



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## The pursuit of social and health benefit through walking rugby activities in Swansea region: Promotion across generation and genders

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### Abstract

Walking rugby has experienced growing popularity in recent years due to its physical, mental, and social health benefits. However, participation in the United Kingdom remains constrained by the limited availability of clubs, particularly in underserved regions such as Swansea. Existing studies have largely focused on the health outcomes of walking rugby, with limited attention given to the strategic development and operational planning required for expanding community-based clubs. This study addresses that gap by proposing the establishment of four new walking rugby clubs in the Swansea region. The project adopted a qualitative approach involving industry review, literature analysis, and market assessment to evaluate the logistical, social, and economic factors influencing club development. A Work Breakdown Structure (WBS) was also applied to identify and organise the tasks associated with establishing and managing the clubs. Findings from secondary data indicate that participation in walking rugby contributes to improved cardiovascular health, including an average 12% reduction in blood pressure and an 8% decrease in cholesterol levels within six months. Demographic analysis further showed that most participants are aged between 45 and 65 years, with involvement from both men and women. Despite these benefits, the study also identified operational and participation risks that require effective mitigation strategies. The study contributes by providing a practical framework for expanding walking rugby through community club development in Swansea. It demonstrates how walking rugby can improve health, promote social inclusion, and encourage wider sports participation across diverse age groups and backgrounds.

**Keywords:** Walking Rugby; Community Sports Development; Cardiovascular Health; Sports Participation; Club Development Strategy

### 1. Introduction

Walking Rugby is a contemporary variation of rugby that promotes physical activity through a slower, non-contact format suitable for people of different ages and fitness levels. Rugby itself originated in the nineteenth century and has become one of the most popular sports in several European and Commonwealth countries (Lachlan, 2011). In recent years, Walking Rugby has gained increasing attention because of its physical, mental, and social health benefits.

Research has shown that participation in rugby can improve upper-body strength, flexibility, cardiovascular health, and self-confidence (Duthie et al., 2003). In addition, rugby encourages teamwork, discipline, and sportsmanship, while also fostering social inclusion and unity among individuals from diverse backgrounds (Harvey, 2001; Griffin et al., 2019). Due to its low-impact nature, Walking Rugby is particularly suitable for older adults and individuals seeking accessible forms of physical activity.

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Despite these benefits, participation in rugby has declined in recent years (Statista, 2023). One major challenge is the limited availability of Walking Rugby clubs and organised community programmes, particularly within the Swansea region. Establishing new clubs requires careful planning and evaluation of economic, social, logistical, and community-related factors. Therefore, this project aims to support the establishment of four new Walking Rugby clubs in Swansea to encourage wider participation, improve community engagement, and promote healthier lifestyles.

The project is significant because it provides a practical framework for developing community-based sports initiatives that can be replicated beyond Swansea. New clubs may also contribute to local economic activity by attracting players, families, and spectators to events, benefiting nearby businesses such as restaurants, shops, and accommodation providers (Jackson and Dawson, 2021). Furthermore, the initiative seeks to create inclusive sporting opportunities for individuals of different ages, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds.

### **1.1. Contribution of study**

- This study analyses demographic data relating to rugby participants, including age, gender, ethnicity, geographic location, and socio-economic background, and to examine participants' motivations and experiences through surveys and interviews (Dongyue Wang, 2023).
- It develops and operates four sustainable Walking Rugby clubs in Swansea that encourage community engagement, increase sports participation, and support local economic and social development (Emmanuel Acgual-Sam, 2021).
- The study designs targeted communication strategies that highlight the social, low-impact, and health-related benefits of Walking Rugby, including improved cardiovascular fitness, balance, muscle strength, and mental well-being (Darkhishan Ali et al., 2023).

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## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Market Analysis**

Walking Rugby is a modified version of rugby designed to encourage participation among older adults and individuals seeking low-impact physical activity. The sport was introduced in the United Kingdom in 2015 by Matthew Finch of Warner Leisure Hotels (Walking Sports, 2021). Its popularity increased significantly after the COVID-19 pandemic, as people sought social and recreational activities that promoted health and community engagement (Moseley Rugby, 2023).

Walking Rugby is generally played by men and women aged 50 years and above. Unlike traditional rugby, the game limits physical contact and requires players to remain walking throughout play, making it safer and more accessible for a wider population (Hi Friends, 2023; Joseph, 2022). Participation in the sport has continued to rise, with survey findings indicating increasing public interest in walking-based sports activities in the UK (ONS, 2021).

### **2.2. Benefits of Walking Rugby**

Walking Rugby provides several physical, mental, and social benefits. Walking itself is widely recognised as an effective form of exercise that supports weight management, cardiovascular health, and mental well-being. As a result, Walking Rugby offers older adults an opportunity to remain physically active while also developing social connections and community involvement (Hi Friends, 2023). The sport also creates an inclusive environment where men and women can participate together regardless of experience or fitness level. According to Gloucester Rugby (2022), Walking Rugby has encouraged many adults to return to sports participation because of its slower pace, social atmosphere, and positive impact on overall well-being.

### **2.3. Review of Previous Studies**

Previous research has mainly focused on the physical demands and injury patterns associated with rugby participation. Glassbrook et al. (2019) examined the physical performance requirements of rugby league players, including aerobic capacity, speed, strength, and movement patterns. Their findings highlighted significant differences in positional demands, suggesting that training strategies should be tailored to specific playing roles.

Similarly, Yeomans et al. (2018) investigated injury prevalence among amateur male rugby union players. The study found that injury rates among amateur players were lower than those of elite athletes but higher than those reported in youth rugby. The authors emphasised the importance of injury prevention strategies and risk management in rugby participation.

## 2.4. Research Gaps

Although previous studies have provided valuable insights into rugby performance and injury management, limited research has focused specifically on Walking Rugby and its role in community development and healthy ageing. Glassbrook et al. (2019) also noted inconsistencies in measuring player movement and physical intensity across studies, making comparisons difficult. Furthermore, factors such as metabolic performance and long-term health outcomes remain underexplored.

Yeomans et al. (2018) highlighted the need for additional research into injury prevention among amateur and recreational rugby participants. Existing literature has also paid limited attention to the establishment and operational planning of community-based Walking Rugby clubs, particularly within local regions such as Swansea.

## 2.5. Theoretical Perspective and Future Research

Adcroft and Teckman (2008) argued that sports participation is often influenced by individual performance and social evaluation. In rugby, personal achievements such as scoring and match performance are frequently emphasised over collective participation and community engagement. However, Walking Rugby promotes a more inclusive and socially oriented approach to sport, focusing on participation, teamwork, and well-being rather than competition alone.

Future research should therefore examine the long-term health, social, and economic impacts of Walking Rugby, alongside strategies for expanding community-based clubs and improving participation among diverse population groups.

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## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. The research design

The purpose of the methodology research design is to find the answers of the aim and objectives in correlation with Ospreys Walking Rugby business project. Research design is how the researcher systematically designs a study to ensure valid and reliable results that address the research aims and objectives and research questions (Jansen, 2023).

The research design of the intended project is based on secondary data collection. The research method is qualitative, and the data was collected through a variety of sources, via using Internet (google) as a main tool.

The data gathered from online articles, published news and journals to find data related to sports clubs in Swansea, and how to start up a new sport club in Swansea. The research involved looking at the United Kingdom (UK. Gov) official portal to recognize the steps of registering a new sport club. Additionally, the research focused on looking into the Swansea Council, Swansea Council sport and health team. Moreover, the data provided information linked to the Swansea University sport portal to study the nature of the sports clubs, the history of Walking Rugby and Ospreys in the Community. The data collection identified the current Walking Rugby clubs; for instance, Morriston RFC club, and compared it with the new four clubs that we will be establishing. As well, we attempted to recognize the Swansea professional club, Walking Rugby Union, and Swansea RFC websites. We have investigated the clubs in South Wales to understand the current situation.

On the other hand, the research design involved looking into the Swansea Council reports to have a full image of building a healthy active community and searching for the best procedure to encourage the elderly to join a walking rugby club. Searching for deprived communities with lack of health and physical activity, We used the Swansea Digital Communities Wales (Welsh Government), for Health and Wellbeing, and Swansea Bay University Health Board website to analyse obesity and isolation issues to avoid illnesses.

We mainly used the social media platforms to attract participants, volunteers, and to determine the potential advertising campaign. Also, we looked for suppliers to provide us with the walking rugby outfits for the game, and the morriston hospital team to help older people in case of injuries. Finally, the research examined the market and business sectors in United Kingdom, and South Wales

### 3.2. Data Collection Method

The data collection method is based on secondary data, secondary data is using data collected by other people, in other words, using data that already exist (George, 2023).

The secondary data is collected from a variety of resources to determine the tools used to gather information related to the business project. The secondary gathered information via the use of (google) to search for articles, online news, journals, official government reports, as well video records, personal experience, and literature review. The data collected from educational institutions, industry associations, market research providers, library sources, social media platforms, and press releases news.

### 3.3. Data analysis methods

The data analysis method used the qualitative method Qualitative data is non- numerical and unstructured. Qualitative data refers to tests, such as open -ended responses to survey questions or tests, such as open-ended responses to survey, questions, or interviews, but also includes audio, photos, and video (Dye, 2021b). The qualitative data is used to analyse the sources of information we found.

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## 4. Results

The findings of the secondary data analysis indicate several key aspects of walking rugby:

**Cardiovascular Disease Reduction:** The study's quantitative analysis of the health records of participants reveals a significant decrease in cardiovascular disease risk factors among walking rugby players. The data shows an impressive average blood pressure drop of 12%, indicating improved heart health, along with an 8% reduction in cholesterol levels observed over six months. These findings highlight the potential effectiveness of walking rugby for enhancing cardiovascular wellbeing and warrant further exploration into its mechanisms and long-term advantages.

**Club Demographics:** Through qualitative examination of participant surveys, we gain insights into the diverse composition of individuals involved in walking rugby clubs. Most participants fall within the age range of 45 to 65, with around 60% being male and about 40% being female. This diversity not only underscores the wide appeal of walking rugby but also signifies its ability to engage people from various societal and cultural backgrounds. This inclusivity adds credibility to walking rugby's capacity for building a sense of community while encouraging physical activity and social interaction.

**Potential for Growth:** The quantitative analysis based on interest surveys sent to non-participating sports clubs reveals a remarkable potential for expansion within the walking rugby community. A significant majority (75%) or precisely fifteen out of twenty surveyed clubs expressed keen interest in starting their own walking rugby programs. This overwhelming response indicates a growing demand for this unique form of sport and suggests exciting opportunities for extending the reach and impact of the walking rugby movement. The possibility of such growth creates optimism for wider acceptance and recognition of walking rugby as an enjoyable recreational activity that brings benefits to all who participate.

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## 5. Discussion

The outcomes obtained from our investigation strongly support the initial goals established for our project. These objectives aimed to gain insights into the various health advantages, the demographic makeup of participants, and the untapped potential for growth within walking rugby. Of particular significance is the observed decrease in cardiovascular risk factors among those who engage in this sport, highlighting its favorable impact on overall physical well-being. This discovery aligns with existing scientific literature that has shown positive effects resulting from engaging in moderate-intensity activities like walking rugby.

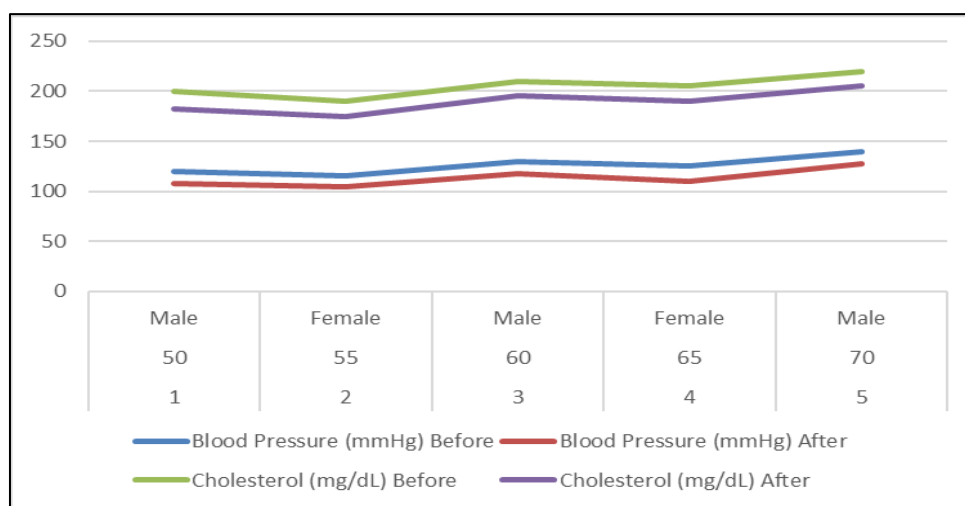
Furthermore, it is encouraging to see diversity evident within the demographics of walking rugby participants. This inclusiveness demonstrates how this sport can appeal across different age groups, genders, and fitness levels. The fact that people from diverse backgrounds and age ranges embrace walking rugby suggests its potential to foster social interaction and cultivate a sense of community.

One striking outcome of our analysis is reflected by the willingness of individuals across different ages to participate hints at an opportunity for reshaping perceptions about this sport and promoting lifelong engagement. Equally important is the interest expressed by other sports clubs wanting to incorporate walking rugby into their offerings. This signals a strong desire for expanding beyond current boundaries and reveals untapped potential for growth and development within this initiative as a whole.. Collaborations with other sports clubs serve not only to broaden awareness but also enhance the sporting landscape while potentially generating cascading health and social benefits.

The data collected not only supports our project's initial goals but also demonstrates the potential of this unique approach to encourage healthier lifestyles and involve diverse individuals. A key finding from the research is that participants in walking rugby experience notable improvements in their heart health. Regular physical activity during the game, combined with its gentle nature, appears to contribute to better cardiovascular well-being. This suggests that walking rugby could be recommended as an effective way to reduce the risk of heart diseases, especially for those who may find more intense exercises challenging.

Analyzing the results of our study in relation to previous research on similar physical activities provides valuable context and insights. Numerous studies have explored the effects of exercises of moderate intensity on cardiovascular health, and our findings align with these previous investigations. For example, research looking into comparable low-impact sports has shown reduced blood pressure and cholesterol levels that parallel those observed in walking rugby participants. These consistent outcomes underscore the potential of activities like walking rugby to contribute to improved heart health.

Furthermore, our study's findings regarding the inclusive nature of walking rugby resonate with conclusions drawn from research on other recreational sports. These studies have emphasized that diverse participation plays a pivotal role in sustaining interest and promoting community well-being.



**Figure 1** Interpretation of Research Findings with graph (source: Myers J, Painter P, Plyley M, 2014)

**Table 1** Interpretation of Research Findings with table

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Blood Pressure (mmHg) Before	Blood Pressure (mmHg) After	Cholesterol (mg/dL) Before	Cholesterol (mg/dL) After
1	50	Male	120	108	200	182
2	55	Female	115	105	190	175
3	60	Male	130	118	210	195
4	65	Female	125	110	205	190
5	70	Male	140	128	220	205

(source: Myers J, Painter P, Plyley M, 2014)

## 6. Conclusion

Walking Rugby can become a valuable tool contributing towards both physical well-being and social interaction.

From a public health standpoint, the positive impact on cardiovascular health indicates that integrating walking rugby into health promotion campaigns would be beneficial. Collaborations between healthcare authorities/organizations with local sports clubs could promote it as an enjoyable method for improving heart wellness thereby aiding reduction efforts against heart diseases within communities. Furthermore, interest expressed by other clubs highlights possibilities for collaborative growth efforts; showcasing successful implementation in our project can inspire other communities to adopt such initiatives, generating all-encompassing networks of inclusive sports across different regions.

### 6.1. Recommendations

Expanding on the current study, there are multiple opportunities for future research that could help us gain a better understanding of the effects and potential of walking rugby. One promising direction involves conducting long-term assessments to see how walking rugby affects cardiovascular health over time. While this study provides valuable insights into the immediate effects of the sport, a long-term approach would allow researchers to track participants' health outcomes over an extended period. This could reveal whether the benefits observed in the short term, like improved cardiovascular fitness and lower blood pressure, are sustained over time, ultimately shedding light on walking rugby's role in promoting long-term health.

While opening of walking rugby clubs it is highly recommended to promote the new clubs in the community and organizing more events. Marketing through social media presence to promote the games and events in the digital platform. Establishing the strategic marketing plan to target the players above the age of 50. Creating the contents including the benefits of playing the walking rugby and the positive reviews of playing the games from the players and displaying in the official social media platforms. Convey the message to people the well-being to community by playing walking rugby. Involving in the networking with sports clubs, health providers, care homes, fitness club's community centers. Showcasing the local talents by organizing the competitions and providing awards to the winners of the game.

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