

# RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AND THE MENTAL HEALTH OF MEDICAL STUDENTS: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

This study conducted an integrative review to investigate the relationship between participation in extracurricular activities, mental health, and quality of life among medical students. Articles published between 2002 and 2023 were included, obtained from databases such as PubMed, Scopus, SciELO, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar. The results highlight that extracurricular activities can positively influence students' adaptation to the university environment, improving academic performance and promoting emotional well-being. However, challenges were also identified, such as the overload associated with excessive involvement in extracurricular activities. The review revealed gaps in the literature, indicating the need for longitudinal studies and evidence-based interventions to further explore the specific impacts of extracurricular activities on medical education.

**Keywords:** extracurricular activities; mental health; quality of life; medical students.

## INTRODUCTION

Mental health refers to an individual's state of emotional, psychological, and social balance, which is crucial for dealing with emotions, establishing healthy relationships, and facing challenges (ALMEIDA; NOGUEIRA, 2002). The mental health of medical students is a cause for concern, given the demanding course and the daily challenges they face (ANVERSA et al., 2018). The transition to the university environment includes new academic demands, conflicts between leisure and tasks, time management, and new emotional bonds (AQUINO et al., 2022). Studies suggest that involvement in extracurricular activities can help students adapt to the academic environment and manage these demands (BARBOSA-MEDEIROS; CALDEIRA, 2021; CHEN et al., 2023). However, too many of these activities can also be a source of

overload and additional stress (DINIS et al., 2020). Understanding how students use extracurricular activities to cope with these changes and their effects on mental health and academic performance is essential (DYSON et al., 2023). This study analyzes how these activities affect the quality of life of medical students, considering both positive and negative aspects (KHAN et al., 2023).

## METHOD

An integrative literature review was conducted, covering articles published between 2002 and 2023, to investigate the relationship between extracurricular activities, mental health, and quality of life of medical students. The databases consulted were PubMed, Scopus, SciELO, Web of Science, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar (Table 1). The inclusion criteria covered studies investigating the relationship between extracurricular activities, mental health, and/or quality of life among medical students. Studies unavailable in full text and those that did not present results relevant to the topics of interest were excluded. This approach allowed for a critical analysis of existing studies, identifying gaps in the literature and suggesting areas for future interventions.

Table 1. Descriptors used in the databases

Database	Descriptors used
PubMed	Extracurricular activities, mental health, quality of life
Scopus	Extracurricular activities, mental health, medical students
SciELO	Mental health, quality of life, medical students
Web of Science	Extracurricular activities, mental health, university adaptation
PsycINFO	Mental health, academic performance, social skills
Google Scholar	Extracurricular activities, emotional well-being, overload

Source: RAMOS et al., 2024.

## RESULTS

The analysis of the reviewed articles indicates that participation in extracurricular activities is associated with better academic performance, adaptation to the university environment, and the development of social skills. However, excessive involvement in such activities can cause emotional overload and negatively impact students' mental health (Table 2). The studies reviewed highlight the importance of balancing curricular and extracurricular activities to maximize benefits and minimize risks. Proper management of these activities is crucial to promoting student well-being and ensuring their academic and personal development during medical training.

Table 2: Results: Strengths and weaknesses of extracurricular activities on mental health

Aspect	Strengths	Weaknesses
Academic performance	Better academic performance related to balanced participation	Excessive involvement may hinder performance
University adaptation	Facilitates adaptation to the university environment	Difficulty managing time
Mental	Promotes emotional well-being and improves mental health	Excessive involvement can cause emotional overload
Personal development	Contributes to the development of social skills and resilience	Pressure to participate in many activities
Quality of life	Improvement in the quality of life of medical students	Potential to increase stress due to high extracurricular demands

Source: RAMOS et al., 2024.

## CONCLUSION

This integrative review highlights that extracurricular activities play a significant role in the mental health and well-being of medical students. Evidence suggests that balanced participation in such activities can improve academic performance and promote mental health, while excessive involvement can be harmful. It is recommended that educational institutions encourage practices that ensure this balance, in addition to providing adequate psychological support to students. The need for longitudinal studies and evidence-based interventions to further understand the specific impacts of extracurricular activities on medical education is evident.

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