

The Role of Professional Football Clubs in Enhancing the Mental Health and Well-Being of Young People

Presented by:

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Mental Health of Young People

- NHS 2017 survey
- 1 in 9 aged 5 to 16 had diagnosable mental health condition
 - Average 3 per classroom
- Emotional disorders most common
 - Rates higher in girls than boys
 - Increase with age



Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

- Follow-up NHS survey in 2020
 - Mental health problems increased to 1 in 6
- Kauhenen et al. (2022) review of longitudinal studies across 11 countries
 - Depression, anxiety, psychological distress, and loneliness increased since start of pandemic



Physical Activity of Young People

- WHO recommends children aged 5 to 17 should:
 - Take part in an average of 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous intensity, mostly aerobic physical activity, across the week
 - Incorporate vigorous-intensity aerobic activities, as well as those that strengthen muscle and bone, 3 days a week
 - Limit amount of sedentary time, particularly recreational screen time
- Team sports, yoga, walking, play, age-appropriate resistance training, aerobic activities



Impact of Physical Activity on Mental Health

- Young people who are more active display increased self-esteem and lower anxiety and depression (Biddle et al., 2019)
- Due to various biopsychosocial influences (Lubans et al., 2016):
 - Changes to the structural and composition of the brain
 - Increased confidence
 - Opportunities for social interaction
- Physical activity programmes can enhance young people's quality of life, body image, psychological well-being, and reduce depression (Hale et al., 2021, 2022)
 - Team sports, cardio activities, yoga, age-appropriate resistance training
 - Some programmes also include education sessions (e.g., importance of a healthy diet, how to improve psychological view of the self)



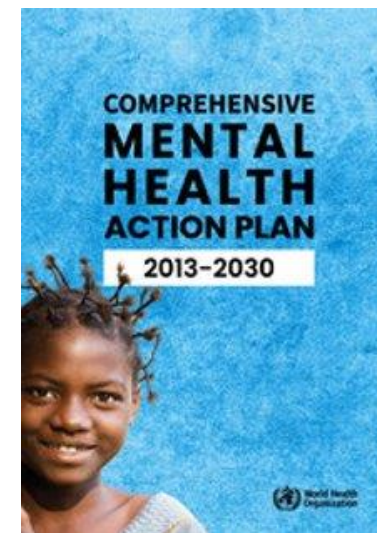
Barriers to Young People's Physical Activity

- Over 80 % do not engage in WHO recommendations and rates decline throughout adolescence (Farooq et al., 2018; Hallal et al., 2012)
- Various factors can prevent physical activity during childhood (Kemp et al., 2020):
 - Preferences for electronic media
 - Time devoted to academic activities
 - Lack of parental support
 - Bullying
 - Peer judgements
- Sedentary children at greater risk of developing a physical or mental health problem



Using Physical Activity to Improve Young People's Mental Health

- WHO's 2013-2030 Mental Health Action Plan: Need for mental health promotion and prevention strategies
- NICE Guidelines recommend that a child or young person with depression should be:
 - Offered advice on the benefits of regular exercise
 - Encouraged to follow a structured exercise programme for between 10 to 12 weeks



NICE National Institute for
Health and Care Excellence



Depression in children and young people: identification and management

NICE guideline
Published: 25 June 2019
www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng134

Why Professional Football Clubs?

- Team sports can improve mental health by increasing physical activity and feelings of social connection
- Community trusts attached to UK professional football clubs
- Use funding and the appeal of their parent club as a “hook” to connect with their local communities
- Deliver programmes to promote various public health agendas
 - Health, education, social issues
- Well-placed to deliver programmes to encourage physical activity and improve young people’s mental health



Can Football Clubs Improve Mental Health?

- 8-week programme delivered in schools to boys aged 13 to 18
- 30-minutes of classroom activities & 30-minutes football skills
- Uses football as a metaphor to improve mental health
- Aim is to:
 - Encourage young boys to be physically active
 - Teach them about the importance of mental health



Week 1: Mental Health Awareness



Learning Objectives

“Mental health problems are common”

“Stigma and discrimination are widespread and damaging”

“Language matters”

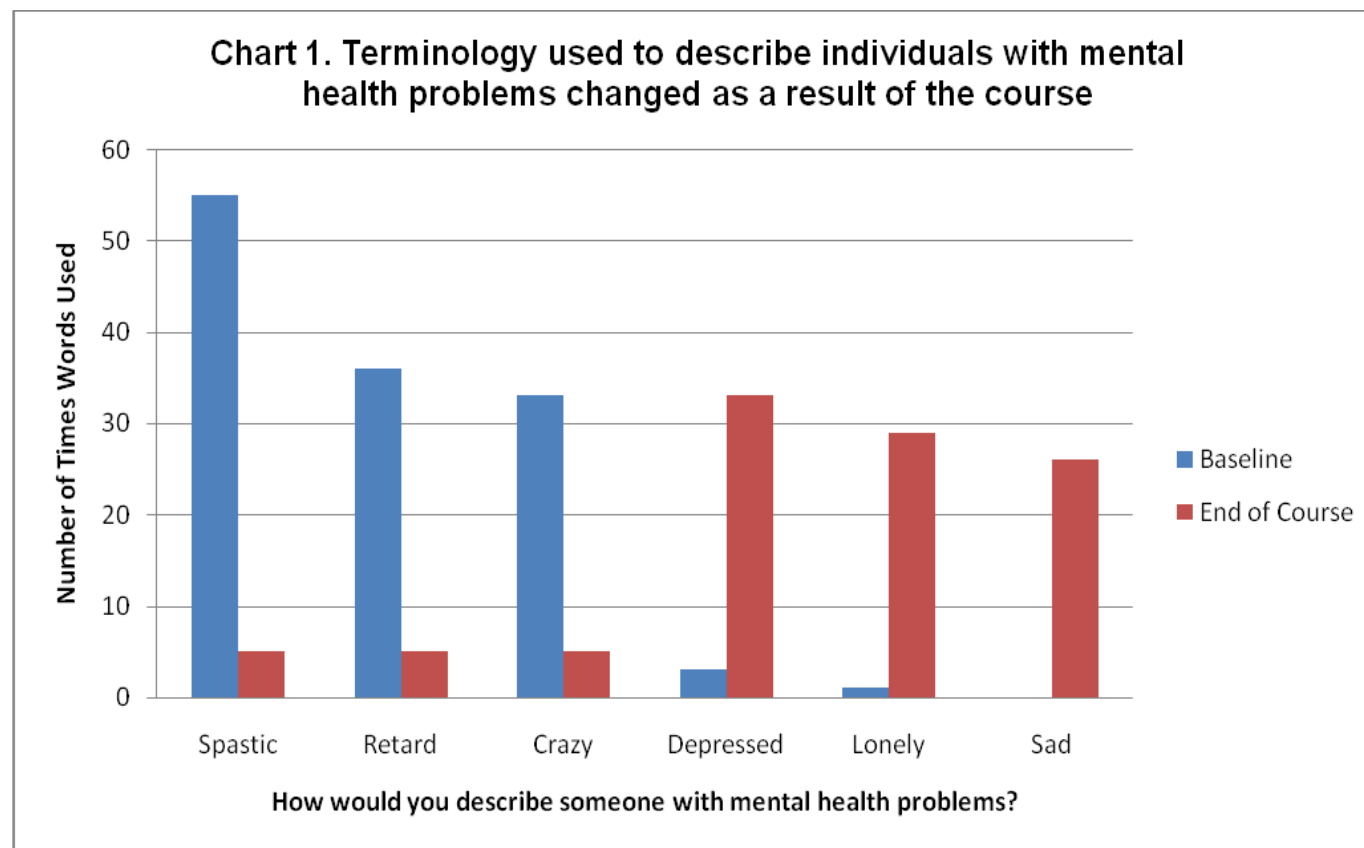
Content

Group Discussion: What do you think when you hear the word “mental health” and why?

Case Study: Ex-Premier League legend Gary Speed

Coaching Session: Keepy-up competition & small-sided game

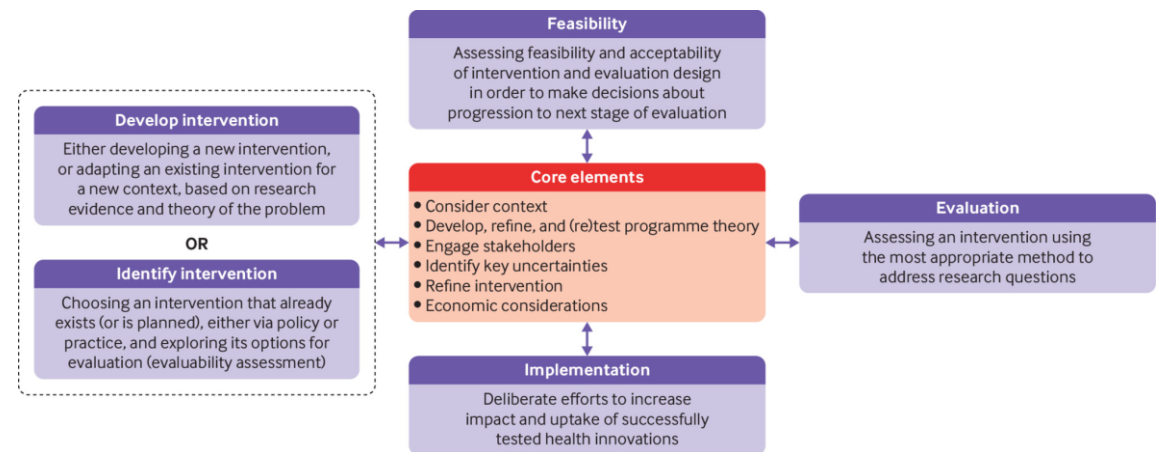
Can Football Clubs Improve Mental Health?




Tyson (2013)

Rationale for PhD Research

- Limited evidence in academic literature
 - Unclear how many clubs were offering similar programmes to MEN Talk
- Overall aim of PhD
 - Understand what programmes were being delivered, how they were expected to work, and how to improve impact
- Underpinned by UK MRC and NIHR framework (Skivington et al., 2021)
 - Recommendations for developing and evaluating complex interventions
 - Maximise efficiency, use, and impact



PhD Study: Impact of Professional Football Club Programmes

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- Interviews conducted with 5 UK trusts delivering mental health programmes to young people
 - Including:
 - Staff that managed or delivered the programmes
 - Young people that had taken part
 - Explored their experiences to understand:
 - The possible impact on mental health
 - Programme features that work well
 - How to ensure best practise

Impact of Professional Football Club Programmes



Conversations Around Mental Health are Encouraged

- *“I’ll talk about how, like “I love the idea of meditating and I’ve got headspace and I’ll do it every day. But actually a lot of days I fail and it’s hard and even though I know it’s good for me sometimes I don’t do it” just these kind of things that make it accessible and gives them a touchdown to talk about their experiences” (Coach, Club 2)*



Conversations Around Mental Health are Encouraged

- *“I was like a very closed off person, I think now it has sort of made me open my eyes to, um, like the benefits of talking about how you feel and stuff, like it really does help you out a lot more than you think it does” (Young person, Club 1)*
- *“he has made it easier for us to be able to talk to one another, because now we know that we can talk to the coaches and that it is easier” (Young person, Club 2)*



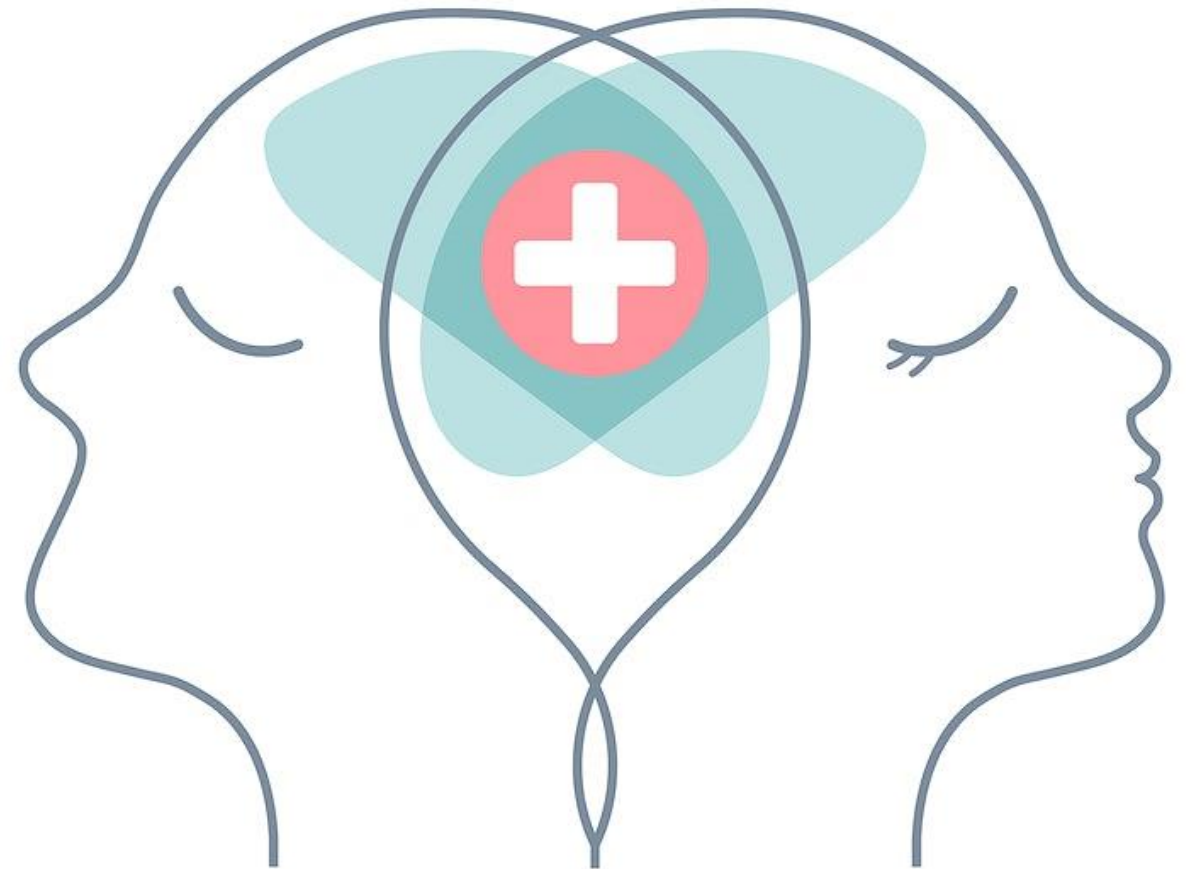
Enhanced Learning and Insight into Mental Health

- *“You start talking a bit more about it and then you can see they kind of realise how serious it can be” (Coach, Club 1)*
- *“taught us that you could be really, really famous and be earning so much money and be really, really successful and still have a mental illness... but we don’t know that obviously because all we see is them having fun, so it was good to show us that” (Young person, Club 2)*



Enhanced Learning and Insight into Mental Health

- *“after you do quite a good session you feel better about yourself, so that helps you”* (Young person, Club 3)
- *“when he done the Gary Speed one, he had loads of different ways that you can find out that you’ve got depression or anxiety”* (Young person, Club 1)
- *“you want them to be happy, but now you know how to actually do it and what to do”* (Young person, Club 2)



**MENTAL
HEALTH**

Opportunities to Identify Young People At-Risk

- *“That did lead to a number of individual conversations, which I was quite pleased about. Because that means that people want to trust you or open up to you and ask for specific support” (Coach, Club 5)*
- *“can sense if someone is not quite right because they know the character. So someone might be generally shy or maybe a bit isolated from the group and suddenly they might be acting differently and they will see the signs... and that is where good youth work kicks in because you can actually say like “What’s going on? What’s wrong?” and then we can sort of speak to the young person and support them” (Manager, Club 3)*



Young People Can Get the Necessary Support

- *“should there be a more serious situation arise then we can follow different routes, whether it's school or social services or police” (Coach, Club 2)*
- *“I would imagine it is not very nice for a young person to be referred to CAMHS... so I think the fact that we do it in a community setting kind of takes away that stigma. I think that might be what works or is what is appealing to young people” (Coach, Club 5)*



Recommendations for Best Practise

Physical activity programmes designed to enhance young people's knowledge and understanding of mental health should:

1. Include sports/physical activities that young people enjoy
 2. Use examples that young people understand to teach mental health topics
 - Sports, TV stars, well-known public figures
 3. Be delivered by facilitators that are relatable and positive role models
 - Receive up-to-date training on supporting young people's mental health
 4. Encourage open and honest discussions around mental health
 5. Include interactive activities during classroom sessions
 - Peer-led discussions, post-it notes, creating posters
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Further Information

- [NHS](#) statistics
- [WHO](#) physical activity guidelines
- [NICE](#) guidelines for treating children and young people with depression
- [WHO](#) 2013-2030 Mental Health Action Plan
- [EFL Trust](#)





Additional References

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Thank you for listening!

Any questions?

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