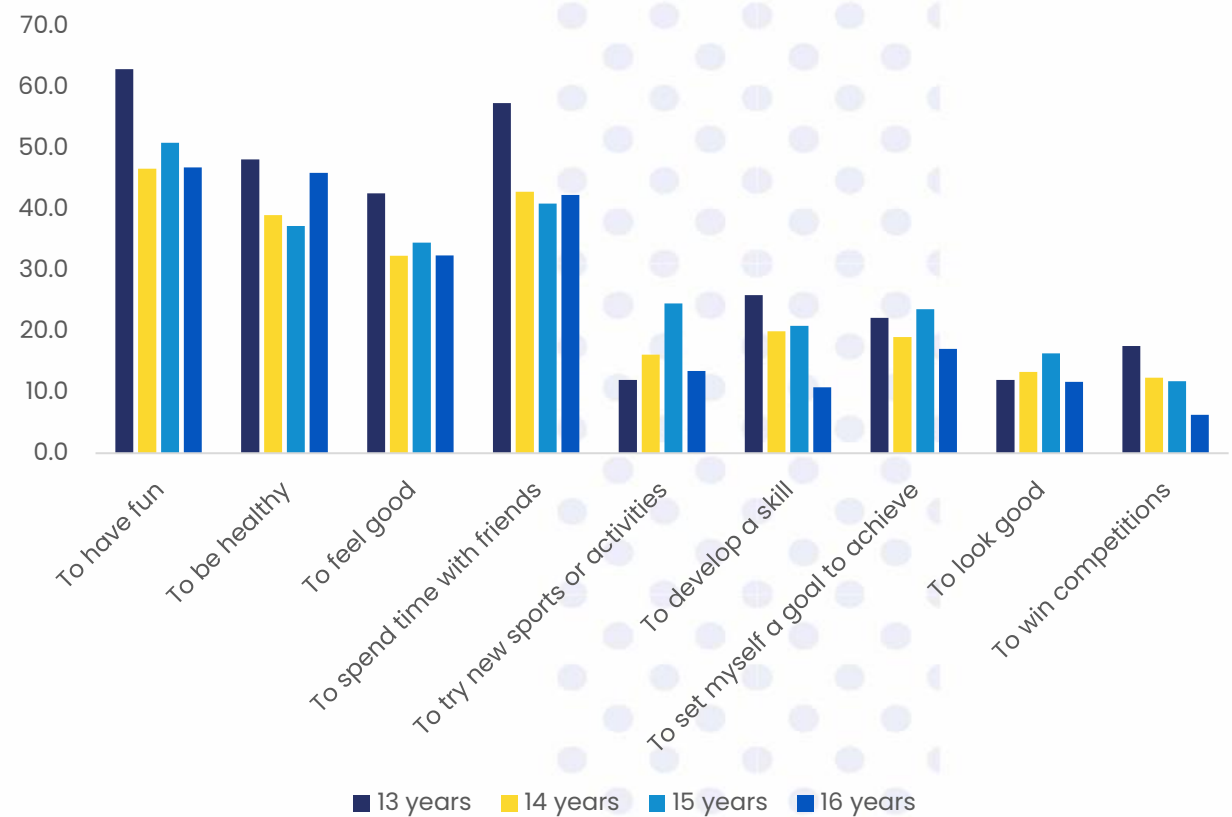
# Motivations – Age

The principal motivators for participation are; to spend time with friends, to feel good and be healthy, and to have fun. Motivation to take part in exercise and sports across all areas (in school, out of school and at community sport/youth clubs) decreases with age.

Motivations for exercise and sport **IN SCHOOL** by age

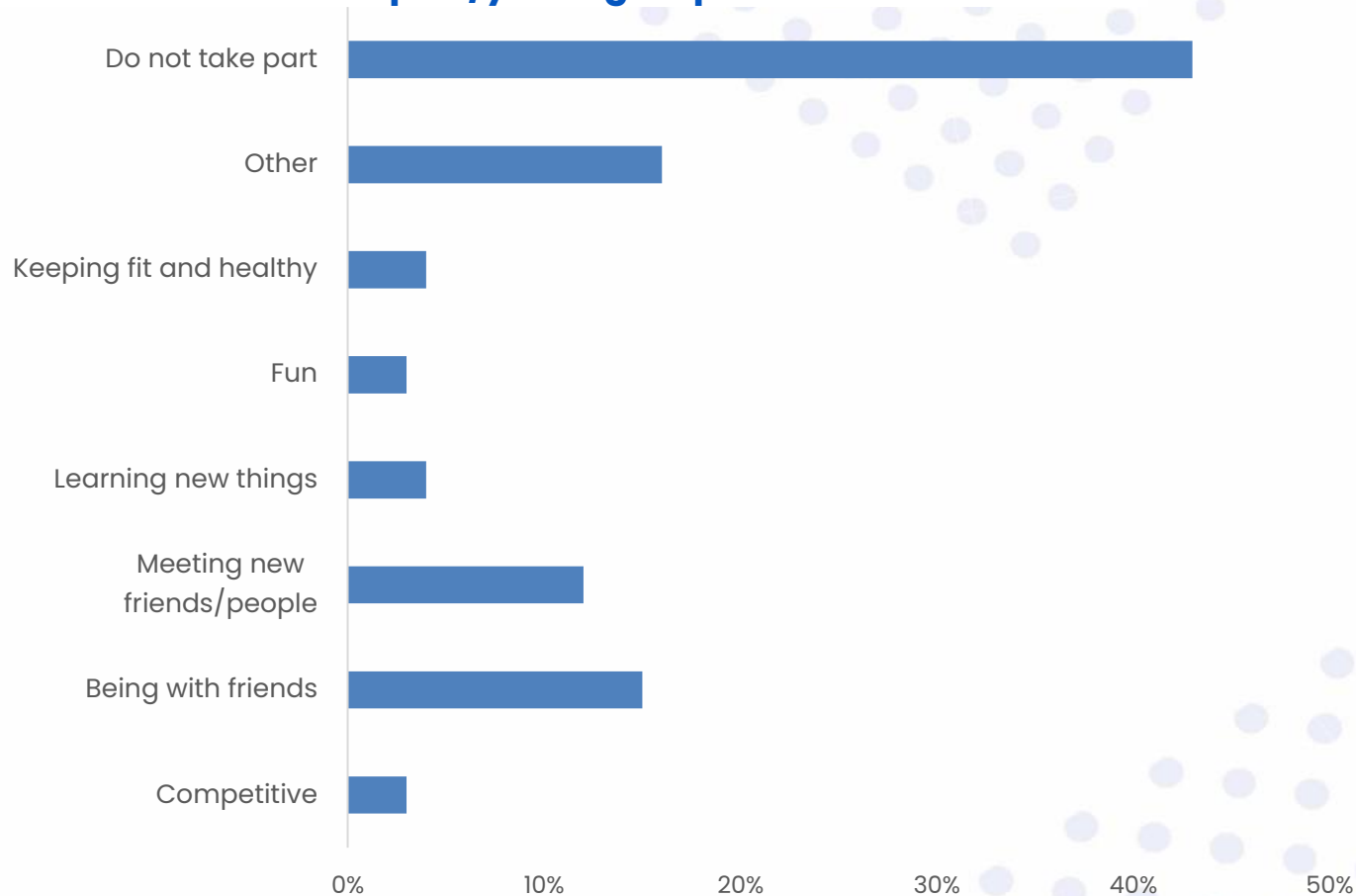


Motivations for exercise and sport **OUTSIDE SCHOOL** by age



# Motivations – Community Sport/Youth Groups

Motivations for exercise and sport at community sport/youth groups



**“I get to see my friends and keep fit and we can challenge each other”**

**“I like the freedom you get and to be part of a team trying to achieve something”**

**“Good team work, fun, and healthy routine”**

**“I take part in a local drama group which includes exercise games. I love seeing my friends every week and knowing I’m being active”**

**“It’s fun being around different people than in school”**

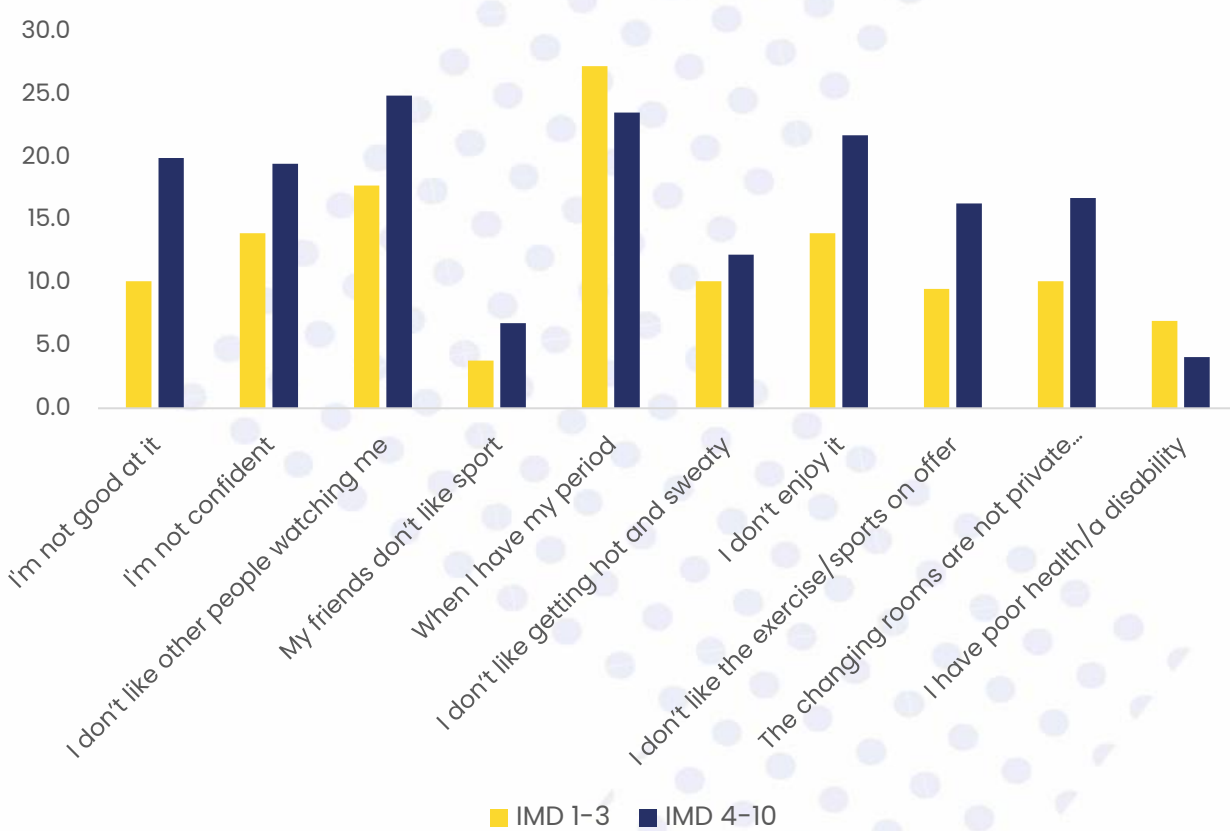


# Barriers

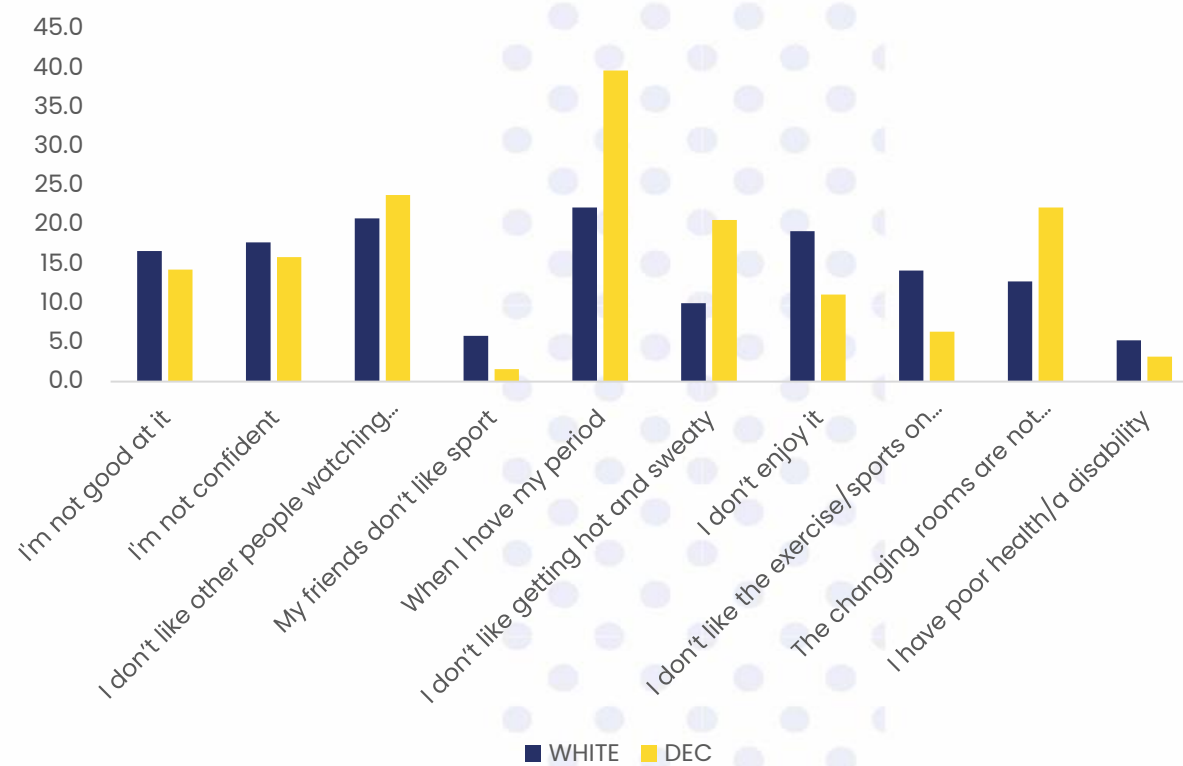
## School exercise and sport

The most common barrier for exercise and sport in school for all respondents was 'when I have my period'. Those from diverse ethnic communities are most affected by the, with almost 40% stating it as a barrier for in school exercise and sport.

Barriers to exercise and sport IN SCHOOL by IMD



Barriers to exercise and sport IN SCHOOL by ethnicity



Those in areas of higher SES appear to be less confident stating 'I'm not good at it', 'I'm not confident' and 'I don't like other people watching me' as main barriers.

For those from diverse ethnic communities, main barriers include 'being watched by peers', 'getting hot and sweaty in school' and 'changing rooms not being private enough'.

## Outside of school

Most commonly cited as reasons for not taking part in exercise in sport outside of school is lack of confidence (15%) and when having a period (17%).

Interestingly, 14% of those from higher SES areas cited 'it is too expensive' as a barrier, compared to just 9% of those living in more deprived communities.

