

PERCEIVED EFFECT OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND MENTAL HEALTH OF ADOLESCENTS IN KOGI STATE

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Abstract

This study explores the perceived effects of physical activity on the mental health of adolescents in Kogi State, Nigeria. Physical activity is essential for promoting overall health and well-being, particularly during adolescence, a critical developmental stage characterized by significant physical, emotional, and social changes. The World Health Organization recommends that adolescents engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily to support healthy growth and development. This paper highlights the multifaceted benefits of physical activity, including improved mood, reduced anxiety and depression, and enhanced emotional resilience. Engaging in regular physical activity is associated with the release of endorphins, which elevate mood and contribute to better emotional regulation. However, many adolescents face barriers to participation, such as lack of access to facilities, socioeconomic challenges, and cultural norms that prioritize academic achievement over physical activity. Understanding these barriers is crucial for developing effective strategies to promote physical activity among adolescents. The findings underscore the importance of fostering supportive environments that encourage physical activity, thereby enhancing mental health outcomes and overall quality of life for young people in Kogi State.

Keywords: Physical activity, mental health, adolescents, barriers

INTRODUCTION

Physical activity encompasses a range of movements that enhance or maintain physical fitness and overall health. From structured exercises like sports and gym workouts to everyday activities such as walking or gardening, physical activity plays a crucial role in promoting well-being (Iroha, 2021). Regular engagement in physical activity is essential for adolescents, as their bodies and minds undergo significant development during this critical stage of life. The World Health Organization recommends that young people aged 5 to 17 engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily to foster healthy growth and development. The importance of physical activity transcends mere physical health benefits (Adesina, 2023). It contributes to the development of essential life skills, such as teamwork, discipline, and resilience. Furthermore, participating in physical activities can improve academic performance by enhancing concentration, memory, and classroom behavior. In communities where resources may be limited,

fostering a culture of physical activity can also encourage social cohesion and create supportive environments for youth (Kanu, 2023).

Mental health encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, affecting how individuals think, feel, and act. It is crucial for overall health and influences how adolescents handle stress, relate to others, and make choices (Oloyede, 2019). During adolescence, individuals face numerous challenges, including academic pressures, social dynamics, and identity formation, making mental health particularly vulnerable. Oyesola (2020) noted that poor mental health can lead to issues such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem, which can significantly impact daily functioning and overall quality of life. Physical activity plays a vital role in enhancing mental health by serving as a natural stress reliever and mood booster. Umeh, et al., (2024) opined that engaging in exercise stimulates the release of endorphins, often referred to as "feel-good" hormones, which can elevate mood and alleviate feelings of anxiety and depression. Moreover, regular physical activity can improve sleep quality, increase resilience to stress, and foster social connections through group sports or fitness classes. As a result, adolescents who incorporate physical activity into their routines often experience enhanced emotional regulation, greater self-confidence, and a more positive outlook on life (Salawu, et al., 2020).

Mental health, defined as a state of well-being in which individuals realize their own potential, can be significantly influenced by physical activity. Adolescents often face various stressors, including academic pressures, social dynamics, and family issues, making mental health a critical focus during this developmental phase (Solomon, 2019). Engaging in regular physical activity has been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress while boosting self-esteem and cognitive function. The release of endorphins during physical activity can lead to improved mood and emotional stability, highlighting the interconnection between physical and mental health. Oyetunde, et al., (2024) indicates that adolescents who participate in regular physical activity tend to report higher levels of happiness and life satisfaction. The social aspects of group sports or activities can also provide a sense of belonging and support, further enhancing mental well-being. As such, understanding how to promote physical activity among adolescents is vital for fostering healthier, more resilient individuals.

Despite the known benefits of physical activity, many adolescents face barriers that hinder their engagement. Common obstacles include a lack of access to facilities, insufficient resources,

and limited opportunities for organized sports or recreational activities. In rural areas like Olamaboro LGA, infrastructural challenges such as poorly maintained parks or inadequate sports equipment can discourage youth from participating in physical activities. Additionally, socioeconomic factors, such as financial constraints or competing responsibilities, can further limit adolescents' ability to engage in regular exercise (Yusuf, 2024). Social and personal factors also play a significant role in determining adolescents' activity levels. Peer pressure, body image concerns, and a lack of motivation can dissuade young people from participating in physical activities. Furthermore, the increasing prevalence of sedentary lifestyles—often driven by technology and screen time—has led to a decline in physical activity among youth. Addressing these barriers requires a multifaceted approach involving community support, awareness programs, and the promotion of accessible, inclusive physical activity opportunities.

Physical Activity

Physical activity is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle, particularly during adolescence, a critical period characterized by rapid physical, emotional, and social changes. Engaging in regular physical activity has been linked to numerous health benefits, including improved physical fitness, enhanced mental well-being, and a reduced risk of chronic diseases (Umeh, et al., 2024). As adolescents navigate the complexities of growing up, the importance of integrating physical activity into their daily routines cannot be overstated. This introduction explores the concept of physical activity, its significance, and its implications for adolescent health. Zubair, et al., (2021) indicates that physical activity encompasses a wide range of movements that involve the contraction of skeletal muscles and result in energy expenditure. These movements can be categorized into various types, including aerobic exercises (such as running and swimming), muscle-strengthening activities (like weightlifting), and flexibility exercises (such as yoga and stretching). The World Health Organization recommends that children and adolescents aged 5 to 17 engage in at least 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily to promote optimal growth and development (Abah, 2020).

The benefits of physical activity extend beyond mere physical fitness. Engaging in regular exercise has been shown to improve cardiovascular health, enhance muscle and bone strength, and contribute to healthy weight management. For adolescents, the development of these physical attributes is crucial, as they lay the foundation for a healthy adulthood (Adedayo, 2024).

Additionally, physical activity can help reduce the risk of lifestyle-related diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, which are increasingly prevalent among young people. Beyond physical health, the mental and emotional benefits of physical activity are equally significant (Eze, 2021). Regular exercise is associated with improved mood, reduced levels of anxiety and depression, and enhanced cognitive function. For adolescents, who often face various stressors, including academic pressures and social dynamics, physical activity serves as a vital outlet for stress relief. The release of endorphins during physical exercise promotes feelings of happiness and well-being, contributing to better emotional regulation (Bamidele, 2020).

Moreover, physical activity fosters social connections and teamwork, particularly through participation in group sports and recreational activities. Adolescents who engage in team sports not only develop physical skills but also learn important life skills, such as cooperation, communication, and resilience (Alabi, 2021). These social interactions can enhance their sense of belonging and support, which are critical for mental health during this formative stage. Despite the numerous benefits of physical activity, many adolescents face barriers that hinder their engagement. Factors such as a lack of access to safe recreational spaces, limited resources, and increasing sedentary behaviors driven by technology can contribute to a decline in physical activity levels. Understanding these barriers is essential for developing effective strategies to promote an active lifestyle among adolescents (Oloyede, 2019).

The concept of physical activity encompasses various forms of movement that are crucial for both physical and mental health, particularly during adolescence. The integration of regular physical activity into daily routines can lead to improved health outcomes, enhanced emotional well-being, and the development of essential life skills (Oduola, 2019). Recognizing the importance of physical activity and addressing the barriers to participation will be critical in fostering healthier, more resilient adolescents capable of navigating the challenges of their developmental stage. Ultimately, promoting physical activity among adolescents requires a collaborative effort among parents, schools, communities, and policymakers (Nwankwo, 2022). By creating an environment that supports and encourages physical activity, society can help ensure that young people grow up with the skills, confidence, and health necessary to lead fulfilling lives.

Mental Health

Mental health is a fundamental aspect of overall well-being, influencing how individuals think, feel, and behave across various life stages. It encompasses emotional, psychological, and social well-being, playing a crucial role in how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices (Olabisi, 2023). During adolescence, mental health becomes particularly significant as young people undergo profound changes that can impact their emotional stability and social interactions. Understanding the concept of mental health is essential for promoting well-being and addressing the challenges faced by adolescents. Salawu, et al., (2020) suggested that mental health can be defined as a state of well-being in which individuals recognize their abilities, cope with the normal stresses of life, work productively, and contribute to their communities. It is not merely the absence of mental illness but rather a holistic state of balance that encompasses emotional resilience, positive self-esteem, and healthy relationships. Mental health is influenced by various factors, including biological, environmental, and social elements, making it a complex and multifaceted concept (Ukwuoma, et al., 2020).

For adolescents, mental health is particularly vital as they navigate the challenges of identity formation, peer relationships, and academic pressures. During this developmental stage, young people are more susceptible to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders (Salawu, et al., 2020). These challenges can significantly affect their daily functioning, academic performance, and overall quality of life. Therefore, early identification and intervention are critical in promoting positive mental health outcomes. The impact of mental health extends beyond the individual, influencing family dynamics, educational environments, and community well-being (Yusuf, 2024). Adolescents with mental health challenges may experience difficulties in their relationships with peers and family members, leading to social isolation and further exacerbating their conditions. Additionally, schools play a pivotal role in supporting mental health, as they provide a setting for social interaction and learning. A supportive school environment can foster resilience and academic success among students (Uche, et al., 2024).

Furthermore, mental health is closely linked to physical health. Poor mental health can lead to various physical health issues, including increased susceptibility to chronic diseases, substance abuse, and unhealthy lifestyle choices (Salawu, et al., 2020). Conversely, engaging in regular physical activity has been shown to improve mental health by reducing symptoms of anxiety and

depression. Understanding this interconnection is vital for developing comprehensive approaches to health promotion among adolescents. Despite the significance of mental health, stigma and misconceptions surrounding mental illness continue to persist. Many adolescents may feel reluctant to seek help due to fear of judgment or misunderstanding from peers, parents, or educators (Adedeji, 2021). This stigma can prevent young people from accessing the support they need, highlighting the importance of educating communities about mental health and promoting open conversations around emotional well-being.

Mental health is a critical component of overall well-being that affects adolescents in profound ways. Recognizing the complexities of mental health, including its influences and implications, is essential for fostering a supportive environment where young people can thrive (Enemuo, 2022). By addressing mental health proactively, society can equip adolescents with the tools they need to navigate life's challenges and promote healthier, more resilient future generations. Promoting mental health among adolescents requires a multifaceted approach that involves families, schools, healthcare providers, and policymakers. By working collaboratively to eliminate stigma, increase awareness, and provide accessible mental health resources, communities can create a supportive framework that empowers young people to prioritize their mental well-being and seek help when needed.

Relationship between Frequency of Physical Activity and the Mental Health Status

The relationship between physical activity and mental health has garnered considerable attention in recent years, particularly concerning adolescents. As young people navigate the complexities of growth and development, understanding how frequency of physical activity impacts their mental health status is crucial (Fawole, 2024). Regular engagement in physical activity has been associated with various positive mental health outcomes, including reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, improved mood, and enhanced overall emotional well-being. Iroha (2021) explores the significance of this relationship and its implications for fostering healthier adolescents. The relationship between the frequency of physical activity and mental health status can be understood through various psychological and physiological mechanisms. Engaging in regular physical activity triggers the release of endorphins—often referred to as "feel-good" hormones—that can elevate mood and create a sense of well-being. Additionally, exercise has been shown to reduce stress hormones, such as cortisol, which can negatively impact mental health when

present in high levels. Kanu (2023) indicates that adolescents who participate in physical activity more frequently report lower levels of anxiety and depression. This correlation suggests that regular exercise may serve as a protective factor against the onset of mental health issues. By engaging in physical activities, adolescents can develop coping strategies that enable them to manage stress more effectively, thereby enhancing their resilience in the face of life's challenges (Lawal, 2021).

Moreover, the type of physical activity and its context can also influence mental health outcomes. Activities that involve social interaction, such as team sports or group fitness classes, not only provide the benefits of exercise but also foster social connections (Okwuosa, 2024). These social interactions can further alleviate feelings of loneliness and isolation, which are common during adolescence. Consequently, the frequency of participation in such activities may be positively associated with improved mental health status. The frequency of physical activity is not the only critical factor; the intensity and duration of the exercise also play significant roles. Oduola (2019) opined that moderate to vigorous physical activity has been linked to greater improvements in mental health compared to low-intensity activities. Understanding the optimal levels of physical activity required to achieve mental health benefits is essential for developing effective interventions aimed at promoting adolescent well-being.

Despite the numerous advantages of physical activity, many adolescents do not meet the recommended levels of exercise. Barriers such as lack of access to recreational facilities, socioeconomic challenges, and increasing screen time contribute to a sedentary lifestyle, which can exacerbate mental health issues (Ogunleye, 2021). Identifying and addressing these barriers is essential for encouraging regular physical activity among young people. Furthermore, adolescents' perceptions of physical activity and its impact on mental health can significantly influence their engagement in exercise. Many young people may underestimate the importance of physical activity for their mental well-being or may not recognize the benefits of regular exercise. Education and awareness campaigns can play a vital role in changing these perceptions and motivating adolescents to prioritize physical activity (Olabisi, 2023).

The relationship between the frequency of physical activity and mental health status among adolescents is complex and multifaceted. Regular physical activity contributes to improved mental health through various physiological and psychological mechanisms, while social dynamics and perceptions also play crucial roles (Onifade, 2020). Understanding this relationship can inform

interventions aimed at promoting physical activity as a means to enhance mental well-being among young people. Promoting regular physical activity among adolescents is essential for fostering healthier communities and supporting the well-being of future generations (Salawu, et al., 2020). By addressing barriers to participation, enhancing awareness of the benefits of exercise, and creating supportive environments, stakeholders can help young people harness the positive effects of physical activity on their mental health and overall quality of life.

Effect of Physical Activity on Emotional Well-being

Emotional well-being is a crucial component of overall mental health, particularly during adolescence, a period marked by significant emotional and psychological development. Engaging in physical activity has been widely recognized as a powerful tool for enhancing emotional well-being (Owoeye, et al., 2021). Numerous studies have demonstrated that regular exercise can lead to improved mood, reduced anxiety, and increased resilience in the face of stress. This introduction delves into the concept of how physical activity affects emotional well-being and its implications for adolescents. Emotional well-being refers to the ability to manage emotions, cope with stress, and maintain positive relationships (Olabisi, 2023). It encompasses aspects such as self-esteem, life satisfaction, and emotional resilience. Adolescents often face various emotional challenges, including peer pressure, academic stress, and identity exploration. As such, fostering emotional well-being during this critical developmental stage is essential for promoting healthy coping mechanisms and overall life satisfaction (Solomon, 2019).

Physical activity has a profound impact on emotional well-being through a variety of mechanisms. One of the primary ways exercise influences mood is through the release of endorphins, neurotransmitters that act as natural painkillers and mood elevators (Ogunleye, 2021). This biochemical response can lead to feelings of happiness and euphoria, often referred to as the "runner's high." Regular engagement in physical activity can thus serve as a buffer against feelings of sadness and anxiety. In addition to biochemical changes, physical activity can enhance emotional well-being by providing opportunities for social interaction and support (Owoeye, et al., 2021). Group activities, such as team sports or fitness classes, foster social connections that can mitigate feelings of loneliness and isolation commonly experienced by adolescents. These social bonds contribute to a sense of belonging and can further enhance emotional resilience.

Moreover, physical activity serves as a constructive outlet for stress and negative emotions. Engaging in exercise can help adolescents channel their feelings in a positive direction, reducing the likelihood of turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as substance abuse or withdrawal (Olabisi, 2023). By developing healthy habits around physical activity, adolescents can cultivate better emotional regulation skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. The type and intensity of physical activity also play significant roles in determining its effects on emotional well-being. Moderate to vigorous exercise is generally associated with greater improvements in mood and emotional health compared to low-intensity activities (Okwuosa, 2024). Activities that challenge adolescents physically and mentally may provide more significant emotional benefits, as they foster a sense of accomplishment and mastery.

Despite the positive effects of physical activity on emotional well-being, many adolescents do not meet the recommended levels of exercise. Factors such as busy schedules, lack of access to facilities, and the allure of sedentary activities like video games can contribute to a decline in physical activity levels (Zubair, et al., 2021). Addressing these barriers is crucial for promoting regular exercise as a means of enhancing emotional well-being among young people. Furthermore, individual perceptions of physical activity can significantly impact engagement levels. Adolescents who view exercise as enjoyable and beneficial are more likely to participate regularly. Education and awareness initiatives can help shift attitudes towards physical activity, emphasizing its role in boosting emotional well-being and stress management (Udeh, et al., 2022).

The effect of physical activity on emotional well-being is both significant and multifaceted. Regular exercise contributes to improved mood, emotional resilience, and social connections, all of which are vital for healthy emotional development during adolescence (Yusuf, 2024). Recognizing the importance of physical activity in enhancing emotional well-being can inform strategies aimed at promoting healthier lifestyles among young people. Ultimately, fostering an environment that encourages physical activity is essential for supporting adolescents' emotional health. By removing barriers to participation, promoting positive perceptions of exercise, and integrating physical activity into daily routines, communities can help young people harness the emotional benefits of an active lifestyle, leading to improved overall well-being.

Barriers Faced by Adolescents in Engaging in Regular Physical Activities

Regular physical activity is vital for the health and well-being of adolescents, yet many young people encounter numerous barriers that prevent them from engaging in exercise consistently (Taiwo, et al., 2022). These barriers can have significant implications for their physical health, mental well-being, and social development. Understanding the obstacles adolescents face in maintaining an active lifestyle is essential for developing effective strategies to promote physical activity. Umeh, et al., (2024) explores the concept of barriers to physical activity among adolescents and highlights their impact on health outcomes. Barriers to engaging in regular physical activity can be categorized into several domains, including environmental, social, economic, and personal factors. Each of these domains can significantly influence an adolescent's ability to participate in physical activities. By identifying these barriers, stakeholders can better support young people in overcoming challenges and fostering a more active lifestyle (Udofia, 2020).

One of the most significant barriers to physical activity is the lack of access to safe and adequate recreational facilities. Many adolescents live in neighborhoods without nearby parks, sports fields, or gyms, making it difficult to engage in structured physical activities. When safe spaces for exercise are limited, it can discourage young people from being active, particularly in urban areas where outdoor play may be perceived as unsafe (Abah, 2020). Social factors also play a crucial role in influencing adolescents' engagement in physical activity. Peer pressure, social acceptance, and the desire for belonging can significantly impact whether adolescents choose to participate in sports or exercise. If physical activity is not valued or prioritized among peers, individuals may feel reluctant to engage, fearing judgment or exclusion. Additionally, the presence of supportive family members and friends can encourage or hinder participation in physical activities (Kanu, 2023).

Economic constraints represent another major barrier to physical activity. Many adolescents come from families with limited financial resources, which can restrict their access to sports teams, gym memberships, and necessary equipment. Additionally, low-income neighborhoods may lack sufficient recreational facilities, further exacerbating the challenge (Alabi, 2021). Economic pressures can limit opportunities for organized sports and recreational programs, making it difficult for adolescents to engage in regular physical activity. Personal factors, including motivation, self-efficacy, and knowledge about the benefits of physical activity, also influence adolescents'

engagement levels. Some young people may lack the motivation to exercise due to competing interests, such as academic pressures or screen time, which can lead to a sedentary lifestyle. Additionally, a lack of knowledge about the importance of physical activity for health and well-being can result in low levels of engagement (Yusuff, et al., 2021).

Cultural factors can also pose barriers to physical activity. In some communities, cultural norms and values may prioritize academic achievement over physical activity, leading adolescents to focus more on studies than on exercise (Fawole, 2024). Furthermore, gender norms can influence participation, with some young girls facing societal pressures that discourage them from engaging in sports or physical activities deemed inappropriate. Despite these barriers, it is essential to recognize that many adolescents are motivated to be active and value the benefits of physical activity. Programs that promote inclusivity, accessibility, and support can help address these barriers effectively. By creating environments that encourage participation and provide resources, communities can help adolescents overcome obstacles to physical activity (Taiwo, et al., 2020).

The barriers faced by adolescents in engaging in regular physical activity are multifaceted and interconnected. Lawal (2021) indicates that environmental, social, economic, and personal factors all play a role in shaping young people's engagement levels. Understanding these barriers is crucial for developing targeted interventions that promote physical activity among adolescents. Ultimately, addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort among schools, families, communities, and policymakers. By working together to create supportive environments, reduce economic constraints, and foster positive social norms, society can empower adolescents to lead more active and healthier lives.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the relationship between physical activity and mental health among adolescents in Kogi State is significant and multifaceted. Regular engagement in physical activity not only promotes physical health but also plays a crucial role in enhancing emotional well-being and resilience. Despite the numerous benefits, various barriers hinder adolescents from participating in physical activities. Addressing these challenges through community support, awareness programs, and the promotion of accessible opportunities is essential for fostering healthier, more resilient adolescents. By prioritizing physical activity, stakeholders can contribute to improved mental health outcomes and overall well-being for young people in the region.

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