

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

**Community Involvement and Participation in
Physical Activity as Predictors of Mental
Well-Being, Scholastic Achievement and
Healthy Behavior Patterns Among Youth in
Israel**

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Abstract

Adolescence is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. This period is characterized by many changes in all aspects of life: physiological, cognitive, emotional, social and so forth. Alongside and as a result of these changes, adverse effects may develop. The desire to test the limits of authority and the different frameworks, to challenge the accepted social norms and the awakening curiosity, may lead to involvement in risk behaviors and to explicit and implicit dropouts from the education system. In the past, researchers, educators and therapists saw adolescence as a problem that must be solved, and with this approach, they searched for ways to prevent and minimize these effects. In the past few years, new models of mental and functional wellbeing focused on processes to empower mental well-being, resilience and defense in order to bolster the wellbeing of children and youth and thus minimize risk behavior, promote and improve scholastic achievements and social functions (Harel-Fisch, 2014). This approach is based on Antonovsky's salutogenic model (Antonovsky, 1987, 1996), according to this model, focusing on the individual's sources of strength and resilience is the main path to promote health and prevent various risks - physical, mental, etc. This research is based on the "Youth Resilience" model (Harel-Fisch, 2014) that continues this approach and focuses on empowering the individual's mental and functional wellbeing as a main factor for positive psychological development, achievements and minimizing involvement in risk behaviors. The generators for a sense of wellbeing according to this model are: a relationship with a significant adult, a daily positive experience in school, a sense of self-worth and a healthy social attachment.

Diverse and enriching activities such as involvement in the community and physical activity, that lead youths to meet themselves or the society surrounding them in an alternative way, may serve as a means to promote mental wellbeing, achievements and minimize risk behavior. Research has shown that these activities correlate with the development of a sense of competence, self assurance, mental wellbeing, self esteem and so forth (Penso & Stavitsky, 2002; McMahon et al., 2017). In addition, participating in physical activities and being involved in the community contributes significantly to the promotion of achievements, preventing school dropouts and minimizing risk behaviors among youth (Bailey, 2008; Scales et al., 2006).

The object of this research is to examine the correlation between participation in activities for community involvement and physical activity and between mental wellbeing, scholastic achievements and involvement in risk behavior among youth in Israel. The hypothesis of the research is that participation in such activities will predict mental wellbeing, achievements and healthy behavioral patterns among youth.

This research targets school students in 6th to 12th grade in the state, religious-state and Arab education systems. The sample is a representative sample on a national level. The sample includes students in 6th, 8th, 10th-12th grades, a total of 6,384 students.

This study is a quantitative study based on a secondary analysis of the World Health Organization's cross-national survey HBSC (Health Behavior in School-aged Children) conducted in Israel in 2014. The survey is based on an international questionnaire that includes indicators from a wide range of matters that comprise the daily life of youth: background indicators, family culture, parental involvement, daily

school experiences, participation in physical activity, community involvement, patterns of recreation, mental distress and more.

The data was processed and analyzed using the SPSS program (ver. 23) and included distribution analysis, employing regression models and analyzing the path model using the AMOS program (ver. 23).

The research findings indicate that there is a positive correlation between participation in community involvement activities and involvement in risk behaviors and absence from school, as well as a positive correlation between community involvement and scholastic achievements. A positive correlation was found between physical activity and risk behavior, as well as mental wellbeing. Furthermore, a negative correlation was found between mental wellbeing and involvement in risk behavior, absence from school and receiving a “failed” final grade.

The research findings indicate that mental wellbeing is a central factor of resilience, promoting achievements and moderating involvement in risk behaviors. However, it seems that in order for the participation in community involvement activities or physical activities to unlock their potential, additional conditions are required, such as: a significant adult present throughout the process, holding the activities while developing an educational language dealing with the issues this youth is experiencing in the course of the activities and the life skills they are developing as a result, as well as consistent organization of these activities. It is recommended that future research examine community involvement activities and physical activities with different characteristics and how they contribute to mental wellbeing, scholastic achievements and healthy behavioral patterns of Israeli youth.