The Global Journal of Sport and Exercise Science (GJSES)
Vol. 2, No. 2 (2026)
ISSN (Print): 3080-0307 ISSN (Online): 3107-037X
DOI (Crossref): https://doi.org/10.63750/88xdba25

Exercise and the Mind: Exploring the Link Between Regular Physical Activity and Mental Well-Being

Beverly Jean V. Exclamado [1], Shenna Dawn S. Bana-ag [2], Roshane Joy Y. Gallamaso[3], Kylle Donnell D. Berbosidad [4], Gilmar B. Guevarra [5], Renato L. Co Jr [6], Frematívo A. Vergara [7], Evan P. Taja-on [8]

[1] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, bjexclamado@sic.edu.ph
[2] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, sdbanaag@sic.edu.ph
[3] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, rjgallamaso@sic.edu.ph
[4] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, kdberbosidad@sic.edu.ph
[5] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, gguevarra@sic.edu.ph
[6] School of Nursing, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, rco@sic.edu.ph
[7] School of Arts and Sciences, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, fvergara@sic.edu.ph
[8] School of Education, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines, etajaon@sic.edu.ph

Received on: 24 December 2025 | Accepted on: 30 May 2026 | Published on: 30 June 2026

© 2026 The Author(s). Open access under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

ABSTRACT

Regular physical activity nurtures not only the body but also the mind, offering a powerful tool for maintaining emotional balance and resilience. This exploration invites individuals to see exercise as an essential part of overall well-being by uncovering the ways movement supports psychological health. The research gathered insights from individuals who regularly engage in physical activity to uncover how consistent exercise influences mental well-being and reveals the connection between movement and the mind. The findings indicate that regular physical activity supports mental well-being by improving physical condition, enhancing mood, and strengthening social relationships. Enjoyment and connection experienced during shared physical activities further sustain motivation and contribute to a stronger sense of belonging. The results suggest that regular physical activity should be viewed as a holistic practice that supports mental well-being through physical health, emotional balance, and social connection. Encouraging consistent and socially engaging

physical activities may help promote more sustainable mental well-being across daily life contexts.

Keywords: Regular Exercise, Physical Activity, Mental Well-being, Mental Health, Exercise Psychology.

Corresponding Author:
(Evan P. Taja-on)
- Affiliation: School of Education, San Isidro College, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines.
- Email: etajaon@sic.edu.ph

1. INTRODUCTION:

- ***Background of the Study***

Regular exercise refers to consistent engagement in physical activities such as walking, running, cycling, or strength training that promote health and fitness over time. It is more than just a means of improving physical appearance; it plays a crucial role in maintaining balance within the body and mind (Posadzki et al., 2020). When individuals engage in regular exercise, they not only strengthen their muscles and cardiovascular system but also stimulate the release of endorphins, hormones that enhance mood and reduce stress (D'Isanto et al., 2023). These physiological responses create a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that contribute to emotional stability and resilience. Beyond its physical benefits, regular exercise helps foster a healthy lifestyle, improves sleep, boosts energy levels, and nurtures overall well-being. In this sense, it serves as both a preventive and restorative practice that supports individuals in leading happier, healthier lives (Zavalishina et al., 2021).

Despite the known physical benefits of exercise, many people overlook its influence on mental well-being. In a World increasingly marked by stress, anxiety, and sedentary habits, individuals often struggle to maintain emotional balance and mental clarity. Exercise, however, offers a natural and accessible way to support mental health by alleviating symptoms of depression, reducing anxiety, and enhancing cognitive function (Mahindru et al., 2023). However, many individuals fail to recognize or sustain physical activity as part of their routine, resulting in missed opportunities for mental wellness. The challenge lies not only in encouraging regular participation but also in understanding how exercise truly impacts the mind (Biddle et al., 2019; Malm et al., 2019; Ramirez, 2024). This gap between awareness and action underscores the need to explore

how physical activity contributes to a person's emotional health, sense of purpose, and overall psychological well-being.

Although numerous studies have highlighted the connection between physical activity and improved mental states, there remains a lack of comprehensive understanding of how different types, intensities, and frequencies of exercise specifically affect various dimensions of mental well-being (Pascoe et al., 2020). Much of the existing research focuses on clinical populations or short-term interventions, leaving a gap in knowledge about long-term, everyday exercise habits and their effects on ordinary individuals. Additionally, many studies emphasize physiological outcomes rather than psychological experiences, neglecting how personal motivation, social support, and individual perceptions shape the benefits of exercise (Firth et al., 2016; Viveiros et al., 2025). This empirical gap calls for a deeper exploration that considers not just the physical outcomes, but the cognitive, emotional, and social processes that link movement to mental health.

Recognizing the vital role of exercise in promoting mental well-being is essential for both individuals and communities. Individuals can begin to view exercise not as an obligation but as a meaningful act of self-care by understanding how regular physical activity can nurture emotional health (Mikkelsen et al., 2017). This awareness can inspire healthier habits, improve resilience to stress, and encourage a more positive outlook on life. On a broader scale, emphasizing the mental benefits of exercise can inform educational programs, workplace wellness initiatives, and public health policies that promote holistic well-being. In due course, integrating physical activity into daily life offers a sustainable and empowering approach to enhancing mental health and fostering a balanced sense of well-being.

This study seeks to explore the relationship between regular physical activity and mental well-being by examining how exercise influences emotional stability, stress management, and overall life satisfaction. It aims to uncover how consistent engagement in physical activity contributes to a healthier State of mind, emphasizing both the psychological and emotional outcomes of movement.

- ***Conceptual Framework***

The study is grounded in the Biopsychosocial Model (Sampogna et al., 2024), which views health as an interaction of biological, psychological, and social factors. In the context of exercise and mental well-being, this model highlights how physical activity triggers biological responses such as hormone regulation and improved brain function, which in turn influence mood and cognition. Psychologically, exercise fosters motivation, self-esteem, and emotional regulation, while socially, it can provide opportunities for connection and support. The model illustrates that mental well-being is not shaped by a single factor but by the interplay of body, mind, and environment, by integrating these dimensions. This perspective provides a holistic lens for examining how regular exercise serves as a bridge between physical and mental health.

Complementing this framework, Self-Determination Theory (Adams et al., 2017) emphasizes the role of motivation and autonomy in sustaining healthy behaviors. It suggests that individuals are more likely to engage in exercise consistently when they experience a sense of choice, competence, and connection. The study explores how personal fulfillment and intrinsic motivation contribute to the psychological benefits of physical activity by understanding these motivational drivers. Together, the Biopsychosocial Model and Self-Determination Theory provide a comprehensive foundation, one focusing on the multifaceted influences on well-being, and the other on the internal motivations that sustain it. Their integration ensures that both external and internal factors are considered, offering a deeper understanding of how exercise can meaningfully enhance mental health.

- ***Statement of the Problem***

Understanding how physical activity influences mental well-being has become increasingly important in a World where stress, anxiety, and lifestyle-related health concerns continue to rise. While the benefits of exercise on physical health are well-established, its role in shaping emotional balance, resilience, and psychological well-being remains less understood by many individuals. There is a need to explore how consistent engagement in exercise contributes to mental wellness, particularly in relation to emotional stability, stress management, and overall life satisfaction. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the question:

1. How does regular physical activity influence the mental well-being of individuals?

- ***REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES***
- ***Motivational Factors and Behavioral Adherence to Exercise***

Existing literature highlights motivation as a key factor in sustaining regular engagement in physical activity. Studies consistently show that individuals are more likely to maintain exercise routines when they experience enjoyment, personal satisfaction, and a sense of progress rather than external pressure alone (Biddle et al., 2019; Malm et al., 2019; Viveiros et al., 2025). Intrinsic motivation, such as exercising for pleasure, stress relief, or personal growth, is strongly linked to long-term adherence, while social support from peers, friends, or exercise groups further strengthens commitment. Research also suggests that individuals who perceive exercise as meaningful and aligned with their personal goals are more consistent in their participation (Firth et al., 2016; Kirby et al., 2022; Chang de Pinho et al., 2024; Ramirez, 2024; Liu & Liu, 2025; Vergara et al., 2025). These studies emphasize that motivation is not only a starting point but a sustaining force that influences how exercise becomes a stable part of daily life and supports mental well-being over time.

- ***Stress Reduction and Anxiety Management through Exercise***

A substantial body of literature supports the role of physical activity in reducing stress and managing anxiety. Research indicates that exercise helps regulate stress-related hormones, promotes relaxation, and provides a healthy outlet for releasing emotional tension (D'Isanto et al., 2023). Even moderate activities such as walking, jogging, or stretching have been found to reduce feelings of anxiety and improve emotional balance. Exercise also serves as a temporary break from daily stressors, allowing individuals to shift their focus away from worries and toward physical movement, which can result in a calmer mental state (Mikkelsen et al., 2017; Bondarchuk et al., 2024). These effects make physical activity a practical and accessible strategy for coping with everyday stress.

Beyond its immediate calming effects, regular physical activity has been linked to long-term improvements in stress resilience and emotional regulation. Studies show that individuals who exercise consistently report lower levels of perceived stress and greater confidence in handling life challenges (Chan et al., 2019; Herbert, 2022; Laidlaw et al., 2023). Exercise routines can create structure

and predictability, which are important for emotional stability, especially during stressful periods. Over time, this consistent engagement helps individuals develop healthier coping patterns, reducing their reliance on harmful stress responses (Mahindru et al., 2023). The literature suggests that exercise functions not only as a short-term stress reliever but also as a protective factor that supports sustained mental well-being.

- ***Psychological Benefits of Regular Physical Activity and Mental Well-Being***

Research widely recognizes regular physical activity as a significant contributor to positive psychological outcomes. Studies indicate that exercise is associated with improved mood, increased self-esteem, and greater emotional balance. Physical activity stimulates the release of chemicals in the brain that enhance feelings of happiness and reduce negative emotions (Bernstein & McNally, 2018; Posadzki et al., 2020). Individuals who engage in regular exercise often report feeling more confident, motivated, and mentally refreshed (Akram et al., 2025; Liu & Liu, 2025). These psychological benefits are observed across different age groups and activity types, suggesting that the mental health advantages of exercise are broad and widely applicable (Zavalishina et al., 2021).

In addition to improving mood, regular physical activity has been shown to support cognitive functioning and overall life satisfaction. Literature indicates that individuals who exercise consistently experience better focus, clearer thinking, and improved emotional control (Pascoe et al., 2020; Mahindru et al., 2023). Exercise also encourages social interaction and a sense of belonging, which further enhances psychological well-being. Over time, these combined effects contribute to a more positive outlook on life and a stronger sense of personal control (Laidlaw et al., 2023; Vergara et al., 2025). The existing body of research underscores that regular physical activity plays a meaningful role in nurturing mental well-being by supporting both emotional health and daily functioning.

2.METHODOLOGY

- ***Research Design and Locale***

The study utilized a phenomenological design (Pilarska, 2021) to gain a deeper understanding of how individuals experience and interpret the connection between regular physical activity and mental well-being. This approach was

chosen to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and insights of participants who consistently engage in exercise, allowing the researchers to explore the essence of their shared meanings. Through open-ended and reflective discussions, the design enabled participants to articulate their emotional and psychological experiences related to their exercise routines. Conducted in Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, the research aimed to situate these experiences within the local context, offering a grounded understanding of how regular physical activity shapes mental wellness among individuals in this setting.

- ***Sampling Method and Participants***

A purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020) method was employed to select participants who could best provide meaningful insights aligned with the purpose of the research. The inclusion criteria focused on individuals who regularly engage in exercise, particularly those who are active runners. This method ensured that participants possessed firsthand experience and understanding of the phenomena being studied. This approach also allowed the researchers to maintain focus and depth, ensuring that the data collected were both relevant and reflective of the lived experiences of those directly engaged in regular physical activity.

Table 1. Demographic profile of the participants

Participant	Sex	Age	Frequency of Exercise
Participant 1	Male	24	2-4 times a week
Participant 2	Male	29	3 times a week
Participant 3	Female	27	2 times a week
Participant 4	Female	24	2 times a week
Participant 5	Male	28	2-4 times a week

The participants of the study, as presented in Table 1, were individuals who regularly engage in exercise, with a particular focus on those actively participating in running activities. These participants were chosen because their consistent involvement in physical activity provided a valuable foundation for exploring the psychological and emotional dimensions associated with exercise. Their engagement offered insights into how routines of movement influence mental balance, emotional regulation, and overall well-being.

- ***Research Instrument***

Data were gathered using a researcher-made interview questionnaire designed to explore the participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding regular exercise and mental well-being. The instrument was developed

to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research questions. To establish its validity, the questionnaire was reviewed by three experts in the field, resulting in a Content Validity Index (CVI) score of 0.910, which indicates strong agreement among reviewers on its appropriateness and comprehensiveness. This validation process ensured that the instrument effectively captured the intended dimensions of the study and provided reliable data for analysis. The use of an expert-reviewed instrument enhanced the credibility and rigor of the data collection process.

- ***Data Gathering Procedure***

Data were gathered through face-to-face interviews to allow participants to share their experiences in a direct and personal manner. Each interview lasted between seventeen and thirty-two minutes, providing enough time for participants to express their thoughts while maintaining focus on the discussion. With the participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy in capturing their responses and to support a careful review of the data during analysis. This approach allowed the researchers to document participants' narratives clearly and consistently while preserving the natural flow of conversation.

Prior to the interviews, the researchers clearly explained the purpose of the research and the nature of the participants' involvement. Participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent forms were provided and signed before the interviews began, ensuring that ethical standards were upheld throughout the data collection process. These steps helped establish trust, encouraged open sharing, and ensured that the data were gathered in a respectful and ethical manner.

- ***Data Treatment***

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2023) was employed to examine the collected data systematically. This approach allowed the researchers to identify, organize, and interpret recurring patterns and themes within participants' narratives. Through careful reading, coding, and categorization, the researchers distilled essential meanings from the participants' accounts, uncovering the underlying connections between regular physical activity and mental well-being. The process ensured that findings remained grounded in participants lived experiences while allowing for the development of broader insights that reflect

commonalities and variations across individual stories. Thematic analysis provided a flexible yet structured framework that aligned well with the phenomenological nature of the study, ensuring that both depth and authenticity were maintained throughout the analytical process.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents an integrated account of how regular physical activity is experienced in relation to mental well-being. The findings are drawn from participants' shared experiences and reflect consistent patterns across emotional, cognitive, social, and physical dimensions of daily life. Together, these results provide a grounded understanding of how physical activity is woven into everyday functioning and personal well-being.

- ***Enhancement of Mood and Emotional Relief***

Participants' experiences reflect noticeable changes in emotional states that are closely linked to engaging in physical activity. These experiences highlight how movement becomes part of managing emotions, contributing to feelings of lightness, emotional balance, and improved mood in everyday situations.

- ***Improved Mood and Positive Emotional State***

The results show that regular physical activity plays a significant role in improving participants' mood and emotional state. As stated by the participants:
"*It really affects my mood... And then I'll be in a good mood for the whole day.*" (Participant 1)
"*I can say that I am happier and more relaxed after I finish exercising.*" (Participant 2)
"*It really affects my mood and my mental health that I can be happier and more productive.*" (Participant 3)

Participants described how engaging in exercise leads to feelings of happiness, relaxation, and emotional lightness that extend throughout the day. These accounts indicate that physical activity supports emotional balance by helping individuals regulate their mood and experience positive emotional shifts after exercising. The consistency of these responses suggests that exercise serves as a reliable source of emotional uplift, contributing to a more positive mental state in daily life.

These results highlight the importance of regular physical activity in supporting emotional well-being by offering individuals a sense of control and

satisfaction over their emotional experiences. The ability of exercise to promote positive feelings and sustained good mood suggests that it functions as a meaningful personal activity that enhances emotional stability (Mikkelsen et al., 2017; Chan et al., 2019; Herbert, 2022; Mahindru et al., 2023). This reinforces the value of exercise as a practical and accessible way for individuals to maintain emotional wellness and improve their overall mental condition.

- ***Emotional Release from Stress and Personal Problems***

Participants also described exercise as a way to release emotional tension linked to stress and personal challenges. As stated by the participants:
"*If I'm stressed, I just deal with it by walking or jogging... that's my only way to handle my stress.*" (Participant 1)
"*It helped manage my mood... the next day, it's like you can sense the balance.*" (Participant 4)
"*My motivation to exercise is that I can remove or lessen my stress.*" (Participant 5)

Physical activity allowed them to momentarily step away from their worries and manage emotional strain in a healthy manner. These experiences show that exercise provides an emotional outlet where individuals can process stress without becoming overwhelmed. The repeated mention of feeling lighter and more balanced after exercise reflects how movement supports emotional release during stressful situations.

The implications of this result suggest that regular physical activity helps individuals cope with emotional pressure by offering a constructive way to manage stress. Exercise becomes a self-directed strategy that allows individuals to regain emotional balance and prevent stress from accumulating (Mikkelsen et al., 2017; Bernstein & McNally, 2018; Chan et al., 2019; D'Isanto et al., 2023). This emphasizes the role of physical activity as a supportive practice that not only relieves emotional strain but also promotes a sense of calm and emotional clarity.

Synthesizing these points, the findings under this result indicate that regular physical activity enhances mood and provides emotional relief by improving positive feelings and allowing the release of stress. Participants consistently described exercise as a source of happiness, relaxation, and emotional balance, particularly during stressful or emotionally difficult moments. These experiences show that exercise supports mental well-being by

helping individuals manage their emotions, sustain positive moods, and maintain emotional stability in daily life.

- ***Stress Reduction and Coping Mechanism for Life Challenges***

Physical activity emerges as a practical way individuals respond to stress and daily pressures. The experiences shared suggest that movement plays a role in easing tension and supporting emotional regulation when facing personal and situational challenges.

- ***Exercise as a Strategy for Managing Stress***

The results show that participants use physical activity as a direct strategy to manage stress. As stated by the participants:

"*After exercising, I felt calmer and my mind became clearer.*" (Participant 1)

"*If I'm stressed, I walk... my stress immediately goes away.*" (Participant 2)

"*When I exercise, if I have a problem, it feels like it disappears.*" (Participant 4)

Engaging in activities such as walking or jogging helps them feel calmer and mentally clearer, allowing stress to fade during or after exercise. These responses indicate that exercise supports mental regulation by redirecting attention away from stressors and toward physical movement. This process appears to help individuals reset emotionally and regain focus when dealing with daily pressures.

The implications of these findings suggest that exercise functions as a practical coping tool that individuals can easily integrate into their routines. By choosing to engage in physical activity during stressful moments, individuals demonstrate an active approach to managing their mental state (Bernstein & McNally, 2018; Herbert, 2022; Mahindru et al., 2023; D'Isanto et al., 2023). This reinforces the role of exercise as a personal and effective method for reducing stress and maintaining emotional balance.

- ***Emotional Recovery During Difficult Moments***

Participants also shared experiences of using exercise to recover emotionally during particularly challenging periods, such as sadness, isolation, or personal loss. As stated by the participants:

"*That time when I was really down... I just jogged... I feel that I'm okay again.*" (Participant 1)
"*Yes, because there was a time when I was really sad... I was able to socialize with friends... I'm very happy and motivated now.*" (Participant 3)
"*Yes, that time when I broke up (with someone)... I just run it off... your feelings become lighter.*" (Participant 4)

Physical activity helped them regain emotional strength, improve their outlook, and restore a sense of direction. These accounts show that exercise supports emotional recovery by creating space for reflection, renewed motivation, and emotional relief. The shared experiences suggest that movement helps individuals transition from emotional distress toward a more stable and positive state.

The implications of this result emphasize the role of exercise in supporting emotional recovery beyond everyday stress. Regular engagement in physical activity allows individuals to rebuild emotional strength and regain focus during difficult times (Bernstein & McNally, 2018; D'Isanto et al., 2023; Bondarchuk et al., 2024). This highlights exercise as a supportive practice that aids emotional healing and helps individuals move forward with greater clarity and motivation.

Synthesizing these points, the findings show that regular physical activity serves as an effective means for managing stress and coping with life challenges. Participants consistently described exercise as a way to calm the mind, release emotional tension, and recover from difficult experiences. These results demonstrate that exercise supports mental well-being by helping individuals manage stress, regain emotional balance, and develop healthier ways of responding to personal challenges.

- ***Improved Focus, Clarity, and Daily Functioning***

Participants describe changes in how they manage attention and daily tasks alongside regular physical activity. These experiences point to clearer thinking, improved concentration, and a smoother flow in completing everyday responsibilities.

- ***Mental Clarity and Sharper Focus***

The results show that regular physical activity supports mental clarity and improved focus in daily life. As stated by the participants:
"*It actually helped me to focus more on my daily activities…When I started doing physical activity I was more focused and clear and I don't overthink a lot.*" (Participant 3)
"*I feel energetic... I can also easily focus on the things I need to do.*" (Participant 4)

Participants described feeling more mentally organized, clear-minded, and able to concentrate on their tasks after engaging in exercise. These experiences suggest that physical activity helps reduce mental distractions and allows individuals to direct their attention more effectively toward daily responsibilities. The consistency of these accounts highlights exercise as a supportive factor in maintaining mental clarity and sustained attention.

The implications of this result suggest that engaging in regular physical activity can help individuals manage mental demands more effectively. Improved focus and clarity enable individuals to function better in their daily routines, including academic, personal, and social activities (Zavalishina et al., 2021; Mahindru et al., 2023; Akram et al., 2025). This indicates that exercise contributes to mental well-being by supporting cognitive balance and allowing individuals to remain attentive and mentally present throughout the day.

- ***Increased Energy and Motivation***

Participants also emphasized that regular exercise increases their energy levels and motivation. As stated by the participants:
"*I prefer to exercise more because it makes me feel lighter and motivates me.*" (Participant 2)
"*I'm more motivated everyday because I am doing physical activity with my friend.*" (Participant 3)
"*I really feel energetic....*" (Participant 4)

Physical activity was described as making them feel lighter, more active, and more driven to engage in daily tasks. These accounts show that exercise not only supports physical vitality but also enhances mental readiness and willingness to participate in activities. The presence of social interaction during

exercise further reinforced motivation and enjoyment, contributing to sustained engagement.

The implications of these findings suggest that increased energy and motivation play an important role in daily functioning and mental well-being. Feeling energized allows individuals to approach responsibilities with greater enthusiasm and persistence (Mikkelsen et al., 2017; Herbert, 2022; Chang de Pinho et al., 2024). This indicates that exercise supports mental wellness by fostering motivation and encouraging consistent engagement in both physical activity and everyday life tasks.

Synthesizing these points, the findings demonstrate that regular physical activity enhances focus, clarity, and daily functioning by improving mental organization, energy, and motivation. Participants consistently described feeling more attentive, energized, and prepared to handle daily demands. These experiences show that exercise supports mental well-being by strengthening cognitive balance and promoting active engagement in everyday activities.

- ***Support for Self-Esteem, Body Image, and Personal Growth***

Engagement in physical activity is linked to how individuals view themselves and their personal progress. The accounts reflect growing confidence, improved self-perception, and a stronger sense of direction in personal development.

- ***Boost in Self-Confidence and Body Satisfaction***

The results show that regular physical activity contributes to improved self-confidence and body satisfaction. As stated by the participants:
"*When I was very insecure about my body... my thoughts/mind improved when I kept exercising.*" (Participant 2)
"*It feels good because you can flex your body, plus the hormones.*" (Participant 5)

Participants described feeling more positive about their physical appearance and mental state as they continued exercising. These experiences reflect how engaging in physical activity helps individuals develop a more positive self-view and greater acceptance of their bodies. The sense of physical improvement appears to support emotional confidence and a healthier perception of oneself.

The implications of this result suggest that exercise plays an important role in enhancing self-esteem by allowing individuals to recognize their physical capabilities and progress. Improved body satisfaction contributes to a more positive mental outlook and supports emotional well-being (Akram et al., 2025; Liu & Liu, 2025; Viveiros et al., 2025). This indicates that physical activity serves as a meaningful practice for strengthening self-confidence and personal acceptance.

- ***Empowerment and Achievement of Personal Goals***

Participants also highlighted how regular exercise supports empowerment and progress toward personal goals. As stated by the participants:
"*I was able to focus on my goal in life.*" (Participant 3)
"*My muscles became active, and so did my goals in life.*" (Participant 5)

Physical activity helped them feel more focused and purposeful, allowing them to connect their exercise routines with broader life goals. These experiences suggest that exercise provides a sense of direction and achievement, reinforcing personal growth and motivation.

The implications of this result indicate that engaging in regular physical activity supports mental well-being by fostering a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Progress toward personal goals enhances confidence and reinforces positive self-beliefs Akram et al., 2025; Liu & Liu, 2025; Viveiros et al., 2025. This shows that exercise contributes not only to physical health but also to personal development and psychological strength.

Synthesizing these points, the findings indicate that regular physical activity supports self-esteem, body satisfaction, and personal growth by enhancing confidence, motivation, and goal orientation. Participants described feeling more positive about themselves and more focused on their personal aspirations. These experiences demonstrate that exercise supports mental well-being by strengthening self-belief and encouraging continuous personal development.

- ***Social Connection and Sense of Belonging***

Physical activity is experienced not only as an individual practice but also as a shared social space. Participants' experiences suggest that engaging with

others through movement contributes to feelings of connection, enjoyment, and belonging in daily life.

- ***Strengthened Social Relationships***

The results show that regular physical activity contributes to strengthened social relationships by providing opportunities for interaction and connection. As stated by the participants:
"*I was able to socialize with friends... I'm very happy and motivated now.*" (Participant 3)
"*And if you're very lonely, it's like you have entertainment/something enjoyable to do... It can even help your daily life.*" (Participant 4)

Participants described how engaging in exercise allowed them to socialize, feel happier, and experience increased motivation. These experiences indicate that physical activity serves as a social space where individuals can connect with others, reducing feelings of loneliness and enhancing emotional well-being. The shared environment created through exercise supports meaningful interactions that contribute to a sense of belonging.

The implications of this result suggest that social interaction during physical activity plays an important role in supporting mental well-being. Strengthened relationships provide emotional support and encouragement, which help individuals feel connected and valued (Laidlaw et al., 2023; Vergara et al., 2025). This highlights how exercise supports mental health not only through physical movement but also through the social bonds formed and maintained in active settings.

- ***Enjoyment Through Shared Physical Activities***

Participants also emphasized enjoyment as an important outcome of engaging in physical activity with others. As stated by a participant:
"*I'm more motivated everyday because… I'm having a very good time with them.*" (Participant 3)

Shared exercise experiences were described as enjoyable and motivating, making participation more meaningful and sustaining interest over time. These accounts suggest that exercising with others adds a positive emotional layer to physical activity, transforming it into a socially rewarding experience rather than an individual task.

The implications of this finding indicate that enjoyment derived from shared physical activities strengthens motivation and encourages continued participation. Positive social experiences during exercise help individuals associate physical activity with pleasure and connection, supporting long-term engagement (Chan et al., 2019; Kirby et al., 2022; Laidlaw et al., 2023). This demonstrates how shared enjoyment enhances the mental benefits of exercise by fostering both motivation and emotional satisfaction.

Synthesizing these points, the findings indicate that regular physical activity supports social connection and a sense of belonging by strengthening relationships and creating enjoyable shared experiences. Participants described feeling happier, more motivated, and socially engaged through exercise. These experiences show that physical activity contributes to mental well-being by fostering connection, reducing isolation, and enhancing emotional fulfillment through social interaction.

- ***Physical Wellness Leading to Better Mental Well-Being***

Participants' narratives show that changes in physical condition are closely tied to mental and emotional states. These experiences reflect how feeling physically capable and energized supports a more positive mental outlook and overall sense of well-being. The results show that improvements in physical wellness contribute to better mental well-being. As stated by the participants:
"*Exercising helps my body... I don't get tired too easily right away.*" (Participant 2)
"*I was able to help myself because before I was very small/thin... I went to the gym... I was motivated in terms of my mental state and mood.*" (Participant 5)

Participants described how regular exercise helped them feel physically stronger, less easily tired, and more capable in daily life. These physical changes were closely linked to improved mood and motivation, suggesting that feeling physically healthy supports positive mental states. The connection between physical strength and mental readiness highlights the role of the body in shaping emotional experiences.

The implications of this result suggest that physical wellness serves as a foundation for mental well-being. As individuals experience improvements in their physical condition, they also develop greater confidence and motivation,

which support emotional stability (Herbert, 2022; D'Isanto et al., 2023; Mahindru et al., 2023; Liu & Liu, 2025). This indicates that regular physical activity strengthens mental well-being by enhancing physical capacity and reinforcing positive self-perceptions that contribute to overall psychological balance.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings show that regular physical activity plays a meaningful role in supporting mental well-being through interconnected physical, emotional, and social experiences. Participants described how engaging in exercise improved their physical condition, which in turn enhanced mood, motivation, and daily functioning. Feeling physically stronger and less easily tired contributed to a more positive mental state, allowing individuals to manage daily demands with greater ease and confidence. These results highlight how physical wellness serves as a steady foundation for emotional balance.

Beyond physical benefits, the findings also emphasize the importance of social connection in shaping positive mental experiences. Exercising with others strengthened social relationships, reduced feelings of loneliness, and created a sense of belonging. Enjoyment derived from shared activities further reinforced motivation and sustained participation. Together, these results show that mental well-being is supported not only by physical movement but also by meaningful social interaction and positive emotional experiences formed through regular physical activity.

The findings provide new insight into how regular physical activity supports mental well-being through a combined process of physical improvement, emotional regulation, and social connection. Rather than acting as a single pathway, exercise functions as a shared space where physical strength, positive mood, motivation, enjoyment, and social belonging interact, resulting in a more balanced and sustainable sense of well-being.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- ***Limitations of the Study***

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. The results are based on a small number of participants, which limits the extent to which the findings can represent broader populations with different backgrounds, lifestyles, or levels of physical activity. In addition,

the study relied on participants' self-reported experiences, which may be influenced by personal perception, recall, or the desire to present positive outcomes. The qualitative nature of the data also focuses on lived experiences rather than measurable changes over time, which means the study does not capture long-term mental well-being outcomes or differences across varying types and intensities of physical activity.

- ***Recommendations***

Based on the findings, it is recommended that regular physical activity be encouraged as part of daily routines that support both mental and social well-being. Activities that allow individuals to exercise with others may be especially beneficial, as social interaction and shared enjoyment were shown to strengthen motivation and emotional balance. Institutions and community programs may consider promoting accessible and inclusive physical activities that emphasize enjoyment rather than performance, as this approach aligns with the positive experiences reported by participants. Supporting environments that reduce barriers to participation may help sustain engagement and enhance overall mental well-being.

- ***Further Studies***

Future studies may build on these findings by involving a larger and more diverse group of participants to strengthen the transferability of the results. Longitudinal research could examine how regular physical activity influences mental well-being over time, allowing for a deeper understanding of sustained effects. Further studies may also compare different types of physical activities, such as individual versus group-based exercise, to explore how social context shapes mental outcomes. Combining qualitative experiences with simple quantitative measures may provide a more complete view of how physical activity supports mental well-being across different settings

- ***Contributors hip:***

Beverly Jean V. Exclamado, Shenna Dawn S. Bana-ag, Roshane Joy Y. Gallamaso, Kylle Donnell D. Berbosidad, Gilmar B. Guevarra, Renato L. Co Jr.: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Literature Review, Data Curation, Visualization, Validation, Correction and Edit of the Subsequent Drafts, and Approval; and **Frematívo A. Vergara** and **Evan P. Taja-on**: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Tools Construction, Literature Review, Contribution in the First Draft, Final Corrections, and Approval. All authors approved the final version of the article.

- ***Acknowledgements:***

The authors sincerely extend their earnest gratitude to the reviewers who meticulously evaluated the content of this article. Their invaluable insights, constructive feedback, and thoughtful guidance have been pivotal in enriching the quality and depth of this research.

- ***Informed consent:***

Informed consent was obtained from all experts prior to their participation in the study. The experts were provided with a detailed explanation of the study's objectives, procedures, and their expected contributions, ensuring they fully understood their roles and rights, including the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation.

- ***Declaration of conflicting interest:***

The authors declare no competing interests with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publications of this article.

- ***Funding:***

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

- ***Data availability and sharing policy:***

Due to data-sharing restrictions, individual-level data cannot be publicly posted. However, the datasets used and analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

- ***AI-Disclosure Statement:***

The authors acknowledge the use of AI tools (ChatGPT and Grammarly) to enhance the readability and presentation of the study. These tools did not influence the original content, analysis, and/or conclusions. The authors affirm that all analyses and interpretations were conducted with strict adherence to research ethics and academic standards.

- ***Ethical Statement:***

This study was conducted in accordance with established ethical standards and institutional research protocols of San Isidro College; the study was registered under Research ID No. SIC-092725-SON1519-28. Informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection, and confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process.

References

Adams, N., Little, T. D., & Ryan, R. M. (2017). Self-determination theory. In M. L. Wehmeyer, K. A. Shogren, T. D. Little, & S. J. Lopez (Eds.), *Development of self-determination through the life-course* (pp. 47–54). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-024-1042-6_4

Akram, M., Hasan, M. K., & Sołowski, G. (2025). Transformative mind-body technique for enhanced wellness, clarity, and emotional balance. *EuroScience Journal of Technological Innovation, 1*(1), 18–23. https://doi.org/10.64943/esjti.2025.01013

Bernstein, E. E., & McNally, R. J. (2018). Exercise as a buffer against difficulties with emotion regulation: A pathway to emotional wellbeing. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 109*, 29–36. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.brat.2018.07.010

Biddle, S. J. H., Ciaccioni, S., Thomas, G., & Vergeer, I. (2019). Physical activity and mental health in children and adolescents: An updated review of reviews and an analysis of causality. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise, 42*, 146–155. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2018.08.011

Bondarchuk, O., Balakhtar, V., Pinchuk, N., Pustovalov, I., & Pavlenok, K. (2024). Coping with stressful situations using coping strategies and their impact on mental health. *Multidisciplinary Reviews, 7*, Article 2024spe034. https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2024spe034

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2023). Toward good practice in thematic analysis: Avoiding common problems and be(com)ing a knowing researcher. *International Journal of Transgender Health, 24*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597

Campbell, S., Greenwood, M., Prior, S., Shearer, T., Walkem, K., Young, S., Bywaters, D., & Walker, K. (2020). Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing, 25*(8), 652–661. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206

Chan, J. S. Y., Liu, G., Liang, D., Deng, K., Wu, J., & Yan, J. H. (2019). Special issue – Therapeutic benefits of physical activity for mood: A systematic review on the effects of exercise intensity, duration, and modality. *The Journal of Psychology, 153*(1), 102–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.2018.1470487

Chang de Pinho, I., Giorelli, G., & Oliveira Toledo, D. (2024). A narrative review examining the relationship between mental health, physical activity, and nutrition. *Discover Psychology, 4*, Article 162. https://doi.org/10.1007/s44202-024-00275-7

D'Isanto, T., Altavilla, G., Esposito, G., Raiola, G., & D'Elia, F. (2023). Physical activity and sports sciences field in Italian scientific research products and its distinct composition in biomedicine, exercise and sports sciences and pedagogy domains. *Sport Sciences for Health, 19*(3), 987–991. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11332-023-01045-z

Firth, J., Rosenbaum, S., Stubbs, B., Gorczynski, P., Yung, A. R., & Vancampfort, D. (2016). Motivating factors and barriers towards exercise in severe mental illness: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological Medicine, 46*(14), 2869–2881. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291716001732

Herbert, C. (2022). Enhancing mental health, well-being and active lifestyles of university students by means of physical activity and exercise research programs. *Frontiers in Public Health, 10*, Article 849093. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2022.849093

Kirby, J. B., Babkes Stellino, M., Lewis, C., Humphrey, K., Gordon, K., & Lindsay, K. G. (2022). You've got a friend in me: Fostering social connection among college students through peer-led physical activity. *Health Promotion Practice, 23*(6), 907–911. https://doi.org/10.1177/15248399211072535

Laidlaw, R. J., McGrath, R., Adams, C., Kumar, S., & Murray, C. M. (2023). Improved mental health, social connections and sense of self: A mixed methods systematic review exploring the impact and experience of community reminiscence programs. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Healthcare, 16*, 4111–4132. https://doi.org/10.2147/JMDH.S438730

Liu, X., & Liu, L. (2025). The mediating role of college students' body image and self-esteem in the impact of physical activity on life satisfaction and mental health. *Acta Psychologica, 257*, Article 105103. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2025.105103

Mahindru, A., Patil, P., & Agrawal, V. (2023). Role of physical activity on mental health and well-being: A review. *Cureus, 15*(1), Article e33475. https://doi.org/10.7759/cureus.33475

Malm, C., Jakobsson, J., & Isaksson, A. (2019). Physical activity and sports—Real health benefits: A review with insight into the public health of Sweden. *Sports, 7*(5), Article 127. https://doi.org/10.3390/sports7050127

Mikkelsen, K., Stojanovska, L., Polenakovic, M., Bosevski, M., & Apostolopoulos, V. (2017). Exercise and mental health. *Maturitas, 106*, 48–56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2017.09.003

Pascoe, M., Bailey, A. P., Craike, M., Carter, T., Patten, R., Stepto, N., & Parker, A. (2020). Physical activity and exercise in youth mental health promotion: A scoping review. *BMJ Open Sport & Exercise Medicine, 6*(1), Article e000677. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjsem-2019-000677

Pilarska, J. (2021). The constructivist paradigm and phenomenological qualitative research design. In A. Pabel, J. Pryce, & A. Anderson (Eds.), *Research paradigm considerations for emerging scholars* (pp. 64–83). Channel View Publications. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781845418281-008

Posadzki, P., Pieper, D., Bajpai, R., Makaruk, H., Könsgen, N., Neuhaus, A. L., & Semwal, M. (2020). Exercise/physical activity and health outcomes: An overview of Cochrane systematic reviews. *BMC Public Health, 20*, Article 1724. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09855-3

Ramirez, E. (2024). Influence of aerobic exercise on stress reduction in Philippines. *International Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Sports, 2*(2), 25–37. https://doi.org/10.47604/ijpers.2616

Sampogna, G., Brugnoli, R., & Fiorillo, A. (2024). The biopsychosocial model revised for mental health. In A. Fiorillo & S. De Giorgi (Eds.), *Social determinants of mental health* (pp. 11–17). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-70165-8_2

Vergara, F. A., Daling, K. G., & Taja-on, E. P. (2025). Beyond jocularity: Exploring the role

of community in supporting mental health and personal development among male students. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*, *17*(2), 198–227. https://doi.org/10.29173/cjfy30130

Viveiros, B., Jacinto, M., Antunes, R., Matos, R., Amaro, N., Cid, L., Couto, N., & Monteiro, D. (2025). Application of the hierarchical model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the context of exercise: A systematic review. *Frontiers in Psychology, 16*, Article 1512270. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1512270

Zavalishina, S. Y., Karpov, V. Y., Rysakova, O. G., Rodionova, I. A., Pryanikova, N. G., & Shulgin, A. M. (2021). Physiological reaction of the body of students to regular physical activity. *Journal of Biochemical Technology, 12*(2), 44–47. https://doi.org/10.51847/ERJ8YmdKPC