

## **An Investigation into the Social Factors that Influence Sport Participation: A Case of Gymnastics in the Western Cape**

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**Abstract :** Gymnastics is the umbrella term that represents seven different and unique disciplines of gymnastics. Men and women of all ages and abilities practice this sport, and participation in gymnastics can develop both gross and fine motor skills, strength, flexibility, coordination and balance. There are various social factors, such as a family's socioeconomic status or accessibility to sports facilities that may play a role in affecting levels of participation. The aim of this study is to investigate the social factors that have an influence on gymnastics participation in the Western Cape. To this end, a qualitative approach is adopted to collect data. This study also adopts the ecological systems theory as the theoretical framework, and is used to analyze and interpret current social factors that directly or indirectly influence participation in gymnastics. The study's objectives were to ascertain which social factors hinder participation, and which social factors promote participation, thus, coaches, parents and gymnasts participated in focus group discussions. Key informant interviews took place with experts in the field of gymnastics in the Western Cape. A thematic analysis was conducted on transcriptions from the focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Social factors investigated in this study occurred in the chronosystem, macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem, and had both a direct and indirect influence on the gymnast's continued participation. These systems are defined as the environment of the individual, in which they grow and develop. The research findings of this paper are used to draw conclusions and make specific recommendations for practice and further research. The information gathered in this study can assist all stakeholders within the field of gymnastics, such as parents, judges, coaches, gymnasts, and the supporting community which surround the participating gymnast.

**Keywords :** developing child, ecological systems theory, facilities, federation, gymnastics, influence, participation, social factors, socioeconomic status, sport

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