

THE ROLE OF FOOTBALL IN ADOLESCENTS' PSYCHOSOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT AND WELLBEING: SELF-ESTEEM, PEER SUPPORT, AND
EMOTIONAL REGULATION

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Abstract

This research tries to identify the role of football in promoting psychosocial development among adolescents, focusing on three key dimensions: self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation. Drawing from Erikson's psychosocial development theory and Positive Youth Development (PYD) frameworks, the research explores how regular participation in football influences these variables. Data were collected using structured questionnaires from 100 adolescent football players from Kerala. Statistical analysis revealed significant positive relationships between football participation and all three psychosocial factors. Moreover, gender differences were observed, with male adolescents reporting higher levels of self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation than females. These findings highlight football's potential as a developmental tool that fosters psychological resilience and social connectedness during adolescence. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating structured sports programs into youth development initiatives and recommends future research to explore long-term impacts and gender-inclusive strategies for maximizing football's psychosocial benefits.

Key words: Adolescence, Emotional Regulation, Football, Peer Support, Psychosocial Development, Self-esteem.

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical period for psychosocial development, characterized by identity formation, socialization, and the emergence of emotional self-regulation. Adolescence represents a pivotal phase in human development, marked by profound changes in physical, cognitive, and psychosocial domains. This period, typically spanning ages 10 to 19, is characterized by the quest for identity, the formation of peer relationships, and the development of emotional regulation. The interplay of these factors significantly influences an adolescent's overall wellbeing and adjustment to adulthood. Extracurricular activities, particularly team sports like football, can serve as powerful platforms for facilitating these developmental processes (Dolenc 2015). Erik Erikson's psychosocial development theory posits that adolescence is dominated by the conflict of 'identity vs. role confusion.' During this stage, individuals explore various roles, beliefs, and goals to establish a coherent sense of self. Successful resolution leads to a stable identity, while failure may result in confusion and instability Keil, M., et al. (2016). Furthermore, adolescence is a time of increased peer influence, where relationships with friends and peers become central to emotional development. Positive peer interactions can enhance self-esteem and provide emotional support, whereas negative interactions may contribute to stress and emotional challenges. This developmental stage is influenced by various factors, including family dynamics, peer relationships, cultural context, and societal expectations. Same gender friendships during adolescence can significantly contribute to identity formation, as adolescents engage in conversations that help them navigate relationship issues and self-concept. Understanding adolescent psychosocial development is essential for supporting individuals during this formative period, ensuring they develop a strong and resilient sense of identity. Football, with its structured rules, team dynamics, and physical demands, can influence how adolescents perceive themselves, relate to peers, and handle emotional challenges. (Federicks 2011) Engaging in extracurricular activities, particularly team sports like football, offers adolescents structured opportunities to navigate these developmental challenges. Football, with its emphasis on teamwork, discipline, and physical activity, provides a platform for adolescents to explore their identities, build self-esteem, and develop emotional regulation skills. This paper aims to explore the role of football on three core areas of psychosocial development in adolescents: self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation.

Related Literature

Parnell (2016) There exists a key relationship between youth sport participation and life skills development, especially with a sport like football. The key theories such as Positive Youth Development (PYD), and the role of sports coaches in shaping learning environments that foster psychosocial growth were assessed; and evaluated the effectiveness of formal coach education programs in promoting life skill acquisition and explore alternative views on skill development through broader sport culture and context. OROSZ & MEZO (2015) A new, integrative model of sports talent, recognising that giftedness is not static but evolves through the interconnection of personal, interpersonal, and even transpersonal elements. Through a study involving young Hungarian footballers, they discovered significant psychological differences between more and less talented players, highlighting the importance of attributes like concentration, self-confidence, anxiety management, and social skills. The findings suggest that nurturing football talent effectively requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both the psychological and physical aspects of a player's development. Shen et al. (2014) Early life conditions have a lasting influence on outcomes in later life. Poor childhood environments can reduce the likelihood of surviving into old age, potentially due to the effects of early mortality selection. At the same time, supportive and resource-rich childhoods tend to lead to higher socioeconomic status in adulthood, which in turn contributes to better health and increased longevity. This aligns with the life-course pathways model. When both the immediate and long-term impacts are considered together, the overall effect of a positive childhood environment is beneficial for both health and survival in older adulthood. Babiss (2009) Sports participation may reduce depression and suicidal thoughts, though the mechanisms are not well understood. Few studies have explored mediators, with only one examining links to depression. Potential protective factors include elevated endorphin levels, enhanced self-esteem, better body image, stronger social support, and reduced substance use. Curran (2015) Youth sport contributes to adolescent well-being, though experiences can differ widely and dropout rates remain high. The research aimed to identify coach behaviors that promote positive youth sport experiences by exploring how motivational climate relates to athlete engagement specifically confidence, dedication, enthusiasm, and vigor. A mastery-oriented climate, focused on effort and learning, was hypothesized to enhance engagement, while a performance-oriented climate, emphasizing outcomes and ability, was expected to reduce it. Jose et al. (2012), Global connectedness encompassing relationships across family, school, peers, and neighbourhood has been found to predict overall well-being in youth. Adolescents with stronger social ties across these domains tend to report greater life satisfaction, higher confidence, more positive emotions, and stronger future aspirations over time, indicating a lasting impact on their well-being. Begen et al. (2015) Acute shifts in social belonging significantly influence health and well-being. Participants who experienced inclusion showed lower heart rates, elevated social self-esteem, and worsened mood, though positive mood remained unchanged. Excluded individuals showed increased heart rates, but no significant mood or self-esteem changes. Changes in social self-esteem mediated the effects of inclusion or exclusion on mood. These findings remained robust even after controlling for sex, global self-esteem, rumination, and social anxiety. While existing research highlights the potential of football to support life skills and psychosocial development in adolescents, few studies have specifically examined how football participation influences self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation in an integrated framework.

Objectives of the study:

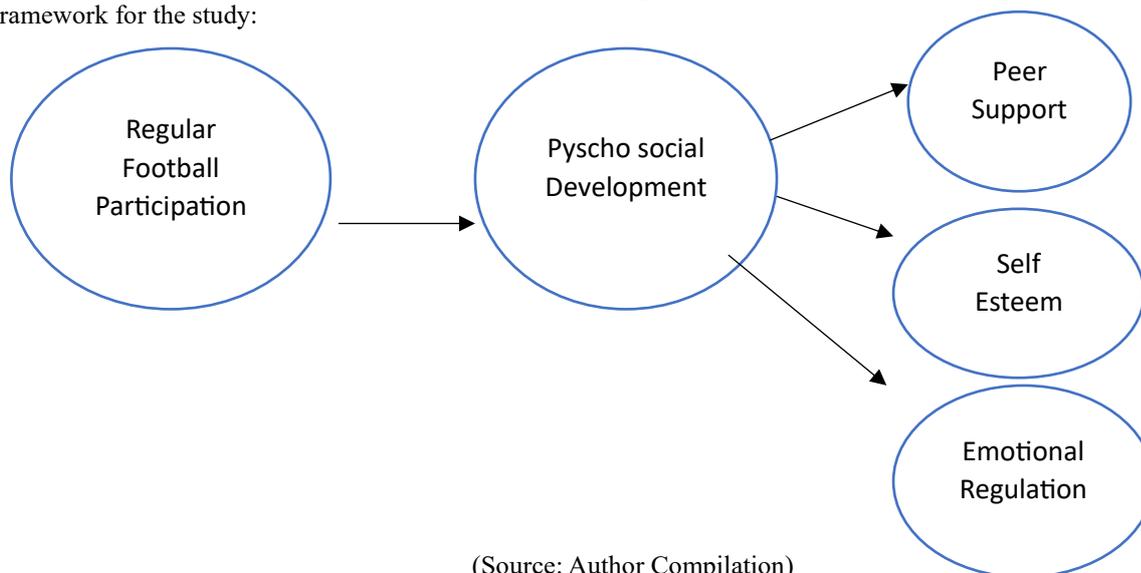
1. To investigate the influence of regular participation in football on adolescents' self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation.

2. To know if there are any gender difference in self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation among adolescents who participate in football.

Material and Methods

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood, typically occurring between the ages of 10 and 19. It is characterized by significant physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes driven largely by puberty and increased brain development. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire from Adolescents aged between 10 and 19 using purposive sampling technique from the state of Kerala. The data were collected from 100 adolescent football players to assess their psychosocial development through their engagement in football. Questionnaire consisted of four sections, first section deals with demographic factors, second section Self-Esteem (Adapted from Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale), the third section deals with Peer support consisting of five statement scale questions and the last section deals with Emotional Regulation (Adapted from Emotion Regulation Questionnaire for Children and Adolescents). The data analysis was done through SPSS software.

Framework for the study:



(Source: Author Compilation)

Results

The research design adopted for the study is descriptive and analytical. As per the objectives set for the study, three dimensions of the psychosocial variables were measured as the outcome variable of football participation. The data were obtained from 52 males and 48 females. These respondents were participating in the football with different durations; 2 respondents with less than 6 months involvement, 16 respondents with 6-12 months involvement, 50 respondents with 1-2 years experiences and 32 with more than 3 years involvement.

I. Regular football participation and adolescents’ peer support:

Prochaska (2002) both parental and peer support significantly influence adolescents' physical activity levels, highlighting the importance of social support systems in promoting healthy lifestyle choices among youth. Salvy et al. (2009) friendships and peer relationships can increase motivation for physical activity among youth, promoting greater engagement in both non-overweight and overweight individuals. Eccles (2006) found that team sports participation enhances a sense of belonging and provides opportunities for developing peer relationships and support systems.

H1: Regular football participation influences adolescents’ peer support.

Model: $Y = \alpha + \beta X_1 + e$

Y denotes the variable peer support among adolescents and Regular football participation, being the independent variable X_1 , where α and β are constants, e is the standard error.

Table 1: Regression Analysis of Regular football participation and peer support

Variable	Unstandardised Coefficient	Standardised Coefficient Beta	Standard Error
Peer Support	.706	.583	.099

$r^2 = .340$ Adjusted $r^2 = .333$, p value = .000 (Source: Primary data analysis)

The findings indicate that greater hours of football participation are significantly associated with higher levels of peer support among adolescents. The moderate correlation and significant F-test suggest that football may be meaningful in enhancing social relationships and connectedness with peers during adolescence. This supports the hypothesis that engagement in team sports like football contributes positively to psychosocial development, particularly in fostering peer relationships.

II. Regular Football Participation and Adolescents' Self-Esteem:

The collaborative nature of football fosters a sense of belonging and community, which are essential components in the development of self-esteem during adolescence. Eime et al. (2013) team sports participation is linked to improved psychological and social health outcomes, including self-esteem, due to the social interactions and support inherent in team environments.

H1: There is an influence of Regular football participation on adolescents' self-esteem.

Model: $Y = \alpha + \beta X_2 + e$

Y denotes the variable self-esteem among adolescents, and Regular football participation being the independent variable X2, where α and β are constants, and e is the standard error.

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Regular football participation and adolescent's self-esteem.

Variable	Unstandardised Coefficient	Standardised Coefficient Beta	Standard Error
Self esteem	.618	.589	.086

$r^2 = .347$ Adjusted $r^2 = .340$, p value = .000 (Source: Primary data analysis)

The analysis supports the hypothesis that regular participation in football significantly enhances self-esteem among adolescents. This highlights the important role of structured physical activity and team sports in promoting psychological well-being during formative years. Football appears to contribute not only to physical health but also to the development of confidence, identity, and self-worth in adolescents.

III. Regular Football Participation and Adolescents' Emotional Regulation:

Donaldson and Ronan (2006) the increased levels of sports participation have a positive relationship with aspects of emotional and behavioral well-being, particularly self-concepts, among young adolescents. Eime et al. (2013) team sports participation is linked to improved psychological and social health outcomes, including emotional well-being, due to the social interactions and support inherent in team environments.

H1: There is an influence of Regular football participation on adolescents' Emotional Regulation.

Model: $Y = \alpha + \beta X_3 + e$

Y denotes the variable Emotional regulation among adolescents, and Regular football participation being the independent variable X3, where α and β are constants, and e is the standard error.

Table 3: Regression Analysis of Regular football participation and adolescent's emotional regulation.

Variable	Unstandardised Coefficient	Standardised Coefficient Beta	Standard Error
Emotional Regulation	.686	.554	.104

$r^2 = .307$ Adjusted $r^2 = .300$, p value = .000 (Source: Primary data analysis)

The results support the hypothesis that regular participation in football significantly enhances adolescents' emotional regulation. Adolescents who engage more frequently in football are better able to manage and control their emotions. This aligns with previous research showing that team sports promote psychological resilience, social skills, and emotional well-being (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006; Eime et al., 2013). These findings highlight the importance of structured physical activities, such as football, in enhancing emotional self-regulation and broader psychosocial development during adolescence.

IV. Gender, Adolescents' Self-esteem, Peer support, and Emotional Regulation:

Understanding how gender may influence key psychosocial variables such as self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation is essential for a comprehensive analysis of adolescent development. Gender differences can shape the way adolescents experience social relationships and regulate emotions (Rose & Rudolph, 2006; Kling et al., 1999). This analysis aims to determine whether male and female adolescents differ significantly across these psychosocial dimensions, thereby offering insights into how gender-responsive strategies might support youth development more effectively.

H1: There is a significant difference among Gender and Psychosocial Variables.

Table 4: Gender and Psychosocial Variables

	SELF ESTEEM	PEER SUPPORT	EMOTIONAL REGULATION
Mann-Whitney U	650.000	686.000	840.000
Wilcoxon W	1826.000	1862.000	2016.000
Z	-4.176	-3.904	-2.833
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.005

a. Grouping Variable: Gender (Source: Primary data)

To examine whether there are significant differences between male and female adolescents in self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation, the Mann-Whitney U test was employed. This non-parametric test was chosen due to its suitability for comparing independent samples when the assumption of normal distribution was not met. Mean Ranks of

self-esteem showed Males- 62.00, Females- 38.04. Males reported significantly higher self-esteem than females, as indicated by the higher mean rank. The mean ranks of Peer support for Males were 61.31, Females were 38.79; The difference in perceived peer support between genders is also statistically significant ($p < .001$), with males again reporting higher levels of peer support than females. The mean ranks of emotional regulation for males were Males- 58.35 and Females- 42.00. A significant gender difference was found in emotional regulation ($p = .005$), with males scoring higher than females. Although the difference is smaller compared to self-esteem and peer support, it is still statistically meaningful.

The results reveal that gender significantly impacts all three psychosocial variables studied. Male adolescents scored higher than their female counterparts in self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation. These findings may reflect gender-specific socialization patterns or differences in how adolescents engage with sports like football and their social environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study emphasise the significant role of football in enhancing adolescents' psychosocial development, specifically in the domains of self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation. Regular participation in football was positively associated with improvements in all three variables, validating the hypothesis that structured team sports can serve as powerful developmental contexts during adolescence. The strong association between football participation and self-esteem highlights the potential of sports to build confidence and a positive self-concept among adolescents. Football, by its nature, fosters goal-setting, skill development, recognition, and belonging, factors known to enhance self-worth. The regression analysis revealed a moderate relationship, with football participation explaining a substantial portion of variance in self-esteem (adjusted $R^2 = .340$). These findings agree with Eime et al. (2013) and Babiss (2009), who found that sport participation leads to improved psychological health and reduced depressive symptoms, primarily through mechanisms like enhanced body image and self-perception. This suggests that beyond physical benefits, football contributes meaningfully to how adolescents view themselves and navigate social hierarchies. The relationship between peer support and football participation reinforces the social integrative function of team sports. Adolescents who engage regularly in football reported higher levels of peer support, indicating that the collaborative nature of the sport strengthens social bonds. This is in agreement with Prochaska (2002) and Salvy et al. (2009), who emphasized the influence of peer dynamics in promoting physical activity and social engagement. Football provides a structured environment for shared experiences, conflict resolution, and cooperation, which are essential for fostering peer trust and camaraderie. The moderate-to-strong correlation (adjusted $R^2 = .333$) suggests that team dynamics in football effectively promote interpersonal connections and belongingness, critical factors during the identity-forming phase of adolescence.

The findings show a positive influence of football on emotional regulation. Adolescents who participated in football more frequently demonstrated greater capacity to manage emotions, reflecting increased emotional resilience and control. These outcomes agree with previous literature (Donaldson & Ronan, 2006) indicating that physical activity and sport participation serve as coping mechanisms for emotional challenges. The structured and rule-bound nature of football may encourage discipline, patience, and emotion regulation in response to both success and failure; skills that transfer beyond the sports context into broader life experiences.

The gender analysis revealed significant differences, with male adolescents scoring higher than females in all three psychosocial dimensions. While these results may reflect genuine gender-based differences in sport participation experiences, they may also be influenced by broader cultural and social norms in Kerala or similar contexts, where males often receive more encouragement to engage in competitive sports. This finding is consistent with earlier work (Rose & Rudolph, 2006), which showed that males and females may develop and express psychosocial competencies differently. Future interventions should focus on creating inclusive, supportive environments that encourage female participation and address barriers they may face in sports engagement. The results strongly support the integration of football and similar team sports into youth development programs, highlighting their value in improving holistic adolescent wellbeing. Continued research should explore longitudinal effects and consider socio-cultural factors that mediate these outcomes.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that regular football participation positively influences adolescents' self-esteem, peer support, and emotional regulation, with notable gender differences favoring males. These findings emphasise football's potential as a tool for psychosocial development and suggest the need for gender-sensitive interventions in youth sports programs. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs to examine causality and explore the underlying mechanisms linking sports participation to emotional and social outcomes. Additionally, studies should investigate the role of coaching styles, cultural context, and access to sports infrastructure in shaping these developmental benefits across diverse adolescent populations.

References

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