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# The perceptions of young Saudis and other key actors about the limits and possibilities for participation in physical activity and sport:

a research project funded by the Prince Faisal bin Fahad Award for Sports Research

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جائزة الأمير فيصل بن فهد للبحوث الرياضية  
Prince Faisal bin Fahad Award for Sports Research



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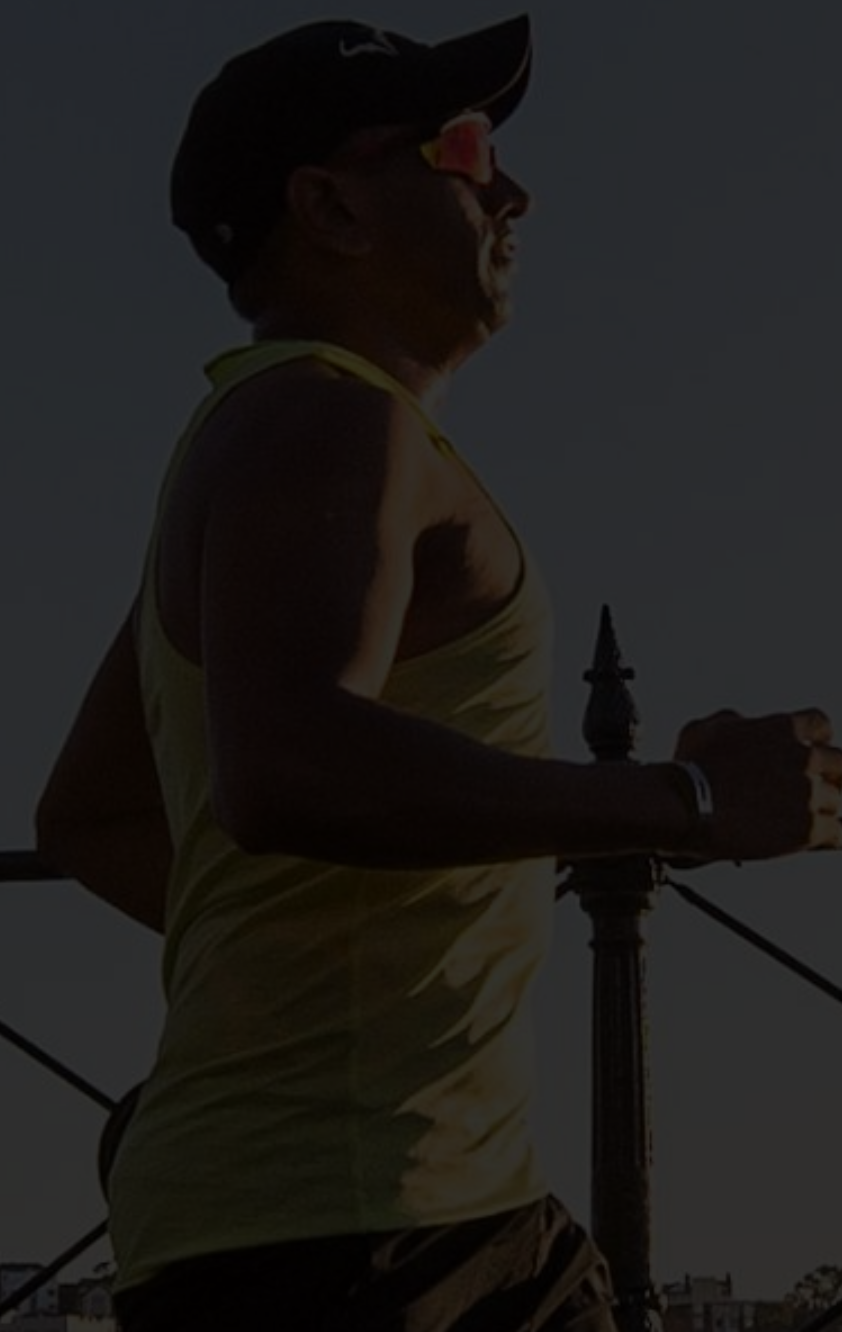
WESTERN SYDNEY  
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Leaders  
Development  
Institute

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# Summary

A cyclist wearing a blue helmet and a yellow and black jersey is riding a road bike on a paved road. The background is a lush green hillside with a stone wall. The image is dimmed to serve as a background for the text.

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the challenges and possibilities for young Saudis' participation in physical activities and sports.

The **findings of this study can contribute to the formulation of new policies** to enhance youth's sports participation in Saudi Arabia, hence reinforcing healthy habits in the country's new generations.

The objective of the research was to know the **challenges and possibilities for young Saudis' participation in physical activities and sports.** Therefore, the specific objectives of the research are to know

# Objectives

**(a)** the physical activities and sports practiced by young Saudis;

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**(b)** the main motivators for the practice of physical activities and sports practiced by young Saudis;

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**(c)** school features, home resources, perceptions of the neighbourhood environment and social support related to physical activity and sports, according to young Saudis; and

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**(d)** the main barriers for the practice of physical activities and sports practiced by young Saudis.

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# Activities

**Bringing together 23 researchers from six different countries, the progress of the research required regular online meetings to discuss and define the course of the work to be developed.**

Among many other activities developed between 2021 and 2023, there was the **“Seminar Saudi Arabia: youth, physical activity, sport”**, with the participation of Dr Joe Piggin (Senior Lecturer in Sport Management & Policy - School of Sport, Exercise and Health Sciences - Loughborough University) and Dr Mahfoud Amara (Associate Professor in Sport Social Sciences & Management, College of Education, Qatar University), held on January 31, 2022. Also with great success, the research carried out in Saudi Arabia the **“Seminar Young Saudis’ limits and possibilities in Physical Activity and Sport”** on January 24, 2023, in Riyadh.

(JAN-DEC)	(JAN, 31)	(JAN, 24)
<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>
Many other activities	“Seminar Saudi Arabia: youth, physical activity, sport”	“Seminar Young Saudis’ limits and possibilities in Physical Activity and Sport”

# Activities

With the presence of people from various Saudi ministries and representatives of local academia, researchers presented the preliminary research data with great success, provoking an interesting debate.

In addition to presenting the research data, the group also listened to representatives from ministries and academia so that the research can better capture the nuances of the issues that it studies.



# Methodology

## Potential and challenges

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Capturing the potential and challenges for the practice of physical activity and sports for such a wide range of people (as is the case of young Saudis) is a complex task. Thus, this research decided to take an equally complex path to achieve this objective, including both qualitative and quantitative data collection. The techniques utilised were document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and an online survey.

## Appreciate the practices

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In order to both appreciate the practices, judgements and behaviours of the research participants and documents selected and to offer a precise and rigorous examination of the datasets, and a highly elastic approach for the requirements of this study, offering a rich, comprehensive, and multifaceted interpretation of the data, Thematic Analysis, as a tried and tested method of analysis was utilised for the analysis of the interviews and documents.

## Interviews

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9 people were interviewed, 5 men and 4 women, all representing sports clubs, ministries, schools, and sports federations. 7 interviews were conducted in Arabic and 2 in English. In total, the interviews resulted in 316 minutes. All interviews were transcribed and then analysed.

# Methodology



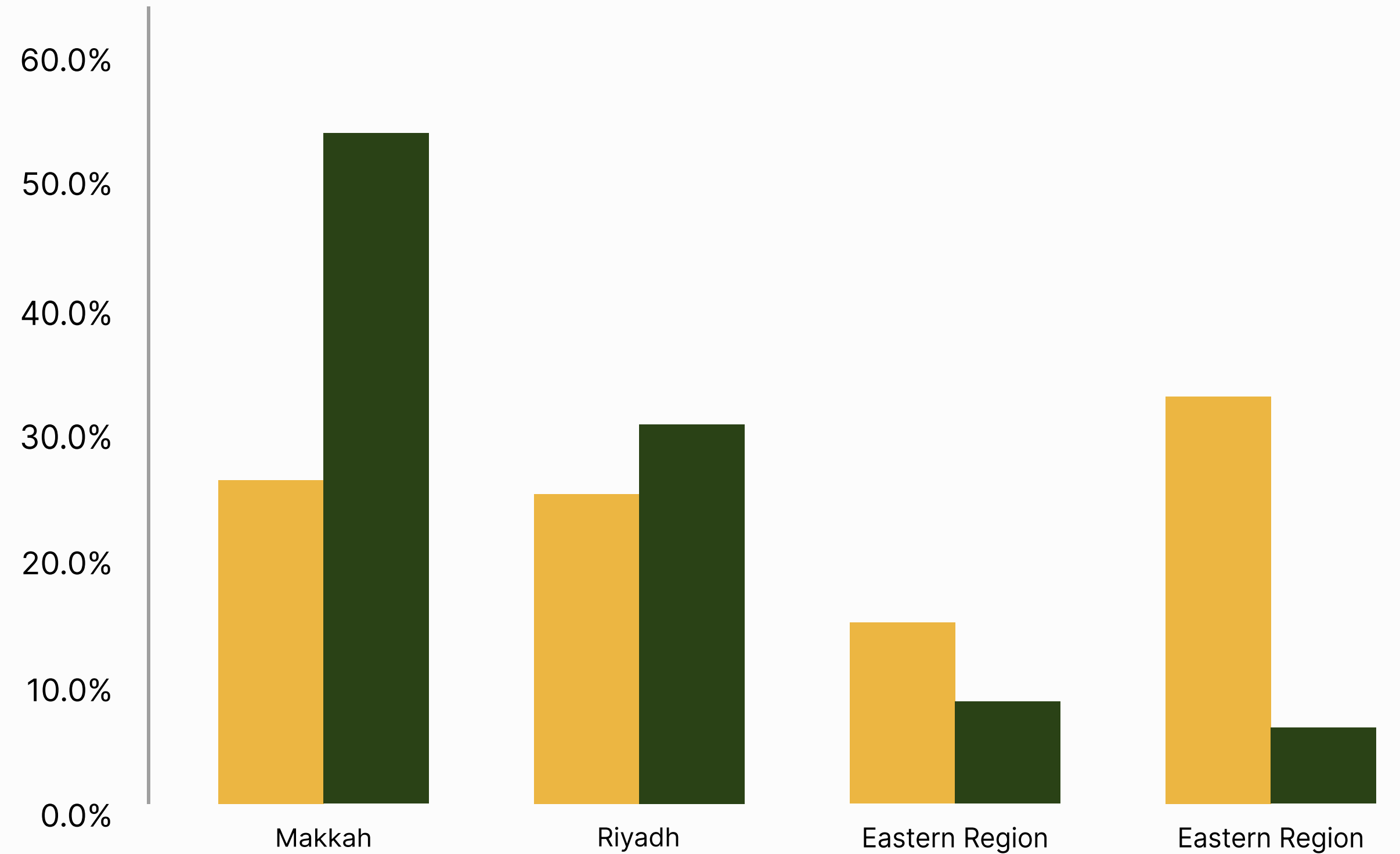
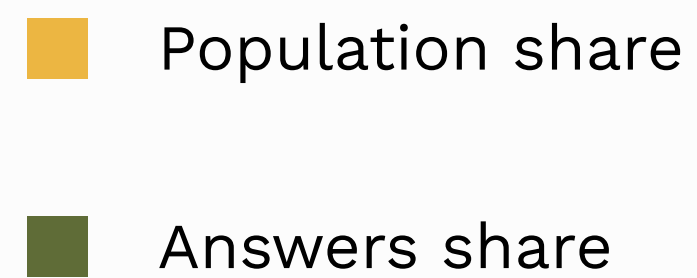
A standardized online questionnaire was used to survey young Saudis, aimed at understanding their access to physical education at school, their engagement with physical activity, and their perceptions around these themes.

This research instrument enabled the characterisation of physical and sports activities in different contexts, such as home, locality, school, sports, commuting and can produce data on differences and inequities, as well as limits and possibilities to the practices of physical activities and sports.

**Self-report of physical activity is thought to offer a practical and cost-effective method for use in population-based studies. 969 respondents (827 males and 142 females), aged 14.90 ± 1.55 years completed the survey.**



# Population share and proportion of submissions per region.



# Results

## **Qualitative:** outline and main themes established

The themes generated from the analysis of the qualitative data were organised into two overarching categories.

The first comprises themes pertaining to the effects of the Saudi government's attempts to promote young people's sport and PA participation, and the second pertains to broader factors that can be understood as existing beyond the control of Saudi government policy, but which still influence the promotion of sport/PA participation for young Saudis.

### **1. Saudi government policy relating to the promotion of young people's sport/PA participation:**

Role of government – policy and practice;

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Role of education system (schools/teachers and cooperation with sport);

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Women's participation in sport.

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### **2. Broader factors:**

Shifting attitudes to youth sport participation in Saudi Arabia;

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External barriers to sport/PA participation.

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## List of interview participants, their professional role, gender and language of the interview

	<b>Profession</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Language</b>
1	Ministry of Education official	male	Arabic (translate to English)
2	Ministry of Education official	female	Arabic (translate to English)
3	University department of sport science staff member	female	Arabic (translate to English)
4	Teacher/Education supervisor	male	Arabic (translate to English)
5	Executive manager at the Saudi Archery Federation	male	Arabic (translate to English)
6	Physical education teacher	male	Arabic (translate to English)
7	Football Federation official	male	Arabic (translate to English)
8	Basketball club management executive	female	English
9	Football club management executive	female	English

## Recommendations

Based on our analysis we recommend the following issues to be taken into consideration:



To continue to support the participation of women in all levels (school, club) and areas (also develop specific sport facilities for women);



To continue to build awareness of the potential benefits of sport/PA participation (such as mental and physical health) in line with the Saudi culture;



To offer further training to PE teachers as they seem to have the main role in organising and educating youth about physical activity;

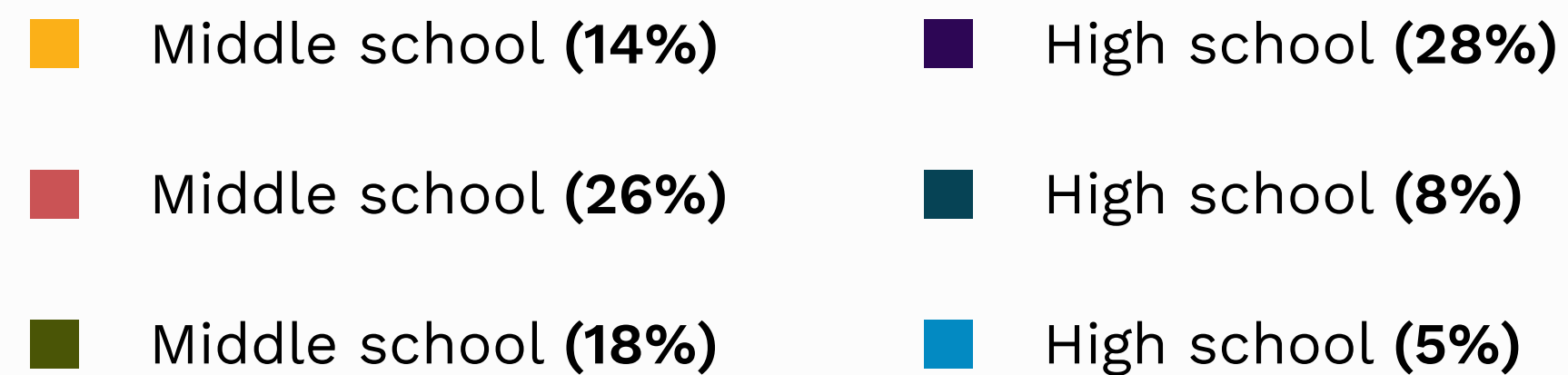
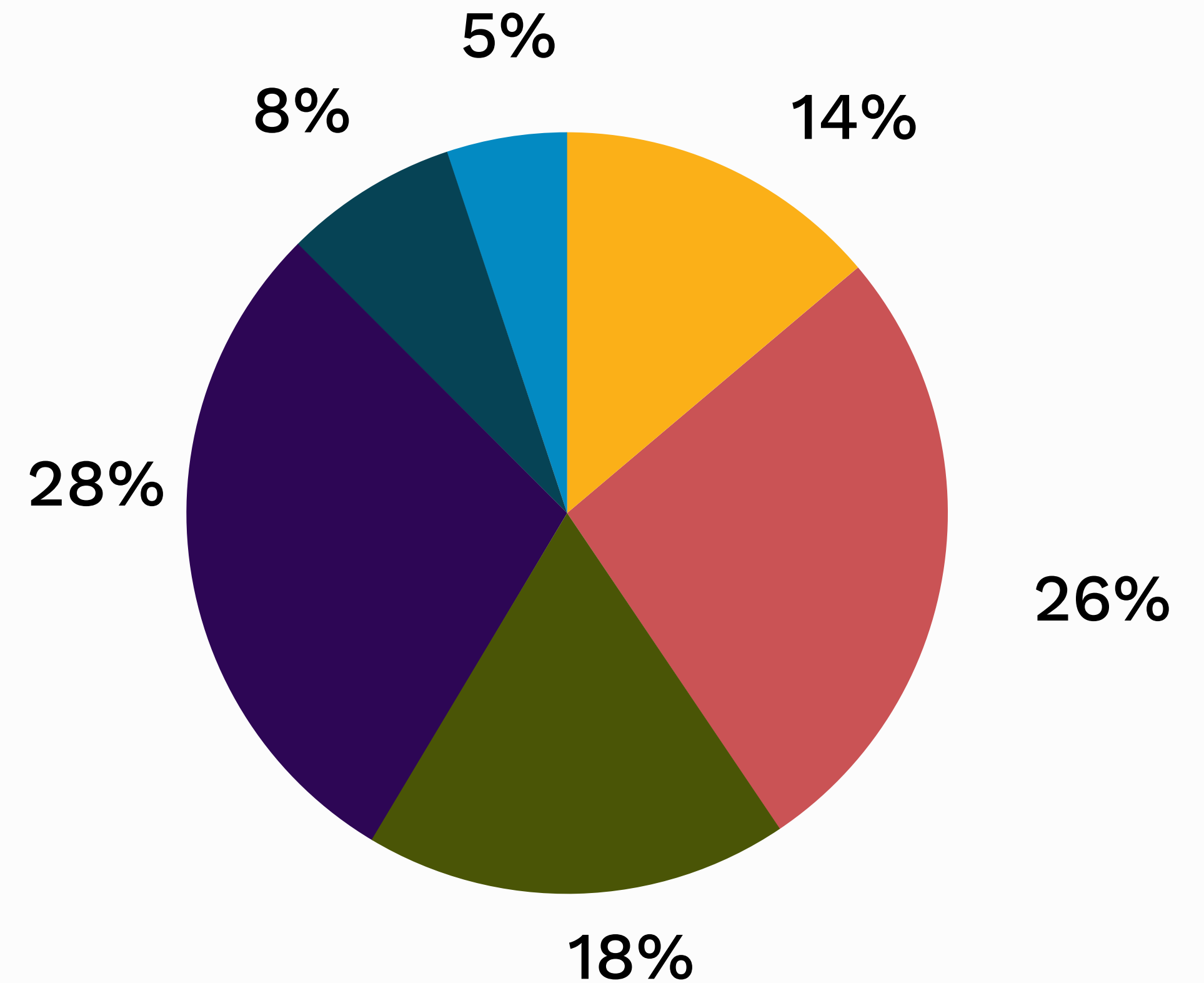


To support the offer of sport and PA that will be available to all Saudis at all levels of the society;



To organise future studies that will analyse how the Saudi Vision 2030 is being implemented in the years to come (as the Vision also seems to be guiding the current process of change also in the area of sport and PA).

# Quantitative: outline and main trends found



# Results



**6.7%**

of respondents declared not having PE lessons offered in their schools,

**21.5%**

to have them as an option and

**61.3%**

as mandatory.

**88.3%**

of them were currently attending PE lessons.

There is a significant difference with a large effect size ( $\chi^2(6, N=928)= 111.60$ ,  $p<0.001$ ,  $V=0.48$ ) in the proportion of attendance to PE lessons between the different year groups, with the two last years of high school being markedly different. Crucially, those two year groups also report the highest rate of difficulty to attend PE lessons, which is significantly different between age groups albeit with a small effect size ( $\chi^2(6, N=863)= 20.792$ ,  $p=0.002$ ,  $V=0.16$ ).

# Results

There is a significant difference with a large effect size ( $\chi^2(18, N=925)=207.02, P<0.001, V=0.58$ ) in the reported offer of PE classes between the different age groups, with the proportion of respondents not having PE lessons offered drastically increasing in the last two years of high school.

There is also a significant difference ( $\chi^2(1, N=919)= 111.60, p<0.001, V=0.34$ ) between the proportion of boys and girls attending PE lessons (92.8% vs 60.3%), potentially caused by the significant differences ( $\chi^2(3, N=916)=96.135, P<0.001, V=0.34$ ) in the reported offer of PE classes between boys and girls:

**6.7%**

of respondents declared not having physical education classes offered in their schools (27.2% of girls vs 3.9% of boys), and

**21.5%**

to have them as an option (11.2% of girls vs 24.5% of boys).

**61.3%**

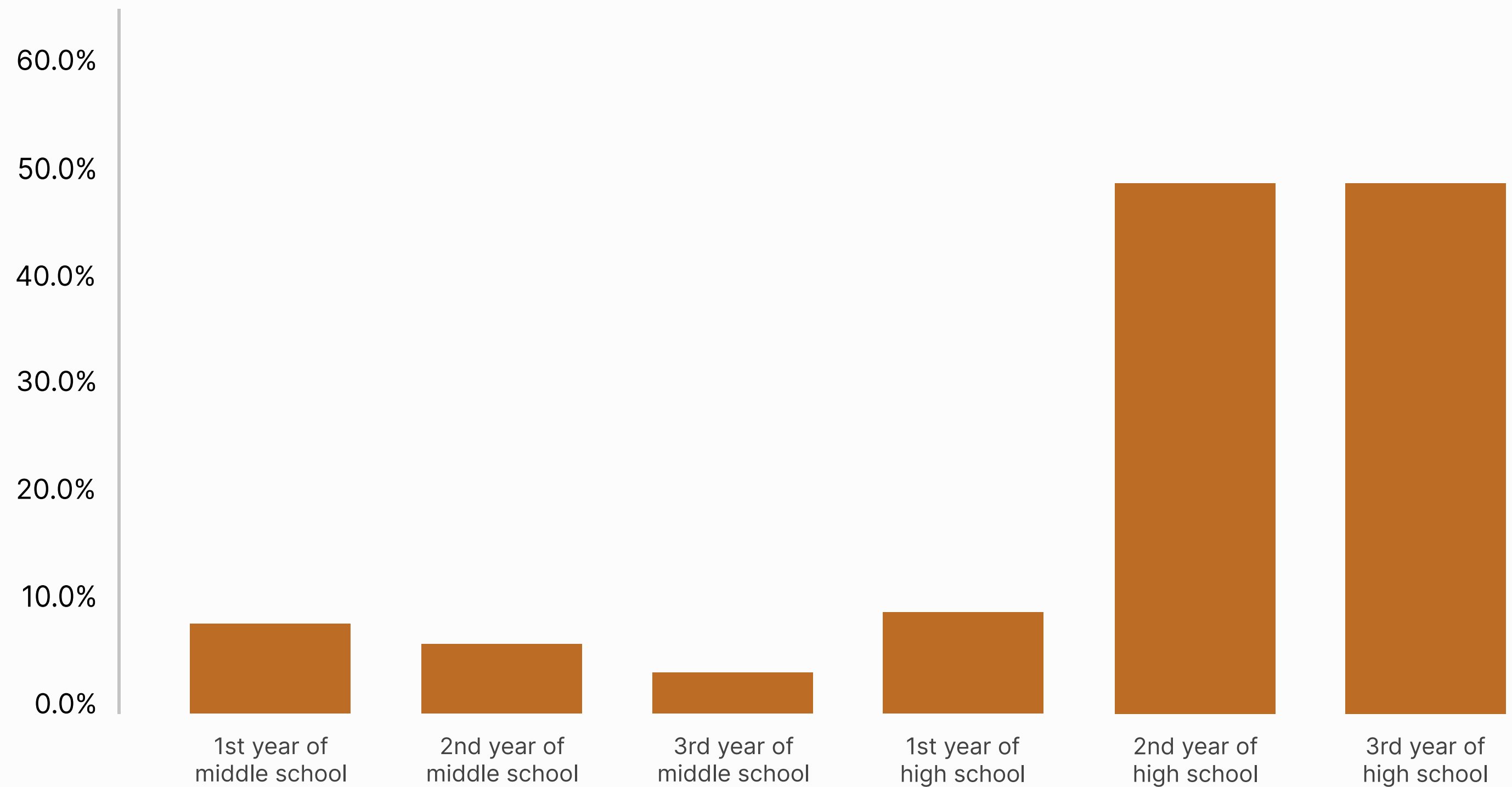
of respondents declared having them as mandatory (53.6% of girls vs 66.9% of boys).

However, there are no significant differences in reported difficulties to attend PE lessons neither between genders ( $\chi^2(1, N=701)= 0.16, p=0.692$ ) nor between year groups ( $\chi^2(5, N=132)= 9.34, p=0.096$ ).

Regionally, there are significant differences ( $\chi^2(3, N=890)=76.769, P<0.001, V=0.29$ ) in proportion of attendance to PE lessons, caused by the stark difference between Makkah (96.5%) and everywhere else (77.5% Riyadh, 79.7% Eastern Province, 74.5% rest of the country). This is justified by the high proportion of respondents from Makkah that report having mandatory PE lessons (71.9%), compared to 50.8% to 57.1% in the other areas.

# Results

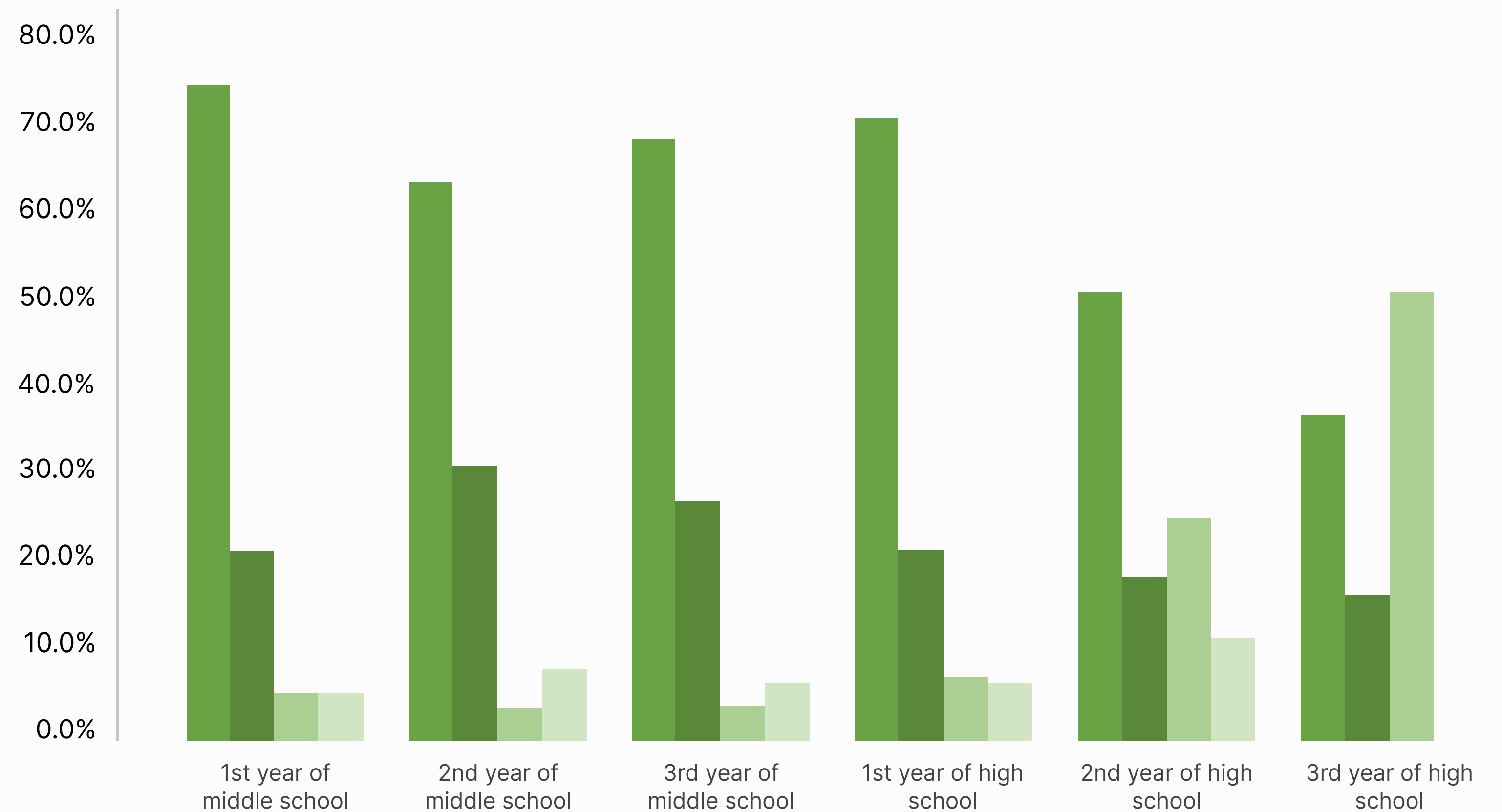
**Proportion** of respondents not attending PE lessons per year group





# Results

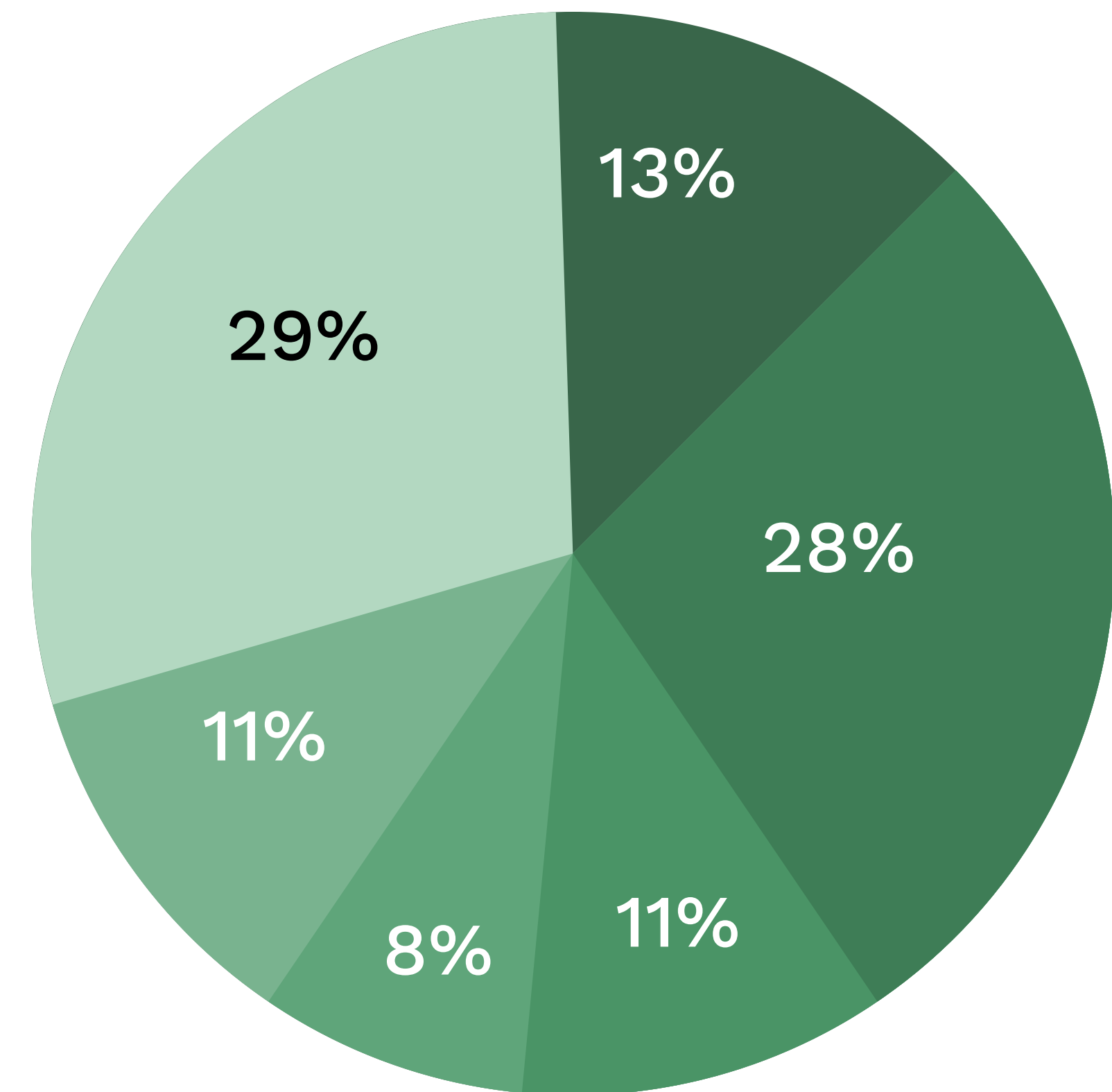
## Availability of PE lessons per school year group



# Results

Of the **21%** of respondents who declared having difficulties getting involved in PE, **28%** declared disinterest and **29%** an unspecified reason.

- Medical certificate (13%)
- Desinterest (28%)
- Previous negative experiences (11%)
- Lack of skills (8%)
- Lack of proper clothing (11%)
- Another reason (29%)



# Results

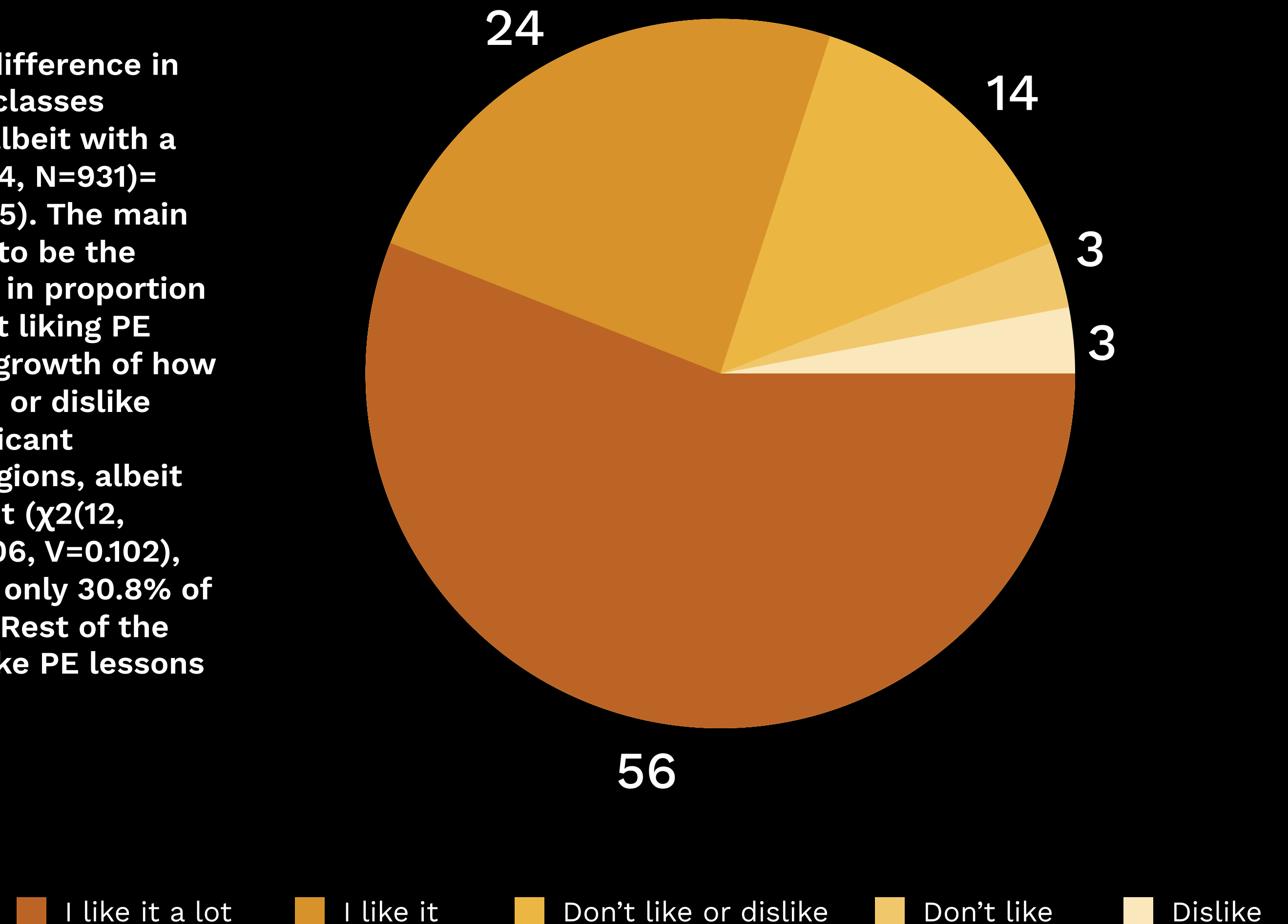
9% of respondents had one PE lesson a week, 57% had two lessons a week, 29% had three lessons a week and 5% had four lessons a week, and gender differences are significant, albeit with a small effect size ( $\chi^2(3, N=806)= 13.44, p=0.004, V=0.13$ ).

There is not a significant difference between genders in the reported number of days they were physically active for at least 60 minutes ( $U=42994, p=0.050$ , with  $3.17 \pm 2.29$  days per week for boys and  $2.76 \pm 2.446$  days per week for girls).

# Results

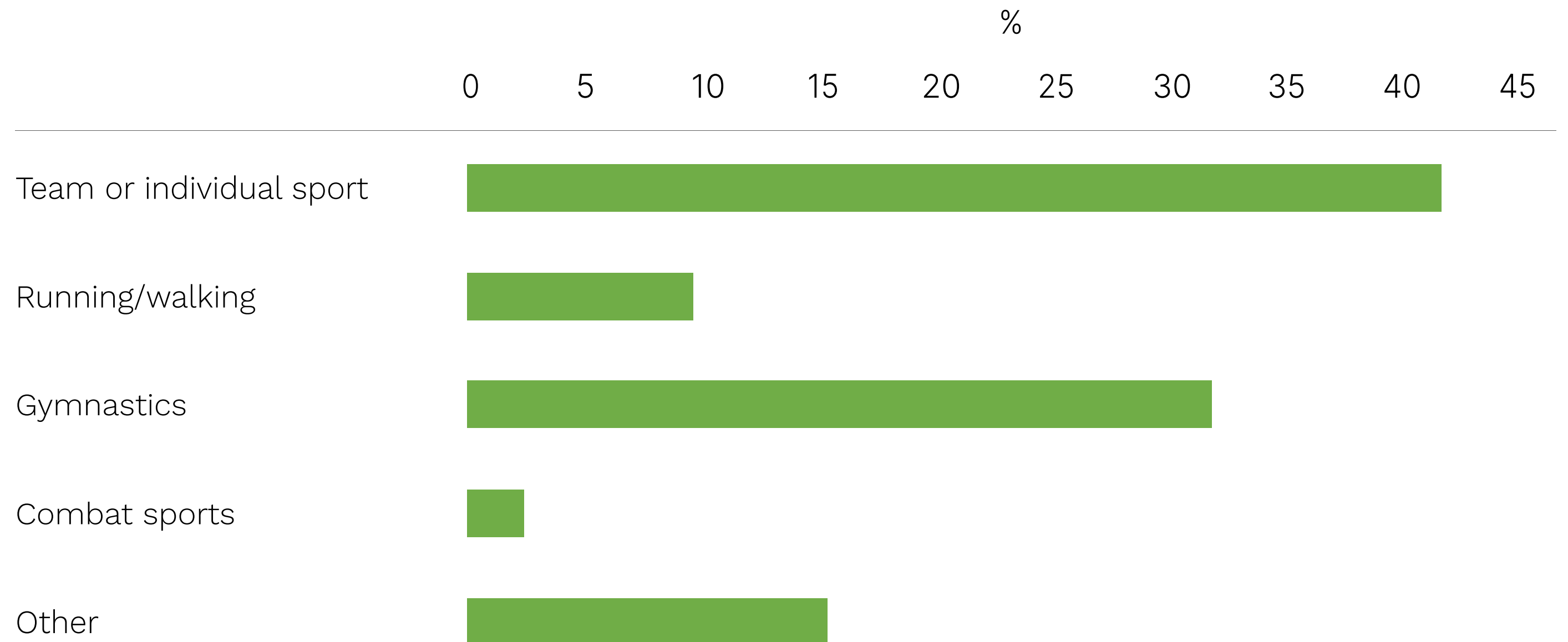
80% of respondents liked or liked a lot of PE lessons, whilst only 6% did not like or disliked them. There is however a significant difference in the perception of PE lessons between boys and girls ( $\chi^2(4, N=922)=81.368, P<0.001, V=0.30$ ). Girls tended to be more ambivalent about PE lessons, with the option of do not like or dislike being the most selected one with 36.8%. 48.0% of girls and 82.2% of boys like or like a lot their PE lessons. There is a significant difference in the perception of PE classes between age groups, albeit with a small effect size ( $\chi^2(24, N=931)=80.51, P<0.001, V=0.15$ ).


There is a significant difference in the perception of PE classes between age groups, albeit with a small effect size ( $\chi^2(24, N=931)=80.51, P<0.001, V=0.15$ ). The main reason for this seems to be the large progressive drop in proportion of students that report liking PE lessons a lot, not in a growth of how many do not like them or dislike them. There is a significant difference between regions, albeit with a small size effect ( $\chi^2(12, N=894)=27.925, P=0.006, V=0.102$ ), caused particularly by only 30.8% of respondents from the Rest of the country declaring to like PE lessons a lot.



# Results

**Team or individual sports were mentioned as offered by 42% of respondents. Gymnastics was singled out by 32%**





# General conclusions

The overall impression from this analysis is that – primarily driven by Vision 2030 – **significant change is taking place within the context of Saudi domestic sport** (consistent with investment in elite international sport), and therefore the provision of sport/PA participation for young Saudis, as best demonstrated by increased organisation/funding but also in the growing focus on women’s sport/PA participation. However, **it is important to note that these broad overall trends must be understood in relation to variations** in PE uptake across different age groups and regions of Saudi Arabia.



# General conclusions

Interviewees suggested that this new policy focus on sport/PA could be further strengthened by sustained emphasis on developing sporting facilities (both in general and in terms of women's sport specifically) and upon developing the relationship between the sport and education sectors. Although traditional attitudes to sport persist among older generations – there are signs that this pattern is also beginning to change. This shift is particularly evident in the increasing enthusiasm of girls towards sport participation as described in detail by the interviewee 1.

Throughout both the qualitative and quantitative data collected it is apparent that the distinction between competitive sport and PA for young people is particularly blurred.

This lack of clarity resonates with broader debates that have taken place in the international research literature about the complex relationship between elite sport and PA/mass participation sport.

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# Thank you!

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