

## Role of Physical Activity in Mental Well-Being

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### ABSTRACT

Regular physical activity plays a vital role in both psychological and physiological well-being of people of all ages. Mental well-being, a psychological wellbeing, which is mostly influenced by physical activity. The purpose of the present study is to conceptually investigate the role of physical activity in mental well-being. This paper has focused on exploring physical activity and mental well-being on the basis of Review of Literature, which helped in developing the theoretical framework. The finding of this paper is that the physical activity helps to improve mental well-being. Further, managerial implications have also been discussed. This study is conceptual in nature, which needs to be empirical tested.

**Keywords:** *Physical Activity, Mental Well-Being*

*“To keep the body in good health is a duty...otherwise we shall not be able to keep our mind strong and clear.”*  
**- Buddha**

**D**ue to past few decades, there has been an increasing attention on regular physical activity and exercise (Fletcher et al., 1996). Physical activity and exercise can be considered as the fundamental step in lifestyle modifications for the prevention of chronic diseases. Now-a-days, there has been growing focus on psychological well-being of such activities (Stathi et al., 2002), particularly in the domain of mental well-being. Regular physical activity can help to improve the mental well-being outcomes. Mental well-being outcomes include improvements in self-esteem, reduction in depressive symptoms, anxiety and emotional distress (Janssen and LeBlanc, 2010). Physical inactivity increases the risk of anxiety and stress level, which increases the mortality rates. Physical inactivity is the fourth foremost cause of death in the UK (Lee et al. 2012). In order to reduce the negative effects of physical activity like depression, anxiety and stress, focuses on motivating the entire ages group to participate in regular physical activity and exercise. It has also been observed that physical activity like aerobic exercises, which includes, running, swimming, walking, bicycling, dancing and doing jumping jacks helps to reduce the depression, anxiety and stress level. In the same vein, physical activities, especially aerobic exercise in small to medium sized groups, may have positive impacts on cognitive thinking. The

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probable benefits of physical activity in terms of emotional, cognitive and social wellbeing receive relatively less attention. Based on extant review of literature, it has been found that most of the research studies have identified the relationship between physical activity and self-esteem (Gilani and Pour, 2016); physical activity and anxiety (Mochcovitch et al., 2016; Anderson and Shivakumar, 2013); physical activity and depression (component of mental health well-being) (Overdorf et al., 2016; Lee et al. 2014) but there is dearth of research regarding impact of physical activity on overall mental wellbeing. Therefore, the present study focuses on the prospective of physical activity to enhance our wellbeing. In particular, it concentrates on mental-health wellbeing.

### ***Physical Activity and Self-Esteem***

Self-esteem is considered as a term which is used in psychology that facilitates to express the degree to which individuals feel positive about themselves. It is an important aspect of mental health (Gilani and Pour, 2016). In other words, self-esteem enhances mental growth and also plays a vital role in an individual's thoughts, feelings, values, and goals. Ghafari et al. (2007) believed that people with higher levels of self-esteem appraise themselves positively and have an affirmative attitude toward themselves. Self-esteem is a vital aspect when studying mental well-being because of (a) its close relationship with emotional stability and adjustment, (b) low self-esteem deals with many forms of mental illness as well as is associated with poor health behaviours. Previous literature has suggested that several ways for improving self-esteem. One of them is physical activity, which helps us to attain a higher degree of mental and physical power. Erikssen et al. (1998) revealed that an individual's physical activities positively influences on his or her mental health. Various researchers such as Hansen et al. (2001) and Ghafar et al. (2007) revealed that physical activities are beneficial in the management of psychological issues, like anxiety, depression, anger, tension, reaction to stress, self-efficacy, and self-esteem. Sepahmansour et al. (2012) proved that physical activity and exercise positively influences on self-esteem. In this same line, physical activity and exercise improve an individual's adequacy and efficiency. Opdenacker et al. (2009) indicated that there is a positive correlation between physical activity and self-esteem in adults. Participation in physical activity and sports helps to improve the self-esteem of an individual. Physical activity and sports provides positive perception, which in turn create a feeling of competence and self-acceptance in individuals.

### ***Physical activity and depressive symptoms***

Depression refers to a major health problem in the world today (Overdorf et al., 2016). In other words, it is a chronic mental illness (Lee et al., 2014). The main characteristics of depression are loss of capacity to experience pleasure, increased sense of worthlessness, fatigue, and preoccupation with death and suicide (Neugebauer et al. 1999). Depressive symptoms are common in modern era. Physical activities or exercise might endow with an alternative to reduce depression or depressive symptoms. Hassmen et al. (2000) stated that high amount of physical

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activities, low amount of depressive symptoms in adolescent and middle-aged populations. Physical activities might be effectively to reduce the depressive symptoms among patients with mild to moderate depression (Martinsen, 1994). King et al. (1993) stated that aerobic exercise play an essential role in reducing depressive symptoms only among men after a 16 week aerobic exercise program. Further, Lampinen et al. (2010) asserted that older women less engaged in physical activity program than the male counterparts. Less engaged in physical activity program, result in increase depressive symptoms. In the same vein, physical inactivity increases the risk of depression in our society. Additionally, physical inactivity has been widely recognised as one of the key risk factors in many chronic diseases such as cardio-vascular disease, Type II diabetes, as well as in mental health problems, especially depression (Blair and Brodney, 1999). Blumenthal et al. (1989) indicated that yoga and aerobic exercise reduced depressive symptoms.

### *Physical activity on anxiety*

Anxiety refers to as a set of physiological and behavioural responses that protect individuals from danger. In clinical term, anxiety is also considered as an unpleasant, subjective state of vague and diffuse apprehension that is often accompanied by physical sensations, such as sweating, muscle tension, tremors, and tachycardia, among others (Mochcovitch et al., 2016). Adults who engage in regular physical activity occurrence fewer anxiety symptoms (van Minnen et al., 2010). The major anxiety disorders defined in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) are General Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Panic Disorder (PD), Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Social Anxiety Disorder, and Specific Phobia (APA, 2000). Further, the occurrence of anxiety disorders in older adults is lower as compared to younger adults; many older adults report anxiety symptoms (Viana and Andrade, 2012). In this context, physical activities for younger adults are beneficial in both anxiety disorders and anxiety symptoms (Jayakody et al., 2014). Further, out of five meta-analyses, four concluded that exercise is an effective treatment for anxiety, with effect sizes ranging from 0.22 (small) to 0.56 (moderate) (Stonerock et al. 2015). Aerobic activities help to decrease in anxiety-related behaviour and sleep pattern improvements (Costa et al. 2012). Further, aerobic exercise is effective in reducing high sensitivity to anxiety such as the propensity to fear anxiety sensations based on appraisals that they will lead to disastrous consequences, an attribute which is characteristic of most anxiety disorders. Physical activity appears to be effective strategies to reduce the anxiety disorders in all ages. Zhang et al. (2014) indicated that different physical activities such as swimming, running, square dancing, tai chi, and a control group treat anxiety symptoms in older adults. Physical activities are considered as an effective tool for improving anxiety symptoms also in older populations (Mochcovitch et al., 2016).

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

The present study focuses on impact of physical activity on mental health wellbeing. Physical activity is an important tool in improving mental health well-being. Mental illness is socially

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unbearable and allied with suicide ideation and attempts, drug and alcohol abuse and homelessness. In these cases, however, various individuals who suffer a general dissatisfaction of low mental well-being categorized by emotional distress, low self-esteem, sense of hopelessness, chronic stress and anxiety. In this situation, most of the individuals take heavy drinking, smoking, absenteeism from work, family breakdown, physical violence and abuse, and quality of life. In current era, these problems seem to be in westernized countries regardless of the stability of economic or political climate. In this regard, physical activity plays an important role to solve mental health related problems such as treatment of mental illness and disorders; prevention of mental illness and disorders; improvement of mental and physical well-being of those with mental illness; improvement of mental well-being of the general population. Further, physical activity is associated with decreased risk of depression. Experimental studies show that aerobic and resistance exercise is most efficient in treating depression. Fox (1999) revealed that physical activity and exercise can facilitate prevent and treat this common cause of mental illness and threat to mental well-being. Physical activity and exercise can be beneficial in treating and avoiding depressive illnesses, and it can also be used as a means of reducing stress and anxiety on a daily basis in order to improve mood and sleep quality, in this way, sense of mental well-being can be more positively. Physical activity refers to as a vehicle for improving self-perceptions, mood, life satisfaction, social interaction and quality of life in modern era. Further, Strohle (2009) stated that physical activity positively affects on mood and stress. Physical activity is often as an alternative approach to reducing or managing stress. It is seen as one of the most important element that protect against anxiety. Aldana et al. (1996) indicated that lower level of stress among physically active adults as compared to inactive ones. In the same vein, physical inactivity as a significant risk factor for mental disorders. In addition to this, physical activity may also strengthen the self-esteem among individuals. In this context, people who participate in physical activity have greater physical and overall self-esteem such as high life satisfaction, resilience and greater achievement in education and work. Physical activity plays an important role in promoting mental health. In other words, physical activity can develop psychological well-being, by improving self-perception and self-esteem, mood and sleep quality, and by reducing levels of anxiety and fatigue. The major implications of this study every individuals should be walk at least 45 to 60 minutes in each day towards this all truly great thoughts are conceived while walking. Further, each individual should be 10–15 minute period of rest in order to participants' moods returned towards calmness and relaxation and feel less depression. In short, physical activity could be used as a strategy to regulate mood during the entire day. Moreover, individuals should participate in physical activity that facilitates to increase positive health behaviours during periods of stress, for instances, decreased smoking and healthier eating habits. Individuals' preferences about physical activity type like swimming, dancing, and football should be accommodated into physical activity programmes. In competitive environment, people less participate in physical activity, every individual should be motivate at least 45-60 minutes participate in physical activity in order to reduce the anxiety and stress. Physically active employees tend to have greater job satisfaction, higher mental alertness

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and higher self-confidence. Employees should be encouraged to use stairs instead of lift that facilitate to feel physically fit as well as employers arrange on-site gym or discount at a local leisure facility in order to employees to become active during their break and before and after work. Employers should also organize group activities such as yoga, which can also increase activity level and reduce the anxiety level of employees. Lastly, all health practitioners should be encouraged to become physically active themselves, both for their personal self-care as well as role models. Few limitations of this study need to be acknowledged. First, this study focuses only two variables i.e. physical activity and mental health, physical health should be considered in future. Secondly, this study is conceptual in nature; empirical study should be conducted in future in order to improve the generalisability of the findings.

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