Mental Health and Wellbeing in Sport: Review and Recommendations

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Overview

• Background
• Northern Ireland Context
• Phase 1
• Phase 2
• Phase 3
• What next?
Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.
Background

The problem!

Mental health problems are one of the main causes of disease burden, with major depression being the second leading cause of disability and a contributor to suicide and heart disease worldwide (Whiteford, Degenhardt, & Rehm, et al., 2013).

Globally an estimated 350 million people are affected by depression, 60 million by bipolar affective disorder, and 21 million by schizophrenia/other psychoses (WHO, 2016a; 2016b).
Background

Sport and Mental Health

Recent evidence suggests that competitive sport may contribute to poor mental health (Bauman, 2016), and that athletes can have specific stressors that hinders mental health optimisation (Donohue et al, 2007: also see Rice et al, 2016).

- **Athletes**: Sport culture celebrates mental toughness and disapproval of weakness disclosure (Bauman, 2016)
- **Coaches**: experience specific stressors (Fletcher and Scott, 2010)
- **Parents in youth sport**: ‘parenting expertise’ (Harwood and Knight 2014)
- **Sporting Organisations**: health as well as sport (see sociology in sport)

**Stressors**
- Pressure to achieve (Evans et al, 1992)
- Separation from family (Masland, 1983)
- Increases risk of substance misuse (King et al 2010)
- Emotional consequence of injury (Wiese-Bjornstal, 2010)
- Worries of media, perception of others about failure (Bauman, 2016)
- ....Interpersonal conflict, employment qualms, finances

Context dependent: Sport participation versus high performance environments
THERE'S NO STORY SO FAR
The Northern Ireland Context

DCAL scoping review into the use of sport and arts to tackle mental health (Bateson, 2012)

At-risk groups – within NI, those in the lowest social grouping (DE) perceived lower levels of control over their mental health and were less aware of the activities they could engage in to improve their mental health (Breslin and McCay, 2012)

January 2016: Sport NI hosted a stakeholder workshop: for the formation of Mental health and Wellbeing in and Through Sport Strategy, several meetings have taken place since.

Mood Matters in Sport Programme Evaluation (Sport NI, 2015; Breslin et al 2016)

Public Health Agency development of governing body strategies on mental health and wellbeing in sport (PHA and Ulster Rugby, 2015-2016).

DHSSPS strategic framework for public health “Making Life Better 2013-2023” details a specific target to improve mental health and well-being, using sport (Theme 3, Outcome 8; Theme 5, Outcome 14)
Background and Rationale

The Northern Ireland Context

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Interventions

>100 clubs have received the programme

Breslin, Haughey, Kearney, Prentice & Donnelly (2017)
create positive change
Background

The paradox of help seeking!

- Unlike physical health, it is argued that mental health has not been accorded the same importance.
- Low level of understanding of mental health (HPA, 2006)
- Paradox around help seeking (Breslin and McCay, 2006; Breslin and McCay, 2012).
- This unwillingness to seek help was attributed to mental health stigma.
Getting organised!!!

- January 2016: Sport NI hosted a stakeholder workshop: for the formation of Mental health and Wellbeing in and Through Sport Strategy – STEERING GROUP
- Four subsequent meetings…
Phase 1

Systematic Review of Peer reviewed interventions which promote mental health and wellbeing in sport
Results

Figure 2: PRISMA flow diagram for identified and included studies

- Records identified through database searching (n = 1095)
- Additional records identified through other sources (n = 0)

Records after duplicates removed (n = 1007)

Records screened (n = 1007)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 11)

Studies included in quantitative synthesis (n = 6)

Records excluded (n = 996)

Full-text articles excluded, with reasons (n = 5)

Sport Northern Ireland
What was found?

- Generally, findings supported the introduction of knowledge based mental health and wellbeing awareness programmes in sport.
- Of the programmes available, few showed good methodological quality and a majority had a high risk of bias.
- None of the studies followed standards for reporting trials, referred to the MRC guidelines or conducted long term follow ups (beyond three months).
- Future longitudinal studies are required with larger sample sizes of males and females, wherein randomisation to groups is blinded, and outcomes are measured with validated measurement tools.
- If designing or delivering programmes locally, consideration should be given to measurement and evaluation design.
- Conclusion: A cautionary approach should be taken when determining an effective programme.
Phase 2

- A regional review of mental health and wellbeing policies, strategies and interventions.
Method
Qualitative Study

Participants
• 26 participants took part (20 = male: 6 = female).
Method
Qualitative Study

Participants
• 17 interviews: 14 face to face; 3 via telephone
• 2 focus groups (n=4, then n=5 in each)

Interview and focus group content
• Section A: Understanding of mental health and wellbeing
• Section B: Support provision
• Section C: Training requirements
• Section D: Monitoring and Evaluation

Recording
Each was recorded via a Digital Dictaphone (Phillips Voicetracer, 660) which was transcribed verbatim. Each interview was anonymised to ensure confidentiality,
RESULTS

- Mental health and wellbeing awareness is taking place in sport (16+ programmes)
- Varied understanding of mental health and wellbeing, that will have implications for training and awareness raising
- Little evaluation apparent in the effectiveness of existing programmes in sport settings

- There is a willingness to develop mental health and wellbeing in governing bodies, clubs, and at policy level.
- The skills of the person who delivers any training to clubs or within clubs requires consideration
- Leadership is being sought on what governing bodies and clubs can do next, in terms of mental health and wellbeing

- Recognition that evaluation should be part of determining what works
- There are existing networks in place to facilitate the delivery of the mental health and wellbeing message.
# Mental Health in Sport Programmes

## 16+ programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Delivery Organisation</th>
<th>Programme delivered</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Action Mental Health</td>
<td>ASIST</td>
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<td>Mental Health First Aid</td>
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<td></td>
<td>SafeTALK</td>
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<td>AWARE</td>
<td>Mood Matters for Young People</td>
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<td>Living Life to the full</td>
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<td>Mood Matters Adults</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mental Health First Aid</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mindfulness (Elite athletes only)</td>
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<tr>
<td>NHSCT</td>
<td>Mental Health First Aid</td>
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<td>SHSCT</td>
<td>ASIST</td>
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<tr>
<td>SE PHA – co-ordinated by SET</td>
<td>SafeTALK</td>
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<tr>
<td>Belfast Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Area</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIPS Newry and Mourne</td>
<td>ASIST</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mental Health First Aid</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Safetalk</td>
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<tr>
<td>State of Mind Ireland and Ulster University</td>
<td>State of Mind Ireland Pilot Programme</td>
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Key Recommendations

A. Strategy/Action Plan development
B. Resourcing the Strategy/Action Plan
C. Mental Health and Wellbeing officer in clubs
D. Develop Mental health and wellbeing awareness programmes
E. Integration of mental health and wellbeing into existing networks
Evidence to guide practice

• Systematic Review of Peer reviewed interventions across the world which promote mental health and wellbeing in sport

• A regional review of mental health and wellbeing policies, strategies and interventions.
Evidence to guide practice

- Systematic Review of Peer-reviewed interventions across the world which promote mental health and wellbeing in sport.
- A regional review of mental health and wellbeing policies, strategies and interventions.
Report Launched, February 2017
Department for Communities

Breslin, Shannon, Haughey, Donnelly and Leavey (under peer review)
Recommendations

A) Strategy Development

1. Due to the lack of a mental health and wellbeing strategy specific to sport, there was a resounding need for direction and leadership in this area, the development of a strategy should be considered to provide this leadership and direction.

2. Sport NI, the Public Health Agency, local councils, government departments and governing bodies of sport to work in partnership to develop the strategy in mental health and wellbeing in sport. This could be led by Sport Northern Ireland and the steering group that has already been established.

3. A new strategy will help avoid a ‘start stop’ approach to the delivery of mental health and wellbeing in sport, and for existing strategies on mental health and wellbeing, sport should be specifically mentioned.
Recommendations Cont

B) Resourcing the Strategy
   1. Resources to deliver training and the development of the strategy and evaluation
      would need to be put in place, with a dedicated team to over-see the strategy.

C) Mental health and wellbeing awareness programmes
   1. Knowledge and understanding of the terms mental health and wellbeing was
      dependent on the background of the participants. Mental health awareness
      raising through training to governing body personnel is required in the first
      instance. The training programme delivered should be developed, piloted and
      reviewed before being rolled out across Northern Ireland.

   2. The evidence for the effectiveness of mental health awareness programmes in
      sport settings lacks a sound methodological foundation on which to determine
      what types of programmes are most effective. With this gap in knowledge
      cautionary steps should be taken when designing, selecting the content,
      implementing and evaluating future programmes.
Recommendations Cont

D) Mental health and Wellbeing Officer
   1. If governing bodies decide to put in place a mental health and wellbeing officer, training will need to be put in place to develop the required skill set.

E) Integration of mental health and wellbeing into existing available networks
   1. Consideration should be given to the integration of effective mental health and wellbeing programmes into coaching qualifications and lessons learned from the NSPCC in engaging clubs in safeguarding and welfare could be considered.
   2. Clubs and organisations should consider updating their safeguarding, health and welfare protocols to reflect mental health and wellbeing.
   3. Psycho-educational mental health and awareness programmes should be made available to coaches and athletes, this maybe through increasing awareness of existing courses (once evaluated) or developing sport specific courses for delivery in clubs. In the development of new courses guidelines for effective intervention design should be adhered to.
Strategy/Action Plan Public Consultation
Aim

To develop a strategy/action plan for mental health and wellbeing in sport based on the public’s view of the five recommendations listed above.
Consultation events

- Six consultation events were held between the 3rd April – 10th May 2017 across five venues in Northern Ireland.
- An open invitation to attend the consultation events was circulated via Sport Northern Ireland, Northern Ireland Sports Forum, coach and talent networks and posted on Eventbrite.
- A total of 90 people registered for the consultation events, with 83 attending (59% male, 41% female).
Content of the consultation event

• Welcome
• Review of the working group and outcomes to date,
• A description of the five key recommendations,
• A series of questions on how the five key recommendations could be achieved and by when.
• Group activity
• Each session lasted 2 hours
a) Develop a Strategy/Action Plan for mental health and wellbeing in sport

Participants, although supportive of a strategy where unclear how to develop actions for inclusion in a strategy.

Recommended actions are:

- The strategy could link to other existing strategies – specifically community planning with local authorities and wider governmental documents.
- Language in the strategy should be suitable for all within the community to understand.
- Development of 1-page action plan for National Governing Bodies and Clubs.
- Integration into the current Clubmark/Kitemark Schemes in local authorities and/or National Governing Bodies.
- Build on work currently underway on leadership and integrate wellbeing into this.
- Identification of role models to show mental health is important to everyone, this would tackle mental health stigma.
- Development of a mental health and wellbeing trained workforce to educate those involved in sport.
- Production of a mental health and wellbeing toolkit relevant to the needs of those involved in sport.
- Identification of funding opportunities to assist communities to develop mental health in sport initiatives.
Link to other Strategies

- Community planning/policy/legislation/ Gov dept
- School

Workforce

- Coach Educator
- Appoint person

Awareness programme

- Training/refresher
- All level — tailored for age groups
- Officer/Members/Coaches

Consultation

- Evaluate programme — rugby etc
- Key messages — benefit of sport
- Communication strategy

Tool kit

- awareness package
- referral route/support/signpost
- training pack — pocket resource

Toolkit aspect

ACTION PLAN

STRATEGY

Clubmark Scheme

1) Workplace / leadership
2) Funding — Resourcing
3) Strategy links
4) Communication

1 page into GB/club — good club/GB governance

Those not involved in sport

- Sport initiative
- Referral GP
-
B) Ensure the Strategy/Action Plan was adequately resourced

Adequate financial resourcing of the strategy was raised in all consultation events. Resourcing the strategy would prevent the start-stop reactive approach to mental health in sport, and provide a level of consistency. Recommended actions are:

- Maintain the Mental Health in and through Sport Working Group to provide overall leadership and governance.
- Train the existing employed and volunteer workforce in sport, develop specific mental health in sport resources and toolkits, link with agencies that are currently delivering mental health promotion who can assist with policy, strategy and action plan development.
- Examine potential funding opportunities for the strategy.
- Build partnerships – area alliances; learning networks, Sports Forums, Community Planning to share the costs of the strategy.
- Address the mental health and wellbeing training gap within current coaching qualifications.
RESOURCING

Pilot programmes
- Maintain steering group

Workforce – Training Tutors / improve resilience /
- MH/WB knowledge / referral services
- Coaches & Committee / Coach education programme

Private Sponsorship

Agencies on ground can deliver
Who will lead policy/strategy/action plan

Funding available
- Training
- Longterm

NB of MH as well as PH

Existing Resources
- Local plans
- Links + telephone number
- Networks

Support
Role Models – elite athlete

Local spend currently

Toolkit / Resources
- Posters / App / Facebook / Social media (t-map)
- talks, website – ads rolling platform

Area plans to link to GBs & Clubs
- Regional level / club level / SNI based lead
- Best Practice share
- Local/regional/global

App / Website
- Inform and educate
- Report and detail
- Direct

Replicate Safeguarding/phased approach
C) Introduce Mental Health and Wellbeing officers in sport clubs

- The skill set of the person was considered most important.
- Appoint a regional officer who was the overall contact person for the officer in the club when a mental health issue was to arise.
- Accredited or certified training was suggested best for the regional wellbeing officer, this was to ensure they had the correct skill set for the position.
- If a National Governing Body person takes the role it should be a paid position.
- For the development of officers, a similar approach to that of the current safeguarding officer in the club could be considered.
D) Develop evidence based mental health and wellbeing awareness programmes

- At all consultations, participants showed an awareness of what mental health awareness programmes were delivered within the community.
- There was an overwhelming view that there is a requirement for mental health awareness programmes and advice required for participants, leaders, coaches, administrators and volunteers.
- A recommendation was to develop a communication pack that would be relevant to organisations – similar to templates in the Clubmark scheme, this could be supported by a social media campaign.
- Attendees suggested that for this to occur financial support and investment was required and that only effective programmes be integrated into clubs.
E) Integrate mental health and wellbeing promotion into existing networks

- Make use of existing networks.
- It was felt that work was required to develop better working relationships with professional and non-sporting bodies to assist in the development of mental health initiatives.
- Specific programmes could be developed for: (a) clubs and officers, (b) coaches, (c) those participating in sport, (d) athletes, and (e) parents.
- The working group could provide advice on current mental health literature and develop resources (i.e. information cards, videos, training resources) for use in clubs.
SACN – Fresh Little Minds – guidelines
  - Mental health education into clubs
  - Develop policy and procedure

Replicate safeguarding – integrate training into current programme

Governance – integrate into clubmark

Role models / Media

Build partnerships
  - Local mental health and wellbeing organisations

Current in work
  - Club, coaching, talent, governance

Coaching Qualification

Funding links

Area alliances – learning network
  - Shared resources
  - LA, Sports Forum, Active Club Network,
  - Community plans, Community groups

Social evenings / groups – create awareness
  - Talks
Athlete / coach → Results → Resource

Questionnaire annual

Person
→ Roles / skill set

Role of Athlete
→ Advocates → Role models – delivers

Link to Clubmark

GB pledge

MH & Wellbeing policy
+ officer in place

OTHER

Joint approach

Audit of available training

Terminology

Language

Government support

Club support

Parallel with PA / MA

Community based
→ Capacity building

Communication

Welcome pack
Website
email
posters
information pack
social media / facebook / campaigns

M & E

Funding available

Information

Eg. Coaching qualification
Stand-alone programme / volunteers / leadership / young people
Summary and Recommendations
# Acknowledgements

**Participants who took part in the events**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Members of the Strategy Steering Group for Mental Health and Wellbeing In and Through Sport</th>
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<td>Dr John Kremer - Independent Chair</td>
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