

## PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING IN PHYSICAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM: A SCOPING REVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

*This scoping review examines the impact of global physical education curricula on psychological well-being, with a particular focus on gender differences in anxiety levels. Following Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework, the review rigorously adheres to each step, from formulating research questions to synthesizing collected data. The findings reveal that men participate in physical activities at a higher rate than women, which significantly enhances their psychological well-being. This disparity suggests that men may experience lower anxiety levels compared to women, highlighting a critical area for further research and intervention. Additionally, the review identifies several effective strategies from existing literature that can improve the physical education curriculum and support students' mental health. Key approaches include incorporating diverse and inclusive activities to engage all students, utilizing technology and modern teaching tools to make physical education more appealing, and fostering a positive, supportive environment that encourages participation. The importance of professional development for teachers is also emphasized, ensuring they are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and techniques to create a motivating and engaging physical education experience. Collaborative learning and peer interaction are encouraged to enhance social skills and enjoyment, while a holistic approach that prioritizes overall health—mental, emotional, and physical—is advocated. In conclusion, this scoping review highlights the critical role of a well-rounded physical education curriculum in promoting psychological well-being and offers practical interventions to address gender disparities in anxiety levels. By adopting these evidence-based strategies, educators can create a more inclusive, effective, and supportive environment for all students.*

**Keywords:** Mental health, physical activity, exercise.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, growing concerns have emerged about addressing students' psychological well-being. Students are often under immense pressure to excel academically while simultaneously managing various personal commitments. Additionally, many do not receive the necessary support due to the stigma surrounding mental health issues. A significant number of students feel ashamed to admit they are struggling, fearing judgment from peers, teachers, and even their families. These issues are becoming increasingly prevalent in school environments, and the impact on students' psychological well-being can greatly influence their academic performance - sometimes leading to tragic outcomes, including suicide.

Globally, mental health disorders among students are alarmingly high, affecting approximately 20% of the population, with only 5% receiving appropriate treatment due to a

lack of mental health services in many countries (Nastasi, & Borja, 2016). While some nations offer mental health services, others still struggle to adequately address their students' mental health needs. Key challenges contributing to this gap include insufficient government funding, a shortage of professionals such as school psychologists, and a lack of public mental health awareness (Nastasi, & Borja, 2016). As a result, students often face negative emotional outcomes and are at a higher risk of dropping out due to untreated mental health issues.

Physical education encourages students to engage in physical activities, promoting both physical fitness and confidence in their abilities. By actively participating in physical education classes, students not only improve their physical health but also gain the confidence needed to reduce stress and develop essential cognitive skills to navigate challenging situations. Although physical education has long been part of the curriculum, it remains crucial to emphasize its role in supporting students' psychological well-being. Physical education helps students achieve better academic performance and enhances their resilience. As Gul et al. (2017) noted, student well-being is key to fostering a positive life and improving overall outcomes.

Teachers who incorporate physical activities into school routines can serve as motivational role models, demonstrating positive emotions and encouraging students to do the same. Over time, students can develop self-confidence, self-determination, and strong interpersonal relationships, all of which contribute to personal growth and help them manage anxiety, stress, and social pressure.

According to Lubans et al. (2016), the foundation for enhancing psychological well-being lies in a person's cognitive function. This is closely linked to students' mental health, as improved cognitive function can encourage participation in physical activities that help relax the mind and alleviate negative emotions. Teachers implementing physical activities based on the curriculum should identify strategies that support the development of students' psychological well-being. They are also in a position to recognize signs of stress among students. By planning and recommending strategies, teachers can help reduce stress and promote student well-being.

Introducing new strategies and techniques to manage stress is vital for improving students' performance and overall well-being, as these approaches help students develop and grow in various aspects. Coping strategies, as defined by Lazarus and Folkman (1986), are adaptive responses to stressors. Teachers must consider ways to help students manage stress using psychological strategies that mitigate its negative effects (Gustems-Carnicer, & Calderon, 2012). Resilience, much like coping strategies, plays a crucial role in helping students face various stressors, enabling them to “bounce back” to their normal state (Kumar, 2019).

The curriculum recognizes that personal development is a key objective of modern education, and physical education plays a vital role in promoting students' personal growth, particularly their psychological well-being (Cronin et al., 2018). Physical education fosters essential skills such as teamwork, communication, problem-solving, and decision-making. These competencies are crucial for students, helping them develop effective strategies to overcome challenges and improve various aspects of their lives.

This scoping review focuses on psychological well-being in the context of physical education within the curriculum. It draws on existing international studies to examine and synthesize information on how physical education contributes to students' psychological well-being.

This research aims to examine the relationship between physical education and psychological well-being by analyzing gender differences in anxiety, student coping mechanisms, and the role of teachers in enhancing engagement and outcomes, ultimately identifying strategies to support students' mental health and overall development. Specifically, the following questions were answered:

1. What are the differences in anxiety levels between men and women, and how do these variations affect their psychological well-being in the context of physical education?
2. What coping strategies do students use to manage academic and personal challenges, and how effective are these methods in reducing stress and promoting psychological well-being?
3. How can teachers enhance physical education through curriculum interventions, and which specific approaches have been most successful in improving student engagement, mental health, and overall outcomes in physical education?

## 2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

This scoping review follows Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework to gain a deeper and broader understanding of psychological well-being in physical education curricula, proceeding through five stages: identifying research questions, finding relevant studies, selecting studies, charting the data, and collating, summarizing, and reporting the results.

### *Stage 1: Identifying Research Questions*

The first stage involves researchers formulating a clear and concise research question that guides the literature review process, establishing a focused framework for examining the psychological well-being of students. This question is specifically designed to address existing issues and identify gaps in the implementation of related strategies. By clarifying the emphasis and scope of the literature review, researchers ensure that their inquiry is directed and relevant to the study's objectives.

### *Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies*

In gathering relevant studies for this review, researchers focused on specific coverage to avoid misinformation and ensure the accuracy of their findings. They employed targeted keywords related to students' psychological well-being in the context of physical education on an international scale. Various databases were utilized to collect information, including Google Scholar, ResearchGate, ERIC, and JSTOR, specifically targeting publications from 2014 to 2024.

**Table 1: Key Search Term**

Search Terms
Psychological well-being in the physical education curriculum
Physical education curriculum affects the psychological well-being of the students

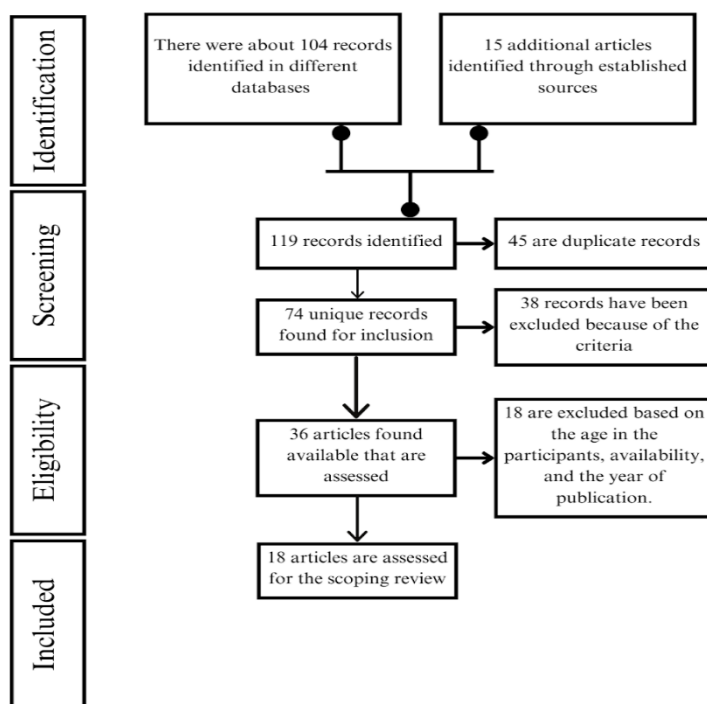
**Table 2: Inclusion and Exclusion criteria**

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Year	2014-2024	Studies before
Language	English	Non-English Studies
Types of Articles	Journal Articles/ Research Papers	Articles that need permission and are not published
Focus of the study	Psychological well-being of the students those teachers implementing the physical education curriculum	Other subjects aside from physical education

Literature Focus	Published papers about how physical education helps students to have better psychological well-being	Articles that share about past physical education curriculum
Participants	Students who are high school to college students that has a physical education subject	Elementary students

### Stage 3: Study Selection

In conducting the scoping review, the researchers employed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) as a roadmap to outline their findings, previous research, and future plans (Sarkis-Onofre, 2021). A recommended strategy is to include filtered and limited data to enhance transparency in the review process. The table below presents the scoping review framework of Arksey and O'Malley (2005), systematically analyzing data from various articles.



**Figure 1.** Scoping Review Framework

### Stage 4: Charting the Data

In this section, the researchers present relevant data from various articles, including details such as the author, year of publication, study location, population studied, research methods employed, and key results. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of this information.

**Table 3: Data chart of the final literature**

Author details, year, and setting of the study	Participants/ Design of the Study	Results
Gul, Caglayan and Akandere (2017), Turkey	187 high school students participated in the study. Using a pretest and posttest model to identify how sports affect the psychological well-being of the students.	This study found that students who are actively engaged in physical exercise have better well-being than those students who are not doing any physical exercise and students who are engaged in different sports do have good social, emotional, and self-value because they play in teams and do physical exercise. It is also said that a good

Author details, year, and setting of the study	Participants/ Design of the Study	Results
Cronin, Allen, Mulvenna and Russel (2017), United Kingdom	This study uses surveys from a total of 294 British students to know how teachers' support can help students develop life skills in PE.	social ability students have will positively develop their self-esteem and they will be more successful in taking and fulfilling their tasks and doing exercise does have a positive effect on not having stress.
Erturan-Ilker (2015), Turkey	It is based on a survey, descriptive, correlational, and cross-sectional study, and the total of participants is 1,082 students from six different public schools.	This study found that PE develops many life skills in students such as teamwork, planning, how to handle emotions, handling relationships with other students, being a leader, and problem-solving and decision-making skills. Supporting the autonomy of the students has a positive effect that develops the life skills that are related to psychological well-being indicators. This suggests that PE teachers should have an autonomy-supportive climate that can help the students develop life skills and their psychological well-being.  PE teachers should promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness to the students to have a learning environment that promotes well-being in using the interests of the students. The choices that the teachers can make to facilitate PE are to associate timing, tasks, and drills in implementing the lesson. Teachers need to value the students' feelings and thoughts because it allows them to have responsibility and promoting collaborative learning can enhance the student's competence. That is why students need to feel that they belong to not feel embarrassed and communication is important between students and teachers.
Theodoratou, Kalafatis and Panitsa (2020), Greece	A total of 150 students participated in this study using questionnaires that identified having regular physical exercise can help to lessen the stress that has a good influence on psychological well-being.	We cannot change the fact that the impact of physical exercise on psychological well-being and mental health is huge. Nowadays, many issues are going about the mental health of the students and they are informed about the importance of doing physical activity to their psychological well-being. It is important to discuss that maintaining exercise is good for the mental health of the student and that needs to be included in the curriculum. School authorities need to monitor students' mental health and they should provide acceptable physical exercises that can also support their learning.
Curran and Standage (2017), United Kingdom	This study uses the self-determination theory (SDT) to determine the result of in engaging physical activities that give satisfaction to basic psychological needs.	PE is an essential source of physical activity and engagement in PE has a big potential as it is the vehicle for students' well-being. Students who perceive development in competencies, self-directed behaviors, and having a connection to others are very important because these are the ones that will be developed when teachers teach PE to the students.
Piñeiro-Cassio, Fernandez-Martinez, Nuviala and Perez-Ordaz (2021), Spain	This study uses the PRISMA protocol outline that different articles suggest that teachers should introduce psychological well-being in PA that can promote personal growth and self-realization in the students.	The study suggests that the teachers should introduce a single definition of psychological well-being in PA because students will develop self-realization and personal growth if they will focus on excellence rather than questions about well-being.
Wha Back (2015), India	Surveying a total of 780 students from Region C in different three schools to know the level of participation and how it affects the students.	High levels of participation in school physical education can affect the psychological well-being of the students. This study recommends that developing programs that will improve the psychological well-being of the students such as ego-resilience is very important to have because it can help students to cope with the level of academic stress they feel.

Author details, year, and setting of the study	Participants/ Design of the Study	Results
Tunc (2020), Turkey	By random sampling, a total of 210 students who are studying at Gazi University Faculty of Sport Sciences were questioned about their gender, and active sport to know the level of stress and anxiety of the students.	It was found that women were more anxious than men. In this study, the anxiety level of women is always higher than men as it identifies that men are found to be happier and have better psychological well-being than women.
Luna, Guerrero and Cejudo (2019), Spain	A total of 113 students answered the pre-test and post-test using a quasi-experimental design.	Having a better quality in physical education implementation does have a positive outcome on the psychological well-being of the students in an educational context. Being committed to any sports or physical activity plays an important role in students' development.
Freire, Ferradas, Valle, Nuñez and Vallejo (2016), Spain	This study uses a Spanish version of the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-being to measure the well-being of 1,072 students.	The finding suggests that using adaptive coping strategies such as positive reappraisal, support-seeking, and planning can optimize the students' psychological functioning. Based on different genders, male students use positive reappraisal and planning then females use support-seeking as coping. It is recommended to design and adhere to programs that encourage the psychological well-being of the students.
Cheon, Reeve, Yu and Jang (2014), Korea	There are 27 PE teachers and 1,312 students participating in this study. It is either an experimental or control group on how teachers will teach their students and how the students will react or what they would feel.	This study found that after analyzing the psychological needs of the students, the involvement of how the teachers deliver their lessons can increase the students' satisfaction and decrease their frustration.
Liu, Bartholomew, and Chung (2017), China	Through questionnaires, 591 Chinese students participated in this study to measure their feelings in PE classes.	Students who have high support from their teacher will experience less frustration and will feel more positive energy. This study suggests that PE teachers should apply various strategies that are supportive to students rather than them feeling controlled because having controlled teaching will lessen the positive outcomes on the psychological well-being of the students and they will feel more frustration than satisfaction.
Erdvik, Haugen, Ivarsson and Safvenbo (2020), Norway	Through a cluster sampling procedure, 2854 adolescents voluntarily participated, and they answered questionnaires through a web page.	The PE curriculum suggests that PE can affect the self-worth of the students. Students who are engaged in physical activity feel more autonomy, competence, and satisfaction than those students who are not engaged. This study highlights that PE teachers should focus on the satisfaction needs of their students same as their self-worth in instructing PE.
Leisterer and Gramlich (2021), Germany	A short questionnaire was given to a total of 160 participants who voluntarily participated in this study to know how teachers' support affects the students' improvement of their autonomy.	This study recommends that to improve the students' autonomy, PE instructors should help and boost their students by adopting different teaching strategies that target the PE composition to fulfill the psychological needs of their students. It is also another way how teachers can help their students satisfy their needs in terms of the student's ability, independence, association with others, and enjoyment of the students in PE. To enhance the long-term benefits of enjoyment of the students in PE and to stay in line with the recommendations of WHO, to develop a physically active lifestyle of the students.

Author details, year, and setting of the study	Participants/ Design of the Study	Results
Erdvik, Haugen, Ivarsson and Safvenbom (2019), Norway	An E-survey was conducted on 693 Norwegian students who were offered whether explorative or sports approach that will be used in their PE classes.	To lessen the imbalance and unfairness in learning and to replicate the advantages of PE as a sport, this study requires more comprehensive strategies when teachers will teach PE that is according to the curriculum.
Burgueño, Cueto-Martín, Morales-Ortiz, Costa Silva and Medina-Casaubón (2018), Spain	The study involved 44 high school students and 2 Physical Education pre-service teachers. The research design was a quasi-experimental study.	Using sports education in sports-based teaching PE, it is found that implementing it gives an insane level of psychological need and the fulfillment of students. The traditional teaching of PE does not satisfy the needs of the students which is why it is suggested to use Sport Education in the curricula to fulfill the psychological needs of the students.
Valenzuela, Codina and Pestana (2021), Spain	The study has a large number of participants in total of 423 university students who reported utilizing PA. By unspecified accessing questionnaires via the internet such as web links or scan codes.	Promoting intrinsic motivation in programs such as PE through different activities is a must. It requires more examples, approaches, and systematic directions when teaching physical activities and you can integrate new technologies in physical activities to increase the positive effects of it. Students must be motivated in their everyday lives as it affects their psychological well-being positively.
Sevil-Serrano, Aibar, Abos, Generelo and Garcia-Gonzales (2020), Spain	A total of 210 students participated in this study. A quasi-experimental design was used to know what are the improvements of the students that affect their psychological well-being.	Many behaviors change theories can help students to have better psychological well-being corresponding to social-ecological models, self-determination theory, and theory of planned behavior. This will help the students to have a better understanding of how to cope with their stressors and plan to maintain it as well as stay active in doing physical activities. The role of PE teachers is to empower students to be active in doing physical activity not only in school but also outside of the school so that they can be motivated to increase their autonomy in doing physical activities.

### **Stage 5: Summarizing and Report Findings**

In this scoping review, the researchers identified 18 different articles that addressed all the research questions for the study. These articles originated from various countries, with a notable distribution: 6 from Spain, 3 from Turkey, 2 each from the United Kingdom and Norway, and 1 each from Greece, India, South Korea, China, and Germany.

## **3. RESULTS**

### ***Comparative Levels of Anxiety Between Men and Women and Their Impact on Psychological Well-Being in Physical Education***

Based on various studies, it is evident that students experience high levels of anxiety, although the reasons for this anxiety may vary. When students are not actively engaging in physical activities, their likelihood of experiencing elevated anxiety levels increases. Research indicates that women experience significantly higher levels of anxiety than men (Tunc, 2020). This disparity may stem from the fact that women tend to focus more on problems and often feel distracted, whereas men are more likely to find enjoyment and happiness in physical activities.

Men can more easily set aside their negative emotions by socializing, which helps alleviate their anxiety and fosters a sense of courage derived from their interactions with others. In contrast, women often experience heightened anxiety due to hormonal fluctuations

that can affect their emotions, thoughts, and behaviors. When women are not mentally well, it can significantly impact their daily activities, making it difficult for them to manage negative emotions. As a result, even when participating in physical activities, they may struggle to fully enjoy the experience due to their emotional state. However, they may find temporary relief by engaging in activities that divert their attention from their anxiety.

### ***Student Coping Mechanisms for Challenges***

Students who actively engage in exercise tend to report lower levels of stress compared to those who do not participate in physical activities (Gul et al., 2017). Engaging in physical activities helps students cope with their experiences by providing positive energy and clearing their minds. Some effective adaptive coping strategies include positive reappraisal, seeking support from others, and planning (Freire et al., 2016).

Male students often employ positive reappraisal and planning as coping mechanisms. By reflecting on past experiences, they can make better decisions for solving their problems and develop plans to improve their psychological well-being while preventing negative experiences in the future.

In contrast, female students frequently utilize support-seeking strategies, as they value the presence of someone who can encourage them during difficult times. Women tend to be more emotional than men, which is why seeking support from others is an effective coping strategy for them. They appreciate hearing different suggestions and perspectives, as they may struggle to find answers on their own and often find challenging situations even more difficult when they are alone.

### ***Teacher Contributions to Enhancing Physical Education and Effective Interventions***

Teachers play a crucial role in prioritizing the well-being of their students through physical activities that help alleviate stress and anxiety. By creating an environment where students feel valued, teachers can encourage participation in various physical activities and assign tasks that foster a sense of inclusion and necessity. It is important that students do not embarrass one another during these activities (Erturan-Ilker, 2015).

Research indicates that teachers should implement diverse strategies to support student independence, which contributes to their psychological well-being. When students are actively engaged in different activities, they are more likely to enjoy themselves and experience happiness, ultimately developing various skills. Additionally, teachers must work to elevate their students' motivation by integrating physical education into their teaching methods. This approach creates a positive learning environment that encourages students to express themselves freely in discussions and fosters a joyful learning experience that can lead to positive lifestyle changes.

Physical education serves as a stepping stone toward better mental health (Curran & Standage, 2017), and introducing students to different sports can provide alternative coping mechanisms for managing stress and anxiety. When planning lessons, teachers should adapt their strategies to align with students' confidence levels and learning needs, as they are best positioned to understand their students' strengths and challenges. Furthermore, during lesson implementation, teachers need to ensure that their delivery satisfies students' needs, as a lack of understanding can lead to frustration (Cheon et al., 2014).

## **4. DISCUSSION**

This scoping review highlights the crucial importance of including physical education in the curriculum, as it not only aids students in developing their physical skills but also positively



impacts their psychological well-being, helping them maintain good mental health. Physical education is often misunderstood as merely a source of physical discomfort due to the various activities involved; however, it should not be viewed as a burden. Instead, physical education offers numerous benefits that significantly contribute to individual development and psychological wellness.

Many students associate the term “physical education” with the expectation of being skilled in sports or achieving high grades to pass the subject. However, the review of various articles reveals that teachers are actively working to shift this mindset, encouraging students to focus on enjoyment and fun in physical education classes. At the college level, active participation in physical activities can present challenges, as some students struggle to effectively manage their time, resulting in heightened levels of stress and anxiety in their daily lives. Unlike in the past, when physical education was often seen as requiring specific skills for high grades, the literature indicates that participation in physical education classes helps students develop their abilities while offering opportunities for enjoyment, rather than frustration and anxiety.

In conclusion, physical education is essential to the curriculum as it significantly improves students' psychological well-being and physical fitness. This scoping review aims to foster a better understanding of the value of physical education as a vital subject that provides numerous opportunities for both students and teachers in the long run.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This scoping review highlights a significant gender disparity in anxiety levels, revealing that women tend to experience higher levels of anxiety compared to men. The findings suggest that men's greater engagement in physical activities and enjoyment of various sports contribute positively to their psychological well-being. Students can effectively cope with stress and anxiety by leveraging support from their classmates, revisiting past challenges, and planning solutions to maintain their mental health.

Teachers who implement physical education play a crucial role in enhancing the curriculum by developing better strategies that meet students' needs and ensure satisfaction in their learning experiences. Evaluating students based on their progress and improvements from previous lessons is essential for fostering a positive learning environment. Consequently, schools should avoid relying on a one-size-fits-all approach; it is vital to recognize the importance of physical education as it not only helps students improve their skills but also enhances their psychological well-being.

## **6. RECOMMENDATION**

This study serves as a valuable reference for future research examining how the physical education curriculum affects students' psychological well-being. However, the participants chosen for this scoping review were limited to a specific group, which may have resulted in the oversight of other relevant information and perspectives.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the influence of the physical education curriculum on student engagement and psychological well-being, future researchers should consider including elementary-level participants. Additionally, to enhance insights into students' psychological well-being at this level, it is recommended that more articles be incorporated beyond those reviewed in this study. Given its global scope, future research would also benefit from including articles from countries not represented in this scoping review, thereby enriching the overall understanding of the topic.

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