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‘‘The relationship between active mobility and mental health—a systematic review’’

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Purpose: Evidence shows that Active Mobility (AM), defined as ‘‘walking and cycling for transport solely or in combination with public transport’’ (1), has a positive influence on physical health as it increases physical activity levels (2). However, its psychological effects are much less studied, even though both aspects of health are important. The objective of this review is to identify studies that have focused on the effects of AM on different mental health outcomes, to summarise what if anything has been learned, and to highlight possible future research objectives.

Methods: A Systematic Literature Review was conducted using data sources including PubMed, ProQuest, Web of Science, and Scopus. Inclusion criteria were:

- primary studies
- use of the English language
- adult study sample
- AM (defined as active means of travel/transport) as an exposure
- mental health factors as outcomes (depression, anxiety, self-esteem, stress, psychological well-being, subjective well-being, resilience, loneliness, quality of life, mood, brain health, life satisfaction, and sleep).

Results: The results from these studies are mixed and inconsistent, mainly due to the considerable variety of designs, definitions and measures used. A total of 52 documents were identified as relevant:

5 longitudinal, 2 quasi-experimental, 4 RCTs and 1 experimental study. We also identified 38 cross-sectional studies in this review. A total of approximately 23 outcome instruments were assessed (and multiple items created ad hoc based on the psychological literature), and seven groups of potential confounding factors (mainly sociodemographic). The experimental study showed that mental health improved in those people who used more active modes, compared to those who used motorised vehicles. Despite this, one RCT found that there were no differences between the intervention and control group when mea- suring the quality of life after a 3-months intervention programme.

Conclusions: The relationship between active mobility and mental health in adults is not yet clear. Future research is necessary on this topic in order to create a unified methodology to measure this relationship, obtain solid results and encourage the policymakers to build cities that facilitate active travel as a public health strategy.

References:

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2. Sahlqvist S, Song Y, Ogilvie D. Prev Med 2012;55:206–11