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Exercise Frequency, High Activation Positive Affect, and Psychological Well-Being: Beyond Age, Gender, and Occupation

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ABSTRACT

Regular physical exercise contributes to marked reductions in psychosocial stress, the enhancing of positive affect and well-being. However, affect can be measured as high (e.g., engaged) or low (e.g., content) activation affect. To ascertain further these interactions, we examined the relationship between exercise frequency (i.e., how often an individual engages in physical activities) and affect and Psychological Well-Being (PWB). We investigate this relationship in the context of individuals' gender, age, psychosomatic symptoms (i.e., headaches, pain in shoulders, neck or other parts of the body), sleeping problems, smoking habits, and Body Mass Index (BMI). Moreover, we also investigate if the relationship between exercise frequency and affect differs depending on the dimension of affect (low or high activation). In Study 1 ($N = 635$), 2 ($N = 311$), and 3 ($N = 135$) high activation positive affect (PA) predicted frequently exercising, while high activation negative affect (NA) predicted being less physically active. Moreover, high activation PA was negatively related to smoking habits and to how often the participant had sleeping problems. Finally, the relationship between frequently exercising and high activation affect was still present when controlling for age, occupation and gender. Moreover, in Study 2, high activation PA remained strongly related to exercise frequency even when we controlled for BMI. In Study 3, frequent physical activity was also related to PWB. In Study 4, participants ($N = 150$) self-reported low activation affect. All findings in regard to exercise frequency were replicated, with the exception of the relationship to affect. Psychological resources (i.e., PWB), the frequent experience of PA, together with the infrequent experience of NA may provide for the facilitation of an exercise regime and healthy behavior. Thus, regular physical exercise remains as a health-ensuring necessity over age, gender, and occupation. Nevertheless, high activation positive affect should be in focus.

KEYWORDS

Affect, BMI, Exercise; Health; Negative Affect; Positive Affect; Sleeping Problems; Smoking; Psychosomatic Symptoms

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