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Exercise Therapy as a Treatment for Men's Mental Health

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Exercise Therapy: Possible Treatment for Mental Health Issues in Men?

Abstract

By analyzing qualitative and quantitative studies, review articles, and personal anecdotes, my research determined mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety, are often under-diagnosed in men and how exercise therapy can be a viable intervention. Inaccessibility to traditional forms of treatment and stigmas surrounding seeking help stemming from traditional masculinity patterns has been shown to be a likely cause behind these statistics. Through the analysis of primary literature in scientific journals, exercise therapy has been suggested to be a very effective intervention for treating poor mental health through the experiences of patients. The serious lack of attention and research surrounding men's mental health in the western world has led to men's death by suicide rates to nearly quadruple the rate of women although women are diagnosed with mental health disorders at a higher rate. The implementation of exercise therapy into mainstream treatment for mental health has potential to improve the lives of many men by providing an accessible treatment that more men are willing to utilize.

Methods

To conduct this study, a systematic search was conducted within the Binghamton University Library Database. The search was conducted from 01/01/2008 to 01/01/2023 in order to only include information from the last 15 years. Initially, 27 articles were identified through the database search. After reviewing the title and abstract of these articles, 16 articles were found to be relevant to the research question. Full text copies were obtained and further assessed for eligibility.

Inclusion criteria for the final selection of articles were as follows:

- 1) The study had to investigate the effect of exercise on mental health
- 2) The study had to be conducted in the Western World (United States, Canada, United Kingdom)
- 3) The study had to be published in a Peer Reviewed Journal

After screening the full-text articles for eligibility, a total of 9 articles met the criteria and were included in the final analysis.

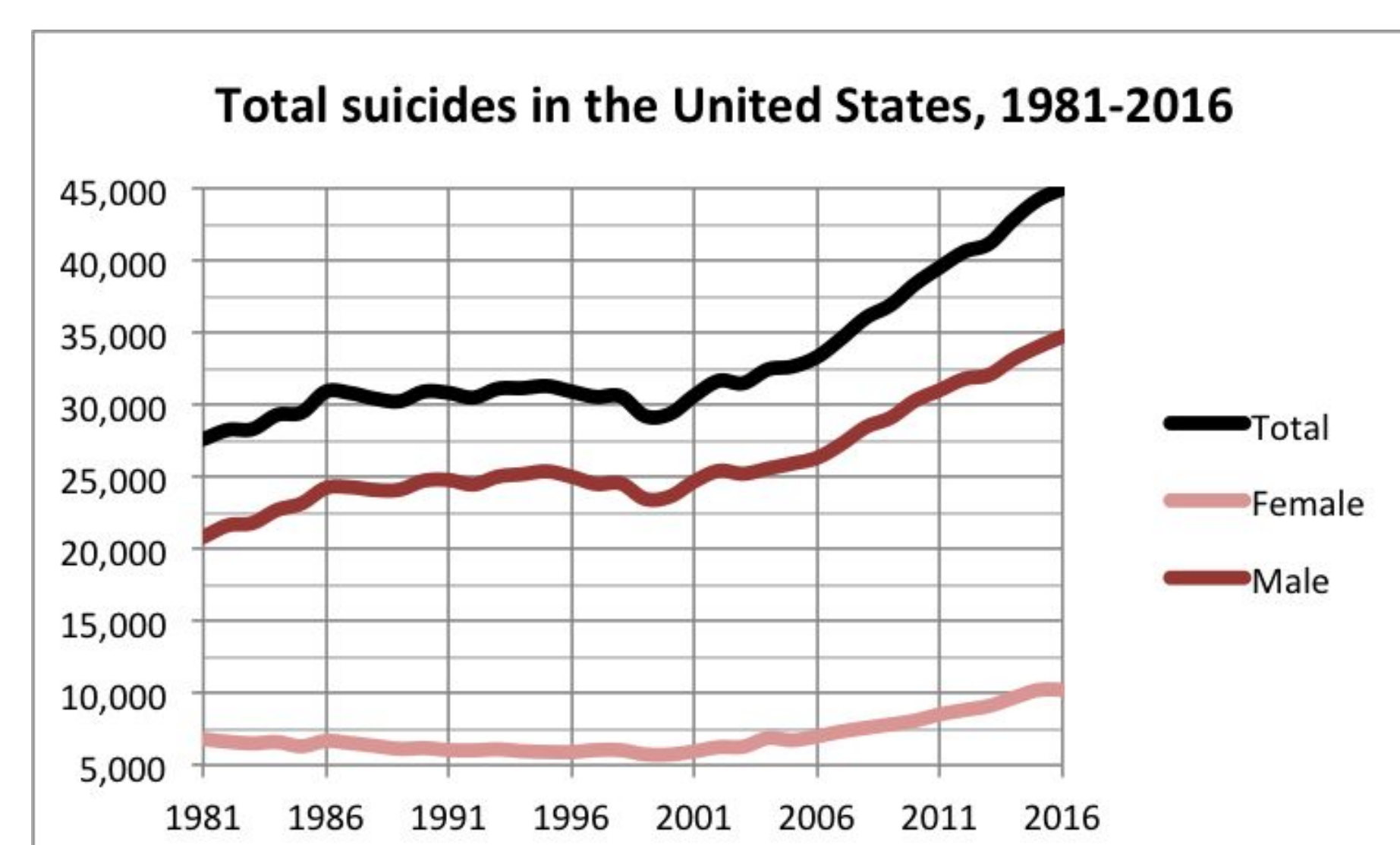
Data and visualizations were then extracted from each article.

Salman Rahman
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Introduction

Men's mental health has long been a topic of concern within the field of psychology with research indicating that men are less likely than women to seek help for mental health issues. Men's suicides are steadily increasing from 2001 and statistics show that there's a gap between suicides between men and women. Exercise therapy has emerged as a promising treatment for men's mental health, with numerous studies highlighting its benefits for reducing symptoms of anxiety, depression, and stress. Researchers have implemented mental health metrics, such as the Beck Depression Inventory-II, in order to track changes in mental health over the duration of the experiment. Despite the positive correlation between exercise therapy and improved mental health in men, it isn't being widely implemented as a treatment for mental health issues.

To gain a better understanding of exercise therapy and its potential role as a treatment for mental health issues in men, information from current literature about the distinctive features of men's mental health as well as the promising effectiveness of exercise therapy was utilized.



Results

This graph highlights the results from a study which tested the results of exercise and its effect on mental health on 104 males between the ages of 18-40. The BTN program (integrated team sport), IE program (aerobic and resistance training), and a control group were classified and assigned. The results show that those who were participants of the BTN and IE programs were able to lower their scores on the BDI-II (Beck Depression Inventory).

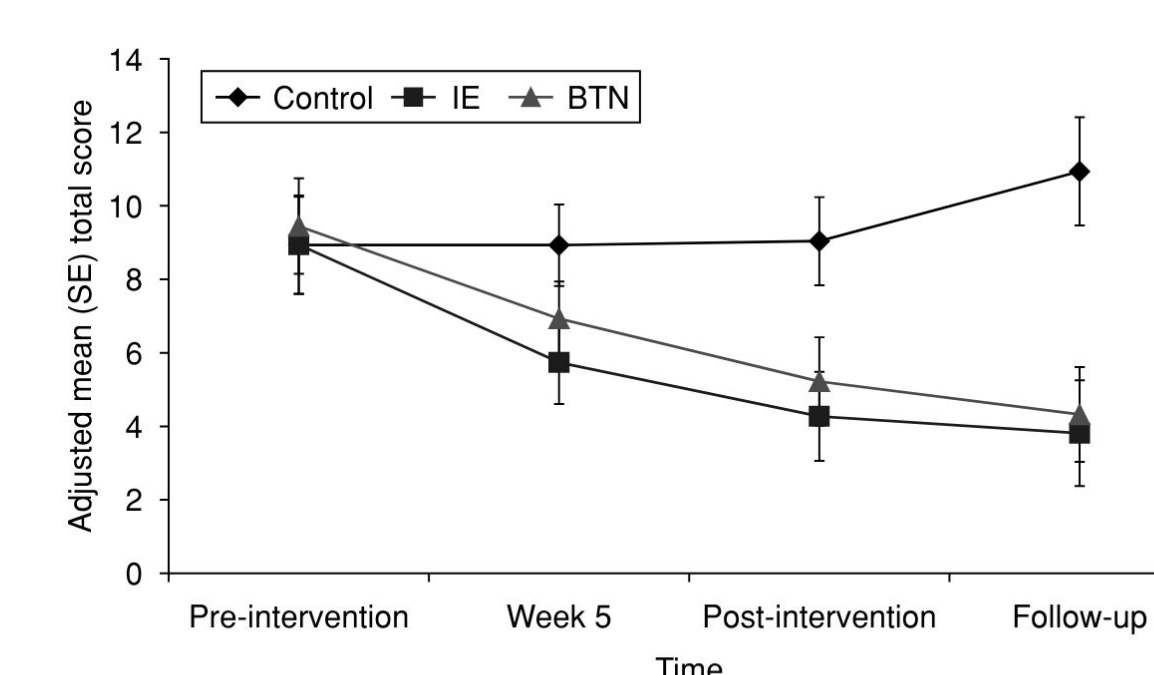


Figure 2. Adjusted mean scores for BDI-II across time.

Over the course of the exercise intervention, patients who utilized the IE and BTN Programs saw improvements in their BDI-II scores even post-intervention.

	Adjusted mean (SD) range			
	Week 1	Week 5	Week 10	8 Week follow-up
Control				
BDI-II	8.93 (6.97)	8.93 (5.86)	9.04 (5.85)	10.94 (4.42)
SPS	82.49 (9.20)	81.39 (8.54)	79.15 (8.92)	76.27 (7.41)
IE				
BDI-II	8.94 (6.98)	5.74 (5.86)	4.27 (5.91)	3.81 (4.54)
SPS	81.61 (9.31)	85.19 (8.70)	83.89 (9.01)	84.62 (7.59)
BTN				
BDI-II	9.45 (7.00)	6.93 (5.85)	5.22 (5.74)	4.32 (4.82)
SPS	77.31 (8.58)	78.24 (8.70)	78.67 (8.73)	80.04 (8.03)

Changes in BDI-II scores between the BTN, IE, and Control Groups over time.

Raw Scores	Depression Severity
0-13	Indicates minimal depression
14-19	Indicates mild depression
20-28	Indicates moderate depression
29-63	Indicates severe depression

The Beck Depression Inventory is a self-report questionnaire which is widely used in clinical and research settings to assess the severity of depression symptoms.

Upon the analysis of various articles and controlled studies regarding mental health and exercise therapy, we found promising data to show exercise programs can be utilized to improve symptoms of mental health issues.

Discussion/Conclusion/Analysis

Exercise therapy can be an effective treatment for improving mental health outcomes. The analysis of numerous articles have demonstrated the positive impact exercise can have on symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress.

A possible explanation for the beneficial effects of exercise on mental health is that it promotes the release of endorphins, which can work towards reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety. In addition, exercise can help individuals develop coping strategies for stress management and can provide a sense of accomplishment and control in order to improve self esteem.

Exercise therapy can be used in combination with other treatments, such as medication and psychotherapy, or as a standalone treatment. The type, intensity, and frequency of exercise required for optimal mental health benefits may vary depending on the individual's needs and preferences. Exercise therapy may be a particularly appealing intervention for those seeking a more holistic approach to mental health treatments.

Overall, exercise therapy is a promising and accessible intervention for improving mental health outcomes. Exercise therapy may offer a low-cost and accessible treatment option for individuals who are seeking alternative or complementary forms of mental health treatment. It may be a more attractive option for men who are opposed to seeking help as it aligns with masculine values and doesn't have any stigma associated with it. Further research is needed to better understand the mechanisms underlying the effects of exercise therapy on mental health and to determine the optimal dosage and duration of exercise therapy for different populations.

References

