IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE PROGRAMS TO MAINTAIN AND INCREASE WOMEN AND GIRLS' PARTICIPATION IN SPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last five years, since a 2015 "Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation," there has been a major focus in Victoria on increasing participation and engagement by women and girls in team sport. This has led to the creation of a wide range of programs, initiatives, and incentives to support community clubs to engage with gender equality, address exclusionary behaviours, and ensure women and girls have clear participation pathways and opportunities.

There are many signs of the benefits of this work, including large increases in rates of girls (under 10) participating and the creation of female teams at many clubs which previously only offered playing opportunities for males. However, although participation numbers are important indicators of progress, there is also a need to understand the impact of these efforts in the day to day operation of sporting clubs and how the focus on women's sport has affected the experiences of adult (over 18) female sport participants, particularly in sports where participation opportunities have only recently been made available. Key questions that need to be answered are:

- What is the lived experience of women in clubs? Do they feel they are being treated equally? Do they report experiencing discriminatory or exclusionary behaviours? Are there differences between types of sports?
- How do male players perceive efforts to increase the representation of women?

To help answer these questions, surveys were conducted with 23 sports clubs all located in a major metropolitan Melbourne area. The research was supported by Victoria's Office for Women in Sport and Recreation (OWSR). There has been a strong focus and a range of supports available to sport clubs in this geographic area from all levels of government over the last five years to assist them in advancing gender equality and inclusion. The clubs which participated in this study are also affiliated with a major university that has similarly prioritised gender equality, has provided specific training and support to club leaders, and conducts an annual 'diversity audit' to track progress and ensure action remains a priority.

The objective was to take a 'snapshot' of the current experiences of women in sport contexts at clubs which have been a focus and have been beneficiaries of the broad and multifaceted approaches that are being used to support action and drive change at grassroots sporting clubs.

METHODOLOGY

The survey was conducted at the end of the 2019 season. A short (10-15 minute) paper and pen survey was conducted with sport clubs in 23 sports including field hockey, netball, Australian Rules football, soccer, table tennis and volleyball, prior to their normal weekly training sessions. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data included demographic and sport participation data (e.g. ethnicity, years playing a sport/at club), participants sense of belonging and acceptance at their club, and perceptions of the equitable treatment of males and females. The study also collected data about sexist language and behaviour in sport, and cultural norms around the acceptability of this language.

Qualitative data was gathered by asking participants two open-ended questions: "In your opinion, why do some girls stop playing or avoid traditionally male team sports like AFL or Cricket?" and "Do you have any suggestions to make sport clubs more welcoming and inclusive to everyone?"

KEY FINDINGS

The results were analysed by gender but also type of sport. Improving access and participation opportunities for women in football sports has been a major area of focus for governing bodies and policy makers, thus we created three categories for the analyses: football sports, team sports, and individual sports. Twenty of the clubs in the study provided participation opportunities for both genders, two provided opportunities only for males, and one club had opportunities only for females. Males have higher participation levels across all sporting codes; football codes, team sports and individual sports.

- Despite the strong focus and support provided to help clubs in this region to engage with gender equality (and all forms of diversity), just 10% of clubs reported that they had received specific gender equality training, and less than half of male participants (49%) and three quarters of female participants said they did not perceive there to be any change in the focus on diversity at their club in recent years.

- The study also found sexist language was common at sport clubs, particularly in the football sports, with 53% of females and 43% of males reporting they had heard others use words such as slut, cunt or bitch in the past years. This compared to close to 30% of both males and females in team sports and 22% in individual sports hearing this language being used.

- In football, one in five women said this language had been directed at them by a male at their club, compared to 9% (team) and 11% (individual) of the time, although only a small percentage of males viewed this language as acceptable.

- Across all clubs that offered participation opportunities for males and females, we found a disconnect between the perceptions of males and females in relation to whether men and women are treated "completely" equal at their club: females were less likely than males to believe this to be the case. This was most pronounced at the football sport clubs: 82% of men believed that men and women are treated equally, compared to less than half (49%) of female participants.

- There was significant support for suitably qualified women as coaches from both men and women, with males in football codes the least likely to say they would be happy with a suitably qualified female coach (83%).

- Qualitative results show that dominant gender and sexuality norms, including limited opportunities and inequalities exist between males and females in traditionally masculine sports.

- Participants recommendations on how to create inclusive and welcoming clubs include targeted training and education sessions, levelling funding, resource and facility allocation and more awareness and promotion of diversity through promotion materials (e.g. websites, flyers etc). Policies and procedures should be embedded in clubs to support diversity, with a no tolerance approach to any form of discrimination, including inappropriate language.

![Monash University logo]

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Club culture

Despite the strong focus and support around increasing female sport participation in this region, exclusionary and discriminatory language remains common, particularly the use of sexist language in football sports such as Australian Rules Football. This language makes women feel unwelcome and unsafe, thus, while there has been an increase in the number of women playing sport, sustainability of participation may prove to be a challenge without change to this language. The study also found females were much less likely to say they were treated 'completely equal' at their club than males. There is a need to address the language and day to day inequities between genders. We recommend a unified approach, with sporting organisations and sports club leadership (e.g. committee members and coaches, captains, diversity champions) to collaborate on approaches to change normative behaviours including sexist language in sports environments. Utilising a united, collaborative approach from the State Sporting Associations (SSAs) creates institutional support, with practical examples of how to create inclusive sporting environments within sports clubs (e.g. by-stander action, embedding it in policy and practice, club champions). Leadership (including committee, captains and coaches) and diversity champions are integral in clubs creating culture change for girls and women.

2. Task-force

Studies find developing task-forces at organisations with mandates to advance specific areas of diversity is an effective way to drive change. Dedicated regional taskforces made of key stakeholders (e.g. SSA representatives and sporting club leaders) will help to make inclusive sporting clubs a key priority, including developing practical resources and ongoing education for SSA's in this space. Upskilling key stakeholders in this sector is particularly important, including through education. Education can provide the opportunity to signifying the harms of sexist language, and provide sporting clubs with strategies to challenge unequal behaviour, attitudes and language in sports clubs.

3. Funding alignment

For normative behaviours to be dismantled and equitable practices in place for girls and women, the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation should ensure that all funding allocated to sporting clubs meet a set of inclusive criteria for girls and women. The task-force could create this criterion based on evaluations and reports in inclusion and diversity (e.g. the Pride Cup evaluation report). Clubs should only receive funding from local council and government sectors if they meet the inclusion criteria. They can also profile their club to the local community as an inclusive environment. Measurable outcomes are required to ensure that clubs are continuing to meet the inclusive criteria.

4. Longitudinal research

Longitudinal research with sporting clubs in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria is important to determine how sports clubs are operating, and supporting girls and women in their sports. This research should examine participation trends, club culture (including language and attitudes) and club practices (e.g. game and training times, resource allocation and infrastructure). This research can assist in supporting and developing 'best-practice' case study resources for clubs to implement in their sporting contexts.

5. Evidence-based programs, resources and support

Ongoing resources to assist sports clubs, with institutional support is important in creating welcoming and inclusive sporting environments for girls and women (and every person). Although educational resources are now widely available, including online training modules

![CHANGE OUR GAME logo]

(e.g. Play by the Rules) the study found evidence that club leaders, who are often volunteers, are not accessing or using these materials. Club leaders need specific, targeted and evidence-based programs they can use which are pragmatic and practical to implement. For example, there are no evidence-based approaches/programs that clubs can adopt which have proven to be effective in stopping (or at least reducing) the use of sexist language in sport environments. Similarly, there are no evidence-based approaches/programs which a volunteer club leader can integrate into the day-to-day operations to ensure resources are, and also perceived to be, distributed equitably between males and females. Once an evidence-base has been established, educational resources and training can be developed and accessible as an online 'one-stop shop' on equality and leadership and toolkits with step-by-step approaches on minimising exclusionary practices including practical examples and case studies will assist clubs to understand the girls and women's experiences and what an inclusive sports club looks like. This will need to be endorsed and promoted by government and SSA's for institutional support and recognition.

CONCLUSIONS

The study found that although there has been an effort to boost female participation and there is a general sense that diversity has improved at clubs in recent times, the findings raise a range of concerns. Males are still overrepresented in football sports, yet also participate in team and individual sports at higher levels than females. Football sports, which are traditionally hyper-masculine and dominated by men have a disconnect between perceptions of equality between men and women, and sexist language remains a part of club culture. This does not support inclusive and welcoming environments for girls and women to participate in these sports. This shows that there is much work to be done to provide sustainably inclusive environments for girls and women (and other groups such as diverse sexualities and ethnicities) in these sporting environments. Encouragingly, both males and females in grassroots sports clubs support women as qualified coaches, which is an area for further support and investment to ensure women have the opportunity to be leaders in sports, especially those that are traditionally male sports.

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, the Government's "Inquiry into Women and Girls in Sport and Active Recreation" released a "Five Year Game Plan for Victoria" which led to the creation of the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation (OWSR) and major investments in facilities, participation, leadership opportunities, and professional and grassroots sport programs. The overall objective has been to "level the playing field for women and girls across all roles in sport and active recreation."

To help assess progress in achieving this goal, the OWSR supported researchers at Monash University's Faculty of Education to conduct surveys across 23 sport clubs, located in a Melbourne metropolitan region where there has been a strong focus and support provided to sport clubs by state and local governments, and state governing bodies, over the last five years to assist them in advancing gender equality and inclusion. The clubs are also affiliated with a major university that has similarly prioritised gender equality and has provided specific training and support to club leaders. At the start of the 2018 sport season, club leaders were also asked to complete, a now annual, audit to help track progress on gender equality and inclusion, and other areas of diversity. The survey was conducted at the end of the 2019 season.

This region was chosen because prior research has found engagement with gender equality by sport clubs continues to be uneven, however, key factors shown to drive progress and engagement by clubs in gender equality (and all forms of diversity) are awareness of the need for action among club members and leaders, financial and other forms of support from governments and governing bodies, and external pressure on club leaders to take action.

The aim of the study was to gather 'grassroots' data from clubs which have received education, focused support, and strong external pressure to help assess the impact and effectiveness of the current approaches being used in Victoria to advance gender equality and inclusion in community sport.

METHODS

Both quantitative and qualitative data was collected between July and November 2019 at 23 sports club located in a metropolitan Melbourne region through a paper and pen survey completed by participants prior or after their normal weekly training sessions. The survey was voluntary and anonymous. There were two separate surveys, one for men and one for women. As far as we are aware, this study is one of the first comprehensive inclusion and diversity surveys across multiple types of sports, conducted with a large sample size.

QUANTITATIVE DATA

The survey collected demographic information (age, ethnicity, sexuality) and participants were also asked if their club has received any formal diversity related training in the past year, and the topic(s). Participants were also asked their gender identity with the question 'what is the gender on your birth certificate', proceeded by the option to state if the individual identifies as a different gender now.

Club inclusivity

- Sport participation and club engagement was assessed by asking participants the number of years they have played their sport and the length of time they had played at the present club;
- Sense of belonging was asked on a four-point scale whether participants felt deeply connected to their club from not at all (1) to completely (4);
- Participants were also asked agreement with "my club is inclusive and welcoming to all kinds of people". Participants were also asked whether "diversity has become more important at their club recently" (using a six-point scale: strongly disagree – strongly agree).

Gender equality

- Participants were asked whether "males and females are treated equally" at their club and could indicate their agreement on a six-point scale (1 = strongly disagree – 6 = strongly agree).

Exclusionary behaviours

- Participants were asked if at their club they had heard others use sexist language in the past year and female participants were asked if they had been called these words by a male;

- Attitudes of participants around the acceptability of this language was assessed by asking participants whether they, themselves felt it was acceptable to make jokes about women if there are no women in the room.

Attitudes toward women

- Participants were asked agreement with the statements "I would not mind if a suitably qualified women was our coach" and "it is more important to encourage boys, than girls, to play team sports" and "even if men get less, more money should be spent to grow women's sport" on a six-point scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree;

- Attitudes of females toward women athletes were assessed using a three-item semantic differential scale. This approach of measuring attitudes has been shown to measure subtle forms of sexism. Participants were asked: "when you think of women playing team sport, what words describe your feelings" and were provided with the following words on opposite ends of a six-point scale: (1) dislike - admire (6), strong to weak and masculine to feminine. These items were combined and the 'strong' to 'weak' item was reversed scaled.

QUALITATIVE DATA

Participants were also asked two open-ended questions: "In your opinion, why do some girls stop playing or avoid traditionally male team sports like AFL or Cricket?" and "Do you have any suggestions to make sport clubs more welcoming and inclusive to everyone?". This was to gain further insight into some of the quantitative responses and understand perceptions and experiences of participants.

ANALYSIS

The survey data was analysed using SPSS software packaging (version 25). Improving access and participation opportunities for women in football sports (e.g. AFL, Soccer, Rugby) has been a major area of focus for governing bodies and policy makers, thus we created three categories for the analyses: football sports, team sports, and individual sports. The specific sports in each category is shown in Table 1. Across 23 sports, 735 participants were included in analyses. The data was analysed by gender, though we only used male/female categories given no participants identified as non-binary. Descriptive statistics (gender, sexuality, age etc.) are shown in Table 2. Differences between groups were assessed using simple t-tests/chi-square/Mann-U tests (where relevant) and identified.

TABLE ONE: SPORTS CATEGORIES.

Football Codes	AFL
	Gridiron
	Rugby (incl Touch)
	Football (soccer)
Team sports	Badminton
	Baseball
	Cheerleading

	Cricket
	Dodgeball
	Hockey
	Lacrosse
	Netball
	Ultimate Frisbee
	Volleyball
	Waterpolo
Individual sports	Jiujitsu
	Kendo
	Kickboxing
	Snow Sports
	Squash
	Taekwondo
	Table tennis
	Tennis

QUALITATIVE DATA

Responses to the qualitative question 'why do some girls stop playing traditionally male sports like AFL and cricket' and 'Do you have any suggestions to make sport clubs more welcoming and inclusive to everyone?' were coded and placed into overarching themes, aligned with thematic coding as described by Clarke and Braun (2017). The four overarching themes are:

- Systemic norms in sports which are traditionally categorised as male domains, including males getting more focus and taking over;
- A disconnect between males and females in relation to gender equality and limited opportunities for women in these sports;
- Gender and sexuality stigma, which perpetuates common attitudes and negative language towards women;
- Suggestions on how clubs can be more inclusive and welcoming by focussing on equality for all, strict policies and procedures, events and promotion, and participants who believed sport should just focus on sport, or that their club is already inclusive.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

PARTICIPANTS

Study participants were primarily young adults (average age 23). This shows a relatively young demographic, however an important one in terms of keeping young people engaged in sport. The majority of participants identified as heterosexual and Caucasian. The average length of years playing a sport was 2.9, with 2.2 years the average length playing with the club.

|	Football		Team		Individual	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Age (mean)	23	24	22	23	22	25
Heterosexual	68%	99%	88%	97%	87%	94%
Caucasian	80%	86%	58%	50%	63%	51%
Years playing sport (mean)	3	3.5	2.8	3	2.4	2.8
Years at club (mean)	2.4	2.5	2	2.2	1.9	2.2

CLUB INCLUSIVITY

Overall, the majority of participants perceived club's to be an inclusive environment, with 89% of women and 94% of men stating that their club welcomes all kinds of people. A quarter of women and 41% of men believed that diversity had become more important at their club recently.

Most participants across all sports felt deeply connected to their club. 56% of women and 57% of men in football codes, 61% of women and 64% of men in team sports, and 48% of women and 56% of men in individual sports felt deeply connected to their club.

PERCEPTIONS OF EQUALITY

The study found a disconnect in the perceptions of males and females around whether men and women are treated equally at football clubs. This is shown in table 3. A disconnect was not found at the team and individual sports. At the football codes, 82% of men perceive that men and women are treated equally, compared to less than half (49%) of women.

TABLE THREE: PERCENTAGE OF PARTICIPANTS WHO BELIEVE MALES AND FEMALES ARE TREATED COMPLETELY EQUAL AT THEIR CLUB.
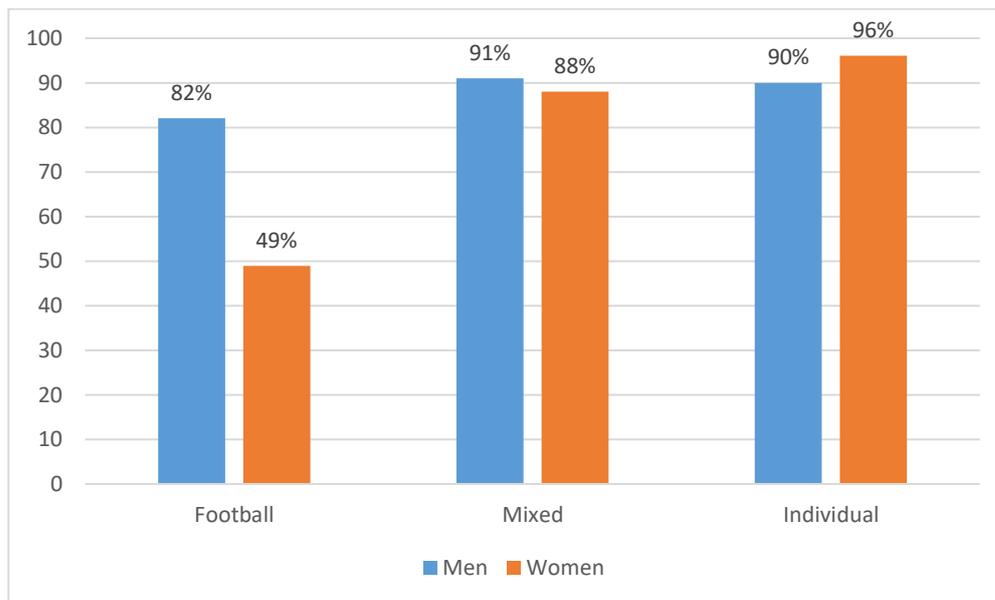
EXCLUSIONARY BEHAVIOUR

The results to the question 'have you heard negative words about women such as slut, cunt, bitch in the past year while involved in sport (in your club)' showed that both men (31%) and women (35%) across all sports heard these words frequently. These words were more prevalent in football codes, where women had heard them 53% in the past year, compared to men who had heard them 43% in the past year (see table four). At a lesser, yet still concerning rate, women and men in team sports heard these negative words also (31% and 29% respectively). Individual sports had the lowest amount of reported sexist language with 22% respectively for women and men hearing this language. Sexist language had been directed at women 20% (football), 9% (team) and 11% (individual) of the time. A small percentage of male participants felt it was acceptable to make jokes about women if there were no women in the room (8% football, 3% team, 6% individual).

TABLE FOUR: SEXIST LANGUAGE HEARD IN THE PAST YEAR WHILE INVOLVED IN THIS SPORTS CLUB.
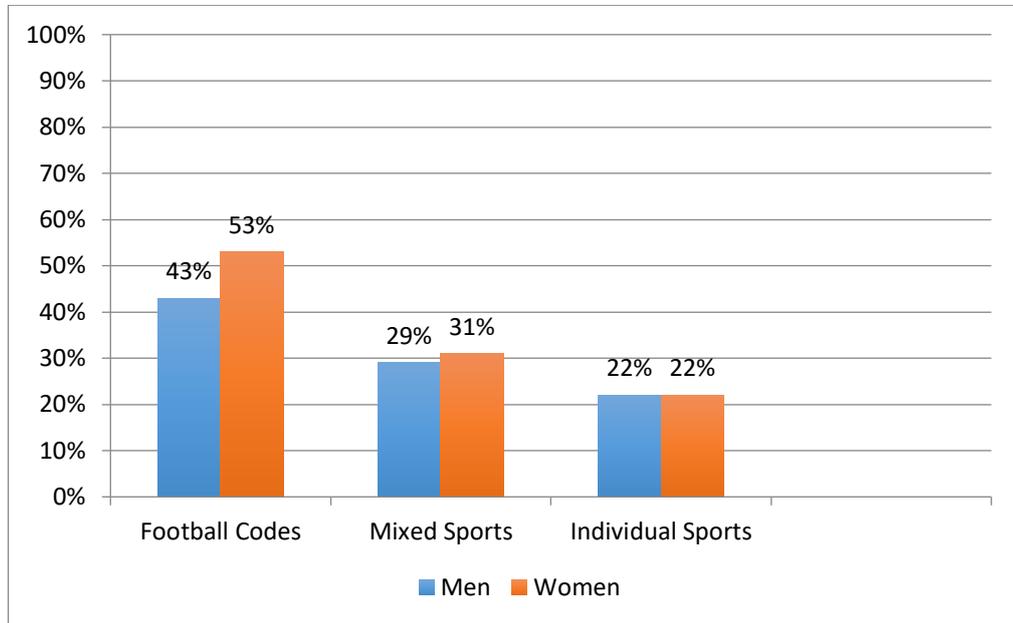
ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN IN SPORT

Participants were asked if they would be happy to have "a suitably qualified woman as our coach" to gauge attitudes around the equality of male and female leaders. The study found overall, a strong majority of participants, both male and female, would be comfortable with having a female coach. This is shown in table five.

TABLE FIVE: WOMEN AS SUITABLY QUALIFIED COACHES.

CHANGE OUR GAME
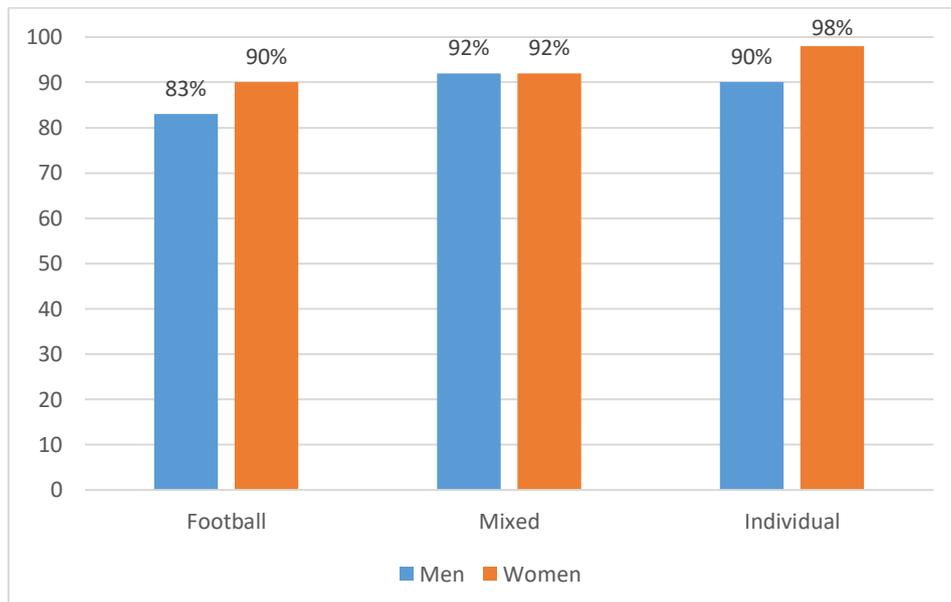
Participants expressed support for additional funding being dedicated toward women's sport, even if that meant fewer resources could be directed toward male sport. Almost half of male participants stated they supported more money being spent growing female sport, even if they get less (49% football, 45% team, and 44% individual respectively).

A relatively small number of participants agreed that it is more important to encourage boys, than girls, to play team sports, however more males than females agreed. 9% (football), 10% (team) and 14% (individual) of males stated that they believed it was more important to encourage boys to play team sports. Comparatively, 3% (football), 5% (team) and no women in individual sports agreed with this statement.

In previous studies we have conducted, we have found overt sexist attitudes to be rare. In this study we used a subtle prejudice scale to understand female's attitudes of women playing team sport. Across all sports we found similar feelings of femininity, admiration and strength of women in team sports (38% footballs codes; 33% team sports; 30% individual sports).

SUMMARY OF QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The quantitative data shows that sporting participants believe that all people are welcome and more is being done to be inclusive in their sports club, yet there is a disconnect between equality in clubs, particularly football sports, where men view equality more than women. Sexist language was frequently heard in sports clubs, in particular at worryingly high levels in football clubs. It was also directed at women at higher levels in football clubs. This perpetuates exclusionary behaviour in clubs and may discourage women's sporting participation.

Promisingly, there is support for investment in women in sports, including in leadership positions. This requires translation into practice to enable more women to become suitably qualified coaches.

QUALITATIVE RESULTS

The findings from the qualitative responses provide further insight into the statistical responses of participants and the experiences and perceptions of both men and women in grassroots sporting clubs. Aligned with the statistical data, we have coded the qualitative results in the following themes:

- Systemic norms in sports which are traditionally categorised as male domains, including males getting more focus and taking over;
- A disconnect between males and females in relation to gender equality and limited opportunities for women in these sports;
- Gender and sexuality stigma, which perpetuates common attitudes and negative language towards women;
- Suggestions on how clubs can be more inclusive and welcoming by focussing on equality for all, strict policies and procedures, events and promotion, and participants who believed sport should just focus on sport, or that their club is inclusive.

Many of the qualitative comments had multiple factors inter-related, such as gender equality and norms integrated with other factors, such as discrimination, inequality, fear of judgement, and perceptions of women's lack of ability to play these sports.

NORMS

The theme of norms consisted of systemic gendered norms that are perpetuated through systems, environments and social and cultural practices both within the sporting context and in the wider community. Women were also compared to men, who have had more opportunities, accessibility, and less structural and socio-cultural barriers. These views were summarised in the following comments:

> "They (women) are afraid of being judged, systemic inequalities and gender discrimination leading women to think they can't play sport" (Woman, AFL, 22)

> "Deeply entrenched masculine attitudes that are prevalent in traditional sports clubs" (Man, hockey, 34)

> "Lack of opportunity, societal pressure, fear of getting hurt, not the norm from an early age" (Woman, AFL, 24)

The ideology that sport is a male habitus (Metcalfe, 2018) is perpetuated through gendered norms, which are prevalent amongst those playing the sports, however goes beyond the sports context.

> "Because as women get older I believe the importance of getting into a relationship is increased, to do that they believe they must appear feminine" (Woman, football, 21)

> "Because family and childhood enforced that it was a male sport" (Woman, hockey, 42)

Many girls may not have played sports that are traditionally constructed as masculine in their youth, and therefore did not gain the skills, and confidence to participate in these sports, with a heightened fear of judgement. This was demonstrated in the following quotes:

> "Did not learn skills younger, so embarrassed or feel judged and unsupported in the team" (Woman, AFL, 21)

> "They're not encouraged enough in early years to play the sport" (Woman, football, 21)

A lack of available role models was discussed as being problematic.

> "Lack of support/ encouragement, body image issues, made fun of/ not taken seriously, lack of positive female role models" (Woman, AFL, 26)

Visible and accessible women role models are important for women, especially for younger women who are breaking traditionally gendered norms (Bevan et al., 2020; Elliott et al., 2019). This representation includes using social media (e.g. Instagram) as a platform to increase the visibility of elite level (and community) women athletes (Cooky et al. 2015; Bevan et al. 2020). Fear of negative appraisal, including criticism, judgement and stereotypes were prominent comments.

> "Because of negative community views, but also we aren't taught to prioritise playing sport" (Woman, AFL, 21)

> "Peer pressure, worry about what people will think, think they will be criticised, find something else they enjoy." (Woman, AFL, 20)

> "Perception that it is less accepted for women to play these sports. Women often stop playing sport after school" (Man, football, 27)

Literature has shown that women stop playing sport during or post high school (Haycock & Smith, 2014). Women's participation in sport is internationally and nationally lower than men's sport participation levels (Eurostat, 2018; ASC, 2017).

Fear of injury within sports traditionally dominated by men was also a common reason for why women may avoid these sports. In a study by Elliott et al. (2019), it was found that for adolescent girls, injury may provide adversity for participation in AFL, however there can be other factors that over-ride the fear of injury, such as a 'sisterhood' that is established with the friendships that are formed.

> "Traditional gender roles and perceived physicality or potential for injury" (Man, football, 27)

The gendered norms of what women and men can and should do, were perpetuated by others, including parents at a young age. This has been recognised amongst other studies including Cooky et al. (2016) which highlighted that familial attitudinal inequalities were present and 'girls' and 'sport' are incongruent.

> "Parents stop encouraging engagement in sport to focus on studies. A lot of clubs don't have well established female teams for these sports" (Woman, cricket, 23)

In both the comment above and below, the opportunities, including established women's teams and career opportunities were also mentioned. These will be discussed further in the next section.

> "Not enough support, not the 'norm', less avenues to play professionally or as a full time career" (Woman, hockey, 19)

Although it was recognised that women's participation in sports that are traditionally classified as male dominated has increased, and there may be less barriers than in history, certain sports such as AFL and cricket are still viewed as sports for men and equality between sexes still has a long way to go.

> "Participation is on the up and improving, but traditionally seen as sports for men" (Man, football, 20)

Male's receive more focus, support and attention in traditionally male sports, showing the systemic inequalities that persist within contemporary sport settings. Comparisons, discomfort, higher numbers of men across all levels of club settings, including leadership, and discouragement were all potential factors to the avoidance of participation in sports that traditionally have been dominated by men.

> "Male dominated both in leadership roles and participation" (Man, hockey, 26)

The male dominated culture of the club was described as a major factor for women stopping playing sports such as AFL and cricket.

> "Feel uncomfortable in a predominantly male egotistic environment" (Man, AFL, 23)

> "Because of their 'old school' male dominated culture. Males are in leadership positions and don't adapt to different ways of coaching/ leading" (Woman, hockey, 28)

“They may feel out of place. Could also feel uncomfortable being around a club with strong male pressure” (Man, lacrosse, 23)

“Discouraged by men” (Woman, Kendo, 47)

“Because of the patriarchy” (Man, football, 20)

Being in an environment that is heavily male dominated could be intimidating, especially not having many other women in the club environment. Having more women in the club could assist with improving confidence and comfort.

“It is intimidating to have the majority males, when there are more females, their confidence will improve e.g. club functions” (Man, AFL, 22)

Inequity in resources, opportunities and not being prioritised or respected were also factors to take into consideration.

“Physical requirements, lack of resources, priority to men's sport” (Woman, football, 30)

“They are not given the same level of respect. On a mixed boy/girl team they are not given as many opportunities to participate as the boys” (Woman, taekwondo, 19)

Additionally, being compared to elite levels may get tiresome.

“They probably get sick of being compared to the highest level of the men's game” (Man, lacrosse, 28)

GENDER INEQUALITY

Sporting participants mentioned several forms of gender inequality, including a lack of opportunities for women in sports traditionally dominated by men. For example, less resources (e.g. time and money), coaching, pathways, professional opportunities and less invested in women than men. The lack of opportunities for women in sport has been discussed in Bevan et al. (2020), and Burton (2015) reviewed the research of women in sport from a leadership perspective. The multi-level lack of investment and resources (e.g. infrastructure, leadership, funding) can be problematic for women in sports traditionally constructed as masculine, with a disparity and disconnect of equality between males and females (as shown in the quantitative results of this study).

“There is zero investment in infrastructure and coaching resources so most training is male centric” (Man, gridiron, 33)

“Not enough pay, no equality even though they’re playing the same sport” (Woman, taekwondo, 19)

“As more attention, time and money is put into the males” (Woman, AFL, 21)

A lack of competition opportunities contributes to women dropping out, or avoiding these sports.

“They might be thought of as weak, not competitive enough up to their professional level” (Woman, Taekwondo, 24)

“Lack of available leagues, less media posts about women” (Woman, football, 29)

This may be particularly salient if opportunities to practice these skills and sports were not provided at a young age, and skill development commences as an adult.

“Time poor - team sports require a lot of time commitment, lack of skills to join in at adult level” (Woman, football, 30)

> "Girls are often not given the support to thrive or develop their skills i.e. lack of coaches, lack of parental support" (Woman, cricket, 21)

Sociocultural factors including respect and encouragement were less for women than men also.

> "Lack of parental support/ community encouragement. Not offered in schools until recently. Boys sport in school, more girls play netball, also" (Woman, hockey, 21)

> "They are not given the same level of respect. On a mixed boy/girl team they are not given as many opportunities to participate as the boys". (Woman, taekwondo, 21)

These comments show that there are multi-level factors influencing the lack of opportunities for women in sports that are traditionally constructed as masculine. This is particularly problematic for intersections of gender, sexuality, class, race, age, (dis) ability and geography (Spaaij, Magee & Jeanes, 2014).

STIGMA

In alignment with the literature regarding women in sports that are traditionally dominated by men, both gender and sexuality stigma was inherent in participation, as well as perceptions of participation (e.g. from people in other sports). It is challenging to separate stigmatisation into gender and sexuality, as they are often compounded together, and there are multiple intersections between the two.

There were more comments from participants of sports historically dominated by men, such as football, AFL and cricket, however we included an array of comments from different sports to display the breadth of the stigma associated with women playing sports that are traditionally constructed as male domains.

Gender

Gendered stigma (e.g. negative attributes based on gender) in sport remain. Stigma based on gender can start in childhood (Schmalz, Kerstetter & Anderson, 2008), and continue into adolescence (Bevan et al., 2020) and adulthood (Krane, 2014). Non-conformation to the expectations of biological sex can lead to stigma, bias and exclusion in sport (Krane, 2014). The concept of sports such as AFL and cricket as masculine perpetuate a stereotype of what these sports look like and who they are designed for. The gendered differences within sport participation may be based on the gender constructs that still exist in contemporary society, therefore specific roles within sport are dedicated to men (e.g. coaches) and women (e.g. team managers) (Richards & May, 2016).

> "Stereotypical mentality where we used to see men always playing football and not women, thus it does not encourage them" (Man, football, 19)

> "Because it's seen as a masculine sport" (Woman, taekwondo, 22)

The culture and stigma involved in playing club sports that are traditionally constructed as male domains may result in teasing and exclusion for women. Stigmatisation can be from both men and women.

> "Associated stigma, non-inclusive clubs" (Woman, football, 22)

> "Culture that creates a negative image for women playing "men's" sports" (Man, Jiujitsu, 24)

> "Some women may avoid team sports like AFL due to social stigmas that paint these more male dominated sports as solely "masculine" activities" (Woman, hockey, 19)

> "Because mainly from stigma around by other girls calling them names" (Man, gridiron, 18)

Sexuality

Homophobic attitudes are still present in sport (Jeanes et al., 2020; Cunningham & Melton, 2012) with slurs and verbal insults such as dyke and butch being frequently used towards women in sports (Denison & Kitchen, 2015) that are traditionally dominated by men. Both external (e.g. parents, non-sporting peers) and internal (e.g. team-mates, other club members, members from other teams) voices and perceptions may dominate sexuality stigma. Perceptions of women who participate in sports traditionally constructed as male domains continue to perpetuate the assumption of lesbianism, regardless of their sexuality (Robertson et al., 2019; Storr et al., 2017; Symons et al., 2016).

> "They are worried about the negative connotations associated with playing male dominated sport i.e. sexual identity" (Woman, AFL, 21)

> "Don't want to be seen as gay or be hit on by gay girls" (Woman, football, 22)

> "Not enough opportunity and presumptions about sexuality being made" (Woman, AFL, 18)

Even from sports which are not traditionally dominated by men, there was a perception of women who play in these sports, including discrimination on the basis of both gender and sexuality, as detailed in the below comments.

> "Discrimination from team members (if in a male dominated team) "lad culture" in many boy teams. Perceived to be gay even if an all-female team" (Woman, netball, 23)

> "Body image, cultural, use of words like dyke/butch stereotypes. Lack of access" (Man, hockey, 27)

These findings are in line with the literature surrounding women in sports traditionally constructed as male dominated through different ages e.g. adolescence and adulthood (Bevan et al., 2020; Sartore-Baldwin & Cunningham, 2009).

INCLUSIVE AND WELCOMING CLUBS

The qualitative question 'do you have any suggestions to make sport clubs more welcoming and inclusive to everyone' was coded into four overarching themes; equality, policies and procedures, events and promotion, and focus on sport.

EQUALITY

Focussing on equality between men and women in a variety of ways was seen as a way to be more inclusive and welcoming to women. This included equal, or more, funding put into women's teams.

> "Equal funding for men's and women's teams" (Soccer, female, 21)

> "More promotional material, greater funding to women's teams, religious sportswear" (Soccer, female, 30)

Leadership was viewed as an important area to reach further equality, including women and minorities (e.g. LGBTQ+ and non-Caucasian people) as coaches and on committees, as shown in the comments below:

> "Female members in the executive committee" (Cricket, female, 21)

> "Have minorities as the coach or in leadership positions" (Jiujitsu, male, 25)

Social and cultural considerations of challenging and breaking down norms, stereotypes and expectations of sports that have traditionally been dominated by one gender will assist in creating welcoming and inclusive environments.

"Change and breakdown people's perception regarding sports that are gender dominated" (Badminton, female, 24)

Equality in facility use, improvements in facilities, including access to sanitary bins, and uniforms for women were stated as areas to address for equality:

"Equality in facility access" (Soccer, female, 30)

"Improve change rooms, have sanitary bins, usable showers and clean toilets, uniforms that fit (don't shrink and go see-through)" (Soccer, female ,30)

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Suggestions to create sporting clubs that are more welcome and inclusive included addressing policies and procedures. Embedded policies in the club would assist both new and existing club members understand and be aware of expectations around behaviours and inclusionary practises within clubs;

"I think to make policies more available to clubs so when new members come they are aware and more welcome" (Hockey, female, 29)

Many participants supported a zero-tolerance attitude to participants who do not adhere to appropriate behaviours, including negative language use:

"Trial/open days. Zero tolerance policy to complaints/language" (Touch, female, 28)

"Actively make clubs welcoming. Take action against behaviour and language that is unacceptable, calling out/ removal of members who behave inappropriately" (Jiujitsu, female, 21)

"Create an accepting culture and strong address people who actively bully, condemn or inhibit others from playing sport" (Jiujitsu, male, 24)

The culture of a club is an important focus in creating inclusive and welcoming sporting environments. Bullying, discrimination and negative language use was not deemed acceptable and there should be sanctions for those who do this. This should include having an easily accessible complaints system in place for club members, and accountability of sports officials (e.g. umpires) to play a role in addressing inappropriate behaviour.

"Put up Pride flags to symbolise acceptance. Get umpires to crack down on poor behaviour during game play, gets ignored too much, have a good complaints system/ process" (Hockey, female, 28)

EVENTS AND PROMOTION

Events, awareness and promotion of club diversity and inclusion were viewed as a good way to create inclusive and welcoming environments for all. Promotion included specifically promoting women's teams, and sexually and ethnically diverse groups.

"More female representation in flyers/ banners/ advertisements" (Soccer, female, 20)

"Promote women's teams more" (Gridiron, male, 25)

"Promote queer and ethnic acceptance more it runs under the radar" (Hockey, female, 20)

"More involvement of women and LGBTQI the more minorities the more awareness, the more inclusive the more better the environment" (Gridiron, male, 24)

Holding a Pride day to promote gender and sexual diversity for sports people

"Sport + pride day for all sporting people" (Soccer, female, 22)

Specific education and training on inclusivity and diversity, including appropriate use of language was seen as an appropriate and suitable way to increase knowledge and understanding around how clubs can be inclusive and welcoming.

"Speakers to come down and talk about the important of inclusivity on training nights" (Soccer, male, 27)

"More education about appropriate language" (Hockey, male, 26)

FOCUS ON SPORT

Some participants believed that clubs were already welcoming and inclusive and that nothing further was required.

"I think they are super inclusive and nothing else needs to be done" (Netball, female, 21)

"I think it is already welcoming diverse people" (Table tennis, male, 22)

Other participants believed that sports environments should not place as much emphasis on gender, sexuality and race inclusivity and that the focus should just be on the sport instead of anything else, as demonstrated by the comments below.

"Stop with identity politics and inclusiveness rammed down people throats" (Soccer, male, 22)

"Make it about sport not gender or race. No one cares what gender you are, or aren't or whether you are gay or not. Stamp out homophobia but if you focus on sport, then the barriers will fall." (Gridiron, male, 23)

SUMMARY OF QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Overall, the qualitative data provides further context to the quantitative data, resulting in dominant gender and sexuality norms that have historically been male dominated, including limited opportunities and inequalities between males and females in these sports. There is a strong perception of women in traditionally masculine sports as less feminine, and stereotyped as lesbians. This perpetuates common attitudes, negative language about women in these sports, and limiting an inclusive and welcoming environment for women (and other intersections of sexual and ethnic diversity).

Suggestions on how clubs can be more inclusive and welcoming included through targeted training and education sessions, levelling funding, resource and facility allocation and more awareness and promotion of diversity through promotion materials (e.g. websites, flyers etc). Policies and procedures should be embedded in clubs to support diversity, with a no tolerance approach to any form of discrimination, including inappropriate language. Some participants believed sport is inclusive enough and that the prime focus should be on the sport alone.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this research was to provide a snapshot of the current experiences of women at community clubs in a metropolitan area of Melbourne in which over the last five years there has been a strong focus by all levels of government and extensive support provided to help sport clubs engage with and advance gender equality. Previous research has suggested that key factors which drive progress and engagement in gender equality (and all forms of diversity) are awareness of the need for action among club members and leaders, financial and other forms of support for change from governments and governing bodies, and external pressure on club leaders to take action. Based on this, we expected that the clubs in this geographic region would be strong case studies which can be used to illustrate the benefits of the strong focus on gender equality by governments and institutions. Unfortunately, the study found mixed evidence of change and progress in this area of diversity.

Although just over half of participants felt that there had been a greater focus on diversity in recent years at their club, very few participants (10%) reported they had received any specific training or education around gender equality. The results of this study showed that sporting participants perceive their club to be welcoming and inclusive, with more of a focus on inclusion and diversity recently, yet when exclusionary behaviour was explored further, there was a disconnect between the perception of inclusive clubs and the attitudes and behaviour exhibited, including the common use of sexist language. Exclusionary behaviours and attitudes were particularly salient in sports which have historically been dominated by men.

In sports traditionally constructed as masculine such as football codes, persistent stigma and stereotypes of gender (e.g. manly) and sexuality (e.g. assumption of lesbianism) may be influencing participation of young women. The stigmatisation and stereotypes go beyond the sports themselves, with people from team sports and individual sports aware of the denigration and devaluation of women in sport traditionally dominated by men. Homophobic language is common in sporting environments (Jeanes et al., 2020; Symons et al., 2014; Menzel et al., 2019) and problematic and harmful to young people (Denison & Kitchen, 2015). Targeting gender norms (including sexist language) and sexuality-based stigma, especially in sports traditionally constructed as masculine, will assist with addressing the systemic inequality that exists within these sports (see recommendations). However, other factors such as perceptions of gender inequality, including less opportunities for women, also need to be addressed to get to the route of systemic and cultural inequalities (Brackenridge et al., 2008; Sartore-Baldwin & Cunningham, 2009). Football codes require specific assistance in working towards gender equality in their clubs. Previous research has suggested that stereotyping, inadequate media coverage and limited resources for women in these sports are significant challenges to providing legitimacy of women in footballs codes (Pfister, 2015; Gacka, 2017). Sexist language is a specific target area that needs to be addressed across all sports.

Sexist language is prolific and problematic in grassroots sport and needs to be a focus of government, governing bodies and sporting communities. The results of this study show that sexist language is common in football codes and less so, yet still at worrying levels, in team sports. Sexist language is used the least in individual sports; however, this is expected due to the nature of team sports and the 'banter' that remains a part of team sport culture, particularly in male dominated environments (Jeanes et al., 2020). The prevalence of sexist language across all sports is a cause of concern. Previous studies have found sexist attitudes including sexist language is prominent in sports such as athletics, perpetuating gender inequalities in sport (Leaper & Brown, 2008). For adolescents, parents play an important role in the socialization of achievements that are traditionally male-dominated (e.g. sports) (Elliott et al., 2019; Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2003). As drop-out is significant during this life stage (ASC, 2017), it is integral to address sexist attitudes and language in adolescence. Appropriate behaviours need to be embedded into grassroots sports clubs to ensure that girls and women of every age, sexuality and ethnicity feel welcomed and included.

A promising result of this study showed that men support investment in women's sport, even if men get less. One potential opportunity could be to consult with sport governing bodies highlighting this support

to redirect resources and investment. There are multiple opportunities for investment in women's sport, despite general society deeming men's sport 'of greater value', with sex stereotypes and sport value prominent, even in adolescence (Boiche, Chalabaev & Sarrazin, 2014; Shaw & Amis, 2001). This value-placement will not change unless sporting bodies invest significantly into women's sport. With a recent report showing that national women's sporting teams have the strongest emotional connection with Australian sports fans (1. Australian women's cricket team; 2. Matilda's; 3. Australian women's rugby 7s team; and 4. Diamonds: True North Research, 2020), investment may assist in supporting the growth of women's sport, and supporting young girls and women to remain involved in sport, instead of the significant sport drop-out that occurs for young girls and women (ASC, 2017).

A focus area of the Victorian Government has been investing in women in leadership positions, such as the minimum mandatory 40% quota of women on State Sporting Association boards (Change Our Game, 2019). This study shows that at a grassroots level, both males and females support women in leadership positions, as suitably qualified coaches. However, there are many factors influencing women becoming leaders in sporting environments (e.g. coaches, sports organisation managers and executives) (Evans & Pfister, 2020; LaVoi & Baeth, 2018; Sartore & Cunningham, 2007) which should be a priority area of investment.

This study highlights key areas which need addressing in grassroots sports clubs to ensure welcoming and inclusive environments for girls and women. This includes targeted approaches to exclusionary behaviours, such as the use of sexist language. The study also shows promising results, with males supporting investment in female sport, especially in qualified female coaches.

FUTURE OUTCOMES

The results of this study assist in understanding the current context and environment for women in community club sport. Specific areas need addressing to assist in creating inclusive and welcoming sporting clubs for women. This report provides a general overview of the differences between football codes, team sports and individual sports, providing a breadth and depth of comparison between equality, inclusivity and diversity within community club sports.

The findings of this study show that there is a disconnect between reality and perception in relation to welcoming and inclusive community sporting clubs. Women, ethnic minorities and diverse sexualities are all groups that seemingly would be welcomed into sporting clubs, however in reality, have varying participation levels across the codes.

Women are participating in more individual sports, which is aligned with the recent AusPlay data (2020), detailing that non-sport recreational activities (e.g. walking, gym activities) are popular for women. This could be attributed to a number of factors, including the results of this study which indicate that some sporting clubs are still not welcoming and inclusive environments for women.

Promisingly, the results of this study show that there is support for investment in women's sport, even if this means that men receive less, and there is strong support for qualified women coaches. This is an area that requires dedicated support and investment, especially with the low level of women coaches across all levels (e.g. grassroots to elite) currently in traditionally male sports. The Office for Women in Sport and Recreation should work collaboratively with sport leagues, associations, clubs and the wider sporting community to assist more women to become coaches. The growth of women's sport requires investment, and the results of this study show that there is support from the sporting community, although to what extent requires further investigation.

As demonstrated through this report, systemic and cultural inequalities are still prevalent for women in community sporting clubs. Our recommendations can assist in addressing the inequalities this study has found. These recommendations have been developed based on the evidence in the literature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Club culture

Despite the strong focus and support around increasing female sport participation in this region, exclusionary and discriminatory language remains common, particularly the use of sexist language in football sports such as Australian Rules Football. This language makes women feel unwelcome and unsafe, thus, while there has been an increase in the number of women playing sport, sustainability of participation may prove to be a challenge without change to this language. The study also found females were much less likely to say they were treated 'completely equal' at their club than males. There is a need to address the language and day to day inequities between genders. We recommend a unified approach, with sporting organisations and sports club leadership (e.g. committee members and coaches, captains, diversity champions) to collaborate on approaches to change normative behaviours including sexist language in sports environments. Utilising a united, collaborative approach from the State Sporting Associations (SSAs) creates institutional support, with practical examples of how to create inclusive sporting environments within sports clubs (e.g. by-stander action, embedding it in policy and practice, club champions). Leadership (including committee, captains and coaches) and diversity champions are integral in clubs creating culture change for girls and women.

2. Task-force

Studies find developing task-forces at organisations with mandates to advance specific areas of diversity is an effective way to drive change. Dedicated regional taskforces made of key stakeholders (e.g. SSA representatives and sporting club leaders) will help to make inclusive sporting clubs a key priority, including developing practical resources and ongoing education for SSA's in this space. Upskilling key stakeholders in this sector is particularly important, including through education. Education can provide the opportunity to signifying the harms of sexist language, and provide sporting clubs with strategies to challenge unequal behaviour, attitudes and language in sports clubs.

3. Funding alignment

For normative behaviours to be dismantled and equitable practices in place for girls and women, the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation should ensure that all funding allocated to sporting clubs meet a set of inclusive criteria for girls and women. The task-force could create this criterion based on evaluations and reports in inclusion and diversity (e.g. the Pride Cup evaluation report). Clubs should only receive funding from local council and government sectors if they meet the inclusion criteria. They can also profile their club to the local community as an inclusive environment. Measurable outcomes are required to ensure that clubs are continuing to meet the inclusive criteria.

4. Longitudinal research

Longitudinal research with sporting clubs in metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria is important to determine how sports clubs are operating, and supporting girls and women in their sports. This research should examine participation trends, club culture (including language and attitudes) and club practices (e.g. game and training times, resource allocation and infrastructure). This research can assist in supporting and developing 'best-practice' case study resources for clubs to implement in their sporting contexts.

5. Evidence-based programs, resources and support

Ongoing resources to assist sports clubs, with institutional support is important in creating welcoming and inclusive sporting environments for girls and women (and every person). Although educational resources are now widely available, including online training modules

(e.g. Play by the Rules) the study found evidence that club leaders, who are often volunteers, are not accessing or using these materials. Club leaders need specific, targeted and evidence-based programs they can use which are pragmatic and practical to implement. For example, there are no evidence-based approaches/programs that clubs can adopt which have proven to be effective in stopping (or at least reducing) the use of sexist language in sport environments. Similarly, there are no evidence-based approaches/programs which a volunteer club leader can integrate into the day-to-day operations to ensure resources are, and also perceived to be, distributed equitably between males and females. Once an evidence-base has been established, educational resources and training can be developed and accessible as an online 'one-stop shop' on equality and leadership and toolkits with step-by-step approaches on minimising exclusionary practices including practical examples and case studies will assist clubs to understand the girls and women's experiences and what an inclusive sports club looks like. This will need to be endorsed and promoted by government and SSA's for institutional support and recognition.

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