



ABSTRACT

- Between five to ten percent of adults in the United States qualify for some type of psychological disorder.
- Research suggests that there are other health implications associated with low physical activity that affects this community of adults.
- There is insufficient research on alternative, holistic interventions that are effective in serving couples who struggle with psychological distress or other mental health issues.
- The current study analyzes a baseline questionnaire along with ten daily short questionnaires which collected information on daily stress experiences, social interactions, and health behaviors among 838 married adults.
- Results indicated that couples that engaged in moderate or vigorous exercise exhibited reduced symptoms of depression and felt more calm, but did not report a difference in symptoms related to psychological distress, or change in marital strain.
- SENTENCE FROM DISCUSSION
- Implication of the current study is to better understand the relationship between physical activity or exercise and the effectiveness as an intervention among couples experiencing psychological distress.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of the Study

- The prevalence of mental health issues among people in the United States is at an all-time high.
- Regardless of the interest and recognized history of prevalence, past research on mental illness and adequate ways of coping and intervening within couples experiencing symptoms of psychological distress is under-investigated.
- This study can provide insight and understanding on how to help couples undergoing psychological distress by the relationship between physical activity, a relevant therapeutic strategy, and psychological distress.

Purpose

- To expand the research on couples by exploring the relationship between engaging in physical activity and symptoms related to mental health.
- The results of the study may also identify which specific mental health issues is most effective on for couples who implement physical activity into treating mental illness.
- The intention of this study is to support previous research regarding physical activity being an effective psychotherapeutic strategy or intervention in decreasing the perceived symptoms of mental health issues among couples.

Research Question

- Do physically active couples have less frequent symptoms of mental health issues or psychological distress?

Hypothesis

- Physically active couples have less frequent symptoms of mental health issues or psychological distress.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- The present research is limited or non-existent when exploring the role of physical activity among couples who are experiencing mental health issues such as, depression, anxiety, and psychological distress.
- Generally, physical activity is not often considered or integrated into traditional psychotherapeutic approaches.
- Research regarding mental illness among couples indicates that there is a positive relationship between both partners experiencing symptoms related to mental illness.
- Stress within a relationship has been found to have a negative impact on the partner who is experiencing mental health issues and exacerbating the condition, as well as impacting their physical health.
- Research indicates that symptoms of depressed and anxiety disorders significantly reduced when individuals increased exercise into their weekly routine.
- A study suggested that structured exercise therapy is equal or better in treating mood symptoms compared to other forms of treatment among people diagnosed with a depressive disorder.

METHODS

Research Design

- The current study will be utilizing the data collected between 2014-2015 based on the Health and Relationship Project (HARP, 2014a, 2015b).
- The secondary database will include all couples who participated in the study and completed the baseline questionnaire and daily surveys.
- This study will analyze the association between the impact of being physically active and mental health among married couples within 2014 and 2015.

Sample

- The study will examine all participants who completed the daily questionnaire on the 10th day which include approximately 838 adults; thus, 419 couples in total.
- This sample size includes legally married same-sex and different-sex couples, ranging from ages 35 to 65 of all ethnic backgrounds.
- The sample was selected by utilizing a non-probability sampling method, also known as snowball sampling.
- The original study selected different-sex and same-sex couples who agreed to participate in the study and asked to invite couples who met the requirements for the study.

Measures

Independent Variable: Physical Activity

- The independent variable is Physical Activity, that the intervention used to determine reduction in mental health issue - such as, psychological distress and depression.
- Based on four self-reported, 6-point Likert Scale questions: *“How often do you engage in vigorous physical activity or exercise long enough to raise your heart rate and work up a sweat (for example, running or lifting heavy objects)?”* and *“How often do you engage in moderate physical activity or exercise long enough to raise your heart rate and work up a sweat (for example, running or lifting heavy objects)?”*

Dependent Variable: Mental Health Issues & Marital Strain

- Mental health issues will be the dependent variable for the current study. In this study, mental health issues can be defined by psychological distress, depression, and marital strain.
- The level of psychological distress is measured through a scale that assess negative affect and distress experienced by one spouse or both spouses.
- Based on a nine self-reported questions: *“In the past 24 hours felt: calm, frustrated, worried, sad, irritated, upset, tired, angry, and happy”*.
- Depression is based on eleven self-reported questions, 4-point Likert Scale: *How often did you feel or behave in the following ways during the past week: a) I did not feel like eating, b) I felt depressed, c) I felt like everything I did was an effort, d) my sleep was restless, e) I was happy, f) I felt lonely, g) people were unfriendly, h) I enjoyed life, i) I felt sad, j) I felt that people disliked me, and k) I could not “get going.”*
- Marital Strain is based on five self-reported questions, 5-point Likert Scale: *“Over the past 24 hours, how much did your spouse (a) let you down, (b) criticize you, (c) act inconsiderate toward you, (d) seem bothered or upset with you, and (e) make demands on you.”*

RESULTS

- The current study utilized data from the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) databank that only analyzed couples who were engaging in moderate or vigorous physical activity.
- Couples were being compared to level of psychological distress, depression, positive psychological response, and marital strain that were experienced from participants.
- 44% Male, 56% Female, Mean age=48.6, 86.4% White, 4.3% Hispanic, 3.3% Black, 2.7% Asian or Pacific Islander, 1.9% Mixed, 1.2% Other, and 0.9% Native American

Self-reported Mental Health Issues (Psychological Distress, Positive Psychological Response, Depression, Marital Strain) & Physical Activity

- A series of chi-square tests were calculated to examine the self-reported symptoms of mental health issues or psychological distress differed between those who engaged in moderate or vigorous physical activity.
- The results of the chi-square analysis indicated that couples who engaged in either moderate or vigorous activity experienced less frequent symptoms of depression, less likely to being let down by their spouse, and higher levels of positive psychological responses (i.e. feeling calm in past 24 hours).
- The results of the chi-square analysis indicated that there was no difference or significant relationship between couples who engaged in physical activity and experiencing psychological distress.

Table 3
Psychological Distress and Physical Activity

Criteria	Level of physical activity					Chi-Square	Sig
	(0)Never %	(1)Less than once a month %	(2>About once a month %	(3)Several times a month %	(4)Several times a week %		
Psychological Distress							
Felt Worried						20	13.09
Not at all	77.8	48.3	68	52.5	61.9	56.5	
A Little	22.2	44.8	28	39.3	27.6	32.3	
Moderately	0	3.4	4	6.6	6.7	8.3	
A Lot	0	0	0	1.6	1.9	2.1	
Extremely	0	3.4	0	0	1.9	0.8	
Felt Sad						20	11.01
Not at all	77.8	72.4	84	80.3	80	79.9	
A Little	22.2	24.1	12	14.8	13.3	15.3	
Moderately	0	0	4	3.3	5.7	3.1	
A Lot	0	3.4	0	0	1	1.2	
Extremely	0	0	0	1.6	0	0.4	
Felt Irritated						20	25.32
Not at all	55.6	69	84	60.7	70.5	68.5	
A Little	44.4	27.6	16	37.7	21.9	24.3	
Moderately	0	0	0	0	3.8	5.2	
A Lot	0	0	0	1.6	1.9	1.9	
Extremely	0	3.4	0	0	1.9	0.2	

Felt Upset						20	17.92	0.592
Not at all	77.8	82.8	72	77	75.2	76.1		
A Little	11.1	17.2	24	18	13.3	17.4		
Moderately	11.1	0	0	1.6	9.5	3.9		
A Lot	0	0	4	3.3	1.9	1.5		
Extremely	0	0	0	0	0	1		
Felt Tired						20	17.69	0.607
Not at all	33.3	20.7	24	30	28.6	37.3		
A Little	44.4	44.8	48	41.7	34.3	38.3		
Moderately	11.1	20.7	20	20	28.6	16.6		
A Lot	11.1	10.3	0.4	6.7	5.7	6.6		
Extremely	0	3.4	4	1.7	2.9	1.2		
Felt Angry						20	22.34	0.322
Not at all	88.9	82.8	88	88.5	79	84.5		
A Little	0	13.8	12	11.5	14.3	11.2		
Moderately	11.1	0	0	0	4.8	2.9		
A Lot	0	0	0	0	1.9	1.2		
Extremely	0	3.4	0	0	0	0.2		

DISCUSSION

Strengths & Limitations

- One limitation is the non-probability sampling method and the study was limited to couples in Massachusetts, which was not representative of the general population.
- The use of secondary data is also another limitation. The current study would have re-defined and measure level of physical activity differently by asking more specific questions regarding physical activity.

Implications & Future Research

- The current study intended to gain a better understanding on how alternative interventions, outside of traditional therapeutic interventions, impact mental health among couples.
- Some implications for practice and policy for this current study include an increase of funding to support research on reducing psychological distress and other issues related to mental health among couples by using a holistic approach.
- It is important for social workers to research and implement the most effective form of intervention when working with couples with different backgrounds.

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