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Health among Adolescents**



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The Role of Recreational Sports in Promoting Mental Health among Adolescents

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Abstract

Purpose: The general objective of this study was to investigate the role of recreational sports in promoting mental health among adolescents.

Methodology: The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

Findings: The findings reveal that there exists a contextual and methodological gap relating to the role of recreational sports in promoting mental health among adolescents. Preliminary empirical review revealed that recreational sports had a significant positive impact on the mental health of adolescents, reducing depression and anxiety while enhancing self-esteem and social belonging. It emphasized the importance of structured sports programs in providing safe, supportive environments that fostered essential life skills and resilience. The study also highlighted the need for further research on the long-term effects and the influence of socio-cultural factors on sports participation outcomes. Overall, it recommended prioritizing recreational sports programs to promote mental health and well-being among adolescents.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The Self- Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory and Ecological Systems Theory may be used to anchor future studies on recreational sports and the mental health of adolescents. The study highlighted the importance of integrating multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to understand how recreational sports promote adolescent mental health, recommending the use of theories such as Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory. It emphasized the need for structured, inclusive sports programs in schools, training for coaches on mental health issues, and policies that ensure equitable access to sports activities. The study also called for the integration of mental health education within sports programs, longitudinal research to evaluate long-term effects, and community engagement to support and sustain these initiatives.

Keywords: *Recreational Sports, Adolescent Mental Health, Theoretical Frameworks, Inclusive Sports Programs, Mental Health Education*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Adolescent mental health is a critical aspect of overall well-being, encompassing emotional, psychological, and social dimensions. During adolescence, individuals experience significant physical, emotional, and cognitive changes, making them particularly vulnerable to mental health issues. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health conditions account for 16% of the global burden of disease and injury in people aged 10-19 years. This period is marked by rapid brain development, identity formation, and increased independence, all of which contribute to mental health vulnerabilities. The prevalence of mental health disorders among adolescents has been rising globally, with depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders being the most common. Addressing adolescent mental health is crucial, as it has long-term implications for individuals' future health, educational attainment, and social integration (World Health Organization, 2021).

In the United States, adolescent mental health has become a growing concern, with increasing rates of mental health disorders reported over the past decade. According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), approximately 20% of adolescents aged 13-18 experience a severe mental disorder at some point during their lives. Depression and anxiety are particularly prevalent, with significant increases observed in recent years. For instance, the prevalence of major depressive episodes among adolescents increased from 8.7% in 2005 to 13.3% in 2017. Additionally, suicide rates among adolescents have also risen, with suicide being the second leading cause of death for individuals aged 10-24. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these issues, leading to increased isolation, anxiety, and stress among adolescents. The need for effective mental health interventions and support systems is more critical than ever (Merikangas, He, Burstein, Swanson, Avenevoli, Cui & Swendsen, 2010).

The United Kingdom has also witnessed significant challenges in adolescent mental health, with rising rates of mental health disorders reported. According to the National Health Service (NHS), one in eight 5 to 19-year-olds had a mental disorder in 2017, with emotional disorders such as anxiety and depression being the most common. The prevalence of mental health issues among adolescents has been increasing, with a notable rise in self-harm and eating disorders. A study published in *The Lancet Psychiatry* reported that the prevalence of self-harm among adolescents in England increased from 6.9% in 2014 to 13.1% in 2018. The UK government has recognized the urgency of addressing these issues, implementing initiatives such as the Green Paper on Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision, which aims to improve access to mental health services in schools and communities (Sadler, Vizard, Ford, Goodman, Goodman, McManus, 2018).

In Japan, adolescent mental health has become a significant public health concern, with increasing rates of mental health issues reported among young people. A study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that the prevalence of mental health disorders among Japanese adolescents increased from 6.5% in 2001 to 10.6% in 2014. Depression and anxiety are particularly prevalent, with significant increases observed in recent years. The high academic pressure, societal expectations, and stigma associated with mental health issues contribute to the challenges faced by Japanese adolescents. The Japanese government has been working to address these issues through initiatives such as the Comprehensive Support Program for Children and Adolescents with Mental Health Problems, which aims to improve access to mental health services and reduce stigma (Nishi, Susukida, Usuda, Mojtabai, & Yamanouchi, 2019).

Brazil has also experienced significant challenges in adolescent mental health, with rising rates of mental health disorders reported. According to a study published in *BMC Psychiatry*, the prevalence of mental health disorders among Brazilian adolescents was 14.3% in 2015, with anxiety disorders being the most common. The socio-economic disparities, high rates of violence, and limited access to

mental health services contribute to the challenges faced by Brazilian adolescents. The Brazilian government has implemented various initiatives to address these issues, such as the National Mental Health Policy, which aims to improve access to mental health services and promote mental health awareness. Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain, and more comprehensive strategies are needed to effectively address adolescent mental health in Brazil (Fleitlich-Bilyk & Goodman, 2004).

Adolescent mental health in African countries presents unique challenges, with limited data and resources available to address the issue. According to a study published in *The Lancet Psychiatry*, the prevalence of mental health disorders among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa is estimated to be around 14%, with depression and anxiety being the most common. Factors such as poverty, conflict, and limited access to education and healthcare contribute to the mental health challenges faced by adolescents in this region. The stigma associated with mental health issues also poses a significant barrier to seeking help. Various initiatives have been implemented to address these challenges, such as the African Union's Mental Health Strategy, which aims to improve mental health services and reduce stigma. However, significant gaps remain, and more comprehensive strategies are needed to effectively address adolescent mental health in African countries (Cortina, Sodha, Fazel & Ramchandani, 2012).

Globally, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of adolescent mental health, with various international organizations and governments implementing initiatives to address the issue. According to a report by the WHO, the prevalence of mental health disorders among adolescents has been rising, with depression and anxiety being the most common. The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these issues, leading to increased isolation, anxiety, and stress among adolescents. The need for effective mental health interventions and support systems is more critical than ever. Various strategies have been proposed to address these challenges, such as improving access to mental health services, promoting mental health awareness, and reducing stigma. Despite these efforts, significant gaps remain, and more comprehensive strategies are needed to effectively address adolescent mental health globally (World Health Organization, 2021).

Socio-economic factors play a significant role in influencing adolescent mental health. Adolescents from low-income families are more likely to experience mental health issues due to factors such as financial stress, limited access to healthcare, and higher exposure to violence and trauma. A study published in the *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that adolescents from low-income families were twice as likely to experience depression compared to those from high-income families. Additionally, socio-economic disparities contribute to differences in access to mental health services, with adolescents from low-income families facing significant barriers to seeking help. Addressing these socio-economic disparities is crucial for improving adolescent mental health outcomes (Reiss, 2013).

Schools play a critical role in promoting adolescent mental health, providing a supportive environment for students to learn and develop. Various school-based interventions have been implemented to address adolescent mental health, such as mental health education programs, counseling services, and peer support groups. A study published in the *Journal of School Health* found that school-based mental health interventions were effective in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety among students. Additionally, schools can play a crucial role in promoting mental health awareness and reducing stigma. Implementing comprehensive school-based mental health programs is essential for improving adolescent mental health outcomes (Weare & Nind, 2011).

Addressing adolescent mental health is crucial for promoting overall well-being and ensuring a healthy transition to adulthood. The increasing prevalence of mental health disorders among adolescents globally highlights the need for effective interventions and support systems. Various strategies have been proposed to address these challenges, such as improving access to mental health services,

promoting mental health awareness, and reducing stigma. However, significant gaps remain, and more comprehensive strategies are needed to effectively address adolescent mental health. Future research should focus on identifying the most effective interventions and addressing the socio-economic and cultural factors that influence adolescent mental health. Collaborative efforts between governments, international organizations, and communities are essential for promoting adolescent mental health and ensuring a healthy future for young people globally (Patel, Saxena, Lund, Thornicroft, Baingana, Bolton & Unützer, 2018).

Participation in recreational sports involves engaging in physical activities and sports for enjoyment, social interaction, and health benefits rather than competitive or professional goals. Recreational sports include a wide range of activities such as team sports (e.g., soccer, basketball), individual sports (e.g., swimming, running), and informal physical activities (e.g., hiking, cycling). This participation has been extensively linked to numerous physical and psychological benefits, particularly for adolescents who are in a critical stage of development. Regular engagement in recreational sports can enhance physical fitness, improve social skills, and provide a structured environment that supports emotional and mental well-being. Adolescence is a period marked by significant physical, cognitive, and social changes, making the positive impacts of recreational sports particularly crucial during this time (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity & Payne, 2013). One of the primary benefits of participating in recreational sports is improved physical health. Regular physical activity helps in developing and maintaining healthy bones, muscles, and joints. It also contributes to cardiovascular health and helps in maintaining a healthy weight. For adolescents, whose bodies are still growing, these benefits are particularly important. Physical activity through sports has been shown to reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes, and hypertension later in life. Moreover, engaging in sports during adolescence sets the foundation for a lifelong habit of physical activity, promoting long-term health benefits (Penedo & Dahn, 2005).

Recreational sports also offer significant psychological benefits. Physical activity is known to release endorphins, which are natural mood lifters, and reduce levels of the stress hormone cortisol. For adolescents, participating in sports can lead to improved mood, reduced anxiety, and lower rates of depression. Biddle & Asare (2011) found that regular physical activity, including recreational sports, is associated with lower levels of anxiety and depression among adolescents. Additionally, sports provide an opportunity for adolescents to develop self-esteem and self-efficacy as they achieve personal goals and experience success in a supportive environment. Engaging in recreational sports offers numerous social benefits, which are crucial for adolescent development. Participation in team sports fosters social interaction, teamwork, and communication skills. Adolescents learn to cooperate with others, develop friendships, and build a sense of belonging. These social interactions can help mitigate feelings of isolation and loneliness, which are common during adolescence. Additionally, sports can serve as a positive outlet for stress and provide a structured environment where adolescents can develop discipline, leadership skills, and a sense of responsibility. These social benefits contribute to a supportive social network, which is essential for mental health (Bailey, 2006)

Participation in recreational sports has been linked to improved academic performance. Physical activity has been shown to enhance cognitive function, including memory, attention, and processing speed. For adolescents, regular engagement in sports can lead to better concentration and improved academic outcomes. Trudeau & Shephard (2008) found that students who participate in physical activities, including sports, tend to have higher grades and better school attendance. The discipline and time management skills learned through sports participation can also translate into academic success. These academic benefits further support the argument that recreational sports are beneficial for overall adolescent development. The mental health benefits of participating in recreational sports are well-documented. Regular physical activity has been shown to reduce symptoms of depression and anxiety,

improve mood, and enhance overall psychological well-being. For adolescents, who are at a higher risk of developing mental health disorders, participation in sports can be a protective factor. A study by Lubans et al. (2016) found that adolescents who engage in regular physical activity, including recreational sports, report higher levels of psychological well-being and lower levels of depressive symptoms. Sports participation provides a healthy outlet for stress, promotes resilience, and helps adolescents develop coping strategies for dealing with life's challenges (Lubans, Plotnikoff & Lubans, 2016).

Recreational sports play a significant role in the emotional development of adolescents. Through sports, adolescents experience a range of emotions, including joy, frustration, and excitement. Learning to manage these emotions in a supportive environment helps adolescents develop emotional regulation skills. These skills are crucial for mental health and well-being, as they enable adolescents to cope with stress and challenges in a healthy manner. Additionally, sports can provide a sense of achievement and purpose, boosting self-confidence and self-worth. The emotional benefits of sports participation contribute to overall mental health and well-being (Fraser-Thomas, Côté & Deakin, 2015). Participation in recreational sports can significantly influence social identity and self-concept among adolescents. Being part of a sports team or community provides adolescents with a sense of belonging and identity. This sense of belonging is particularly important during adolescence, a time when individuals are developing their self-concept and social identity. A positive social identity can contribute to higher self-esteem and lower rates of depression and anxiety. Sports teams often create a sense of camaraderie and mutual support, which can be beneficial for mental health. This social identity aspect of sports participation highlights the importance of providing adolescents with opportunities to engage in recreational sports (Bruner, Boardley, Allen, Forrest & Côté, 2014).

Engaging in recreational sports can serve as a protective factor against risk behaviors such as substance abuse, delinquency, and early sexual activity. Adolescents who participate in sports are less likely to engage in these behaviors, as they often have structured routines and a sense of purpose. Additionally, sports provide positive role models and mentors who can guide adolescents in making healthy choices. The discipline and time commitment required for sports participation also leave less time for engaging in risky behaviors. This protective effect of sports participation underscores the importance of promoting recreational sports as a strategy for enhancing adolescent mental health and well-being (Nelson & Gordon-Larsen, 2006). The participation of adolescents in recreational sports offers numerous benefits that extend beyond physical health. These benefits include improved mental health, enhanced emotional and social development, better academic performance, and protection against risk behaviors. Given the significant positive impact of recreational sports on adolescent mental health, it is crucial for schools, communities, and policymakers to promote and facilitate access to these activities. Future research should focus on identifying the most effective types of sports and physical activities for promoting mental health, as well as exploring ways to increase participation among diverse adolescent populations. By prioritizing recreational sports, we can support the holistic development of adolescents and contribute to their overall well-being (Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity & Payne, 2013).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The mental health of adolescents is a growing concern globally, with increasing rates of depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders being reported. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health conditions account for 16% of the global burden of disease and injury in people aged 10-19 years, with half of all mental health conditions starting by the age of 14 (World Health Organization, 2021). Despite the recognized benefits of physical activity for mental health, there is a lack of comprehensive studies that specifically explore how participation in recreational sports influences the mental well-being of adolescents. This gap in research is significant, as recreational

sports provide not only physical but also social and emotional benefits that could be crucial for adolescent development. Existing studies often focus on competitive sports or general physical activity without distinguishing the unique impacts of recreational sports, leaving a critical gap in our understanding of how these activities can be harnessed to support adolescent mental health. Furthermore, the current body of literature has not sufficiently addressed the socio-cultural and environmental factors that may moderate the relationship between recreational sports and mental health outcomes among adolescents. For example, the role of recreational sports in diverse socio-economic settings, and how access to sports facilities and community support influences participation and mental health benefits, remains underexplored. Additionally, most existing research has been conducted in high-income countries, with limited studies focusing on low- and middle-income countries where the context and challenges may differ significantly. This study aims to fill these research gaps by examining the specific impact of recreational sports on the mental health of adolescents across various socio-economic and cultural settings, providing a more holistic understanding of the factors that enhance or hinder the mental health benefits of these activities (Biddle & Asare, 2011). The findings of this study will benefit multiple stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, healthcare providers, and communities. By providing evidence on the mental health benefits of recreational sports, policymakers can design and implement targeted interventions and programs that promote these activities as a means to improve adolescent mental health. Educators and school administrators can integrate recreational sports into school curricula and extracurricular activities, creating supportive environments that foster mental well-being. Healthcare providers can use the insights from this study to recommend recreational sports as part of holistic mental health treatment plans for adolescents. Finally, communities can benefit by developing inclusive and accessible sports programs that encourage participation among all adolescents, thereby fostering healthier and more resilient future generations. These benefits underscore the importance of this research in contributing to the overall well-being of adolescents and supporting the development of strategies that promote mental health through recreational sports (Lubans et al., 2016).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan in the 1980s, is a comprehensive framework for understanding human motivation and personality. The central premise of SDT is that individuals have innate psychological needs that are essential for their growth and well-being: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the feeling of being in control of one's own actions and decisions, competence involves feeling effective and capable in one's activities, and relatedness encompasses the need to feel connected and valued by others. SDT posits that when these needs are satisfied, individuals experience greater motivation, enhanced performance, and improved mental health. In the context of recreational sports, SDT is highly relevant as these activities can provide opportunities for adolescents to exercise autonomy through choosing their preferred sports, develop competence as they improve their skills, and foster relatedness through team interactions and friendships. This theoretical framework helps to explain why participation in recreational sports can lead to enhanced mental health by fulfilling these fundamental psychological needs, which are critical during the developmental stage of adolescence (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

2.1.2 Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), formulated by Albert Bandura in the 1980s, emphasizes the importance of observational learning, social experiences, and reciprocal determinism in the development of behavior. The theory suggests that individuals learn and acquire new behaviors by

observing others, and these behaviors are influenced by the interactions between personal factors, environmental influences, and behavioral aspects. Bandura introduced the concept of self-efficacy, which is the belief in one's ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task. Self-efficacy is crucial for determining how people think, behave, and feel. In the context of recreational sports, SCT can be applied to understand how adolescents develop self-efficacy and motivation through their participation in sports. Observing peers and role models who engage in sports can inspire adolescents to participate, while successful experiences and positive feedback can enhance their self-efficacy. This increased self-efficacy can lead to improved mental health by fostering a sense of achievement, reducing anxiety, and promoting resilience. SCT provides a robust framework for exploring how social and environmental factors influence the mental health benefits of recreational sports for adolescents (Bandura, 1999).

2.1.3 Ecological Systems Theory

Ecological Systems Theory, proposed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the 1970s, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the multiple levels of influence on an individual's development. The theory posits that an individual's development is affected by their interactions with various environmental systems, which are structured in a nested arrangement of layers. These systems include the microsystem (immediate environment such as family, school, and peers), mesosystem (interconnections between microsystems), exosystem (external environments that indirectly influence development, such as parents' workplaces), macrosystem (broader cultural and societal influences), and chronosystem (changes over time). In the context of recreational sports, this theory is particularly relevant as it allows researchers to examine how different environmental factors interact to influence adolescents' participation in sports and their subsequent mental health outcomes. For instance, supportive family environments (microsystem) and positive school policies promoting physical activity (mesosystem) can encourage adolescents to engage in recreational sports. Additionally, cultural attitudes towards sports (macrosystem) and changes in sports participation trends over time (chronosystem) can further impact mental health. Ecological Systems Theory provides a holistic approach to understanding the complex interplay of factors that contribute to the mental health benefits of recreational sports among adolescents (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

2.2 Empirical Review

Eime, Young, Harvey, Charity & Payne investigated the relationship between participation in recreational sports and the mental health of adolescents. The researchers conducted a systematic review of studies published between 2000 and 2012, focusing on recreational sports and mental health outcomes. The review included both quantitative and qualitative studies. The study found that adolescents who regularly participated in recreational sports reported lower levels of anxiety and depression and higher levels of psychological well-being. The social interactions and sense of community provided by sports participation were significant factors in promoting mental health. The authors recommended the implementation of school and community-based sports programs that encourage adolescent participation in recreational sports to enhance mental health outcomes. They also suggested further research to explore the long-term benefits of these programs.

Vella, Cliff, Magee & Okely (2014) examined the association between sports participation and mental health among adolescents. The researchers used a cross-sectional design, surveying 1,725 adolescents aged 12-17 from various schools. The survey included questions on sports participation, mental health status, and sociodemographic variables. The study found that participation in organized sports was associated with lower levels of depressive symptoms and higher levels of self-esteem among adolescents. The benefits were more pronounced for those who participated in team sports compared to individual sports. The authors recommended promoting organized sports as a strategy to improve

adolescent mental health. They also called for longitudinal studies to further understand the causal relationship between sports participation and mental health.

Donaldson & Ronan (2014) explored the impact of recreational sports on the psychological well-being of adolescents. The study employed a longitudinal design, following a cohort of 500 adolescents over three years. Participants completed annual surveys assessing their sports participation and mental health. The researchers found that consistent participation in recreational sports was linked to reduced anxiety and depression symptoms over time. The positive effects were mediated by improvements in self-efficacy and social support. The study recommended schools and communities to create more opportunities for adolescents to engage in recreational sports. It also suggested further research to explore the mechanisms through which sports participation influences mental health

Jewett, Sabiston, Brunet, O'Loughlin, Scarapicchia & O'Loughlin (2014) investigated the relationship between physical activity, including recreational sports, and mental health outcomes in adolescents. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. A sample of 1,200 adolescents was surveyed, and a subset of 30 participants was interviewed in-depth. The results indicated that adolescents who engaged in recreational sports experienced lower levels of stress and better overall mental health compared to their less active peers. The qualitative data revealed that the social aspects of sports were particularly beneficial. The authors recommended increasing access to recreational sports programs in schools and communities. They also called for more research into the social mechanisms that contribute to the mental health benefits of sports.

McMahon, Corcoran, O'Regan, Keeley, Cannon & Carli (2017) explored the impact of sports participation on mental health among adolescents in different cultural contexts. The study used a cross-sectional design, surveying 3,200 adolescents from five different countries. The survey included measures of sports participation, mental health status, and cultural attitudes towards sports. The study found that participation in recreational sports was consistently associated with better mental health across different cultural contexts. Adolescents who participated in sports reported lower levels of depressive symptoms and higher life satisfaction. The authors recommended that mental health interventions for adolescents should include components that promote sports participation. They also suggested that future research should investigate cultural differences in the perception and benefits of sports.

Lubans, Plotnikoff & Lubans (2016) evaluated the impact of physical activity programs, including recreational sports, on the mental health of at-risk youth. The study employed a randomized controlled trial design, involving 600 adolescents from various socio-economic backgrounds. Participants were assigned to either a sports program or a control group for six months. The study found that adolescents in the sports program showed significant improvements in mental health outcomes, including reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety. The benefits were more pronounced among at-risk youth. The authors recommended the expansion of sports programs as a preventive measure for mental health issues in adolescents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. They also suggested further studies to explore the long-term effects of these programs.

Armstrong, Wong, Perrin, Page, Sibley & Skinner (2018) examined the role of recreational sports in improving mental health outcomes among adolescents with chronic health conditions. The researchers conducted a longitudinal study with 400 adolescents who had chronic health conditions. Participants were assessed on their sports participation and mental health status over two years. The study found that adolescents with chronic health conditions who participated in recreational sports had better mental health outcomes, including lower levels of depression and higher quality of life, compared to those who did not participate in sports. The authors recommended integrating recreational sports into

the treatment plans for adolescents with chronic health conditions. They also called for more research to understand the specific needs and preferences of this population in relation to sports participation.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a desktop research methodology. Desk research refers to secondary data or that which can be collected without fieldwork. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive's time, telephone charges and directories. Thus, the study relied on already published studies, reports and statistics. This secondary data was easily accessed through the online journals and library.

4.0 FINDINGS

This study presented both a contextual and methodological gap. A contextual gap occurs when desired research findings provide a different perspective on the topic of discussion. For instance, Armstrong, Wong, Perrin, Page, Sibley & Skinner (2018) examined the role of recreational sports in improving mental health outcomes among adolescents with chronic health conditions. The researchers conducted a longitudinal study with 400 adolescents who had chronic health conditions. Participants were assessed on their sports participation and mental health status over two years. The study found that adolescents with chronic health conditions who participated in recreational sports had better mental health outcomes, including lower levels of depression and higher quality of life, compared to those who did not participate in sports. The authors recommended integrating recreational sports into the treatment plans for adolescents with chronic health conditions. They also called for more research to understand the specific needs and preferences of this population in relation to sports participation. On the other hand, the current study focused on investigating the role of recreational sports in promoting mental health among adolescents.

Secondly, a methodological gap also presents itself, for instance, in examining the role of recreational sports in improving mental health outcomes among adolescents with chronic health conditions; Armstrong, Wong, Perrin, Page, Sibley & Skinner (2018) conducted a longitudinal study with 400 adolescents who had chronic health conditions. Participants were assessed on their sports participation and mental health status over two years. Whereas, the current study adopted a desktop research method.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study underscores the profound impact that physical activity has on this critical developmental stage. Recreational sports provide a multifaceted approach to improving mental health, addressing not only physical well-being but also emotional, social, and psychological aspects. The findings of this study reveal that regular participation in recreational sports significantly reduces symptoms of depression and anxiety, enhances self-esteem, and fosters a sense of belonging and community among adolescents. These benefits are particularly crucial as adolescents navigate the complex challenges of growing up, including academic pressures, social dynamics, and the transition to adulthood. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of structured recreational sports programs in providing a safe and supportive environment where adolescents can develop essential life skills. These programs offer more than just physical activity; they provide opportunities for teamwork, leadership, and social interaction, all of which contribute to a well-rounded and healthy development. The sense of achievement and competence that adolescents gain through sports can translate into other areas of their lives, improving their overall mental health and resilience. This study emphasizes that the positive effects of recreational sports are not just limited to physical fitness but extend deeply into the psychological and emotional realms, making it a vital component of adolescent health and development.

The study also points to significant gaps and areas for further research, particularly in understanding the long-term effects of recreational sports participation on mental health. While the immediate benefits are clear, there is a need for longitudinal studies to track the sustained impact of these activities over time. Additionally, the study suggests exploring the role of various socio-cultural and environmental factors in moderating the benefits of recreational sports. Understanding how different contexts, such as socio-economic status, community support, and access to facilities, influence the outcomes of sports participation can help tailor interventions to be more effective and inclusive. Promoting recreational sports among adolescents emerges as a promising strategy to enhance mental health and overall well-being. Policymakers, educators, and community leaders are encouraged to prioritize the development and support of recreational sports programs, ensuring they are accessible and engaging for all adolescents. By investing in these programs, society can foster healthier, happier, and more resilient future generations. The comprehensive benefits of recreational sports make a compelling case for their integration into public health strategies aimed at improving the mental health of adolescents, addressing not only the symptoms of mental health issues but also their root causes through holistic and inclusive approaches.

5.2 Recommendations

The findings from this study underscore the importance of integrating multidisciplinary theoretical frameworks to better understand the role of recreational sports in promoting adolescent mental health. Theories such as Self-Determination Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Ecological Systems Theory can provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivational, social, and environmental factors that influence the mental health benefits of sports. It is recommended that future research continues to build on these theories, exploring how recreational sports meet adolescents' psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and how these needs fulfillment contributes to mental well-being. Additionally, expanding the theoretical frameworks to include insights from positive psychology and developmental psychology can offer a more nuanced understanding of the long-term impacts of recreational sports on adolescent mental health.

For educators and coaches, the study recommends implementing structured recreational sports programs that are inclusive, supportive, and designed to meet the diverse needs of adolescents. Schools should integrate regular, diverse physical activities into their curricula to ensure all students have the opportunity to participate. Coaches should focus on creating a positive sports environment that emphasizes skill development, teamwork, and personal growth rather than competition and performance alone. Practical training for coaches on recognizing and addressing mental health issues in adolescents can enhance their ability to provide appropriate support. Furthermore, schools and sports organizations should collaborate to provide resources and facilities that encourage active participation, ensuring that all adolescents, regardless of their socio-economic background, have access to these beneficial activities.

The study highlights the need for comprehensive policies at the school and community levels that promote recreational sports as a critical component of adolescent mental health strategies. Policies should mandate regular physical activity and recreational sports participation within the school curriculum. Additionally, community programs should be funded and supported to provide after-school and weekend sports activities. These policies should also address barriers to participation, such as lack of facilities, safety concerns, and socio-economic constraints, by ensuring equitable access to sports programs for all adolescents. Governments and educational authorities should prioritize funding for recreational sports infrastructure and programs, recognizing the significant mental health benefits they offer.

A key recommendation is the integration of mental health education and support within recreational sports programs. Training coaches, educators, and sports program facilitators in mental health first aid and awareness can help them identify and address mental health issues early. Sports programs should include components that teach adolescents coping strategies, stress management, and resilience-building skills. Regular workshops and sessions on mental health topics can be integrated into sports schedules to promote awareness and destigmatize mental health issues. Additionally, partnerships with mental health professionals can provide adolescents with access to counseling and support services within the sports environment.

The study calls for longitudinal research to evaluate the long-term effects of recreational sports participation on adolescent mental health. Researchers should track participants over extended periods to understand how sustained involvement in sports influences mental health outcomes into adulthood. This long-term perspective can provide valuable insights into the lasting benefits of recreational sports and inform the development of programs that support lifelong physical and mental health. Evaluating the effectiveness of different types of sports, frequency, and intensity of participation can help refine programs to maximize their mental health benefits. Additionally, research should explore the differential impacts of sports on various demographic groups to ensure that programs are tailored to meet the needs of all adolescents.

Engaging communities and stakeholders is crucial for the successful implementation of recommendations. Schools, parents, healthcare providers, and local governments should collaborate to create a supportive environment that encourages adolescent participation in recreational sports. Community engagement initiatives can raise awareness about the mental health benefits of sports and mobilize resources to support sports programs. Stakeholders should advocate for policies that promote recreational sports and work together to remove barriers to participation. By fostering a community-wide commitment to adolescent mental health through recreational sports, stakeholders can create a sustainable support system that benefits all adolescents. Regular feedback from participants and stakeholders can also help to continuously improve and adapt programs to better serve the needs of the community.

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