

Mentally healthy days affected by physical activity, gender, race, ethnicity

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Let's get physical—The poor and disadvantaged tend to report higher rates of mental health issues. It's almost as if social inequality can lead to personal problems. Work published in the *International Journal of Behavioural and Healthcare Research*, discusses the potential for physical activity to improve mental health in the context of race, ethnicity, and gender and the link with social inequality.

Jake Jennings of the Department of Economics at California State University, Chico and Iris Buder of the Department of Economics at Idaho State University in Pocatello, U.S., explain that many steps have been taken in efforts to address inequality and inequities, but there remains a long road ahead before the gaps are closed. They write how "Positive mental health is more than the 'absence of a mental disorder;' it is integral in a person's ability to fulfill productive activities, find employment, handle adversity, cope with normal stresses of life, and contribute to society." Low socioeconomic status often correlates with poor mental health and a lack of access to the means to remedy that situation.

The team has now looked at how much [physical activity](#) might improve [mental health](#) despite inequalities for people of different race, ethnicity, and gender. Researchers have used cross-sectional, longitudinal, and experimental methods to analyze reporting of the number of mentally or physically healthy days in connection to socioeconomic factors, such as income, education, wealth, and occupation. The present team has now used the US Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) data to show the mitigating effects of physical [activity](#) on the number of mentally unhealthy days people experience.

"We believe that this work has important public policy implications, as it can help shape and target policies aimed at increasing physical activity levels," the team writes. Physical activity is good for one's overall health. The new research provides policymakers with new insight into how physical activity might be employed to boost the number of mentally healthy days an individual has.

More information: Jake Jennings et al. The mitigating impact of physical activity on mentally healthy days: differential effects based on race, ethnicity and gender, *International Journal of Behavioural and Healthcare Research* (2021). [DOI: 10.1504/IJBHR.2020.112166](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBHR.2020.112166)

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