

EFFECTS of OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES, NUTRITION AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ACTIVITIES on YOUTH's MENTAL HEALTH

Introduction

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is a mental disorder characterized by symptoms such as unhappiness, loss of interest, restlessness, low energy and sleep disturbances. Depression in adolescents is a serious public health problem that significantly increases the risk of suicide. Studies have shown that there is a strong relationship between suicide attempts and various risk factors in adolescents with depression. In this study, we aimed to evaluate the sociodemographic and clinical characteristics associated with suicide attempts in adolescents with MDD. According to a 2021 study, 17.2% of the population in Turkey suffers from a lifetime mental illness and only 14% of those with mental problems have consulted a specialist. Considering that the person is a whole with his/her environment, this is an important public health problem that affects their families and the society living together.

Suicide is the 10th leading cause of death worldwide and accounts for 1.5% of all deaths. Suicide risk is most commonly associated with mental illness. Of people with a mental disorder who die by suicide, 25% had a relationship with mental health services before their death.

If we examine the suicide rates in Turkey, it is seen that the number of suicide cases resulting in death increased from 2611 in 2011 to 4146 in 2022 according to TurkStat data for 2011-2022.

In this period, it is noteworthy that cases in the 15-39 age group are concentrated and crude suicide rates are increasing, while suicides in older age groups tend to decrease. According to TURKSTAT data, in 2022, the crude suicide rate was 4.88 for all cases, while the average crude suicide rate in the 15-39 age group was 7.38.

The crude suicide rate increases in the 15-19 age group (6.54) and 20-24 age group (8.13), peaks in the 25-29 age group (8.72), and tends to slow down gradually in the 30-34 (7.27) and 35-39 (6.24) age groups.

While there is no significant variability in the crude suicide rate by age group in the 15-19 and 35-39 age groups, there is a steady upward trend in the 20-34 age group, and after 2020, the crude suicide rate exceeds 10, especially in male suicides (in 2022, the rate of male suicides resulting in death in the 25-29 age group was 13.93%, while the rate of female suicides in the same category was 3.31%).

In the current high-speed world, youth mental health has become a significant issue, shaped by numerous lifestyle and environmental influences. Psychosocial activities, nutrition, and outdoor sports create a dynamic triangle that is essential for emotional well-being, with each element contributing significantly. Social interactions and emotional support, as part of psychosocial engagement, promote resilience and a sense of belonging. The basis for brain function is nutrition, which affects mood, energy levels, and general cognitive health. At the same time, outdoor sports foster physical fitness, alleviate stress, and improve emotional stability via movement and nature connection. When these three elements are effectively balanced, they collaborate to bolster mental health, providing young individuals with the resources necessary to tackle challenges, cultivate self-assurance, and live rewarding lives. This article investigates how psychosocial activities, nutrition, and outdoor sports are interconnected and their effects on youth mental well-being, emphasizing their joint potential to promote a healthier future.

The Effects of Sports and Exercises in Nature on Psychology

The positive effects of sports on the mental and physical health of individuals have been addressed in many studies. It has been determined that regular exercise is beneficial in reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety and it has been emphasized that physical inactivity may be associated with the development of mental disorders. With the studies conducted on this subject, sedentary life has been associated with some mental problems.

In studies examining the effect of sport on depression, similar results have been found in both adolescents and older adults. "Strawbridge et al. found the preventive effect of sports on depression in older adults, while Motl et al. found that physical activity was inversely related to depressive symptoms in adolescents." (CANAN & ATAÖĞLU, 2010)

Team sports were found to be more effective in reducing depression symptoms than individual sports. In addition, it was determined that depression and anxiety symptoms decreased and problem solving skills increased as the duration of sports increased.

In addition, it was determined that there were significant relationships between body satisfaction, mental well-being and self-confidence levels of individuals who practiced sports. "It has been determined that there is a statistically significant, positive and moderate relationship between body satisfaction and mental well-being level and there is a statistically significant, positive and high level relationship between mental well-being and self-confidence level." (YILMAZ & AĞGÖN, 2023). It is thought that sports create a complete physical, mental and spiritual well-being on the individual.

In addition, the psychological state of athletes and their endurance to pressure during the competition are associated with an increase in their mental endurance.

Effects of Nutrition on Psychology and Mood

Scientific studies, case studies and research from the past to the present reveal that there is a direct relationship between nutrition and psychological health. The brain needs certain nutrients to continue its healthy functions. Diet can affect mood, stress levels, mental performance and overall mood. At this point, neurotransmitters (serotonin, melatonin, dopamine, etc.) and hormones support psychological well-being by synthesizing the components that pass into our bodies from food.

Serotonin: A neurotransmitter that provides feelings of happiness and peace. Its deficiency has been associated with anxiety, depression, anxiety disorders, sleep disturbances and low energy levels. The essential amino acid tryptophan is required for serotonin synthesis.

Dopamine: An important neurotransmitter involved in the brain's reward mechanism, motivation, learning and movement control. When dopamine levels drop, fatigue, lack of attention and loss of motivation are observed.

Melatonin: Melatonin is a hormone that determines our sleep patterns and is secreted in pitch darkness during sleep. It regulates the circadian rhythm, which is of great importance for mental health. Since it is synthesized from serotonin, serotonin levels are directly related to the amount of melatonin.

Intestinal Microbiota: Apart from neurotransmitters and hormones, the brain-gut relationship is also a major factor in terms of mental state. Gut health and microbiota interact directly with the brain, affecting psychological state, mood and cognitive activities. When this structure is examined, it is seen that the brain-gut axis is established bidirectionally through neural, stress, endocrine and immune systems. In this bidirectional communication process, there are interactions in the context of cognitive, emotional, behavioral and other physiological factors. These factors enter into bidirectional relationships with the brain and gut microbiota separately, and are also affected by the bidirectional communication between the brain and gut. Processes related to cognition, emotion and behavior also bring up the relationship with the gut microbiota in the emergence of problems or disorders underlying these processes in the brain. In other words, the relationships between gut microbiota and cognition, emotion and behavior may also involve problems and disorders related to these mechanisms in the context of cause and effect. For example, the intestinal microbiota influences cognitive processes or cognitive processes influence the intestinal microbiota. Similarly, depression may destabilize the intestinal microbiota, or the intestinal microbiota may facilitate or contribute to preventing depression.

In general, people who eat a diet rich in red meat and fat have been found to disrupt the genetics of beneficial bacteria in the gut microbiota. Due to the disturbed balance, the brain and cognitive processes are negatively affected and resistance to psychological disorders is reduced.

On the other hand, a Mediterranean diet consisting of fiber-rich foods has been found to have a positive effect on mood and mentality by keeping the gut biota healthy.

In summary, there is a multiple relationship between nutrition and mental health. Recent experiments on rats and meta-analysis studies also support this.

Psychosocial Activities

According to the International Federation of the Red Cross (IFRC) (2014), the term “psychosocial” refers to the following:

“[It is] the dynamic relationship between the psychological and social dimension of a person, where the one influences the other. The psychological dimension includes internal, emotional and thought processes, feelings and reactions. The social dimension includes relationships, family and community networks, social values and cultural practices”. (p.11)

Similarly, the IASC (2006) has explained the term in the following manner:

“[It is] the inter-connection between psychological and social processes and the fact that each continually interacts with and influences the other. The term psychosocial emphasizes the close connection between psychological aspects of our subjective experiences (involving personal thoughts, emotions and behaviour) and broader intersubjective social experiences (involving relationships, tradition and culture).”

Psychosocial activities assist people's mental, emotional, and social well-being by attending to their psychological and social requirements. The purpose of these activities is to enhance people's quality of life and make it easier for them to integrate into society.

They can include a wide range of activities that foster emotional support, social connection, and the development of coping skills. Psychosocial activities are used in educational settings, community programs, healthcare environments, and social support systems to improve individuals' quality of life.

Types of Psychosocial Activities:

1- Art Therapy and Creative Activities: Creative processes such as music, painting, and theater offer a safe space for emotional expression, reduce stress and increase self-awareness.

2- Workshops, Life Skills Training and Group Projects: Young people are given a sense of belonging through group conversations and sharing sessions. It makes their

networks of social support stronger. Enhances problem-solving skills, communication, and emotional regulation.

3- Volunteering and Community Participation Projects: The feeling of contributing to the society increases the sense of belonging and improves empathy and responsibility awareness.

4- Nature and Outdoor Activities: Outdoor activities provide both physical and psychological relaxation. Contact with nature reduces stress levels and supports mental health.

Objectives of Psychosocial Activities

Providing Emotional Support: Facilitates coping with emotional difficulties such as anxiety, stress and depression.

Developing Social Skills: Encourages the acquisition of skills such as communication, empathy and co-operation.

Increasing Social Participation: It enables individuals to establish stronger ties with society and prevents isolation.

Self confidence and self expression: It allows participants to discover their talents and express themselves more comfortably.

Psychosocial rehabilitation is a holistic approach used to improve individuals' mental health and social skills. This process is based on basic principles such as supporting individuals' autonomy, ensuring their integration into society and combating stigmatisation. Psychosocial rehabilitation is applied in various fields such as mental health problems and reintegration of individuals into society.

As a result, psychosocial activities and interventions are important tools that support the mental and social well-being of individuals and facilitate their integration into society. These approaches play a critical role in improving the quality of life of individuals and supporting public health. Research shows that outdoor sports, nutrition, and psychosocial activities have an important effect on young people's mental health. It will be beneficial to assist young people's psychological well-being by addressing these factors holistically.

Music Therapy in the Turks: Historical Process and Effects

In Turkish culture, treatment with music has been an important practice from Central Asia to the Ottoman period. In Central Asia, shamans healed the sick by entering a trance accompanied by drums, and instruments such as kopuz and saz were used to drive away

evil spirits. With the acceptance of Islam, music was combined with poetry and dance by healers called “Baksı” and applied as a treatment method.

During the Abbasid period, music was put on a scientific basis and thinkers such as Farabi and Ibn Sina studied the effects of musical modes on mental health. In the Seljuk period, Safiyüddin Urmevi created the Turkish music system, and in the Ottoman period, while mehter music was used for military purposes, palace physicians used music in the treatment of diseases.

Music therapy became widespread in Ottoman health institutions, and it was determined that certain makams were good for certain diseases. For example, Hekimbaşı Gevrekzade Hasan Efendi stated that the Iraqi makam was good for meningitis and the Hicaz makam was good for urinary tract diseases.

In conclusion, music therapy was used effectively in hospitals from the 9th century to the 18th century. Today, these methods can be re-evaluated with the support of modern science and can be applied in many fields, especially psychotherapy.

According to Farabi, the effects of Turkish music maqams on the soul are classified as follows:

1. Rast maqam: gives pleasure (joy and peace).
2. Rehavi maqam: gives the person eternity (the idea of eternity).
3. Kuçek maqam: gives sadness and sorrow.
4. Buzurk maqam: gives one havf (fear).
5. Isfahan maqam: gives mobility and a sense of security.
6. Neva maqam: gives flavor and refreshment.
7. Uşşak maqam: gives a feeling of laughter.
8. Zirgüle maqam: gives sleep.
9. Saba maqam: gives courage and strength.
10. Buselik maqam: gives strength.
11. Hüseyini maqam: gives tranquility, comfort.
12. Hicaz maqam: gives humility.

In many researches, it has been seen that especially Turkish music shows positive results in psychological treatments. It has been observed that musical instruments such as ney,

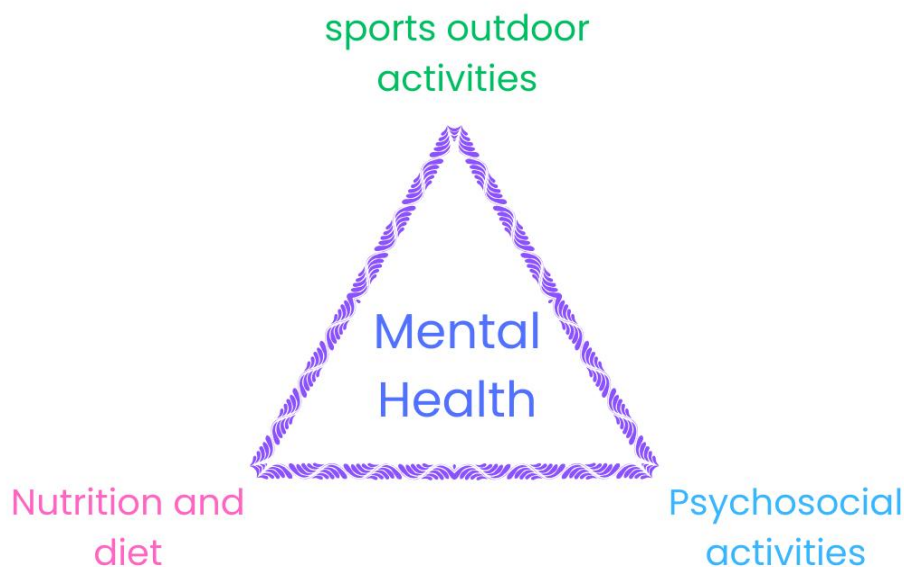
kudüm, saz, oud, tanbur, which are instruments specific to Turkish music, play an important role in music therapy.

Art Therapy

Art therapy is not just a modern invention, but a universal treatment method with ancient roots. Examples such as painting on cave walls in ancient times, mummification of the dead, carving ceremonial masks, painting on parchment, and in modern times printing, drawing with putty and mud, and mold making are examples of this situation.

Art therapy is the process of expressing one's inner state, suppressed and non-verbal feelings with the help of artistic elements and is an alternative therapy using art materials. The psychological aspect of the process of making and creating combines traditional psychotherapeutic theories and techniques, especially understanding the emotional properties of different art materials. It includes applications in all areas of the arts, such as painting, music, theater, cinema and dance.

Art therapy provides people with a non-verbal mode of expression through an intuitive graphic visual presentation that helps prevent negative emotions, alleviate behavioral and psychological symptoms and improve quality of life.



Conclusion

This research explored holistic approaches that aim to teach and raise awareness about how young people can cope with psychological challenges. Today, young people face many psychological burdens such as academic pressure, difficulties in social

relationships, anxiety about the future, and the stressors of digitalization. In this context, teaching methods that support mental health to young people at an early age can help them develop skills to cope with potential mental problems by increasing their psychological resilience.

The study revealed that physical activity and exercises in nature have positive effects on stress management and emotion regulation. It has been supported by scientific studies that regular sports play an important role in reducing depressive symptoms and increasing individuals' self-confidence. In addition, the determinant effects of nutrition on mental health have been examined and it has been shown that healthy eating habits that support the production of neurotransmitters such as serotonin, dopamine and melatonin can strengthen individuals' psychological well-being. Furthermore, by emphasizing the effects of bidirectional communication between the gut microbiota and the brain on mood, cognitive performance and stress management, the role of conscious nutrition in increasing psychological resilience was highlighted.

It has been observed that traditional and modern art therapy methods are effective for individuals to express their emotions, explore their inner worlds and provide psychological relief. It has been revealed that music therapy practices dating back to the Ottoman period are supported by scientific studies showing that different maqams have positive effects on the mood of individuals. In addition, it has been determined that art therapy is a powerful method that improves individuals' ability to express themselves and manage emotional difficulties.

In the light of all these findings, it was concluded that a multifaceted and sustainable approach should be adopted to increase the psychological resilience of young people and raise awareness. Within the scope of the project, young people will be encouraged to develop their stress coping skills by offering physical, nutrition-oriented and artistic methods to support their psychological well-being. In this way, it is aimed that individuals will not only struggle against difficulties, but also get to know themselves better, achieve inner balance and acquire healthy living habits.

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