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Current status and changes in sports club participation between 2016-2022 among 9-15 year olds in Finland

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Sports clubs attain a lot of children and adolescents in many countries and contributes to physical activity (PA) and physical education (PE), and further to public health (PH). In Finland, sports club participation has been monitored nationally in The Finnish School-aged Physical Activity (FSPA) study. The purpose of this study is to describe the current status and changes in sports club participation in given age groups over time and with regards to age and gender. Nationally representative samples of 9-15 year olds were collected by electronic questionnaire in 2016 (n = 6956), in 2018 (n = 5683) and in 2022 (n = 7936). Sports club participation was asked by four category question: 1) No current nor previous participation; 2) No current, but yes previous participation (drop out); 3) Occasional current participation; and 4) Regular and active current participation. Results are presented through percentage distributions and changes in proportions. The proportion of regularly participating children and adolescents was smaller in 2022 (46%) than in 2018 (50%) and in 2016 (51%) and among both genders. The proportions of the participation over time remained stable among 9 and 11 year olds, but were smaller among 13 and 15 year olds. The largest change was observed among 13 year olds, in which the proportion of regular participants had dropped 10% from 2016 to 2022. Regarding to gender, the proportion of dropouts had increased among both genders, but more among girls. As low levels of PA among school-aged has been one of the major public health

concerns in Finland, the decrease in sports club participation steepen this concern further. This is especially true among girls. Actions to induce more participants and prevention of drop out are needed. The negative trend in sports club participation is a public health concern as with wide coverage club activities contribute to physical activity and education. This trend needs to be changed.