

<b>Institution:</b> Edge Hill University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 24 Sport and Exercise Sciences, Leisure and Tourism		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Mental Health Promotion through Sport		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> From September 2013-December 2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Professor Andy Smith	Professor of Sport and Physical Activity	Sept 2012-
Dr David Haycock	Senior Lecturer in Sports Development and Management	Sept 2012-Oct 2014 and Feb 2016-
Dr Laura Johnson (nee Houghton)	Lecturer in Sport, Physical Activity and Health	Sept 2016-
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> From September 2013-December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>		
<p>Eight years of research on mental health in community and professional sport has informed government policy on sport and mental health and suicide prevention. It has changed the policies and practices of internationally recognised sport and mental health organisations in north-west England and beyond and helped improve mental health awareness and management of mental illness among children, young people and men. It has underpinned the creation and delivery (since 2015) of an award-winning school-based sport, education and mental health programme for children and young people and informed the professional development of senior leaders and teachers in schools and the development of new whole school approaches to mental health.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>		
<p>This impact case study is based upon two interrelated strands of original research, conducted over eight years, which examines the promotion of mental health and management of mental illness in community and professional sport settings, and in health- and education-related contexts. It has been conducted by members of the Sport, Work and Health Research Group, led by Professor Andy Smith and supported by competitive external funding from a range of bodies, including: Sport England, the Premier League, Clinical Commissioning Groups, the Big Lottery, and charities.</p> <p>Moving beyond the dominant tendency for mental health in sport to be studied by psychologists and psychiatrists, the research has developed new understandings of mental health and illness in sport by drawing upon the sociology of sport, education, health and work. The research has involved a combination of qualitative (e.g. interviews, focus groups, write-draw-show-and-tell) (output 1, 4) and quantitative methods (e.g. online surveys, output 2), and applied policy analysis (output 6). The theoretical emphasis of our research (output 4, 5, 6), and engagement with diverse research users has generated new sociological evidence on the mental health and education of groups including children and young people (output 1, 4) and sports coaches (output 2).</p> <p>Our school-based research, based on our work with Everton in the Community (EitC, the official charity of Everton Football Club), has provided new evidence on how the mental health of children and young people can be effectively addressed in schools using learning activities associated with physical education, sport and physical activity. This is an area on which little is currently known internationally (output 1). Our findings from research undertaken in 21 schools in socio-economically deprived communities across Merseyside and Lancashire revealed how improved mental health awareness can be effectively achieved via the provision of co-developed, participant-centred, holistic sport- and education-based activities delivered as part of whole school approaches to mental health. These activities were shown to enable children and young people to better recognise and manage their feelings and emotions, and identify personalised strategies (e.g., problem-solving, communication, coping, conflict management) for managing their own and others' mental health. They were also shown to be critical in improving children's and young people's awareness of the importance of communicating feelings and emotions in protecting mental health, and in treating, managing and recovering from mental illness (output 1).</p> <p>The findings from the first United Kingdom nation-wide survey of mental health in the sport and physical activity workforce, conducted with DOCIA sport (output 2), demonstrated how mental</p>		

illness was commonly experienced among coaches (in the past and currently), with those working in grassroots/community settings being most likely to experience mental illness, including the two most commonly reported conditions: depression and anxiety. Our evidence shed new light on how many coaches preferred to access mental health support outside of the organisation for whom they worked or volunteered and revealed – for the first time – that there is a significant public health challenge which needs to be met among coaches, and other workers, as part of duty of care in sport. This body of work, together with our school-based research (output 1), informed the development of the first interdisciplinary International Consensus Statement on Psychosocial and Policy-Related Approaches to Mental Health Awareness Programmes in Sport (output 3). This expert consensus statement (informed by engagement with 26 organisations from 7 countries) made six evidence-based recommendations to underpin the effective implementation, translation, and evaluation of mental health awareness programmes at all levels of sport, and for all workers. These recommendations included: (i) the development of minimal competencies of mental health awareness training for those involved in sport to support good mental health, those experiencing mental illness and when to refer to professional services; (ii) the provision of evidence-based guidance for the selection of mental health awareness and implementation programmes in sport; and (iii) the identification of the roles played by coaches, athletes and other workers/volunteers have in the co-creation of mental health promotion in sport (output 3).

Our research on mental health promotion through sport has been grounded in our calls for more sociologically-oriented and theoretically-sophisticated accounts of mental health and illness as aspects of wider wellbeing, including education, (output 4) in sports work (output 5). We have shown how mental health and illness remain a largely under-acknowledged, and highly stigmatised, feature of community and professional sports work (output 2, 3, 5). In the first paper to critically analyse policies related to community sport, physical activity and mental health in England (output 6), we show how measurable and specific targets, which can be used to track positive change related to mental health and illness, have not been included in government policy. Our work also demonstrates that appropriate measures and targets are needed to help assess the effectiveness of sport-based mental health programmes in England and beyond (output 3, 6).

### 3. References to the research

The quality of the underpinning research is demonstrated by its publication in international peer-reviewed scientific journals in mainstream and sub-disciplinary journals, with support from external peer-reviewed funding, and with internationally known partners.

**Output 1:** Haycock, D., Jones, J. and Smith, A. (2020). Developing young people's mental health awareness through education and sport: insights from the *Tackling the Blues* programme. *European Physical Education Review*, 26, 664-81. doi: 10.1177/1356336X20942264

**Output 2:** Smith, A., Haycock, D., Jones, J., Greenough, K., Wilcock, R. and Braid, I. (2020). Exploring mental health and illness in the UK sports coaching workforce, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17, 9332; doi:10.3390/ijerph17249332

**Output 3:** Breslin, G., Smith, A., Donohue, B., Donnelly, P., Shannon, S., Haughey, T., Vella, S., Swann, C., Cotterill, S., MacIntyre, T., Rogers, T., and Leavey G. (2019). International consensus statement on psychosocial and policy-related approaches to mental health awareness programmes in sport. *BMJ Sport and Exercise Medicine*, 5: e000585. doi:10.1136/bmjsem-2019-000585

**Output 4:** Platts, C. and Smith, A. (2018). 'We don't need no education'? Exploring the educational experiences of young footballers. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 39, 925-41. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2018.1434408

**Output 5:** Roderick, M., Smith, A. and Potrac, P. (2017). The sociology of sports work, emotions and mental health: scoping the field and future directions. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 34, 99-107. doi: 10.1123/ssj.2017-0082

**Output 6:** Smith, A., Jones, J., Houghton, L. and Duffell, T. (2016). A political spectator sport or policy priority? A review of sport, physical activity and public mental health policy. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 8, 593-607. doi: 10.1080/19406940.2016.1230554

### 4. Details of the impact

#### Developing a school-based sport, education and mental health programme

The school-based research (output 1) we have undertaken informed the design, implementation and analysis of effectiveness of **Tackling the Blues** (TtB), a prevention and early intervention

sport- and education-based mental health awareness programme delivered by EitC and Edge Hill University in socio-economically deprived communities with greatest mental health need since 2015. The need for TtB was identified by Edge Hill researchers, alongside colleagues at EitC, and initially supported by funding from a joint external funding application to a local Clinical Commissioning Group and recruitment of local schools by Edge Hill researchers. Output 1 reports how during the first three years of programme delivery various learning activities have been used as part of a curriculum of weekly workshops and sport and physical activity sessions, which have 'been important in shaping the design, delivery and impact of the programme' (source 4) for pupils attending 21 primary and secondary schools across Merseyside and Lancashire. It demonstrates how our research has 'improved the mental health awareness of children and young people, improved their management of mental illness, increased self-confidence and self-esteem, and improved trusting relationships with others' for 885 6-16-year-olds (source 4).

Informed by the findings reported in output 1 and the need to develop theoretically-informed and robustly designed and evaluated programmes (output 3, 6), TtB has also underpinned mental health training provided to 110 teachers, and 102 university student mentors, which has been used by schools to develop new whole school approaches to mental health support. This has led to the introduction of new curricular activities which have supported mental health improvements generated by pupils' engagement in TtB, created a new post for lead responsibility for mental health in one of the largest secondary schools in Liverpool, and enabled EitC to secure 'an additional £200,000...to ensure the programme...continues to effectively support those in greatest mental health need locally' (source 4) and recruited more schools to the programme. Given its impact, TtB was cited as good practice in the UK's Health Select Committee 2017 report on suicide prevention (source 1), awarded the 2016 Times Higher Education Award for Most Outstanding Contribution to the Community (source 2), and recognised by the former Shadow Secretary for Mental Health (source 3). Our research which has shown TtB to be effective in improving pupils': mental health awareness, management of mental illness (e.g. anxiety, depression, loneliness), self-confidence and trust, and social and emotional learning (output 1), led an independent social return on investment exercise commissioned by Everton Football Club to conclude that the programme 'generated a societal value of £9,755,000' (source 4) between 2016 and 2018, representing 6% of the total societal value (based on the scientific methodology of Social Value UK / Social Value International) generated by EitC in the same period (source 4).

In 2019, funding from the UEFA Foundation for Children enabled the findings of outputs 1, 3 and 6, which inform TtB, to be embedded 'into the activities of other sports charities and clubs in Europe via a new handbook supported by UEFA' (source 4). In this handbook teachers noted how TtB has impacted pupils' 'learning and awareness on a massive scale', ensured their 'confidence has definitely grown', and enabled pupils to gain 'an enormous sense of self-worth, through understanding and recognition of each other's differences that actually make them more supportive of each other'. The same research outputs helped secure £527,000 in 2020 from Research England and the Office for Students to expand TtB into 25 schools and 'to develop a new partnership with Tate Liverpool to deliver art, alongside sport, in the programme' (source 4) to deepen the reported impacts of TtB on the mental health of children and young people (output 1), and increase university students' engagement in knowledge exchange activity underpinning TtB (source 4). The learning activities developed by Edge Hill researchers, as described in output 1, also formed the basis of an Everton Football Club national fan engagement campaign to raise mental health awareness among children and young people 'based on the drawings and learning activities from TtB' (source 4). The campaign was awarded the Silver Medal at the 2020 Sports Business Awards for successfully raising awareness of mental health internationally. Judges of the award described the research-informed campaign as 'adopting an innovative approach to bringing partners together as a force for good', as an 'excellent way of engaging with the younger fans and dealing with emotions and children's mental health', and as addressing 'three very important areas: youngsters (both genders), mental health and the local community' (source 4).

### **Improving mental health through sport-based partnerships**

TtB is part of an eight-year (ongoing) partnership with EitC who work with over 20,000 participants annually, including 5,000 accessing mental health and wellbeing programmes. The recommendations outlined in output 3, our analysis of current government sport and mental health policy (output 6), and learning from TtB (output 1), have been used by EitC to benefit a wider range



of beneficiaries and to change policy and practice in mental health. Our research led EitC to introduce new co-developed programmes which have improved the mental health of physically inactive men in north Liverpool through a programme delivered by Sport England funding which was secured with 'the expert advice and synthesis of the existing evidence provided by the researchers from Edge Hill' (source 4). The research led EitC to 'introduce a new evidence-based approach to designing and assessing the effectiveness of an existing mental health programme for veterans' which helped increase its 'impact...on veterans' mental health, reduce their substance use and isolation, and develop new ways of engaging men in our work' (source 4).

Our research has led EitC to introduce new theoretically robust, evidence-based, approaches to programme monitoring and evaluation which 'helped ensure we [EitC] met the objectives of the programme and government's Sporting Future policy outcomes' (output 3, 6). The decision taken by EitC to train all members of staff (n=500) in mental health 'to benefit their own mental health, as well as that of the participants on our programmes who often present with complex mental health needs' (source 4) was informed by our recommendation that minimum competences for staff working on mental health programmes should be introduced (output 2, 3), and by learning from the effective mental health training provided to mentors on the TtB programme (output 1). The recommendation in output 3 on the need to clarify the roles of coaches and other staff in delivering mental health programmes, and the findings of output 2 on the experience of mental health among coaches, led EitC to expand their mental health support services for its '140 staff who have benefitted from being able to access new personalised support' (source 4). Collectively, the research reported in outputs 1, 2, 3 and 6 has led EitC to: increase the 'use of evidence to inform...programme design and applications to external funders, as well as increasing the amount of external funding which has allowed us to recruit new staff (over £2.5 million since 2013)'; and 'develop new partnerships with organisations in a new sport-based suicide prevention programme (in 2020) funded by the Champs Public Health Collaborative' (source 4) focused on suicide prevention among middle-aged men across the nine local authorities of Cheshire and Merseyside (source 4). Outputs 1, 2, 3 and 6 have shaped planned service design and provision 'in a new dedicated mental health facility, called The People's Place' (source 4), EitC's response to the mental health impact of Covid-19 in the Liverpool City Region where 3,650 vulnerable people have received mental health and wellbeing support (source 4, 5), and the development of a new holistic 'Impact Model which guides the delivery of our programmes involving young people (aged 6-24) in our local communities throughout Merseyside (especially South Liverpool) and has led to improvements in educational and employability outcomes for young people across Merseyside' (source 5). It has enabled the development of new partnerships with national organisations (e.g. the Home Office) and local law enforcement agencies which have reduced serious organised crime and prevented youth reoffending, and which for three programmes 'has had an estimated societal value of £53,983,000' (source 5). Overall, our research contributed to the estimate that 'for every £1 we [EitC] spend on our programmes we generate £14.74 of societal value' (source 4).

Building our work with EitC, EHU was commissioned to work with Rugby League Cares (RLC), State of Mind Sport, and three rugby league foundations (Warrington Wolves, Salford Red Devils and Widnes Vikings) on their men's mental health programme, Offload, delivered in socio-economically deprived communities where suicide prevalence is higher than the average in England. Our research on developing effective evidence-based mental health awareness programmes, supporting the mental health of delivery staff, and analyses of programme effectiveness (output 2, 3), led RLC to: amend their 'approach participant recruitment...to better target men living in our core areas who had greatest mental health need'; 'help implement boundary training and support for programme staff who were being increasingly contacted by participants/service users for mental health support which, at times, extended beyond their boundaries of professional expertise'; 'revise our initial programme outcomes and monitoring and evaluation approaches' (source 6). Over 18 months, these changes helped 972 men (aged 16+) experience 'the wider benefits that the research led to Offload participants/service users experiencing' (source 6), namely: how to better improve health and wellbeing (78% improvement); increased intention to engage in education, employment or training (63%); better able to manage challenges and setbacks (73%); reduced challenging family situations (49%); and increased engagement in physical activity and other cultural activities (53%). 10 men reported how the revised programme helped prevent their intended suicide which, on current estimates, would each cost £1.7 million to society (source 6, 7). Our recommendations also allowed RLC to: secure new

income to deliver Offload to more men for two years; revise approaches to recruitment, marketing and engagement with health services; develop new partnerships with Clinical Commissioning Groups and global partners (e.g. Movember Foundation); reduce programme dependency; improve exit strategies; recruit new staff; and develop Offload for the workplace (source 6).

### **Influencing national mental health strategy and wider initiatives**

Based on his research on the mental health and education of sports workers (output 2, 4, 5), and embedding mental health awareness and training into sports programmes (output 3), Professor Smith was invited to contribute to the development of the Mental Welfare in Sport recommendations of the government's independent Duty of Care in Sport Review (2017), led by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson (source 8). The recommendations on the need to 'introduce sector standard mental health training for coaches and physical activity professionals' and enable 'staff, coaches and athletes to receive mental health awareness training and support' (both included in output 2, 3) were important because they underpinned the introduction of new online mental health training for sports coaches (provided by Sport England, UK Coaching and 1<sup>st</sup>4Sport), the government's first mental health and elite sport action plan and a new mental health strategy (by UK Sport/English Institute for Sport) to provide new mental health support for high performance sports workers. Our research on sports workers' mental health (output 2), and importance of mental health training and duty of care (output 3), have been used by DOCIA sport to: contribute to the development of UK Coaching's policies and practices related to duty to care which supports 3 million coaches; inform the development of the Mental Health Committee and Mental Health Position Statement of the British Universities and Colleges Sport; and create the first network of stakeholders in performance sport to create and implement the first mental health for sport strategy on the Isle of Man (source 9). This has helped 'raise the profile of the importance of good mental health in the broad workforce in sport and that there should be appropriate preventative measures as well as reactive measures to sustain this', and supported 'the creation and delivery of the strategies so that they are sustainable and adapt to changing circumstances in the future' (source 9).

In other mental health settings, outputs 1 and 3 informed the design of the Ambassador of Hope training programme delivered by the national mental health charity, Chasing the Stigma, to 4,000 people from over 20 diverse organisations (e.g. NHS England Mental Health Team, the Regenda Group, Disclosure and Barring Service) who are now able to identify the signs and symptoms of good and poor mental health (source 10). Outputs 1 and 3 informed the development of the charity's free-to-access Hub of Hope app, which has enabled 'over 120,000 unique users to search for local mental health services (over 2,000 are listed on the Hub)' (source 10) and is now used by NHS England, Mind, Rethink Mental Illness, MHFA England, Public Health England and the Samaritans to signpost the public to local mental health services. NHS England have identified the app as 'the best use of digital services nationally to direct people to local mental health and suicide prevention services' (source 10). The research reported in output 4 further helped Chasing the Stigma 'to tailor the training to a football context for the English Premier League' as one of just three preferred mental health training providers cited in the 2019/20 Premier League Care Lifeskills and Personal Development Programme for all Premier League Clubs. The training has since been used 'to successfully benefit players by engaging club staff, parents and host families' at 10 Premier League football club academies in England (source 10).

### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

1. UK Health Select Committee 2017 *Suicide Prevention* report
2. 2016 Times Higher Education Award, Outstanding Contribution to the Local Community
3. Letter from former Shadow Secretary for Mental Health
4. Testimonial: Director of Health and Sport, Everton in the Community
5. Testimonial: Director of Youth Engagement, Employability and Sports Development, Everton in the Community
6. Testimonial: Health Manager, Rugby League Cares
7. Offload Evaluation Report 2019, Edge Hill University
8. Independent Duty of Care in Sport Review (2017) led by Baroness Tanni Grey-Thompson and <https://bit.ly/3q7e4bk>
9. Testimonial: Managing Director, DOCIA sport
10. Testimonial: Chief Executive Officer, Chasing the Stigma