

# A Comprehensive Analysis of Factors Affecting the Development of Expertise in Para Sport Athletes

Nima Dehghansai & Joseph Baker



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en  
sciences humaines du Canada

Canada



## Introduction & Objective

- There are a wide range of benefits for persons with a disability to participate in sport (WHO, 2011)
- However, there is limited literature pertaining to Para sport athletes' sporting experience (Dehghansai et al., 2019), particularly in how athletes are introduced, involved, and developed in the Para sport system

**Project Objective: To develop a better understanding of factors impacting Para sport athletes' development**

### Phase I: Paralympian Search (Completed: 2019)

- 225 participants filled out the survey across 10 events
- Most successful outreach was via online platforms: social media (n=31) and email (n=15)
- Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa events attracted mostly local participants, while Calgary and Halifax also reached participants from near-by cities
- Athletes who acquired their injury later in life displayed different sporting experiences when compared to athletes with congenital or early acquired impairments
- Most early sport experiences were in an open setting

### Phase II: Pathway Athletes (Preliminary Findings)

- 203 Canadian & Australian athletes participated
- Athletes who acquired their impairment later in life reached the majority of the sporting milestones later age athletes with congenital or early acquired impairments
- There was no difference between groups regarding the hours devoted to various types of training
- Most athletes sampled other able-bodied and/or Para sports: mainly in an open setting
- Next step is an in-depth analysis of training histories, sport-specific trajectories, and experience in other able-bodied/Para sports

### Phase III: Athletes' and Coaches' Perspective (On-Going)

Semi-structured interviews with athletes and coaches to capture their experiences in the Para sport system to identify current gaps and future directions in sporting pathways

## Implications

- There is a need to explore ways to reach rural areas/participants with little/no experience in Para sport
- Most athletes' early experiences were in an open setting: is this detrimental or beneficial to their development?
- Recent research suggests the timing of athletes' injury influences their sporting experience. There is a need to consider multiple pathways and timing of resource allocation/support that is unique to athletes' situation/readiness