

John Walsh (in partnership with healthCORE)

'Getting to the heart of farmers' health'

Irish farmers are a high-risk group for cardiovascular disease (CVD), which has significant implications for farmers' health and farm productivity. The majority of CVD cases are caused by unhealthy lifestyle behaviours and are therefore preventable. There is a gap, however, in research evidence in what prompts farmers to adopt lifestyle and health behaviour change. This qualitative study forms part of a larger study that assesses the effectiveness of a health behaviour change programme (Farmers Have Hears, FHH), designed to improve the cardiovascular health status of Irish farmers (n=960). Specifically, this study explores barriers and enabling factors to health behaviour change among farmers within the wider context of farmers' attitudes to their health and notions of farming and rural masculinity(ies).

Using a community-based participatory research approach, qualitative methodologies (focus groups/interviews/observation) will be used to explore farmers' experiences of FHH and the unique characteristics of farm settings (marts/co-ops) as a hook to engage farmers. Purposive sampling will be used to recruit a diverse sample of participants. The principles of Grounded Theory will be used to inform data analysis and guide a cyclical and reflective data collection process. Open and comparative coding techniques will be used to analyse data and conceptual mapping will identify emerging themes. Field notes and reflective journaling will be used to capture the nuances of farmers' engagement with various elements of FHH. The study findings will inform best practice approaches to health interventions targeted at Irish farmers and will have an important bearing on public health policy and farm health and safety policy.