

Teen girls who exercise are less likely to be violent

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Regular exercise is touted as an antidote for many ills, including stress, depression and obesity. Physical activity also may help decrease violent behavior among adolescent girls, according to new research to be presented Monday, May 6, at the Pediatric Academic Societies (PAS) annual meeting in Washington, DC.

Researchers from Columbia University analyzed results of a 2008 survey completed by 1,312 students at four inner-city high schools in New York to determine if there was an association between [regular exercise](#) and violence-related behaviors.

"Violence in neighborhoods spans the entire length of this country and disproportionately affects the poor and racial and ethnic minorities. It results in significant losses to victims, perpetrators, families and communities and costs our country billions of dollars," said lead author Noe D. Romo, MD, primary care research fellow in [community health](#) in the Department of [Child and Adolescent Health](#) at Columbia University, New York. "There is a need for innovative methods to identify potential interventions to address this issue and lessen the burden it is having on our society."

The survey included questions on how often students exercised, how many sit-ups they did and the time of their longest run in the past four weeks as well as whether they played on an organized sports team in the past year.

Students also were asked if they had carried a weapon in the past 30 days or if they were in a physical fight or in a gang in the past year.

Nearly three-quarters of the respondents were Latino, and 19 percent were black. Fifty-six percent were female.

Results showed that females who reported exercising regularly had decreased odds of being involved in violence-related behaviors:

- Females who exercised more than 10 days in the last month had decreased odds of being in a gang.
- Those who did more than 20 sit-ups in the past four weeks had decreased odds of carrying a weapon or being in a gang.
- Females reporting running more than 20 minutes the last time they ran had decreased odds of carrying a weapon.
- Those who participated in team sports in the past year had decreased odds of carrying a weapon, being in a fight or being in a gang.

In males, none of the measures of exercise was associated with a decrease in violence-related behaviors, which could be because a larger proportion of males than females did not answer all of the survey questions, Dr. Romo said.

"This study is only a start," concluded Dr. Romo, who also is at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health. "It suggests a potential relationship between regular exercise and decreased involvement in [violent behavior](#). Further studies are needed to confirm this association and to evaluate whether exercise interventions in inner-city neighborhoods can decrease youths' involvement in violence-related behavior."

More information: To view the abstract, "The Effect of Regular Exercise on Exposure to Violence in Inner City Youth," go to [www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view ... hp?nu=PAS13L1_3165.8](http://www.abstracts2view.com/pas/view...hp?nu=PAS13L1_3165.8).

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