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Football Cooperative, a community-based physical activity social intervention for men: The development of an implementation strategy for scale-up

Submission date
24/05/2023

Recruitment status
No longer recruiting

Registration date
26/05/2023

Overall study status
Completed

Last Edited
18/09/2026

Condition category
Other

[_] Prospectively registered
[X] Protocol
[_] Statistical analysis plan
[X] Results
[_] Individual participant data

Plain English summary of protocol

Background and study aims

Loneliness is a risk factor for morbidity and mortality and a leading cause of death. It is a common experience among men in Ireland; men are also at an increased risk of COVID-19-related unemployment-related isolation, loneliness and suicide. Football Cooperative (FC) provides social 'pick up football' games for men aimed at reducing social isolation among men and improving their overall health and well-being. Adopting an implementation science approach, the current study proposes to investigate the processes of implementing FC and other such interventions with a view to developing an implementation strategy for national and international scale-up. Qualitative data will be collected from a variety of sources to understand the organisational mechanisms and processes necessary as well as facilitators and barriers to delivering such interventions to scale. In addition, an environmental and situational analysis will be conducted with national implementation partners. A draft implementation strategy for replication will be developed and assessed via a modified Delphi study to be reviewed by a panel of experts; the final draft will be completed after this process. The findings from this study may inform the translation of FC to national rollout for population-wide benefit in Ireland and beyond.

Who can participate?

Healthy volunteers aged ≥18 years old and over who are FC participants, service users, service providers, founders, or have a role in an organisation involved in providing funding or implementing policy related to Sport for Good Initiatives in Ireland, and stakeholders at all levels of the ecological system of best practice examples of football interventions that have translated to scale across a number of European countries.

What does the study involve?

FC is a social enterprise established in 2017 that aims to bring men together, improve their overall health, and benefit local communities through the medium of "pick-up football." FC organizes games in North County Dublin and Limerick, offering accessibility, flexibility in

attendance, affordability, and inclusivity to individuals of all fitness and football skill levels. The games take place on rectangular, floodlit astroturf pitches, promoting year-round activity. A team environment is fostered, with 5-9 players on each side, and teams are carefully formed to balance football ability and ensure a unique experience in each game. The core team at FC manages governance responsibilities, strategic direction, communication with members, and social activities. Match Coordinators oversee the games, including publishing notifications, ensuring adherence to FC values, and reporting game details to the core team. FC games are volunteer-led, and the organization utilizes a self-sufficient infrastructure to operate efficiently. For this research study, purposive sampling will be used to recruit participants, involving gatekeepers and stakeholders at various levels within FC, including service users, service providers, organizational founders, and policy and funding representatives. Gatekeepers are independent of the research team and have no influence over participant selection or access to the collected data.

What are the possible benefits and risks of participating?
Participants of the study may benefit from making meaning of their experience of the football initiative and may improve their practice. There are no risks to participants as they are not being asked to divulge personal information.

Where is the study run from?
Centre for Health Behaviour Research, South East Technological University (Ireland)

When is the study starting and how long is it expected to run for?
September 2022 to November 2024

Who is funding the study?
1. South East Technological University Co-Fund PhD Scholarship Programme (Ireland)
2. Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) (Switzerland)

Who is the main contact?
Dr Paula Carroll, pcarroll@wit.ie

Contact information

Type(s)
Principal investigator

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Dr Paula Carroll

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Study information

Scientific Title
Football Cooperative, a community-based physical activity social intervention for men: The development of an implementation strategy for scale-up

Acronym
FC Study 2

Study objectives
The proposed study aims to conduct a translational formative evaluation with a view to developing an implementation strategy for the scale-up of Football Cooperative (FC) nationally and internationally.

Ethics approval required
Old ethics approval format

Ethics approval(s)
Approved 24/01/2023, South East Technological University, School of Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee, (C/o: Michael Harrison, Chair of The School of Health Sciences Ethics Committee, Bianconi Building, Cork Road Campus, Waterford X91 K0EK, Ireland; +353 0 51302161; Michael.Harrison@setu.Ie), ref: none available

Primary study design
Other

Study design
Qualitative translational evaluation grounded in implementation science

Study type(s)
Other

Health condition(s) or problem(s) studied
Exploration of pick-up football intervention that acts as the vehicle to bring men together to improve their overall health and achieve social gains for local communities.

Interventions
Football Cooperative (FC) is a social enterprise (SE) established in 2017 for men, by men and uses ‘pick-up-football’ as the vehicle to bring men together to improve their overall health and achieve social gains for local communities. FC games are currently available in North County Dublin and in Limerick (established 2019) and are a) accessible i.e. local amenities are used for games; b) flexible regarding attendance (played 2-3 nights/week), c) affordable to ensure inclusion of all and d) offered to all levels of fitness and football capacity. ‘Pick-up-football’ differs from Association Football in terms of the pitch and player numbers. Games (60-90 mins

depending on pitch availability) are played on a rectangular pitch with floodlit capability and an astroturf surface to ensure year-round activity. Games create a team environment (5-9 a-side depending upon attendance); team formation is crucial to ensuring both the game and social experience are maximised. The Match Coordinator will tactfully select the teams for the game with the objective to find a cumulative balance of football ability while also ensuring the makeup of teams is unique from one game to the next. The values upon which the SE is driven are the cultivation of community, inclusivity, sportsmanship and life-long learning.

A core team at FC oversees the governance responsibilities for managing the venue (health and safety, insurance, bookings), driving the strategic direction of the SE (securing funding, training and learning for members, expansion planning), communicating with all FC members, organising social activities around games (e.g. BBQs, fundraising activities) and ensuring that the values of FC are upheld. Match Co-ordinators (multiple at the site) are responsible for the FC games; they will publish a game notification to the participant pool via their 'bespoke game portal' (developed in-house) in advance of the activity, they ensure that equipment is onsite and that the FC values are followed by all participants. Games are not refereed and therefore, via leadership from Match Co-ordinators, the onus is on all participants to manage the situations on the pitch to achieve a fluid, enjoyable and competitive game. After games, the Match Coordinator submits a game report for review by the FC core team; optional details include the final score, goal scorers, match incidents i.e. participant red card, injury as well as pitch or location problems i.e. lights, parking. Notably, FC games are volunteer-led and have developed a sophisticated infrastructure (game portal) to ensure self-sufficiency using minimal resources.

Purposive sampling will be used to recruit participants for this study via both the support of gatekeepers on the advisory board and direct contact from members of the research team. Within FC: As per the Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research (CFIR), stakeholders will be identified at each level within FC, service user (male participants), service provider (coordinators), organisational (FC founders) and ecological systems levels (policy and funding representatives). This use of a gatekeeper in this study is in keeping with good practice. All gatekeepers (outside of the research team) will be at the 'arm's length' of the study. Therefore, those gatekeepers who are on the AB do not have a conflict of interest as they have no influence on who participates in the research and no access to the data collected.

Intervention Type
Behavioural

Primary outcome(s)
Barriers and facilitators to implementation will be measured at all levels of the ecological framework [service user, service provider, organisational and wider ecological system i.e. policy maker and funders] both within FC and beyond FC. Data will initially be collected within FC from Feb-July 2023 and beyond FC from Oct 2023 – April 2024. Within FC data will be collected via ongoing consultation that involves:
1. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups
2. Informal short 'pitch side' interviews with service users
3. Observational data and reflections by embedded researchers at FC games
4. Desk-based research reviewing and synthesising findings from the feasibility study
5. Exit surveys with those who dropped out of games or who registered but never attended
Beyond FC, data will be collected from a number of initiatives that have been successful in growing men's and sport-related initiatives to scale. Following the desk review of the organisations, members of the research team will visit these organisations to collect data via informal (ad-hoc conversations) and formal (observations, interviews and focus groups) methods.

Key secondary outcome(s)
Processes and mechanisms for implementation will be measured at all levels of the ecological framework [service user, service provider, organisational and wider ecological system i.e. policy maker and funders] both within FC and beyond FC. Data will initially be collected within FC from Feb-July 2023 and beyond FC from Oct 2023 – April 2024. Within FC data will be collected via ongoing consultation that involves:
1. Semi-structured interviews and focus groups
2. Informal short 'pitch side' interviews with service users
3. Observational data and reflections by embedded researchers at FC games
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5. Exit surveys with those who dropped out of games or who registered but never attended
Beyond FC, data will be collected from a number of initiatives that have been successful in growing men's and sport-related initiatives to scale. Following the desk review of the organisations, members of the research team will visit these organisations to collect data via informal (ad-hoc conversations) and formal (observations, interviews and focus groups) methods.

Completion date
30/11/2024

Eligibility

Key inclusion criteria
Participants in general must be:
1. ≥18 years old and over
2. Provide written informed consent

Service users:
Participate in FC games

Service Providers:
Participate in and/or is involved in providing FC games

Organisational Founder:
Involved in the founding of FC games

Wider Ecological System:
Has a role in an organisation involved in providing funding or implementing policy related to sport for good initiatives in Ireland

Outside of FC:
The UEFA representative on the advisory board will act as a gatekeeper for some organisations relevant to this study.
The Selection Criteria include:
Service users:
Participate in the programme/intervention provided by the organisation

Service Providers:
Participate in and/or is involved in providing the programme/intervention provided by the organisation

Organisational Founder:
Was involved in the founding of the programme/intervention provided by the organisation

Wider Ecological System:
Has a role in an organisation involved in providing funding or implementing policy related to sport for good initiatives in Ireland

Participant type(s)
Healthy volunteer, Service user

Healthy volunteers allowed
No

Age group
Mixed

Lower age limit
18 Years

Upper age limit
80 Years

Sex
All

Total final enrolment
0

Key exclusion criteria
Does not meet the inclusion criteria

Date of first enrolment
10/02/2023

Date of final enrolment
30/06/2024

Locations

Countries of recruitment
Belgium

Denmark

Germany

Ireland

Israel

Türkiye

Study participating centre
Centre for Health Behaviour Research, South East Technological University
School of Health Sciences
Bianconi Building
Cork Road
Waterford
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X91 K0EK

Sponsor information

Organisation
South East Technological University

ROR
https://ror.org/03fgx6868

Funder(s)

Funder type
University/education

Funder Name
South East Technological University

Funder Name
Union of European Football Associations (UEFA)

Results and Publications

Individual participant data (IPD) sharing plan
The datasets generated during and/or analysed during the current study are/will be available upon request from Dr Paula Carroll, pcarroll@wit.ie. Data will be stored for 10 years upon project completion in line with policy. During this period, anonymised data can be made available to third parties. The profile of this research project will be housed within the Centre for Health Behaviour Research and contact details of the PI will be accessible there for anyone wishing to

access the data for further analysis. Members of the project team will define the terms of data use and licence same.

IPD sharing plan summary

Available on request

Study outputs

Output type	Details	Date created	Date added	Peer reviewed?	Patient-facing?
Results article		10/07/2026	04/08/2026	Yes	No
Results article		17/09/2026	18/09/2026	Yes	No
Protocol article		05/08/2025	28/08/2025	Yes	No
Participant information sheet			25/05/2023	No	Yes