



Cost-of-living and its impact on sport & physical activity

An analysis into the behavioural changes and perceptions on exercise during the cost-of-living crisis

**LONDON
SPORT**

In partnership with



What people think,
feel and do

Introduction

Following our [London 2012 Anniversary report](#) in summer 2022 which highlighted the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on our sector, London Sport has commissioned new research to develop our understanding of how the crisis is affecting activity levels in London and across the UK.

In partnership with Opinium, a market research and insight agency, London Sport conducted a poll to adults across London and the UK in February 2023. The poll explored varying opinions and perceptions amongst 2,000 UK adults and 500 London-based adults.

The research found the ability to be active and exercise behaviours have been disproportionately impacted for young people, ethnic minority communities and disabled people / people with long-term health conditions. Londoners in general were seen to be worse affected than the rest of the UK.

About London Sport

London Sport is a charity that exists to help all Londoners live longer, healthier and happier lives through being active. Our focus is on children and adults in the most deprived communities who face the greatest challenges of inequality.

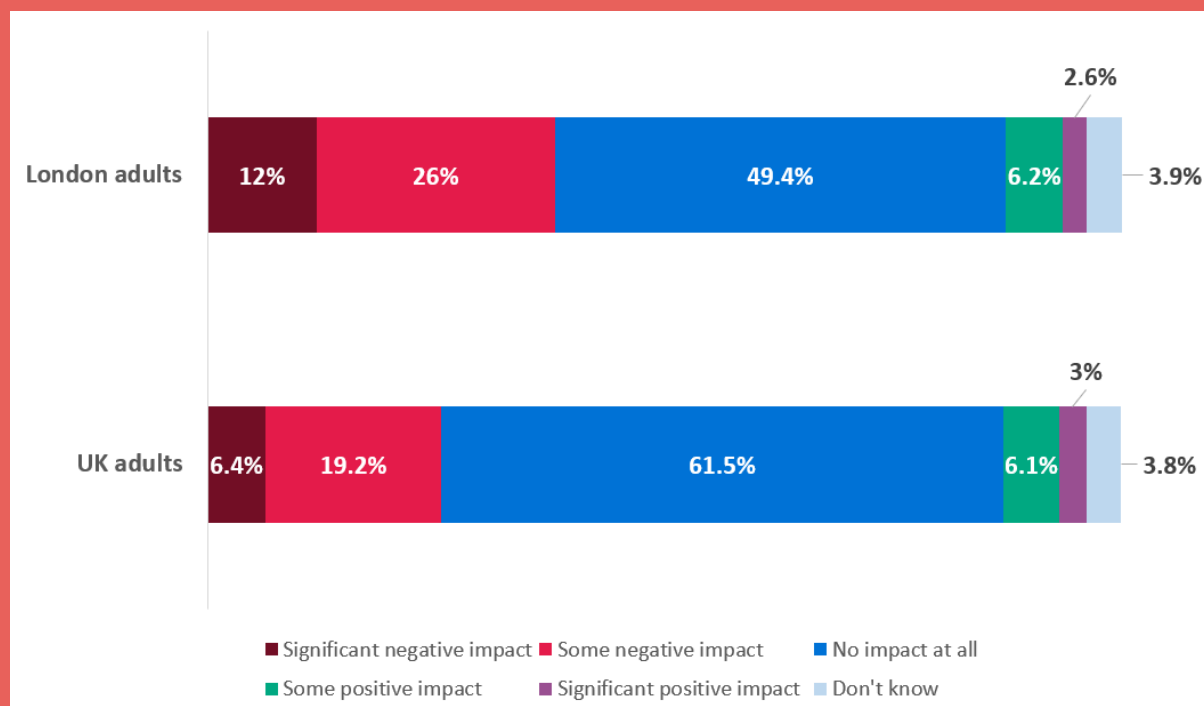
With physical inactivity responsible for 1 in 6 premature deaths, we want to help every Londoner find their way to move more.

Supported by Sport England and the Mayor of London, we collaborate with London's local authorities and other organisations, to provide better access to sport and physical activity across the capital.

Negative Impact on Communities

The cost-of-living crisis has negatively and disproportionately impacted Londoners' ability to be active, particularly for sub-groups including ethnic minority and disabled communities.

Over a third (38%) of Londoners reported the cost-of-living crisis had either a significant or somewhat negative impact on their ability to exercise. This is compared to a quarter of people (25.6%) when looking at the data for the rest of the UK.



London Sport X Opinium online survey conducted in February '23 amongst n = 500 London based adults and n= 2,000 UK adults more broadly (age 16+)

When looking at sub-groups across the UK, young people (aged 18-34), disabled people or people with long-term health conditions, and people from ethnic minority backgrounds stated their ability to be active has been most negatively impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.



57% of Londoners from ethnic minority backgrounds are negatively impacted

Compared to 44% nationally



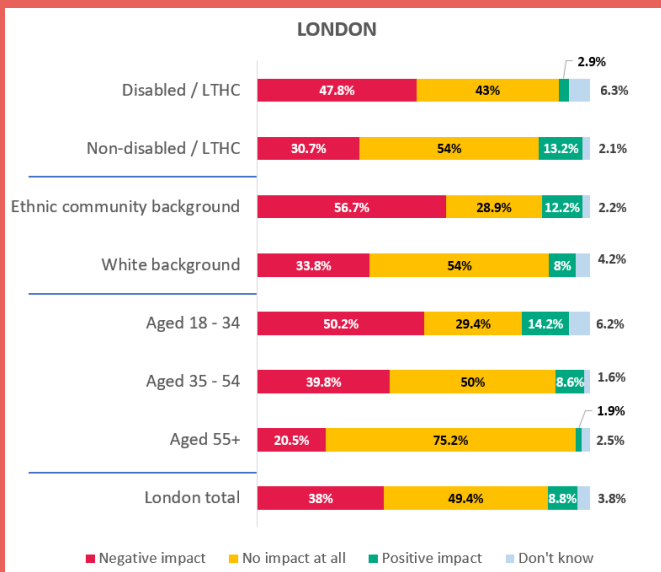
50% of young Londoners (aged 18-34) are negatively impacted

Compared to 31% nationally



48% of disabled Londoners and Londoners with long-term health conditions are negatively impacted

Compared to 29% nationally



This data shows the heightened impact of the cost-of-living crisis on specific communities and groups within society. For these groups in London, the impact is even greater.

The fall in perceived ability to be active is reflected in the next section, which outlines how respondents' behaviour has changed in response to the cost-of-living crisis.

London Sport X Opinium online survey conducted in February '23 amongst n = 500 London based adults and n= 2,000 UK adults more broadly (age 16+)



More London adults have changed exercise behaviours in response to cost-of-living increases compared to UK adults.

However, not all behavioural changes are negative and result in doing less activity. Nearly a quarter of Londoners (22%) increased their use of free activities including walking. Additionally, active travel has increased in some instances with 21% of Londoners stating they have increased walking or cycling instead of using their car.

Londoners' spending habits are also reflected in the data, with 13% having cancelled their gym or sport club memberships, compared to just 7% across the UK. Furthermore, double the proportion of London respondents have switched to cheaper gym memberships than those nationally.

When looking at sub-group variations in London, 54% of lower socio-economic groups have changed their exercise behaviours in response to cost-of-living increases in comparison to higher socio-economic groups (69%).

This correlates with the [London 2012 Games Legacy Report](#) that lower socio-economic groups are already spending or doing less when it comes to exercise, therefore the baseline of activity is already very low and may not shift further.

Finally, in London, almost nine in ten (87%) of ethnic minority individuals have made changes to their exercise habits, in comparison to 62% of white individuals.

London Sport X Opinium online survey conducted in February '23 amongst n = 500 London based adults and n= 2,000 UK adults more broadly (age 16+)

Influencing factors

The data shows that Londoners who already face the greatest challenges of inequality are the same groups who have seen reduced access to sport and physical activity.

The driver of this negative trend varies slightly between sub-groups, but recent research from the [Centre for London](#) identifies key common factors such as housing and low incomes.

Sharp increases to the cost of housing, and in particular renting, combined with real terms pay loss, further squeezes disposable income ([Centre for London, 2023](#)). This proves unsustainable for more disadvantaged individuals who are less likely to have sufficient savings to see them through periods of financial uncertainty ([ONS, 2020](#); [HMRC, 2022](#)). Disabled people or people with long-term health conditions also often struggle to find suitable employment and incomes, hindering their ability to spend money on activity ([Scope UK, 2022](#)).

It is important to note that, whilst these are national issues, London has experienced the strongest annual percentage change in private rental prices since January 2013 compared to other regions ([ONS, 2023](#)). It is therefore likely that, with wages failing to keep up, there is less disposable income for Londoners to spend on being active. This could explain the increased behaviour change in London compared to the UK average.

The fall in Londoners' ability to be active is concerning on multiple levels. Particularly, the impact on Londoner's health, with physical inactivity estimated to cost the NHS in the UK nearly £1 billion annually already ([OHID, 2022](#)).

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We want all Londoners to reap the benefits of an active life.

However, this research demonstrates the scale of impact that the cost-of-living crisis is having on population health and wellbeing. Unfortunately, we are likely to see further challenges as communities endure higher levels of financial difficulties.

Unless significant interventions are put in place, this crisis will continue to affect Londoners and the rest of the UK, and will result in detrimental long-term health outcomes for the population.

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Looking forward

The data shows that the impact of the cost-of-living crisis is disproportionately hitting London, and making Londoners unable to access physical activity. It is paramount that this negative impact is curbed as soon as possible to negate long running detrimental implications and worsening existing inequality.

With Londoners pivoting to free activities, expanding free accessible ways to move for the most affected areas and groups should be a sector priority to keep people active through this challenging time. To do this, London Sport is currently distributing £500,000 via the Together Fund to 80 projects across London to provide free sports and physical activity sessions to local communities. Earlier in 2023, we launched Space for Girls in Lewisham, transforming a vacant shopping unit into a community hub with free physical activity. In collaboration with Decathlon, we are expanding this in the coming weeks in their Surrey Quays Store.

By coming together, we can help Londoners live longer, healthier and happier lives through access to physical activity.

For more on this report and the data:

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