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## A psychological study investigating the impact of physical fitness exercise and meditation on the overall well-being of college students

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### Abstract

Promoting good health and well-being involves prioritizing self-care practices such as maintaining a balanced diet, staying physically active, getting sufficient rest, and effectively managing stress. Taking control of one's life includes setting personal goals, making informed decisions, and seeking opportunities for personal growth and development. Additionally, accessing available social support networks entails building and nurturing relationships with friends, family, and community members, as well as seeking professional help when needed. These three components collectively contribute to an individual's ability to lead a healthy and fulfilling life. The current study aims to investigate the levels of physical, emotional, social, and academic well-being among college students. Furthermore, the study aims to assess the correlation between engaging in physical fitness exercises and meditation with various dimensions of well-being.

**Keywords:** Good health and well-being, self-care practices, balanced diet, physical activity

### Introduction

World Health Organization (1948) defined health as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity”. An important implication of this definition is that mental health encompasses more than the mere absence of mental disorders or disabilities. It represents a state of well-being in which an individual recognizes and harnesses their own abilities, possesses the resilience to cope with life's everyday stresses, can engage in productive work, and is capable of making meaningful contributions to their community.

In 1986, the World Health Organization, in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion, (The first international conference on health promotion) declared that health is “a resource for everyday life, not the objective of living. Health is a positive concept emphasizing social and personal resources, as well as physical capacities. Therefore, health promotion is not just the responsibility of the health sector, but goes beyond healthy lifestyles to well-being.”

According to Kiefer (2008) <sup>[1]</sup>, health and well-being have four characteristics-

- Being able to function and do what they wanted to do,
- Being independent or self-determining,
- Having both a physical and emotional state of well-being and
- Absence of pain.

The cornerstone of maintaining good health and overall well-being hinges upon an individual's capacity to practice self-care, take charge of their own life, and tap into available social support networks. At its most fundamental level, psychological well-being shares many commonalities with other terms that describe positive mental states, such as happiness or satisfaction. In many respects, it is not essential to dwell on fine distinctions between these terms. When someone expresses that he or she is happy or extremely satisfied with his or her life, it's fair to assume that his or her psychological well-being is quite strong.

General Well-being has been defined as encompassing people's cognitive and affective evaluations of their lives (Karatzias *et al*, 2006) <sup>[9]</sup>. Dhar, Sen and Basu (2010) <sup>[4]</sup> have stated that judgements of well-being are irreducibly subjective and that the meaning and content of

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the terms used seem to fluctuate, depending on who is using it and why it is being used.

To function optimally, subjective well-being is essential (Aelterman, Engels, Petegem, Verhaeghe, 2007) [1]. Subjective well-being has both emotional and cognitive components. The emotional component includes positive and negative affect, while the cognitive component is related to an individual's level of satisfaction with life, including their job, health, and other factors (Du H, King, Chi, 2017) [5].

Our overall well-being is intricately influenced by our thoughts, our daily actions, and the unique life experiences we encounter, the majority of which fall within our realm of control. Maintaining a positive mind-set tends to result in an improvement in our emotional well-being, fostering resilience and the ability to navigate life's challenges effectively. Lower levels of Psychological Well-being may well lead to serious illness, including cardiovascular disease, problems with blood sugar control, such as diabetes and immune system malfunctions (Chandola *et al*, 2008) [3]. Additionally, cultivating meaningful and supportive relationships greatly contributes to enhanced social well-being, as it provides a strong support system and a sense of belonging. Conversely, experiencing dissatisfaction with our job can significantly impact our workplace well-being, leading to increased stress, reduced motivation, and ultimately affecting our overall state of well-being.

### Physical Fitness and well-being

It is essential to prioritize fitness and well-being to lead a healthy and satisfying life. Fitness pertains to the physical aspect of health, encompassing activities such as exercise, sports, and other physical activities that enhance muscle strength, cardiovascular health, and overall physical endurance. In India, many stressors such as long working hours, inadequate pay, ambiguous roles, poor infrastructure, lack of social recognition, and job dissatisfaction, often associated with workplace conflict (Reddy, Anuradha, 2013) [14]. Physical activity has been reported to reduce stress and increase well-being in school teachers (Webster, Luo, Krageloh, *et al.*, 2016) [16].

Well-being includes both physical and mental health, involving elements such as happiness, self-esteem, and a sense of purpose. Achieving optimal fitness and well-being necessitates cultivating healthy habits, including regular exercise, proper nutrition, stress management, and adequate rest. Prioritizing fitness and well-being offers numerous benefits, such as improved mood, increased energy levels, and a reduced risk of chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes. Regular practice of yoga has been associated with higher levels of psychological well-being (Tihany, Boor, Emanuelsen, Koteles, 2016) [15]. Yoga intervention significantly improves self-compassion and mindfulness (Mathad, Pradhan, Sasidharan. 2017) [13]. Thus we can conclude that regular physical exercise has a positive impact on the well-being of college students, reducing stress, anxiety, and depression, improving mood and self-esteem, and enhancing cognitive function and academic performance. Students must prioritise their physical health by incorporating exercise into their daily routine.

### Meditation and well-being

Meditation is a discrete and well-defined experience of a state of "thoughtless awareness" or mental silence, in which

the activity of the mind is minimized without reducing the level of alertness (Manocha, 2000) [12]. Throughout its millennia-long history, meditation has served as a vital practice for achieving deep insight into the mystical and divine elements of existence. While its original purpose was to gain profound understanding, modern practitioners often turn to meditation as a powerful tool for relaxation and stress reduction. Mindfulness meditation may be salutogenic for immune system dynamics (Black, & Slavich, 2016) [2], increase in various dimensions of self-actualisation with meditation (Gelderloos, Walton, Orme Johnson, and Alexander, 1991) [6] and Mindfulness-based therapy is an effective treatment for a variety of psychological problems and is especially effective for reducing anxiety, depression, and stress (Khoury *et al.*, 2013) [10]. As a form of mind-body complementary medicine, meditation is renowned for its ability to induce deep relaxation and calm the mind. By honing the focus onto a singular point, this practice effectively silences the constant barrage of thoughts that contribute to stress, resulting in significant improvements in both physical and emotional well-being. Through focused attention and mindfulness, individuals can experience reduced stress levels, improved emotional regulation, and enhanced self-awareness. Moreover, meditation has been linked to increased patience, and better sleep quality. Additionally, research suggests that meditation may have beneficial impacts on blood pressure, and overall cardiovascular health.

### Purpose of the study

An overview of college students and well-being would encompass various aspects of their physical, emotional, institutional and social well-being. It would also explore the challenges and opportunities that college students face in terms of maintaining their well-being. Additionally, the overview would consider the impact of gender differences on college students' well-being. Ultimately, the goal of such an overview would be to promote a holistic understanding of college students' well-being and to identify strategies and interventions that can help them thrive academically, personally, and professionally.

### Methodology

#### Objective

- To investigate gender disparities in participating in physical fitness exercises.
- To investigate gender disparities in engaging in meditation.
- To examine gender differences in dimensions of well-being.
- To analyze the correlation between participation in physical fitness exercises and dimensions of well-being
- To evaluate the correlation between engaging in meditation and dimensions of well-being

#### Hypothesis

- Gender differences will be found in participating in physical fitness exercises.
- Gender disparities will be found in engaging in meditation.
- Gender differences will be found in scores of dimensions of well-being.
- The correlation between participation in physical fitness exercises and dimensions of well-being will be found differently in male and female students.

- The correlation between participation in meditation and dimensions of well-being will be found differently in male and female students.

**Sample**

80 students studying in undergraduate classes in Delhi NCR were randomly selected as a sample, which included 40 male and 40 female students.

**Measures and Procedure**

A survey was conducted to measure the percentage (Based on frequency) of undergraduate college students who do physical fitness exercises and meditation. With the help of the General Well-being Scale constructed by Dr Ashok K. Kalia and Ms Anita Deswal, in which answers were

obtained through a total of 55 questions. The questions were related to four dimensions of well-being.

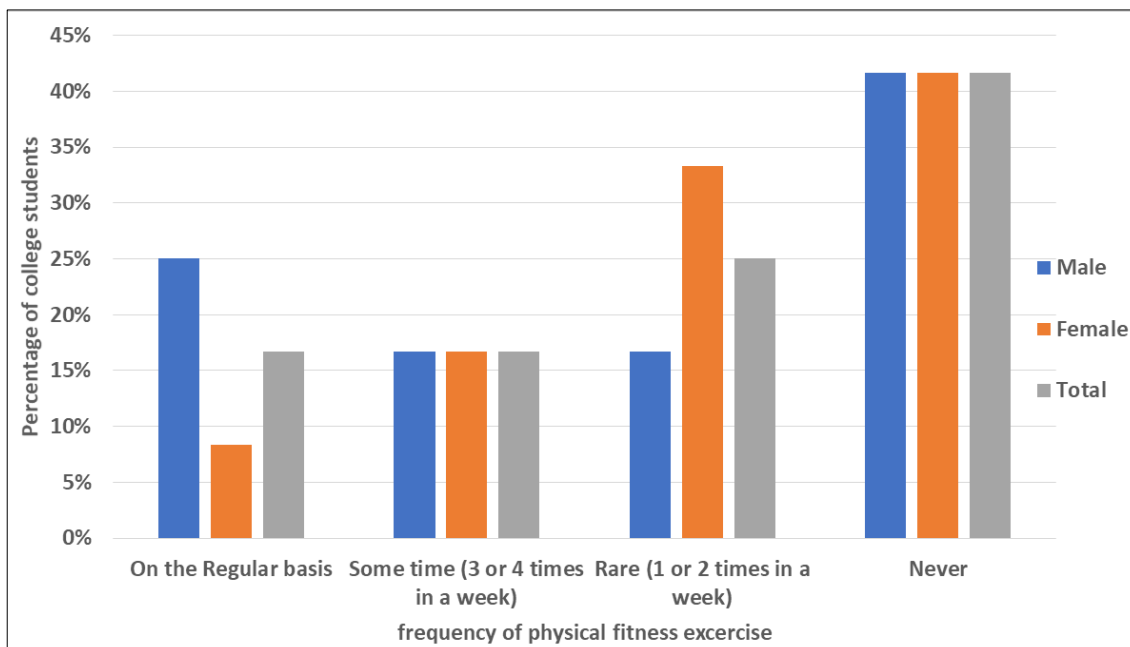
- Physical Well-being.
- Emotional Well-being.
- Social Well-being.
- School Well-being.

This study was conducted to assess the overall well-being of undergraduate college students across four dimensions. Additionally, the study measured the correlation between physical fitness exercises and dimensions of well-being, as well as the correlation between meditation and dimensions of well-being.

**Results**

**Table 1:** Percentage of College students based on frequency of doing Physical fitness Exercise

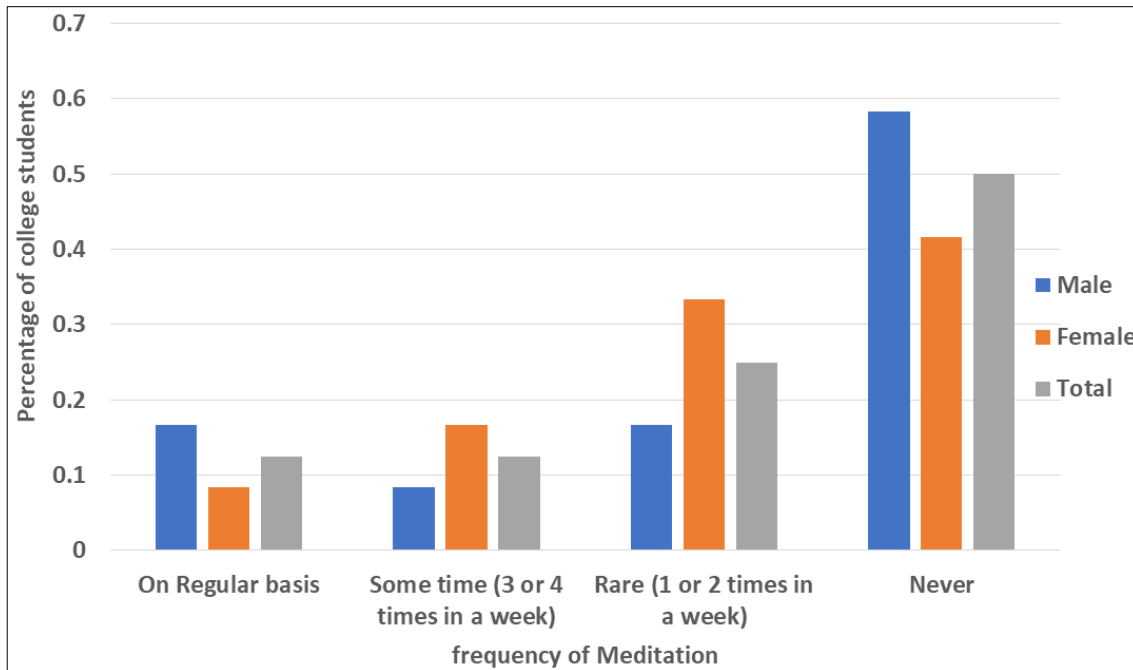
Frequency of doing Physical fitness Exercise	Male	Female	Total
On the Regular basis	25%	8.33%	16.67%
Some time (3 or 4 times in a week)	16.67%	16.67%	16.67%
Rare (1 or 2 times in a week)	16.67%	33.33%	25%
Never	41.66%	41.67%	41.66%



**Diagram 1:** Percentage of College students based on frequency of doing physical fitness exercise

**Table 2:** Percentage of College students based on frequency of doing Meditation

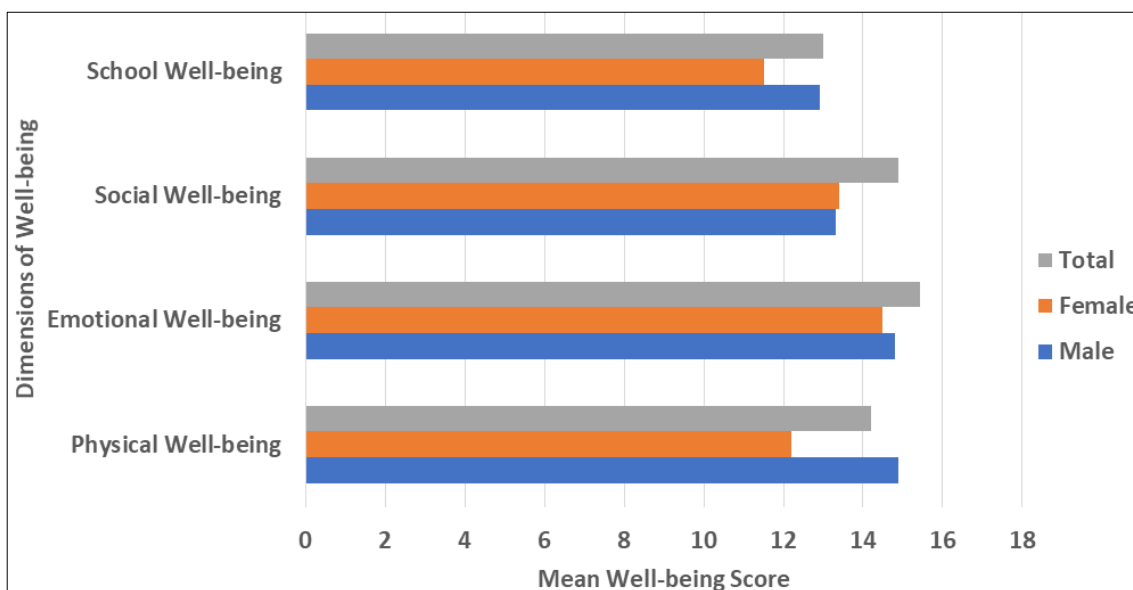
Frequency of Meditation	Male	Female	Total
On Regular basis	0.1667	0.0833	0.125
Some time (3 or 4 times in a week)	0.0833	0.1667	0.125
Rare (1 or 2 times in a week)	0.1667	0.3333	0.25
Never	0.5833	0.4167	0.5



**Diagram 2:** Percentage of College students on basis of doing Meditation

**Table 3:** Gender-wise Mean Well-being score of college students

Dimensions of Well-being	Male	Female	Total
Physical Well-being	14.9	12.2	14.21
Emotional Well-being	14.8	14.5	15.42
Social Well-being	13.3	13.4	14.9
School Well-being	12.9	11.5	13



**Diagram 3:** Gender wise Mean Well-being score of College Students

The data in Table No. 1 illustrates the distribution of college students based on their frequency of physical exercise, segmented by gender. Notably, it shows that male students tend to exercise more frequently than female students. Specifically, 25% of male students and 8.33% of female students exercise regularly. Overall, 16.67% of college students engage in consistent exercise, with equal representation from both genders at 16.67%. In the 3 to 4 times a week exercise category, again 16.67% of both male and female students participate. However, male students exercise less frequently (16.67%) than female students

(33.33%) in the once or twice-a-week category. This group represents 25% of college students. The data also indicates that the majority of college students (41.66%) do not engage in regular physical exercise, a trend that applies to both male and female students.

Table No. 2 presents the percentage of college students based on the frequency of doing meditation, categorized by gender and total percentage. 16.67% of male and 8.33% of female college students meditate regularly. 12.5% of all college students (both male and female) surveyed meditate regularly. 8.33% of male and 16.67% of female college

students meditate 3 or 4 times a week. 16.67% of male and 33.33% of female college students meditate 1 or 2 times a week. Data shows that a significant portion of both male and female students never meditate (58.33% of males and 41.67% of females). Overall, the data indicates varying levels of engagement with meditation among college students, with a notable portion not practising meditation at all.

The data in Table No. 3 offers a detailed analysis of the average well-being scores of college students, categorized by gender, across various dimensions including physical, emotional, social, and school well-being.

- Regarding physical well-being, male students reported a mean score of 14.9, higher than the female students' score of 12.2. The overall mean score for physical well-being across all students was 14.21, indicating a generally positive perception of physical health among the respondents.
- Emotional well-being exhibited slightly higher mean scores overall, with male students averaging 14.8 and female students at 14.5. The combined average across all students was 15.42, which suggests that emotional well-being is generally perceived positively among college students, albeit with a slight gender difference.
- For social well-being, both male and female students reported similar mean scores: 13.3 for males and 13.4 for females, contributing to an overall average of 14.9. This implies that students generally feel reasonably satisfied with their social interactions and support networks within the college environment.
- In terms of school well-being, male students again reported a higher mean score of 12.9 compared to females, who scored 11.5. The overall mean score for school well-being was 13, indicating that while students generally perceive their academic experiences positively, there may be some variations between genders in how they perceive their school-related well-being.

Overall, the table provides a comprehensive view of how college students rate their well-being across different dimensions, highlighting both similarities and variations between male and female perceptions. These insights are valuable for understanding the holistic well-being of college students and identifying potential areas where targeted support or interventions may be beneficial.

**Table 4:** The correlation coefficient of frequency of doing physical fitness exercise with scores on dimensions of Well-being

Dimensions of Well-being	Male	Female	Total
Physical Well-being	0.79	0.89	0.84
Emotional Well-being	0.51	0.47	0.49
Social Well-being	0.26	0.64	0.42
School Well-being	0.15	0.65	0.37

Table No. 4 presents correlation coefficients between the frequency of physical fitness exercise and scores on different aspects of well-being among college students, categorized by gender and overall totals. The correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. In this context.

**Physical Well-being:** The correlation coefficient between the frequency of physical fitness exercise and physical well-

being is strong at 0.79 for males and even stronger at 0.89 for females. The overall correlation coefficient for physical well-being across all students is 0.84, indicating a robust positive relationship between engaging in physical fitness activities and feeling physically well.

**Emotional Well-being:** The correlation coefficients for emotional well-being are lower compared to physical well-being, with males at 0.51 and females at 0.47. The total correlation coefficient for emotional well-being is 0.49, suggesting a moderate positive relationship between physical fitness exercise and emotional well-being among college students.

**Social Well-being:** There is variability between genders in the correlation coefficients for social well-being. Males have a relatively low coefficient of 0.26, while females show a significantly higher coefficient of 0.64. The overall correlation coefficient for social well-being is 0.42, indicating a moderate positive relationship overall, with a stronger impact among females.

**School Well-being:** Similar to social well-being, there are notable differences between genders in the correlation coefficients for school well-being. Males have a relatively low coefficient of 0.15, whereas females exhibit a much higher coefficient of 0.65. The total correlation coefficient for school well-being is 0.37, suggesting a moderate positive relationship overall, with a stronger association observed among females.

These findings emphasize that engaging in physical fitness exercise is generally positively associated with various dimensions of well-being among college students. The strengths of these associations vary across dimensions and between genders, underscoring the importance of physical activity in promoting overall well-being, particularly in physical and emotional dimensions, while also showing significant impacts on social and school-related well-being, especially among female students.

**Table 5:** The correlation coefficient of frequency of doing meditation with scores on dimensions of Well-being

Dimensions of Well-being	Male	Female	Total
Physical Well-being	0.71	0.83	0.74
Emotional Well-being	0.35	0.34	0.35
Social Well-being	-0.09	0.49	0.16
School Well-being	0.11	0.64	0.33

Table 5 presents correlation coefficients between the frequency of doing meditation and scores on various dimensions of well-being among college students, segmented by gender and overall totals.

**Physical Well-being:** The correlation coefficients indicate a positive relationship between the frequency of meditation and physical well-being. Specifically, males show a correlation coefficient of 0.71, while females exhibit a stronger correlation of 0.83. The overall correlation coefficient for physical well-being across all students is 0.74, suggesting that higher frequencies of meditation are associated with better perceptions of physical well-being among college students.

**Emotional Well-being:** In terms of emotional well-being, both males and females show relatively similar and

moderate correlation coefficients, with males at 0.35 and females at 0.34. The overall correlation coefficient for emotional well-being is 0.35, indicating a modest positive relationship between the frequency of meditation and emotional well-being among college students.

**Social Well-being:** The correlation coefficients for social well-being show more variability. Males exhibit a negative correlation coefficient of -0.09, suggesting a weak negative relationship between meditation frequency and social well-being among male students. In contrast, females show a stronger positive correlation coefficient of 0.49, indicating a moderate positive relationship between meditation frequency and social well-being. The overall correlation coefficient for social well-being across all students is 0.16, suggesting a weak positive relationship on average, influenced by the stronger correlation observed among females.

**School Well-being:** For school well-being, males show a modest positive correlation coefficient of 0.11, while females exhibit a stronger correlation of 0.64. The overall correlation coefficient for school well-being is 0.33, indicating a moderate positive relationship between meditation frequency and school-related well-being among college students.

These findings suggest that the frequency of meditation is associated with improved perceptions of well-being across various dimensions among college students, albeit with varying strengths and directions of correlation. Meditation appears particularly beneficial for physical and school-related well-being, with stronger associations observed among females compared to males. Emotional well-being shows a more modest association across both genders, while social well-being demonstrates a mixed relationship, being negatively correlated for males and positively correlated for females. These insights underscore the potential benefits of meditation practices in fostering overall well-being among college students, emphasizing the nuanced impacts across different dimensions and gender groups.

### Discussion

The data reveals that male students are more active in exercising than their female counterparts. Overall, only 16.67% of college students maintain consistent exercise routines, with an equal split between genders. Additionally, 41.66% of college students, both male and female, do not engage in regular physical exercise. When it comes to meditation, 16.67% of male and 8.33% of female students meditate regularly, while 12.5% of all students surveyed meditate regularly. It is widely known that regular physical exercise can have a positive impact on the well-being of college students. Exercise has been found to reduce stress, anxiety, and depression, while also improving mood and self-esteem. In addition, physical fitness has been linked to improved cognitive function and academic performance. Students need to prioritize their physical health and incorporate exercise into their daily routines. The analysis of well-being scores across different dimensions among college students revealed that male students generally reported higher scores for physical and emotional well-being compared to female students. Both genders reported similar scores for social well-being, while there were variations in school well-being, with male students scoring

higher than female students. This data provides valuable insights into the holistic well-being of college students and may help identify areas for targeted support or interventions. The study also shows a strong positive relationship between physical fitness exercise and physical well-being among college students. There is a moderate positive relationship with emotional, social, and school-related well-being. These associations vary by gender, with stronger impacts observed among female students. Lastly, the findings indicate that meditation frequency is linked to improved well-being among college students, with varying strengths and directions of correlation for different aspects of well-being. Optimal well-being stands as one of the pivotal elements of human existence, attainable through the harmony of a sound body and a nourished mind. Exploring the intricate and symbiotic relationships between physical fitness, targeted workout regimens, and mindfulness practices provides a captivating opportunity to unveil profound insights into their collective impact on holistic health and well-being.

### Conclusion

The study on the impact of physical fitness exercise and meditation on the overall well-being of college students highlights the importance of both physical and mental health practices in enhancing well-being. The data reveal that male students are generally more active in engaging in physical exercise, while a significant portion of both male and female students neglect regular physical activity and meditation. Despite this, those who engage in regular physical fitness exercises show a strong positive correlation with physical and emotional well-being, particularly among female students. Meditation also positively influences physical and emotional well-being, with a more significant impact on females, especially regarding social and school-related well-being.

The findings emphasize that incorporating regular physical fitness activities and meditation can enhance various dimensions of well-being, including physical, emotional, social, and academic well-being. However, given the relatively low engagement levels in these activities, particularly among female students, there is a need for initiatives that promote these practices. Interventions designed to encourage regular participation in both physical fitness and meditation may lead to improved overall well-being and academic performance among college students.

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