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Atividade física e saúde mental na adolescência: impactos sobre ansiedade, depressão e estresse

Physical activity and mental health in adolescence: impacts on anxiety, depression, and stress

Actividad física y salud mental en la adolescencia: impactos en la ansiedad, la depresión y el estrés

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Resumo: A adolescência é uma fase marcada por intensas transformações físicas, emocionais e sociais, sendo considerada um período de maior vulnerabilidade ao desenvolvimento de transtornos mentais, como ansiedade, depressão e estresse. Nesse contexto, a atividade física tem sido amplamente reconhecida como uma importante estratégia para a promoção da saúde mental e a melhoria da qualidade de vida. O presente estudo teve como objetivo analisar os impactos da atividade física na saúde mental de adolescentes, com enfoque na redução dos sintomas de ansiedade, depressão e estresse. Trata-se de uma revisão integrativa da literatura realizada nas bases de dados LILACS, MEDLINE/PubMed, SciELO, BVS e Scopus, abrangendo artigos publicados entre 2021 e 2025, em português e em inglês. Foram selecionados 12 estudos que atenderam aos critérios de inclusão estabelecidos. Os resultados evidenciaram que a prática regular de atividade física está associada à redução dos sintomas de ansiedade, depressão e estresse, além de favorecer a autoestima, a qualidade do sono, a resiliência, a socialização e o bem-estar psicológico. Conclui-se que a atividade física constitui uma estratégia eficaz para a promoção da saúde mental e prevenção de agravos emocionais durante a adolescência.
Palavras-chave: Adolescência. Ansiedade. Atividade física. Depressão. Saúde mental.

Abstract: Adolescence is a stage characterized by intense physical, emotional, and social changes, making it a period of increased vulnerability to the development of mental health disorders such as anxiety, depression, and stress. In this context, physical activity has been widely recognized as an important strategy for promoting mental health and improving quality of life. This study aimed to analyze the impacts of physical activity on adolescent mental health, focusing on the reduction of anxiety, depression, and stress symptoms. An integrative literature review was conducted using the LILACS, MEDLINE/PubMed, SciELO, VHL, and Scopus databases, including articles published between 2021 and 2025 in Portuguese and English. A total of 12 studies met the established inclusion criteria and were selected for analysis. The findings demonstrated that regular physical activity is associated with reduced symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, and with improved self-esteem, sleep quality, resilience, social

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interaction, and psychological well-being. It is concluded that physical activity represents an effective strategy for promoting mental health and preventing emotional disorders during adolescence.
Keywords: Adolescence. Anxiety. Depression. Mental health. Physical activity.

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a phase of human development characterized by profound physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes, constituting a period of great vulnerability to the emergence of mental health problems. During this stage, individuals face challenges associated with identity formation, interpersonal relationships, academic demands, and the biological transformations resulting from puberty. These factors can directly influence emotional balance, favoring the emergence of symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, which currently constitute significant public health problems worldwide (Walker *et al.,* 2024).

The increasing prevalence of mental disorders among adolescents has raised concerns among researchers and healthcare professionals. Several risk factors are associated with the development of these conditions, including adverse childhood experiences, family difficulties, and unfavorable socioeconomic conditions. According to Van Heijningen *et al.* (2024), traumatic events experienced early in life, such as the loss of a parent in childhood, can have lasting repercussions on physical and mental health. Similarly, food insecurity has been identified as a factor significantly associated with increased levels of anxiety, depression, and stress in adolescents (Cisneros-Vásquez *et al.,* 2025).

In addition to individual and family factors, collective events also significantly influence the mental health of young people. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the impacts of global crises on the psychological well-being of the adolescent population. Social isolation, changes in school routines, uncertainties related to the future, and increased consumption of information through digital means contributed to the worsening of symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress in different countries (Daimmer) . *et al.,* 2022). Studies have also demonstrated high rates of depressive and anxious symptoms, as well as manifestations similar to post-traumatic stress disorder, among adolescents during this period (Stewart *et al* ., 2022).

Given this scenario, there is a growing interest in strategies capable of promoting mental health and preventing emotional disorders in this age group. Among the most studied non-

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pharmacological interventions, regular physical activity stands out, recognized for its comprehensive health benefits. Physical activity involves any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure, and can be performed through structured exercises, sports, recreational activities, and active commuting. In addition to physical benefits, its practice has been widely associated with the promotion of psychological and emotional well-being (WHO, 2020a).

The World Health Organization guidelines recommend that children and adolescents engage in, on average, at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity daily, considering the positive effects on physical, cognitive, and mental health (WHO, 2020b). Among the observed benefits are improved self-esteem, sleep quality, socialization, and mood, as well as reduced levels of emotional stress and psychological distress. These results make physical activity an important tool for promoting health in adolescence.

Recent scientific evidence reinforces the association between adequate levels of physical activity and better indicators of mental health. In a study conducted with elementary school students in China, Zhang, Shao, and Wu (2025) found that physically active adolescents had lower rates of anxiety and depression than those who were less active. Similarly, Poon (2022) highlights that programs involving aerobic exercise and high-intensity interval training have the potential to reduce negative emotional symptoms and promote the psychological development of adolescents in socially vulnerable contexts. These benefits may be related to both neurobiological mechanisms and the strengthening of social interactions and the perception of personal competence.

Furthermore, environmental factors that are favorable to physical activity can also contribute to the promotion of mental health. Studies show that contact with healthy environments and green spaces is associated with improved psychological well-being and a reduction in symptoms related to emotional distress (Boakye , Danquah , and Antwi , 2025).

In this context, the present study aims to analyze the impacts of physical activity on mental health in adolescence, focusing on anxiety, depression, and stress, highlighting its importance as a strategy for promoting health, preventing psychological harm, and improving the quality of life of adolescents.

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2. Theoretical Framework

Initially, mental health in adolescence is one of the main indicators of healthy development, being related to the ability to cope with daily challenges, establish satisfactory interpersonal relationships, and achieve psychological well-being. In this context, emotional, social, and behavioral factors directly influence the quality of life of young people. Haile *et al* . (2024) highlight that health-related quality of life in children and adolescents is strongly influenced by emotional, family, and environmental factors, evidencing the need for strategies that favor the maintenance of psychological balance in this phase of the life cycle.

Additionally, scientific literature demonstrates that events with a significant social impact can trigger important changes in the mental health of adolescents. Mzadi *et al.* (2022) found that the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with an increase in psychological symptoms among high school students, including anxiety, sadness, and emotional distress. Similarly, Annam *et al.* (2022) observed significant changes in the behaviors and attitudes of children and adolescents during the pandemic period, highlighting negative consequences related to social isolation, reduced face-to-face interactions, and changes in daily routines.

In parallel, sleep quality has been identified as an important component of mental health in adolescence. Gao *et al.* (2024) identified an association between psychological well-being and adequate sleep patterns in Chinese university students, demonstrating that individuals with better sleep quality presented lower levels of emotional distress. These findings reinforce the understanding that adequate rest plays a fundamental role in emotional regulation, physical recovery, and cognitive functioning, contributing to the prevention of symptoms of anxiety and depression.

From this perspective, certain individual conditions can increase adolescents' vulnerability to developing emotional problems. Canavan *et al.* (2025), when analyzing children and young people with visual impairments, showed that functional limitations and challenges related to social inclusion can negatively impact psychological well-being and sleep quality.

In this context, physical activity emerges as one of the main strategies for promoting mental health among adolescents. As established by the World Health Organization, regular physical activity is associated with physical, cognitive, and emotional benefits, contributing to disease prevention and improved overall well-being (WHO, 2020a; WHO, 2020b). In addition

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to promoting physical fitness, physical activity stimulates neurobiological mechanisms related to the production of neurotransmitters associated with pleasure, motivation, and the reduction of psychological stress.

Supporting this perspective, Pascoe *et al* . (2021) identified that single sessions and short-term interventions involving physical exercise can produce positive effects on students' mental health, including improved mood, reduced emotional tension, and...

Increased sense of well-being. The authors highlight that even relatively short periods of physical activity are capable of promoting favorable psychological responses, suggesting that incorporating exercise into one's routine can represent an accessible and effective intervention for promoting mental health.

Likewise, the benefits of regular exercise have been widely documented in recent literature. Pasquerella *et al* . (2025) demonstrated that continuous participation in sports activities is associated with improved mental health and executive functioning in adolescents. According to the authors, sports practice promotes skills related to attention, memory, decision-making, and emotional control, in addition to contributing to the reduction of symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Finally, promoting mental health in adolescence requires integrated approaches that consider individual, social, and behavioral factors. Vancampfort *et al.* (2025) found that culturally sensitive school interventions aimed at strengthening social belonging, community engagement, and active student participation contributed to a reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression. In this context, physical activity, combined with psychosocial support strategies and health-promoting environments, is an important tool for promoting healthy development, emotional well-being, and quality of life for adolescents.

3. Materials and Methods

This is an integrative literature review study, a method that allows for the synthesis and critical analysis of scientific knowledge produced on a given topic, enabling the gathering of research results with different methodological designs and contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the investigated phenomenon. The integrative review was conducted in six stages: identification of the topic and formulation of the guiding question; definition of inclusion

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and exclusion criteria; literature search; selection of studies; analysis and interpretation of results; and presentation of the synthesis of the knowledge produced.

The research was developed based on the following guiding question: what scientific evidence is available on the impacts of physical activity on the mental health of adolescents, especially in relation to anxiety, depression, and stress? The formulation of the question considered the growing relevance of emotional disorders in adolescence and the

The potential of physical activity as a strategy to promote mental health and quality of life.

Literature database. Analysis and Retrieval System Online (MEDLINE/ PubMed), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Virtual Health Library (BVS), and Scopus were used. The Health Sciences Descriptors (DeCS) and Medical Subject Headings were also used. Headings (MeSH): "physical activity", "mental health",
"teenagers", "anxiety", "depression", "stress", " physical The keywords " activity ", "mental health ", " adolescents ", " anxiety ", " depression ", and "stress" were combined using the Boolean operators AND and OR to increase the sensitivity and specificity of the search strategy.

The inclusion criteria were: original scientific articles, available in full, published between 2021 and 2025, in Portuguese or English, addressing the relationship between physical activity and mental health in the adolescent population. Observational studies, clinical trials, longitudinal studies, and cross-sectional studies that presented results related to anxiety, depression, stress, quality of life, psychological well-being, or other indicators of mental health were also included.

The following were considered as exclusion criteria: duplicate studies in the databases, literature reviews, editorials, letters to the editor, dissertations, theses, book chapters, abstracts published in proceedings of scientific events, articles unavailable in full, and research that did not directly address adolescents or that did not present an association between physical activity and outcomes related to mental health.

The selection of studies occurred in three stages. Initially, publications were identified using a previously defined search strategy. Next, titles and abstracts were read to assess eligibility. Subsequently, potentially relevant articles were read in full, and those that met all established criteria were selected. The process of identifying, screening, assessing eligibility, and including studies was organized as shown in Figure 1.

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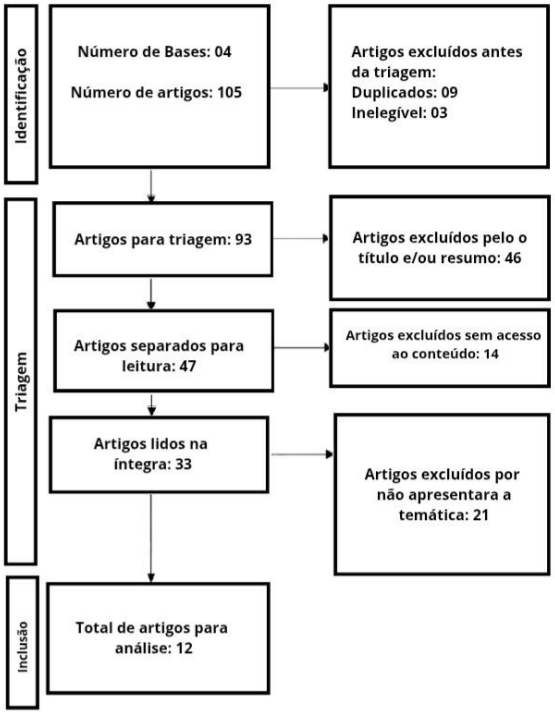
Figure 1 – Flowchart of the process for selecting studies included in the integrative review.



Source: prepared by the authors (2026).

After selection, the articles were subjected to data extraction and organization using a structured instrument that included information on authorship, year of publication, country of origin, study objective, methodological design, sample, main results, and conclusions. The data obtained were analyzed descriptively and interpretively, which made it possible to identify convergences, divergences, and gaps in scientific knowledge on the investigated topic.

For the discussion of the results, the studies will be organized into two central thematic axes. The first will address the neuropsychological and psychosocial effects of physical activity in reducing anxiety, depression, and stress in adolescents, exploring the biological, emotional, and behavioral mechanisms associated with physical exercise. The second axis will discuss physical activity as a strategy for promoting resilience, quality of life, and mental well-being in contexts of social vulnerability and post-pandemic situations , analyzing its relevance for the development of public policies and interventions aimed at the comprehensive health of adolescents.

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Since this research was based exclusively on publicly available secondary data, without the direct involvement of human subjects, there was no need to submit it to the Research Ethics Committee, in accordance with the guidelines established by Resolution No. 510/2016 of the National Health Council.

4. Results and discussion

The search conducted in the selected databases resulted in the identification of 12 studies that fully met the inclusion criteria established for this integrative review. The analyzed publications were developed in different countries and encompassed distinct methodological designs, including cross-sectional studies, longitudinal studies, narrative reviews, systematic reviews, and meta-analyses. In general, the studies investigated the association between physical activity and mental health in adolescence, addressing outcomes related to anxiety, depression, stress, quality of life, sedentary behavior, emotional health, and contextual factors capable of influencing psychological well-being. A summary of the main characteristics of the selected studies is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 – Characterization of the studies included in the integrative review.

Author/Year	Study objective	Key results
Krause *et al.* (2021)	To develop international consensus on outcome measures in mental health. children and teenagers	It highlighted the need for standardized instruments for assessing anxiety, depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder , and post-traumatic stress, aiming to improve the monitoring and effectiveness of interventions in child and adolescent mental health.
Okuyama *et al* . (2021)	To investigate the relationship between physical activity and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic.	The study demonstrated that physically active adolescents showed better mental health indicators, lower levels of psychological distress, and greater coping capacity in the face of the adversities imposed by the pandemic.

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Zhu *et al* . (2021)	To assess the association between academic stress, physical activity, sleep, and mental health.	It was identified that high levels of academic stress, associated with reduced physical activity and poorer sleep quality, contributed significantly to the...
		increased symptoms of anxiety and impairment of psychological well-being.
Ben Brik *et al.* (2022)	To analyze the influence of parental mental health on childhood anxiety during the pandemic.	A direct association was found between parental emotional distress and increased anxiety levels in children and adolescents, highlighting the influence of the family environment on the mental health of young people.
Graziano *et al* . (2022)	Assessing stress and mental health in adolescents with cystic fibrosis after the pandemic.	The study revealed persistent high levels of stress and psychological distress even after the critical period of the pandemic, reinforcing the emotional vulnerability of adolescents with chronic health conditions.
Magklara and Kyriakopoulos (2023)	Discussing the impacts of the pandemic on the mental health of children and young people.	It pointed to a significant increase in symptoms of anxiety, depression, social isolation, and emotional difficulties resulting from changes in routine and social restrictions imposed by COVID-19.
Abbas, Athar and Jilani (2023)	Assessing the physical and mental impacts of the pandemic on school	A significant reduction in physical activity levels, an increase in sedentary behavior, and a worsening of mental health and emotional well-being indicators were observed.
Sayed *et al* . (2024)	Reviewing the effects of COVID-19 on mental health. children and youth	A substantial increase in the prevalence of anxiety, depression, stress, and other emotional disorders was identified among children and adolescents during and after the pandemic.

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Li *et al.* (2024)	To analyze the positive effects of physical activity on the mental health of adolescents.	Studies have shown that physical activity promotes emotional regulation, strengthens self-esteem, improves social relationships, and significantly reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression.
Bucko *et al.* (2024)	To investigate the association between adherence to physical activity recommendations and mental health.	It was found that adolescents who achieved the recommended levels of physical activity showed better indicators of mental health, greater psychological well-being, and a lower prevalence of emotional distress.
Yani *et al* . (2025)	Assessing factors associated with mental health literacy, anxiety, and depression.	The study found that higher levels of mental health literacy favored the early recognition of emotional symptoms and contributed to better psychological coping strategies.
Fu *et al* . (2025)	To assess the effects of physical activity on the mental health of children and adolescents.	The meta-analysis confirmed that regular physical activity significantly reduces symptoms of anxiety and depression and contributes to an overall improvement in psychological well-being.

Source: own authorship (2026).

Analysis of the studies demonstrated consensus regarding the protective role of physical activity in the mental health of adolescents. The results showed that adequate levels of physical activity are associated with a reduction in symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, in addition to contributing to improvements in mood, self-esteem, sleep quality, and quality of life.

In parallel, factors such as sedentary behavior, academic stress, social isolation, and family vulnerabilities were identified as elements associated with the worsening of psychological distress. Taken together, the findings reinforce the importance of physical activity as a strategy for promoting mental health and preventing emotional distress in adolescence, especially in contexts marked by social, educational, and post-pandemic challenges.

The findings of this integrative review show that physical activity plays a relevant role in promoting mental health in adolescence, especially in reducing symptoms of anxiety,

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depression, and stress. The analysis of the studies allowed us to identify that the benefits of physical exercise go beyond biological aspects, reaching emotional, cognitive, and social dimensions, which are fundamental for the healthy development of adolescents. In this sense, the discussion was organized into two thematic axes: (4.1) the neuropsychological and psychosocial effects of physical activity in reducing anxiety, depression, and stress in adolescents; and (4.2) physical activity as a strategy for promoting resilience, quality of life, and mental well-being in contexts of social vulnerability and post-pandemic.

4.1 The neuropsychological and psychosocial effects of physical activity in reducing anxiety, depression and stress in adolescents

The relationship between physical activity and mental health has been widely documented in contemporary scientific literature, especially in the context of adolescence, a phase characterized by intense biopsychosocial transformations. The studies analyzed show convergence in indicating that regular physical exercise is associated with a significant reduction in symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress, contributing to the strengthening of emotional balance and adaptive capacity in adolescents. In this context, Fu *et al* . (2025) highlight that physical activity produces consistent positive effects on mental health, evidencing a reduction in depressive and anxious symptoms in different youth population groups.

From a neuropsychological point of view, physical activity favors physiological mechanisms that directly influence brain function. Li *et al* . (2024) state that physical exercise stimulates neurobiological processes related to the release of neurotransmitters, such as serotonin, dopamine, and endorphins, substances associated with feelings of pleasure, well-being , and emotional regulation. These mechanisms contribute to the reduction of psychological suffering and the strengthening of cognitive functions involved in controlling stress and negative emotions. Therefore, regular physical activity acts as an important protective factor against the development of mental disorders in adolescence.

The positive influence of exercise is also observed in the reduction of stress levels resulting from academic demands. Zhu *et al* . (2021) found that adolescents subjected to high levels of school pressure presented worse mental health indicators, especially when associated with low levels of physical activity and inadequate sleep quality. The authors emphasize that

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physical activity contributes to the regulation of physiological responses to stress, favoring greater emotional balance in the face of the educational demands frequently experienced at this stage of life.

The psychosocial benefits of physical activity also deserve highlighting. Bucko *et al.* (2024) observed that adolescents who met international physical activity recommendations showed better mental health indicators and lower levels of emotional distress. This result suggests that the effects of exercise are not limited to biological mechanisms, but also encompass factors related to self-esteem, perception of competence, social interaction, and sense of belonging.

The importance of mental health in adolescence is also highlighted by Krause *et al.* (2021), who emphasize the need for standardized instruments to assess anxiety, depression, and stress-related disorders. According to the authors, adequate monitoring of these indicators allows for the early identification of vulnerable situations and the targeting of effective interventions. In this context, physical activity emerges as a low-cost, widely applicable, and highly effective strategy for promoting psychological well-being.

Another important aspect concerns the influence of physical activity on the development of self-confidence and a positive self-perception. Li *et al.* (2024) emphasize that physically active adolescents tend to have higher self-esteem and better coping abilities in the face of adverse situations. This condition favors the reduction of emotional vulnerability and contributes to the building of psychological resources necessary for healthy development.

In a complementary way, Yani *et al* . (2025) highlight that a proper understanding of aspects related to mental health favors the early recognition of emotional symptoms and encourages the adoption of protective behaviors. When associated with regular physical activity, this awareness enhances the positive effects on psychological well-being . Thus, the studies analyzed converge in demonstrating that physical activity constitutes an effective intervention for reducing anxiety, depression, and stress, promoting fundamental neuropsychological and psychosocial benefits for the mental health of adolescents.

4.2 Physical activity as a strategy to promote resilience, quality of life, and mental well-being in contexts of social vulnerability and post-pandemic.

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Adolescence is a period of heightened sensitivity to environmental, familial, and social influences, making individuals more susceptible to the impacts of adverse situations on mental health. In this context, the studies analyzed show that physical activity plays a strategic role not only in reducing psychological symptoms but also in promoting resilience, quality of life, and mental well-being, especially in scenarios marked by social vulnerabilities and the persistent effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The psychosocial consequences of the pandemic have represented one of the main challenges for children's and adolescents' mental health in recent years. Magklara and Kyriakopoulos (2023) highlight that social distancing measures, school closures, and the interruption of recreational activities have caused significant emotional repercussions among children and adolescents. Similarly, Sayed *et al* . (2024) observed a significant increase in the prevalence of anxiety, depression, stress, and feelings of isolation, demonstrating that the effects of the pandemic went beyond physical aspects and profoundly impacted the psychological well-being of the young population.

In this scenario, physical activity emerged as an important protective factor. Okuyama *et al* . (2021) found that adolescents who maintained adequate levels of physical activity during the pandemic period showed better mental health indicators than those who reduced or stopped exercising. According to the authors, maintaining physically active habits contributed to preserving emotional balance and minimizing the negative impacts resulting from the social restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

Similar results were described by Abbas, Athar , and Jilani (2023), who identified an association between decreased physical activity and worsening emotional symptoms in schoolchildren. The authors argue that the reduction in opportunities for movement, leisure, and socialization favored an increase in sedentary behavior and psychological distress.

Promoting resilience is another aspect widely related to physical activity. Resilience can be understood as the ability to face adversity, adapt to difficult situations, and recover from potentially stressful experiences. Li *et al.* (2024) emphasize that regular participation in physical activities favors the development of emotional competencies, such as self-control, perseverance, discipline, and self-confidence, characteristics that strengthen adolescents' ability to cope with daily challenges. In this way, physical exercise contributes to the construction of protective mechanisms that help prevent psychological harm.

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The influence of family context also deserves emphasis in this discussion. Ben Brik *et al* . (2022) observed that parental mental health was directly related to anxiety levels observed in children and adolescents during the pandemic. This result demonstrates that situations of emotional vulnerability within the family can exacerbate the psychological suffering of young people. In this sense, physical activity carried out in school, community, or family environments can represent an important tool for strengthening social bonds and promoting emotional support, factors recognized as being associated with improved mental health.

Furthermore, quality of life is one of the main benefits associated with regular physical activity. Fu *et al.* (2025) show that physically active adolescents have better indicators of psychological well-being, social functioning, and life satisfaction. The authors highlight that the positive effects of physical exercise are observed in multiple dimensions of health, encompassing physical, emotional, and relational aspects. These benefits are especially relevant in populations exposed to conditions of social vulnerability, in which risk factors for the development of mental disorders tend to be more frequent.

Another relevant aspect refers to the importance of mental health literacy as a complementary element to health promotion strategies. Yani *et al* . (2025) highlight that adolescents with greater knowledge about mental health have a greater capacity to recognize emotional symptoms and seek appropriate coping mechanisms. When associated with regular physical activity, this awareness enhances the protective effects on psychological well-being, favoring the adoption of healthier and more sustainable lifestyles.

Finally, the results of Graziano et al. (2022) demonstrate that, even after the most critical period of the pandemic, significant challenges related to stress and emotional distress persist among adolescents and young adults. This evidence reinforces the need for continuous interventions aimed at promoting mental health. In this context, physical activity stands out as an accessible, safe, and effective strategy to strengthen resilience, improve quality of life, and promote mental well-being. Taken together, the studies analyzed converge to demonstrate that the incorporation of regular physical activity should be encouraged by schools, families, and public policies, constituting an important tool for building healthier environments more conducive to the integral development of adolescents.

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Final Considerations

This integrative review allowed us to understand the relevance of physical activity as a strategy for promoting mental health in adolescence, highlighting its positive impacts on anxiety, depression, and stress. In response to the guiding question of this study, the results demonstrated that regular physical activity is consistently associated with a reduction in negative emotional symptoms, a strengthening of psychological well-being, and an improvement in the quality of life of adolescents.

The proposed objective of analyzing the impacts of physical activity on mental health in adolescence was achieved, since the selected studies showed significant benefits in different dimensions of mental health. The findings indicated that physical activity favors neuropsychological mechanisms related to emotional regulation, stress control, and the reduction of symptoms of anxiety and depression. Furthermore, positive effects were identified on self-esteem, socialization, sleep quality, perception of well-being , and the ability to cope with adverse situations, demonstrating that physical exercise constitutes an important protective factor for the mental health of young people.

Another relevant aspect observed was the role of physical activity in contexts of social vulnerability and in the post-pandemic period. The literature analyzed revealed that adolescents exposed to factors such as social isolation, academic stress, family difficulties, and impacts resulting from COVID-19 presented a higher risk of psychological distress. However, those who maintained adequate levels of physical activity showed better mental health indicators, greater resilience, and a greater capacity to adapt to adversity. Thus, the results reinforce the need to encourage the regular practice of physical activity through school and family actions and public policies aimed at promoting the comprehensive health of adolescents.

Finally, longitudinal studies are suggested to investigate the effects of different modalities, intensities, and frequencies of physical activity on the mental health of adolescents in distinct sociocultural contexts. Future research could also explore the biological and psychosocial mechanisms involved in this relationship, contributing to the development of more specific and effective interventions. Thus, it is concluded that physical activity represents an accessible, safe, and relevant strategy for promoting psychological well-being, preventing mental disorders, and strengthening quality of life during adolescence.

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