



Guideline of Football Promotion on Mental Health of Youth Aged 7-12 in Guangdong Province

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Received 30/08/2023

Revised 31/08/2023

Accepted 10/09/2023

Abstract

Background and Aim: Regular sports contribute positively to mental health by alleviating depression, reducing stress, and triggering neurochemicals that boost self-confidence and self-esteem. This study aims to establish football promotion guidelines to enhance the mental well-being of 7-12-year-olds in Guangdong, China.

Methods: Through semi-structured interviews, 20 experts were engaged to gather data on the effects of football promotion. Rigorous piloting ensured the credibility of the research instruments.

Results: Football promotion significantly improved the mental health of 7–12-year-olds, fostering physical fitness, stress reduction, heightened self-esteem, and the development of cognitive and social skills. Key success factors encompass robust family support, well-designed school programs, accessible community facilities, and effective club development.

Conclusions: This study emphasizes the compelling need to prioritize mental health in youth sports through educational and policy interventions. Collaborative efforts between sports and mental health experts are crucial. Equipping coaches to facilitate mental well-being is of paramount importance. Involving parents through targeted resources and communication is recommended. Adopting a holistic approach that comprehensively addresses emotional, social, and cognitive dimensions is essential for a well-rounded youth development strategy.

Keywords: Mental health; Football promotion guidelines; Adolescents; Sport; Psychology

Introduction

In recent years, the significance of youth mental health and well-being has garnered increasing attention from researchers, practitioners, and policymakers alike. The crucial formative years of childhood and early adolescence lay the foundation for cognitive, emotional, and psychological development (Bethell et al., 2017). Consequently, identifying effective avenues to promote positive mental health among youths has become an imperative goal. One such avenue that has gained prominence is the promotion of sports, particularly football, as a means to foster holistic well-being in young individuals (Eime et al., 2013). The interaction between physical activity and mental health has long been recognized, and sports offer a unique platform that combines physical exertion with social engagement and skill development. Among these, football emerges as a dynamic and versatile sport, providing opportunities for physical fitness, teamwork, strategic thinking, and personal growth (Ferguson et al., 2019; Pierce et al., 2010).

In the context of Guangdong Province, China, where the contemporary challenges of urbanization, academic pressures, and technological advancements influence the lives of young individuals, the exploration of innovative strategies to enhance their mental health becomes paramount. The age group of 7-12 years, encompassing childhood and early preadolescence, forms a critical phase in human development. During this period, the foundation for lifelong attitudes, behaviors, and coping mechanisms is laid, making it an opportune time to intervene and shape positive mental health trajectories.

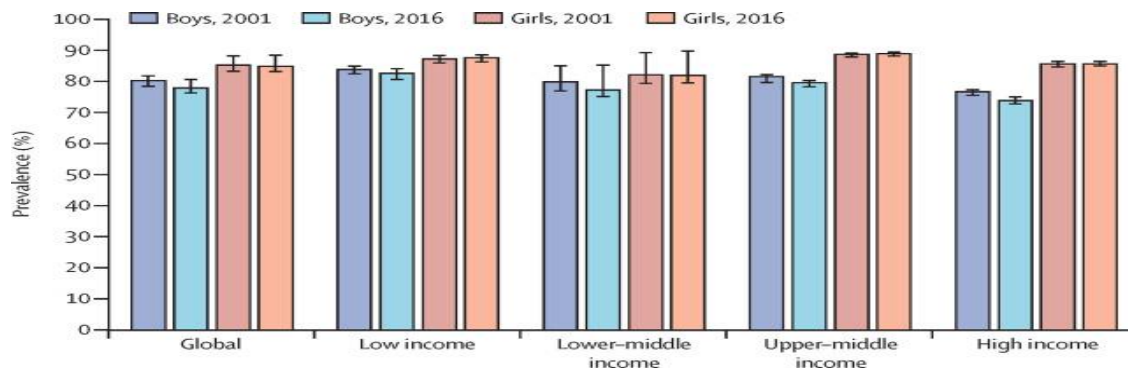


Figure 1: Global Insufficient Physical Activity in Adolescents (11-17 years) - (World Bank)

Figure 1 shows that there was no consistent trend in the prevalence of insufficient physical activity based on the income group of each country. In 2016, the rates of insufficient physical activity were 84.9% (95% UI 82.6–88.2) in low-income countries, 79.3% (77.2–87.5) in lower–middle–income countries, 83.9% (79.5–89.2) in upper–middle–income countries, and 79.4% (74.0–86.2) in high-income countries. Between 2001 and 2016, there were slight but significant decreases in the prevalence of insufficient activity for boys across all income groups except for lower–middle–income countries. However, for girls, there were no decreases in any income group, resulting in a widening disparity in insufficient activity levels between genders over time. In 2016, the differences in insufficient activity between boys and girls ranged from 4.7 percentage points in lower–middle–income countries to 11.8 percentage points in high-income countries.

However, current research on football promotion primarily focuses on existing issues, influencing factors, promotion guidelines, and effectiveness evaluation. Nevertheless, there are still certain limitations in such research. For instance, the research perspective is relatively narrow, often concentrated on specific levels of the football hierarchy. Furthermore, the research methods employed are relatively limited in diversity. Moreover, there are constraints related to sample representativeness and the scale of research. Despite these limitations, it's important to recognize the broader impact of football, particularly its consistent participation, on various short-term and long-term health outcomes. This link has been extensively discussed in existing research. Especially among "former professional players," those with a history of concussions are "1.5 to 3 times more likely" to experience depression at some point in their lives compared to those without such concussion histories (Andersen et al., (2019). Moreover, this group shows a higher occurrence of "neurodegenerative mortality," particularly when compared to the broader population in the US. The rates of cardiovascular, all-cause, and neurodegenerative mortality are notably elevated among "professional football players."

Given the limited research conducted on the effects of soccer promotion on mental health for children aged 7 to 12 years in Guangdong, this paper addresses a notable research gap in this area. By deeply exploring the relationship between mental health issues and soccer promotion among children within this specific age group, the paper offers a fresh perspective for academic research in the related field. Drawing on expert interviews with professionals in psychology, physical education, and child development, the study gathers valuable insights and experiences. A thorough analysis of these expert opinions provides empirical research evidence supporting the positive impact of soccer promotion on the mental health of children aged 7 to 12 years in Guangdong. Based on the findings of the expert interviews, the paper proposes guidelines for soccer promotion to enhance mental health for children aged 7 to 12 years in Guangdong. These guidelines encompass designing child-friendly soccer activities, fostering a positive sense of competition, and providing essential support and counseling. Stakeholders such as schools, soccer clubs, coaches, and parents can refer to these guidelines to promote the mental health development of children. The findings and guidelines are poised to have a constructive impact on practical applications in Guangdong, where schools, soccer clubs, and related organizations can implement targeted children's soccer promotion programs based on the provided guidelines, thus promoting psychologically healthy development. Furthermore, the study's results may offer valuable insights and lessons for similar



research and practice in other regions or countries. Therefore, the study's overarching goal is to answer the following research questions: Firstly, to understand the current state of the issue concerning the promotion of football play and its impact on the mental health of youth aged 7 to 12 years. Secondly, to identify the key factors influencing the promotion of football play and its effects on the mental health of youth in the same age group. Thirdly, to delineate specific guidelines for promoting football play that positively affect the mental health of children aged 7 to 12. Lastly, to ascertain the impact of implementing the proposed football promotion guidelines on the mental health of youths aged 7 to 12. Through these research questions, the study aims to contribute insights that inform the creation of effective strategies to support the mental well-being of young football players in the Guangdong region.

Research Objective

The main objective of our study is; to establish guidelines to promote mental health in football players for 7–12-year-olds in Guangdong.

Literature Review

Research on Factors Influencing Promotion

Noll, (2002) examined the impact of economic development on football promotion. Research shows that economic conditions directly affect hardware investments such as venues and equipment. Economically underdeveloped areas are unable to obtain sufficient financial support, resulting in a serious lack of infrastructure construction. McGlynn et al., (2020) investigated the impact of parental attitudes on children's participation in football and found that parental doubts are an important obstacle to participation. Parents are worried about the impact of practicing basketball on their studies and are unwilling to provide financial support. Zhou et al., (2012) study shows that regional differences lead to significant differences in promotion participation. The promotion enthusiasm in the eastern region is higher, while the participation in the central and western regions is relatively insufficient. It can be seen that existing research has explored multiple influencing factors, but the mechanism analysis is not in-depth enough, and the sample representation is limited. It is necessary to use richer samples to systematically study various influencing factors, and clarify their mechanisms of action and relative importance.

Research on the Effectiveness of Football Promotion

Football, as the world's most popular sport, relies heavily on effective promotion strategies to engage audiences, generate revenue, and expand its influence. Extensive research into the effectiveness of football promotion has unveiled its profound impact on various facets of the sport (Eberl et al., 2019; Krstrup et al., 2019; Milner et al., 2013). These strategies, ranging from interactive social media campaigns to grassroots community involvement, have been proven to enhance fan engagement by fostering emotional connections and unique experiences. Furthermore, successful promotion efforts drive revenue through increased ticket sales, lucrative sponsorships, and the promotion of merchandise. In the global context, such strategies facilitate the expansion of football's reach to new international markets, transcending cultural barriers and uniting diverse communities. Moreover, promotion plays an instrumental role in grassroots development, nurturing aspiring talent from a young age and securing the sport's future. It also champions the cause of women's football, promoting inclusivity and celebrating the achievements of female athletes. While research demonstrates the remarkable benefits of football promotion, maintaining a balance between commercialization and the sport's core values remains pivotal for its sustainable growth and continued resonance with fans worldwide.

Mental Health of Adolescents in China

Children's mental health is defined as a good state of children at the psychological level, including emotional stability, positive mindset, and adaptability. The literature suggests that soccer activities have a positive impact on children's mental health. For example, participation in soccer can improve children's self-concept and self-confidence (Syahrudin et al., 2023). In addition, soccer activities can help children learn to deal with stress and frustration and improve mental toughness (Kremer et al., 2018). In terms of China, there is a rapid level of development in terms of socio-economic factors which has been associated with different levels of changes in the overall structure of the society, and various discrepancies (Werder et al., 2019). This includes the development between the urban as well as rural areas which is rapidly



increasing in the urban population areas. This increased the level of social pressure as well as competition, and along with that, it also changed the overall structures of families in China (Chow et al., (2019). In terms of teenagers, there is a high level of academic requirements as well as a huge level of psychological pressure (Watt and Yvette Roubideaux 2022). This results in increasing the negative level of emotions among teenagers and adolescents in China. On a worldwide basis, the prevalence of non-suicidal harm in terms of children and adolescents is around 19.55%. However, in terms of China, the estimated level of relevance in the students of middle school who come under the age group of 7-12 is around 27.4% in overall China (Wallén et al., 2019).

Adolescent Mental Health Challenges in Team Sports

Playing team sports can impact adolescents' mental health difficulties by revealing the extent of their emotional well-being challenges. Children who actively engage in team-based activities, including sports, tend to exhibit more favorable mental health outcomes. This is in contrast to their counterparts who predominantly partake in individual sports, and often experience poorer mental health outcomes (González-Hernández et al., (2023). Weisz et al., (2005), consistently points out that the participation of the youth generation in various level of organized sports can be helpful to children in terms of protecting them against various difficulties in mental health. However, various studies have even shown the level of the link between the participation of the youth in sports affects that worse on the mental health of children. also, this study is involved in determining this approach to sports which is highly beneficial in most cases. Furthermore, Hurley et al., (2021), reflect data on sports in terms of various habits and mental health of around 11,235 children aged under 9 to 13. Parents, as well as guardians, reported on various reports on different aspects of the mental health of children by filling out a form that is well known as the "Child behavior checklist". Various researchers even looked for various levels of association between the data on mental health. This includes the level of income from households as well as various levels of physical activity. In accordance, various other researchers also expected various individual levels of sports to be associated with a few of the difficulties of mental health. Few lesser levels of an extent than from the sports involved team.

Chinese Government Spurs Youth Football Engagement

The Chinese government's fervent drive to boost youth football engagement encompasses multifaceted approaches. By investing in cutting-edge infrastructure through football academies and schools, collaborating with foreign coaching experts to elevate training quality, initiating grassroots programs to democratize access, and bolstering the domestic professional league like the Chinese Super League, they aim to nurture a new generation of skilled players and passionate enthusiasts. Simultaneously, their emphasis on national team performance, media campaigns, and hosting international events underlines their commitment to creating a robust football culture that unifies the nation and resonates globally, promising a vibrant future for football in China. In the year 2015, various levels of reforms of "Chinese National Football" depicted the beautiful level of vision for the fans of Chinese football. This signifies the overall level of policies of the "Program of Chinese Football Reform and Development" (Peng et al., 2021). This agenda aspired to make China a power level in terms of football by the year 2050. This level of reform was aimed at improving Chinese football at both elite as well as at the level of grassroots. As per the views of Xu et al., (2016), this reform was the most radical level of reform in the entire history of Chinese football. This is not only due to the prominent level of changes that were made in the overall governing body of the national team football. Along with the "Chinese Football Association's" separation from the central level of government. However, on a more significant level of the way it is also marketed as the unprecedented level of prioritization on the entire level of development of youth football.

Summary of Literature Review

Human mental activity is governed by the nervous system of the brain, and positive emotions can enhance the function of the brain and the entire nervous system. As the "world's number one sport", soccer is widely loved by young children, and participation in soccer can regulate and influence people's emotions and abilities in many ways, strengthen people's physical strength and exercise their will, and has a very obvious effect on promoting people's mental health. This paper focuses on the relationship between mental health and soccer promotion among children aged 7 to 12 years in Guangdong, an age group that is



at a critical stage of mental and physical development. Compared to the widely studied adults or adolescents, there is less research on the impact of soccer promotion on mental health in children in this specific age group, so the research in this paper fills a gap in the field. This paper uses an expert interview method, inviting experts in the fields of psychology, physical education, and child development to conduct in-depth interviews. Professional opinions and experiences were obtained through interaction with experts, thus providing empirical research evidence and soccer promotion guidelines for mental health promotion for children in Guangdong. Based on the research results, a realistic pathway for the development of mental health qualities in youth sports is constructed and the theoretical results related to mental health qualities in youth are implemented through sports practice.

Research Conceptual Framework

Input	Process	Output
a. The problematic state of football promotion b. Factors affecting the promotion c. Guidelines for promoting d. The effects of football promotion	The following steps are involved in the research process a: Expert interview	Guideline of Football Promotion on Mental Health of Youth Aged 7-12 in Guangdong Province

Method and Materials

In this study, we delve into the effects of promoting football on the mental health of youths aged 7-12 in Guangdong province, China. Our research methodology is carefully designed to ensure the robustness and credibility of our findings. The methodology chapter serves as a roadmap, guiding our research process from data collection to analysis and interpretation.

Selected Region and Rationale

Our focus is on Guangdong province due to its significant development in football and comprehensive strategic blueprint for advancing the sport. This region's prominence in trade and cultural history further adds depth to the study's context.

Respondent Selection and Expertise

Experts in children's mental health and children's soccer are the primary respondents. This includes child psychologists, physical education specialists, mental health practitioners, and professional soccer coaches. Their extensive experience and insights enrich the study's outcomes.

Research Tools

Our qualitative approach incorporates a literature review and interviews. A thorough literature review establishes a foundation, indicating that soccer can positively impact mental health. The interview process involves structured objectives and questions, facilitating a deeper understanding of the promotion's effects.

Data Collection Process

The interview process involves face-to-face or online interactions with selected experts. Audio recordings capture verbal expressions, and notes/observations document nonverbal cues, enriching the data pool. The systematic transcription of interviews and notes ensures accuracy in subsequent analysis.

Population and Sample

We set up a panel of experts: the Guidelines Development Group (20 experts), including specialists in mental health, sports psychology, research, physical education, and football coaching.



Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis follows a structured process involving initial coding, theme extraction, and synthesis analysis. Themes are identified, categorized, and integrated to draw key insights from expert perspectives. This analysis forms the basis for the study's conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Respecting interviewees' rights is paramount. Informed consent emphasizes privacy protection, and recording discussions is for transcription purposes only, with recordings destroyed post-transcription.

Assessment and Validation

To validate findings, sample validation involves discussing analysis results with experts, ensuring the study accurately reflects their views and experiences.

Results and Discussion

The Significance of Promoting Football for Children Aged 7-12 and its Impact

The interviewer (P1) facilitated the interview process with the respondents. This report examined the findings regarding the promotion of football in children and youth aged 7-12, revealing numerous positive effects on their physical, cognitive, social, and mental well-being.

Physical Development

According to the Sports Psychology Expert (P2), "Promoting football in this age group was crucial as it fostered physical development, built teamwork and social skills, and promoted a sense of belonging and self-confidence." The Physical Education Expert (P3) agreed, stating, "I completely agree. Promoting football at a young age helped children develop fundamental movement skills and physical fitness. They learned coordination, agility, and spatial awareness, which were essential for overall health and well-being."

Teamwork and Social Skills

Both experts underscore football's positive impact on social development. P2 notes that it fosters goal-setting, resilience, teamwork, and cooperation, extending beyond the field, while P6 emphasizes its role in discipline, belonging, and mental well-being. These findings validate the importance of encouraging youth participation in football for overall development. Existing research supports its significant contribution to physical development in children aged 7-12, resonating with P2's insights and studies like Anuradha & Institute for Development and Communication (2019). Aligning with prior research such as Smothers et al. (2021), football's early exposure aids in movement skills, coordination, agility, and spatial awareness. P3 further strengthens this, highlighting its pivotal role in nurturing physical fitness from a young age.

Psychological Well-being

P5's research findings reveal that promoting football among children aged 7-12 yields positive effects, enhancing physical fitness, motor skills, cognitive abilities, and social integration, while also boosting self-esteem and psychological well-being. Echoing this, P6, the Mental Health Expert, affirms that regular football engagement reduces stress, mitigates anxiety and depression symptoms, and nurtures positive social connections. Complementing its physical impact, prior research, such as McGlynn et al. (2020), consistently underscores football's benefits on cognitive abilities and social integration, aligning with P5's assertions. The Mental Health Expert further emphasizes these cognitive advantages, highlighting football's role in stress reduction and overall well-being, supported by Andersen et al. (2019), who underline its capacity for positive social interactions, teamwork, and cooperation among youth. Collectively, these findings underscore football's pivotal role in fostering physical, cognitive, and social development, as well as a sense of team belonging.

Benefits of Encouraging People to Play Football on their Mental Health



The study's findings, supported by expert perspectives, strongly substantiate the positive influence of encouraging youth to engage in football on their mental health. The Mental Health Expert (P6) emphasizes that football offers physical activity-induced endorphins, reducing stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms while fostering social connections. P2, the Sports Psychology Expert, echoes this sentiment by highlighting football's role in self-expression, emotional regulation, and goal-oriented motivation. The Physical Education Expert (P3) further underscores the mood-enhancing impact of physical activity and football's structured nature aiding cognitive and problem-solving skills. P4, the Football Coaching Expert, adds firsthand observations of football's benefits in emotional expression, resilience, and coping skills. P5's research strengthens these views by affirming improved emotional well-being, reduced anxiety and depression, and heightened self-esteem through football participation. These insights are aligned with existing research (Wilczynska et al., 2021; Rodriguez-Ayllon et al., 2019; Lam, 2019; Aliyari et al., 2018).

Anecdotal Impact: Football Promotion and Child Mental Health (Ages 7-12)

Anecdotal evidence reveals key themes in the impact of promoting football on the mental health of children and adolescents (ages 7-12). Theme 1 highlights concerns and mitigation strategies, as the Mental Health Expert (P6) emphasizes a balanced approach through open communication, team culture, and mental health support services. This aligns with previous studies (Leavey & Breslin, 2019), highlighting the need for mental well-being in tandem with physical health. Theme 2 underscores educating stakeholders, echoed by the Sports Psychology Expert (P2), stressing the importance of parent, coach, and stakeholder awareness. Such education improves overall well-being and athlete understanding, as affirmed by Bean et al. (2021). Theme 3 emphasizes age-appropriate training and a positive environment, advised by the Physical Education Expert (P3), mirroring studies by Mossman et al. (2021) and Dari et al. (2021) that endorse skill development and enjoyment over outcome. Theme 4, addressed by the Football Coaching Expert (P4), centers on holistic development, including open communication and realistic expectations. Koulanova et al. (2021) support this approach for fostering a supportive environment, while Kim & Park (2020) emphasize personal growth over performance pressure. The factors influencing the promotion of playing football on the mental health of youth aged 7-12 years are explored through expert perspectives. P7 (Sports Psychology Expert) emphasizes the importance of safe and accessible facilities to foster physical activity, aligning with research that links a supportive physical environment to improved well-being and reduced stress. P7 and P8 (Physical Education Expert) stress social factors, citing positive peer interactions, teamwork, and inclusivity as fostering social connections and mental well-being. P9 (Child Development Specialist) underscores developmental considerations, suggesting age-appropriate activities and celebrating progress to boost self-esteem during critical cognitive, emotional, and social development. P10 (Mental Health Professional) addresses potential risks, acknowledges performance pressure, and suggests mental health resources, counseling services, and open communication. P11 (Football Coach) highlights the coach's role in creating a supportive environment, aligning with studies emphasizing coaches' influence on skill development, values, and well-being. Collectively, these themes inform the multifaceted approach required to ensure the positive effects of football on mental health, considering physical, social, developmental, and coaching factors.

The experts' insights on factors influencing the promotion of football's impact on the mental health of children aged 7-12 reveal distinct themes. The physical environment, underscored by safe facilities, supports physical activity and reduces stress, aligning with research emphasizing its positive influence. Psychosocial development benefits from football, fostering skills transferable to life, alongside a sense of belonging and resilience. Cognitive and emotional gains emerge from the sport, involving cognitive challenges and emotional expression. Socially, football encourages connections, acceptance, and security, protecting against mental health challenges. Coaches play a pivotal role in shaping players' mindset, resilience, and healthy competition orientation, significantly enhancing their psychological well-being.



These comprehensive insights showcase the multifaceted ways in which football positively impacts the mental well-being of young players aged 7-12.

The experts' insights reveal diverse aspects of the physical, social, and mental surroundings that impact the mental health of children aged 7-12 engaged in football. The physical environment, highlighted by P7, holds significance in providing safe facilities that encourage physical activity, outdoor engagement, and reduced stress. Social factors, as emphasized by both P7 and P8, encompass positive peer interactions, inclusivity, and diversity, fostering social connections and acceptance. P9, the Child Development Specialist, underscores the importance of aligning football activities with developmental needs for skill enhancement and confidence building. Potential risks and challenges, discussed by P10, stress the need for strategies to address performance pressure while fostering a supportive environment. P11, the Football Coach, emphasizes the influential role of coaches in nurturing a positive coaching environment, instilling values, and promoting a healthy attitude towards competition, thereby contributing significantly to the psychological well-being of young players. These insights collectively highlight the multifaceted interplay between these surroundings and mental well-being, underscoring the importance of holistic support in youth football programs.

Guidelines for Enhancing Youth Mental Health through Football Promotion (Ages 7-12)

The experts, including a Football Coach, Physical Education Expert, Sports Psychologist, Mental Health Counselor, and Youth Football Trainer (P1, P12, P13, P14, and P16), outlined effective guidelines for promoting football among children aged 7-12 to benefit their mental health. Prioritizing fun and enjoyment during training sessions and matches was emphasized by the Football Coach, recognizing that this approach fosters a positive attitude toward the sport and encourages sustained participation. Creating a supportive and inclusive environment that values teamwork and individual progress over outcomes was highlighted as crucial, aligning with research that underscores the significance of social support and a positive psychosocial setting. Additionally, providing opportunities for social interaction and fostering a sense of belonging within the team emerged as essential, given their positive impact on overall mental health see Figure 2. These guidelines collectively promote a positive developmental experience, where children can enjoy the sport, build self-esteem, and nurture strong mental well-being.

Incorporating Key Factors into Guidelines for Youth Football Promotion

The experts' discussion highlights the positive impact of promoting football on the mental health of children aged 7-12. Age-appropriate training techniques, inclusivity, and mental health support resources are emphasized as key factors in creating a positive experience for young players. The dialogue explores the psychological benefits of football, including the development of resilience, self-confidence, and social skills. The connection between physical activity and mental well-being is discussed, along with the role of neurotransmitter release in promoting happiness. The social and emotional benefits of team participation are underscored. The experts suggest using diverse assessment methods to measure changes in self-esteem, mood, and social connectedness. Existing studies are cited, highlighting improvements in self-esteem, social connectedness, and physical fitness among participants in football programs.

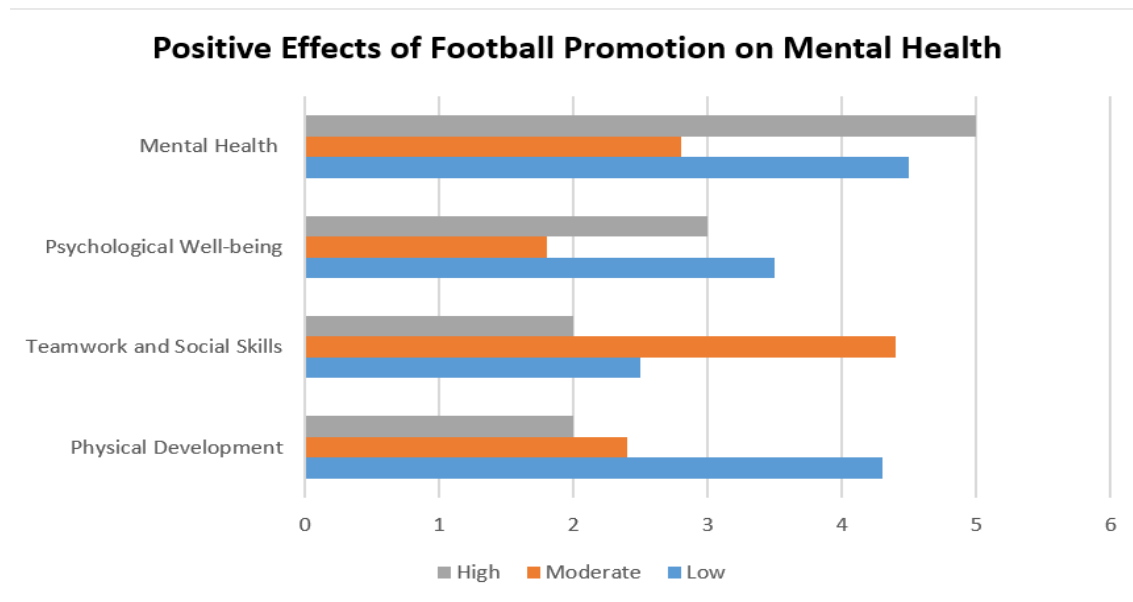


Figure: 2 Positive Effects of Football Promotion on Mental Health

Conclusion

In conclusion, regular engagement in sports activities has been shown to have a positive impact on alleviating symptoms associated with mental health conditions, such as depression and stress, while enhancing confidence, self-esteem, and anxiety reduction. Pleasurable physical activities, like playing sports, trigger the production of neurochemicals that counteract negative feelings. This study focused on the guidelines for promoting football's effect on the mental health of youth aged 7-12 in Guangdong province, China. Through qualitative analysis involving 20 experts, the study identified issues related to football promotion, its impact on cognitive and social skills, and contributing factors. The findings emphasize the importance of mental health in youth sports, necessitating educational initiatives and collaboration between sports and mental health experts. Coaches' training should include strategies for mental well-being and skill development, while parental involvement is crucial, demanding relevant resources and open communication channels. A comprehensive approach encompassing social, emotional, and cognitive dimensions is advised for athlete development. Embracing these implications can create a sports environment that fosters physical and mental well-being, promoting overall positive development in children aged 7 to 12.

Discussion

The exploration of the significance of promoting football for children aged 7-12 and its consequent impact underscores the multidimensional positive effects on their physical, cognitive, social, and mental well-being. The research, facilitated by the interviewer (P1), delved into expert insights and empirical findings, revealing the transformative role of football in youth development. The Sports Psychology Expert (P2) stressed the essential nature of promoting football within this age group, citing its contribution to physical development, teamwork, social skills, and self-confidence. Echoing this sentiment, the Physical Education Expert (P3) highlighted how early exposure to football nurtured fundamental movement skills, physical fitness, coordination, and spatial awareness, all crucial elements for holistic health. Moreover, the study found a consensus among experts on football's capacity to enhance social development. P2 emphasized its role in fostering goal-setting, resilience, teamwork, and cooperation



beyond the field, while P6 highlighted its influence on discipline, belonging, and mental well-being. These findings were further corroborated by existing research, such as Anuradha & Institute for Development and Communication (2019), affirming the sport's significant contribution to physical development. Additionally, alignment with prior research, including studies like Smothers et al. (2021), emphasized the benefits of early football exposure in building movement skills, coordination, agility, and spatial awareness. The assertion was reinforced by P3, further accentuating its role in nurturing physical fitness from a young age. The research also highlighted football's impact on psychological well-being, with P5's findings indicating positive effects on physical fitness, motor skills, cognitive abilities, social integration, self-esteem, and psychological well-being among children aged 7-12. This was complemented by P6's assertion that regular football engagement mitigated stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms while fostering positive social connections. This psychological impact was consistently supported by previous research, such as McGlynn et al. (2020), and Andersen et al. (2019), underscoring football's role in stress reduction, cognitive enhancement, and positive social interactions. Moreover, the study illuminated the importance of holistic support in promoting mental well-being. The thematic analysis of anecdotal evidence showcased how concerns and mitigation strategies, stakeholder education, age-appropriate training, and holistic development collectively contribute to fostering mental health in tandem with physical well-being. The experts' perspectives collectively offered a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the promotion of football's impact on youth mental health. From emphasizing safe and accessible facilities (P7) to highlighting social factors (P7 and P8) and developmental considerations (P9), the study encompassed various dimensions of support. Furthermore, potential risks and challenges (P10) were acknowledged, while the instrumental role of coaches (P11) was recognized in shaping a supportive environment for young players. In conclusion, the research unveiled the intricate interplay of physical, social, developmental, and coaching factors in promoting the mental well-being of children aged 7-12 through football. This comprehensive analysis serves as a foundation for the outlined guidelines, which prioritize a positive developmental experience and holistic well-being, encapsulating the multifaceted ways in which football positively influences the mental health of young players.

Policy Recommendations

Based on our findings we offer the following policy recommendations. This study highlights football's positive influence on the mental well-being of children aged 7-12 and identifies avenues for further research. To enhance findings, randomized controlled trials (RCTs) are recommended, establishing experimental and control groups to systematically assess football's impact on various mental health dimensions. Long-term studies should be conducted to capture sustained effects and age-specific outcomes. Multicenter research can account for regional cultural variations and guide tailored strategies. Leveraging advanced neuroscience techniques such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and electroencephalography (EEG) can unveil the intricate interplay between football, cognition, and emotions. Policy-level promotion should address participation disparities by establishing accessible facilities, offering training programs, providing coach training, and supporting clubs, thereby ensuring equitable access and fostering improved confidence and mental well-being for children from diverse backgrounds.

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