

Participation of Asian population groups

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In collaboration with:
*Te Hau Kori – Victoria University
University of Waikato*



Executive summary

The Active NZ survey consistently shows that Asian ethnic communities are among the least active groups in New Zealand society. However, the issue is complex, nuanced and multilayered. The motivations, opportunities and barriers for Asian New Zealanders are complex, varying considerably based on age, gender, generation and language skills.

Voices of the Asian population in New Zealand

A focus on competition and a lack of cultural knowledge can limit participation

People from Asian communities, who preferred social and recreational activities, often felt that facilitators and their selection policies were primarily focused on organised and competitive sports. This made them feel unwelcome and limited their participation. A lack of cultural knowledge and understanding of the rules and etiquette within traditional sporting environments was also found to be a barrier.

Sports organisations with a focus on inclusion are highly valued

Participants of the focus groups expressed mostly positive experiences and enthusiasm for sports and physical activity. However, they also discussed negative aspects of their experiences, such as discrimination, racism, unconscious bias, and xenophobia. They highlighted that sports organisations and clubs that made efforts to be inclusive, were highly valued and perceived as more welcoming.

Facilities are safe to access in New Zealand

People who had experience participating in both New Zealand and their Asian country of origin, were mostly positive in terms of safety and access to facilities in New Zealand. Being in nature is one of the key motivations to participate in physical activity. Asian participants were positive about the accessibility of nature in New Zealand.

Accessing information about sports and active recreation can be challenging

Participants experienced a variety of difficulties accessing and understanding information about sport and physical activity, which was mostly related to language barriers. This was mainly challenging for new arrivals.

Conflicting messages from family and society influence participation

Family plays a critical role in supporting or inhibiting participation for the Asian community. Different generations have different understandings and experiences of sports, leading to conflicting messages from schools, society, and parents.

Motivations and barriers to participation

The primary motivations for participation include wellbeing, physical health benefits, social aspects, being in nature, and family/community connections.

The barriers to participation are mostly related to access, inclusion, and the competitive nature of New Zealand sports

Recommendations to building culturally inclusive environments

Overwhelmingly participants and sports facilitators felt that more could be done to create sports opportunities for Asian Communities. Several actions to create more culturally inclusive and supportive environments were identified including:

- Recognising the diversity within the Asian population and their diverse needs
- Asian representation in leadership positions
- Addressing the under-resourcing and funding issues in the sector
- Acknowledging and addressing cultural bias and stereotypes within organisations and staff that continue to limit Asian participation

Background

The Asian population in New Zealand is growing rapidly, with Auckland predicted to have a 44% Asian population by 2043. However, research shows that people of Asian ethnicities are generally less active than those of non-Asian ethnicities.

To address these issues, sports organisations and active recreation providers need to better understand and respond to the specific needs of the diverse and quickly changing Asian community.

Objectives

The objectives of this report are to understand participation of Asian ethnic community groups in physical activity in New Zealand. It aims to explore their:

- Experiences when participating in physical activities in New Zealand, and
- Perceptions, barriers, and motivations related to their own participation in physical activity in New Zealand.

Approach

This work is based on quantitative data results from Sport New Zealand's Active NZ survey (2017-2021*), which measures nationwide participation in play, active recreation, and sport.

The 2022 results from Voice of Rangatahi (VOR) are also used throughout the report to substantiate some of the findings.

To complement this work, Sport NZ commissioned Professor Holly Thorpe (a sociologist of sport, gender and culture, from the University of Waikato) to conduct a qualitative study to better understand the experiences, perceptions, barriers, and motivations of Asian ethnic community groups when participating in physical activity in New Zealand. She collaborated with Sheryne Lok (SLS&R Consultants), and Dr. Tom Kavanagh (Lincoln University) and wrote the report: *The Changing Nature of Asian Participation in Play, Active Recreation and Sport: Voices from the Community* (2023)

Method

Please see appendix 1 (pages 26-27) for a more detailed explanation of the methods used for the qualitative and quantitative study.

Please note the breadth of Asian communities in New Zealand

While reading this report, please note that the Asian communities in New Zealand are highly diverse, and their experiences of play, active recreation and sport vary significantly. The Active NZ sample sizes aren't big enough to look at all ethnic subgroups individually.

*Please note that the quantitative analysis took place just before the Active NZ 2022 data was available. However, the story had not changed in 2022 in terms of participation of the Asian population.

The participation landscape of Asian ethnic communities in New Zealand

The following pages provide context, derived from the Active NZ survey, on how young people and adults from Asian ethnic communities participate in physical activity. What sports and activities they prefer to participate in and are interested in trying and doing more of.

This is supplemented by results of Voice of Rangatahi (VOR), an in-school survey of secondary school students administered by the Regional Sports Trust (RST) or Regional Sport Director (RSD) within the region.

People of Asian ethnicity are generally less active than average

Compared to people of non-Asian ethnicity, people of Asian ethnicity:

- are less likely to participate weekly in physical activity
- spend less time being physically active
- are less likely to meet the physical activity guidelines

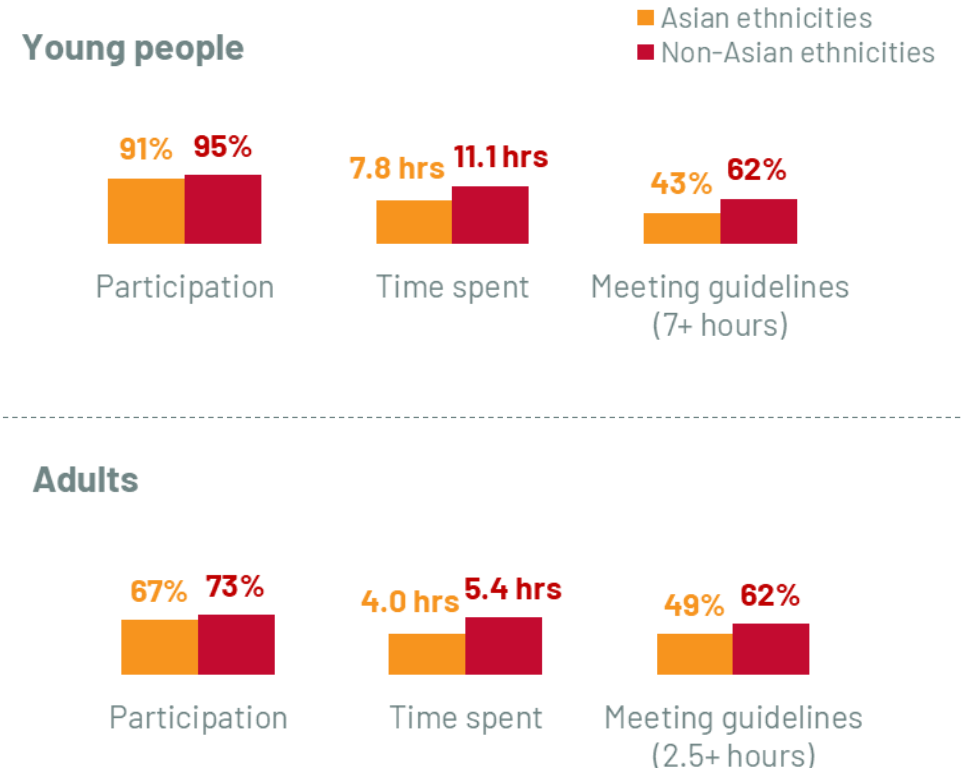
Young people of Asian ethnicity were less impacted by the COVID-19 disruption

Participation in organised activity has been negatively affected by the COVID-19 disruption. Young people of Asian ethnicity were impacted, but less so than average, due to their generally lower involvement in organised participation compared to non-Asian young people.

An increase in time spent by all young people in informal activity has counterbalanced this drop-in organised activity. Among the Asian population this even increased the overall time spent participating, although not significantly so.

More adults were meeting Physical Activity guidelines during the pandemic

Participation trends for adults from Asian ethnic communities are in line with what we see for adults overall; the proportion meeting the physical activity guidelines increased during the pandemic.



% Weekly participation
Average number of hours per week
% Meeting physical activity guidelines of 7+ hrs (young people) or 2.5 + hrs (adults) per week at any intensity
 Results are from 2017-2021
 Base young people: All young people aged 5 to 17
 Base adults: All respondents aged 18 and over

The lower participation levels of young people of Asian ethnicity are more significant for tamariki than rangatahi

Tamariki (5-11) of Asian ethnicity have significantly lower participation levels than all tamariki

Compared to all tamariki, tamariki of Asian ethnicity:

- spend a less time participating in *play* and *informal activity*
- spend less time *playing with friends or family*
- participate in a lower than *average number of activities* per week.

However, tamariki of Asian ethnicity are most likely to want to be doing more physical activity.

Asian tamariki are more likely than average to mention the following barriers to increasing their participation:

- *Too hard to get to training, games or competitions*
- *Too busy*
- *My parents want me to focus on schoolwork/other activities.*

The differences in participation between rangatahi (12-17) of Asian ethnicity and all rangatahi are not as significant as for tamariki

They spend less time in *play* and *informal participation* than average.

They are more likely than average to mention the following barriers to keep them from increasing their participation:

- *My parents want me to focus on schoolwork / other activities.*



Popular sports and activities among young Asian

Most popular activities

While the top ten most popular sports and activities are the same for young people of Asian and non-Asian ethnicities (see table), there are some differences in popularity of other sports and activities.

Participation in these sports and activities is low (ranging between 1-6%), young people of Asian ethnicities are more likely to participate in *badminton*, *table tennis*, *karate*, and *tae kwon do*.

VOR shows that *badminton* is the 2nd most popular *in school activity* for Asian rangatahi, compared with 4th for all rangatahi.

Sports and activities interested in trying or doing more of

Young people of Asian ethnicities have a higher desire to increase their participation compared with the non-Asian population.

The top four activities that young people were most interested in trying or doing more of, were the same for Asian ethnicities and non-Asian ethnicities, only the order is different; *swimming*, *football*, *cycling*, and *running*. The activities of particular interest to young people of Asian ethnicities, were *badminton*, *basketball*, and *cricket*.

	Asian ethnicities	Non-Asian ethnicities
Running / jogging / cross country	40%	39%
Swimming	32%	38%
Playing (e.g., running around, climbing trees, make-believe)	32%	45%
Playing on playground (e.g., jungle gym)	28%	41%
Walking for fitness	26%	25%
Cycling	25%	37%
Games	23%	36%
Scootering	15%	25%
Trampoline	14%	29%
Dancing	13%	16%

% Who have done this activity in the last 7 days
Results are from 2017-2021
Base: All young people aged 5 to 17

Popular sports and activities among Asian adults

Most popular activities

The top eight most popular sports and activities are the same for adults of Asian and non-Asian ethnicities (see table). However, there are some differences in the popularity of other sports and activities. Participation in these sports and activities is low (below 4%), adults of Asian ethnicities are more likely to participate in *basketball*, *badminton*, and *table tennis*.

Sports and activities interested in trying or doing more of

When adults are asked which activities they would like to try or do more of in the next 12 months, *running*, was of far greater interest to adults of Asian ethnicities. Besides running, Asian adults are interested in trying *swimming*, *yoga*, and *individual workouts*.

Other activities mentioned at least twice as much by adults of Asian ethnicities compared to non-Asian are *badminton*, *football*, *table tennis*, *basketball*, *karate* and *cricket*.

	Asian ethnicities	Non-Asian ethnicities
Walking	51%	59%
Workout (using equipment)	22%	21%
Running / Jogging	21%	19%
Gardening	17%	27%
Playing games	13%	16%
Yoga	7%	7%
Swimming	6%	9%
Group fitness class	6%	9%
Dancing	5%	Not top 10
Badminton	3%	Not top 10
Day tramp	Not top 10	4%
Road cycling	Not top 10	4%

% Who have done this activity in the last 7 days
 Results are from 2017–2021
 Base: All respondents aged 18 and over

Voices of the Asian population in New Zealand

Asian New Zealand communities are highly diverse, and their experiences of play, active recreation and sport vary significantly.

The following pages highlight the primary factors that have had an impact, both positive and negative, on the experiences of the Asian population in sport and active recreation.

Each finding is accompanied by illustrative quotes, which serve to amplify the voices and perspectives of individuals and shed light on the complexities within each theme.

The social aspect of participation is a key motivation

While some participants of the qualitative study engaged in competitive and elite level sport, social sports were more popular.

This is supported by the Active NZ survey results, showing that young Asian are significantly more likely to participate in *non-competitive* sports and activities *only*.

The Asian population in New Zealand is highly motivated by the social aspect of participation. Through sports and activities, they connect with friends and engage with the community.

New Zealand sports facilitators prioritise competition

Participants who preferred social, recreational, and informal sports and activities often felt that:

- When compared to their country of origin, New Zealand offerings tended to prioritise space, facilities and resources towards organised and competitive sports
- Club and team selection policies were favoring elite and competitive sports were limiting participation among those who were keen social, recreational and/or informal participants.

This made them feel **unwelcome** at clubs and programs if they were not able or did not prefer to play at a competitive level, which **limited participation**.

"....it's good to get out there, surround myself with friends, just doing some activities. That's my motivation."

(Karen ethnic woman from Burma, late 20s)

"I would say even league [formal competition] is a bit too competitive for me. I just want to come in, play a game and have no expectations that I have to show up next week because maybe I have some event to go to. But we're just here to have a good hour and a half, two hours together in the sport. I don't need that league aspect, even if it's a friendly thing. I'm just here for the game."

(Chinese woman, early 30s).

"School sports, the nature of it is to compete. At least definitely when I was at school and I can't imagine there is now, there's no sports you can just do all the sake of sports which, actually, if you think about it, is something that is quite lacking in our society. There are social clubs everywhere, but you have to really, really look for them, I feel."

(Chinese woman, early 30s)

Joining new sports later in life can be intimidating

Some respondents noted that, because New Zealand children are strongly encouraged to invest a lot of time learning and developing skills in sports from a young age, joining/learning new sports later in life can be intimidating and embarrassing. These perceptions often put them off trying new sports and joining clubs and teams.

Lack of (cultural) knowledge around sports

Some participants felt excluded from sports with a long tradition and popularity in New Zealand, such as rugby and netball, due to a lack of cultural knowledge and understanding of the rules and etiquette within these sporting environments.

Recent immigrants in particular faced barriers related to knowledge (availability, locations, costs), social connections, and anxiety/fear/embarrassment about unfamiliar sports or activities.

Few opportunities to explore new sports in a social way

Many participants showed an enthusiasm for trying new sports and physical activities. However, many felt that there were few opportunities to explore new sports, at a reasonable price, particularly if they lacked prior knowledge and skills.

"You kind of lose the confidence if you see other people your age who've been doing it since they were younger and then you're like, "Oh, I can't start now because that'll just be embarrassing""

(Chinese female, teen)

"I think in terms of volleyball, definitely accessibility can be improved because you have the school league, but if your school isn't one of those schools that play well in the school league, you have no opportunities whatsoever to break into the volleyball circle ... And if you want to play for clubs, it's all very network based and if you just never break into that circle and never get to know those people, you will pretty much never get selected into the teams and never actually have the opportunities to play for the clubs around here.

That's what I think, in terms of accessibility."

(Chinese female, teen).

Negative experiences feed a feeling of exclusion

Participants of the focus groups expressed mostly positive experiences and enthusiasm for sports and physical activity.

However, they also discussed encountering negative aspects in their experiences. These negative experiences highlight the need for greater awareness, inclusivity, and efforts to address racism and discrimination in sports and physical activity settings.

Racism

Participants highlighted the issue of racist abuse in their sports, both on-field targeting and off-field sideline abuse. According to participants, this is occurring at a very high frequency, but more so in adult sport than youth sport. Reporting such incidents often resulted in blame being placed on the victims.

Xenophobia

There were reports of a rise in xenophobia and racial attacks, including unwanted physical and verbal attacks, while participating in sport and active recreation during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to heightened fear among Asian women when exercising in public spaces. This is supported by findings from the Active NZ survey. The barrier of *I don't feel safe* was more commonly mentioned by adults of Asian ethnicities.

No 'others like me'...

During the focus group, the importance of visibility of 'others like me' was highlighted. The absence of other Asian participants can create a lack of belonging, connection and enjoyment.

Seeing others like yourself participating, or in leaderships roles, can be motivation and inspiring.

"I had one very bad experience in the changing room at the (council) pool. I was washing my jandals in the hand basin and this lady, a Kiwi lady, just looked at me, she came over to me and said, "Oh, we don't do it in New Zealand". She was very angry, and she was pointing at me, my face, and said, "no, you go back home". I cried."

(Japanese woman, mid 50s).

"I go outside for a walk, someone shouts at me, screams at me, I get terrified for my life. How do you expect me to have wellbeing when no one in the society accepts you?"

(Muslim woman of Asian heritage, mid 30s).

Asian athletes feel overlooked at team selections

Unconscious bias and stereotyping

The experiences of many young individuals in school revealed the presence of cultural stereotypes perpetuated by PE teachers, coaches, fellow students, and athletes. These stereotypes, especially of young females, falsely assumed that they were not interested in or skilled at sports.

Asian athletes feel they are often overlooked at team selection, based on stereotypes that Asians aren't 'good at' or 'serious' about sport. Some described being pigeon-holed into playing only certain positions because of their ethnicity.

While some internalised these stereotypes and believed they were not good at sports, others actively resisted and challenged them.

The Active NZ 2021 and VOR 2022 results substantiate this by showing that young people from Asian ethnic communities are less likely than average to say they

- *Like/liked PE or fitness classes at school* (Active NZ)
- *Are good at sport* (Active NZ)
- *Are good at lots of different physical activities* (Active NZ & VOR)

However, it's encouraging that there's no significant difference between Asian rangatahi and all rangatahi that *my school provides an inclusive and safe environment to be physically active.*

Disrespectful treatment

Some facilitators made no effort to learn participants' names of Asian origin, instead using similar Anglo names, which was seen as disrespectful and affected their sense of inclusion and belonging.

Participants are willing to adjust to new norms

Some older participants expressed difficulties in adjusting to new cultural norms in New Zealand. While they acknowledged the challenge and were willing to adapt, they faced instances where people aggressively highlighted their cultural differences, which further impacted their experiences.

Young Asians expressed a desire to have more people from similar backgrounds to enhance their enjoyment.

*"Even if it's just like unconscious bias, there is [a stereotype] that Asians are just bad at sport."
(Chinese female, teen).*

Facilities in New Zealand are safe to access

People who had experience participating in both New Zealand and their Asian country of origin, were mostly positive in terms of safety and access to facilities in New Zealand. Many Asian New Zealanders mentioned that facilities were also more affordable than what they were used to in their country of origin.

Accessibility of nature is a great motivator to participate

Being in nature is one of the key motivations to participate in physical activity. Asian participants were positive about the accessibility of nature in New Zealand.

However, getting to spaces and places can be challenging, particularly older people and recent arrivals experienced transportation difficulties such as parking, traffic and public transport.

Information can be difficult to access and understand

Some found it challenging to access information about social clubs and activities, suggesting the need for better collation and sharing of information and sharing information in multiple languages.

Notably, participants mentioned being confused by signage in public facilities, with a lack of assistance in this area.

"It's more accessible to nature. Where I lived before was city in Bangkok. But here, just around the corner, we have parks and bays or beach access that we can walk to. Our local park is our local playground."

(Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s)

"Just getting to the gym is very difficult because I live in Devonport and the gym is in Takapuna. I have to choose the time to travel, and sometimes I'm sitting in a car for about an hour just to get to the gym. That puts me off."

(Japanese woman, early 60s)

"I think language is a major barrier, especially if they've just moved to New Zealand and they're not fluent in English. I think language is always a huge problem if they want to try. Also, the lack of confidence because they can't speak English fluently, or people are struggling or people from the clubs or running the clubs are struggling to understand them. I think that's one of the things that prevents ... or the kind of experiences that make them maybe pull back a bit."

(Chinese woman, mid 30s)

Lack of funding and high costs limit participation

Funding was identified as a major issue

Respondents felt that despite the large and rapidly growing Asian population funding poses an ongoing issue – both in terms of subsidised participation and investment in facilities. The Asian community typically do not participate in the same structured way as Western participants, and thus they felt they often missed out on funding, resources and facilities, with critical decisions continuing to be made by organisations with little Asian voice, representation or leadership.

Costs and confusion around affiliated costs are a barrier

Even though some mentioned that sports in New Zealand were more affordable than their home countries, for others, fees, subscriptions, and additional affiliated costs were seen as obstacles. Especially for lower socio-economic groups.

Some commented that costs of fitness classes have increased considerably since Covid-19, and they are less willing to go to the gym or join busy workout/fitness spaces.

"I stopped soccer because I hated having to pay for everything. Because we pay \$350, and then every single week, we had to bring in \$10 or \$5 for the home game. Then again, the t-shirt, \$25, \$30. And I'm like, what is this? So I was like, no, I'm not going to join anymore. Working as hard already and then ... but yeah, that was one of the reasons that I quit."

(Karen ethnic woman from Burma, early 30s).

Lack of time is a big barrier to participate

The findings of the Active NZ survey show that being *too busy* is the biggest barrier among all young people and adults. However, young people from Asian communities are more likely than average to say they are *too busy* to participate.

Family, work, transport, school and church commitments all inhibit people's ability to participate in sport and active recreation. Time is a major barrier to participation in sports and physical activities.

Different priorities

For some, particularly new immigrants, sport and physical activity may not be among their highest priorities, with education and work needing to take precedence during times of resettlement.

Some commented on competing demands for young people's recreational time, with many youths opting for (passive) digital leisure (i.e., social media) and play (i.e., gaming) over physical activity.

*"For me, I work during the day, and in night time I usually have church commitments, so it's six days of my week and I've got church stuff going on so I don't really have time so I only use that one day free to play badminton."
(Burmese woman, late 20s).*

Lack of time increases demand for accessible and flexible activities

Younger participants spoke of the importance of finding recreational sports facilities close by (to minimize transport time) with times/availability that suited their busy lifestyles.

Among younger Asian New Zealanders (16-24 years), 'gyming' was a particularly popular form of physical activity and fitness because of convenience around their busy working and social lives.

However, there's more time and opportunity in New Zealand to participate compared with Asian countries

Recent arrivals and older generations, who experienced participating in both Asia and New Zealand, mentioned there's generally more time and opportunity to participate in New Zealand, compared with Asian countries. This indicates that a lack of time, is more an effect of prioritising other activities or commitments over participation, rather than the pressure created by New Zealand society.

Young Asians, family support & mixed messages

Family plays a significant role in supporting or inhibiting participation in physical activity for Asian young people.

Some families were highly supportive of sport and active recreation participation. While for others, family and parental cultural beliefs regarding types of sports and activities, gender expectations and expectations around priorities were at odds with participation.

Young and female Asian sometimes feel like they have to advocate for the value of participating

A few youths noted that being second generation New Zealanders meant that their understandings and experiences of sport and physical activity were different from their parents (who migrated from Asian countries).

Some, mostly women, described having to challenge dominant cultural ideas about sporting participation, having conversations with their parents and families to help them understand why their participation is important.

This can lead to families deepen their understanding and support

Some families deepen their support as they see, hear and learn about the social and physical health and wellbeing benefits of their children, youths, and partner's (i.e., wives) participation.

The Active NZ 2021 survey shows that the young Asian population is less likely than average to agree they:

- *Feel encouraged by people in their life to take part in physical activities*
- *Have support in their community to do the physical activities they want*

This highlights the role of various people (i.e., teachers, coaches, parents, friends) in the lives of Asian youth that influence their physical activity participation.

"Culture has a great influence in Asian communities' participation, especially the parents influence, like the parents have a big say in whether the kids can spend time on sports or recreation and how much time they spend on it and what particular sport or active recreation they spend time on. For example, some parents urge their kids to spend more time in tutoring class to study more on science and math, etc., but not necessarily on sports and active recreation. And even though some Asian parents are particularly keen on their kids getting active, they focus on particular sports like badminton, hoping their kids could gain valuable skills and can compete at high level competitively."

(Chinese woman, mid 30s).

Young people navigating family priorities

Family/parental cultural beliefs regarding sports and activities

Participation in certain sports is often shaped by parental support or aversion, based on their cultural beliefs.

Some parents were worried about the risk of injury in contact sports such as rugby.

Gender expectations

For example, some female participants mentioned that parents would discourage them from going to the gym because they assumed it would lead to masculine traits. Young women also noted that their reasons for participating (i.e., health, fun) were sometimes in contrast to expectations from their families (i.e., weight management, appearance).

"My mum and dad think I shouldn't do weight training because it will make me look bulky. I think it's the same thing as you said, lack of understanding. I think especially in Asian culture where they expect women to look slim, and only do yoga. No weights. But we're not doing it for looks, we're doing it for health."

(Taiwanese woman, mid 20s)

"My parents have supported me because they know physical activity is good for you and they know I enjoy it. My dad got me into playing golf because he was very good and was able to coach me"

(Chinese male, 16)

"My mum really supported me playing volleyball because she played the sport herself and was happy that I was getting more active"

(Chinese female, 16)

Expectations around priorities

Young people (16-24 years) described strong family expectations to prioritise their education (and music) over sport, which conflicted with messages they were receiving from school and wider society.

This is in line with Active NZ results showing that young people of Asian ethnicities are more likely to say that *parents want me to focus on schoolwork or other activities*. VOR results confirm this, young Asian are more likely to say they're *too busy with schoolwork*.

Navigating these different priorities are challenging, which is substantiated by the Active NZ 2021 results, which show that Asian young people are less likely to agree that they *like their parents/family to be involved in their sport and physical activities*, these results are driven by Chinese* young people.

*Please note: In the Active NZ data, Indian and Chinese ethnic groups are the only two Asian subgroups with enough sample to look at individually.

Participants are hesitant to try a new sport alone

As mentioned before, the social aspect of participation is a key motivator for the Asian community in New Zealand. However, this can also create challenges, mainly for new arrivals without an established social network.

Fear of not wanting to go alone is higher among recent immigrants

Social barriers emerged as a significant issue. Participants expressed a hesitation to join new clubs, gyms, or similar establishments without the presence of friends.

They highlighted the challenge of attending alone, often seeking companions to engage in activities together. Additionally, participants noted the lack of accessible avenues and information to join existing groups, further hindering their integration into established social circles within these settings.

“When I came to New Zealand, joining a club was seen as like, ‘Oh my God, these are like where the very good players would go’... Not being bred in an environment where you already know how and where to go for information... it definitely creates a barrier for a lot of the newcomers’ community”
(Hong Kong Chinese male, late 20s)

“I would like to have something like a basketball game just on the court. But I think it’s just having nobody to play with. Usually you see the basketball courts full of people and their friends, their classmates playing with each other but my friends aren’t interested in any of that stuff. I don’t have anyone to play with. It would be nice if I had someone, like a small group, we can casually just go out play a small game of anything.”
(Taiwanese woman, mid 20s).

“I have the time but I feel a bit shy going to a new class. I just need a big push to push myself to start it. I think once I start and then if I start talking to the people in the class, I might be okay. But to go in the class, everybody knows each other and they say, hi, hi, hi. So awkward. That’s always my fear ... Even if it is somewhere accessible and in my time range, the idea of going there by myself and around all these people I don’t know ...”
(Japanese woman, late 40s).

To summarise: Key motivations and barriers

Motivations

Overall, participants of the focus groups noted six key themes when explaining what they enjoyed about their chosen sport and active recreation pursuits:

1. Wellbeing
2. Physical health benefits
3. Social aspects
4. Being in nature
5. Family / community aspects
6. Ease of use (i.e., facilities close to home, without having to drive too far and with reasonable fees)

Barriers

The qualitative study reveals three main themes; access barriers, inclusion barriers, and the competitive nature of New Zealand sports.

1. Access (cost, information, transportation)
2. Inclusion (lack of diversity of staff and leaders, cultural understanding)
3. Negative experiences (cultural stereotypes, unconscious bias and everyday racism)
4. Competitive nature (structures and priorities of sports, club and teams, barriers for trying new activities)
5. Resourcing of Asian-led programmes and initiatives

Mainly recent immigrants face barriers when attempting new sports or activities, especially difficulties accessing information and supportive and welcoming sporting environments.



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Participants' and facilitators' suggestions for action

Participants' suggestions for action

Participants identified several actions that sports organisations and clubs could take to create more culturally inclusive and supportive environments.

These actions include:

- Increase cultural representation through offering diverse food options and correctly spelling words and names.
- Broaden the focus beyond competition by prioritising resources for social, recreational, and informal needs.
- Improve accessibility to information by providing it in multiple languages and establishing a central information point.
- Enhance access to grants and funding for programs targeting Asian communities.
- Increase representation of Asian staff within sport and active recreation organisations.

"You feel that they've thought about you. I think it's as much as when you walk in the door and someone says hello or speaks in your language, it's very comforting. I think it's huge, it's just a very welcome feeling that you get if you've got that luxury."

(Fijian-Indian male, late 40s)

"What they [sports club] started to do was provide more non-alcoholic options over the bar, more water freely available, added a prayer room in their space... doing small things like that makes a huge difference for our communities, making them feel a bit more welcomed, a little bit more included"

(Fijian-Indian male, mid 30s)

- Create sustained efforts to welcome and retain participants, going beyond introductory sessions.
- Organise festivals and events that celebrate the intersection of sport, physical activity, and Asian cultures.
- Promote representation of Asian individuals in leadership positions and governance boards.
- Include Asian individuals in promotional materials for sport and active recreational organisations.
- Subsequently, participants suggested clubs/organisations should offer more free trials ('Give it a Go' sessions) or open days to welcome new participants, with efforts made to ensure such information is widely available (using appropriate networks and in a range of languages) to reach the Asian communities.

Sport facilitators' suggestions for action

In a focus group with Asian sport facilitators, key insights were shared on how New Zealand can better support Asian participation in sport, active recreation, and play:

- Systemic change is needed, which requires strategic planning and funding that specifically addresses the needs of the diverse Asian communities.
- Recognise the diversity within the Asian population, considering factors such as gender, age, cultural heritage, nationality, and generation.
- Extend attention and focus beyond the rapidly growing Asian population in Auckland to include Asian communities in other parts of New Zealand.
- Identify, encourage and support (current and next generation) Asian sport leaders who can advocate for their respective communities within the Asian population of New Zealand.
- Sport and active recreation organisations need to engage in staff education, recognising that various forms of cultural bias, stereotyping and racialised abuse and harm are negatively impacting Asian communities' engagement.
- Address the under-resourcing and funding issues in the sector, recognising that Asian participation may differ from Western participants and may not align with traditional funding criteria.
- Increase Asian representation and leadership in governance positions.
- Recognise the passion and skills of Asian sport facilitators, but also acknowledge challenges of longstanding lack of visibility and value placed on their work by the wider sector. They require adequate funding, support, and staffing to meet the needs of diverse and rapidly growing Asian communities.

*"To be honest, I think a lot of sports organisations are still not open minded to change, to adapt and to accept – yes, accept on a superficial level, but genuine acceptance, it's a different ball game."
(Chinese-Malaysian female, mid 30s)*

How might you use this research?

This research further emphasises that the category of “Asian” is extremely dynamic and includes many diverse individuals with different and evolving needs. The intersections of gender, ethnicity, generation, and age all offer insights into the subtle differences within and across the increasingly diverse Asian New Zealand communities.

Therefore, the high-level themes identified in this research will not be always true for all individuals of Asian descent in New Zealand.

This highlights the importance of multi-layered and intersectional approaches to understanding the sport, active recreation and play experiences of Asian New Zealand communities.

We encourage organisations to build on the knowledge from this research within their own context, to better understand the specifics of the participants they are seeking to engage.

Some questions you might use to get you started:

- How might I/my organisation reflect on the findings of the research and recommendations?
- How can I/my organisation connect with existing Asian community organisations to better understand their specific needs and leverage off existing social connections and cultural knowledge?
- Are our board/staffing/volunteer structures representative of our community?
- How might I/my organisation champion role models to increase visibility and amplify the voices of Asian participants, volunteers, coaches, leaders and administrators in sport and active recreation?
- How might I/my organisation identify opportunities to co-design with Asian communities to ensure initiatives are culturally inclusive and supportive?
- How do I reflect on, identify and challenge assumptions, stereotypes and biases regarding Asian participants in sport and active recreation?
- What networks are available in my community that could support me/my organisation to increase our knowledge of Asian communities and develop cultural competency?
- How might I/my organisation adapt our offerings to ensure facilities and staff create a respectful and culturally friendly environment where Asian participants feel safe and supported to participate in the ways they prefer?

Appendix 1

Method qualitative study

Qualitative study

The Changing Nature of Asian Participation in Play, Active Recreation and Sport: Voices from the Community (2023), by Professor H. Thorpe (University of Waikato), Sheryne Lok (SLS&R Consultants), and Dr. Tom Kavanagh (Lincoln University).

Eight focus group sessions were held with already established sport, fitness, and community organisations within the diverse Asian New Zealand community in Auckland. The focus was on capturing the perspectives of Asian New Zealanders living in different parts of Auckland without comparing them.

Sample

The study included a final sample of 36 Asian New Zealanders residing in Auckland, New Zealand. The sample consisted of 67% female and 33% male participants from various age groups (16 to 73 years) and representing 12 different national and ethnic backgrounds. These participants were actively engaged in a wide range of sports, active recreation, and physical play activities, as shown in the chart below.

Ethnicity	(N)
Chinese	10
Hong Kong Chinese	2
Chinese-Indonesian	1
Chinese Malaysian	3
Taiwanese	1
Japanese	7
Canadian (of Asian heritage)	1
Sri Lankan	1
Fiji-Indian	4
Fijian (of Asian heritage)	1
Indian	1
Burmese	4
Age	(N)
16-18 years	4
19-24 years	3
25-34 years	10
35-44 years	3
45-54 years	7
55+ years	5

Gender	(%)
Female	66.7%
Male	33.3%
Common types of sports/activity	(N)
Gym and group fitness	13
Sports (incl. Badminton, cricket, football, volleyball)	16
Running	2
Walking/hiking	13
Swimming	9
Pilates/yoga	3
Dance	3
Fishing	2
Biking/scootering	2
Refereeing	1

Method quantitative study

Quantitative work

National Participation survey from Sport NZ: Active NZ (2017-2021*).

Sport New Zealand's [Active NZ](#) survey measures nationwide participation in play, active recreation, and sport.

The aim of Active NZ is to gather information about the demographics, activities, patterns, and locations of participation among young people and adults. It seeks to explore the factors influencing participation or non-participation, understand its impact on health and well-being, and assess the importance of participation in New Zealand society.

The project aims to gather 20,000 adult and 5,000 young people respondents per annum. The numbers in this report are based on unweighted Active NZ data, gathered continuously between 2017 and 2021, with quarter 2 of 2020 data missing, due to the COVID-19 disruption.

Sample

In the quantitative study, participation results of respondents who identify with at least one Asian ethnicity (e.g. Chinese, Indian, Korean) with or without other ethnicities (Asian) were compared with respondents who report no Asian ethnicity (non-Asian).

*Please note that the quantitative analysis took place just before the Active NZ 2022 data was available. However, the story had not changed in 2022 in terms of participation of the Asian population.

	Young people		Adults	
	Asian (n=2,674)	Non-Asian (n=21,529)	Asian (n=9,060)	Non-Asian (n=99,368)
5-9 years	44.7%	43.5%		
10-14 years	39.5%	41.5%		
15-17 years	15.8%	15%		
18-24 years			17.7%	11%
25-34 years			16.5%	9.8%
35-49 years			39.9%	31%
50-64 years			18.1%	25.1%
65-74 years			5.9%	14.1%
75+ years			1.9%	8.9%
Male	50%	48.4%	46.1%	43.7%
Female	49.7%	51.2%	53.9%	56.3%
Low deprivation (1-3)	36.1%	40.7%	33.2%	35.5%
Mid deprivation (4-7)	42.6%	39.9%	43.6%	41%
High deprivation (8-10)	21.6%	19.5%	23.2%	23.5%
Born in NZ	71%	90.5%	18.4%	81.1%
Born outside of NZ	29%	9.5%	81.6%	18.9%

