



Multiple and Multi- dimensional Life Transitions of Transplant Athletes

**Faculty of Wellbeing Education
and Language Studies (WELS)**

Call for PhD projects starting in October 2024

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Project description

Schools

Health, Wellbeing and Social Care

Education, Childhood, Youth & Sport

Institute of Educational Technology

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Background

Solid organ transplant surgery is a life-saving medical procedure of life supporting allografts (e.g., heart, kidney, lung, liver, pancreas, stem) and haemopoietic cell transplants (e.g., bone marrow). Annually around 130,000 transplant surgeries take place globally (Leddington Wright et al., 2019). After a successful transplantation, recipients are encouraged to pursue a healthy lifestyle (Didsbury et al., 2013). This includes maintaining a balanced diet and

undertaking some form of physical activity. While there is an emerging body of literature focussed on the benefits and limitations for transplant recipients to participate in physical activity, we argue that there are several important gaps in the current literature.

First, nearly all the reviewed literature takes a medical/social care perspective of the experience of transplant recipients, with limited research focussed on the lived experiences and transitions of both Transplant Athletes and their direct social networks (e.g., partner, family, friends). Yet, in related social science and sport psychology fields there is a wealth of evidence that people go through multiple- and multi-dimensional transitions (Jindal-Snape, 2023; Jindal-Snape & Rienties, 2016), with and without support of their direct social network, which may also influence their physical activity and sport participation. The psycho-social and multiple levels of athlete transitions is also supported by the sport psychology literature (e.g., Stambulova et al., 2021).

Second, most of the literature on physical activity and Transplant Athletes adopt an aggregated approach of analysing transplant recipients as one coherent group. Often these studies adopt an implicit deficiency approach of what Transplant Athletes are unable to do (e.g., anxiety to do sport, muscle fatigue, lower VO₂peak) rather than what they are still able to do (van Adrichem et al., 2016). However, in some high-intensity Transplant Games sports Transplant Athletes are able to produce relatively competitive performances, indicating that for some Transplant Athletes strive for and achieve excellence.

Research questions

The following three research questions are proposed in this project:

1. To what extent are the lived experiences of high-intensity Transplant Athletes multiple and multi-dimensional?
2. To what extent are there similarities in the lived experiences of Transplant Athletes ranging from those who are competing at the top of their sport, through active participants to those whose goals are about finishing competitions?
3. To what extent does a Patient and Public Involvement and engagement approach allow for new insights into the wider Transplant Athletes research in terms of inclusion, power and meeting athletes' needs?

Methodology

While the applicant is welcome to propose alternative methodologies, the current research project uses an explorative mixed methods study of both objective sport data as well as interview data of participants. We would imagine that the PhD candidate would build on this initial work and propose additional methodological contributions.

Contribution

All people go through various transitions in their life as a result of life events and changes in their social environment (Jindal-Snape, 2016). Becoming ill, and needing a transplant is obviously a substantial transition for transplant recipients, which can have affective, behavioural, cognitive, social, and

environmental impacts on themselves and others. As argued by Holmes et al. (2019) Patient and Public Involvement and engagement is an important and expected component of health-related research activity. This is also reflected in sports medicine in which athlete's voice is increasingly sought (e.g., Weissensteiner, 2015). In line with Patient and Public Involvement and engagement, in this study we aim to explore the lived experiences of high-intensity Transplant Athletes by running this study by, with, and for Transplant Athletes (Hariharan et al., 2021).

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Website

<https://sites.google.com/view/cycling-triathlon-wtg-perth/home>

PhD project

The doctoral researcher is expected to develop their own line of research within this project that helps to advance our understanding of physical and mental wellbeing of people with chronic illness, in this case transplant recipients. We welcome critical and inspired ideas to this project, being mindful that the research is interdisciplinary and nested in practice. The research has a cross-country focus but currently primarily includes Anglo-Saxon contexts and participants with English as their first or second language. We therefore particularly welcome contributions that allow for expanding our geographical and cultural focus.



