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AACPDM Adapted Sports/Recreation Committee  
Journal Article Digest Sub-Committee

**Article Title**

Pathways to participation in gymnastics for children with disability

**Article Citation**

Shuttleworth, H., Hickey, L., & Toovey, R. (2024). Pathways to participation in gymnastics for children with disability. *Disability and Rehabilitation*, 46(11), 2365-2373.

**Adaptive Sport/Recreation Categories:**

- Childhood Disability
- Gymnastics
- Participation

**Study Type:** Sequential explanatory mixed-methods

**Summary:** Physical activity has numerous benefits for children. However, children with disabilities participate in lower levels of physical activity due to personal and environmental barriers. Gymnastics involves learning to run, jump, flip upside-down, and swing. It has been found to promote strength, flexibility, balance, and coordination as well as increasing confidence, self-esteem, and social development in children with disabilities. This study aimed to understand the experiences of, and pathways to participation in gymnastics for children with disability living in Victoria, Australia. Parents of children with disability who participated in gymnastics currently or in the last 3 years were recruited. 58 parents of 59 children (Mean Age= 10, SD= 5; 56% Female; Primary diagnosis= 80% Autism Spectrum Disorder) completed an online survey explored different aspects of parents' experiences of navigating pathways for their child to participate in gymnastics including the facilitators and barriers to participation, factors they considered when enrolling in gymnastics, and funding options for gymnastics participation. 13 parents participated in a semi-structured interview elaborating on themes discussed in the survey. This study identified five core themes: (1) tailored, accessible and supportive environments and programs make a difference, (2) an explicitly inclusive club culture helps young people get and stay involved, (3) coaches' knowledge about engaging with children with disability is valued, (4) enjoyment, recognition and achievement experienced by the child facilitate ongoing participation, and (5) gymnastics has physical and social benefits for children with disability. Parents and guardians enrolled children in gymnastics due to the perceived physical and social benefits for their child; and they reported that movements in gymnastics, such as jumping and swinging fulfilled sensory needs among their children.

The authors also created a conceptual model, "Pathways to Participation", based on the findings to support gymnastics clubs and assist rehabilitation professionals to understand the challenges and enablers to participating in gymnastics.