

A Comprehensive Analysis of Factors Affecting the Development of Expertise in Para Sport Athletes

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Introduction & Objective

- There are a wide range of benefits for persons with a disability to participate in sport (WHO, 2011)
- However, there is limited literature pertaining to Para sport athletes' sporting experience (Dehghansai et al., 2019), particularly in how athletes are introduced, involved, and developed in the Para sport system

Project Objective: To develop a better understanding of factors impacting Para sport athletes' development

Phase I: Paralympian Search (Completed: 2019)

- 225 participants filled out the survey across 10 events
- Most successful outreach was via online platforms: social media (n=31) and email (n=15)
- Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa events attracted mostly local participants, while Calgary and Halifax also reached participants from near-by cities
- Athletes who acquired their injury later in life displayed different sporting experiences when compared to athletes with congenital or early acquired impairments
- Most early sport experiences were in an open setting

Phase II: Pathway Athletes (Preliminary Findings)

- 203 Canadian & Australian athletes participated
- Athletes who acquired their impairment later in life reached the majority of the sporting milestones later age athletes with congenital or early acquired impairments
- There was no difference between groups regarding the hours devoted to various types of training
- Most athletes sampled other able-bodied and/or Para sports: mainly in an open setting
- Next step is an in-depth analysis of training histories, sport-specific trajectories, and experience in other able-bodied/Para sports

Phase III: Athletes' and Coaches' Perspective (On-Going)

Semi-structured interviews with athletes and coaches to capture their experiences in the Para sport system to identify current gaps and future directions in sporting pathways

Implications

- There is a need to explore ways to reach rural areas/participants with little/no experience in Para sport
- Most athletes' early experiences were in an open setting: is this detrimental or beneficial to their development?
- Recent research suggests the timing of athletes' injury influences their sporting experience. There is a need to consider multiple pathways and timing of resource allocation/support that is unique to athletes' situation/readiness