



Research Paper: Impact of Pilates Training on the Levels of Depression and Self-Esteem in School Teachers



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Citation: Askarnia, M., Elmi, S., Shafaei, H., Soltanahmadi, T. (2025). Impact of Pilates Training on the Levels of Depression and Self-Esteem in School Teachers. *Journal of Modern Psychology*, 5(3), 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.22034/jmp.2024.454105.1106>

<https://doi.org/10.22034/jmp.2024.454105.1106>

Article info:

Received date:

08 Feb. 2025

Accepted date:

24 May. 2025

Keywords:

Depression, Pilates, Self-esteem, Sport Teacher

Abstract

Objective: It is crucial to prioritize the enhancement of teachers' mental health within the education system. As a result, this study aims to examine the impact of a Pilates training course on the psychological and mental well-being of school teachers, encompassing aspects such as depression and self-esteem.

Methods: The research was carried out using a quasi-experimental approach. The study involved 60 elementary school teachers who were chosen through convenience sampling and then randomly and equally divided into two groups - experimental and control. Data was collected using standard questionnaires. T tests and ANCOVA were used to analyze data.

Results: The results showed that there is no significant difference in both depression and self-esteem in the pretest (both $P > 0.05$). However, it was observed that experimental group had significantly lower depression and higher self-esteem compared to control group in the posttest (both $P = 0.001$). Finally, the results of ANCOVA showed significant differences between experimental and control groups in both depression and self-esteem (both $P = 0.001$).

Conclusions: These findings indicate that it is possible to recommend Pilates exercise and movement activities as a way to improve mental health, self-esteem, satisfaction with life, efficiency, positive mood and reduce mental and emotional tensions in school teachers.

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1. Introduction

Stress and psychological pressure in today's society have impacted various facets of human life, including work, social interactions, and family dynamics. The intricate system we live in constantly exposes individuals to stressful stimuli, leading to tension in the nervous-muscular systems and ultimately contributing to mental pressure (Chaharbaghi et al., 2022; Afsanepurak et al., 2012; Dana & Shams, 2019; Dana et al., 2011, 2019, 2021). Given the significance of physical health and well-being, any fluctuations in this area can significantly influence not only psychological well-being but also other aspects of human life. Depression is a significant psychological disorder that has garnered the attention of numerous researchers in the field of mental health. It has become one of the most prevalent mental illnesses affecting individuals worldwide (Letvak et al., 2012; Mikkelsen et al., 2017; Newhan et al., 2014; Ohler et al., 2010). Characterized by prolonged duration and specific symptoms, depression can severely impact an individual's functioning and overall well-being. Particularly prevalent among the elderly, depression is a major risk factor for suicide in this age group. The World Health Organization has identified depression as the fourth leading cause of disability globally, with projections indicating it will rise to the second position by 2020. Mental health professionals have recognized depression as the most prevalent and fundamental mental health issue over the past two decades. Studies show that approximately 15% of adults aged 15 to 74 exhibit significant

symptoms of depression. While medication remains a common treatment approach for depression, it may not fully address the needs of all individuals. Physical activity and exercise have emerged as one of the most important, simplest, and cost-effective strategies, particularly for promoting mental well-being among the general population (Farsi et al., 2016; Ghorbani & Bund, 2014, 2017; Ghorbani et al., 2020; Khosravi et al., 2023; Moradi et al. 2020; Sadeghipor & Aghdam, 2021a).

Sports activities offer numerous physical, psychological, and social advantages. Engaging in regular physical exercise can lower the chances of heart disease-related deaths, reduce the risk factors associated with colon cancer, type 2 diabetes, and high blood pressure, enhance glucose metabolism, decrease obesity, and boost antioxidant levels. Professionals argue that by encouraging individuals to participate in physical activities, a society can effectively enhance the self-esteem, physical well-being, and mental health of its citizens (Sadeghipor et al., 2021a; Sadeghipor et al., 2021b; Seyedi-Asl et al., 2021; Seyedi-Asl et al., 2016; Taghva et al., 2020). Extensive studies conducted on both men and women have revealed that physically active individuals exhibit fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression in comparison to their sedentary counterparts.

Pilates is a renowned form of mental-physical exercise that emphasizes movement control, body posture, and breathing. It aims to achieve perfect harmony between body, mind, and spirit. Through purposeful control,

individuals gain mastery over their bodies and gradually develop natural coordination through consistent repetition of movements. This method enhances coordination, corrects improper body postures and movements, revitalizes the body, and boosts mental strength (Faircloth, 2017; American Psychological Association [APA], 2014; Davidson, 2003; Jolivet et al., 2010). Originally created by Joseph Pilates post-World War I, Pilates was designed as a unique physical fitness regimen by doctors. It combines muscle strengthening, stretching, and breathing techniques to strengthen core muscles and restore muscle balance. Unlike traditional resistance training, Pilates takes a holistic approach, engaging multiple muscle groups simultaneously. The versatility and effectiveness of Pilates have made it a popular supplemental exercise for people of all ages and genders, from professional athletes to pregnant women, who can even practice it in the comfort of their own homes (Sadeghpour & Sangchini, 2020; Taso et al., 2014; Bandura, 1997; Conner & Davidson, 2003; Hartfiel et al., 2011; Herrick & Ainsworth, 2000; Chris et al., 2010).

The field of education is currently facing a significant challenge in terms of the decline in teachers' energy and workforce. This issue not only hampers the efficiency and effectiveness of teachers but also leads some of them to leave the education system prematurely. This phenomenon is commonly referred to as job burnout, which adversely affects individuals. Moreover, the factors contributing to job burnout can also have a detrimental impact on a teacher's physical health, influencing their thoughts, emotions,

and overall mental well-being. Consequently, it is crucial to prioritize the enhancement of teachers' mental health within the education system. As a result, this study aims to examine the impact of a Pilates training course on the psychological and mental well-being of school teachers, encompassing aspects such as depression and self-esteem.

2. Methods

2.1. Population, Sample, and Sampling

The research was carried out using a quasi-experimental approach. The study involved 60 elementary school teachers who were chosen through convenience sampling and then randomly and equally divided into two groups - experimental and control. In order to participate in the study, the teachers had to meet certain criteria: 1) being an elementary school teacher, 2) not having any physical disabilities, and 3) giving written consent to take part in the research. Exclusion criteria consisted of: 1) not completing the Pilates exercise form, 2) not completing the research questionnaires, and 3) not providing written consent.

2.2. Instruments

Beck Depression short Inventory (BDI-13): The measurement of the participants' depression was conducted using the BDI-13 (Letvak et al., 2012), which is a short 13-question Beck Depression Questionnaire. To make it more accessible for general use, Beck created a concise and straightforward self-assessment form. This questionnaire consists of 13 questions, with each category being graded on a scale of 0 to 3. The highest possible score on the scale is 39, and the test materials within each category are arranged in descending order based on the severity of

depression. In this study, the Cronbach's was for this scale was obtained to be 0.88.

In this study, teachers' self-esteem was assessed using Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003). This questionnaire comprises 10 items that participants must respond to using a four-point Likert scale ranging from completely agree to completely disagree. Scores on this scale range from 10 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-esteem. Half of the items (1 to 5) are phrased positively, while the other half (6 to 10) are phrased negatively. Scoring is as follows: for items 1 to 5, completely disagree = 0, disagree = 1, agree = 2, and completely agree = 3. For items 6 to 10, completely agree = 0, agree = 1, disagree = 2, and completely disagree = 3. In this study, the Cronbach's was for this scale was obtained to be 0.94.

2.3. Procedure

The study utilized a pretest-posttest research design with a control group. The participants in the experimental group underwent an 8-week Pilates training course, consisting of three one-hour sessions per week, at the sports department of the medical center. The

training sessions were divided into two parts. The first part involved exercises performed on a mat, which were conducted during the initial four weeks. The second part involved exercises using bandages and cloths to support and assist the muscles and joints, and these exercises were carried out during the subsequent four weeks.

2.4. Data Analysis

The research employed descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, and frequency percentage to depict the variables under investigation. Additionally, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was utilized to assess the normality of the data distribution. T tests were used for comparing pretest and posttest among groups. Finally, to assess the efficacy of Pilates exercises, covariance analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26 software. The significance level for all analyses was set at $P \geq 0.05$.

3. Results

Table 1 presents the mean and dispersion of individual characteristics of the subjects, including age, height, weight, and body mass index (BMI).

Table 1
Demographic features of the participants

Indicator	Group	No.	mean±SD	P
Age (year)	Control	30	35.68±3.07	0.68
	Training	30	34.18±5.84	
Height (M)	Control	30	1.70±0.05	0.93
	Training	30	1.69±0.04	
Weight (Kg)	Control	30	72.06 ±3.79	0.81
	Training	30	71.95±2.73	
Body mass index (Kg/M ²)	Control	30	24.20±1.18	0.87
	Training	30	24.31±1.58	

First of all, the results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests showed that all research variables had normal distribution (all $P > 0.05$). The results of the paired-sample t-test (Table 2) revealed a notable influence of the Pilates training on depression ($P = 0.001$) and self-esteem ($P = 0.001$) among the

individuals in the training group from the initial assessment to the final assessment. Conversely, there were no significant differences in the impact observed between the pre- and post-tests in the control group for both depression and self-esteem ($P < 0.05$).

Table 2

Paired-sample t test results for intra-group comparison of depression and self-esteem

	Control Group				Training Group			
	Pretest	Posttest	T	P	Pretest	Posttest	t	P
Depression	26.62±5.09	27.58±6.94	0.090	0.89	25.47±6.37	17.93±5.88	12.08	0.001
Self-esteem	21.51±5.15	20.41±4.66	0.147	0.59	19.71±6.22	25.71±4.77	15.96	0.001

Table 3 presents the findings of the covariance test analysis conducted to compare the two groups. According to Table 3 and the level of significance is 0.001, which is less than 0.05, there is a significant difference between the estimated mean depression scores of experimental and control subjects, and the amount of difference

indicates that 70.68% of the variance of the post-test scores is due to the effect of Pilates training on depression. Therefore, Pilates training is effective on the depression of the school teachers, and according to the averages, it has reduced the amount of depression.

Table 3

Analysis of covariance test outcomes for inter-group evaluation of depression

	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	P	Eta squared
Pretest	4018.694	1	4018.694	12.248	0.001	13.05
Group	35174.024	1	35174.024	140.05	0.001	48.69
Error	2958.449	57	128.63.616			

Table 4 presents the findings of the covariance test analysis conducted to compare the two groups. According to Table 4 and the level of significance is 0.001, which is less than 0.05, there is a significant difference between the estimated mean self-esteem scores of experimental and control subjects, and the amount of difference

indicates that 71.04% of the variance of the post-test scores is due to the effect of Pilates training on self-esteem. Therefore, Pilates training is effective on the self-esteem of the school teachers, and according to the averages, it has increased the amount of self-esteem.

Table 4

Analysis of covariance test outcomes for inter-group evaluation of self-esteem

	Sum of squares	df	Mean of squares	F	P	Eta squared
Pretest	4254.369	1	4254.369	8.96	0.001	3.84
Group	52041.364	1	52041.364	98.96	0.001	68.97
Error	3025.029	57	89.649			

The Independent t test results (Table 5) indicated a significant difference in the post-test results between the control and training groups (P=0.001). More precisely, the

training group exhibited a significant improvement in depression and self-esteem in comparison to the control group.

Table 5

Results of Independent t test to investigate the difference inter-groups in depression and self-esteem

	Test stage	T	P
Depression	Posttest	10.47	0.001
Self-esteem	Posttest	18.64	0.001

4. Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to investigate the effect of 8 weeks of Pilates exercise on depression in school teachers. The results of the present study showed that the symptoms and signs of depression in the studied population improved after a period of selected Pilates exercises compared to the control group. It seems that the effect of Pilates exercises on improving physical performance, balance, strength and flexibility somehow improves health in physical, social, psychological and environmental dimensions and also reduces depression (Masten, 2001; Sadeghipor & Aghdam, 2021a). The effect of Pilates exercise in reducing depression and improving mental health can be attributed to the role of serotonin. Because the imbalance in serotonin levels may affect the mood in a way that leads to depression and affects the functioning of the gastrointestinal and mental organs related to the quality of life (Conner

& Davidson, 2003; Jolivet et al., 2010). One of the strategies that increase serotonin is exercise, which naturally increases the level of alertness and general mood of the individual, and gives people a feeling of more energy and vitality to carry out daily life tasks.

This improvement can be attributed to the effects of exercise on cognitive function. Because exercising leads to a change in the transcription level of a number of genes known to be related to neuronal activity, synaptic structure and the production of neurotransmitters, which are important in the process of memory processing and reducing depression. On the other hand, regular physical activity, as a necessity for a healthy lifestyle, affects the central nervous system and the adjustment of hippocampus, which plays a significant role in learning and memory. Exercise directly affects the structure and function of the brain

(Sadeghipor & Aghdam, 2021a; Sadeghipor et al., 2021a). Increasing breathing capacity in Pilates exercises leads to strengthening cerebral blood flow, improving the use of oxygen, increasing the activity of blood antioxidant enzymes (glutathione peroxidase - and glucose in the brain, speeding up the transfer of biochemical substances and PX-GSH), for quick elimination Radicals are released and lead to improvement of mood and reduction of depression (Sadeghipor et al., 2021b; Seyedi-Asl et al., 2021; Seyedi-Asl et al., 2016; Taghva et al., 2020). Also, it has been reported that physical activity and exercise can affect neural support processes and brain flexibility and have a positive effect on cognition and behavior, and the above arguments play an important role in improving the depression process (Khosravi et al., 2023; Moradi et al., 2020).

The Pilates training method consists of exercises that have a beneficial effect on breathing, flexibility, relaxation, memory, learning strength and endurance and is well designed to increase physical and mental health. The findings show that Pilates exercise may be a useful tool to help school teachers improve their self-esteem (Bandura, 1997; Conner & Davidson, 2003; Hartfiel et al., 2011; Herrick & Ainsworth, 2000). On the other hand, Pilates is a low-cost, low-risk and non-invasive sport, and it is based on very controlled and relaxed movements. Therefore, it seems that with the help of this sport, it is possible to reduce the negative consequences of life and the subsequent treatment costs, and to pave the way for improving the quality of life and mental

health (Dana et al., 2021; Ghorbani & Bund, 2014).

5. Conclusion

In summary, it can be concluded that exercise and physical activities have a significant effect in reducing depression disorders, improving mental health and self-esteem of school teachers. Therefore, it is possible to recommend Pilates exercise and movement activities as a way to improve mental health, self-esteem, satisfaction with life, efficiency, positive mood and reduce mental and emotional tensions in school teachers. Although 8 weeks of Pilates training was effective in improving the depression of the school teachers, it is suggested that doing exercises with a different duration, type of exercise protocol and in other groups will bring a clearer answer about the extent of these effects on the well-being of the school teachers. The results of this research can be useful for experts in sports psychology, movement behavior, occupational therapy, exercise physiologists, as well as planners in the field of school system.

Acknowledgement

The authors are grateful to everyone who participated in this study and contributed to and facilitated the present research process

Conflicts of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with any organization. Also, this research did not receive any specific grant

from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors

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