



# Women Run The Streets

Dr Sara MacBride-Stewart & Dr Charlotte Brookfield





## The Cardiff Half Marathon

- Held every October, the Cardiff Half was established in 2003 and has grown to second biggest half marathon in the U.K.
- Organisers Run 4 Wales took ownership of the event in 2012, growing the amount of entries to 27,500 for the 2019 event.
- Cardiff University has been the title sponsor of the event since 2016.
- The event has hosted the Welsh, British, World and Commonwealth Half Marathon Championships.
- Alongside the elite field, the Cardiff Half has grown a community of social, first-time and occasional runners.
- The need to address inclusion and accessibility to ensure that a diversity of runners and communities feel included in the opportunity to take part.





## Cardiff University Research

- Cardiff University and Run 4 Wales have partnered to undertake research on a number of aspects related to the event.
- This has included research that has focused on its potential to alleviate some socio-economical inequalities and health impacts in the region.
- Research has also looked at the economic and environmental impact of the race, helping to inform future event planning and Run 4 Wales' Environmental Policy.
- Cardiff University research has led to initiatives to reduce the environmental impact of the event, and to foster running communities that benefit the lives of previously inactive or marginalised communities.





## A SPOTLIGHT ON GENDER:

Previous Cardiff University research involved conducting an online survey with runners following the race:

**2018 saw an increase in women runners compared to 2017**

**2018 was the first half marathon for 47% of runners**

**2018 saw *more* women register than men**

**2018 saw *fewer* women than men at the start line**





## ADDRESSING THE GENDER 'GAP'

- The number of women runners taking part has increased significantly, following a consistent trend across research with runners and running events.

- Reasons given for women's increasing participation includes:

Targeted women events

Actions by various groups to increase women's participation

The parkrun movement

- Much of the research to date has focused on shorter distances, despite women's increasing participation in longer distance events.





## WOMEN RUN THE STREETS FINDINGS: HOW RUNNABLE IS YOUR LOCAL AREA?

- Women were asked in an online survey and focus groups about the runnability of their local streets.

- The four areas selected to investigate in more details were:

- Ely
- St Mellons
- Grangetown
- Merthyr

These are urban areas where average household incomes are below the Wales/UK average ([cardiff.gov.uk](http://cardiff.gov.uk)).

- Runnability was assessed through a series of questions that asked about:

- Feeling of safety
- Possibility for harassment
- Maintenance of the local streets/pavements
- Existence of lighting
- Traffic
- Litter





## WOMEN RUN THE STREETS FINDINGS: WHY WE RUN?

- 1501 women responded to the online survey, 2/3 of which were aged 35-55.
- Over half lived in urban rural, the rest in semi-rural or rural areas.
- 1/4 had been running for 1-2 years, 1/3 had been running for 3-5 years.

### Most important factors in women's decision to run:

- *Physical health*
- *Mental health*
- *Challenge or personal goals*
- *Motivation oneself*
- *Improvement of mood*
- *Feeling of optimism*





## WOMEN RUN THE STREETS FINDINGS: WHERE WE RUN?

- 65% said they trained on the street
  - 17% trained offroad
  - 5% trained in the gym
  - 12% trained 'elsewhere'
  - 25% rated their local area as 'excellent' for running
- Over 40% reported i) poor conditions of pavements/paths, ii) lack of lighting, iii) trees or plants blocking pavements as problems with their local running routes.
- 40% reported feeling 'extremely safe' running alone, but this reduced to 6% in the night.
- A number of strategies were used by women to sustain their running, including:
- Running with others
  - Avoiding certain parts of the day
  - Avoiding others





## WOMEN RUN THE STREETS FINDINGS: RUNNABILITY FINDINGS PAGE 1

- **1/5 women said that 'catcalling' and inappropriate comments were a problem, increasing to 30% in some areas.**
- **1/2 of women in Grangetown reported that pavements/paths were 'too busy'.**
- **1/4 of women in Grangetown and Merthyr reported having difficulty crossing the streets to run, and also reported high levels of traffic.**
- **1/3 of women running in St Mellons and 1/4 of women in Merthyr reported feeling unsafe.**
- **The strongest factor to determine feeling 'unsafe' was the level of traffic and lighting rather than 'people or animals'.**





## WOMEN RUN THE STREETS FINDINGS: RUNNABILITY FINDINGS PAGE 2

- At least 1/4 of women in each area reported a lack of lighting, and almost 1/2 of Merthyr women reported this as a problem.
- The conditions of pavements stood out as an important issue in all areas, especially the presence of trees/plants blocking the pavements.
- In all areas, the easily mitigated impacts on runnability (litter, ice, lighting) were more often reported by women that those aspects would be more difficult to address.
- The impact on runnability was different for each area, but St Mellons stood out as a particularly challenging area to run - perhaps down to its geography and aspects of both urban and rural aspects.

\*Data from 150 participants





## GETTING TO THE START LINE

- **14,280 women registered for the 2019 Cardiff University Cardiff Half Marathon, with 9885 (69.2%) turning up to the start line on race day.**

- **51% said work commitments had affected their ability to train, confirming workload pressures as a huge barrier stopping women from getting to the start line.**

- **Other factors reported with fairly high consistency were:**

- **Family commitments**
- **Injury and illness - reported by over 40%**

- **42% reported they had previously registered for an event but had not participated in it.**

- **Of that 42%, 61% said it was because of injury or illness; 22% reported family and 11% reported work commitments.**







## THE #WHYWERUN FINISHERS TEE

- To commemorate the #WhyWeRun campaign and bring attention to the focus of the research, the Cardiff University Cardiff Half Marathon devoted its finishers t-shirt to women's reasons for running.
- A selection of one-word answers accrued from Facebook helped create a vibrant and meaningfully designed t-shirt which all runners received once crossing the finish line.
- There were a mixture of Welsh and English words, including 'Focus', 'lechyd', 'Friendship', 'Her' and many, many more.





## SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE RUNNING FOR WOMEN

- Women's exercise time needs to be valued and protected
- It is women who often lose their exercise time in the pressure between work and family commitments.
- Registering for an event may encourage running, however because this is a one-off, it may not sustain running.

### What sustains running for women?

- The opportunity to run regularly
- Protecting their running time
- Ensuring local areas are 'runnable'





## CREATING LOCAL PLACES THAT ARE MORE 'RUNNABLE'

- It was reported in at least one study area that the local police force were encouraging women to treat catcalling seriously and to report it to the police.
- The issue of busy streets suggests that it may be helpful to advertise routes to women that are runnable or less busy.
- It may be worth checking lighting in areas reported as having a lack of lighting.
- Not all areas have the same issues, so improving runnability needs a 'place by place' approach.
- Circadian and seasonal changes are important and can impact on the runnability of the areas explored.





## WHAT NEXT? A LEGACY FOR WOMEN RUNNING THE STREETS

**Cardiff University and Run 4 Wales are currently working together to devise a number of suggested 'Runnable Routes' for women within the Cardiff region.**

**The routes will be reflective of the research findings, offering practical solutions to counteract some of the recurring barriers, especially those around safety, that can negatively impact regular running.**

**These will be made readily available to the running community and leave a lasting legacy from the research.**





## COVID-19 UPDATE

**This research was carried out in Oct-Nov 2019. COVID-19 lockdown measures in Wales were introduced in March 2020, with households restricted to 1) daily outdoor exercise only and 2) running in their local area. Lockdown measures were globally reported to affect women.**

**Sports England research found that overall, women's activity levels during COVID-19 did not change. Some women reported exercising more, yet a similar proportion of women exercised less. There was also an increase in the gender gap for activity levels, as men were able to increase their overall activity during lockdown relative to women.**

**Women Run The Streets research remains relevant. It will help to consider the impact that COVID-19 has had on women's experiences of the runnability of their local area, and the inequalities highlighted by lockdown measures. Ongoing social distancing and hygiene concerns, and changed routines and homelife patterns continue to play a part in how we run. There are opportunities for more research in this area.**





## THANK YOU

**We would like to thank ALL the women who participated in this Cardiff University and Run 4 Wales Research. Thank you for sharing your experiences. Everyone of you is the reason we run and are the inspiration for this research.**