

BELONGING STARTS WITH INCLUSION

**Increasing our women's physical activity levels –
an insight report to build understanding of barriers
and motivations to movement**

Spring 2025

**THIS
GIRL
CAN**

INTRODUCTION

THE CHALLENGE

For 10 years, This Girl Can has been on a mission to narrow the gender activity gap. Since its launch in January 2015, it has inspired more than 4 million women to engage in sport and regular physical activity. But we know there is more work to be done. To ensure no woman is left behind, we have adopted an intersectional approach to selecting our target audiences for the next phase. Using our newly developed Inequalities Metric, we identified the characteristics that most significantly impact minutes of activity.

Our analysis shows that the more overlapping characteristics of inequality someone has, the less likely they are to be active. For an individual woman, having multiple characteristics has a greater impact than any single characteristic. Therefore, our focus for the next phase of the campaign will be all **women on lower incomes** and who are also:

- Aged 55-74
- Pregnant or with babies under one year old
- From Black communities
- From South Asian Muslim communities.

However, we know that every woman is unique and much more than just a set of characteristics. To reflect this, throughout this report, we will describe our audience of around 3.6 million women simply as '**our women**'.



TOPLINE RESULTS

THE GOALS OF THE RESEARCH

In order to explore how we could encourage our women to get active and create the conditions for change, we undertook deep qualitative and robust quantitative research.

Our primary objectives were to:

1. Understand the barriers.
2. Investigate the motivators that will get our women moving despite them.
3. Explore what our women need to start and keep moving.

TOPLINE RESULTS

Our research revealed a complex and layered set of barriers that straddle economic, social, cultural and emotional dimensions. Many factors can keep people stuck in ‘getting ready’ mode, including capability, opportunity, and self-confidence. In the next section, we’ll explore how these emotional and practical barriers interact with cultural and inclusion challenges.

The scale of the problem:

- Only 9% of our women are active in a typical week.
- Only one in 10 of our women feel they completely belong in the world of physical activity.
- Almost one in six of our women have felt so unwelcome in a physical activity setting that they have never returned to that type of activity or lost all confidence to try something new.

Barriers

Many of our women are stuck in ‘getting ready’ mode: they have a high intent to want to engage in physical activity, but are not yet doing so. Cost and lack of motivation are most often cited as the top barriers, but the reality is more complex. Barriers vary and may include:

- functional things like affordability, time and accessibility
- physical limitations such as pain and lack of energy
- emotional barriers such as feeling embarrassed or inadequate.

In addition to this, many have felt unwelcome in physical activity spaces or felt that there was not enough consideration for their needs, including everything from clothing requirements to pregnancy.

However, the biggest perceptual barrier are that our women often feel low on energy, cash and time. This causes many to view activity as depleting, rather than restorative – ‘yet another thing on my to-do list’, rather than ‘something that will help me feel better’.

Motivators

Although our women recognise the many benefits of exercise, they often associate it with long-term goals like weight management or overall health improvements—both of which require consistency. However, they may overlook the immediate benefits, such as increased energy and a better mood, which can be felt the very same day.

TOPLINE RESULTS

When prompted, 88% say they would be motivated to be active by immediate benefits like better quality sleep, improvements in mental health, feeling more confident, having fun, being part of a community and feeling accomplished. Those women amongst our audience who are already active are more likely to have shifted their perspective from seeing activity as something they ‘should’ do to look good, to something they want to do to feel good.

This means there’s an opportunity here: to help our women see that their motivation doesn’t have to be about looking their best – it can be about feeling their best.

The support our women need to start and keep moving

Motivation alone will not be enough to get our women moving, because many say they lack the knowledge of how to get started. However, the solutions they are asking for are simple.

Our research revealed how important it is to help our women to break the deadlock of inactivity and that even a little movement can get them wanting more. Walking remains the most popular activity, but it is certainly not the only thing our women are interested in:

- **Many of our women are interested in gentle online classes, as well as in-person low impact class options.**

- **Many expressed a desire to feel supported in an environment where they were among peers of a similar fitness level, rather than feeling like the least fit participant, and one in five women say women-only classes would make them feel more welcome in settings with physical activity.**
- **More often than not, our women are not seeking out information on what is already locally available which indicates we need to bring ideas, information and guidance to them, into their worlds.**

OUR INTENTION

Addressing inactivity will require a comprehensive approach, including inclusive initiatives in communications, policy reform and sector innovations. There is no single problem and therefore no single solution.

Our strongest intention is that in sharing these insights with you, you can play a part in turning sports and physical activity settings into places and spaces where every woman feels welcome.

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METHODOLOGY

From the very beginning, it's been vital that This Girl Can reflects the authentic experiences and genuine needs of the women we are speaking to. A woman's active life is interwoven with all other aspects of her life, so we have always taken the time to listen and understand their reality, the demands on their time, their priorities and their emotional relationship with activity. Only then can we meet them where they're at.

This research was conducted in collaboration with Outsiders Insight and Savanta research agencies. All women were recruited by external research recruiters adhering to best practice recruitment guidance. Research was conducted over a four-month period from October 2024 to January 2025.

We conducted a two-phase qualitative approach to unearth insights, followed by a robust quantitative validation of these findings.

PHASE 1: QUALITATIVE COMMUNITY

For a week we ran an online community of 25 women from across the country. Our women were given a number of tasks to complete and questions to answer.

The community consisted of a mix of active and inactive women on lower incomes and those who are additionally:

- Women aged 55+ on lower incomes.
- Black women on lower incomes.
- South Asian Muslim women on lower incomes.
- Pregnant women and new mums on lower incomes.

PHASE 2: QUALITATIVE QUADS

Follow-up interviews were selected from our community. We ran three 1-hour quad group discussions to explore cultural barriers and test some early communication territories. The three quads were held with:

- Women aged 55+ on lower incomes.
- Black women on lower incomes.
- South Asian Muslim women on lower incomes.
- Pregnant women and new mums on lower incomes.

METHODOLOGY

PHASE 3: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

We took our findings from both the qualitative community and the quads, and shaped them into a comprehensive survey to test them at scale.

This included a 15-minute-long survey, conducted online with 2,223 women aged 18+ drawn from the research agency panel and a sample partner.

Quotas were used during fieldwork to ensure a nationally representative sample of UK adult women by age, region, socio-economic group (C2DE only) and ethnicity. Boosts for key demographic groups were included to allow for sufficient analysis of the following groups:

- Women aged 55+ on lower incomes.
- Black women on lower incomes.
- South Asian Muslim women on lower incomes.
- Pregnant women and new mums on lower incomes.

Reported data throughout this report is nationally representative of all lower income women unless otherwise specified. Knowing that all of our women are more than statistics, and demographic characteristics we will refer to them as “our women”. Otherwise, we will refer to the data as audience specific or “Boost groups”.

ABOUT OUR WOMEN

THEY DON'T FEEL GREAT

When it comes to physical activity, our women told us they are starting from a place of exhaustion. The current wellbeing picture for our women is concerning:

- Only **41%** report good energy levels.
- Only **37%** report good sleep quality.
- Only **47%** rate their health as good.
- **44%** say pain limits what they can do.
- **35%** feel they are too stressed to exercise.
- **35%** feel they are held back from getting active by confidence and self-image.

They're under financial, family and time pressures, and it's taking a toll. For some, these pressures are exacerbated by comparing their lives to the aspirational lives showcased in social media.

“The pressure of social media stresses me out and how everyone on there has amazing lifestyles all the time and I'm just here trying to survive the day.”

THEY ARE COLLECTIVIST

Many of our women benefit from strong, close-knit communities of family and friends in their immediate vicinity. The friends and family in their community are a central aspect of their daily existence, offering both emotional and practical support during life's challenges. Our women depend on these trusted networks to navigate difficulties without fear of judgement. They almost always put their family before their own needs and if it's not their family, it's their friends.

“I'm the first to stop everything I'm doing in order to help others. I sometimes feel guilty for wanting a few moments alone when there's so much to do. It's like I'm constantly torn between my responsibilities and my own need to recharge.”

South Asian Muslim women in particular are under a lot of pressure to make sure the house is in order before they can prioritise themselves.

“I think it's the whole stigma around women are inferior to men. You think that it's not a thing anymore but it really is.”

“An average day for me is a busy day. I've got a heavy, caring role. And in and out, cooking, cleaning, running to the shops. Everything is down to me.”

ABOUT OUR WOMEN

ME-TIME IS SCARCE

The demands of daily life leave our women with little time for themselves, often just a brief window at the end of the day. For many, the idea of using this time for exercise isn't appealing. This precious 'me-time' is typically spent unwinding with TV or scrolling on their phones before another busy day begins. Instead, physical activity needs to seamlessly fit into their routines at a time that feels natural and sustainable for them.

“Constantly rushing to go to work, skipping lunch to finish tasks, rushing home to pick my daughter up. Rushing to cook and eat meals and complete housework tasks.”

“I feel like I really should be doing it for my health. I know it would really help my mood as I feel like when I exercise in the morning it really sets me up for the day. However, at the moment I really just don't have the energy to get out and actually do it. I know I am making excuses, but the kids wake up early so it's a very long day as it is. I feel extremely drained in the evenings so I don't think it would happen then.”

“By the time I've done everything for family and for my children, I'm just so tired.”

INACTIVE WOMEN VIEW EXERCISE AS DEPLETING

Our women are often trapped in a negative cycle of stress and poor sleep which leaves **42%** feeling like lack of energy and/or fatigue stops them from getting active.

Many of our inactive women see physical activity as something that will drain and deplete their precious energy supply even further. It requires a lot of energy to make it happen, including before and after a workout.

- **Before exercising:** energy to find time in the day, to get ready, to find the right clothes, to work out childcare options, to get to an exercise space.
- **After exercising:** energy to wash hair, shower, get changed etc. And of course, a potentially tiring workout might leave them sore and achy.

With little time or energy to spare, many of our women are left assuming that exercise will be depleting rather than restorative.

“It's purely an energy thing. I feel like if I had more energy, if I wasn't so tired, I'd have the motivation to just do it. But the thought of it right now just fills me with absolute dread, like I can't bring myself to even start.”

ABOUT OUR WOMEN

ACTIVE WOMEN VIEW EXERCISE DIFFERENTLY

Our qualitative research highlights a key difference in how active and inactive women perceive exercise. Inactive women see it as something they should do for their health or to manage their weight, while active women prioritise it for how it makes them feel.

Many inactive women assume they'll simply feel satisfied after a workout, overlooking the deeper emotional and mental benefits. The opportunity lies in shifting their perspective – helping them see movement as a way to feel better.

- **Active woman:**

“Exercise is an escapism. It is something that I now could not live without. It is my joy, my go-to and my level of stability both mentally, physically and spiritually. I don't care if it's just a walk out in the park.”

- **New mum:**

“My goals back then were about weight loss. But now I need to focus on my new goals. It makes me feel mentally better.”

- **Post-menopausal woman:**

“The crucial parts of exercise now have changed. What we need and want has changed. We need to find things that slow us down with less jumping around, that benefit us mentally.”

WHY SO SERIOUS?

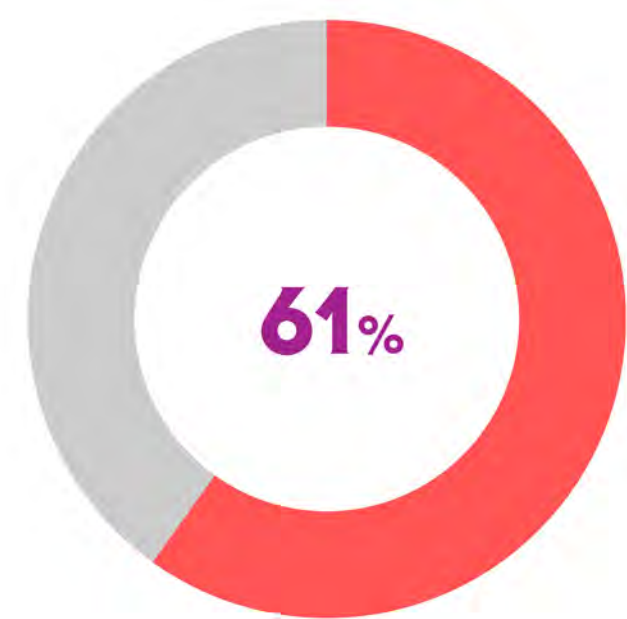
Some of our women feel that physical activity can lack in fun, with some classes and organised activities feeling intimidating. Women are looking for environments where they can make mistakes, move at their own pace and enjoy themselves.

28% of our women said having fun would motivate them to get active.

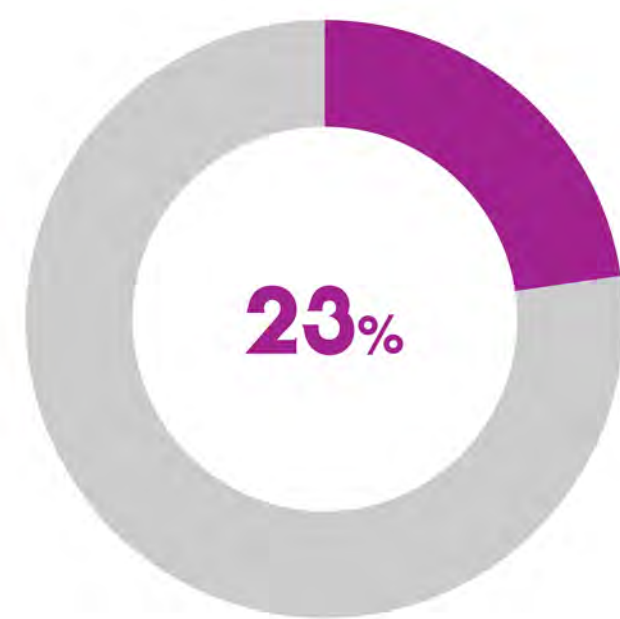
“I would like options that keep me moving while also bringing some joy into my routine. Finding ways to incorporate physical activity that feels enjoyable rather than just a task would make a big difference for me, maybe doing it in a fun type of thing like dancing, rather than a strict routine, so it doesn't feel like I'm doing exercise.”

ABOUT OUR WOMEN

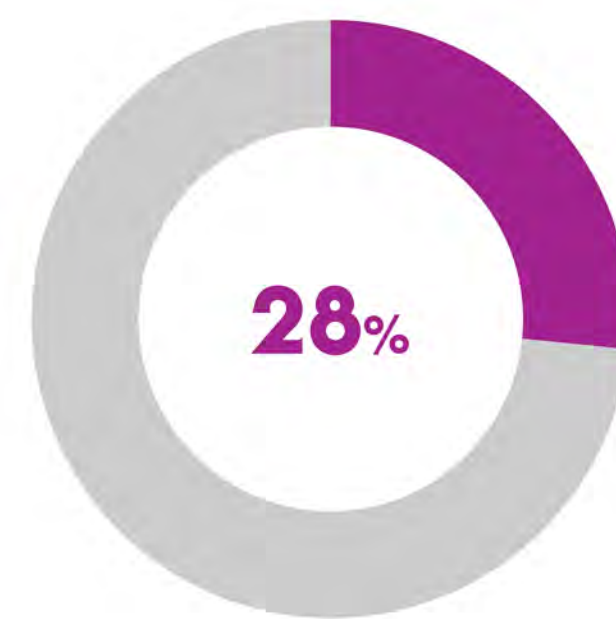
STUCK IN THE 'GETTING READY' STAGE



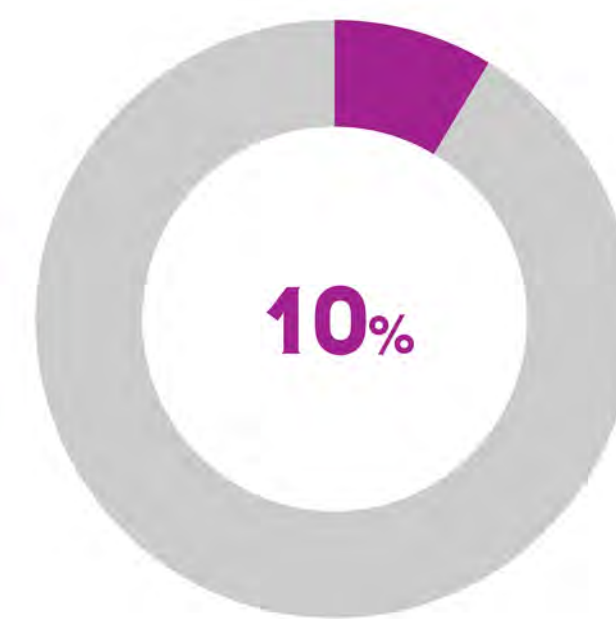
A total of 61% of our women are considering getting more active at some point.



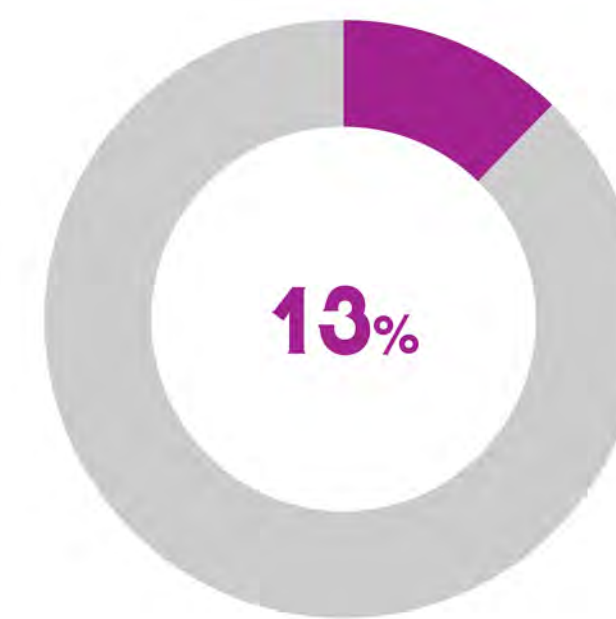
23% said they sometimes think about getting more active but just haven't got round to it.



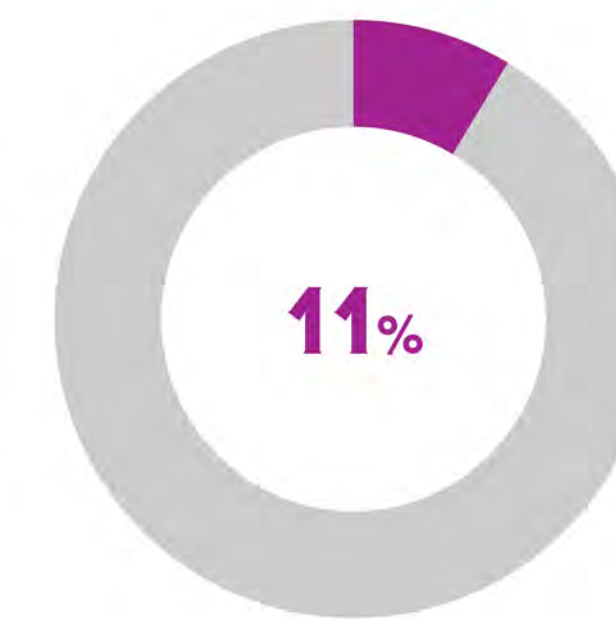
28% said they were thinking about getting more active after the New Year.



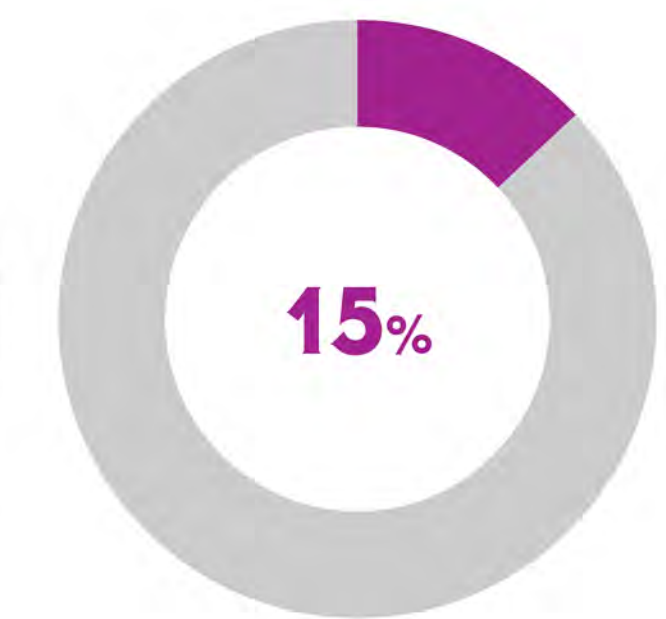
10% say they are planning to be more active within the next month.



Only 13% of our women say that getting more active doesn't interest them.



However, only 11% said they'd recently started being more active (within the last year)



and 15% said they'd been keeping active for over half a year now and plan to keep going at this rate.

Many things contribute to people being stuck in 'getting ready' mode, from capability to opportunity and self confidence. In the next section we will explore how these emotional and practical barriers also interplay with cultural and inclusion barriers.

BARRIERS

This Girl Can has been researching the barriers to women getting active for 10 years. Our most recent research has flagged some familiar barriers, including cost, time, distance and safety. Our data demonstrates many of these disproportionately impact the lower income women this campaign aims to reach.

The top barriers are cost and motivation, but the reality is far more complex.

THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN LACK OF MOTIVATION

One in two of our women blame their lack of motivation for not getting active.

Lack of motivation was also the most cited reason for not being active in our qualitative research. However, motivation is not the root issue – it's the result of the many barriers our women face. Perhaps unaware of the psychological impact of these challenges, they often blame themselves for their lack of activity.

“When things get overwhelming, it can really zap my energy, making it harder to find the motivation to do even the simplest tasks.”

“I know I'll feel better afterward, but the motivation to keep it consistent feels challenging, like there's always something else holding me back.”

The reality is that our women encounter many layers of barriers. A look at the top barriers for our women reveals a complex picture of practical and emotional barriers.

Top barriers:

- Cost/affordability (49%)
- Lack of motivation (49%)
- Energy levels/fatigue (43%)
- Confidence/self image (38%)
- Body doesn't move like it used to (36%).

This mix of practical and emotional barriers illustrates the complexity of the challenges facing our women.

“I am just not motivated enough. I decided to purchase some second-hand gym equipment from Gumtree and Facebook Marketplace. However, my lack of motivation and confidence has made it difficult to get started. I sometimes feel like there's something wrong with me.”

BARRIERS

BARRIER: 'NOT ACCESSIBLE TO ME'

Right now, some of our women feel that the world of physical activity isn't designed for them.

This "outer layer" of barriers are generally the first to always come up. Cost is a frequently cited barrier, especially with the rising cost of living. They can perceive the available activities as mismatched with their needs, e.g. scheduled at inconvenient times that clash with work or run too late at night. Even sessions labelled 'all levels' are, in practice, often perceived as too advanced. Some perceive there to be a lack of consideration for childcare or pregnancy, and classes may seem too expensive or too far away. Additionally, the cost of clothing and shoes can be a barrier.

Pain is also a significant barrier here. Many of our women have experienced health/mobility changes that have impacted their level of physical activity and of these women:

- 57% say pain limits what they can do.
- 50% say certain movements are more difficult.
- 26% say they need more recovery time.

Among Asian Muslim women whose activity levels have been affected by health/mobility changes, one in two (53%) say they have less confidence in their bodies (compared to 25% of black women and 28% of women aged 55-74).

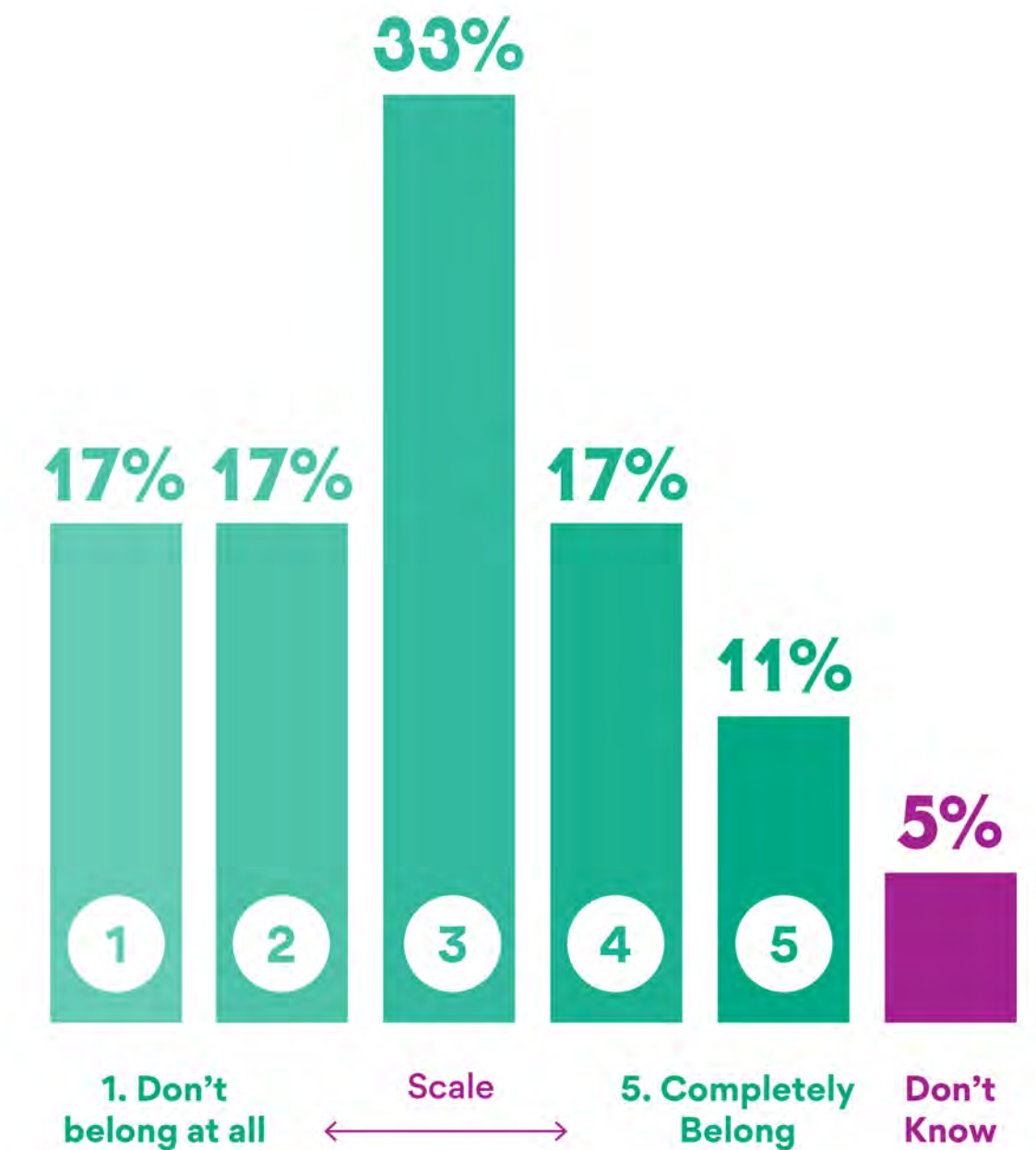
BARRIER: 'NOT MY WORLD'

Some of our women feel they don't fully belong in the world of exercise. To explore this, we asked them to rate their sense of belonging in exercise on a scale from one to five.

The average score was around 3, indicating that while many don't feel entirely excluded, they don't feel fully included either. Their feelings are mixed—uncertain and ambiguous.

Alternatively, a lack of experience in physical activity settings may contribute to feelings of ambivalence.

Though ambivalence may seem innocuous, we know from other research that ambivalence is a huge predictor of inactivity.



Graph 1: Women's sense of belonging in exercise.

BARRIERS

We also explored whether our women are feeling excluded or unwelcome. It's worth noting that belonging, inclusion and exclusion manifest themselves differently for our women and form a complex picture. Just because someone isn't actively excluded, that doesn't mean they necessarily feel included.

The quantitative data also flagged a difference in experienced and perceived exclusion amongst our women, signifying a complex picture to unpack.

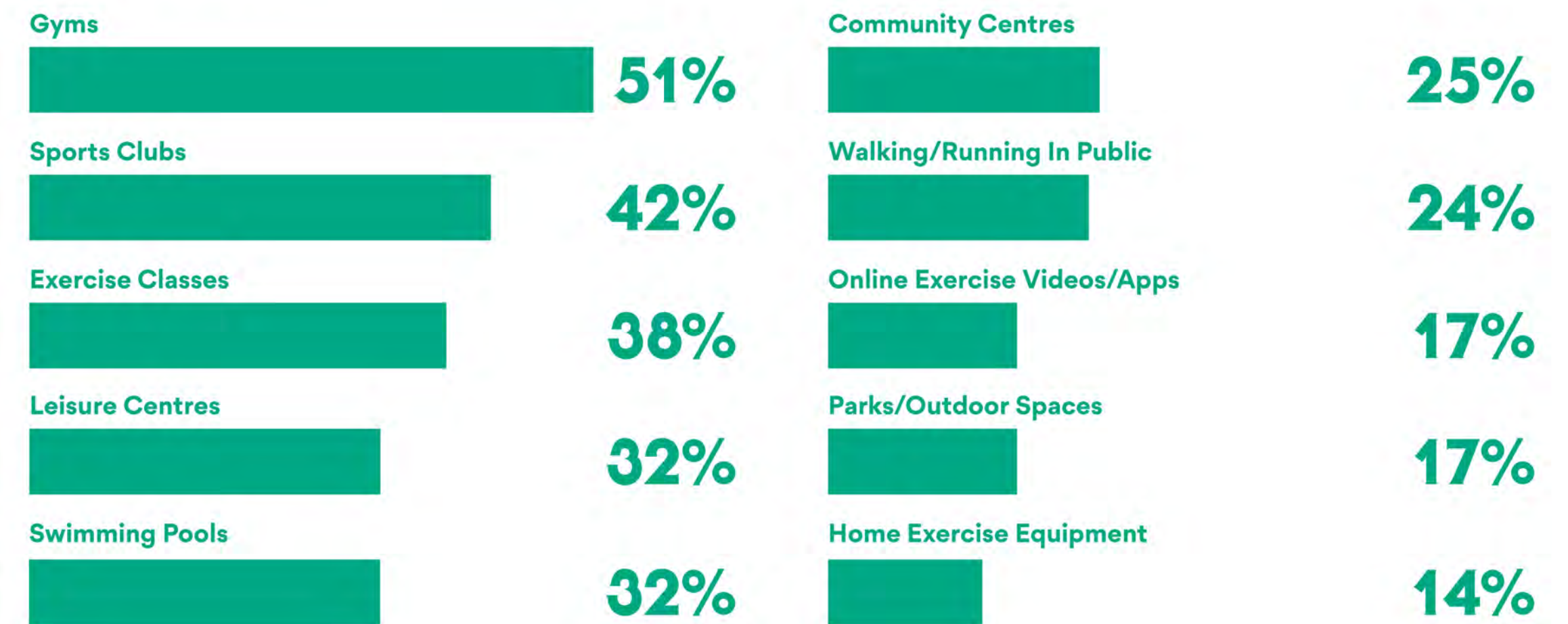
Our research found:

- Only **11%** of our women feel they completely belong in the world of exercise.
- **17%** have felt so unwelcome that they have never returned to that type of activity or lost confidence in trying new activity.

- Older women (ages 55 and over) are the most likely to feel like they don't belong at all in the world of physical exercise (**22%**).
- **18%** of women on lower incomes have felt unsafe or been stared at when trying to be active.
- Traditional exercise spaces create the biggest belonging barriers: Half of our women (**51%**) feel they don't belong in gyms; **42%** feel like they don't belong in sports clubs; **38%** in exercise classes, **32%** in leisure centres or swimming pools.

IF ANY, ARE THERE ANY PLACES OR SITUATIONS REGARDING PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, WHERE YOU FEEL YOU DON'T BELONG?

Base: (n=1,001)



Graph 2.

BARRIERS

When we aggregate the possible negative experiences tested, our boost audiences report significantly more negative experiences while exercising compared to our women overall, with nearly half having been made to feel excluded or unwelcome (49% vs 38%).

One in five (19%) of our women report experiencing inappropriate comments or assumptions in physical activity settings.

For some of our women, there isn't a clear idea of what they should or could be doing when it comes to exercise. Some have never been to a gym or aren't familiar with the equipment, while others may not have learned to swim or ride a bike. They often feel unsure about where to start or where to go.

Many compare their current experience with exercise to when they were younger, which can be discouraging when they can't do the same activities or see immediate weight loss results. In certain spaces, they can feel unrepresented, overlooked and not entirely comfortable.

“So, when you're doing the exercises, I'd probably be the one that, by the time I've figured out how you do something, they change it. I need something that's properly for all abilities, not just people who know what they're doing.”

Cultural barriers also play a significant role. Some of our Asian Muslim women expressed the need for all female spaces and classes, whether for religious reasons or to avoid judgment from their communities. Additionally, older generations highlighted that restrictions on wearing traditional clothing in exercise spaces can be a major barrier to participation.

Some of our Black women don't feel represented in classes or in communications.

“I like the idea of Pilates. But am I willing to be that embarrassment in the middle of the Pilates class where I'm the only Black woman who can't work the machine? For me, it's like no, the thought and anxiety about it is not to be worthwhile me going.”

“I only see White women in exercise on TV, advertised, promoted. I think different bodies need to be seen, different types of bodies, different types of complexions, hair textures need to be included.”

BARRIERS

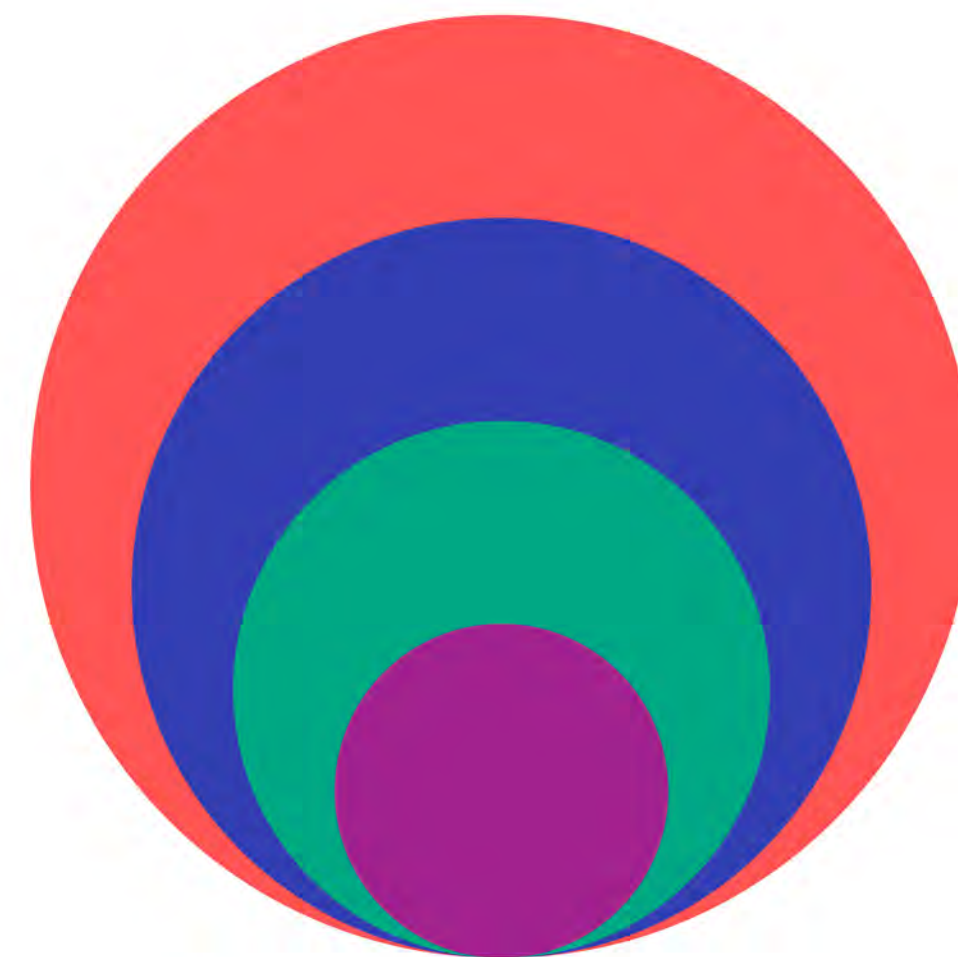
BARRIER: 'NOT MY FOCUS'

Our women often shared that exercise isn't a current priority for them. With limited time and energy, it tends to take a backseat to other responsibilities. Many are working long hours or shifts, and have family or others to care for.

EMOTIONAL BARRIERS

The idea of exercise is emotionally charged and interwoven with our women's self-esteem. Our qualitative research in particular reveals the array of emotional barriers that erode our women's confidence in attempting to get active. Our women spoke of the overwhelm, the fear of judgement, the fear of embarrassment, the fear of inadequacy, the fear of failure, and the fear of looking or feeling stupid.

The biggest reason in a drop of activity levels for fairly active women is feeling less confident.



- Not accessible to me
- Not my world
- Not my focus
- Emotional Barriers

Fig 1. The barriers that hold women back from getting active are layered and complex.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE STAGES

Beyond these barriers, we must also acknowledge the significant impact of life stages. A woman's body undergoes profound transformations throughout her life, most notably during pregnancy and menopause. These unify all of our audiences who experience new barriers as they try to navigate their new bodies.

PREGNANCY RELATED BARRIERS

56% of women who are pregnant or have a child under one say pregnancy and motherhood has negatively affected their physical activity levels. Of these:

- 46% are too tired from childcare.
- 37% have lost confidence in their bodies.

There is still much more that could be done to support women in recovering from childbirth, retraining their pelvic floor, and regaining their strength.

BARRIERS

PERI/MENOPAUSE AND HORMONAL RELATED BARRIERS

- **17%** of women aged over 55 and **10%** of our women overall say their activity levels have been affected by menopause.
- **59%** of those who say menopause has affected their activity levels report a change in energy levels.
- And **38%** feel the menopause has led to a loss of confidence in their abilities.
- **27%** feel they have new physical limitations.

There appears to be a lack of education and support on how to stay active during menstruation and menopause, as well as how to work with the menstrual cycle, rather than against it. Information on maintaining activity throughout hormonal changes and menopause may exist but there are still many misconceptions.

BARRIERS BROKEN DOWN BY AUDIENCE

Whilst all our women share some common barriers (such as lower income), we found that each of our focus audiences also experienced differing barriers, or that certain barriers affected them to different extents.

For our Black women:

- Lack of motivation (**52%**)
- Being stressed (**43%**)
- Time (**43%**)
- Cost (**41%**)
- Energy levels (**39%**)
- Confidence/self-image (**31%**).

For our South Asian Muslim women:

- Lack of motivation (**54%**)
- Time (**48%**)
- Energy levels (**45%**)
- Cost (**39%**)
- Being too stressed (**38%**)
- Confidence/self-image (**37%**).

For our pregnant women or new mums:

- Lack of motivation (**48%**)
- Time (**41%**)
- Energy levels (**40%**)
- Cost (**35%**)
- Being too stressed (**38%**)
- Confidence/self-image (**34%**).

For our women over 55:

- Lack of motivation (**48%**)
- Time/scheduling (**41%**)
- Energy/fatigue (**40%**)
- Being too stressed (**38%**)
- Cost/affordability (**35%**)
- Confidence/self-image (**34%**).

BARRIERS

FEELINGS OF EXCLUSION ARE COMPLEX

Black women report the highest feelings of belonging on a scale from one to five, where one means “don’t belong at all” and five means “completely belong,” with women over 55 rating highest on not belonging at all. Interestingly, despite experiencing the highest rates of perceived exclusion, women aged 55+ report the fewest negative experiences. This contrast suggests a complex relationship between perceived and experiences of exclusion.

Negative experiences can create lasting impact. One in six of our women have felt so unwelcome in a sport or physical activity that they have lost confidence in trying new activities. This is even higher for South Asian Muslim women, pregnant women and new mums.

Compared with White women surveyed, South Asian Muslim women are significantly more likely to have felt so unwelcome that they:

- lost confidence in trying new activities **(28% vs 17%)**
- decided not to participate in the session **(19% vs 12%)**
- asked for a refund **(11% vs 2%)**.

And over one in four (26%) of our boost groups have experienced inappropriate comments or assumptions.

Younger groups are more likely to actively respond to feeling unwelcome e.g. asking for refunds, telling others. This suggests a potential difference in generational approach to handling exclusion, with younger women showing themselves to be/proving to be/appearing more willing to advocate for change.

Our women’s relationship with physical activity is fragile – just one negative, stressful or frustrating experience can lead to inactivity and discourage them from returning.

“I decided to try going to a gym I had been to before with my friend, but this time I went by myself. The experience was actually traumatic because I was on the running machine minding my business and then this old white man came along and was increasing the speed on the machine. And he was saying horrible things like I need to run faster because I’m too fat and what I was doing was not sufficient.”

MOTIVATIONS

TOP MOTIVATORS

Some of our women report wanting to exercise to lose or manage weight but many are aware of its much longer list of benefits. There is a clear opportunity in reminding our women of the more immediate benefits that would help them feel better, not just look better. Interestingly, boost groups show a stronger shift towards wellbeing, moving away from aesthetic and performance goals.

Boost Groups:

Women on lower incomes and those who are, additionally:

- Over 55
- Are Pregnant or with babies under 1 year old
- From Black communities
- From South Asian Muslim communities.

HOW HAVE YOUR REASONS FOR BEING ACTIVE CHANGED OVER TIME?

My reasons haven't changed



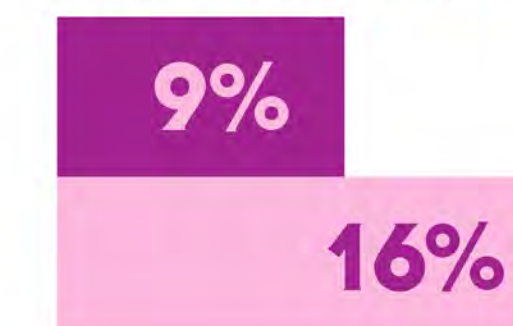
Used to be focused on weight management, now its about wellbeing



Used to be about fitness, now about mobility/staying healthy



Used to be about improving performance, now about maintaining that level



Used to be about looking good, now about feeling stronger



● Nat Rep
● Boost

Graph 3.
Base: Those who are active/fairly active: Nat rep (n=655), Boost (n=822)

MOTIVATIONS

When it comes to motivation, **88%** of our women say they would be motivated to get active by health benefits such as **better sleep, improving strength and balance, managing health conditions and improvements in mental health.**

The single most motivating factor for all audiences was better sleep:

- South Asian Muslim women **(40%)**
- Black women **(40%)**
- Women over 55 **(45%)**
- Pregnant women and new mums **(36%)**.

This is followed closely by **86%** saying they would be motivated by personal benefits such as feeling more confident, having fun and feeling accomplished. Finally, **61%** of our women say they would be motivated by social benefits such as being part of a community, meeting people and spending time with friends.

MOST MOTIVATING BENEFITS BY AUDIENCE

For our Black women:

- Better sleep **(40%)**
- Improving mental health **(38%)**
- Socialising with friends **(38%)**
- Taking time for self-care **(38%)**
- Improving physical strength and balance **(35%)**
- Feeling more confident **(34%)**
- Meeting people my age **(24%)**.

For our South Asian Muslim women:

- Better sleep **(40%)**
- Socialising with friends **(37%)**
- Taking time for self-care **(36%)**
- Managing weight **(35%)**
- Feeling more confident **(34%)**
- Meeting people my age **(32%)**.

For our pregnant women or new mums:

- Better sleep **(36%)**
- Managing weight **(33%)**
- Socialising with friends **(33%)**
- Feeling more confident **(32%)**
- Having fun **(31%)**
- Taking time for self-care **(29%)**.

For our women over 55:

- Better sleep **(45%)**
- Meeting people my age **(37%)**
- Managing weight **(36%)**
- Feeling more confident **(34%)**
- More energy for daily life **(34%)**
- Improving physical strength and balance **(33%)**.

HOW DO WE HELP OUR WOMEN GET ACTIVE?

Organisations, groups and communities around the country are working tirelessly to make physical activity more inclusive.

Yet, we know there's still more to be done to support and encourage our women to stay active. Even small changes can have a big impact.

In this section you'll find the key things to think about, some changes you can consider making and approaches you can take to ensure you're meeting our women's needs.

REPRESENTATION IS KEY

"I only see white women in exercise on TV, advertised, promoted. I think different bodies need to be seen, different types of bodies, different types of complexions, hair textures need to be included."

For all our women, representation is very important. They want to see women like themselves in the media and communications but also in classes and movement settings. This goes beyond race – our women want to see their age (43%), their body type (33%), their life stage (20%) and their fitness level (38%) represented. They also want to see a range of clothing, with fewer women in tight lycra and more modest clothing.

OUR WOMEN WANT PRACTICAL SUPPORT

88% of women told us that practical support would make them feel more welcome in physical activity. These practical things include childcare, transport, flexible timing, free class options, nearby locations, women-only facilities. We know a lot of this support is already out there, but there may still be a job to do in guiding our women towards it.

Our women told us that they'd feel more welcome in physical activity settings with:

- Practical support (childcare, transport, flexible timings) (84%)
- Gentle, low-impact class options (32%)
- Women-only sessions (26%)
- Classes just for women who are starting/restarting (26%)

- Other people like them in the space (26%)
- Staff who understand their needs (25%)
- Clear expectations of class level, who it is suitable for and what to expect (20%)
- Help with equipment (18%)
- Family-friendly facilities (17%)
- Flexibility with clothing/dress (e.g. freedom to wear loose clothes, jeans, headscarves etc.) (13%)
- Classes with music from their culture (e.g. soca, afrobeat, bhangra) (6%)
- Cultural considerations (e.g. prayer rooms, halal food options, instructors familiar with their culture) (4%).

HOW DO WE HELP OUR WOMEN GET ACTIVE?

WALKING REMAINS A POPULAR OPTION

Walking is still the most popular, easiest way to get moving. But this isn't about asking women do things like get off the bus one stop early- that risks patronising. Instead, it's about reframing walking as a powerful tool to transform how we feel.

DEMOGRAPHIC DIFFERENCES

Ethnicity

Asian (23%) and Black (21%) women are more likely to prefer to get moving with family activities than White women (10%).

Conversely, White women (25%) state swimming more often than Asian (16%) or Black (12%) women as an activity they'd like to do most to get moving.

WHAT ACTIVITIES WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO DO TO GET MOVING?



Graph 4. Base: Inactive women: Asian Muslim women: (n=93). Black women: (n=52). Women aged 55 to 74: (n=78), Pregnant women and/or have a child under one year old: (n=93).

- Asian Muslim Women
- Black Women
- Women Aged 55 to 74
- Pregnant women and/or have a child under one year old
- ↑ Significantly higher compared within groups of interest

HOW DO WE HELP OUR WOMEN GET ACTIVE?

THE SNOWBALL EFFECT: EVEN A LITTLE MOVEMENT CREATES MOMENTUM

Lack of motivation is the number one reason women give for not being more active. Our qualitative research showed that in the right conditions, action can actually feed motivation. Many of our women who were invited to do just 10 mins of activity ended up doing much more. This phenomenon has been documented in many other studies and shows the importance of encouraging our women do some activity, even if it's only for 10 minutes, to remind their body how good it feels and rebuild their confidence.

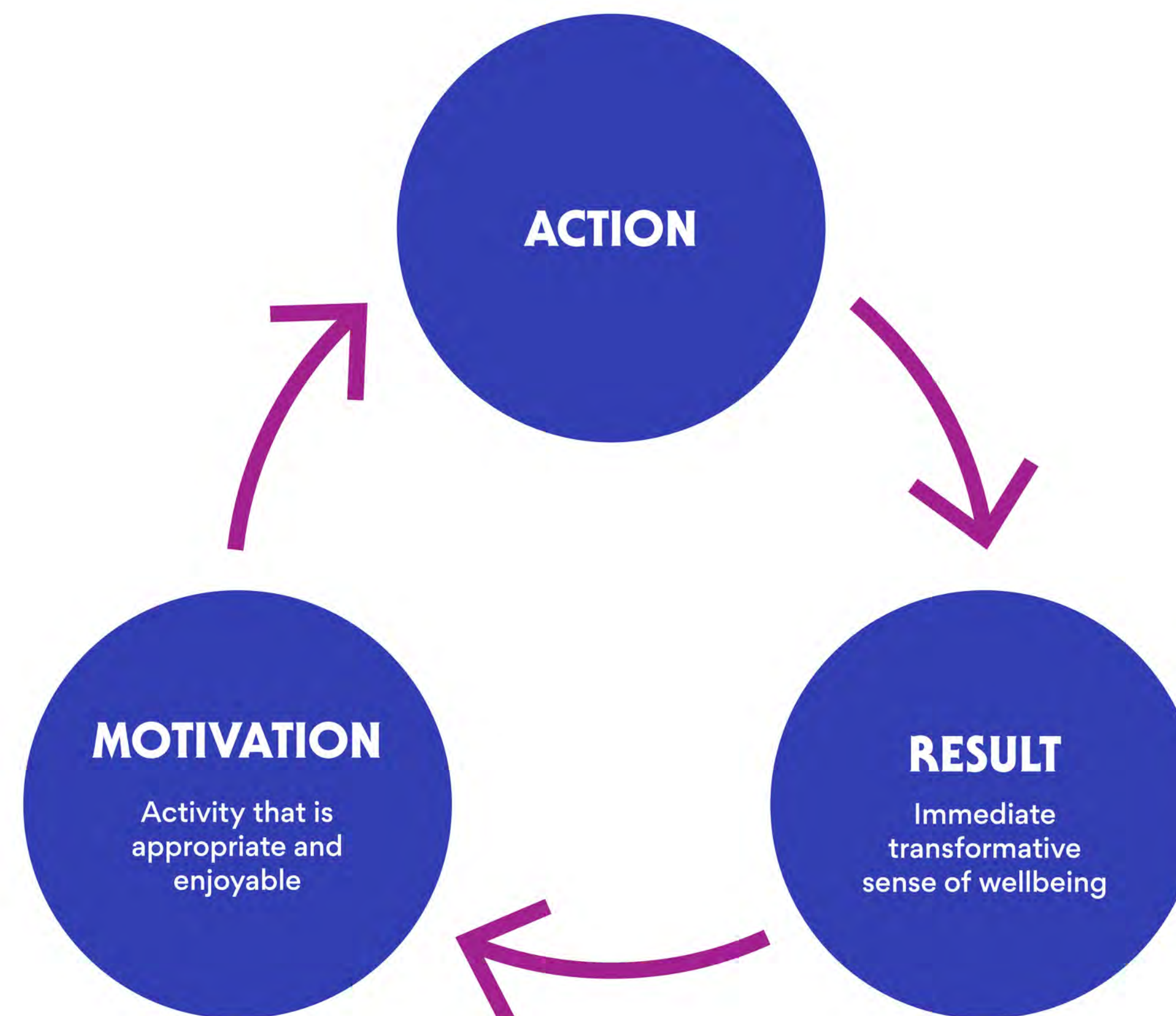


Fig 4.
How do we help our women get active?

HOW DO WE HELP OUR WOMEN GET ACTIVE?

INACCURATE VIEWS OF WHAT IS OUT THERE

When it comes to knowing what experiences and physical activity offerings are available to them, our women's views are often based on assumptions, historical knowledge or hearsay. When set a 'discovery task' to explore what might be available, many of our women were able to find something locally that they found appealing. Many were pleasantly surprised.

Many found things they didn't know existed, including many free or low-cost opportunities offered for different levels, that met many of their needs including childcare.

This suggests that, even when inclusive programmes are created to meet the needs of our women, the challenge lies in communication and marketing – these offerings are not reaching many of them. And this makes it challenging to change perceptions of the sector.

Many of our women are currently not yet seeking out what is on offer to them locally. We need to bring knowledge of what exists into their world or help guide them there.

THE POWER OF COMMUNITY

Many of our women are motivated by the idea of getting active with the support of a community and the opportunity to share experiences with like-minded women going through the same thing. Socialising is a big motivation:

- **69%** of our women want community support in getting active, e.g. buddy system (**16%**), park walk meet-ups (**28%**), community activities (**11%**), family activities/sessions (**18%**).

These results were amplified in our groups of Asian Muslim and Black women with **83%** of Black women and **85%** of Asian Muslim women agreeing they'd like social support compared to **69%** of Nat rep women on lower incomes.

“I think women should be supported more to be active, as they would be able to make friends including mums out there who are really isolated. There should be more free walking groups and accessible places where women can do activities together.”

HOW DO WE HELP OUR WOMEN GET ACTIVE?

GETTING STARTED AGAIN IS HARD

Our women are generally not beginners, but they are unsure about how to fit activity back into their lives. Knowing where to start can be overwhelming for our women – **82%** of our women want some form of advice and support on how to get started.

For our women, knowing how to get going can feel like an overwhelming challenge. To support this **25%** of women told us they don't know where to start, e.g. lack of knowledge on equipment or how to perform certain movements or exercises.

Many shared experiences of not being helped, of being in classes that claimed to be 'all levels' or 'beginner friendly' yet they left feeling discouraged or even ashamed. The baseline for 'beginners' or 'restarters' needs to be accessible to ensure that women aren't left feeling overwhelmed.

“Getting started again is part of the journey.”

THREE SIMPLE STEPS TO HELP OUR WOMEN

- 1 **We need to help our women see exercise and physical activity as restorative rather than depleting.** Most are looking to feel better in their everyday life. The emphasis should be on how movement can make us feel.
- 2 **Make it easier to restart.** Promote and provide activities that are accessible, fun, bite-sized and offering a supportive community.
- 3 **Women are looking for help with their mindset, with regular nudges that help motivate, done differently for each audience to respect their nuances.** Inclusive provision needs marketing, to shift assumptions of what is out there.

CONCLUSION AND SHARED AMBITION

OUR WOMEN FACE MANY BARRIERS BUT THE ACTIVE WOMEN AMONG OUR AUDIENCES PROVE THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO OVERCOME THEM GIVEN THE RIGHT CONDITIONS.

Together we can create even more spaces and opportunities for our women to move in ways that are right for them. Together we can inject joy and make women feel seen and cared for. And ultimately, create a world of activity where every woman feels like they belong.

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THANK YOU

