- Sports / Child psychology

Kids' sport can tackle mental health issues

Huddersfield Daily Examiner · 14 May 2025 · 6

PLAYING football, rugby or netball as a child could help ward off mental health problems in adolescence, a new study suggests.

But time playing sports appears to taper off during children's school years, researchers found.

The new study, published in the British Journal of Sports Medicine, examined data on more than 16,000 children in Sweden.

They were tracked from birth to the age of 18, with information gathered about their physical activity levels, time spent outdoors and time spend participating in organised sports.

Researchers also gathered information on whether or not the children were diagnosed with any psychiatric disorders.

During the study period, 15% of the youngsters were diagnosed with mental illness, including anxiety, depression, sleep problems and eating disorders.

And levels of exercise appeared to decline as children age – from an average of 4.2 hours a day among children the age of five to 2.5 hours a day for those aged 11 years.

Academics found that exercise, particularly organised sports, appeared to carry a protective effect against mental illnesses during teenage years.

Those who were physically active at the age of 11 were found to be 12% less likely to be diagnosed with any psychiatric condition until they were 18 years old.