

Chapter 9

Investigating the Impact of Physical Activity in Enhancing the Well-Being of Children Affected by Emotional, Behavioral, and Developmental Disorders

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ABSTRACT

Children's mental health problems have emerged from a long history of misunderstanding and neglect, becoming the central concern of researchers, educators, and practitioners. This research aims to highlight the role of physical activity in mental health issues and its effectiveness among children with ASD, depression and anxiety, and other behavioral disorders. This chapter reviews the literature available on this topic to highlight the gap in the existing literature. Physical activity is gaining increasing attention as a viable and potentially effective approach to preventing and treating a range of mental health problems in adults, children, and young people. The chapter focuses on children's externalizing and internalizing problems. It analyzes findings from research studies to explore the link between exercise and children's psychopathology and evaluate comprehensive physical fitness and its direct or indirect effects on children's mental health. These findings suggest that there is a lack of concrete research on physical activity and mental health issues among children.

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INTRODUCTION

Unskilled, aggressive, hyperkinetic, impulsive children, and children lacking social skills are quickly rejected and ostracized from peer groups and become frequent targets of bullying in school settings by their peers (Snyder et al., 2004). Research on children's psychopathology indicates that a large number of school-aged children with symptoms of depression, anxiety, and mental health problems are often left without necessary early diagnosis, psychiatric assessment, and help (Efstratopoulou, Janssen, & Simons, 2012). In addition, many children facing attentional, emotional, and/or behavioral problems are placed in typical primary schools without a first screening. These children are at risk for school failure, emotional difficulties, and significant negative adult outcomes compared to their typical developing peers (Eisenberg, Fabes, Guthrie, & Reiser, 2000). The research also suggests that the integration of exercise into the routine showed a significant decrease in anxiety and depression among children (Toscano et al., 2022). The World Health Organization (WHO) reported in 2022 that almost a billion people globally are living with mental disorders. Most typically, anxiety issues and depression. Roughly 301 million people have an anxiety disorder, and this figure includes 58 million children and adolescents. There were 280 million individuals living with depression. While the most recent mental health data from the WHO comes from 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic, the WHO's initial estimate for 2025 suggests an increase in mental health disorders of 26%–28%.

Research Objectives

In order to achieve the goal of the research, the authors have set the following objectives:

- This study aims to look at the effect of regular physical activity on the emotional well-being of children with emotional disorders, with a particular emphasis on changes in anxiety and depression.
- To investigate the impact of exercise on the occurrence and severity of externalizing behavioral issues in children, such as anxiety and stress.
- To investigate the impact of physical fitness promotion programs on anxiety levels in children suffering from anxiety disorders such as generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, and particular phobias.
- To examine the relationship between exercise and the development of coping strategies in children and how these coping mechanisms may lead to increased resilience in the face of emotional and behavioral obstacles.

Background of the Study

Detection efforts are particularly critical during the early years. Students with symptoms of emotional and/or behavioral disorders (EBD) and children with social interaction with peers and teachers experience negative outcomes within and beyond the school setting (Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003; Volkmar, Lord, Bailey, Schultz, & Klin, 2004). Children with anxiety feel high levels of stress while interacting in the classroom with peers and teachers, which further destroys their mental health (Pettitt et al., 2022)

Anxiety and depression are some of the most common psychiatric conditions among children. The early symptoms of these psychiatric conditions are often ignored and not given much importance as it

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