

Welsh Institute of Physical Activity, Health and Sport
Audit of COVID-19 related research activity

Introduction

The Welsh Institute of Physical Activity, Health and Sport (WIPAHS) has been established to increase the collaborative research capacity across Wales, with the aim of promoting the health benefits associated with sport, physical activity and recreation. Specifically, WIPAHS facilitates the translation of research outcomes to tangible individual and societal impact through collaboration between higher education institutions (HEIs) and Sport Wales.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the work of Sport Wales and their focus in the short-, and potentially, medium-term has shifted towards responding to the COVID-19 pandemic to continue to support the local communities they serve. The aim of the current audit was to determine the nature of research activity relating to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on physical activity, health and sport across Wales.

Methods

An online survey was developed to obtain information relating to research activity across Wales, the institution, study details, and opportunities for collaboration. The survey was hosted via the Swansea University Survey System (Lime Survey, Version 2.64.3+170327) and was live between 19th August - 16th September 2020. A link to the electronic form was distributed via email with accompanying information to all eight HEIs constituting the WIPAHS network. Participants were instructed to complete the form on behalf of their institution or to disseminate the form within their institutions in order to capture as much research activity as possible. It is not possible to assess the reach of the survey given the nature of the snowball sampling method employed.

Results

The survey response rate was 63%, with at least one representative completing a survey from five of the eight participating HEIs. All respondents reported that their institutions were engaging in research activity relating to COVID-19. Additionally, all respondents reported that their institution is planning further COVID-19 related research, with 19 separate research projects reported across a broad range of disciplines including Education (n = 1), Health (n = 3), Sport and Exercise Sciences (n = 12), Psychology (n = 1) and across multiple disciplines (n = 2).

All respondents reported being willing to collaborate with Sport Wales as well as being willing to report the findings of any COVID-19 related research directly to Sport Wales to inform policies relating to physical activity, health and sport in Wales. However, one respondent cited that this would be on the proviso that appropriate governance was in place. Additionally, all respondents reported being in favour of a central registry for COVID-19 related research projects, with 7/8 (88%) respondents also being

willing to discuss the feasibility of establishing a central database to enable sharing/pooling of COVID-19 related study data within WIPAHS, with the remaining respondent reporting that they were not in a position to make such a decision.

Discussion

The findings highlight that HEIs across Wales are engaging in research activity relating to COVID-19, physical activity, health and sport, which may be directly relevant to Sport Wales. The audit provides an overview of the research interest and expertise within WIPAHS. Additionally, the audit demonstrates that the research activity covers a range of academic disciplines, heightening opportunities for collaboration across multiple faculties, as well as across multiple institutions. The audit also suggests that institutions are willing to collaborate with other institutions as well as with Sport Wales.

Recommendations

- An online database of COVID-19 related research activity has been developed and is accessible to WIPAHS members. Updating and maintaining this database may help to identify and develop opportunities for collaboration.
- The current audit should be replicated to capture the wider research activity within WIPAHS, beyond COVID-19 related research.
- The research projects identified as part of the current audit should be listed on the WIPAHS webpage in order to publicly promote the research activity across Wales.