

# Young Adults' Perception and Concept of Psychological Well-being Through Physical Activity: A Photo-elicitation Study

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## Abstract

Today, psychological health is a significant health concern. For this reason, it has been deemed essential to investigate how physical activity (PA) and sports can enhance psychological well-being (PWB). Consequently, this study aims to examine and comprehend how young adults perceive PWB through PA. This study's sample consists of 34 participants between the ages of 23 and 28. All participants in this study responded to semi-structured questionnaires that included photo-elicitation as a research technique. Young adults perceived physical activity and sports as a place to cultivate their PWB by emphasizing personal development, life purpose, and social relationships. In addition, the data analysis produced new dimensions such as liberty, self-assurance, and personal equilibrium. This study provides further information that will assist policymakers and researchers in developing effective PWB and mental health promotion programs and strategies for young adults and adolescents.

**Keywords:** Psychological Well-being, Physical Activity, Photo-elicitation, Well-being Drivers, Perceptions

## Introduction

One of the primary objectives of the World Health Organization (WHO) Mental Health Initiative (2019-2023) is for all individuals to attain the utmost possible level of mental health. This allows individuals to realize their full potential, surmount normal life stresses, work productively, and contribute to the community (WHO, 2013). Even though mental health involves several variables, Psychological Well-Being (PW) is currently receiving the most attention due to pandemics and social situations (Salmon, 2021; Zolopa et al., 2022). In addition, people with high psychological well-being are more successful in various aspects of life, including education, employment, friendships, relationship quality, and physical health (Butler & Kern, 2016; Cobo-Rendón et al., 2020; Santiago, Bernaras, & Jaureguizar, 2020). Moreover, well-being has been incorporated as a specific objective within the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2030) (Naciones Unidas, 2015a, 2015b).

## Literature Review

(Dias, Cruz, & Danish, 2000; Salas, 2018) Psychological well-being in adolescence and adolescents is a current concern and a government health priority. According to the WHO (2020), mental disorders account for 16% of the

global burden of disease and injury among young adults. Therefore, failure to treat mental disorders at these ages has long-term consequences, affecting physical and mental health and limiting opportunities for a fulfilling adult existence. Therefore, developing skills and strategies for optimally coping with life's challenges is essential through high levels of physical and psychological well-being beginning at a young age (Cronin et al., 2020; McNamee et al., 2017; Pechmann, Catlin, & Zheng, 2020).

Physical activity and sports have been shown to significantly positively affect people's mental health (Malm, Jakobsson, & Isaksson, 2019; Mayoh & Jones, 2015; Wehner et al., 2021; Zhang & Chen, 2019). In addition, it improves cognitive functions and performance, enhancing mental health (Malm et al., 2019; Mnich et al., 2019).

Building on Ryff (2017, 2018) and its multidimensional model defined by 6 dimensions of PW (Autonomy, Environmental Mastery, Personal Growth, Purpose in Life, Social Relationships, and Self-Acceptance) and their systematic review of the scientific literature on the relationships between well-being and PA, Piñeiro-Cossio et al. (2021) defined Psychological Well-being in Physical Activity (PWPA) as "the state of optimal psychological functioning in the context of PA, which includes accepting one's strengths and limitations, being independent in decision-making and self-assessment, choosing or creating supportive environments and functioning positively with

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others in PA and sport, developing one's potential to the fullest, and seeking meaning and direction in life based on the values provided by PA" (p. 13). Based on these concepts, it is necessary to move from theorizing to confronting young adults' perceptions of PWPA. To do this, there is nothing better than giving them a voice through participatory research (Kowalski et al., 2018). Therefore, through the photo-elicitation technique, this study aims to discover young adults' concept of well-being and the link between well-being and the practice of PA.

Consider that during and after the pandemic, this population experienced direct consequences in their interpersonal relationships, training, education, and professional career development (Lee, Cadigan, & Rhew, 2020), variables associated with the definition of psychological well-being provided a few lines earlier.

According to social and behavioral theories of health, an individual's behavior does not exist in isolation but is instead shaped by their interaction with their environment and community. This is why photo-elicitation research techniques were deemed suitable for this study, as they enable researchers to give a voice to the real actors and contextualize the theoretical hypotheses (Schneider & Stokols, 2015). Fernández-Prieto, Canet, and Giné-Garriga (2019) demonstrate that images elicit more profound aspects of human consciousness than words and that words require less brain capacity than interactions in which the brain processes both images and words. In addition, the regions of the brain that process visual information are evolutionarily older than the regions that process only verbal information (Harper, 2002). This methodology has been utilized in numerous contexts. For example, this method is used by Bornioli, Parkhurst, and Morgan (2018) to comprehend the PWB benefits of place engagement during urban walking. Hanson, Guell, and Jones (2016) examine the impact of walking in economically disadvantaged communities. Fleury, Keller, and Perez (2009) have previously investigated the resources for PA in Hispanic women. Strachan and Davies (2015) use this methodology to comprehend and analyze youth experience and positive athletic development.

Consequently, given this context, this methodology could be a highly effective means to investigate and comprehend young adults' perceptions of psychological well-being through PA.

## Methods

### Research design

According to the Report of Qualitative Research (O'Brien et al., 2014), this is qualitative research. In 2020, data collection was conducted. The study's design considered the Spanish

legal framework governing the protection of personal data under Organic Law 15/1999 and the fundamental principles established by the Declaration of Helsinki (revised by Brazil in 2013). Two Spanish universities conducted the investigation, collecting data from a sample of the Chilean population. The Research Ethics Committee of the Autonomous Community of Aragon (CEICA) granted ethical sanction, and all participants provided informed consent.

### Instrument

Consistently, semi-structured questionnaires integrating photo-elicitation were used as a research method. This method was used to investigate the perspectives and experiences of juvenile participants. These visual images may be generated by the researcher or the participant (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Hatten, Forin, & Adams, 2013). Shaw (2021) explains that photo-elicitation is a methodology when the researcher rather than the participant produces the photographs; when the participant has the photographs, the paper employs Wang and Burris (1997) terminology of photo-voice. Harper (2002) describes photo-elicitation as eliciting more information than conventional interviews, including feelings, memories, and facts. According to Wright (2016), photo-elicitation can be defined as the deliberate exploitation of the viewer's response to the photograph and the use of images to elicit a reaction from people as part of a structured method of inquiry.

Instead of relying on indirect researcher-driven communication, this method allows young adults to share their experiences through visual representation (Epstein et al., 2006). In addition, this methodology permits a contemporary, multidimensional approach that enables participants to characterize their experiences visually and verbally, resulting in more prosperous and comprehensive data (Bates et al., 2017).

Documents utilized for this study included a research information leaflet, guidelines for administering the semi-structured photo-elicitation questionnaire, and a consent form for participants. The completion of the form took approximately 15 to 20 minutes.

### Participants and settings

The sample consisted of 34 individuals aged 21 to 29 ( $M = 25.09$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) years old (63 % women). The sampling strategy was convenient randomness. Consideration was given to voluntariness and willingness to participate. The only inclusion criterion was that the subjects fell within the juvenile age range (15-29 years). After obtaining the necessary permissions, data generation was conducted. The researchers were knowledgeable in the PWPA domain. However, there were no significant contextual factors because the photo-elicitation was conducted through a Google form without the researcher's presence due to global pandemic constraints when the data was collected.

**Method and Procedure**

The specific procedure for the development of the PWPA photo-elicitation instrument was as follows:

(i) Definition of the constructs of the PWPA concept.

The analysis and definition of the PWPA previously presented served as the starting point. Each dimension of well-being was defined using Ryff (1989, 2014, 2017, 2018) and aspects endemic to PA, such as movement and bodiliness. Following the definitions, which were examined and agreed upon by several researchers, the constructs comprising each were delineated and presented in Table 1.

(ii) Selection of images linked to the constructs that make up the definition of PWPA, its dimensions, and constructs.

Three researchers with a substantial background in PW and PA independently selected six photographs for each PWPA construct. After compiling the initial set of

images, the principal researchers made a preliminary selection of the most representative images of each construct to present them to a group of experts and conduct a group discussion for the final selection of photographs. Consequently, 18 images were chosen for each construct.

(iii) Analysis by a group of experts to filter and select the battery of images.

A discussion group was conducted with six specialists (3 psychology professionals and 3 PA professionals). First, the images most likely to represent each construct were chosen by consensus. Next, each expert selected the photograph that best represented their criteria and explained their selection. Additionally, if they deemed it appropriate, they were invited to suggest any image that could best depict the concept. (iv) Selection of the images that form part of the photo-elicitation.

Following this discussion, 18 images (see Figure 1) were chosen for this photo-elicitation study. Each image represented a critical construct of the PWPA concept (see Table 1).

**Table 1**

*Dimensions, Definition, and Constructs of Psychological Well-Being through PA (PWPA)*

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Dimension Definition</b>	<b>Construct</b>
Self-acceptance	Ability to accept one's characteristics in practicing PA with one's possibilities and limitations. It involves identifying strengths and weaknesses and feeling satisfied with one's physique and character.	Self-concept Self-efficacy Historical acceptance
Positive Relationships	Ability to establish reciprocal, empathic, quality, and trusting relationships in PA that enhance personal qualities and those of others, generating value and strengthening identity and belonging.	Friendship Contribution of relationships Support
Autonomy	Ability to make decisions and to choose independently and thoughtfully when, how, and where to practice. The feeling of being the initiator of one's actions without social pressure, acting according to one's values and convictions. At the same time, the desire to do PA for enjoyment, not out of obligation.	Decision-making Critical thinking Self-assessment
Environment Mastery	Ability to adapt to different contexts, identifying which are positive and negative, as well as to control the environment, and to deploy on it with security and confidence, taking advantage of the opportunities that arise. In turn, it is the capacity to generate favorable environments for oneself and others.	Adaptation to the Environment Perception of control Analysis of the environment
Personal Growth	A conscious feeling of continuous development, constantly seeking the maximum potential of one's abilities and talents. At the same time, the openness to face challenging experiences will lead to progress.	Intention to grow Exploratory interest Perception of personal development
Purpose in Life	It is the ability to give meaning and significance to one's practice. It includes setting goals and objectives and striving with determination to achieve them. It involves knowing what one hopes to accomplish in PA and setting expectations for achieving those results.	Search for Meaning Goals and objectives Capacity for introspection



Figure 1. Agreed images by the group of experts for the PWPA

Five questions were formulated to enable participants to delve deeper into the concepts. These queries were defined based on the purpose of the study and validated by PWB and PA criteria experts.

### Photo-elicitation application procedure

Participants were instructed to choose one, two, or three images representing the PWPA. Then, they were asked to select and discuss the chosen images. The appended semi-structured questionnaire includes the following questions: How would you describe the image(s)? Why did you choose this/these images? What do you see in the image(s)? How does it relate to your well-being? Why does this image remind you of PWPA? Why does this image fit into your conception of psychological health? They were encouraged to express themselves as freely as possible, that there were no correct or incorrect answers, and to include all the details, emotions, sensations, and ideas inspired by the photographs. It was emphasized that the data collected for the study was completely confidential and anonymous so that participants could feel comfortable expressing themselves freely.

In addition to sociodemographic information, information on the type of PA they performed was gathered. Although it was not possible to obtain an objective assessment of participants' PA levels, participants were asked if they considered themselves to be active and to describe the amount of PA they typically engaged in each week, the number of hours, the reason, the location, and their family's PA habits.

### Data analysis procedure

The data analysis fulfills the primary objective of this study, which was to determine the perceptions of young adults aged 15 to 28 regarding psychological well-being as a result of PA. In other words, the objective was to collect various data regarding the participants' perceptions of psychological well-being and its prospective relationship with PA.

Four analysts contributed to the data analysis. First, they independently read and analyzed the gathered data and photos. Ryff (1989, 2014, 2017, 2018) Each identified the principal codes based on the scientific literature and the dimensions and constructs from which the instrument was

constructed. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, with each researcher classifying the information obtained into previously established constructs or, if deemed necessary, formulating a new construct. Later, these data clusters were analyzed and reorganized into themes based on the investigators' level of agreement on individual data analysis until the researchers could confidently classify all themes into functional constructs (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The research identified and incorporated new constructs that the researchers had not hypothesized before the study. The data was encoded with the N-VIVO 12 program.

## Results

Following the completion of the data analysis, the obtained results are presented. First, the data collected regarding the PA performed by the participants and their perception of whether or not they are physically active are described. Later, about the objective mentioned above, the presentation of the results is structured based on each of the analyzed dimensions, specifying the constructs defined in each of them as well as those new constructs that have emerged directly and consistently from the data analysis - through the frequency of occurrence (n) for each dimension and construct. Finally, the frequency of occurrence of each dimension and construct is displayed in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Results of dimensions and constructs*

Dimension	n	Constructs	n
Self-acceptance	23	Self-concept	14
		Self-efficacy	6
		Historical acceptance	3
Positive Relationships	81	Friendship	7
		Contribution of relationships	48
		Support	26
Autonomy	47	Decision-making	13
		Self-confidence	10
		Self-assessment	11
		Freedom	13
Environment Mastery	5	Adaptation to the Environment	2
		Perception of control	2
		Positive environments generator	0
		Analysis of environment	1
Personal Growth	95	Intention to grow	25
		Exploratory interest	4
		Perception of personal development	31
Purpose in Life	78	Balance body-mind-environment	35
		Search for Meaning	23
		Goals and objectives	48
		Capacity for introspection	7

## Physical activity

This study's participants responded to the frequency with which they conducted PA, the type of PA they performed, the location where they performed PA, and their motivations. They also indicated the existence of family members who regularly performed PA. Concerning these factors, the collected data revealed that nearly half of the participants in this study (47%) devote between 1 and 3 hours per week to physical activity, while 24% of the sample devoted between 3 and 5 hours per week. Physical conditioning (30%), cycling (21%), yoga (17%), and functional training (15%) were the most popular forms of PA among participants. In addition, 53% of participants engage in physical activity at home, compared to 21% who do so outside. Regarding the reason they engage in PA, most of their responses (65%) are associated with enhancing their physical and mental health, i.e., their quality of life. Lastly, 65% of participants reported that at least one family member regularly engages in PA.

## Self-acceptance

The first dimension proposed is self-acceptance (n=23). It consists of various constructs, such as self-concept (n=14), self-efficacy (n=6), and historical acceptance (n=3). These constructs refer to the approval of one's own body and its condition for the practice of PA, the awareness of one's strengths and limitations for the practice of PA, and the satisfaction with PA performed in the past and the present, respectively. In this regard, participants' perceptions of well-being are primarily influenced by self-concept and self-efficacy, with an emphasis on "how I look" and "how I feel". There is a close relationship between PA and self-awareness, as some participants noted that PA allows them to comprehend themselves in an environment where skills and competencies are revealed. On the other hand, they frequently convey explicitly that PA "makes them feel better." Several examples follow:

Participant 4: *It increases self-esteem and helps in self-perception, also generating the activation of neurotransmitters that allow a feeling of pleasure.*

Participant 12: *PA can also be used as a tool for self-knowledge.*

Participant 22: *The feeling of personal satisfaction, knowing you are capable, a sensation of fulfilling yourself, is significant for self-knowledge and self-esteem. I think it generates well-being in two areas: knowing one's limitations, knowing that one can overcome obstacles, and knowing what kind of things I am not capable of doing.*

## Social relationships

This dimension refers to the capacity to form positive social relationships (n=81) with various agents in the

environment through PA, thereby enhancing psychological well-being. In this regard, friendship (n=7), contribution to social relationships (n=48), and social support (n=26) are valued. In the case of friendship, PA is associated with creating and promoting relationships between friends through the practice of PA, as well as the desire to participate in sports prompted by the desire to meet and spend time with friends. The collected testimonials demonstrate the significance of friendships in pursuing well-being in PA.

Participant 8: *I chose this image because it brings back lovely memories of the moments one can have when doing PA or sports with friends.*

Participant 13: *It is related to well-being because social interactions are fundamental to feeling good. Friendship in this case, friendship is something extraordinary that sport provides.*

Participant: 31: *I feel that doing what you like is excellent, even more so if you do so in an environment with friends.*

Another concept derived from this dimension is the contribution to social relations, which refers to the impact of PA on getting to know people better and enhancing the sense of group membership. In this way, participants highlighted the importance of these relationships to well-being.

Participant 6: *The feeling of belonging to a team is part of my well-being, as it has a support network.*

Participant 16: *Having contact with people outside your immediate circle and doing an activity together is gratifying for the soul and allows you to disconnect from reality for a while, which for me is to be balanced in life.*

Participant 23: *Because I think that the friendships generated by sport sometimes motivate more than the sport itself, and always being able to share with people who have similar interests will give you the confidence to be who you are and the necessary support to be able to grow and develop as a good person.*

The final construct in this dimension relates to the social support that PA and sports participants receive from their immediate environment (parents, teachers/coaches, etc.). This support participants view the support of those closest to them as a crucial element for achieving objectives and goals in PA and granting special teamwork recognition as a factor that promotes well-being.

Participant 2: *When you practice group sports, you get to the point of spending more time with them than with your own family, it reminds me of my school days when I was in one of the sports teams, and it brings back nice memories of good and bad times that we spent together as a team, always managing to get ahead, just like families do.*

Participant 14: *Teamwork is an essential skill that makes me feel good.*

Participant 18: *Reflecting on teamwork, while it is essential to develop personal skills, it is also good to have a circle of support, people close to you who are interested in what you do and share similar experiences to improve as a group and as a person.*

### **Autonomy**

The autonomy dimension (n=47) initially encompassed only three primary constructs (decision-making, critical thinking, and self-evaluation; (Ryff, 2017, 2018). As a consequence of these analyses, however, the constructs of this dimension have been refined as follows: decision-making, self-confidence (instead of critical thinking), self-assessment, and freedom (as a new construct).

The ability to make independent decisions regarding aspects of PA practice was maintained. Under the decision-making heading (n=13), participants report that PA allows them to make decisions within a personal framework, free from external coercion and of their own volition.

Participant 5: *It is part of well-being because it comes from you. No third party tells you how to do things or play, only someone who gives you the essential tools, and you develop them to achieve something much better.*

Participant 17: *Because we always have the option of continuing along a path that forms active and sporting habits that lead us to well-being.*

Participant 18: *It is essential not to feel that sport is an obligation but a daily decision to do it. Otherwise, I don't feel like it.*

Another of the initial constructs derived from this dimension was critical thinking (n=10), defined as the capacity to express opinions, be confident in one's way of thinking, and evaluate the personal benefits of participating in sports. However, after analyzing the collected data, it was unanimously decided to change the name of the critical thinking construct to the construct of self-confidence, as it was deemed more appropriate and more following the concept's definition.

Participant 1: *Because in life, you have to have sporting habits to feel good about yourself, to have a healthy body, and even if you think you don't have time or money, there are always options.*

Participant 8: *As for negative emotions, it is necessary to know how to identify and manage them to create an opportunity for growth through sport and what it brings.*

Participant 10: *I tend to be a person who gets stressed and frustrated very quickly when things are not working out for me. This image gives me peace of mind and perseverance on my way, that everything will be fine and that there is always a solution, but with peace of mind, without losing your way, even if it is difficult.*

Another construct refers to self-assessment (n=11) related to comparing oneself with others or benchmarking oneself and differentiating sports practice based on the enjoyment it provides instead of performance out of obligation. In this regard, most participants report a task- or mastery-driven motivational orientation, emphasizing self-improvement rather than social comparison.

Participant 3: *Competing with ourselves is the best competition in the world. My effort has been very worthwhile,*

Participant 21: *The phrase "I am the fruit of my effort" represents sporting life very well.*

Participant 23: *What a great feeling it is to achieve what you set out to do. I think that is one of the best things to happen in life: feeling rewarded for your own effort. It gives me 100% fulfillment, happiness, and well-being.*

Finally, a new concept, freedom (n=13), emerged. This contribution is validated by the frequency with which participants mentioned this term in their statements concerning wellness and physical activity. In addition to the freedom to make decisions, it provides a sense of liberation - not being confined in a space - and emotional release by allowing me to do what and how I want.

Participant 3: *It reminds me of that feeling of freedom, of space, of movement, which reminds me of the feeling of freedom that riding a bicycle brings me, at my own pace, at the speed I want.*

Participant 12: *Feeling empowered, free, calm, "loose," and at peace after doing a liberating PA of this style.*

Participant 25: *She suggests and invites me to continue doing PA, to add days and hours of training. I relate it to well-being, as I consider freedom part of feeling pleasantly inside the same cages we sometimes have (mental and ideological).*

### **Environment Mastery**

Environment mastery (n=5) comprises the constructs of environment adaptation (n=2), perception of control (n=2), and environment analysis (n=1). This dimension includes the ability to adapt to different situations or circumstances brought about by the environment, the assumption of control over one's actions and their outcomes, the availability of tools that promote performance in a variety of environments, and the ability to make the most of each situation and create positive environments. Participants have made limited references to issues associated with this environment mastery.

Participant 14: *In the image, I can see how the athlete goes through different states and knows how to manage, over time and with additional learning and tools that sport provides, those emotional states. The image reminds me that in life, everything is acquired through effort.*

Participant 31: *I see movement with nature. It evokes well-*

*being because it is a kind of disconnection from everyday life, technology, or confined spaces. It is part of my concept of well-being because I also need nature, not only when I move.*

### **Personal growth**

This dimension is one of the most highly regarded by the study's participants. Consequently, the link between the perception of PWPA and personal development (n=95) can be observed based on the evidence provided by the participants. This dimension consists of three specific constructs: growth intention (n=25), exploratory interest (n=4), and perception of personal development (n=31). First, the intention to develop is defined as the effort to increase one's potential and the ability to benefit from the knowledge gained through sports practice, regardless of whether these are positive or negative aspects. Participants associate personal development with self-improvement and exertion in this sense.

Participant 4: *I think that improving yourself and getting better will always be positive.*

Participant 16: *Seeing how much you have advanced and grown through sport, everything it has given you and taken away from you, but it gives you the space for personal self-knowledge that other activities or occupations do not provide you.*

Participant 26: *I see that it shows a never-ending path because, in the end, one can set goals to achieve, but you will always want to keep improving yourself, and for that, there is no end.*

The second construct, exploratory interest, refers to the pursuit of new methods of learning, challenges, and experiences in PA and the enjoyment of the opportunities it affords. They also highlight the challenge component of PA as a catalyst for personal development.

Participant 7: *Each goal you achieve is a learning experience contributing to your personal development. Setting goals and achieving them allows you to analyze yourself.*

Participant 15: *You become more aware of your body and capabilities, allowing you to face new challenges.*

The third construct is the perception of personal development, which refers to PA as an ongoing process of effort, learning, and growth that applies to all aspects of life and encourages the acquisition of values that contribute to a better person. According to the participants, PA acquires the status of a health development tool, so they perceive an improvement in their lives when PA allows for personal development on a physical and psychological level; a large proportion of participants perceive personal growth on these two levels after beginning to be physically active.

Participant 9: *It will give you the confidence to be who you are and the support you need to grow and develop as a good person.*

Participant 13: *I can see how the athlete goes through different states and knows how to manage those emotional states over time and with different learning and tools that sport provides. The image reminds me that in life, everything is acquired through effort.*

Participant 33: *Overcoming the mini goals has improved my personal life. I have been able to rest better. I feel healthier. It has improved my self-esteem and confidence. It has helped me to know the limits of my body and not to force it, and above all, it has helped me to understand that PA should not be left aside because of all the benefits it brings to me.*

To conclude this dimension, a new concept is proposed that was not mentioned in the initial idea of psychological well-being. After analyzing the collected data, the researchers reached a consensus and supported the incorporation of a recurrent and consistent construct, body-mind-environment balance (n=35). This new construct seeks to give a voice to all the dimensions that can influence performance by establishing the connection between them and highlighting the significance of their balance to ensure holistic psychological well-being.

Participant 8: *How I feel to generate well-being within the sport is essential, and being in balance with myself and my environment gives me a sense of well-being.*

Participant 13: *Sport is also necessary for a healthy mind, and being mentally and physically healthy generates well-being and a better quality of life overall.*

Participant 17: *I relate it to well-being because of a life experience, because for me starting to train my body and mind has been incredible, a crucial change in my life. I have grown a lot.*

#### **Purpose in life**

The constructs of the search for meaning (n=23), goals and objectives (n=48), and capacity for introspection (n=7) comprise the last of the dimensions (n=78) presented as a set of factors that contribute to the achievement of PWPA. The first of these, the search for meaning, establishes a connection between PA and giving life meaning, imparting a sense of purpose, and enriching life. In addition, participants believe that PA provides them with a sense of fulfillment, referring to this feeling as desire or purpose.

Participant 12: *Fulfilment, personal development, and self-esteem in tune.*

Participant 19: *This sport has moved me since I was a child. It invites me to practice it, continue to surround myself in it and with it, and work to improve the performance of the people who practice it.*

Participant 21, *I was like that some time ago, wanting a "perfect body," but I feel that this is guided by what others think of the body and oneself. It is like a deviation from*

*healthy living, and it prevents one from exercising to just be happy and have more profound energy and a sense of life.*

Second, the goals and objectives construct incorporates the proposition of PA-related objectives, setting goals as a source of satisfaction, and the ability to set PA-related goals. In this sense, many people state that PA forces them to set goals and objectives; again, commitment, effort, and work are viewed as essential components of life's purpose.

Participant 14: *I think it is related to well-being because it makes sense to set and achieve your goals, and it is very satisfying to live the process of reaching and achieving one.*

Participant 23: *Each goal achieved is a learning experience contributing to personal development. Setting goals and achieving them allows you to analyze yourself.*

Participant 31: *Sport will enable us to achieve goals and objectives set by ourselves, which we achieve thanks to our motivation and effort.*

Introspection refers to the ability to renew goals and objectives, refocus objectives according to requirements, and maintain explanation and meaning in the practice of PA. In this respect, participants claim that PA provides them with happiness, tranquility, a sense of accomplishment, and the desire to develop based on their own goals rather than what others say.

Participant 3: *It suggests to me that there is a dedication behind it, a commitment, a motivation, failures, falls, etc.*

Participant 21: *In this image, I see the tranquility of the inner observation that one makes in life, whether it is making decisions or analyzing possible issues that one can improve.*

Participant 31: *I feel that one of the benefits of doing an activity is to get to know oneself, to go deeper into myself, to know what I like, what I dislike, why I made a mistake, or why I made a particular decision and not another. To be able to have some time with me.*

## **Discussion**

The current study was based on the hypothesis that young adults' perceptions of PWPA are consistent with the dimensions and constructs derived from Ryff (2017, 2018) definition of psychological well-being and Piñeiro-Cossio's (2021) definition of PWPA. We began with a deductive approach, considering a series of previously studied dimensions/constructs made explicit by the aforementioned theoretical models. However, the study sample revealed what is truly significant, supplying pertinent data that strengthens the theoretical model among young adults. For example, body-Mind-Environment balance (within the Personal Growth Dimension) and freedom (within autonomy) are two new relevant constructs not previously considered in the literature. This is the most remarkable aspect.



In contrast, neither Historical Acceptance (Self-Acceptance) nor the mastery of the Environment dimension with its three constructs (Adaptation to the Environment, Perception of Control, and Analysis of the Environment) are expressed or perceived as relevant by the sample. In addition, the construct of Critical Thinking (Self-Acceptance) would make more sense if a different name referred to it but within the same dimension. As a result, the judges agreed that this construct should be named "Self-Confidence" because it does not refer to critical reasoning but to self-confidence and self-assurance.

Regarding the dimensions, it is observed that Self-Acceptance was not one of the most significant for young adults, as it was only mentioned 23 times. There is almost no mention of Historical Acceptance (only 3 times), which may make sense given the life cycle of the participants, and "Self-confidence" replaces "Critical thinking" in the curriculum. These findings are consistent with [Bal et al. \(2020\)](#) assertion that as the duration of PA increases (particularly in females), so does self-confidence. In addition, the literature indicates that the methodology approach utilized in the development of PA impacts empowerment and self-confidence ([Bessa et al., 2021](#)).

Social Relationships were one of the most pertinent dimensions for the study sample (n=81). This data is supported by the findings of [Martínez Martínez and González Hernández \(2017\)](#), who state that the practice of PA enhances the physical self-concept, which in turn leads to an improvement in the social perception of adolescents, thereby facilitating their integration into the group class. Regarding adults, [Cuadra-Peralta, Cáceres, and Guerrero \(2016\)](#) state that social support is a variable associated with quality of life and well-being, a notion supported by several other researchers ([Gómez, 2010](#); [Herrera & Kornfeld, 2008](#); [McDavid & McDonough, 2019](#)). In turn, social relationships are directly related to fundamental psychological needs, and PA is a tool for satisfying them. Understandably, those who practice PA in this population have as one of their goals (among others) to develop relationships with their peers. These findings are consistent with those of [Fernández-Prieto et al. \(2019\)](#), who found that social and familial relationships motivate PA practice.

Similarly, the concept of autonomy gains significance in the discourse. PA is where young adults can develop and make independent decisions, fostering their autonomy. In this dimension, we highlight the emergence of a new construct, freedom, a significant predictor of psychological well-being for young adults, possibly influenced by the pandemic they are currently experiencing. In this regard, [Agyar \(2013\)](#) investigated the significant positive correlation between self-esteem, perceived freedom in leisure, and life satisfaction.

Mastery of the Environment was scarcely mentioned, with only three mentions among its three dimensions. This could be explained by the present pandemic context, in which young adults may feel constrained to master or perform optimally in an uncertain environment. From this vantage point, ambiguity may be a variable that directly impacts well-being ([Godinić & Obrenovic, 2020](#)). However, there are studies in which the application of specific PA programs improves the dimension of mastery of the environment in young adults ([Hudson, Spence, & McHugh, 2020](#); [Navarro Patón, Castedo Lombao, & Basanta Camiño, 2013](#)), so the data do not permit us to draw a conclusion regarding this dimension in particular and require us to investigate it further.

As the theory suggests, psychological well-being desires the self-actualization of its subjects. Consequently, it makes sense that the Personal Growth dimension is the most frequently mentioned by the sample population. This dimension is closely related to the Meaning in Life dimension, which also received a high rating (n=78). In this regard, goals and objectives, desires or objectives, commitment, and effort stand out. Relevant here is that the discourse points to setting goals that will enable them to advance, which directly relates to the dimension of "Personal development." In this way, it has been observed that young adults and adolescents who orient their practice toward mastery of the task, setting goals and objectives for development rather than results, generate higher levels of well-being and, consequently, greater intrinsic motivation ([Shen et al., 2020](#)). According to [Martínez et al. \(2020\)](#), adolescents and young adults have a more excellent mastery orientation, pursuing personal improvement and setting goals and objectives.

Numerous physical activity (PA) programs to enhance the mind-body connection have been documented in the scientific literature, particularly in medicine ([Adamson et al., 2018](#); [Lucha-López et al., 2017](#); [Williams et al., 2018](#)).

Researchers identified several transversal values, which emerged repeatedly and are perceived as transformative due to the fundamental analysis. In other words, they all appear to contribute to the development of well-being and are interconnected with the analyzed vital constructs. These values are tenacity, communication (intra and inter), respect (to oneself and others), (self-) acceptance and general acceptance of others, awareness (self- and social-), self-knowledge, self-improvement, empowerment (self and to others), mindfulness, and connection (to oneself and others).

One of the remarkable aspects of these data-driven values is that (1) they appear to be clear predictors of

psychological well-being, (2) they are all linked to PA comments, and (3) they all refer to inner and outer dimensions, i.e., the self and the social dimension are intrinsic to each value.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, young adults perceive physical activity and sports as spaces to cultivate their psychological well-being, emphasizing their effect on Personal Growth, Life Purpose, and Social Relationships.

Simultaneously, we observe the emergence of new dimensions, such as Freedom (Autonomy) and Body-Mind-Environment Balance (Personal Growth), as well as the redefinition of others, such as Self-confidence and the lack of emphasis that young adults place on Mastery of the Environment and Self-knowledge.

As proposed improvements, we suggest transferring these findings into quantitative research to compare and contrast the model derived from these results and generate new research to confirm these findings and compare them with other populations. In light of the significant increase in mental health disorders and the need to promote and foster PWB in this population, this study provides policymakers with important information that can be applied to the development of programs that can stimulate, through physical activity and sports, the PWB of youth, thereby preventing complex, risky behaviors and situations that result from poor mental and physical health. In light of the significance of self-realization and individual development in the aftermath of traumatic events such as those experienced in recent years, we believe it is imperative to increase the visibility of the psychological health of the population.

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