**WORKING TOGETHER TO UNDERSTAND THE STRONG MINDS OF SPECIAL OLYMPICS ATHLETES**

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**Objectives:**

Access to appropriate mental health services requires recognition of the signs and significance of mental health concerns (i.e., ‘mental health literacy’), but difficulties with communication, adaptive living skills, and high rates of co-occurring physical conditions often complicate the identification of psychological symptoms among people with intellectual disabilities (ID). With a reach of over 46,000 athletes with ID across Canada, Special Olympics (SO) is in a unique position to improve the mental health literacy of individuals with ID. However, moving research findings into practice can be difficult. Including knowledge users throughout the research process can help to overcome some of these challenges by producing more relevant research designs and results. As such, the current study is part of a larger project focused on co-creating a mental health literacy tool to assist SO coaches, families, and athletes in the accurate and timely identification of athletes’ mental health concerns. This poster will describe the collaborative efforts between researchers, SO athletes, family caregivers, and coaches to co-create the mental health literacy tool.

**Method:**

Adopting a model of integrated knowledge mobilization, researchers worked alongside an advisory team comprised of three SO athletes, a family member of an SO athlete, and a SO coach, who assisted with all aspects of our mental health literacy tool development. Over a period of 4 months, an iterative process was developed whereby the team provided input regarding content and design to a graphic designer to allow for tool refinement.

To pilot the tool, advisory team members are currently assisting in conducting separate focus groups with SO athletes, coaches, and family members across the Greater Toronto Area. Data collection is ongoing. Each focus group will be comprised of three to five participants. Sampling will be purposive to allow for variability of individual traits (e.g., age, sex, heterogeneity of disability and athletic ability).

**Results:**

Working together, researchers, SO athletes, coaches, and families co-created a mental health literacy tool written in lay language with visual aids, which is based in the lived experiences of SO participants. The poster will explore preliminary pilot findings of the tool and further document our advisory team’s co-creation experiences as members of a research team.

**Discussion/Conclusions:**

Our collaborative process will lead to the co-development of a resource that can be readily implemented across multiple knowledge users (e.g., athletes, coaches, families). Ultimately, this project will assist in the accurate and timely identification of mental health concerns for individuals with ID.

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