

Fitness boosts mental health

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(Medical Xpress) -- Researchers from The Australian National University have confirmed that children's psychological wellbeing is linked to cardio-respiratory fitness and physical activity.

ANU researcher Lisa Olive said that although these relationships seemed obvious, there was limited research using reliable methods to examine these relationships in children.

“As part of the Lifestyle of our Kids (LOOK) longitudinal study, we have been looking at the psychological wellbeing of children and providing concrete research to support the idea of physical [fitness](#) contributing to [mental health](#),” she said.

“Our main findings are that higher levels of fitness are resulting in lower levels of depression and stress and greater body satisfaction and this is even after accounting for the potential negative effect of body fat.”

Ms Olive is a primary investigator on both the psychology and education sections of the project, as part of the team working with Professor Don Byrne in the Department of Psychology.

“Specifically, we have been looking at the effectiveness of physical education (PE) in government funded primary schools,” she said.

“LOOK researchers have found that when PE programs are designed in line with strong contemporary evidence and conducted by specialist PE teachers they can improve specific areas of academic performance and

can lessen age-related increases in body fat.

“With regards to psychology, we found that specialist PE had a small, positive and time-limited effect on body image. However, there is no evidence as yet that this relates to other areas of psychological wellbeing and this is something we will be analysing further.”

Ms Olive said the psychology section was just one part of the LOOK study which also investigated cardiovascular health, bone health, nutrition, physical activity patterns, metabolic health, family influences, academic success and more.

“The aim of the study is to tie all these factors together in order to better understand the development of physical and psychological health in children and how physical activity participation, including early experiences in PE, affects these components of health.”

LOOK is a multi-disciplinary longitudinal project tracking the health of Canberra school children, which commenced in 2005.

Provided by Australian National University

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