

Women In Orienteering Report



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Research Aim

To examine and identify the reasons that women typically take up orienteering later than males, and stop participating sooner.

Objectives

1. To identify key motivations and factors to women's participation in orienteering.
2. To analyse the barriers to women's participation in orienteering.
3. To provide recommendations for increasing the number of women in orienteering.

Rationale

British Orienteering has identified that whilst there is a relatively strong gender balance in the sport, both in terms of membership and participation (60:40 male:female), when returning to the sport in the mid 30's women typically start later than their male counterparts. In addition, once people start to drop out from the sport again around mid-50's women tend to drop out sooner than their male counterparts.

Research Approach

The research and final report are largely underpinned by qualitative research supported by a small amount quantitative data. The interpretive approach is beneficial to the research by focusing on explanations over expectations. This allows beliefs, values and behaviours to be analysed, and enables a deeper analysis of opinions relating to individual experiences within orienteering.

Research Design

Questionnaires

The first research method that was used was questionnaires. These were used to generate primary data and help to identify some of the key themes to women's participation in orienteering. The questionnaire was delivered through the online survey software, Survey Monkey. Adopting the use of questionnaires was beneficial to the research as it meant that it could be distributed to a large sample size and reach various geographical locations. The questionnaire contained both open and closed ended questions, which allowed different types of answers to be obtained.

The research adopted a purposive sampling technique, as the sample was selected on elements of previous knowledge such as gender and age. The distribution of the questionnaire took place by;

1. Social media (Facebook and Twitter)
2. British Orienteering website
3. E-news

Sending the survey via the use of a gate keeper helped to increase the validity of the results by reducing the level of contact with the researcher.

For the size of the research the target was to receive 100 responses to the questionnaire, however the questionnaire generated **373 responses**. Upon the return of the questionnaires the responses were analysed using a coding technique. This attempted to display concepts and factors which link to the research. The coding categories were based around the research questions. Following the analysis of the questionnaire data participants for the interviews were selected.

Participants who completed the questionnaire and left an email address were then entered into a random prize draw to receive an £20 Amazon voucher. This was used as an incentive for participants to complete the questionnaire.

Interviews

The second research method used was interviews. The interviews were used as a way of developing further understanding into women's participation in orienteering. A semi-structured format was adopted for the interviews around the set themes of why females started late or dropped out early of orienteering.

The participants for the interviews were again chosen using a purposive sampling technique based upon their answers provided in the questionnaires. Upon identifying the individuals to speak to, emails were then sent out asking the participants if they were willing to take part in an interview. There was an aim of conducting two types of interviews with 5 participants in each category.

The research did however encounter an issue with the number of respondents willing to take part in the interviews. Further issues relate to some of the respondents to the questionnaire not leaving a contact email address, which meant that we were not able to contact them regarding the interviews. However, **5 telephone interviews** did take place, and were recorded and later transcribed.

Key themes of interest were then identified from the interviews and compiled with the questionnaire to generate the data for the results.

Results and Discussion

From conducting an analysis of the data generated from both the questionnaire and the interview several themes have been identified that relate to women's participation in orienteering. These themes will now be discussed in terms of key motivators and factors to women participation in orienteering.

The Role of The Family

The research has identified that the role of the family can be seen as a significant driver in terms of women participation in orienteering. **48%** of those who completed the online questionnaire stated that they first started participating in orienteering as a significant member of their family had encourage them, or they were looking for an activity that could be enjoyed by the whole family. This is further supported by the results of the interviews with participants stating that:

"We were looking for a sport that all of us could do"

"If my partner had not taken part then I probably wouldn't have found out about it, or taken my children along"

"My husband was great at encouraging me to come along"

Therefore, it would be reasonable to suggest that the family can act as influencer in terms of participation and this can help to endorse certain behaviours, such as encouraging initial participation.

It can be identified that a motivating factor for some women who start participating in orienteering later in life can be a result of a life stage, such as having a family and the need to do an activity together. Respondents to the questionnaire stated that:

"We were going along as family, so I soon started having a go myself"

"We were looking for a sporting activity where the whole family could participate at the same event"

Whilst the role of the family is clearly a significant factor in recruiting female participants into the sport the research highlights a slight concern regarding altered motivations for women. **17%** of responses to the questionnaire referred to the family as a reason why their motivations to orienteer had changed. There were two themes identified here; those who now orienteered to support their family, or those who now orienteered for themselves now that children had grown up. It would be reasonable to suggest that those women who fail to identify other motivating factors for their

own participation in the sport may be more susceptible to dropping out earlier once their family no longer requires support.

Motivations to Orienteer

67% of respondents to the questionnaire stated that having fun and enjoying themselves was of the most importance for motivating them to participate in orienteering. Whereas **41%** ranked improving health and fitness as a large importance.

Exploration of this further during the interviews found that keeping fit which was something that women used as a motivator to take part in orienteering.

"See it as a way of keeping me active and fit"

"It was also good way of keeping me fit"

Additionally, participants felt that a benefit of orienteering is that it allows you to take part regardless of your fitness levels.

"I like how I could go at my pace and didn't always have to run"

"I'm not like the world's best runner but I found it quite enjoyable that you don't have to be the best runner as long as you can read a map. In some of my events I actually beat some of the faster runners, which is quite good!"

Altered Motivations

The research found that **70%** of respondents stated that their motivations to orienteer have altered since they first started participating. As previously stated factors relating to the family were ones of significance.

Furthermore, the largest element that was referred to within the comments related to the level of competition, with **29%** of respondents stating this as a reason why their motivations had changed.

A further breakdown into this shows that **16%** of women have become less competitive, whereas **13%** of women have become more competitive.

Competition

The element of competition is one that was raised numerous times throughout the interviews and as a result of the online questionnaire.

During the questionnaire when participants were asked if they felt you had to compete in orienteering **56%** of respondents disagreed, with only 10% either strongly agreeing or agreeing. This therefore highlights that the majority of women do not feel that there is a pressure around the need to compete in orienteering.

Furthermore, responses collected from the interviews support the idea that the competition element is relevant to each individual in terms of its importance, and is often based around personal challenge and development.

"I don't really care how I do relative to other people"

"I just focus on myself and what I am doing"

"I'm more focused on wanting to be competitive with myself, not other people"

Further themes to come from the research around the element of competition, is the need to highlight the non-elite and non-competitive side to beginners and those who are not already involved within the sport.

"I know it's important to be competitive but not everyone wants to be and it can still be enjoyed by everyone regardless of that"

"I think you need to encourage the enjoyment factor first, then being competitive can follow."

The idea was raised that that the elite competitive side of orienteering can sometimes over shadow the other forms.

"I strongly think at the moment that British Orienteering is far more focused on the elite and competitive end"

Stop Participating

When the respondents who no longer participate in orienteering were asked to identify why they stopped participating **39%** stated that reasons relating to health issue were the main issue.

Furthermore **52%** of those who are still participating stated that health issues or injury would be a factor that may stop them from orienteering in the future.

In the interviews when participants were asked if the risk of injury from orienteering was something that concerned, them the majority of responses concluded that it would not be enough to stop them from taking part but may alter their approach. For example, one participant stated that:

"It doesn't stop me doing it, but it does affect the way that I approach orienteering"

Another stated that:

"I do what I feel I want to do and what I feel is safe. If I need to take a path to avoid some rough terrain, I'll do it."

Therefore, it could be suggested that developing an injury is a factor that may stop women from orienteering in the future, however the risk of developing an injury it is unlikely to alter their motivations towards participation.

Positive First Experience

The relationship between receiving a positive first experience and the correlation of retention is significantly important. **100%** of the participants who were interviewed stated that receiving a positive first experience of orienteering was a driving factor to their participation. One participant stated that:

"I would say I had nice first experience, and I do think that's important else I wouldn't have gone back."

Another stated that:

"In the first stage is was a very positive experience, . . . everyone was very friendly which encouraged me to join the club initially."

Further analysis into what defined a positive experience highlighted that participants felt people could make or break the experience. It is therefore important to have someone who is friendly and welcoming to encourage beginners, and to support them to return.

Childcare

Only **12%** of respondents to the questionnaire stated that they would orienteer more if there was childcare available at events. However, a breakdown of this 12% showed that **78%** of the respondents were aged 35-45. Therefore, it would reasonable to suggest that the issue of childcare is more prominent for women in this age bracket, but overall not having access to childcare is not seen as a significant barrier for most women.

Further analysis of this in the interviews has shown that the women feel that it can be straight forward to take part with children due to having string courses and appropriate colour coded courses, as well as the option of split starts.

Participants felt that the family nature of the sport meant that it was something they could all take part in together, which reduced the issue of childcare being a barrier.

Marketing and Representation

14% of respondents to the questionnaire stated that they felt more could be done to encourage and maintain female participation in orienteering by increasing the levels of awareness for the sport and the surrounding marketing.

A further examination of this during the interviews identified that participants felt more could be done to raise the profile of the sport by showcasing that it can be enjoyed by a range of people and abilities.

"you can carry on doing it well into your 80's, or when you are 10"

"Showcase that fact that it's suitable for the whole family, and mum can get involved as well as the kids"

Furthermore **64%** of respondents to the questionnaire either disagreed or strongly disagreed that there is a lack of female role models in orienteering. Therefore, it would be reasonable to suggest that there is need to encourage the use of these role models to inspire other women. One of the participants from the interview stated that:

"People that women can aspire to, and they don't need to be the fittest fastest people, you know. Even those with children or older people will look at and think yeah if they can I can."

Recommendations

Increase levels of beginner friendly coaching sessions

- Encourage clubs to offer more coaching sessions, which are specific for adults, to provide the opportunity to develop orienteering skills. Being adult specific will ensure that the focus is centred on the adult's development.
- Adult's sessions to run alongside junior sessions to retain the focus of being able to do something as a family, but in different groups.
- More taster and drop in sessions that allow participation without the concern of over commitment being required.

Ensure there are appropriate levels of support in clubs for women

- Offer training and guidance for front line club members on how to ensure that the experience is enjoyable, and therefore participants want to return. Areas for guidance to focus on should include:
 - Encouraging a consistently reassuring experience
 - Identify individuals who are designated to meet and greet.
 - Personalised contact
 - Opportunities for feedback
 - Communication, before during and after.

Alter the message and the way orienteering is promoted

- Promote the non-competitive side as well as the competition element by highlighting the internal rewards of taking part.
- Promote the additional benefits that can be received from the sport in terms of what might be important for that target group. Themes to focus on should include:
 - Focus shift to feeling good afterwards
 - Improving own health and fitness
 - Fun and enjoyment
 - Personal progression

Promote and inspire through role models

- Identify individuals who have might have particular success stories.
- Write case study articles for the website about what individuals have achieved.
 - Show what is possible by inspiring with relatable influencers.
 - Frame around individual success and progression in orienteering.

Questionnaire Summary

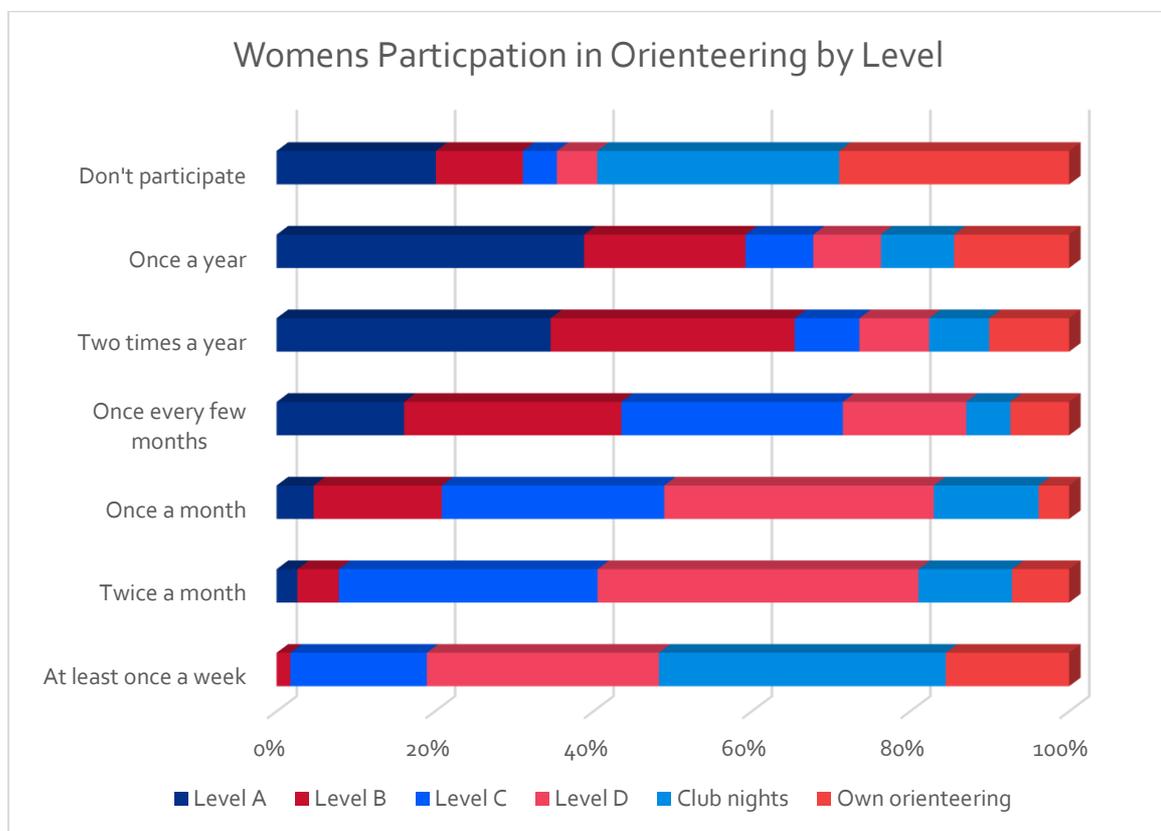
86% of respondents to the questionnaire were members of an orienteering club, compared to 14% who were not.

94% had orienteered in the last 12 months.

39% or women who stopped participating in orienteering did so because of factor relating to health and injury.

48% started participating orienteering as result of the family.

Level of female participation in orienteering:



67% ranked having fun and enjoying themselves as a big importance to motivating participation.

41% ranked improving health and fitness as a big importance to motivating participation.

70% started that their motivations to participate have altered since they first started.

16% of women have become less competitive since starting orienteering.

13% of women have become more competitive since starting orienteering.

61% of women have not taken a prolonged break (1+ years) from orienteering.

93% of women said they would recommend orienteering to a female friend.