

Women, Outdoor Gyms, and Spatial Equality in the UK

Key factors that ensure women feel comfortable, safe and equally represented in outdoor fitness environments



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Executive Summary

Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in outdoor fitness trends worldwide. This growth is driven by the recognition of the physical and mental health benefits of exercise, the demand for affordable fitness options, and a greater appreciation for outdoor spaces.

Despite the proliferation of outdoor gyms, participation rates among teen girls and women remain disproportionately low compared to other demographics. This disparity stems from unique challenges they face in fitness environments and their exclusion from research, public policy, and planning processes. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct further research to ensure these spaces are inclusive and beneficial for everyone.

This whitepaper investigates the accessibility, utilization, and preferences of outdoor gyms among teen girls and women in the UK, emphasizing the importance of spatial equality. It examines their experiences and usage patterns of outdoor fitness facilities, identifying the barriers they face in accessing and utilizing these spaces.

Leveraging existing literature on girls' and women's participation in physical activities, an online survey titled "Women and Gyms: Experiences and Aspirations" was conducted. The survey explores factors influencing their engagement with outdoor gyms, including accessibility, equipment preferences, privacy, and safety concerns. This analysis reveals how these factors intersect with broader societal issues of gender inequality, affecting the ability of teen girls and women to access fitness parks and engage in physical activity.

Key Findings

- **Accessibility and Convenience:** A significant number of respondents emphasized the importance of proximity to their homes and other park facilities. Outdoor gyms that are easily accessible and located near amenities are more likely to be used.
- **Privacy and Safety:** Privacy and safety concerns are major barriers. Women prefer secluded areas within parks for a more comfortable workout environment.
- **Social Support and Professional Guidance:** Exercising with friends and having access to group fitness sessions or professional trainers can significantly enhance engagement.
- **Economic Considerations:** The cost-free nature of outdoor gyms is a significant motivator, particularly amidst rising living costs.

Results

- Proximity to home (**59%**) and the positive effects of exercising outdoors (**58%**) are the strongest motivators for using outdoor gyms.
- **37%** of respondents prefer to workout outdoors, while **56%** prefer indoor gyms.
- **35%** have cancelled gym memberships due to cost, highlighting the financial appeal of outdoor gyms.
- Preferences for gym locations within parks show a strong inclination towards more secluded areas (**38%**) and areas near other facilities (**22%**).

Conclusion

The findings underscore the need for outdoor gyms that are strategically placed and designed to address the specific needs of women. Privacy, safety, accessibility, and social support are critical factors that can influence the usage of these facilities by teen girls and women. By addressing these factors, outdoor gyms can become more inclusive and supportive environments that encourage regular physical activity.

Implications

- **Urban Planning and Policy:** Integrating outdoor gyms into community planning with a focus on accessibility, safety, and privacy can promote greater use among women.
- **Design and Amenities:** Outdoor gyms should include a variety of equipment to cater to different preferences and should be located near other park amenities.
- **Community Programmes:** Offering group fitness sessions and professional guidance can enhance the appeal and effectiveness of outdoor gyms.
- **Economic Benefits:** Promoting the cost-free nature of outdoor gyms can attract individuals who are economically disadvantaged, thereby supporting public health initiatives.

This whitepaper advocates for a holistic approach to creating more inclusive, equitable, and empowering outdoor fitness environments for women. By addressing their specific needs and concerns, these improvements will not only promote physical health but also contribute significantly to their social and psychological well-being.

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Introduction

The past decade has witnessed a substantial increase in outdoor fitness trends globally, specifically after the COVID-19 restrictions period (Johnston *et al.*, 2023), which revealed the significance of regular physical activity (WHO, 2022). Outdoor gyms are becoming popular in Europe, America, and other regions, reflecting a global shift towards promoting public health and utilizing the outdoors as a new leisure space (Nałęcz *et al.*, 2018). Many parks have installed outdoor fitness equipment to encourage people to participate in fitness exercises and structured physical activities in open public spaces (Lee *et al.*, 2018).

The rise in outdoor fitness trends are supported by a large body of research (WHO 2020a, 2022b), which is particularly beneficial for girls and women. The outdoor gyms provide them with cost-effective alternatives to prohibitively expensive traditional indoor gyms. However, they often face unique challenges in fitness and exercise environments, and their participation rate in such activities is lower than men (Turnock, 2021). They frequently encounter long-standing structural inequalities, making them feel unwelcome in outdoor public gyms originally designed for men (Rogers *et al.*, 2022). Studies reveal that women are less likely to engage in sports or physical activities alongside men (Bodenner, 2015).

This whitepaper explores spatial equality in relation to girls and women's use of outdoor gyms in the UK, aiming to understand and address the issues and challenges faced by them in accessing outdoor gyms and participating in physical activities. An online survey was also conducted in the UK of teen girls and women to explore their experience in use of outdoor gyms, their preferences for the types of exercise equipment they want to use, and the design of outdoor fitness spaces to fully support their participation.

The whitepaper is divided into sections covering global trends in outdoor gyms for girls and women, local realities of fulfilling their unique needs, and proposed solutions for their participation and equality in the UK.

Global Trends in Outdoor Fitness

The global wellness industry has experienced significant growth, with outdoor fitness emerging as a dominant trend. Cities across Europe, America, parts of Asia, and other regions have invested in outdoor fitness equipment to promote physical activity and combat sedentary lifestyles (Johnston *et al.*, 2023). However, the progress on expanding physical activity among all age groups on a global scale has been sluggish, primarily as a result of insufficient awareness and investment (WHO, 2018).

The level of physical activity is affected by multiple factors such as cultural, social, religious, health, and other conditions. In many nations, females, older individuals, disadvantaged communities, and those with disabilities and

chronic illnesses all encounter fewer chances to participate in safe, affordable, and suitable physical activity programmes and spaces (WHO, 2018).

During the pandemic, the global fitness industry saw a 37% decline in spending, and many gyms and fitness centres closed permanently. It is steadily recovering to pre-pandemic levels and there has been a shift to online fitness platforms and/or joining outdoor public gyms (Johnston *et al.*, 2023). Yet over 80% of adolescents and 25% of adults are not involved in the minimum physical activity recommended by the WHO, and it affects everyone, individuals, their families, healthcare, and society (WHO, 2022).

In the UK, the rise of outdoor gyms aligns with national health policies aimed at increasing physical activity levels among the population. According to Sport England's Active Lives Adult Survey (2022), there has been a notable increase in the use of outdoor spaces for exercise, particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Benefits of Physical Activity

Regular fitness activities are widely recognized as cost-effective approach and protective element in the prevention and treatment of the major non-communicable diseases (NCDs), specifically heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and breast and colon cancer. It also aids in preventing other significant NCD risk factors such as high blood pressure, being overweight or obese, and delay in dementia (WHO, 2018a, 2020b, 2022c).

Increasing physical activity would not only improve individual health and well-being but also contribute to broader societal, economic, and environmental benefits. Being physically active is essential for reducing the burden on healthcare systems and plays a role in promoting social inclusion, gender equity, employability, and education (WHO, 2018a, 2020b, 2022c).

WHO (2020) identified various benefits of engaging in physical fitness for people of all ages such as improved physical, mental, cognitive, bone, and cardiometabolic health. It recommended that children and adolescents should engage in moderate-intensity physical activity across the week and vigorous-intensity physical activity for at least 3 days a week.

Benefits of Outdoor Gyms

The installation of outdoor gym equipment has been associated with increased usage of parks. According to Furber et al. (2014), many park users have reported visiting parks more frequently since the introduction of such equipment. This suggests that outdoor gyms can motivate individuals to engage in physical activity and spend more time in outdoor spaces. Additionally, outdoor gyms provide opportunities for social interaction, potentially enhancing the overall experience for participants (Johnson et al., 2019).

Outdoor fitness gyms offer the benefit of accessibility, being freely available to everyone, unlike expensive indoor gyms. They are purpose-built to cater to the individual needs of people of all ages, allowing everyone to participate in physical activities and resistance training (Marcos-Pardo et al., 2024). Families can have a fun time while engaging in a workout at outdoor gyms (WHO, 2018a, 2022c).

Moreover, many people prefer to work out outside because of the many benefits it provides, including lower blood pressure, reduced stress, and better sleep. Breathing fresh air and getting natural light can rejuvenate and invigorate both the body and mind. Additionally, working out outdoors allows people to connect with nature, which is especially important since busy schedules often prevent them from enjoying the outdoors.

Outdoor Gym Infrastructure

Providing outdoor fitness equipment in public parks and green spaces is essential for encouraging physical activity and promoting a healthy lifestyle. Infrastructure for outdoor gyms supporting physical activity can be as simple as well-designed, accessible, and secure. Public spaces like parks and squares are widely utilized for exercise and recreational activities, particularly in areas lacking private fitness facilities.

Outdoor fitness equipment is specially designed for outdoor use to integrate physical strength training into daily routines and enhance the exercise experience (Marcos-Pardo et al., 2024). There are over 23,000 free outdoor fitness facilities globally, offering amenities like pull-up bars, elliptical machines, stationary bikes, and other basic equipment. These facilities are especially popular in Latin America, Europe, and some parts of Asia such as China, South Korea, Singapore, and India.

Typically, the government establishes and runs such infrastructure often under the public-partner-partnerships with the private fitness industry. Countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and Ireland use such models to develop recreation and exercise facilities (Johnston et al., 2023).

Women's participation in physical activities is increasing...

The health benefits of girls' and women's participation in physical activities are well established which can prevent various non-communicable diseases and have a positive impact on overall health. For older women, physical activities can contribute to preventing cardiovascular diseases and reduce the effects of osteoporosis. It can also aid in the prevention and management of chronic and degenerative diseases associated with ageing. Additionally, participation in physical activities can provide mental health benefits and promote psychological well-being for women of all ages. ■

Motivation for Women in Outdoor Gyms

The motivations for women using outdoor gyms are diverse and influenced by various factors. Young girls and women are driven by the desire to improve and maintain their physical fitness, manage their weight, and enhance their mental well-being. Social factors, such as the opportunity to participate in group activities and being in a supportive environment, also play a crucial role in encouraging regular use of outdoor gyms (Duffey et al., 2021; Molanorouzi et al., 2015). Additionally, the cost-effective nature of outdoor gyms, compared to traditional gyms, which can be prohibitively expensive, is also a significant motivator for women to participate in outdoor gym activities.

According to the Sport England (2023) report, 44% of UK adults engage in some form of muscle-strengthening exercise twice a week, with 10.4 million having gym memberships. The rate of female gym memberships has grown across the UK, specifically in recent years. A nationwide campaign, "This Girl Can," has also been initiated since 2015 to motivate teen girls and women to participate in physical activities.

Participation of Girls and Women

Understanding how girls and women perceive outdoor gyms is crucial for addressing their specific needs and concerns. Research indicates that gender disparities persist in fitness environments (Joseph & Maddock, 2016), particularly for women, disabled individuals, and people from lower socio-economic backgrounds (SportEngland, 2023). These spaces often reinforce traditional gender roles, with boys predominantly engaging in active play while girls tend to be passive observers (Rogers et al., 2022).

Women remain less likely to be active than men, with a notable gap in both activity levels and perceptions of capability and opportunity to engage in physical activity. Men are more likely to feel able and have the opportunity to be active and find sports enjoyable compared to women (SportEngland, 2023). Girls and women prefer to engage in activities at playgrounds, walking paths, and pools. While boys and men participate in moderate to vigorous physical activities (MVPA) in football fields, gyms, and skate parks (Deborah et al., 2021).

The concerns remain over the accessibility of gyms and perceived barriers to entry for those not fitting the mould of the stereotypical muscle-bound male fitness fanatic. It is argued that women feel more confident, empowered, and secure in women-only spaces while participating in physical activities in outdoor gyms (Kerpen, 2019). They often express a desire for more inclusive and welcoming environments where they feel comfortable and safe exercising.

Research Problem Statement

Despite the significance of engaging in exercises in outdoor gyms, particularly for young girls and women (Piercy et al., 2018), there is a research gap that considers the challenges faced by them and their preferences for participating in outdoor fitness spaces. This whitepaper aims to address research gap by exploring the issues and challenges faced by girls and women's in using outdoor gyms in the UK. By examining their experiences and preferences to devise strategies for creating more inclusive and equitable public fitness spaces. This research will provide valuable insights for policymakers, urban planners, and community organizations working to promote physical activity and health among women.

Historic Inequalities constraining women's participation in physical activities...

Despite the growing recognition of the health benefits of engaging in physical activities, the enthusiastic participation and empowerment of girls and women are hindered by gender-based discrimination in sports and physical activities. Women are frequently excluded or segregated from participating in these activities, and their involvement is not always valued equally. Gender stereotypes are sometimes perpetuated through media coverage, and issues like exploitation and harassment are associated with perceptions of male dominance. ■

Barriers for Women in Outdoor Gyms

The importance of participating in physical fitness activities has been well-researched (Hull et al., 2021). However, there is a lack of attention to young girls and women in research, planning, and policy processes (Feldman et al., 2022). Studies have identified various barriers that girls and women face, including time constraints, safety concerns, privacy preferences, social expectations, and the perceived male dominance of public exercise spaces (Bostock, 2020). The underrepresentation of women in outdoor fitness spaces is influenced by several factors, highlighting the complex interplay between gender, space, and perception.

1. Accessible Locations

Women often feel unsafe exercising in public spaces and choose not to use outdoor gyms, particularly if they are isolated or poorly lit, secluded, or poorly kept areas. Women's feeling unsafe in parks is amplified particularly after dark, and their age factor and sexuality make them more at risk of harassment. Improving lighting, increasing security visibility, installing help points, and having more staff around would help women feel more comfortable using parks on their own.

2. Place and Equipment Design

Outdoor fitness equipment refers to any type of equipment or tool utilized during physical activity to manage body weight, enhance physical endurance, and build muscle strength and endurance. The equipment found in an outdoor gym that is primarily designed for male body strength might be daunting to girls and women.

3. Privacy and Social Norms

The open nature of outdoor gyms can lead to feelings of being watched or judged, particularly for women concerned about body image or conforming to societal expectations of feminine behaviour (Duffey *et al.*, 2021). Women often report experiencing harassment in public spaces, and outdoor gyms, particularly if poorly lit or isolated, can heighten these concerns. It was noted that gendered violence and sexist attitudes are the basic causes of girls' and women's feelings of being unsafe in parks.

4. Safety and Security

While actual crime rates in outdoor gyms are generally low, it is important to acknowledge that women's perception of safety is a valid concern. To address this, we can work on improving lighting and security measures at outdoor gyms, especially during early morning or late evening hours (Duffey *et al.*, 2021). Implementing CCTV cameras, emergency call buttons, and having security staff present can help alleviate women's feelings of vulnerability and make outdoor gyms more inclusive and safe for everyone.

5. Social Support and Motivation

Women might feel uncomfortable exercising alone, particularly in unfamiliar or male-dominated spaces. Group fitness classes or community initiatives specifically designed for women are often lacking in outdoor gym settings.

These factors, when combined with broader societal issues of gender inequality, contribute to a sense of exclusion for many women, hindering their access to the physical, mental, and social benefits of outdoor fitness.

Girls and women are generally less active, and their physical activity tends to decrease with age...

WHO (2018a) defined physical activity as any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure, including activities during leisure time, transport, or work. For children and adolescents, the WHO recommends 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily, while adults should aim for 150–300 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity or 75–150 minutes of vigorous-intensity physical activity weekly to maintain good health.

Importance of Physical Activity

Increasing physical activity would not only improve individual health and well-being but also contribute to broader societal, economic, and environmental benefits. Being physically active is essential for reducing the burden on healthcare systems and plays a role in promoting social inclusion, gender equity, employability, and education (WHO, 2018a, 2020b, 2022c).

Consequences of Physical Inactivity

The lack of physical activity has significant individual, societal, and economic costs (GWI, 2023a, 2023b). It directly contributes to the increase of chronic diseases and is a leading cause of preventable deaths. The COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to sedentary lifestyle and exacerbated this issue (Park *et al.*, 2022). If current inactivity rates continue, it is estimated to cause 500 million new cases of preventable diseases, leading to \$300 billion in treatment costs from 2020–2030. However, increasing physical activity rates could potentially add \$6.0–8.6 trillion to the global GDP.

Research Methodology

This research will be conducted online survey with SurveyMonkey across the UK during the month of April and May, 2024.

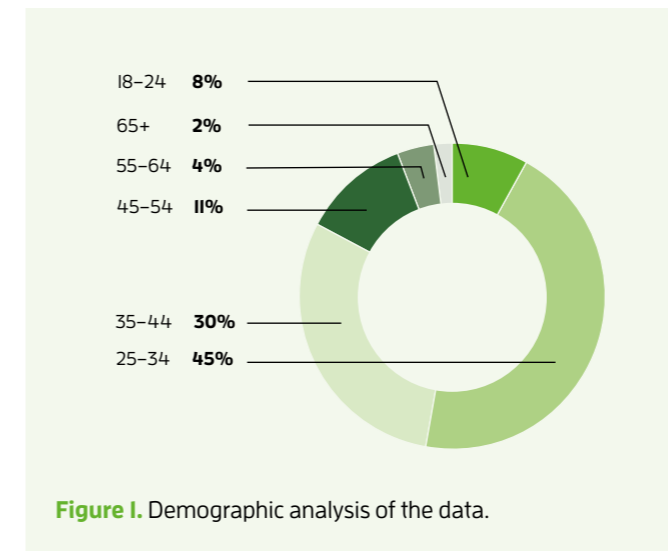
The survey was designed to gather comprehensive data on women's and girls' preferences and experiences with outdoor gyms. It employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data for the analysis. The survey covered the following key areas including the participants' preferences for outdoor gym location, equipment and routine.

Survey Results

The survey was conducted to collect thorough information about the preferences and experiences of women and girls regarding outdoor gyms. A total of 159 respondents participated in the survey, sharing their experiences and expectations regarding outdoor gyms for fitness activities. The survey consisted of eleven questions, including one demographic question, all of which were answered by all respondents. The following is a detailed analysis of each question asked to the respondents.

Respondent Age Group

The survey results for Question 1, "What is your age group?" provide a demographic breakdown of the respondents. The majority of respondents fall into the 25–34 age group (45%), followed by the 35–44 age group (30%), and the 45–54 age group (11%), with 71, 48, and 18 respondents respectively. Here is a detailed demographic analysis of the data:



Young Adults (18–24)

This age group comprises the youngest respondents with a low rate of participation (8%) and only 13 out of 159 participants. While they represent a smaller percentage of the total, their participation is crucial for understanding the needs and preferences of young adults.

Young Professionals (25–34)

Given that the largest group is aged 25–34, outdoor gyms should focus on features that appeal to this demographic which includes young professionals and early-career individuals who may be balancing work and personal life, convenient locations near residential areas and workplaces, flexible hours, and facilities that support a quick but effective workout.

Mid-Life Fitness (35–44)

The second-largest group, with 48 respondents, consists of individuals likely in the midst of their careers and possibly managing family responsibilities. This demographic may prioritize fitness as part of a healthy lifestyle and stress management. For those aged 35–44, outdoor gyms can offer family-friendly environments and programmes that can engage both adults and their children. Equipment that supports a variety of fitness goals, from cardio to strength training, can help meet their diverse needs.

Older Adults (45+)

While older age groups 45–54 (11%), 55–64 (3%), and 65+ (2%) are less represented, their needs are distinct and should not be overlooked. Providing low-impact, easy-to-use equipment and promoting exercises that focus on mobility, balance, and strength can encourage their participation.

Strength Training Equipment Usage

The survey results for Question 2, "What strength training equipment do you use most for working out?" provide valuable insights into the preferences and trends among girls and women regarding strength training equipment in outdoor gyms. The most popular strength training equipment includes the Lat Pull-Down, Leg Press, Chest Press, and Squat Machine, targeting upper and lower body strength. Moderately popular equipment includes Plyo Boxes and Shoulder Presses, while Pull-Up Bars and unspecified equipment are less popular. Here is an analysis of the data:

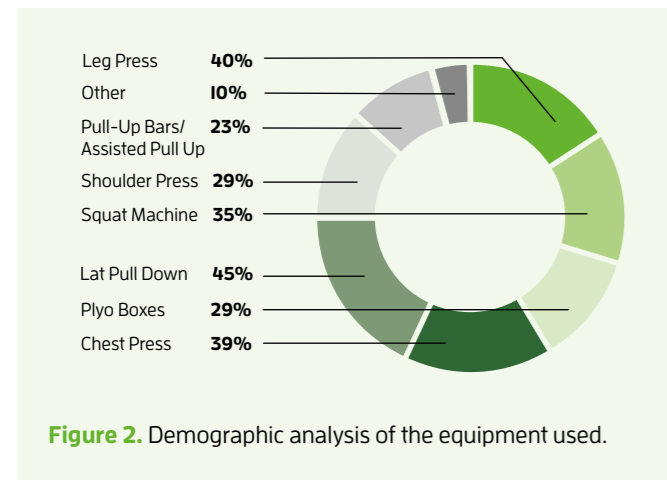


Figure 2. Demographic analysis of the equipment used.



Most Popular Equipment

The most favoured strength training equipment includes the Lat Pull-Down, Leg Press, Chest Press, and Squat Machine, targeting various muscle groups. This reflects a focus on upper and lower body strength training for overall fitness and muscle development.

Lat Pull-Down

The Lat Pull-Down machine is the most frequently (45%) used piece of strength training equipment among the respondents. This indicates a strong preference for exercises targeting the upper back and latissimus dorsi muscles, which are crucial for overall upper body strength and posture.

Leg Press

The Leg Press is the second most popular (40%) piece of equipment, highlighting the importance of lower body strength training. This machine is favoured for its ability to isolate and target the quadriceps, hamstrings, and glutes.

Chest Press

The Chest Press is also widely used (39%), suggesting that many women prioritize upper body strength, specifically targeting the pectoral muscles, shoulders, and triceps.

Squat Machine

The Squat Machine's (35%) popularity underscores the emphasis on lower body exercises. Squats are fundamental for building overall strength and improving functional fitness.

Moderately Popular Equipment

The Plyo Boxes and Shoulder Press are popular equipment in outdoor gyms, as indicated by respondents interested in plyometric training, explosive power, and upper body strength for functional movements and aesthetics.

Plyo Boxes

The usage of Plyo Boxes is moderately popular (29%) among respondents, indicating an interest in plyometric training for developing explosive power and agility. This type of training is beneficial for enhancing athletic performance and cardiovascular fitness and balance.

Shoulder Press

The usage of the Shoulder Press machine is also moderately popular (29%), showing a focus on developing deltoid and upper body strength, which is essential for various functional movements and overall upper body aesthetics.

Less Popular Equipment

The Pull-Up Bars and some unspecified equipment are less popular among respondents either due to their challenging nature or the complexity of specialized machines.

Pull-Up Bars

The relatively low usage (23%) of Pull-Up Bars may reflect the challenging nature of pull-ups, which require significant upper body strength and technique. The availability of assisted pull-up machines can help bridge this gap by providing support.

Other Equipment

The use of other equipment (10%) may include unspecified equipment, indicating a diverse range of preferences that may not be covered by the listed options. This could include free weights, resistance bands, or specialized machines.

The analysis of the survey data on strength training equipment usage highlights the diverse preferences and training needs of women using outdoor gyms. By incorporating a variety of popular and supportive equipment, and continuously engaging with users for feedback, outdoor gyms can create a more inclusive and effective fitness environment.

Cardio Equipment Usage

The survey results for Question 3, "Which Cardio products do you use most in your gym routine?", provide insights into the cardio equipment preferences among women. Here is an analysis of the data:

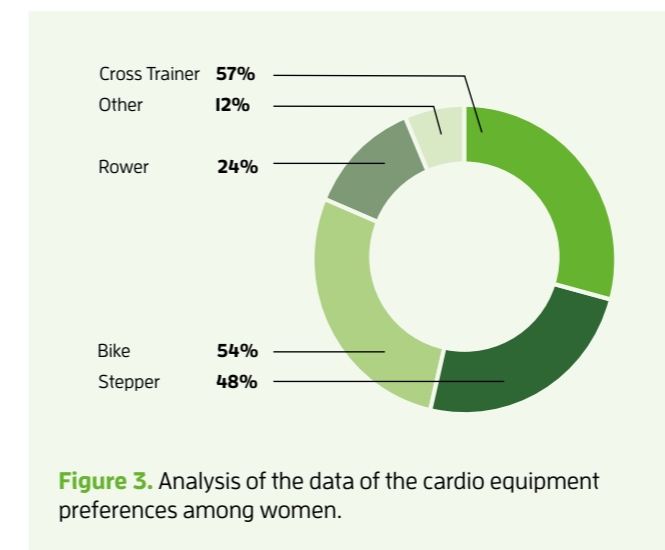


Figure 3. Analysis of the data of the cardio equipment preferences among women.

Most Popular Equipment

Cross Trainer

The Cross Trainer, also known as an elliptical machine, is the most popular piece of cardio equipment (57%) among the respondents. This indicates a preference for low-impact cardio workouts that are easy on the joints while providing a full-body workout.

Bike

The Bike is also highly favoured (54%), whether stationary or spinning. This suggests that many women prefer cycling as a form of cardio exercise, which can be adjusted for various intensity levels and is effective for both endurance and interval training.

Stepper

The Stepper, or Stair Climber, is another popular choice (48%) among women participants. This equipment targets the lower body and provides a high-intensity workout that is beneficial for building strength and endurance in the legs and glutes.

Moderately Popular Equipment

Rower

The Rowing Machine, though less popular (24%) than the other options, is still used by a significant portion of respondents. Rowing provides a comprehensive workout that combines cardio with strength training, targeting multiple muscle groups, including the back, legs, and core.

Other Equipment

This category includes unspecified cardio equipment that respondents may use (12%), indicating a diverse range of preferences not captured by the listed options. This could include treadmills, jump ropes, or other cardio machines.

The analysis of cardio equipment usage provides a clear picture of the preferences among women using outdoor gyms. By focusing on the most popular equipment, offering a variety of options, and ensuring accessibility, outdoor gyms can create environments that encourage regular physical activity and contribute to the overall goal of spatial equality.

Factors Contributing to Comfort During Workouts

The survey results for Question 4, which focused on the factors that contribute to a comfortable workout environment for women, provide valuable insights. These factors include the presence of a personal trainer or instructor, exercising with a companion, women-only areas/classes, daylight workouts, convenient parking, and other comfort factors. Below is an analysis of the data:

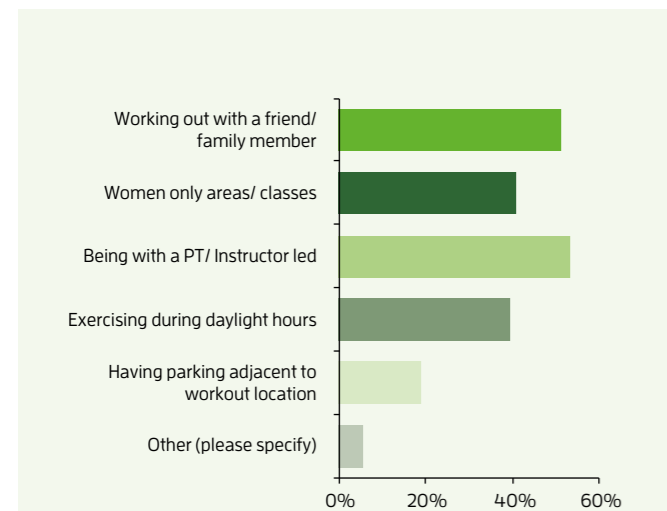


Figure 4. Analysis of the data focussing on the factors that contribute to a comfortable workout environment for women.

Presence of a Personal Trainer or Instructor

The most significant factor contributing to comfort (53%) during workouts is having a personal trainer (PT) or participating in instructor-led sessions. Professional guidance and support can boost confidence and ensure proper exercise techniques.

Exercising with a Companion

Working out with a friend or family member is the second most important factor (51%) for creating a comfortable exercise environment. This highlights the importance of social support and companionship during workout sessions.

Women-Only Areas/Classes

A significant number of respondents (41%) indicated a preference for women-only areas or classes, emphasising the importance of safe and inclusive spaces for women to exercise without feeling self-conscious or uncomfortable.

Daylight Workouts

Exercising during daylight hours is a major comfort factor for respondents (40%), possibly linked to concerns about safety, visibility, and the inviting natural environment during daylight.

Convenient Parking

While not as critical as other factors, convenient parking is still important for a notable portion of respondents (19%). Easy access to workout locations can reduce the hassle and time associated with exercising, making it more appealing.

Other Comfort Factors

This category includes unspecified factors that contribute to the comfort of respondents (6%), suggesting that there are additional, perhaps individualized, preferences that were not covered by the listed options.

The analysis of comfort factors provides a comprehensive understanding of what makes women feel most comfortable when working out. By focusing on professional guidance, social support, women-only spaces, safety, and accessibility, outdoor gyms can create environments that are more appealing and supportive for girls and women.

Deterrents to Trying New Equipment

The survey results for question 5, "What discourages you from trying new equipment?" offer valuable insights into the obstacles that women encounter when considering the use of new fitness equipment. These deterrents include poor instructions/not understanding the benefits, lack of demonstrations, self-consciousness, perceived complexity, uncertainty about strength, and other obstacles. Below is an analysis of the data:

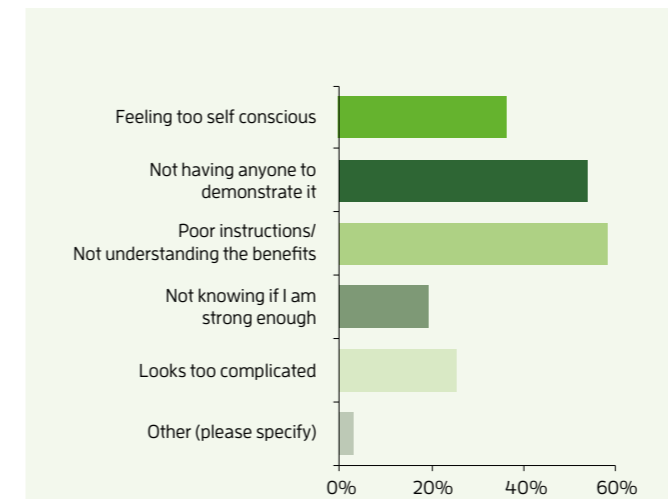


Figure 5. Analysis of the data for the insights into the obstacles that women encounter when considering the use of new fitness equipment.

Poor Instructions/Not Understanding the Benefits

Inadequate instructions or a lack of understanding of the benefits of the equipment is a significant deterrent for 59% of respondents. This highlights the need for clear, accessible information and guidance to help users understand how to use the equipment effectively and the advantages it offers.

Not Having Anyone to Demonstrate

The absence of someone to demonstrate the equipment is the second major deterrent for 54% of respondents. This underscores the importance of having knowledgeable staff or trainers available to provide demonstrations and guidance, helping users feel more confident in trying new equipment.

Feeling Too Self-Conscious

A considerable number of respondents (36%) feel too self-conscious to try new equipment. Creating a supportive and non-judgemental environment is crucial for encouraging users to explore new fitness options.

Looks Too Complicated

For some respondents (26%), the perceived complexity of equipment is a barrier. Simplifying the design of equipment and providing clear, easy-to-follow instructions can help mitigate this issue.

Not Knowing If I Am Strong Enough

Concerns about personal strength and capability deter 20% of respondents from trying new equipment. This underscores the need for equipment that is accessible to users of all fitness levels, as well as the importance of supportive staff to encourage and guide them.

Other Deterrents

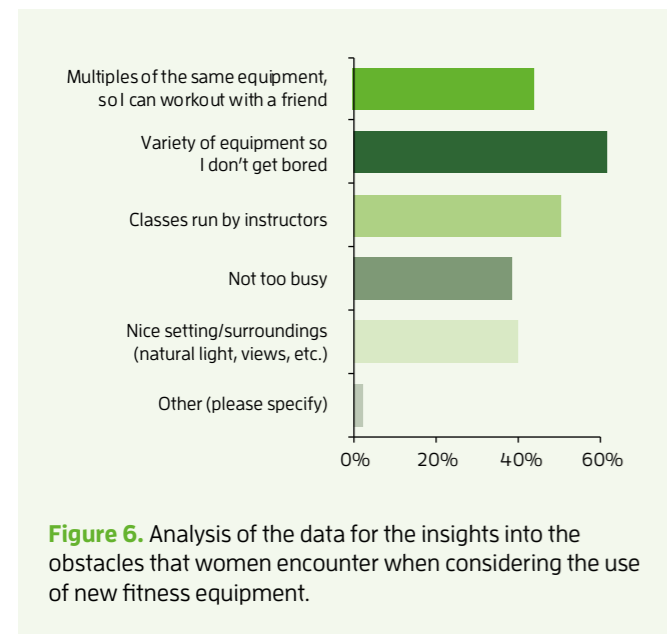
Finally, 3% of respondents are deterred by unspecified factors not captured by the listed options. This reflects unique personal concerns or barriers.

The analysis of deterrents to trying new equipment highlights several barriers that women face in exploring new fitness options. By addressing these barriers through clear instructions, available demonstrations, a supportive environment, simplified equipment design, and encouragement for all fitness levels, outdoor gyms can create more inclusive and user-friendly spaces.

By focusing on the most popular equipment, offering a variety of options, and ensuring accessibility, outdoor gyms can create environments that encourage regular physical activity and contribute to the overall goal of spatial equality.

Important Factors When Using Outdoor Gym

The survey findings from Question 6, which asked “What is most important to you when using a gym?”, offer valuable insights into the priorities and preferences of participants of the study. These include the importance of equipment variety, instructor-led classes, availability of multiple copies of the same equipment, as well as other important factors such as a pleasant environment, manageable crowd levels, and other considerations. Here is a breakdown and analysis of the data:



Preference for Variety of Equipment

A majority of respondents (62%) emphasized the importance of having a diverse range of equipment to prevent monotony. This indicates that offering a variety of workout options is crucial for maintaining engagement and motivation.

Emphasis on Instructor-Led Classes

Many respondents (50%) highlighted the significance of having access to instructor-led classes. This underscores the value of structured, guided workouts that can provide motivation, ensure proper technique, and foster a sense of community.

Desire for Multiples of the Same Equipment

For a significant portion of respondents (44%), having multiple units of the same equipment is important as it allows them to work out with friends. This reflects the social aspect of exercise and the desire to share the fitness experience with others.

Importance of Nice Setting/Surroundings

The ambiance and environment of the gym, including natural light and scenic views, are important to a notable percentage of respondents (40%). This suggests that an aesthetically pleasing and comfortable environment can enhance the overall workout experience.

Preference for Less Crowded Spaces

Many users (38%) prioritize avoiding overcrowded gyms. A less busy environment can reduce wait times for equipment, provide more personal space, and create a more pleasant and stress-free atmosphere.

Other Preferences

This category encompasses unspecified factors important to a few respondents (2%), reflecting individual preferences or needs not captured by the listed options.

The analysis of important factors when using a gym highlights several priorities for women that can significantly enhance their workout experience. By focusing on equipment variety, offering instructor-led classes, providing multiple units of equipment, ensuring a pleasant environment, and managing crowd levels, outdoor gyms can create more attractive and user-friendly spaces.

Outdoor Gym Usage

The data from the survey's Question 7, “Have you ever used an outdoor gym?”, offers valuable information on how often and to what degree women have utilized outdoor gym amenities. Here is the detailed analysis:

Yes, Sometimes

The largest group of respondents (42%) use outdoor gyms occasionally. This indicates a moderate level of engagement, where outdoor gyms are a part of their fitness routine but not the primary venue for their workouts.

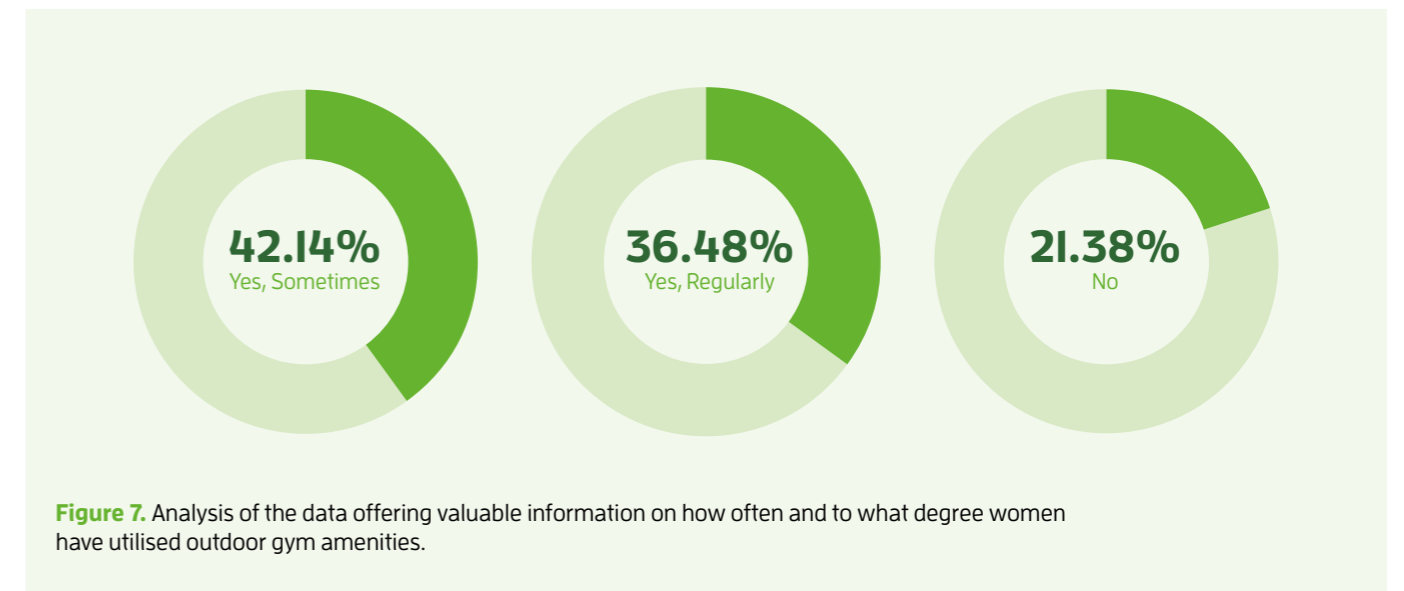
Yes, Regularly

A significant portion of respondents (36%) use outdoor gyms on a regular basis. This shows a strong engagement and preference for outdoor gym facilities among these users.

No

A notable minority of respondents (21%) have never used an outdoor gym. This highlights a potential area for growth and improvement in attracting new users to outdoor gym facilities.

The data on outdoor gym usage provides several important considerations for enhancing the appeal and usage of these facilities. By focusing on encouraging occasional users to become regular users, sustaining the interest of regular users, and attracting new users, outdoor gyms can enhance their appeal and usage. Tailored marketing, targeted programs, and continuous improvement based on user feedback are key strategies to achieve these goals.



Gym Membership Cancellations Due to Cost of Living

The survey results for Question 8, "Have you cancelled a gym membership due to cost of living?", provide insights into how economic factors affect women's decisions regarding gym memberships. Here is an analysis of the data:

Yes

A significant portion of respondents (35%) have cancelled their gym memberships due to the cost of living. This indicates that economic pressures have a substantial impact on women's ability to maintain paid gym memberships.

No, but Considered It

Nearly a quarter of respondents (25%) have not cancelled their gym memberships but have considered doing so due to cost concerns. This suggests that financial considerations are a significant factor in their decision-making process, even if they haven't yet taken action.

No

The largest group of respondents (41%) have not cancelled their gym memberships due to the cost of living, indicating that while economic pressures are present, they do not affect all users equally. This group may have other means to manage costs or prioritize gym memberships differently.

The analysis of gym membership cancellations due to the cost of living highlights the financial challenges faced by many women in maintaining their fitness routines. Outdoor gyms, as free and accessible alternatives, have the potential to address these challenges by providing inclusive and affordable fitness options.

By focusing on encouraging occasional users to become regular users, sustaining the interest of regular users, and attracting new users, outdoor gyms can enhance their appeal and usage.

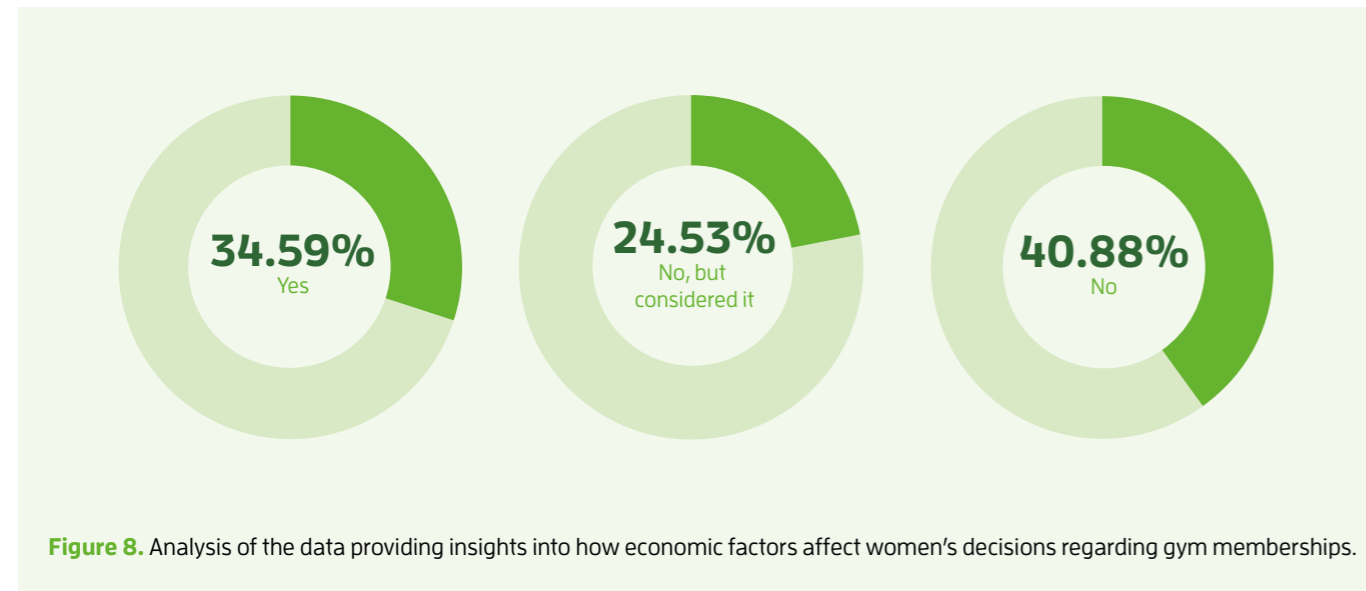


Figure 8. Analysis of the data providing insights into how economic factors affect women's decisions regarding gym memberships.

Preferences for Indoor vs. Outdoor Workouts

The survey results for Question 9, "Do you prefer to workout indoors or outdoors?", provide insights into women's preferences for their workout environments. Here is an analysis of the data:

Indoors

The majority of respondents (56%) prefer working out indoors. This preference suggests that indoor gyms offer certain advantages or comfort levels that outdoor gyms may need to address or replicate to attract more users.

Outdoors

A significant portion of respondents (37%) prefer working out outdoors. This highlights an existing interest and acceptance of outdoor fitness, which can be further leveraged by improving outdoor gym facilities and addressing any potential barriers.

Other

A small percentage of respondents (7%) have other preferences or considerations when it comes to their workout environment. These could include a mix of both indoor and outdoor workouts, seasonal preferences, or specific conditions.

While indoor workouts are currently preferred by the majority of the respondents, there is also a significant interest in outdoor workouts that can be leveraged by enhancing outdoor gym facilities and addressing barriers. By focusing on improving the outdoor gym experience, providing hybrid solutions, and addressing seasonal and weather-related concerns, outdoor gyms can attract more users and promote spatial equality in public fitness spaces.

The analysis of comfort factors provides a comprehensive understanding of what makes women feel most comfortable when working out.

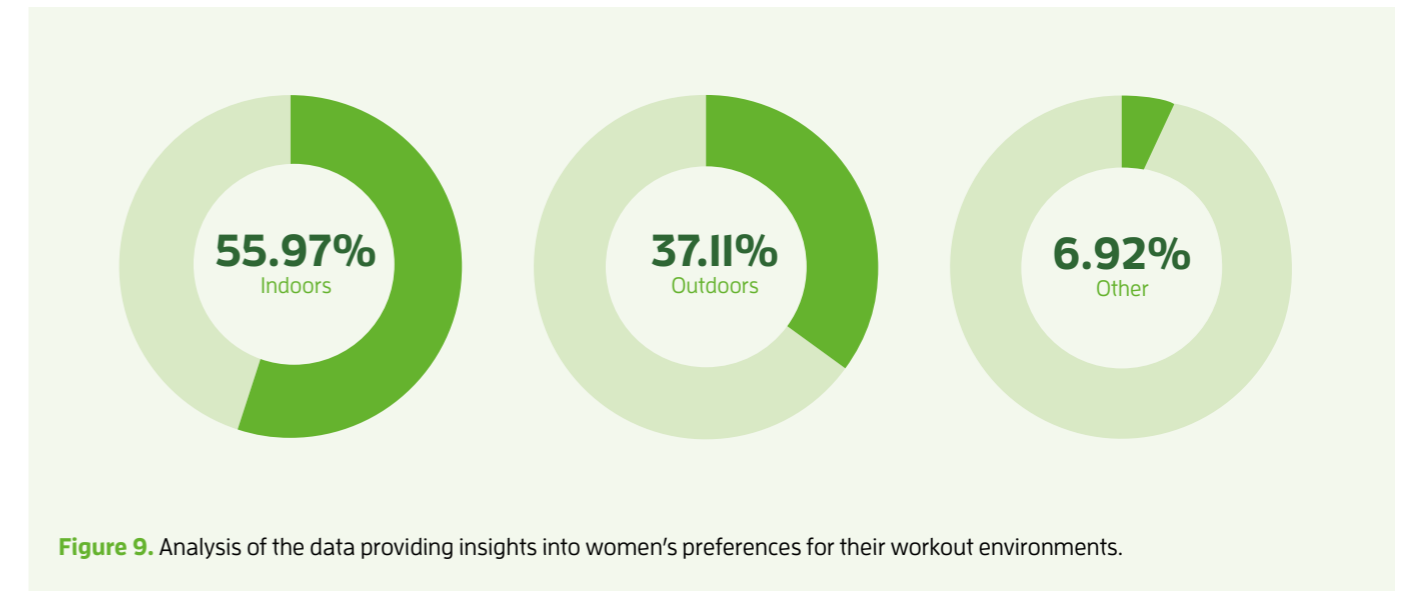


Figure 9. Analysis of the data providing insights into women's preferences for their workout environments.

Factors Encouraging Outdoor Gym Usage

The survey results for Question 10, "What would encourage you to use an outdoor gym?", provide insights into the factors that could motivate women to use outdoor gym facilities. Here is an analysis of the data:

Localization

The proximity of the outdoor gym to participants' homes is the most significant factor (59%), highlighting the importance of convenience and accessibility in encouraging outdoor gym usage.

Positive Wellbeing Impact

The natural benefits of outdoor exercise, including exposure to daylight and fresh air, are highly motivating (58%). This emphasizes the significance of promoting the health and wellbeing advantages of outdoor workouts.

Exercising with Company

Social support and companionship are crucial motivators for a majority of participants (49%). Working out with a friend can enhance the enjoyment and commitment to using outdoor gym facilities.

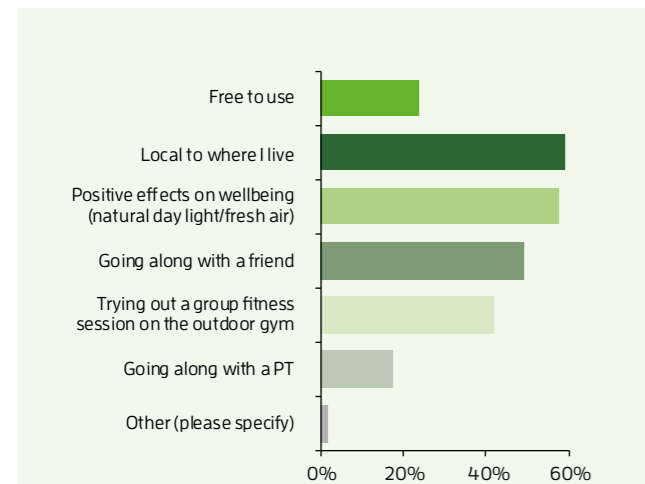


Figure 10. Analysis of the data providing insights into the factors that could motivate women to use outdoor gym facilities.

Group Fitness Sessions

A substantial number of respondents (42%) expressed a preference for group fitness sessions, indicating that structured, social, and motivating workout experiences can significantly boost outdoor gym attendance.

Cost-Free Nature

While not the most prominent factor, the cost-free nature of outdoor gyms is still a considerable motivator for a portion of respondents (24%). Highlighting the financial benefits of using outdoor gyms can attract those seeking affordable fitness options.

Personal Training

For some respondents (18%), professional guidance from a personal trainer (PT) serves as a motivator, indicating that expertise and personalized instruction can enhance the outdoor gym experience for certain users.

Other

A small percentage of respondents (2%) have other unspecified motivators, reflecting unique or individual preferences.

The analysis of factors that would encourage the use of outdoor gyms emphasizes several key motivators for women. By prioritizing proximity, promoting the health benefits, encouraging social interactions, leveraging the cost-free nature of outdoor gyms, and providing professional guidance, these facilities can become more appealing and widely used. Tailored strategies that address these motivators can help promote outdoor gym usage and contribute to spatial equality in public fitness spaces.

While indoor workouts are currently preferred by the majority of the respondents, there is also a significant interest in outdoor workouts that can be leveraged by enhancing outdoor gym facilities and addressing barriers.

Preferred Locations for Outdoor Gyms in Parks

The survey results for Question 11, "Where would you most prefer an outdoor gym to be located in your park?", provide insights into women's preferences for the placement of outdoor gym facilities within park spaces. Here is an analysis of the data:

Further into the Park

The largest group of respondents (38%) prefer outdoor gyms to be located further into the park. This suggests a desire for a more secluded and tranquil workout environment, possibly to avoid the noise and distractions typically found near park entrances.

Close to Other Facilities

A significant portion of respondents (22%) prefer outdoor gyms to be situated near other amenities such as cafés and toilets. This preference indicates the importance of convenience and the availability of complementary facilities, and to provide a feeling of safety.

Close to the Play Park

Some respondents (17%) prefer outdoor gyms to be located near play areas, likely indicating the need for convenience for parents or caregivers who can supervise children while working out.

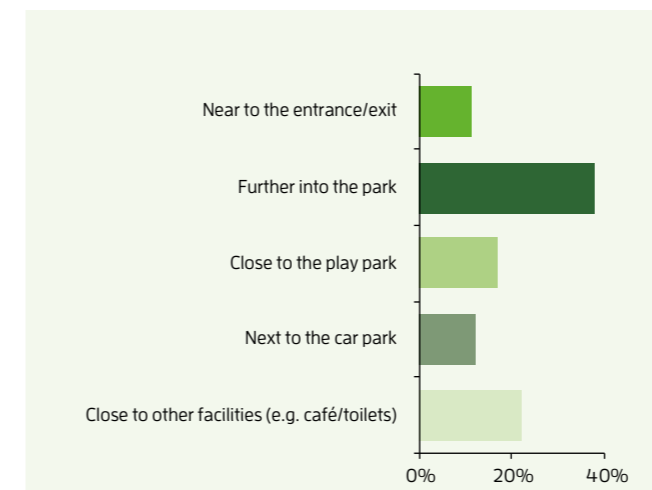


Figure 11. Analysis of the data providing insights into women's preferences for the placement of outdoor gym facilities within park spaces.

Next to the Car Park

A smaller group (12%) prefers outdoor gyms to be adjacent to parking facilities, highlighting the importance of easy access and convenience for those who drive to the park.

Near to the Entrance/Exit

The fewest respondents (11%) prefer outdoor gyms to be located near park entrances and exits. This suggests that while convenience is important, it may be secondary to other factors such as privacy and tranquility.

The analysis of preferred locations for outdoor gyms within parks highlights the need to balance tranquility, convenience, and accessibility. By focusing on secluded and peaceful settings, proximity to amenities, family-friendly locations, and accessible placement near parking areas, outdoor gyms can better serve women's needs and preferences. Tailored placement strategies can enhance the appeal and usability of outdoor gyms, contributing to spatial equality in public fitness spaces.

The largest group of respondents (41%) have not cancelled their gym memberships due to the cost of living, indicating that while economic pressures are present, they do not affect all users equally.



Implications for Outdoor Gyms

The data suggests several important considerations for designing and equipping outdoor gyms to meet the needs of women:

1. Inclusivity and Accessibility

Outdoor gyms should be accessible and inclusive to users of all ages and fitness levels. Equipment should be user-friendly and the environment should be safe and welcoming. Placing outdoor gyms near other amenities like cafés and toilets can enhance user convenience.

2. Encouraging Regular Use

Efforts should be made to convert occasional users into regular users through targeted programs and incentives. For regular users, maintaining and enhancing the quality of facilities is crucial.

3. Attracting New Users

Understanding barriers and concerns of those who have never used an outdoor gym is important for attracting new users. Targeted outreach, education, and introductory programs can help address these issues.

4. Community Engagement and Programs

Developing community fitness programs that cater to different age groups can increase overall engagement and create a sense of community.

5. Variety of Equipment

Offering a wide range of equipment, including both upper and lower body machines, can attract more users.

6. Support for Challenging Exercises

Providing assisted equipment can help users gradually build the strength required for more challenging exercises.

7. Low-Impact Options

Including low-impact cardio options can make outdoor gyms more accessible to users with joint concerns or injuries.

8. Customisation and Feedback

Gathering ongoing feedback from users can guide future enhancements and ensure that outdoor gyms remain relevant and user-friendly.

9. Space and Layout Considerations

Thoughtful layout planning can prevent overcrowding and create a comfortable workout environment.

10. Professional Guidance

Incorporating professional guidance through instructor-led classes or personal trainers can enhance user comfort and engagement.

11. Social Support

Creating an environment that encourages social interaction can make outdoor gyms more appealing. Promoting group activities can foster a sense of community and increase motivation.

12. Women-Only Spaces

Establishing women-only areas or offering women-specific classes can help address safety and privacy concerns for female users.

13. Safety and Visibility

Ensuring that outdoor gyms are well-lit and safe to use during daylight hours can alleviate safety concerns.

14. Affordable Fitness Options

Providing affordable outdoor fitness options can make outdoor gyms accessible to a wider range of users.

Discussion

Global Trends and the UK Context

The increasing popularity of outdoor gyms aligns with global trends emphasizing the benefits of outdoor exercise for physical and mental health. Across the world, cities are integrating outdoor fitness equipment into public spaces to encourage physical activity among residents. In the UK, the adoption of outdoor gyms reflects this trend, offering a cost-effective, accessible alternative to traditional indoor gyms. However, the specific needs and preferences of women and girls must be considered to ensure these spaces promote spatial equality and are utilized effectively.

Perceptions and Accessibility

The survey data reveal a mixed perception among women regarding outdoor gyms. While there is a significant interest in outdoor exercise (37% preferring outdoor workouts), indoor gyms remain more popular (56%). Factors such as proximity to home (59%) and the wellbeing benefits of exercising outdoors (58%) are strong motivators for using outdoor gyms. Accessibility, both in terms of location and ease of use, is crucial. Outdoor gyms must be strategically placed in easily accessible locations within parks to attract more users.

Privacy and Safety

Privacy and safety are critical concerns that influence the use of outdoor gyms. Women value secluded and tranquil settings for their workouts, as indicated by the preference for locations further into the park (38%). The provision of women-only areas and classes, as well as exercising during daylight hours, are significant factors that contribute to a sense of comfort and security. These considerations highlight the need for careful planning and design to create safe and welcoming environments.

Social and Professional Support

The importance of social support in encouraging outdoor gym use is evident from the preference for working out with friends (49%) and trying out group fitness sessions (42%). Additionally, the presence of professional guidance, whether through instructors or personal trainers, can significantly enhance the outdoor gym experience. This suggests that offering structured, social, and instructor-led activities can attract more women to outdoor gyms.

Economic Considerations

The economic benefits of outdoor gyms are a notable advantage, particularly in the context of rising living costs. A substantial number of respondents (35%) have cancelled gym memberships due to cost, with many others considering it. Promoting the cost-free nature of outdoor gyms can appeal to those looking for affordable fitness options, thereby increasing usage and supporting public health.

Equipment Preferences

The data on equipment preferences reveal a diverse range of favoured strength and cardio equipment. Popular choices for strength training include the Lat Pull-Down (45%) and Leg Press (40%), while the Cross Trainer (57%) and Bike (54%) are preferred for cardio workouts. Providing a variety of equipment that caters to these preferences is essential to keep users engaged and satisfied.

Conclusion

The analysis of survey data and literature highlights the potential of outdoor gyms to contribute significantly to spatial equality and public health in the UK. To maximize their impact, it is essential to address key factors such as accessibility, privacy, safety, social support, and economic considerations. Strategic placement within parks, along with thoughtful design that includes a variety of equipment, clear instructional guidance on every piece of equipment and professional guidance, can make outdoor gyms more appealing and effective for women and girls.

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By addressing these needs, outdoor gyms can provide a viable and attractive alternative to traditional gyms, particularly for those affected by the cost of living. Ensuring that these facilities are welcoming, safe, and supportive can encourage more women to participate in outdoor exercise, promoting healthier lifestyles and greater spatial equality in public fitness spaces. The insights gained from this analysis should guide future urban planning and policy decisions to enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of outdoor gyms across the UK.

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