



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

First global findings revealed from landmark WOA Olympians Health Study

63% of Olympians reported at least one significant career-related injury

Findings increase injury understanding and will inform treatment guidelines and welfare recommendations

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World Olympians Association (WOA) has, today, revealed initial findings from the first ever global study into the long-term health issues of Olympians, uncovering new learnings that will underpin future research and policy making to improve the lives of Olympians and elite athletes now and in the future.

The WOA Olympians Health Study saw 3,357 retired Olympians from 131 countries, representing 57 Olympic sports, complete a cross-sectional online survey distributed by direct email via National Olympians Associations and WOA.

The WOA Olympians Health Study has so far found:

- 63% of Olympians reported at least one significant career-related injury
- Injuries most frequently affected the knee (20.6%), lumbar spine (13.1%) and shoulder/clavicle (12.9%)
- Female injury (68.1%) prevalence was higher than male (59.2%)
- 63.8% of injuries were attributed to training
- A third of Olympians reported current, ongoing pain (32.4%) and functional limitation (35.9%) as a result of injuries sustained during their Olympic career
- Olympians taking the survey said that the benefits of sport outweighed any health issues and they would “do it all over again”

The paper is the first of a number of papers which WOA will be publishing with papers two and three going into more detail on specific injuries, sports and demographics. Paper one has just been published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine. WOA commissioned three-time Olympian Dr

Debbie Palmer OLY, a lecturer and researcher in sports injury and illness prevention at Edinburgh Napier University to run the survey and analyse the results.

WOA will continue to lead research and provide evidence-based interventions to delay the onset of and/or reduce the severity of ongoing symptoms and mitigate the long-term consequences of injury. Introduced during IOC Member and WOA Patron, HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco OLY's welcome speech at the Opening Ceremony of the 127th IOC Session in 2014, the WOA Olympians Health Study was launched by the WOA Medical Committee with funding from the IOC Medical and Scientific Commission.

Joël Bouzou OLY, WOA President who led the initiative, said:

“As the world's first-ever worldwide study into injury prevalence in Olympians, the WOA Olympians Health Study has been ground-breaking from the outset. We have produced pioneering and insightful findings which provide greater understanding of the injuries Olympians encounter. The findings lay strong foundations for new protocols to improve Olympians and elite athletes' welfare and to reduce the chances of sustaining injuries now and in the future.

“I would like to thank the Olympian community who have contributed to this study which has enabled us to generate new knowledge on their long-term and overall health. A core part of WOA's mission is to support Olympians at all stages of their lives. This study is just one of our initiatives that benefit Olympians both now and in the future.”

Dr Debbie Palmer OLY, WOA Olympian Health Study lead researcher, said:

“The WOA Olympians Health Study has produced a wealth of information following involvement from the global Olympian community. The focus of our study has resonated with Olympians leading to high quality data and, as an Olympian myself, I know we are all passionate about supporting future generations.

“Our first paper has highlighted new areas of knowledge. Further analysis of the data will allow us to look at the consequences for specific body parts and for individual sports. We will now be focusing on Olympians' later life health including quality of life, diseases such as osteoarthritis, and comparing Olympians versus the global general population to further increase our knowledge in these areas.”

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors

- The WOA Olympians Health Study can be read at <https://bjsm.bmj.com/content/early/2020/11/08/bjsports-2019-101772.full>

About World Olympians Association

WOA is an IOC recognised organisation supporting the 100,000 Olympians worldwide. Its remit is to work for the benefit of all Olympians at all stages of their lives, empowering them to serve society and help make the world a better place through sport. With 96 member National Olympians Associations spread across all five continents, WOA provides support to Olympian-run events and projects based on the Olympic ideals laid down by the founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin. www.olympians.org

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