

# East London - Women and Physical Activity

FULL EVIDENCE REPORT



**EAST LONDON – WOMEN AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FULL EVIDENCE REPORT**

**Table of Contents**

**Project context..... 3**

    Project background ..... 3

    Methodology ..... 5

    Executive summary ..... 9

**Full findings from the online community ..... 10**

    Current behaviours and levels of physical activity ..... 10

    The local area and impact on levels of physical activity ..... 11

    Common barriers to exercise for local women ..... 13

    Relevant communications and messaging ..... 16

    Relevant activities and sessions ..... 21

    Influencers on women and physical activity ..... 23

    Segmenting the local female population ..... 27

    Conclusion ..... 28

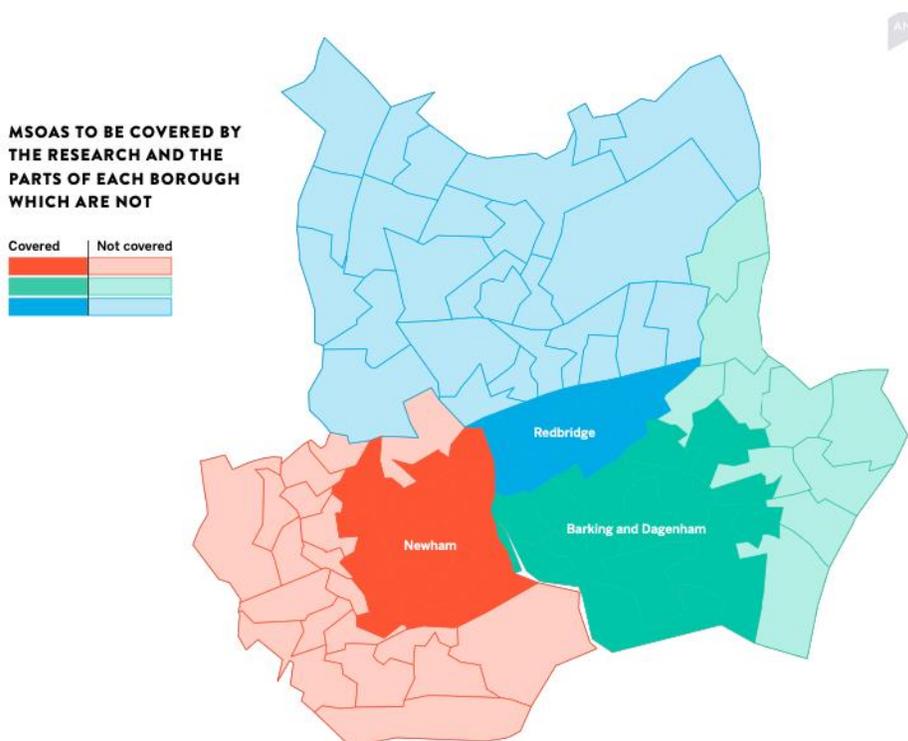
## PROJECT CONTEXT

.....

### PROJECT BACKGROUND

In September 2020, London Sport commissioned AudienceNet as partners in a multi-stage research project designed to understand the barriers to physical activity amongst women and girls in three East London boroughs and to identify potential local influencers who could inspire and enable women to take up more activity.

The area of East London identified for research covers parts of Newham, Barking and Dagenham and Redbridge and was chosen because the Middle Layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs) within this area show some of the lowest levels of physical activity amongst women in the country (just under 250,000 women and girls in this area do not meet the recommended 150mins of exercise a week). The research aimed, in part, to uncover any specific contributing factors towards such low levels of activity in this area.



The key outcome of the research, however, focuses on how to engage local institutions and organisations who have influence amongst women and girls in the area and to bring them on board as partners to engage more females from different communities in physical activity.

The research also informed the development of personas and a segmentation of the local female population, grouped by the most defining factors influencing their approach to taking up

physical activity, from motherhood and religious affiliation to how connected women were digitally. The construction of personas in this way helps to identify the types of channels and influencers best suited to inspire and reach out to less active women in each segment, e.g. places of worship, parenting groups, campaigns over social media etc.

This piece of work seeks to build on London Sport's existing segmentation of 'less active' individuals (<https://londonsport.org/our-research-and-insight/understanding-less-active-londoners/>) and while this latest segmentation clearly shares overlapping themes, it drills down to personas at a very localised level.

Though this project targeted a very specific area, the methodology used throughout this qualitative research is easily replicable amongst other populations in other regions of the capital or beyond. The findings themselves are likely to map onto many other areas in London or around the country, where demographic and socio-economic factors are similar. There may be greater discrepancy with areas that are demographically less diverse or where socio-economic and cultural factors differ substantially.

### **Use and implication**

The ultimate purpose of this project is to provide London Sport's core East London partners, regional partners, and the wider sector with actionable insight into the female population living in these areas of East London. This includes information on the needs of women from different backgrounds and life stages and types of strategies and interventions which are likely to be successful in encouraging more of the female population to take part in healthy physical activity behaviours.

Therefore, a Partner Guidance Pack has been put together with key metrics on groups of local women (in the form of personas and consumer journeys), as well as case studies on local entities who may be able to encourage uptake of physical activity amongst each group.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Methodology

The research was split into 4 stages, carried out over 5 months (due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was necessary to delay some stages).

#### Stage 1 - Project initiation

This stage laid the groundwork for the upcoming research by providing time to share knowledge between London Sport and AudienceNet, specifically on what research had previously been done into less active and inactive populations and women and girls in general.

#### Stage 2 - Subgroup prioritisation

This stage consisted of studying the target area in order to identify the subgroups of local women to recruit for the subsequent fieldwork. The target area was dissected via each Middle Layer Super Output Area, combining data from the 2011 Census with analysis of proximity in each MSOA to green space, leisure facilities, levels of deprivation and demographic make-up as well as levels of activity. This analysis informed the groups identified for recruitment.

#### Stage 3 - Fieldwork

This phase of research encompassed a range of activities:

##### Local safaris

- The AudienceNet team went to areas of Newham, Ilford and Barking and Dagenham in order to understand more about the target area and gauge the range of facilities and public spaces available for exercise - and for women specifically. Through this process, the team was able to identify some organisations which could prove useful as potential partners or influencers on physical activity.

##### Qualitative Online Community

- The main phase of research at the centre of this project was a two-week long Online Community amongst a sample of n=64 women from the target area. This form of research acts as an online forum in which moderators are able to post questions and activities either in private or group settings, allowing participants to respond whenever suits them.
- Conducting research via an Online Community meant being able to gather in-depth and considered responses about what were potentially sensitive topics from each participant. Activities which dealt with personal attitudes and feelings were facilitated in private forums whilst activities which asked participants to think more creatively were discussed in a public forum, allowing participants to engage with each other's ideas.
- The first week of research focused on gaining context from participants about their lives, their local areas and their current attitudes towards exercise, which involved a task around trying out a new activity. The second week of research focused on testing a

range of campaigns/comms and identifying those who participants felt could best influence them to take up more physical activity at a local level.

#### Influencer consultations

- Having identified the most common influencers for women from the local area, 12 local organisations were identified for interview, based on their potential reach and impact. This included places of worship, local councils, parenting groups, media organisations and sports clubs. Each interview discussed the potential reach and impact each organisation could have as a local influencer, as well as any support they would need in order to engage women in more physical activity. Based on both the insight gathered from female participants directly in the Online Community and these consultations, a 'Sphere of Influence' was drawn up, which ranks and scores potential local influencers dependent on their impact and reach.

#### Stage 4 - Reporting and recommendations

Once fieldwork was completed, findings from all stages of the project were combined to inform a number of deliverables, with the aim of directing London Sport and its partners on how to engage groups of women, as well as local influencers, to encourage greater uptake of physical activity amongst the female population.

#### **Project deliverables**

- Full evidence report detailing all findings from the Online Community.
- Guidance pack for London Sport and partners to use with directional information and recommendations on how to engage more local women in physical activity. This pack comprises:
  - Defined segmentation of inactive female communities based on ethnic, social, cultural and life-stage factors. Subset of personas applicable to each identified female segment.
  - Participant journey flows, detailing the trajectory necessary to engage each identified segment in more physical activity, from initial engagement to sustained participation and community advocacy.
  - An influencer framework and set of case studies expanding on the potential for each local influencer to enact change amongst different female segments.

#### **Recruitment and sample**

When recruiting for the Online Community and analysing the target area in Stage 2, the following factors were taken into account:

- The proportion of dominant groups (social, ethnic, cultural, religious) across the target area
- Geographical factors such as green space and proximity to leisure/exercise facilities across the target area

- London Sport and core partner knowledge and insight into local physical activity behaviours and engagement challenges.

Following this analysis, the decision was made to recruit proportionately representative numbers of women from the most common cultural groups in the area, clustered in different regions of the target area.

Participants were then recruited via outreach to London Sport's network of local partners who disseminated the information about the research to their network of female members who subsequently spread the message to other women in the area. Through this network, over 500 women registered their interest in taking part in the Online Community. Recruitment was bolstered by a targeted campaign on Facebook coordinated by London Sport's Digital Marketing team and by a professional recruitment agency in order to ensure good representation from each subgroup with the correct postcodes for the target area.

The final sample for the Online Community was as follows:

- 64 participants between the ages of 16 and 50
- Majority undertaking less than 150mins of physical activity a week
- A quarter 'inactive', i.e. undertaking less than 30mins of physical activity a week

Subgroups:

- 17 women and girls of Bangladeshi or Pakistani heritage
- 8 women and girls of Indian heritage
- 23 women and girls of Black British African or Caribbean heritage
- 16 women and girls of White British or Eastern European heritage

### **Limitations of methodology**

In relation to Covid-19:

- This research was conducted in early December 2020 when London was subject to restrictions on social interaction, greatly limiting the types of physical activity which could be carried out. An element of the Online Community aimed to ask participants to try out a new physical activity, however when the research went live, this was something which could not be explored fully as participants were restricted to home workouts and individual outdoor activities only.
- Similarly, the local safaris carried out by the AudienceNet Team also fell in late November and early December 2020 meaning the team was not able to explore inside any local facilities or speak face to face with any representatives within these local organisations. The pandemic also impacted the speed with which the team was able to carry out interviews with identified influencers in January, as many organisations were either busier than usual or not in the office meaning communication was difficult to take up and this stage had to be extended across the following months.

Limitations inherent to the methodology itself:

- In pursuit of local organisations and individuals who could act as potential influencers, participants in the Online Community were asked who currently positively influenced them in relation to exercise and who had the potential to do so. Although participants were asked about any barriers they felt in relation to exercise, the question of whether there were any negative or detracting influencers in regards to exercise was not directly explored.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The target area for this research was identified by London Sport due to particularly low levels of activity amongst women and is also known to be one of the most deprived areas in London.

It was clear from responses in the Online Community that other local factors also played a role in low levels of activity. Many women reported feeling unsafe taking part in physical activity in public spaces on their own or in the evenings. Equally, they reported a lack of female only spaces in the area which prevented many from being active due to not feeling comfortable exercising with men. This particularly impacted the south Asian and Muslim communities.

In addition, many women faced financial barriers in regards to paying for gym memberships or exercise classes. In particular, mothers of young children felt that they were prevented from participating in many facilities because there were limited or only expensive options for childcare at gyms and leisure centers.

When it came to promoting physical activity for women via comms, participants wanted depictions of women in campaigns to be inclusive and diverse, both in terms of ethnicity and body type. Sport England's 'This Girl Can' campaign was seen as a good case study. Messages around the health benefits of physical activity, female empowerment and solidarity, positioning exercise as fun, sociable and approachable, all worked well for this less active cohort.

When it came to ideal physical activity sessions, many participants focused on solo activities such as jogging or swimming which they could do at their own pace, or dance classes, Zumba and walking groups which felt like more lighthearted and sociable forms of exercise for those who might be underconfident in regards to participating in physical activity.

Combined insights from the Online Community and Influencer Consultations established places of worship, parenting groups and sports clubs as particularly important influencers for London Sport's delivery partners to engage. This was due to the trusted position these organisations held and the opportunity to pool resources, networks and knowledge between them in order to facilitate relevant physical activity sessions for women.

All feedback gathered from participants has been developed into personas which build on London Sport's Inactive Segmentation. The personas provide a snapshot of groups of women at the hyperlocal level dealt with in this research; Digitally Focussed, Busy Mothers, Religiously Oriented and Community Fixtures. These personas dovetail with the local influencer piece in that each group responds best to certain influencers, detailed in the documents accompanying this report.

## FULL FINDINGS FROM THE ONLINE COMMUNITY

.....

### CURRENT BEHAVIOURS AND LEVELS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Overall, participants understood the value and importance of physical activity. All participants mentioned the importance to physical health as well as the benefits to mental health which physical activity provided. However, despite the general acceptance that physical activity was good for their wellbeing, some simply lacked the motivation to exercise whilst others faced logistical barriers which meant they often simply could not engage in as much activity as they wanted to.

Many women in our cohort naturally incorporated a certain amount of physical activity into their week through their commute and walking everyday but did not necessarily take part in any dedicated sport or physical activity. Some took it upon themselves to do yoga or to go for runs every week. A small portion regularly took part in organised sports – though the Covid-19 pandemic had recently made this difficult or impossible.

The impact of social restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic throughout 2020 meant most participants were participating in less physical activity than usual.

- Many of those who, prior to the pandemic, were not frequently physically active had mostly relied on walking or jogging but now didn't necessarily feel safe even to participate by themselves in public areas due to the virus. Disruption to working and daily commutes also meant the loss of 1-2 hours of walking per day for many.
- Many of those who were frequently physically active prior to the pandemic struggled to do as much activity as usual with gyms and sports clubs closed. Some experimented with home workouts, but found it hard to find the same level of motivation.

However, for a small proportion of participants, the pandemic had actually meant an increase in physical activity. Those who had previously taken public transport to work and who still had to commute had started walking as much as possible instead. A few others who suddenly found themselves furloughed and spending almost all day at home had started looking into home workouts for the first time, having more time than usual to dedicate to physical activity.

*“Before Covid-19 my exercise was a weekly yoga class (one hour), plus walking to work and walking my daughter to school. I now drive to work so only really walk about an hour or so a week.”*

35-44, White British/Eastern European

*“In terms of exercise, Covid-19 has been great for me! Not being able to go anywhere with restrictions has forced me to go to the park more and walk more as this was the only thing we could do. I also purchased my bike in lockdown to get out of the house. I do two hours a week now, I know it's still not much but so much more than I did before.”*

25-34, South Asian (Pakistani or Bangladeshi)

## THE LOCAL AREA AND IMPACT ON LEVELS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

### Busy lifestyles

Overall, participants led busy daily lives, especially before the Covid-19 pandemic. Though the pandemic had significantly altered their day-to-day life, many women in the area remained busy with household responsibilities, spending time with family, in many cases still working full time or studying.

A significant number of participants had children, a high proportion of whom had their time taken up with childcare. These busy lifestyles were one of many factors which contributed towards physical activity not featuring high amongst daily priorities.

### Safety around the local community/area

When it came to their local area, participants had mixed feelings about where they lived. Some were happy with their neighbourhood but many had particular concerns about their community which revolved mostly around safety and cleanliness.

Many participants said they did not feel safe, especially at night, to be out alone or even with other women in their area. The reasons most women gave for this were violence and drug and alcohol use in the area as well as feeling intimidated by groups of men in streets late at night.

This sense of insecurity was felt across women of all backgrounds and tended to have the effect that many women and girls felt uncomfortable going out by themselves, particularly after dark which restricted the kinds of activities they were able to do in the evenings or on their own – including participating in physical activity or sport.

A few also mentioned that their area felt neglected and that there was a lack of respect for public spaces, some of which felt dirty and unpleasant to be in or even unsafe in relation to the kind of litter left lying in the streets (e.g. drug related paraphernalia).

*“There are areas where youths congregate and I don't feel safe walking down the road or going out after dark.”*

35-44, White British/Eastern European

*“I just don't feel safe going anywhere alone in the dark.”*

25-34, South Asian (Pakistani/Bangladeshi)

### A lack of local women's only facilities

Most participants were aware of a number of spaces for physical activity; mostly parks, gyms and leisure centres in their vicinity, and felt there were just about enough spaces to choose

from. However, some lived further from any such facilities and noted this as a barrier to making use of such spaces.

Despite a knowledge of general purpose facilities, there were big gaps identified by participants in terms of spaces they would feel comfortable exercising in.

When asked about what kinds of facilities and spaces they would like to see more of locally, the most common wish was for more women's only spaces providing opportunities to take part in physical activity. This not only included more sessions only for women at gyms, leisure centres and swimming pools, but whole gyms and centres dedicated exclusively to women. Also important was the option of always having a female instructor. Participants felt that this would encourage them to use local facilities more.

*"I only use the open spaces for physical activity if I am with a friend as there is the safety aspect that I worry about. It would be great if there was a dedicated track for running and walking which might make it feel safer to walk or run with fellow walkers/runners. I would also like additional evenings for ladies only swimming sessions, as this is limited to only 1 night a week currently."*  
35-44, South Asian (Pakistani/Bangladeshi)

*"Once things go back to normal I may join the gym again but this time I will find a women's only gym. I know of 2, both being a bit further away than I would like, but a bus trip away. I think the gym I previously went to only has maybe 1 or 2 women's only sessions a week which I don't think is enough."*  
25-34, Black British/African/Caribbean

## COMMON BARRIERS TO EXERCISE FOR LOCAL WOMEN

Despite women's best efforts, even prior to the Covid-19 pandemic which severely impacted on the ease of participating in physical activity, there were already many pre-existing barriers for women from our target area which meant they did not or were not able to engage in sufficient levels of physical activity.

There were many barriers identified through the research, which can be roughly divided into logistical, mental and environmental barriers with the latter pertaining to the environment available to participate in. Often, many of these barriers would overlap and women typically faced more than one.

Many barriers were common to local women in general, while certain groups faced barriers specific to their religious beliefs or their life stage. Overall, it is clear that even for women who knew physical activity was important and wanted to take part, many faced barriers they could not combat alone without the intervention of policy or local organisations to enable them.

The most common barriers which participants identified for themselves were as follows:

### Mental:

- A lack of motivation - for some, physical activity felt like a chore and not something which came easily or was particularly enjoyable, meaning it was often overlooked.
- Feeling self-conscious - for women who were less active, the thought of taking part in physical activity was daunting, with insecurity around their ability or about their weight in comparison to others.

### Logistical:

- A lack of time - the most common barrier across the board was simply not finding the time to be physically active, either due to busy schedules, long working hours, childcare or schoolwork.
- Financial barriers - costs associated with sessions at gyms or leisure centers or even costs associated with travelling to sessions sometimes created barriers. Some mentioned they couldn't afford or justify the cost of a gym membership.
- A lack of facilities nearby - some felt there were not enough gyms and leisure centres in their proximity or within walking distance which confounded efforts to regularly attend sessions they had to spend more time and money travelling to.

### Environmental:

- Concerns around safety - many women felt their area was not safe for women wanting to exercise in public spaces, such as parks, on their own, meaning many were put off this option or had to plan when they went, e.g. during busy, daylight hours.

- Lack of female only spaces – many women noted feeling uncomfortable exercising around men, either for religious or personal reasons, saying they felt judged or received unwanted attention. This was one of the most prominent common barriers across women of all backgrounds.

Specific groups of women faced barriers unique to their circumstances, or barriers which were emphasised for women of their backgrounds:

Mothers:

- A lack of childcare options in physical activity spaces - many mothers with young children mentioned being unable to participate outside of their home without some suitable form of creche or childcare on site.
- Financial barriers – often women who had started families were financially stretched and felt that paying for memberships or sessions at leisure centres or gyms was not enough of a priority amongst all the other costs associated with caring for children.

Women of Islamic faith:

- A lack of ‘women only’ spaces – while many women wished for more ‘female only’ spaces, the lack of such opportunities was a particular barrier to many Muslim women.
- The lack of female only and female led sessions meant many Muslim women felt they didn’t have any options to exercise outside of their home.

*“I wouldn't go to a gym unless I was 'gym-ready'. By this I mean that I wouldn't go to a gym until I have built up my stamina/core strength, etc., so I am not visibly struggling to complete the exercise. Even if I did feel comfortable however, I know that I wouldn't be able to afford a gym membership. I think I would feel more inclined to use a gym if it was for women only, because I would feel more comfortable.”*

16-24, Black British/African/Caribbean

*“I like the idea of being physically active. However, I lack the confidence to do it in front of people as I feel judged based on the fact that I cannot do as much as others... Additionally, most gyms do not have female only sections in my area and the membership is too high in price. If there were more local gyms with female only sections and it was affordable, I would go. This would help other women from my background for religious reasons.”*

25-34, South Asian (Pakistani or Bangladeshi)

*“I am with my son 24/7 so when he is asleep, I just want to rest and not be active. I think there is a lack of parent and child exercise classes or creche services which is unfair as not everyone can easily give their child to someone just to do exercise.”*

25-34, South Asian (Pakistani or Bangladeshi)

## **Case Studies of best practice in local area**

Though not many participants knew about them, there are some organisations who are aware of the barriers faced by women and who have created successful programmes in which women feel comfortable and supported.

- The Muslimah Sports Association, based in Barking and Dagenham, addresses the issues faced by many Muslim women as well as attracting women from all communities and religions, by providing female led and female only sessions. The association ensures sessions are run in appropriate spaces e.g. always inside, so all women feel comfortable. It also trains up coaches from diverse backgrounds so that women are coached by someone they can identify with.
- The Early Years Cocoon, a parenting group in Barking, team up with local sports clubs whenever funding allows, to deliver low-cost sports sessions to families so that mothers can exercise without great expense or the need to find childcare.
- West Ham United Foundation facilitates online sessions for fitness, strength and conditioning which anyone can join in with, so that women can work out from home with no travel costs and build up confidence before attending sessions in person. They also provide a kit bank for old kit to be reused to reduce costs for their participants.

Organisations such as these are laying the groundwork for encouraging more women from the local area to participate in physical activity and sport but require funding to ensure they can keep delivering and reaching out to all groups in the community.

## RELEVANT COMMUNICATIONS AND MESSAGING

### The importance of representation

Most participants thought that diverse representation of women playing sports or being active was important and contributed to motivating more women to become physically active. Many also felt that it was important to portray diversity in a range of factors; from different ethnicities to different ages and diverse body types.

Currently, many participants felt that adequate representation was lacking. Particularly those of ethnic minority backgrounds did not feel as if they saw themselves represented enough in physical activity and sport related media.

Besides representation in activity related adverts or campaigns, real life representation was also extremely powerful, suggesting the need for diverse female role models. Though athletes were inspiring for many, sometimes just seeing women who looked like them jogging or doing exercise in their local park was even more motivating, as more relatable role models.

*“Seeing someone who you possibly relate to in any way could be the reason another person wants to participate. Seeing similar representation to yourself would make you feel there is a level of understanding without having to explain (perhaps culture, faith). It makes people feel less alienated... I believe it does play a part, particularly in a society where you might stand out for not looking like others (i.e. wearing a hijab).”*

25-34, South Asian (Indian)

*“I think due to seeing a distinct lack of females of my age being active it leaves me uninspired to be as active myself. It's meant that I don't want to play sports such as football due to the lack of females involved. I think this is down to a lack of representation in the media. I think insecurity holds a lot of young girls back, especially me.”*

16-24, White British/Eastern European

### Inspiring campaigns and other influential role models

Participants were asked to recall any memorable campaigns or inspiring content they had seen in the past which had influenced or inspired them in relation to physical activity. Some said they could not think of any such content but many mentioned certain examples they felt had been successful.

In terms of campaigns, “This Girl Can” was the most commonly mentioned. Those who mentioned this campaign appreciated the fact that it included women of all shapes and ethnicities, showing that participation is for any and every woman, not purely those most commonly depicted.

Many of the other campaigns or inspiring content mentioned were to do with engaging women from minority ethnic backgrounds, mostly associations and athletes:

- Though not related to a specific campaign, the Muslimah Sports Association was mentioned as an initiative which had encouraged a couple of participants of South Asian heritage to take up sports within the association's program.
- Another participant cited the Black Swimming Association and how it had inspired her to enroll herself and her three sons in swimming lessons after seeing the statistics shown about swimming amongst the black population.
- Serena Williams was mentioned multiple times as being a general role model for women, particularly as a mother and woman of colour who perseveres in everything she does. Certain campaigns featuring Serena Williams were mentioned as memorable and inspirational, such as her collaboration with Bumble.
- Other inspirational athletes mentioned were Gabby Douglas (the first African American to win the individual All Around at the Olympics in gymnastics), Jessica Ennis-Hill and Ibtihaj Muhammad (the first American athlete to compete for the US in a hijab).

Lastly, some mentioned fitness influencers on Instagram. Many said they found these influencers inspiring because they were relatable, didn't take themselves too seriously, provided motivation and encouragement in their videos and created accessible workout routines, which participants could easily try out themselves. The most commonly mentioned influencer was Chloe Ting, along with others such as Kathy Drayton, Cassey Ho, Natalee B Fitness, Lauren Alexa and Shona Vertue, all on Instagram.

*"One of the main campaigns that is based on women in sport that has inspired me is 'This Girl Can'. They don't only portray super fit women, they also portray normal everyday women, which is one of the most encouraging things... surrounding women with realistic goals and allowing their body types to be represented, showing them that they can also eventually reach higher goals."*  
16-24, White British/Eastern European

*"Most of my inspiration to get active comes from sporting celebrities such as Serena Williams and Maria Folau. They inspire me as I see their perseverance and sheer determination to always strive for the best and pick themselves up even when times are hard. Additionally, both of these women are from ethnic minorities so therefore show me that it is possible for people with my skin colour to be successful not just in sport but in all aspects of life."*  
16-24, Black British/African/Caribbean

*"The first that comes to mind is Chloe Ting. Even though she has clearly been doing this fitness thing for a while, I find her videos relatable. She doesn't pretend to be perfect and includes in her videos that even she still gets tired and winded when exercising. I also like the format of her workout videos, they are very home-friendly, and you don't need to go to the gym or buy equipment."*  
16-24, Black British/African/Caribbean

*"For me when I watched the Olympics, I saw a female fencer who also wore the hijab. I'm someone who also wears the hijab and she's a great role model that you can do anything. Her name is Ibtihaj*

*Mohammed, a gold medalist, she makes me think I can do it too, if I do certain things for my belief it shouldn't stop me which is something I used to think. Now I wear what I'm comfortable in and do my runs."*

35-44, South Asian (Pakistani/Bangladeshi)

## Testing different types of campaigns

Having provided their own examples of campaigns which resonated with them, participants were shown a handful of further examples to gauge what sort of topic and focus would work best across the sample. The campaigns were generally met with positivity with the most popular listed below.

"This Girl Can is back" by Sport England <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kCdrJS1ojD8>

- This campaign was particularly popular, across all groups of women in the Online Community, as it focused on inclusion and showed a broad range of women, reflecting not only ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, but also different body types.
- Participants also noted the range of activities shown, from club level sports down to home workouts and gentle jogs, which they felt was more representative of the type and level of exercise many saw as realistic for themselves.
- The campaign also went beyond sports into daily obstacles faced by women which gave some the impression the ad understood what women had to contend with on a daily basis and made it all the more relatable and empowering.
- Finally, some also noted that the videography, music and general production of the campaign was creative and of high quality, making for highly engaging and memorable viewing.
- Overall, this was the campaign which resonated with the most participants as all women were able to see themselves represented. The motivational and proactive tone left many feeling inspired.

"Better for it" by Nike [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WF\\_HqZrrx0c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WF_HqZrrx0c)

- Some identified with the Nike "Better for it" advert which shows the negative internal monologue some women go through when exercising and their insecurities.
- Participants who liked this campaign felt it was relatable and reminiscent of their own thought patterns while exercising and felt it important to highlight that this is a common experience which many women go through.
- This campaign was particularly effective for women who faced barriers such as low confidence in physical activities and insecurity about feeling judged on their ability or shape. Therefore, showing women pushing through this internal monologue and coming out feeling proud and satisfied was important and powerful to these participants.

"Time Together" by Women in Sport [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_N6sRvtixU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_N6sRvtixU)

- This campaign by Women in Sport, which advocates for mothers to spend quality time with their daughters through exercise, resonated well with mothers.

- They felt it honed in on the importance of being good examples and role models for their daughters and that this was not only a way to be physically active themselves but to introduce their daughters to healthy activity behaviours as well.
- Similarly to “This Girl Can is back”, the campaign took a relaxed and accessible approach to physical activity, focussing on simple activities which got women moving but did not feel daunting.
- The appeal of the campaign was twofold; going beyond the physical activity component and focussing on the bond between mother and daughter and spending quality time together.

“Join the movement” by Sport England <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5EuZfg0OpJE>

- This campaign proved popular due to its playful and creative take on what constituted exercise.
- This aspect particularly resonated with participants who did lower levels of activity who felt it was important to show that physical activity did not have to be serious or difficult and that it was easily done from home.
- Showing families and friends participating together also appealed for this same reason; showing exercise can be relaxed and a social opportunity as well.

“Too beautiful” by Adidas [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CP9rlSYE\\_U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CP9rlSYE_U)

- Though not mentioned as commonly as others, the participants who liked this campaign felt it was powerful, poignant and inspiring in the way it opposed stereotypes about women in combat sports and sports in general.
- However, it was less likely to create immediate behaviour change, as the woman depicted was at an elite level which many could not relate to.

*“This Girl Can Is Back” is inspirational. It features all different types of women so all communities are represented. The message was all women can be involved with sports, no matter their age, ethnicity, background and it can be any sport they get involved with. It did make me think about getting involved with more activities as it came across as a community of women.”*

16-24, South Asian (Indian)

*“I identified with the “Better For It” by Nike Women example, because I also have those types of inner thoughts while doing physical exercise. Even though they can sometimes demotivate me, in the end it feels really good to achieve a goal you had set for yourself.”*

16-24, White British/Eastern European

*“Join the Movement” - by Sport England. Very good ad targeting everyday “real” people to be creative and active in any which way within their homes and means. Most people will be able to relate to “doable” activities and promoting ways to spend time with each other in a fun way.”*

45-50, South Asian (Indian)

## Participants' own ideas on messaging and campaigns

Asked to think about how they would create their own campaigns and messaging aimed at inspiring more women to do physical activity, three main topics came up:

- A common theme was emphasising the physical and mental health benefits of being active and the importance of women taking time to look after themselves and their wellbeing through physical activity.
- Another was around highlighting how social and fun physical activity can be, with many focussing on making exercise seem more attainable, appealing and approachable for those who may find it uninteresting or daunting.
- Equally, a third theme was about mutual support, solidarity and empowerment, focussing on women encouraging, motivating and building each other up and overcoming stereotypes.

Some participants said they would target their campaign specifically at women from their own demographic; in many cases mothers, who they felt had less opportunity to be active due to the demands of childcare, or South Asian, particularly Muslim women, who many fellow participants felt were currently underrepresented with less of a tradition of women being involved in sport or with particular considerations about the environment in which they felt comfortable exercising.

The channels through which participants said they would spread their campaigns included media such as radio, newspapers and social media platforms, as well as more local touchpoints in various communities like religious institutions, community centres, local papers/magazines and fitness centres.

*“My campaign would be for local mums and the message that just because you become a mum, doesn't mean that you shouldn't make or have time for yourself.”*

25-34, South Asian (Pakistani/Bangladeshi)

*“The message that I would tell people is don't let anyone tell you that being a female will hold you back from doing physical activity. Many Asian people in particular perceive sports to be more of a hobby that males take part in.”*

16-24, South Asian (Pakistani/Bangladeshi)

*“My target would be to focus on the middle aged Indian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani women. It is a group that needs physical activity encouragement but is also hard to impact as it is met with mistrust or cultural differences. I would emphasise the health benefits of exercising and the negatives of not doing so. I would also highlight exercise options for home and how they can manage it according to their needs and backgrounds. It does need to be endorsed by a community/religious leader to encourage people and to give it a “thumbs up.”*

45-50, South Asian (Indian)

## RELEVANT ACTIVITIES AND SESSIONS

In combination with insight on who could best influence local women, the types of sessions and activities local women would most likely engage with was also explored in the Online Community.

Given the high proportion of the sample who were inactive or did low levels of activity, it is important to highlight the emphasis put on activities which focused on making exercise sociable, engaging and relaxed, so as not to create barriers around activities feeling pressured or too competitive.

The range of activities suggested by women as ones they would enjoy themselves or which they thought would work well for women like them was broad:

- Dance based activities (e.g. Zumba classes) were suggested by many participants as a way of engaging women who were looking for something fun and which didn't feel too intensive.
- Some suggested running or walking groups, which could make use of freely available outdoor spaces and would be accessible to everyone, given some of the financial barriers faced by women in the area.
- Yoga and swimming were commonly suggested as more relaxing forms of activity which would also be more accessible for beginners.
- Boxing or martial arts were also common ideas. Some thought that it was appealing to give women the opportunity to learn to be more confident and to defend themselves. Additionally, it was seen as a good way to build strength and provide an outlet for stress.
- Less common were team sports, particularly netball, which were often mentioned by those who had already been involved with club sports. Team sports were suggested due to their social nature and the benefit of feeling part of a group. However, many recognised that it could be difficult for less active women to feel confident joining team sports as beginners unless there were dedicated beginner's or casual community sessions.

In terms of how sessions would be run, participants considered the following:

Facilitation:

- Many emphasised that their sessions would be women and girls only so as to foster their participants' confidence and create a safe space.
- Particularly those of Muslim faith also said they would ensure sessions were run by female instructors, which some others also felt was important to bolster representation of women at all levels in sport and make women more at ease with the coach.
- Others, however, were happy to have male facilitators who fostered a supportive environment for women.

Location:

- Some mentioned their ideal location for group walks, jogs or classes in martial arts would be parks as this would provide fresh air, green space and room for plenty of women to meet for free without any costs attached to the venue.
  - Many specified they would still like to be in a quiet corner of the park where women could relax and not feel too exposed.
- Those who were religious suggested their church halls or spaces within mosques or temples, as these would be familiar spaces in which they would likely already know many of the other women, again with little or no costs attached to sessions thus eliminating cost barriers.
  - It was particularly important to some of Muslim faith to be inside and in a private space where they could feel comfortable and separated from men while being active.
- A few mothers suggested sessions being held at parenting groups and children's centres as this would provide a space to take part in physical activity as well as a place they could come with their children.
- Other spaces included community centres and school halls for activities such as dance or zumba which required little equipment and just a big enough space.
- Gyms and leisure centres were mentioned by some who were comfortable in these spaces as they were purpose built as places for exercise and were full of equipment required for anything such as aerobics or fitness classes. A few mentioned that they would like memberships to be discounted for those who could not afford to attend classes and gym sessions but it is worth noting that these types of venue would likely entail barriers around cost or childcare for many others.

*"I would hold yoga sessions for women at my local mosque. I would provide yoga mats, refreshments and the space and security of being away from the opposite sex. I think in this day and age life can be so stressful and overwhelming that sometimes we need to take a moment to forget it all and take care of our mental health and wellbeing."*

25-34, Black British/African/Caribbean

*"I would host an all girls boxing session, to help young girls struggling with body image, self confidence and mental health problems. I would make it available and free of charge. I would host this in a local park or somewhere where it would be convenient for all girls. I would have amateur women boxers/trainers who can help motivate and train these young girls."*

16-24, White British/Eastern European

## INFLUENCERS ON WOMEN AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Though diverse representation of women being active and motivational campaigns helped inspire many women and made physical activity feel attractive and aspirational, campaigns alone may only go so far in leading to an uptake in activity levels.

As illustrated by the COM-B approach employed by London Sport in previous work on less active audiences (Capability, Opportunity, Motivation), it is crucial that local women are not only inspired, leading to increased motivation, but enabled too. Finding solutions to the common barriers such as cost etc. which hold women back from physical activity is equally important in bringing about sustainable behaviour change.

To this effect, a major part of the research focused on what could be considered 'influencers' on local women; organisations or individuals at a local level who could both positively inspire as well as enable women to be more physically active.

Participants were therefore asked who they felt would best be able to motivate themselves and women like them to become more active and why. The results were as follows:

### Friends and family

- Friends and family were seen as strong influencers. Over half of the cohort selected either friends or family as the most likely to inspire them and have an impact on their levels of physical activity.
- The reason for this was that family and friends played big roles in participants' lives and provided day-to-day motivation, accountability and genuine care and interest in participants' health and wellbeing.
- Some said that if they were able to participate with their friends, they would enjoy it more and keep up their motivation.

### Local Councils

- Overall, local councils, and, to some extent, national government, came out as important, if perhaps indirect influencers. None found their local council particularly inspiring but felt their potential to run campaigns and implement practical changes such as more spaces for women or subsidised classes or childcare was significant.

### Religious establishments

- Though religious establishments were not currently seen to be influencers, those who were religious saw a great opportunity for them to take on this role.
- Many mentioned parallels between religious texts and the importance of physical activity in overall wellbeing, emphasising the relevance for places of worship to get involved in supporting such messages.
- Alongside spreading a positive message and inspiring women, many also felt religious establishments had a unique opportunity to help facilitate activity by offering up their spaces for sessions, in environments which felt safe and familiar to women.

### Social media influencers

- As throughout the Online Community, social media influencers were seen by some as having great potential to influence women in regards to physical activity.
- Due to their prominence, aspirational lifestyles and example workouts, some felt they could help inspire as well as provide women with ready made workout routines to try at home.
  - However, there did not appear to be any prominent social media influencers for women to follow from the local area.
  - If there were any local personalities from the target area who are prominent on social media, there would be great opportunity to engage them in order to provide a greater sense of connection to local activity behaviours.

### Leisure centres and gyms

- In a similar way to local councils, leisure centres and gyms were seen as potential influencers in the sense that they could enable greater uptake of physical activity if they provided more sessions for women only or subsidised memberships and childcare facilities.
- However, many emphasised the need for clear communications and awareness building around any such opportunities as those less engaged with gyms and leisure centres might miss such initiatives.

### Sports clubs

- Some found local sports clubs to be important in building up skills and confidence amongst women, fostering team spirit and supportive environments.
- On the other hand, many felt that unless people were already engaged with sports clubs, converting those who were currently inactive into attendees would take time, with work needed on making sports clubs more approachable environments for beginners.

*“The reason my parents are the most influential when it comes to my physical activity is due to the fact that they are the most educated on what I will enjoy and what I am capable of, so they can advise me as such. They are my main supporters and therefore influence me the most as I can put my trust in them.”*

16-24, White British/Eastern European

*“Local Councils are important as I believe they ultimately hold the key to us accessing sessions. They can provide funding for more sustainable long term programmes and infrastructure... Faith organisations potentially have great ability to influence. In Islam I know there is an understanding/concept where we believe our bodies are a gift to us and that we should take care of them. The role they can play is educating and providing facilities.”*

25-34, South Asian (Indian)

*“Local sports clubs/organisations influence me by signposting me to sports/activities I could participate in, but you have to be linked with them already, or actively looking to see what they*

*offer. My friends are my biggest influence - a mix of friendly rivalry, and also suggestions based on what they know I like/am interested in/might like.”*

35-44, Black British/African/Caribbean

## **Influencer consultations**

To further bolster insight into which local organisations could play as important a role as influencers, 12 organisations were identified for interview in order to hear from them about how they and other organisations like them could contribute towards encouraging more women to be physically active.

Through consultation with London Sport, it was decided which types of organisations would be subject to further research and which would not; either because enough was already known about them or because they were not ideally suited to partnership opportunities. Furthermore, other potential influencers were added to the list for further research given their networks or their usefulness to a wider strategy across the target area.

The full list of organisations identified as priority targets for London Sport and for the Influencer Consultation stage is as follows:

- Religious institutions
- Local councils
- Parenting groups
- Sports clubs
- Media organisations
- Independent sports foundations

The topics for discussion centered around the potential ways each organisation could engage and enable more women to be active as well as any support they would need in order to fulfil this role.

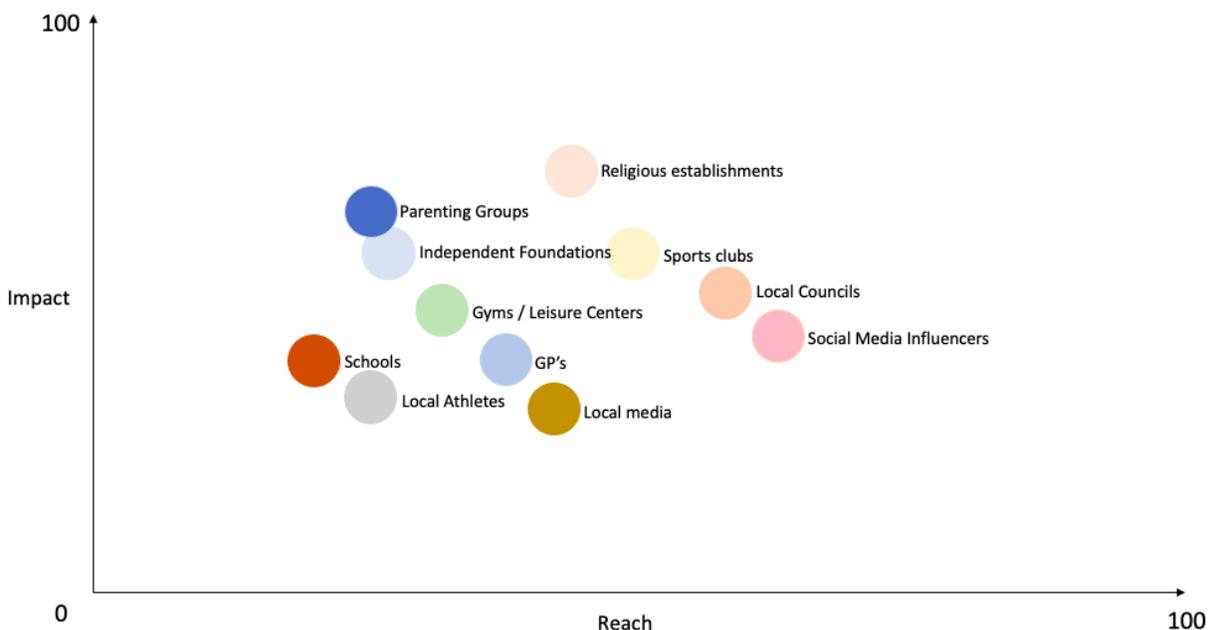
The insight from these consultations has been put together in a collection of case studies which can be found in the dedicated ‘Influencer Case Studies’ document which accompanies this report.

## **The sphere of influence**

The insight from the influencer consultations, combined with initial feedback from participants in the Online Community, was collated to inform the creation of the following ‘Sphere of Influence’, mapping each influencer onto a gradient according to their impact and reach.

Crucially, while some influencers may be positioned lower than others, all are important in a combined approach to engaging more local women in physical activity. Different organisations have distinct roles in either inspiring or enabling women.

This gradient gives an idea of the types of organisations London Sport and its partners could prioritise for partnership and collaboration due to their heightened potential to create behaviour change.



In particular, places of worship/religious establishments and parenting groups had the potential to grow their impact on the local female population. These organisations had the ability to reach and inspire certain demographics as well as help facilitate activity on-site e.g. church halls, community centers.

Sports clubs were further identified as great enablers within the local area as experts in running sessions and having access to coaches, something places of worship or parenting groups would have to build up or fund themselves.

Therefore, there is ample opportunity for influencers to support each other and share resources to collectively provide more, relevant physical activity sessions for women across the area.

## SEGMENTING THE LOCAL FEMALE POPULATION

Alongside the Influencer Consultation stage, the detailed feedback from the Online Community from local women about their needs and barriers around physical activity allowed the sample to be grouped into personas.

Beyond simply looking at dominant demographic factors such as ethnicity and age, the approach was led by identifying the priorities in each group's lives e.g. what they spent a lot of time doing or what was most important to them. This also allowed for the personas to tie in with the concurrent exploration of local influencers; by identifying each groups' priorities, it was easy to pinpoint which influencers, channels and comms would work best.

Taking this approach, four themes emerged within the sample:

1. Faith and religion appeared to play a key role in daily life for some, providing guidance and support. In addition, religious beliefs sometimes impacted where and how women could be physically active, thereby making their experience and needs distinct.
2. Similarly, the research showed that mothers, particularly those with young children, faced very specific and unique barriers to their participation in physical activity and that their role as parents dominated any other aspects of their lives.
3. Engagement with technology and influencers on social media was another distinguishing factor amongst the sample and something which felt dominant and highly influential amongst younger women in particular, presenting clear opportunities for interventions and campaigns focused online.
4. An interest in the local community and wanting to connect and socialise with other women from the area was a trend identified particularly amongst the older end of the sample. These women had often lived in the area the longest and wanted to foster connections across the local community.

Therefore, the final segments identified were as follows:

### Segment 1: Digitally Focused

- Typically younger, best engaged digitally, e.g. clubs who have a presence on social media or can facilitate some sessions online.

### Segment 2: Busy Mothers

- Best engaged through services such as parenting groups and other community organisations who could accommodate children, or by sports clubs who offer family sessions.

### Segment 3: Religiously Oriented

- Best engaged through places of worship who offer a safe space for exercise or through sports clubs who cater towards needs around appropriate kit and women only spaces.

#### Segment 4: Community Fixtures

- Typically older, best engaged through local media and community sessions at sports clubs or public venues which allow for relaxed and social physical activity sessions.

Naturally, there is likely to be some overlap, with women sometimes sitting across one or two segments. Nonetheless, the recommendations and the influencers identified for each segment provide strategies and interventions applicable to any women who fall into each category.

The full detail on segments and personas is provided in the separate 'Segmentation and Personas' document.

Using these personas, London Sport's partners will be able to identify key groups they may want to target and learn from the insight collected on how to do so effectively.

## **CONCLUSION**

Throughout the research process, which has encompassed various stages, it is clear that there are a number of complex barriers which currently impact how often women in the target area of East London engage in physical activity. While some are very personal, there are also structural barriers around safety, cost and facilities which women feel comfortable in.

Through the creation of networks and partnerships between London Sport and local influencers to combine resources and influence amongst the female population, some of these structural barriers could start to be addressed. This, in combination with positive messaging about women and physical activity from local influencers, would help more women to feel motivated, supported and enabled to take up physical activity.