

PREVENTION AND SELF-MANAGEMENT OF RUNNING-RELATED INJURIES AND HOW RECREATIONAL RUNNERS INCORPORATE DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY: A SURVEY STUDY

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BACKGROUND

Recreational running has become an extremely popular activity providing many long-term health benefits. Unfortunately, many runners develop running-related injuries (RRI) which cause them to stop running. This can result in the benefits to their health being lost. Injury prevention and self-management programmes are one way in which runners can maintain their running activities.

The rise in running participation has also seen a rise in the use of digital technology to support running. Recreational runners use digital platforms such as watches and smartphone apps to monitor their training. It is therefore important to gain an understanding of the use of digital technologies by recreational runners and to establish the role that digital platforms could have in helping runners prevent and self-manage RRIs.

Recreational running is an extremely popular activity providing many long-term health benefits but unfortunately it can lead to running-related injuries (RRI). RRIs can lead runners to leave the sport and resulting in a loss of the health benefits. Injury prevention and self-management programmes are one way in which runners can maintain their running activities.

Recreational runners utilise digital technology such as smartphone apps to monitor their training practices. Gaining an understanding of the role of digital technology within the running community has the potential to give insights into how digital technology can be harnessed to provide injury prevention and self-management information to runners with the aim of minimising RRIs.

Purpose: *

The main purpose of this study was to map the use of digital platforms and smartphone apps by recreational runners in Wales and their views on RRI prevention, self-management and a proposed 'Ideal RRI prevention and self-management' app. A secondary aim was to map the characteristics of runners in Wales, identify the most common injuries and identify patterns of injury among sub-groups of runners in Wales.

Methods: *

Data was collected via an online survey distributed to recreational runners in Wales. The survey was designed to gain information on runners' demographics, training habits, injury history, how they prevented and self-managed RRI and views on a proposed RRI prevention and self-management digital platform. Participants were recreational runners in Wales over the age of 18. Elite runners and those under 18 were excluded from this study. Analysis of results was performed using SPSS v25 to produce descriptive results and sub-group analysis of groups of runners.

Results: *

232 runners completed the survey. 87% of runners surveyed reported having sustained an RRI. Achilles tendon injury was the most common injury among those surveyed. 97% of runners used a digital platform to monitor their training. GPS watches and smartphone apps were the most popular monitoring methods. Runners managed injury through rest, seeing a health professional or by self-managing their injury. Only 8.6% used online advice to prevent or manage RRI. 85% of runners were interested in an evidence-based smartphone app to help prevent and manage RRI. Desired features included information for self-diagnosing RRI, exercises to prevent and treat RRI and how to run safely and avoid RRI.

Conclusion(s): *

There is a high prevalence of RRI among recreational runners in Wales. Runners use digital devices to monitor their training but not to prevent or self-manage running injuries. Runners are interested in self-managing and preventing their own injuries and reacted positively to the proposal of an RRI prevention and self-management app. Future work is recommended to develop the content of an RRI prevention and self-management programme for recreational runners so that they can mitigate injury and continue to run and reap the long term health benefits.

Implications: *

Digital platforms have the potential to have a positive role in helping recreational runners prevent and self-manage RRI. There is a role for physiotherapists to play in developing evidence-based content for such a platform.