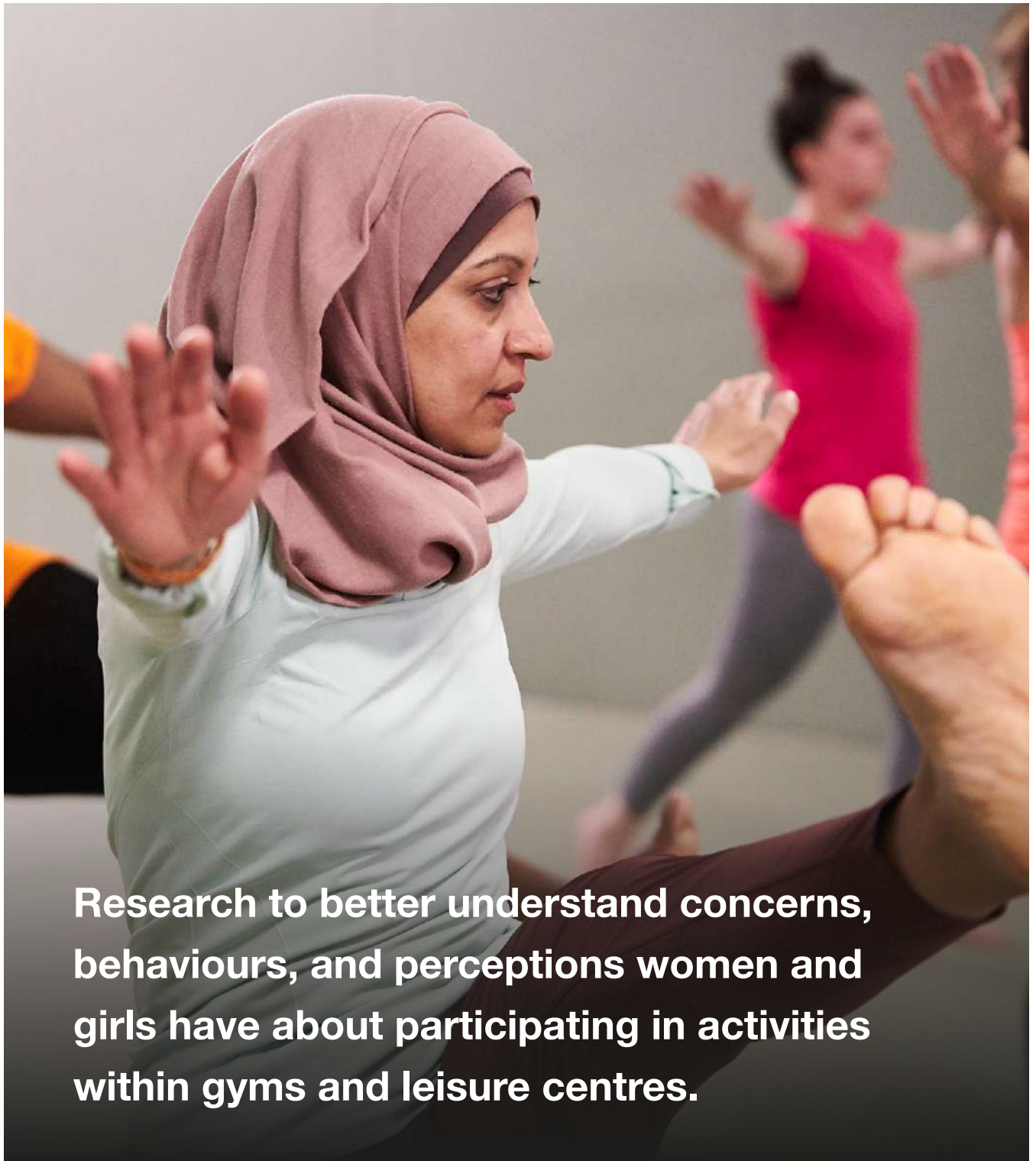


AS TOLD BY THE 51%



Research to better understand concerns, behaviours, and perceptions women and girls have about participating in activities within gyms and leisure centres.

INTRODUCTION

01



THE NEED FOR CHANGE

There is a persistent gender gap between the proportion of women and men who are achieving the Chief Medical Officer's guidelines of physical activity, with women consistently reporting lower activity levels than men¹. Since the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic hit, the situation for women has become worse. While initially, male activity levels fell more significantly they also recovered quicker, whereas female activity levels remained consistently lower than 12 months earlier. This indicates that, despite their activity levels initially seeming more resilient to the impact of the pandemic, women who have experienced their activity levels fall may take longer to recover and require further support to return.

This Girl Can and ukactive have joined forces to work on behalf of the sector to better understand the barriers which women and girls face in taking part in physical activity in this setting. With Sport England funding, ukactive commissioned research to explore these themes and have translated these findings into a practical guide that the sector can use to attract more women and girls into their facilities.

INTRODUCTION



THE RESEARCH

A mixed-methods research approach was utilised that consisted of a nationally representative survey of women and girls followed by two focus groups with women **who used** and **did not use** fitness and leisure facilities.

The nationally representative survey, conducted by Savanta ComRes between the 10th April – 12th April 2021, was completed by 1,030 women over the age of sixteen. The survey consisted of 34 questions to explore activity levels, fitness and leisure facility membership and usage, barriers, motivations and experiences associated with the usage behaviours and engaging in physical activity within these facilities, followed by measures to address any concerns, and specific This Girl Can focussed questions. All statistics presented in this report are from this sample, unless otherwise specified. Analysis was undertaken by the ukactive Research Institute and REMind Research.

Two 60-minute virtual focus groups were conducted on the 14th and 15th July, 2021 with 24 women aged between 20-70 years. These focus groups were separated and conducted with current users of fitness and leisure centres (n=15) and those who had not used these settings for 3 or more years (n=9). All focus group and interview data were recorded, transcribed, and analysed using thematic content analysis by the ukactive Research Institute.

THE UKACTIVE THIS GIRL CAN FITNESS AND LEISURE CENTRE RESEARCH IDENTIFIED A VARIETY OF BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT WHICH HAVE INFORMED THE RECOMMENDED ACTIONS OF **THE PRACTICAL GUIDE**

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT CAN BE CATEGORISED INTO 6 KEY THEMES

Among all women, concerns include:

- Not being fit enough (45%)
- Not fitting in with other people taking part (24%)

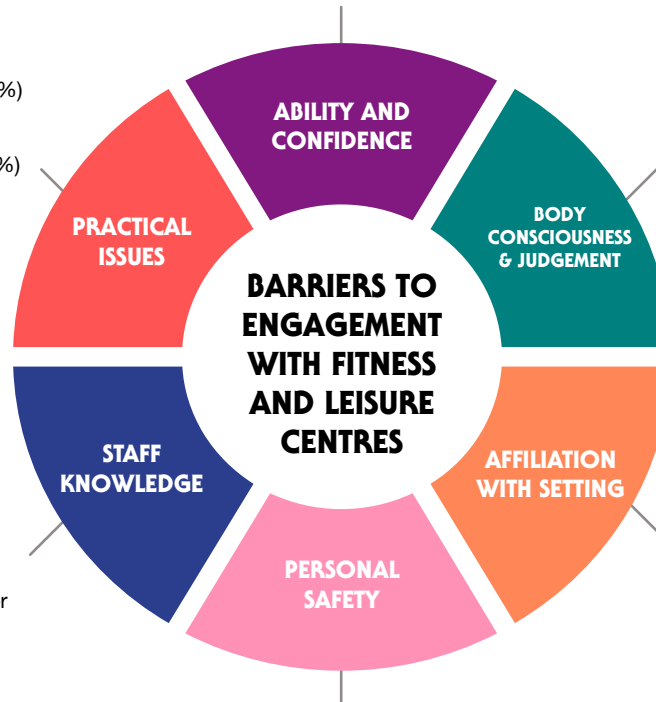
14% of those not attending in last three years say it is due to not having ability to be physically active and exercise in this setting

Among all women, concerns include:

- Not knowing what to wear/equipment to bring (18%)
- Not knowing where to go on arrival (15%)
- Centres will be difficult to access by transport (15%)

Participation encouragement, among all women:

- 45% believe that having a member of staff showing them how to perform exercises/activities and use equipment would encourage participation
- 26% would like a member of staff to observe whether they are performing activities correctly.



Among all women, concerns include:

- Showing my body (30%)
- Being judged by other women (27%)
- Changing in front of others (25%)

Reasons for non-attendance in last three years include:

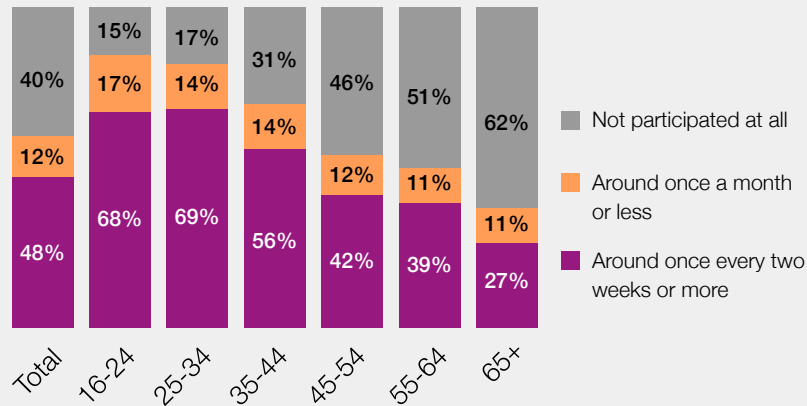
- I'm just not interested in exercising in this setting (29%)
- Exercising in this setting isn't for me (26%)
- I wouldn't feel comfortable exercising in this setting (22%)
- I wouldn't enjoy exercising in this setting (21%)

Risk and protection, among all women:

- 13% of all women are concerned about risk or threat of sexual harassment, intimidation or embarrassment from sexual harassment within a fitness and leisure centre
- 64% of those attending in last three years have taken measures to protect themselves from sexual harassment within a fitness and leisure centre

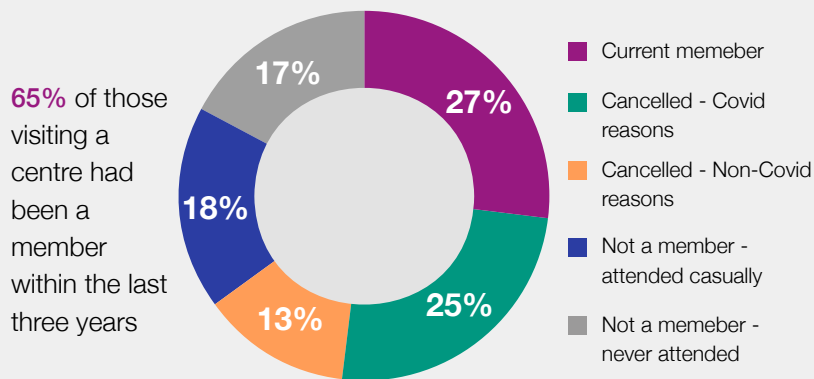
OVERALL PROFILE OF WOMEN

Participated in physical activity at fitness and leisure centre in last 3 years



On average, how often, if at all, have you participated in physical activity at a fitness and leisure centre in the last three years? All women 1,030

Membership status of those attending



Which of the following statements about fitness and leisure centre membership best reflects your situation? All visiting a centre 621

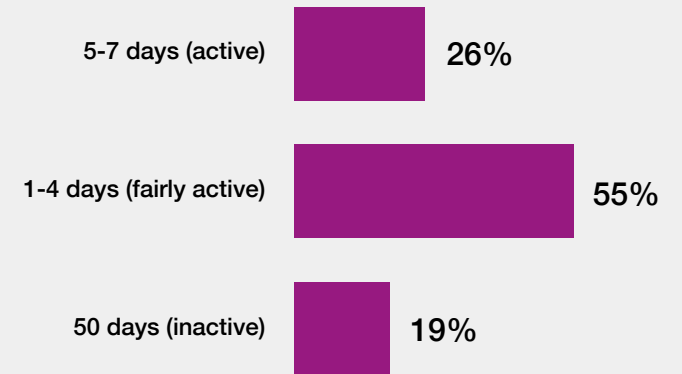


Participated in physical activity at fitness and leisure centre in last 3 years

	Participated in physical activity at fitness and leisure centre in last 3 years	
	Once or more	None at all
Lower SEG (C2DE)	50%	50%
Higher SEG (ABC1)	70%	30%
White ethnicity	56%	44%
Culturally diverse communities	82%	18%

On average, how often, if at all, have you participated in physical activity at a fitness and leisure centre in the last three years? All women 1,030

Physical Activity Level



In the past week, on how many days have you done a total of 30 mins or more of physical activity, which was enough to raise your breathing rate? All women 1,030

REASONS FOR NON-PARTICIPATION ARE WIDE-VARIED

40%

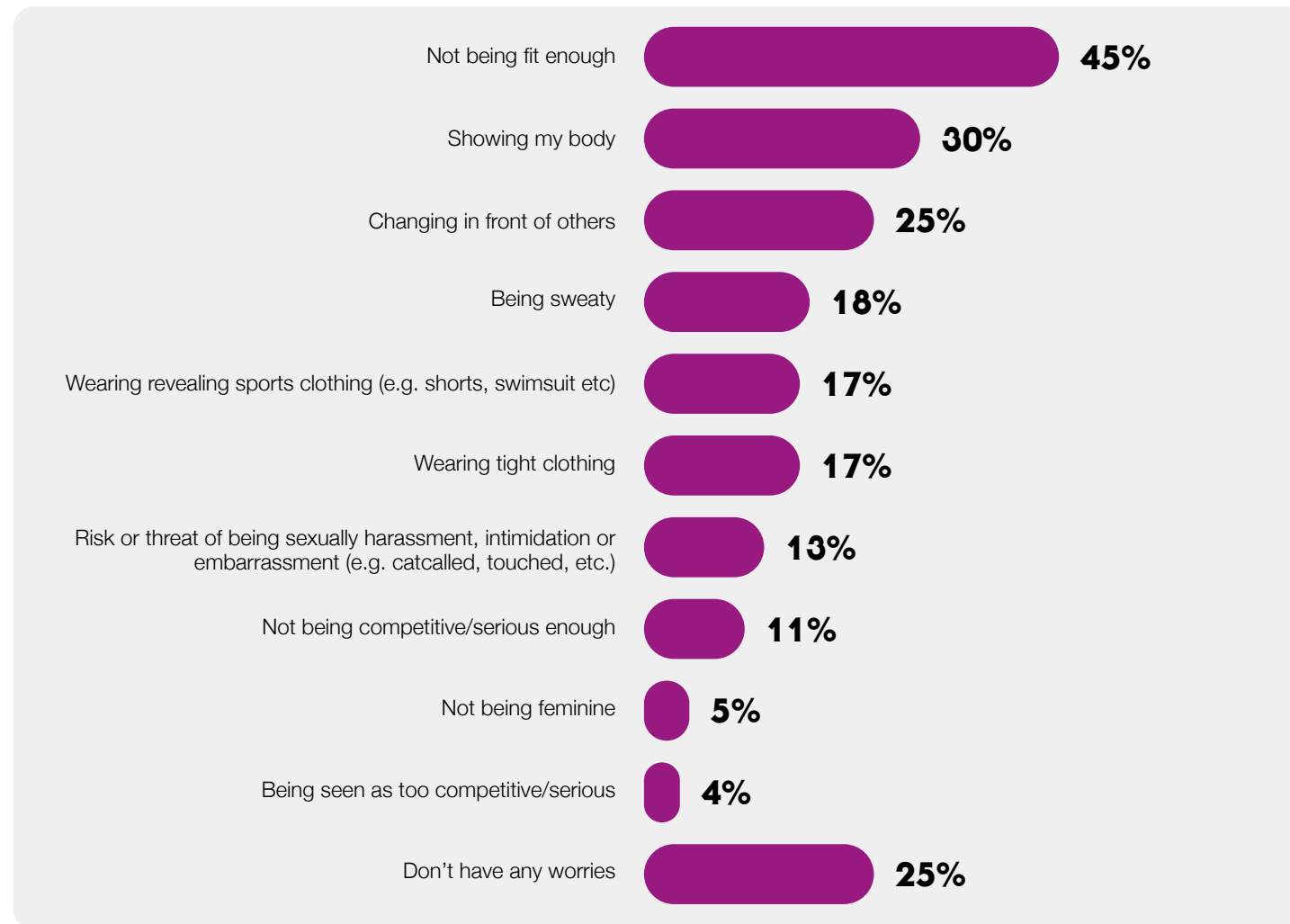
of women have not participated in physical activity within a fitness and leisure centre in last three years



You mentioned you have not participated in physical activity or exercise within a fitness and leisure centre in the last three years. What are the reasons for this? **404 women not participating**

FITNESS AND APPEARANCE CONCERNS OF WOMEN

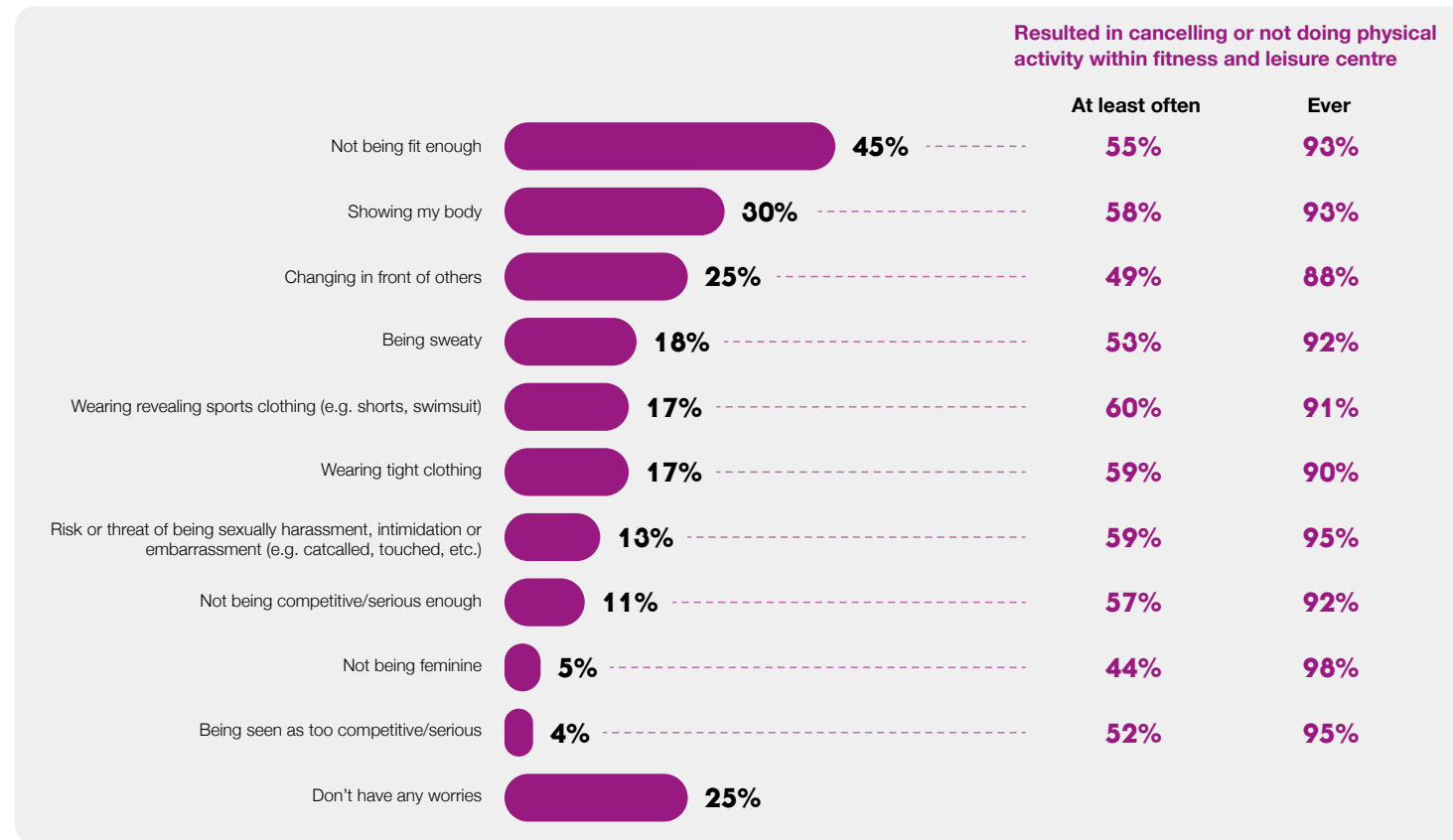
Three-quarters of women say they have concerns about doing physical activity and exercise within a fitness and leisure centre



What worries, if any, do you have about doing physical activity and exercise within a fitness and leisure centre? All women, 1,030

THESE CONCERNS IMPACT ON ENGAGEMENT

For the majority attending fitness and leisure centres a particular worry has, at some point, resulted in a curtailment of their physical activity



The 'At least often' and 'ever' data is of the those who have visited a centre in the last 3 years and selected a particular worry. Note these all have different sample sizes as follows:

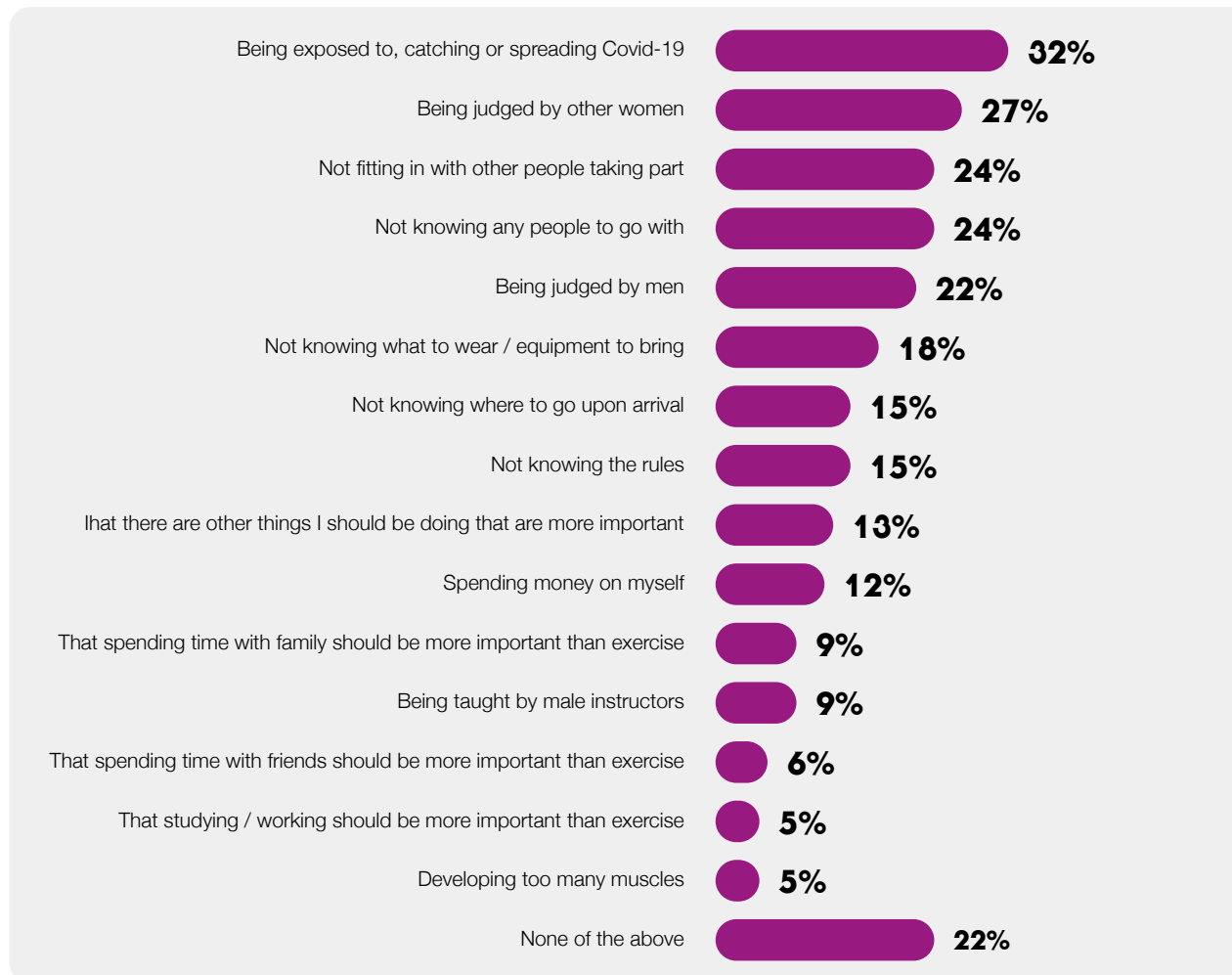
- Not being fit enough – n= 287
- Showing my body – n=224
- Changing in front of others – n=181
- Being sweaty – n=143
- Wearing revealing sports clothing (e.g. shorts, swimsuit etc) – n=121
- Wearing tight clothing – n= 131
- Risk or threat of being sexually harassment, intimidation or embarrassment (e.g. catcalled, touched, etc.) – n=107
- Not being competitive/serious enough – n=77
- Not being feminine – n=46
- Being seen as too competitive/serious – n=40

What worries, if any, do you have about doing physical activity and exercise within a fitness and leisure centre? All women, 1,030

How often, if ever, have the following worries resulted in you cancelling or not doing physical activity and exercise within a fitness and leisure centre? All women who have visited a centre in the last 3 years and state a concern

SETTING AFFILIATION AND JUDGEMENT CONCERNS OF WOMEN

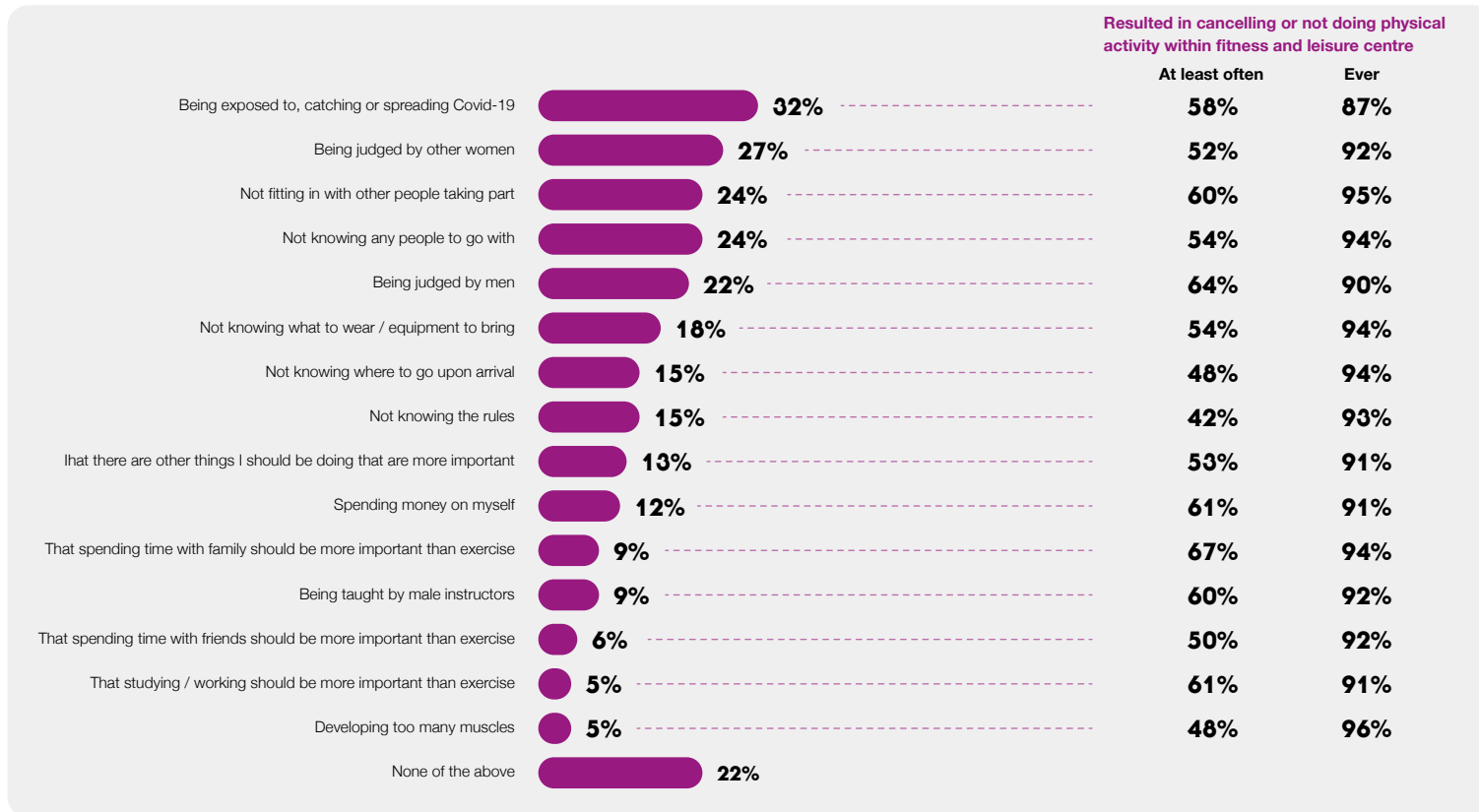
Three-quarters of women say they have a concern about aspects such as knowing the centre/people, judgement issues and time



What worries, if any, do you have about doing physical activity and exercise within a fitness and leisure centre? All women, 1,030

THESE CONCERNS ALSO IMPACT ON ENGAGEMENT

Concerns about these aspects have resulted in the cancellation or suspension of physical activity for most women



The 'At least often' and 'ever' data is of those who have visited a centre in the last 3 years and selected a particular worry. Note these all have different sample sizes as follows:

- Being exposed to, catching or spreading Covid-19 – n=229
- Being judged by other women – n=187
- Not fitting in with other people taking part – n=146
- Not knowing any people to go with – n=145
- Being judged by men – n=160
- Not knowing what to wear / equipment to bring – n=123
- Not knowing where to go on arrival – n=108
- Not knowing the rules – n=101
- The there are other things I should be doing that are more important – n=76
- Spending money on myself – n=76
- The spending time with my family should be more important than exercise - n=59
- Being taught by male instructors – n=60
- The spending time with friends should be more important than exercise – n=45
- That studying / working should be more important than exercise – n=46
- Developing too many muscles – n=45

What worries, if any, do you have about doing physical activity and exercise within a fitness and leisure centre? All women, 1,030

How often, if ever, have the following worries resulted in you cancelling or not doing physical activity and exercise within a fitness and leisure centre? All women who have visited a centre in the last 3 years and state a concern

IMPACT OF FEAR OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION OR EMBARRASSMENT

13%

of all women worry about the risk or threat of sexual harassment, intimidation or embarrassment in relation to doing exercise or physical activity within a fitness and leisure

Specific worries relating to sexual harassment, intimidation or embarrassment among women attending a centre in last three years



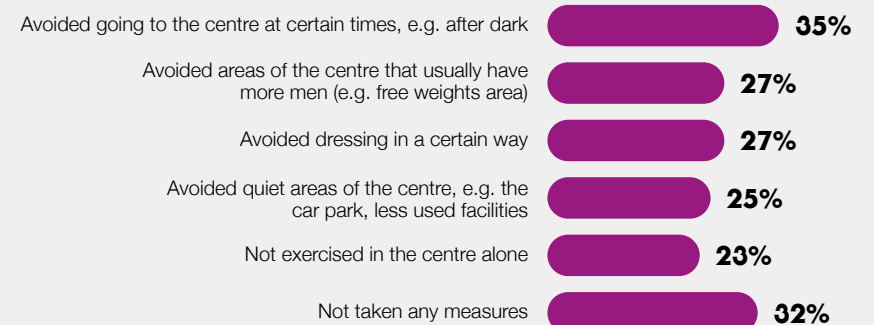
Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which: violates your dignity, makes you feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated, creates a hostile or offensive environment. What worries in relation to sexual harassment, intimidation or embarrassment do you have about doing exercise or physical activity within a fitness and leisure centre? All women who have visited a centre in the last 3 years and state a concern, 129

Significant proportion of women attending a centre in last three years have experienced different types of sexual harassment, intimidation or embarrassment

	Frequency of experience	
	At least often	Ever
Risk or threat		
Staring	27%	64%
Catcalling	21%	49%
Sexually inappropriate language	20%	52%
Unwanted touching	19%	47%
Sexual jokes	17%	52%
Sexual advances	16%	47%
Sexual gestures	17%	48%

Sexual harassment is defined as any unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which: violates your dignity, makes you feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated, creates a hostile or offensive environment. How often, if ever, have you experienced the following when exercising in a fitness and leisure centre? 621

Two-thirds have taken action focused on their own personal behaviour



Sexual harassment is defined as unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature which: violates your dignity, makes you feel intimidated, degraded or humiliated, creates a hostile or offensive environment. Which measures, if any, have you taken to protect yourself from sexual harassment within a fitness and leisure centre? 621

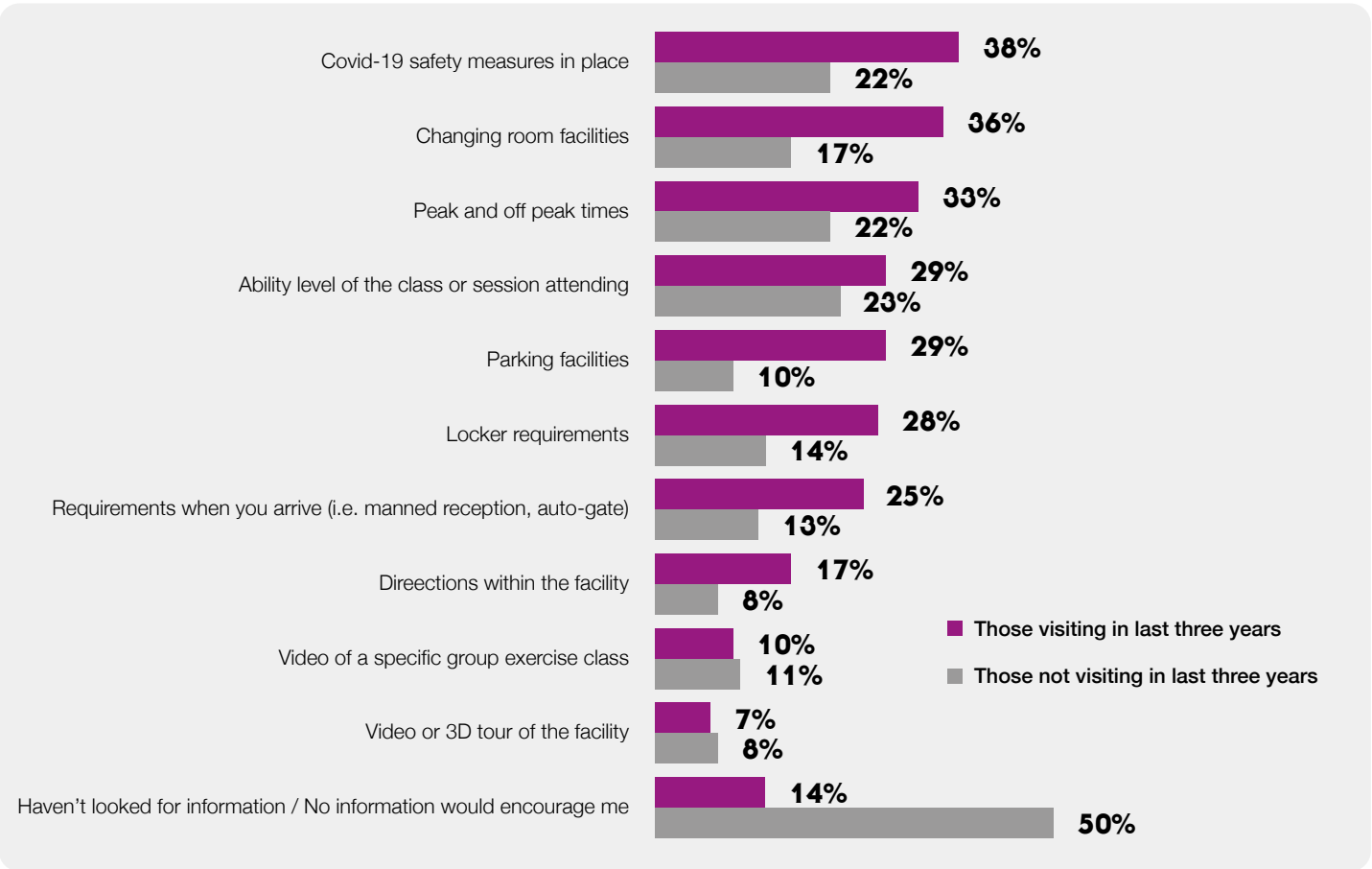
DESIRED INFORMATION FOR WOMEN

83%

of women visiting a centre in last three years looked for information before attending

45%

of women not recently visiting a centre say some aspect of information would encourage them to attend



What information, if any, have you looked for before attending a fitness and leisure centre? 606 women visiting centre in last three years / If you received information on any of the below before attending a fitness and leisure centre, would they encourage you to participate in an activity? 404 women not participating

DESIRED IN-CENTRE SUPPORT AND FACILITIES FOR WOMEN

What would encourage participation in relation to performing activities



Being shown videos on how to perform exercises / activities and use equipment
20%



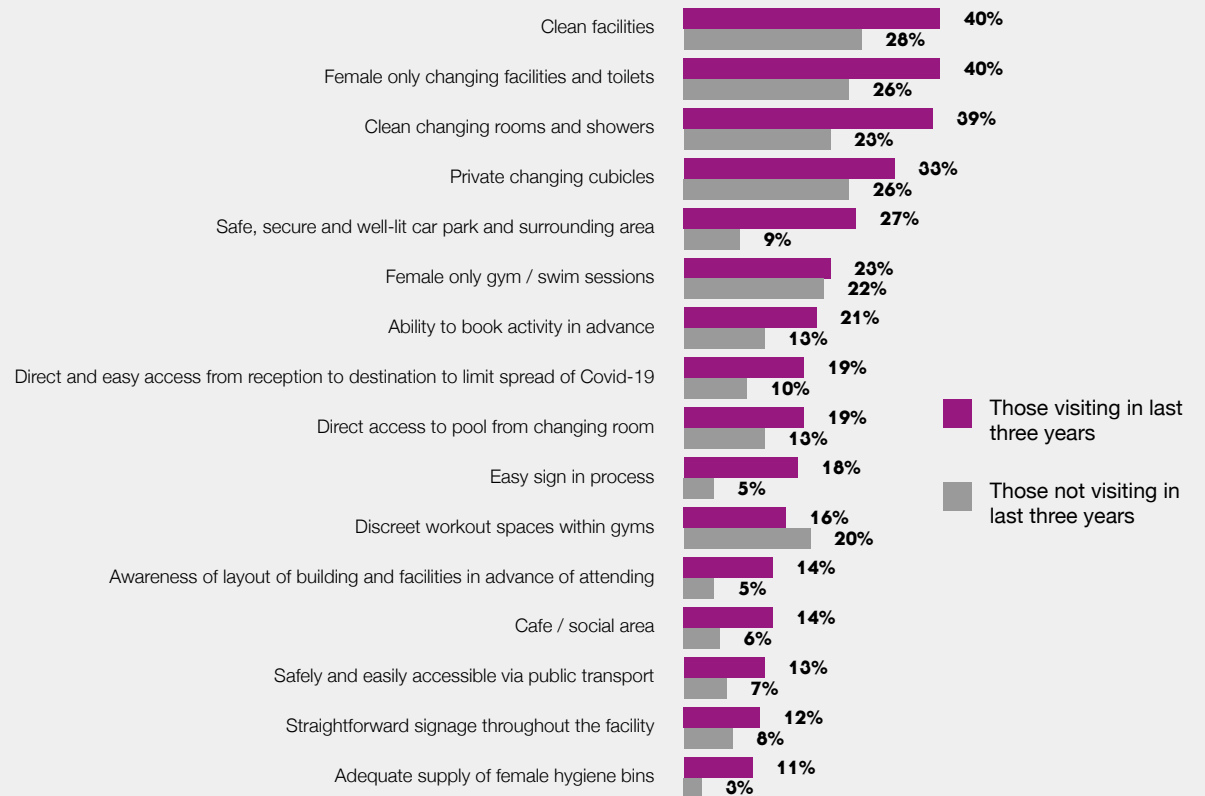
A member of staff showing me how to perform exercises / activities and use equipment
45%



A member of staff observing whether I am performing exercises / activities correctly
26%

Importance of facilities/environmental aspect

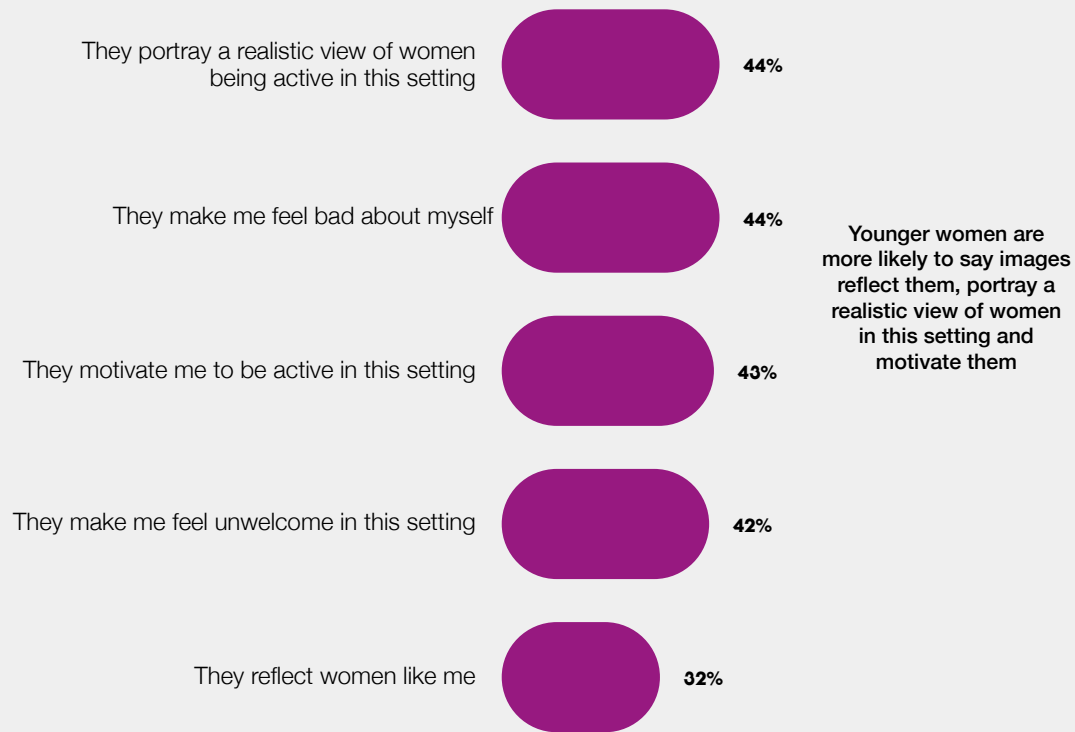
% ranking aspect 1-5 in importance
All mentioned by 10%+ of those attending in last three years



Thinking about performing exercises/activities and using equipment in a fitness and leisure centre, which of the following, if any, do you think you would encourage you to participate in physical activity within this setting? All women 1,030 / Which facilities or environmental aspects, if any, are important to you having positive experiences of attending a fitness and leisure centre? 606 women visiting centre in last three years / Which facilities or environmental aspects, if any, do you think would be most likely to encourage you to attend a fitness and leisure centre? 404 women not participating

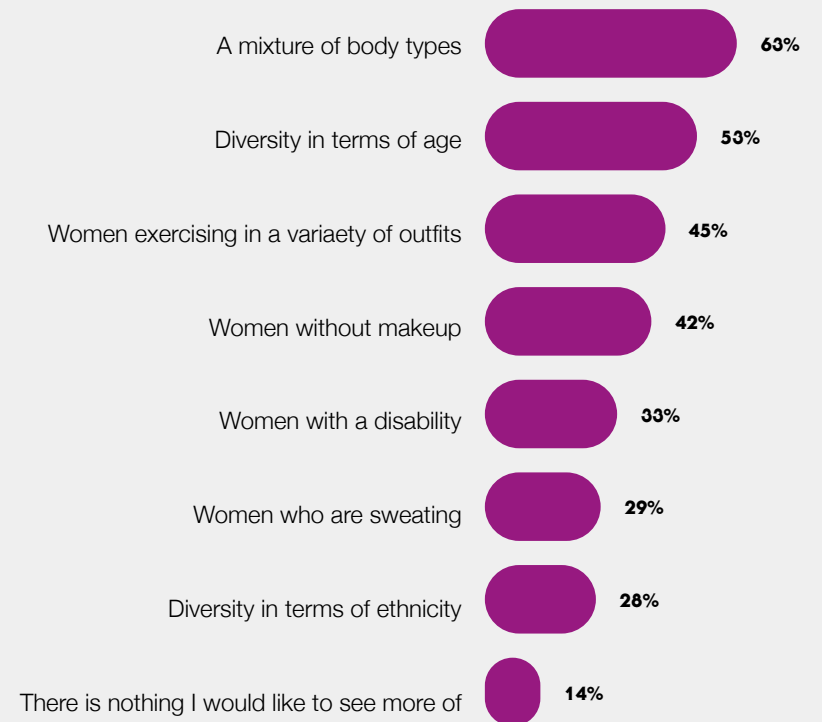
ATTITUDES TOWARDS FEMALE IMAGES IN MARKETING

There are very mixed feelings towards the images of women which are used in the marketing of fitness and leisure centres



To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the images of women in fitness and leisure centre marketing/adverts? This can be images used by fitness and leisure centres on social media, on TV, at the centres themselves etc. All women, 1,030

Women want to see greater representation of different body shapes and age groups



What, if anything, would you like to see more of in the images of women in fitness and leisure centre marketing/adverts? This can be images used by fitness and leisure centres on social media, on TV, at the centres themselves etc. All women, 1,030



More people
More active
More often

