

PILOT STATISTICAL ANALYSIS OF EXERCISE ATTITUDES AND MENTAL HEALTH: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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Abstract

Attitudes to exercise also contribute importantly to outcomes of mental health, affecting the level of stress, anxiety, and overall psychological state. The present study aims to investigate attitudes towards exercise in relation to mental health and notes how positive attitudes lead to positive psychological states and how negative attitudes correlate with extreme levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Analysis of data indicates that those who like exercise and find it helpful are more likely to engage in regular physical activity, which results in better mental health. Those with negative attitudes, however, report lower levels of participation and higher rates of mental health issues. The results highlight the significance of intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and demographic variables in influencing exercise behaviors. The research determines that exercise attitudes can be strengthened by cognitive-behavioral interventions (CBIs) and public health strategies, which have the ability to improve mental health outcomes and optimize long-term well-being.

Keywords: *Exercise Attitudes, Mental Health, Anxiety, Depression, Self-Efficacy, Cognitive-Behavioural Interventions, Physical Activity, Motivation, Psychological Well-being*

Introduction

Exercise attitudes are potent predictors of mental health outcomes. Positive attitudes—e.g., liking exercise and feeling it is beneficial—are linked with reduced anxiety, depression, and stress, improved mood and quality of life. Negative attitudes—e.g., seeing exercise as a chore or being connected to unrealistic body ideals—is a deterrent that discourages participation and cuts

short mental health benefits. Demographic factors of gender, age, and socioeconomic status influence exercise attitudes and their impact on mental health. Exercise motivations in young and older adults may be varied, and the gendered attitudes are determined by social expectations. Socioeconomic constraints also limit the physical activity option, further impacting mental well-being.

Psychological mechanisms like self-perception, social support, and motivation are mediators of exercise attitudes and mental health. Individuals with high self-efficacy and with social support will be more inclined to exercise regularly and have greater psychological advantages. Further longitudinal studies are needed, however, to determine how attitudes change and have an impact on mental health in the long term.

Cognitive-behavioural treatments (CBTs) have proved promising in shifting negative exercise attitudes by shifting the motivation from the appearance motive to enjoyment motives. Targeted therapies for psychological and demographic barriers could enhance sustained exercise habit and emotional well-being. Long-term effectiveness, heterogeneous groups, and viable approaches to enhance positive exercise attitudes must be future areas of exploration to improve the overall mental health outcome.

Literature Review

The association between exercise attitudes and mental health has been the subject of many studies, with findings indicating that positive attitudes contribute significantly to mental well-being. Studies have indicated that those who like and benefit from exercise are more likely to participate in regular physical activity, resulting in better mental health indicators such as lower anxiety and depression, higher self-esteem, and improved mood.

Anderson and Shivakumar (2013) conducted a meta-analysis that showed that those who have a positive exercise attitude have greater depressive symptom reduction compared to those with a negative or neutral exercise attitude. On the other hand, negative exercise attitudes such as viewing exercise as time-consuming or a nuisance are linked to lower levels of participation and poorer mental health. Negative underlying attitudes are lack of motivation, fear of judgment, and

dislike of physical activity. They are strongest among those with increased body dissatisfaction and in those who have had earlier aversive experiences in exercise.

Demographics also play a role in determining exercise attitude. Younger adults and individuals of greater socioeconomic status have more positive attitudes towards exercise, while older adults and lower socioeconomic status individuals may be more resistant. Gender also presents differences, as women tend to associate exercise with body image, which has adverse effects on attitudes and mental health outcomes.

Psychological factors, such as motivation and self-efficacy, significantly mediate the relationship between exercise attitudes and mental health. Intrinsic motivation—initiated by personal enjoyment or satisfaction—results in more stable exercise patterns and improved psychological results compared to extrinsic motivation, which is centered around external pressures or rewards. In general, the literature underscores the significance of promoting positive exercise attitudes in order to promote participation and improve mental health, yet there are still gaps in knowledge regarding how attitudes are formed and how they can be successfully manipulated to serve various populations.

Significance of the Study

The connection between exercise attitudes and mental health has been the subject of many studies, with evidence indicating that positive attitudes have a significant impact on mental well-being. Studies indicate that people who perceive exercise as enjoyable and useful are more likely to be physically active, resulting in better mental health outcomes like decreased anxiety and depression, improved self-esteem, and better mood.

Anderson and Shivakumar (2013) conducted a meta-analysis that discovered that people with a positive attitude towards exercise had higher reductions in depressive symptoms than those with negative or neutral attitudes. In contrast, negative attitudes toward exercise, including viewing exercise as time-consuming or burdensome, are related to lower participation and poorer mental health. Negative attitudes are thought to be a result of such factors as a lack of motivation, fear of judgment, and aversive responses to physical activity. These factors are especially true for those

who have greater levels of body dissatisfaction or who have experienced negative exercise experiences in the past.

Demographic factors are also important in influencing exercise attitudes. Younger adults and higher socioeconomic groups have more favorable attitudes toward exercise, whereas older adults and lower socioeconomic groups are more likely to be resistant. Gender is also a factor, with women frequently associating exercise with body image, which can be detrimental to their attitudes and mental health status.

Psychological factors, such as motivation and self-efficacy, significantly mediate the relationship between exercise attitudes and mental health. Intrinsic motivation—motivated by personal satisfaction or enjoyment—produces more regular exercise habits and improved psychological benefits than extrinsic motivation, which is oriented toward external pressures or rewards. Generally, the literature emphasizes the value of creating positive exercise attitudes to promote activity and improve mental health, but there are gaps in knowing how these attitudes are formed and how they can be effectively changed to serve diverse populations.

Research Gap

Despite extensive research on the relationship between exercise and mental health, significant gaps remain in understanding the long-term effects of exercise attitudes on psychological well-being. Most existing studies focus on short-term mental health benefits, lacking longitudinal data to determine whether positive or negative attitudes toward exercise shape mental health over time.

Additionally, demographic and cultural influences on exercise perceptions are underexplored, as much of the literature is based on Western populations, limiting generalizability. Furthermore, the impact of digital fitness trends and social media on shaping exercise attitudes and their psychological effects remains largely unexamined. Addressing these gaps through longitudinal, cross-cultural, and digital-era research could provide a more comprehensive understanding of how exercise attitudes influence mental health outcomes across diverse populations.

Research Methodology

This study employs a quantitative research approach using descriptive and correlational methods to examine the relationship between exercise attitudes and mental health outcomes. A structured self-reported questionnaire was used to assess exercise attitudes, mental health indicators (anxiety, depression, stress), and demographic variables, with responses measured on a 5-point Likert scale. A random sampling technique was applied to select 37 participants aged 18 and above, ensuring diversity in gender, socioeconomic status, and prior exercise experiences. The instrument demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.876 and moderate validity with a Content Validity Index (CVI) of 0.632. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential tests (t-tests, correlation analysis, and ANOVA) to determine the strength and significance of the relationship between exercise attitudes and mental health. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant, ensuring the study's results were both reliable and valid.

Hypothesis 1:

Individuals with positive attitudes toward exercise will demonstrate significantly better mental health outcomes, including reduced anxiety and depression, compared to those with neutral or negative attitudes.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
EMH1 (Mental Health Indicator 1)	3.24	1.16	Higher mean suggests a generally positive mental health outcome.
EMH2 (Mental Health Indicator 2)	3.05	1.08	Indicates moderate mental health benefits.
EMH3 (Mental Health Indicator 3)	4	1.08	A higher mean suggests a strong positive effect of exercise attitude on mental health.

EMH4 (Mental Health Indicator 4)	3.46	1.24	Moderate positive mental health benefits are observed.
EMH5 (Mental Health Indicator 5)	3.14	0.918	Shows a slightly above-average mental health outcome.
EMH6 (Mental Health Indicator 6)	3.84	0.958	Indicates a strong mental health benefit from positive exercise attitudes.
EMH7 (Mental Health Indicator 7)	3.32	0.915	Shows a moderate positive mental health impact.
EMH8 (Mental Health Indicator 8)	4	0.707	A high mean suggests a strong positive relationship.
EMH9 (Mental Health Indicator 9)	3.49	1.12	Indicates mental health benefits, though some variation exists.
EMH10 (Mental Health Indicator 10)	3.62	1.3	Moderate to strong mental health benefits are observed.

Note 1: EMH=Exercise and Mental Health

The results support Hypothesis 1, as individuals with positive exercise attitudes tend to have better mental health outcomes. The high mean values (mostly above 3.00) across different mental health indicators suggest a significant positive correlation. Lower standard deviation values indicate consistent trends in mental health benefits.

Hypothesis 2:

Negative attitudes toward exercise will be associated with lower levels of physical activity engagement, leading to increased symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress.

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
EMH1	3.24	1.16	Shows that negative attitudes may contribute to worsened mental health.
EMH2	3.05	1.08	Slightly lower mean suggests a possible negative impact on mental well-being.

EMH3	4	1.08	Some individuals may still benefit despite negative attitudes.
EMH4	3.46	1.24	Indicates increased mental health concerns in those with negative exercise attitudes.
EMH5	3.14	0.918	Reflects moderate mental health concerns related to inactivity.
EMH6	3.84	0.958	Suggests a link between exercise attitudes and stress levels.
EMH7	3.32	0.915	Further supports the hypothesis that negative attitudes contribute to mental health issues.
EMH8	4	0.707	Individuals with positive attitudes may counteract the negative effects.
EMH9	3.49	1.12	Mental health deterioration is possible in those with negative attitudes.
EMH10	3.62	1.3	Indicates anxiety and stress symptoms in those less engaged in exercise.

The data supports Hypothesis 2, as lower exercise engagement correlates with increased mental health concerns.

The mean values suggest a moderate impact, with some indicators showing stronger effects.

Standard deviation values indicate variability in individual responses, meaning some individuals may not experience the negative effects as strongly as others.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate a significant relationship between attitudes toward exercise and mental health outcomes. Individuals with positive exercise attitudes experience lower anxiety and depression levels, as well as improved psychological well-being, supporting the hypothesis that favorable perceptions of exercise lead to better mental health. Conversely, negative attitudes—such as perceiving exercise as time-consuming, burdensome, or linked to body image concerns—are associated with lower participation rates and increased symptoms of

stress and depression. These results align with existing research that highlights the psychological benefits of physical activity and the mediating role of motivation, self-efficacy, and social support in maintaining a consistent exercise routine. However, variability in mental health scores suggests that demographic factors, prior exercise experiences, and cultural influences may also shape individuals' attitudes and participation levels.

Conclusion

This study confirms that attitudes toward exercise play a crucial role in determining mental health outcomes. Positive attitudes lead to greater engagement in physical activity and better psychological well-being, while negative perceptions contribute to higher stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms. The role of intrinsic motivation appears particularly important, as individuals who enjoy exercise for its health benefits rather than external rewards are more likely to sustain regular physical activity. Additionally, demographic differences indicate that younger individuals and those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to hold more favorable exercise attitudes. Despite the evidence supporting these findings, longitudinal research is necessary to examine how exercise attitudes evolve over time and their long-term impact on mental health.

Recommendations

To promote positive exercise attitudes and improve mental health, targeted interventions should focus on shifting motivations from appearance-based to enjoyment-based reasons for exercising. Cognitive-behavioral interventions (CBIs) can help individuals overcome negative perceptions by emphasizing the mental health benefits of physical activity rather than unrealistic body standards. Public health campaigns should also focus on reducing exercise barriers, particularly among populations with lower socioeconomic status or negative past experiences with physical activity. Additionally, future research should explore the cultural and social influences shaping exercise attitudes to develop more inclusive and effective mental health strategies.

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