

The effects of the London 2012 Olympics and related urban regeneration on physical and mental health: the ORiEL mixed-methods evaluation of a natural experiment

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Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

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Plain English summary

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Plain English summary

What was the problem?

Little is known about the health effects of urban regeneration and the utility of sporting events such as the Olympic Games in promoting health. Given that large sums of public money are spent on these programmes, decision-makers need to know whether or not they improve population health. However, limited good evidence exists to support decisions on whether or not to invest in such programmes and where to focus resources.

What did we do?

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games gave us the opportunity to study the impacts of the Games and its legacy. We investigated whether or not the event inspired people to become physically active and whether or not the physical legacy of a regenerated Olympic Park improved health.

What did we find?

In the quantitative study we unfortunately found limited evidence that either the spectacle of the Olympic Games or the Olympic Park in legacy mode had an impact on health. Although access to sporting facilities and high-quality green space improved, we found that, over time, people did not become more physically active and their mental health or well-being did not improve. In the qualitative study we found that residents generally welcomed the chance to live in a cleaner, safer and more unified environment. The Olympic Games served to reduce and alleviate stressors in the social and physical environment; however, this was viewed by respondents as temporary. Overall, it served to lessen participants' sense of social exclusion and seemed to generate a sense of inclusion and respite, but did not address the most dominant and emphatically articulated local need: housing.

What does this mean?

We need more evidence for the long-term health impacts of investment in urban regeneration and large-scale sporting events such as the Olympic Games. However, our study provides new evidence to suggest that these programmes may play only a limited role in improving people's health.

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