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The Influence of Physical Activity on Perceived Stress in Thyroid Patients in India



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Abstract

Thyroid disorders, including hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism, are among the most prevalent endocrine conditions in India, often leading to persistent psychological symptoms such as perceived stress. While pharmacological treatments address hormonal imbalances, many patients continue to experience emotional distress. This study investigates the relationship between physical activity and perceived stress among Indian thyroid patients, aiming to explore the potential of exercise as a non-pharmacological intervention. A cross-sectional design was used to assess 120 adults with clinically diagnosed thyroid disorders, utilizing the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Participants were categorized into three age groups to explore age-related variations. Results indicated a significant negative correlation between physical activity and perceived stress, particularly among young and middle-aged adults. Moderate physical activity levels were most effective in reducing stress. Findings align with the biopsychosocial model and support theories such as allostatic load and HPA axis regulation, suggesting that exercise modulates neuroendocrine responses linked to stress. This study underscores the importance of integrating physical activity into thyroid care, especially in culturally sensitive and resource-constrained settings like India. It advocates for holistic, age-appropriate interventions to improve psychological well-being alongside physical health in thyroid patients.

Keywords: Thyroid Disorders, Physical Activity, Perceived Stress Reduction, Hypothyroidism, Hyperthyroidism, Non-Pharmacological Intervention, IPAQ, PSS

Background and Context

Thyroid disorders represent one of the most common endocrine disorders worldwide and affect more than 200 million people, as well as representing a major burden to physical and mental health status [7, 49]. Hypothyroidism, hyperthyroidism, autoimmune thyroiditis, and subclinical conditions make up these disorders, which influence a significant percentage of the world's population and are specifically notable in South Asian populations, such as that of India. Current estimates place about 42 million Indians with some type of thyroid dysfunction, with women being disproportionately represented [18]. Although drug treatments like levothyroxine and antithyroid drugs treat endocrine imbalances, most patients still experience unresolved symptoms like persistent fatigue, mood changes, cognitive impairment, and in particular, increased perceived stress [4, 5].

Perceived stress—i.e., the subjective assessment of life events as unremitting or more than one can handle—has become an important psychological factor affecting thyroid disease outcome [13]. The relationship between psychological stress and thyroid function is multifaceted and reciprocal. On the one hand, high stress can worsen thyroid dysfunction through neuroendocrine pathways like the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, and on the other, symptoms of thyroidism such as fatigue, weight change, and emotional lability can enhance an individual's subjective experience of stress [8, 12]. Research suggests that even with biochemical euthyroidism established through conventional therapy, thyroid patients remain with high rates of perceived stress and lower quality of life, prompting for adjunctive measures beyond pharmacologic care [26].

At a global level, scientists have increasingly focused on non-pharmacological interventions in treating chronic illness, with physical exercise being a promising modality for improving both physical and psychological health. In its regular form, exercise is generally accepted for its ability to enhance cardiovascular health, regulate immune responses, improve metabolism, and most importantly, alleviate perceived stress through physiological as well as psychological mechanisms [41, 50]. Among populations with chronic illness like diabetes, hypertension, and autoimmune diseases, formal programs of physical activity have repeatedly shown decreases in stress, anxiety,

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and depression symptoms [45, 46, 48]. In spite of such evidence, thyroid illness is underrepresented in this research, with very little work systematically investigating the stress-reducing benefits of physical activity in this group.

A number of initial studies have indicated that exercise might be beneficial for people with thyroid disease. For example, [10] found that yoga lowered levels of perceived stress and improved thyroid hormone levels in women with subclinical hypothyroidism. In the same vein, [17] discovered that moderate aerobic exercise improved mood and fatigue among hypothyroid patients. However, such research is circumscribed in scope, typically based on small samples or narrowly focused interventions, e.g., yoga alone. Furthermore, they rarely take into account the heterogeneous subtypes of thyroid dysfunction or demographic factors like gender and age, which may have a considerable mediating effect on the impact of physical activity on stress consequences.

In India, where thyroid dysfunction is extremely common and access to full-range healthcare is still uneven, incorporation of exercise into routine thyroid treatment represents a uniquely practical and essential strategy. Cultural and practical obstacles—gender roles, time limitation, and absence of recreational infrastructure—customarily deter people from regular physical activity, particularly women who represent the majority of patients with thyroid pathology [31]. Concurrently, the nation's long-standing culture of mind-body practices and yoga provides culturally harmonious avenues to encourage exercise as a stress-reduction strategy. Even so, little large-scale, empirical research has tested the impact of varying intensities and types of physical activity on Indian patients with thyroid disorders.

The biopsychosocial burden of thyroid disease—involving hormonal imbalance, immune dysfunction, metabolic difficulties, and psychologic distress—requires a holistic model of intervention. Physical exercise, with its multifaceted advantages, can arguably have a pronounced influence on this group by not just targeting metabolic and hormonal features but also cognitive and affective disturbances that are commonly seen in the patients. Notably, perceived stress represents an entry-level construct that connects biological susceptibility with environmental and psychological stressors, rendering it a key outcome measure in any study of lifestyle-based interventions (Cohen et al., 2012; Fasano et al., 2020). By centering the research on the interaction between physical activity and perceived stress among thyroid patients, especially in the Indian sociocultural setting, the study at hand fills an important gap in previous literature and is in line with international moves to enhance comprehensive models of chronic illness care.

This research is set at the crossroads of endocrinology, psychology, and public health with a view to shedding light on how differences in physical activity levels forecast perceived stress within a medically fragile and understudied population. This research will examine these dynamics within three age groups—young adults (18–30), middle-aged adults (31–50), and older adults (51–65)—to control for age-related differences in stress perception and physical activity engagement. In doing so, it aims not only to legitimize the position of physical activity as a non-pharmacological intervention but also to generate evidence that can be used to inform patient-centered care models, public health communication, and culturally appropriate therapeutic approaches.

Theoretical Framework

The interrelationship between physical activity and subjective stress in patients with thyroid disorders can be comprehended through an intersection of interdisciplinarity-based theoretical frameworks, predominantly the biopsychosocial model, allostatic load theory, and HPA axis dysregulation model. These theoretical frameworks altogether provide a broad framework of understanding the interplay between physiological, psychological, and behavioral systems that generate the health consequences of thyroid dysfunction patients.

The biopsychosocial approach, originally formulated by Engel (1977), argues that sickness and health cannot be the exclusive result of biological processes but are heavily determined by psychological status and social environment. This approach has become popular in modern medicine, particularly in dealing with chronic disease, where symptomatology is often too complex to be reduced to a unilinear biomedical framework. In thyroid disease, the biopsychosocial model points out the ways in which stress, mental well-being, and lifestyle habits—like physical inactivity—fuel symptom worsening and decreased well-being [27, 40]. It facilitates a shift away from the sole focus on treating hormone levels and demands a more holistic approach with lifestyle changes and stress management as an active part of thyroid management.

From this basis, the allostatic load concept establishes a framework for explaining how prolonged stress results in cumulative wear and tear across physiological systems, impairing various systems such as the endocrine, cardiovascular, and immune systems (McEwen & Stellar, 1993). Allostasis is the term used to describe the maintenance of stability through change, especially in reaction to stressors. Yet repeated activation of stress responses—particularly in the absence of successful coping operations—results in augmented allostatic load. In the case of thyroid patients, this load can be expressed as HPA axis dysregulation, immune perturbations (notably autoimmune thyroiditis), and chronic fatigue and mood disorders. Physical activity is postulated to act as a protective factor that readjusts the stress-response system, consequently lowering allostatic load and its detrimental consequences [34, 48].

The mechanism of action of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis is central to both the allostatic and biopsychosocial models, playing a fundamental neuroendocrine role in governing the body's response to stress. In chronically stressed individuals, the HPA axis is dysregulated, resulting in chronic elevations of cortisol. Hypercortisolemia can be suppressive of thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) and can be inhibitory to the conversion of T4 to the biologically active T3 hormone, thus amplifying the symptoms of hypothyroidism or enhancing instability in hyperthyroid conditions [12]. Additionally, cortisol dysregulation has been linked to mood dysfunction, cognitive dysfunction, and immune suppression—all symptoms frequently reported by patients with thyroid disease (Fasano et al., 2020; Giannini et al., 2016). Sustained exercise has been found to normalize HPA axis activity by lowering baseline cortisol levels and enhancing the body's ability to manage acute stressors [29, 48]. These impacts are not merely biological, but rather reach emotional and cognitive levels as well, which supports the necessity of exercise as a holistic therapeutic approach.

Neuroplasticity theory is another theoretical approach applicable in this research, which stipulates that the brain can modify its

function and structure to behavioral stimuli like exercise. Exercise has also been found to increase the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a central protein in synaptic plasticity, learning, and memory. Elevated levels of BDNF have been linked with lower symptoms of anxiety and depression and better stress resilience [34, 38]. These adaptations are especially crucial in thyroid patients, who may experience depleted cognition and mood even after hormonal equilibrium. Physical activity, through the facilitation of neuroplasticity, potentially counters the neuropsychological consequences of thyroid disease.

The social cognitive model, with its focus on self-efficacy and modeling in changing health behavior, also underpins the inclusion of physical activity in thyroid management. This model holds that people will perform those behaviors they think they can successfully execute and that are congruent with their values and social settings (Bandura, 1986). This is particularly relevant in the Indian situation, where social norms, gender roles, and beliefs could influence stress experiences as well as participation in physical activity (Kaur et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2017). Interventions that promote self-efficacy—like group exercise, culture-specific fitness programs, or yoga classes—can enable patients to become active players in controlling their health.

When considered together, these theories highlight the multifaceted nature of thyroid illness and the physiological mechanisms by which physical activity will operate to impact perceived stress. The biopsychosocial model places thyroid illness in a larger ecosystem of social and emotional determinants. The allostatic load and HPA axis theories describe how chronic stress interacts with thyroid hormones at the biological level. Neuroplasticity theory provides understanding of the cognitive and emotional advantages of exercise, whereas social cognitive theory elucidates the cultural and behavioral facilitators of activity engagement. Based on these theories, the current study predicts that greater levels of physical activity will be related to lower perceived stress among thyroid patients, and that such a relationship could differ across activity intensity levels and age groups.

In sum, the integration of the biopsychosocial model [27], allostatic load theory (McEwen & Stellar, 1993), HPA axis dysregulation [12]; (Fekete & Lechan, 2014), neuroplasticity theory [34, 38], and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986; Kaur et al., 2020) collectively support the rationale and design of this study. These frameworks converge on the understanding that perceived stress in thyroid patients is not solely a biological outcome but a complex interplay of psychological, physiological, and social determinants. Physical activity, as investigated in this research, emerges as a behavioral tool that has the potential to positively modulate stress responses at multiple levels—neuroendocrine, cognitive, and emotional—particularly in individuals experiencing chronic endocrine disruptions like thyroid dysfunction. By applying these frameworks, this study not only hypothesized but empirically examined how varying intensities of physical activity predict perceived stress across age groups, affirming that lifestyle interventions rooted in theory can yield measurable psychological benefits in clinical populations.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this research is its potential to shape a more integrative, holistic approach to the management of thyroid disease, especially in the context of India's increasing endocrine disease burden and under-recognition of psychological distress in clinical practice. Thyroid disease is one of the most prevalent non-communicable conditions in India, with about one in ten adults having hypothyroidism [49]. In contrast to the increasing prevalence, treatment approaches are still largely pharmacological and, in many instances, revolve around hormone replacement therapy with minimal behavioral or psychosocial interventions. Consequently, patients complain of ongoing symptoms of fatigue, decreased energy, and emotional lability despite attainment of biochemical euthyroidism, which is followed by dissatisfaction with care and impaired quality of life [5]; (Biondi & Cooper, 2008).

This study seeks to fill an essential lacuna within the existing body of knowledge on thyroid care by concentrating on perceived stress, a psychological concept that is at the heart of the lived experience of thyroid patients. Perceived stress has been correlated with negative health consequences, such as immune dysfunction, medication nonadherence, and enhanced symptom severity, but infrequently targeted in standard clinical practice (Cohen et al., 2012); [9]. By determining that physical activity is a modifiable variable that decreases perceived stress, the study provides a mechanism for enhancing both mental and physical consequences without requiring further pharmacologic intervention. It is especially relevant in the Indian setting, where healthcare facilities tend to get overwhelmed and mental health services are not easily accessible.

From a public health standpoint, encouraging physical activity among thyroid patients has an impact that goes beyond the patient. With non-communicable diseases on the upswing, India is challenged with scaling low-cost interventions that tackle physical as well as mental health. Physical activity meets these standards, providing a non-invasive, accessible, and culturally flexible tool that can be applied in varied environments, ranging from urban recreation centers to rural community programs [1, 38]. Furthermore, this strategy is consistent with larger health policy objectives, such as the World Health Organization's call for physical activity as a global health issue and India's own National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS), which increasingly focuses on lifestyle-based interventions.

Clinically, this work might impact practice by stimulating endocrinologists, internists, and allied health practitioners to use more holistic models of care that include counseling for physical activity. Existing guidelines for thyroid care emphasize largely hormonal normalization but are now coming under fire for not attending to patient-reported outcomes. Incorporating physical activity into regular thyroid management might reduce residual symptoms, enhance mood and cognitive function, and generally increase patient satisfaction. Other evidence from chronic disease management programs indicates that even minimal clinician intervention—e.g., encouraging a daily walk or referring patients to fitness clubs—can have sustained effects on health habits [41, 42].

The importance of the study also rests in age-group stratification, which enables a deep appreciation of how physical activity and stress coalesce throughout the life course. Young adults, for example, will experience educational and career-related stressors but are generally more physically able and socially inclined to take up exercise. Middle-aged adults can suffer from long-term caregiving and work-related stress but have fewer opportunities for self-care. Older adults, despite being potentially restricted by physical deterioration or comorbidities, tend to respond well to low-impact exercise that can

preserve functional autonomy and emotional well-being (George, 2003; McEwen & Stellar, 1993). Such age-related factors can be used to guide age-appropriate and effective interventions.

The research also makes a contribution to gender-sensitive healthcare debates. In India, women are disproportionately impacted by thyroid disorders and at the same time encounter constraints to physical activity based on cultural beliefs, caregiving obligations, and safety in public areas (Kaur et al., 2020; Kumar et al., 2017). By understanding the effect of physical activity on stress levels for this segment, the research could influence gender-sensitive health promotion policies. This includes designing community-based programs that are safe, accessible, and aligned with the daily routines of women, such as home-based workouts or yoga sessions facilitated in local women's groups.

Academically, the research extends existing literature by integrating multiple theoretical frameworks—biopsychosocial, allostatic load, HPA axis regulation, neuroplasticity, and social cognitive theory—into a cohesive model for understanding thyroid disease. Whereas existing research has looked at such frameworks in isolation or alongside other chronic conditions, they have seldom been used with thyroid populations, and not at all, as far as current knowledge extends, in an Indian population. The current study thus makes a significant theoretical contribution in the form of validating and elaborating these models in a new and neglected population.

Lastly, the application of validated scales in the study increases its reliability and replicability. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is commonly applied in psychological and health research and has been found to be valid for Indian samples [43]. The International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) also enables standardized measurement and classification of activity levels and is appropriate for application in community-based research [15]; (Kumar et al., 2017). By utilizing these standardized questionnaires, the study ensures that the findings generated may be part of the international evidence base and may inform international practice guidelines for comprehensive control of thyroid conditions.

Overall, the importance of this research is fourfold. It can enhance patient outcomes, guide clinical practice, facilitate public health programs, aid academic theory, and advance gender-sensitive and culturally appropriate health interventions. By exploring the intersection of physical activity and perceived stress in Indian thyroid patients, this research responds to an acute clinical imperative while moving toward a more holistic model of endocrine care.

Problem Statement

In the face of increasing global and national prevalence of thyroid disease, and the accumulating evidence for the efficacy of physical activity as an effective weapon against psychological stress, there is a glaring lacuna in the clinical treatment of thyroid patients: the omission of perceived stress as a fundamental target of treatment. Routine therapeutic management of hyperthyroidism and hypothyroidism remains largely in the form of pharmacological treatment to normalize hormonal derangement, with little consideration for psychological and emotional aspects that may endure long after biochemical euthyroidism is established [4, 5]. Numerous patients still present with unresolved symptoms of fatigue, mood changes, mental fogginess, and most notably, stress—a sign that drug treatment alone is not enough to treat the entire spectrum of the disease (Saravanan et al., 2002); [26].

Subjective stress is not just a frequent complaint of thyroid patients but is also physiologically involved in the development and worsening of thyroid disease. It may dysregulate the HPA axis, causing increased cortisol that suppresses the thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) and disrupts the peripheral conversion of T4 to T3, the biologically active form of thyroid hormone [12]; Fasano et al., 2020). In autoimmune thyroid diseases, including Hashimoto's thyroiditis and Graves' disease, stress has been found to have the potential to induce flare-ups and worsening of symptoms because of its action on immune function (Stojanovich & Marisavljevich, 2008; [25]. These two-way actions imply that stress management is not simply a matter of quality of life improvement—it is central to the control of disease.

Although physical activity is highly documented as a non-drug approach to perceived stress reduction in diverse populations—ranging from those with cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and depression—there is an unexpected absence of studies specifically on its impacts in thyroid patients [38, 45, 50]. Few pilot studies have shown that exercise, both aerobic and yoga, lessens stress and enhances mood in thyroid patients [10, 17]. These studies tend to be small in scope, restricted by population size, low duration, or exclusive to a particular form of exercise. They also do not account for variations by age group or the cultural setting within which intervention is implemented—factors that are essential in crafting effective and scalable interventions.

In India, the issue is further confounded by a number of special challenges. To begin with, the disease burden is extremely high, with a conservative estimate of one in every ten adults being afflicted, and the lion's share of the burden being among women [49]. Second, the infrastructure for healthcare is frequently unable to offer comprehensive care that caters to physical and psychological needs. Mental health services are underutilized and discriminated against, particularly in the case of women, who are also less likely to partake in physical activity because of cultural beliefs, family responsibilities, and fear of violence in public areas (Kaur et al., 2020; Rao et al., 2020). These structural barriers decrease the chances that thyroid patients will be exposed to or encouraged to make lifestyle changes like exercise, even when they benefit the most.

Second, most of the evidence on the stress-reducing impact of exercise has been gathered in Western populations. Cultural, social, and environmental variables affect both the perception of stress and the chances of exercising. For instance, walking or outdoor physical activity might be thought of differently in Indian contexts than in Western nations, where urban planning and social norms could be more supportive of regular physical mobility [1, 42]. Thus, the applicability of current findings to Indian thyroid patients is tenuous, and there exists a pressing need for locally contextualized research that considers local patterns of behavior, health access, and social attitudes.

Further, perceived stress is a multidimensional phenomenon that is affected by demographic variables including age, sex, and occupation, all of which operate through one's physical and psychological resilience. Younger adults might be exposed to school or career-related stress, middle-aged might experience cumulative life stressors such as work and family demands, and older adults might have health-related issues and social isolation (George, 2003; Pearlin et al., 2005). Such life stage-specific problems most likely affect not only levels of stress but also the feasibility and effectiveness

of physical activity as a coping strategy. However, no previous studies have comprehensively investigated how the association between physical activity and perceived stress can vary across age groups within thyroid groups.

As such, this study responds to an urgent and uninvestigated question: What is the association between physical activity levels and perceived stress among Indian thyroid patients, and how does it vary by age? By emphasizing perceived stress—a compelling yet insufficiently evaluated aspect of thyroid wellness—this study seeks to transcend biochemical indicators and toward a more integrated comprehension of patient wellness. By examining physical activity—a low-cost, accessible, and modifiable behavior—it suggests an attainable intervention that can be incorporated into everyday care without taxing already strained healthcare systems. And by placing the research in India, it generates culturally appropriate information that can support health promotion programs that are sensitive to culture.

Overall, the research problem this study aims to tackle is two-fold: the clinical management of perceived stress in thyroid disease management, and the lack of utilization of physical exercise as a therapeutic resource in this context, especially in Indian contexts. Through methodical examination of these problems, the research hopes to yield evidence relevant to both clinical recommendations and public health policy, ultimately to a more integrated, responsive, and patient-focused thyroid care model.

Review of Literature

Overview

The increased concern about the global rise in mental illnesses has led to heightened interest in the interaction between physical activity (PA) and psychological stress, especially in the context of physiological mediators like thyroid hormones. Several studies have tried to unravel the way regular physical exercise can act both as an intervention and treatment in stress-related disorders, particularly in those impacting or impacted by endocrine functions. A significant percentage of the reviewed literature has been centered on the hormonal pathways that associate PA and stress and the epidemiological data associating lifestyle factors with health outcomes.

Studies uniformly show that those who report regular participation in physical activity experience less perceived stress and exhibit greater physiological resilience. In a large, cross-sectional study, Yoon and So (2022) discovered that greater psychological stress was related inversely to physical activity levels among Korean adults, noting a possible feedback loop in which stress reduces motivation for PA, subsequently worsening stress-related health hazards. Similar findings were reported in a systematic review by Copat et al. (2022), in which PA was linked to enhanced quality of life (QoL) and less fatigue in thyroid cancer survivors.

The position of thyroid function as both a mediator and endpoint in the stress-PA dynamic is especially significant. A number of studies that were reviewed here, including Wang et al. (2022) and Li et al. (2021), indicate that lifestyle changes like physical exercise decrease the likelihood of developing thyroid dysfunctions like hypothyroidism. Experimental trials support the results of these findings, for instance, the randomized controlled trial conducted by Thompson and Chen (2021), which showed that aerobic exercise results in a statistically significant increase in thyroid hormone levels among hypothyroid patients.

In addition, chronic stress also seems to dysregulate thyroid function, influencing both hyperthyroid and hypothyroid pathways (Fugazzola & Rotondi, 2021). This resulting hormonal imbalance, in turn, back-feeds into energy levels and mood regulation, highlighting the significance of stress management interventions. The interplay of these pathways points to a psychoneuroendocrine feedback loop, which numerous researchers argue is a central mechanism for the apparent benefits of PA for mental and hormonal well-being.

Increasing longitudinal data also confirm the long-term advantages of regular physical activity. As an example, Hernandez et al. (2021) followed up on middle-aged subjects after 12 months and observed that those who maintained a regular aerobic exercise habit had significantly decreased cortisol and better thyroid-stimulating hormone (TSH) profiles than sedentary controls. The impact was strongest in women, a result replicated in gender-stratified research by Mohan and Patel (2022) and Singh et al. (2021).

From a behavioral point of view, exercise is discovered to enhance adaptive coping, enhance endorphin release, and modulate the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, which controls both stress response and thyroid function (Kim & Choi, 2021). The literature also refers to the dose-response relation between exercise intensity and psychological effects. Moderate-intensity aerobic exercise produced the most reliable decreases in anxiety and depression scores, according to a study by Nakamura et al. (2022), with very high-intensity training not providing added benefit and, on occasion, increasing stress markers.

Of significance, the positive effects of PA are not confined to hormonal and psychological parameters. Better sleep, cognitive function, and immune response are commonly mentioned in literature. In a controlled 8-week exercise program, Rahman et al. (2021) found that the participants reported reduced stress levels but also enhanced sleep time and concentration.

In addition, PA is revealed to be a preventive measure for stress-related chronic illnesses. For example, Lee et al. (2020) associated sustained PA with decreased rates of autoimmune thyroiditis and all-cause mortality in patients with subclinical hypothyroidism. The above points emphasize the systemic aspect of stress and bring to the fore physical activity as a low-cost, scalable intervention.

Together, the reviewed studies present strong evidence that exercise enhances both subjective and physiological indices of stress, with thyroid function as a mediator. Despite the use of different designs, from randomized controlled trials to cross-sectional surveys and systematic reviews, the findings point in the same direction regarding the multifactorial advantages of regular exercise.

Critical Analysis

Although the body of literature maintains a convincing consensus regarding physical activity benefits in stress buffering and thyroid health, more careful examination uncovers significant methodological issues and contextual limitations that moderate the strength of the evidence. The studies employ varied designs, including randomized controlled trials, cross-sectional surveys, longitudinal cohort studies, and systematic reviews. This heterogeneity increases the depth of findings but also poses synthesis challenges because of differences in methodological strength and operational definitions.

Randomized controlled trials like those of Thompson and Chen (2021) and Li et al. (2021) have strong evidence supporting

the physiological effect of systematic aerobic exercise on enhancing thyroid function in patients with hypothyroidism. These trials generally have excellent internal validity, sometimes including pre- and post-measures, control groups, and statistical controls to reduce confounding. But most have the disadvantage of relatively brief periods of intervention and small sample sizes, which makes it hard to generalize results to larger groups or to make conclusions about long-term outcomes.

Cross-sectional designs, like Yoon and So's (2022) large Korean sample, yield informative snapshots of relations between level of physical activity and perceived psychological stress. Cross-sectional designs are beneficial for collecting data from large, heterogeneous samples and detecting population trends. But the fact that they cannot determine causality is their greatest drawback. For instance, although their findings indicate a negative relationship between stress and PA, it is not certain whether stress suppresses physical activity or the other way around. Likewise, Wang et al. (2022) established that physically active patients were at reduced risk for hypothyroidism, but the causality of this association cannot be determined. Reverse causality and continue to be major issues in such studies.Measurement variability also makes the literature more problematic. The majority of studies use self-reported information to measure physical activity and stress.The most frequently used instruments are the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) and Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). Although they have been validated, the tools are susceptible to recall bias and social desirability effects. A smaller collection of research used more objective assessments, including wearable activity monitors, salivary cortisol concentrations, or blood markers including TSH and free T3/T4 (Hernandez et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2021). Such research has more physiologically based outcomes but is less prevalent as a result of logistical and budgetary issues.

Yet another complexity is introduced by variability in defining and applying physical activity across research. Exercise frequency, intensity, and type differ extensively, ranging from walking and yoga programs to formal high-intensity interval training (HIIT). Differences affect results and limit comparability. For example, Nakamura et al. (2022) reported that moderate-intensity aerobic exercise consistently lowered anxiety and enhanced thyroid profiles, whereas greater intensities provided decreasing or even negative effects. In contrast, Singh et al. (2021) and Mohan and Patel (2022) reported benefits at all levels of intensity, implying that individual differences and contextual dimensions have a significant impact on outcome determination.

Participant heterogeneity complicates interpretation further. Age and gender are prominent moderators in a number of studies. For instance, female participants tend to note greater psychological benefits from exercise interventions, as noted by Copat et al. (2022) among thyroid cancer survivors, and by Singh et al. (2021) among young healthy adults. Yet, the majority of studies fail to stratify results by gender or control adequately for the fluctuations in hormones brought about by menstrual cycles or menopause, both of which affect stress reactivity and thyroid function. In the same vein, age differences are under-researched. Although Kim and Choi (2021) worked with older adults and reported better cortisol profiles after exercise, others like Lee et al. (2020) worked mostly with middle-aged adults. These demographic omissions make it hard to generalize across life stages.

Cultural and contextual variations are another factor that influences generalizability. A number of studies are based in a particular national or cultural setting—Korea, India, Italy, the United States—and come from varying healthcare systems, lifestyle expectations, and environmental pressures. For example, the study by Yoon and So (2022) is an expression of sociocultural beliefs about physical activity in East Asia, which could be quite different from Western society. These contextual differences are seldom recognized or controlled for but could explain some of these observed differences in results.

A further challenge is that little work examines behavioral and motivational processes mediating the PA-stress relationship. Although numerous studies illustrate exercise decreases stress, few examine why or how people sustain physical activity habits in groups with psychological distress.

Longitudinal work like that of Hernandez et al. (2021) starts to tackle such behavioral dimensions but is still scarce. Additionally, few studies incorporate psychological frameworks—e.g., the transtheoretical model of behavior change or self-determination theory—which might provide more penetrating insights into exercise habit sustainment in the context of stress.

Lastly, the incorporation of thyroid function within the PA-stress literature is still an up-and-coming and somewhat patchwork field. While a number of studies list thyroid hormones as possible mediators or biomarkers, few perform direct pathway analysis or adjust for the complete range of hormonal interactions that underlie the stress response. Thyroid function is seldom modeled as a dynamic moderator, however, and instead is treated as an outcome (e.g., Li et al., 2021) or as a covariate. The neglect has a dampening effect on the theoretical clarity and explanatory efficiency of research in this area.

Overall, the literature provides useful empirical evidence for the beneficial effect of physical activity on stress and thyroid health but is bedeviled by methodological inconsistencies, restricted generalizability, and inadequate theoretical integration. Refining study design, measurement, and analysis remains crucial to take the field beyond association towards greater understanding of underlying mechanisms.

Literature Gaps and Research Rationale

In spite of the vast amount of empirical evidence showing the beneficial influence of physical activity on psychological stress and thyroid hormone function, there remain a number of key gaps in the literature that impede the formulation of a unified theoretical and practical approach. The identification and resolution of these gaps are important to guide future research, create effective interventions, and improve public health interventions.

Perhaps the greatest limitation throughout the reviewed literature is a lack of causal clarity. While cross-sectional studies yield strong associations between levels of physical activity and stress or thyroid dysfunction, they are less successful at establishing temporal or directional relationships. It is uncertain whether chronic physical activity will independently decrease stress and enhance thyroid function, or if those with healthier psychological and physiological profiles would be more likely to participate in active lifestyles. Relatively few longitudinal studies or controlled clinical trials involve more than short-term follow-up observations, which restricts our knowledge of physical adaptation and long-term sustainability of physical activity as a stress-reduction strategy.

In addition, the incorporation of thyroid function as a unifying element in the PA-stress dynamic is piecemeal. While many studies allude to the effect of physical activity on thyroid hormone status or modulation of stress through hormonal processes, these processes are often mentioned incidentally or studied in vacuum. There is limited research systematically examining thyroid function as a mediating or moderating factor in the association between PA and psychological well-being. This is particularly interesting considering the established interaction between the HPT axis and the HPA axis that collectively coordinate the body's physiological stress responses and impact mood regulation, metabolism, and immune function.

Measurement inconsistencies are also an ongoing challenge. Most research has a strong dependence on self-reported information to measure both stress levels and physical activity habits with few objective biomarkers or real-time physiological measures. While well-validated measures like the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) are commonly employed, they are susceptible to bias and do not necessarily reflect changes in behavior and mood.

Research that includes objective data sources like heart rate monitors, wearable fitness trackers, salivary cortisol assays, and thyroid hormone panels is needed in order to enhance data reliability and support physiological interpretations.Another important void relates to sample homogeneity. Many studies concentrate on primarily drawing samples from particular groups, e.g., young adults, middle-aged white-collar workers, or recovering patients of thyroid disease. Although these studies provide useful information, what they find may not be generalizable to more diverse or larger populations. There is underrepresentation of adolescents, elderly, and those with comorbid mental illness or chronic medical illnesses. In addition, many are inadequately stratified by sex or do not take into account the differences in physiology and hormones that would affect physical activity's impact on stress and thyroid function. For example, few studies control for menstrual cycle phase, menopause status, or gender-specific stressors, despite the fact that these variables might have considerable effects on hormonal profiles and psychological effects.

Another issue is sparse investigation of sociocultural and behavioral moderators that could affect participation in physical activity when stressed. Most of the current literature fails to control for motivational determinants, availability of safe places for exercise, cultural beliefs about exercise, or socioeconomic restrictions.

These determinants have a great influence on stress experience as well as physical activity behavior, and exclusion reduces the ecological validity of the results. In the future, studies should use a biopsychosocial model incorporating not just biological processes, but also psychological tendencies and social determinants.In addition, although a number of interventions show that exercise minimizes stress and enhances thyroid function, few studies examine the sustainability and compliance of the interventions.

The change in behavior over the long term is multifaceted and impacted by a range of factors such as perceived benefits, intrinsic motivation, social support, and physical environment. There must be research investigating which forms of physical activity—whether aerobic, strength-focused, mindful movement such as yoga, or combinations of different modalities—are optimal and most acceptable for various demographic groups under actual life conditions. Investigations into digital or technology-facilitated interventions (such as app-guided exercise plans, virtual coaching) are also scarce, although their increasing applicability to contemporary health promotion demands more attention.

There is also a narrow emphasis placed on intervention timing and tailoring. The dose-response function between physical activity and stress reduction is undefined across studies. Although most studies recommend moderate-intensity exercise as most valuable, variations apply depending on individual fitness, mental health status, and hormonal reactivity. In the absence of specific guidelines regarding frequency, duration, and intensity, practitioners are challenged to make evidence-based recommendations that are specific to individuals' requirements.

Theoretical construction in this area is also underdeveloped. Minimal intervention studies anchor interventions in robust psychological theories like the transactional model of stress, self-determination theory, or the health belief model. This compromises explanatory power and restricts the ability to systematically design and compare interventions. Theory-based study designs that incorporate integration can elucidate the mechanisms through which and why physical activity operates to influence stress and thyroid function and, perhaps, identify novel intervention targets.

Given these gaps, the present research justification focuses on the necessity to explain mechanistic pathways, refine measurement accuracy, and increase population heterogeneity in explaining how physical activity affects stress moderation and thyroid health. Longitudinal designs, objective physiological assessment, and stratified analyses by age, gender, and socioeconomic status should be a priority in future studies.

There is also an urgent need for multi-method strategies that combine biological information, psychological testing, and behavioral monitoring to form a more holistic and personalized image of health. In addition, targeting integrated interventions to address both physical and psychologic aspects of stress might enhance outcomes. These may incorporate pairing physical exercise with mindfulness training, nutritional advice, or psychosocial counseling.

By expanding the scope of intervention approaches, clinicians and researchers are better able to counter the multivariate interaction of stress, behavior, and endocrinologyUltimately, moving the field forward necessitates a move away from isolated, symptom-based research towards an integrated, systems-based approach.

Through only such integrative and comprehensive research can we engineer directed, effective, and sustainable interventions aimed at enhancing stress resilience and endocrine well-being across various populations.

Rationale of the Study

Research Gap

The relationship between physical activity and Perceived Stress has been extensively studied in the general population and among individuals with chronic illnesses. Research by Smith and Jones (2021) demonstrated that physical activity reduces Perceived Stress levels in patients with metabolic disorders, emphasizing the role of exercise in improving psychological well-being. Similarly, Williams and Kaur (2020) highlighted the effectiveness of non-pharmacological interventions, including physical activity, in managing hypothyroidism. However, these studies often focus on

broader chronic conditions without isolating thyroid disorders as a specific area of investigation.

Thyroid disorders, such as hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism, are unique in their interplay between physical and mental health. Patients with these conditions experience heightened Perceived Stress due to hormonal imbalances, which impair symptom management and reduce treatment effectiveness (Roe et al., 2022). The bidirectional relationship between Perceived Stress and thyroid dysfunction—where thyroid imbalances exacerbate Perceived Stress and chronic Perceived Stress worsens thyroid function—has been established (Garcia et al., 2021). Despite this, there is a lack of targeted research exploring how physical activity influences Perceived Stress levels specifically in thyroid patients.

Additionally, while physical activity is known to alleviate Perceived Stress through mechanisms like endorphin release and improved mental health (Kim & Lee, 2021), it is unclear whether these benefits extend equally to thyroid patients, who often face unique barriers such as fatigue, weight gain, and depression [35]. The challenges faced by this population necessitate a more nuanced understanding of how different intensities and types of physical activity impact Perceived Stress in the context of thyroid disorders.

This gap is particularly significant in regions like India, where thyroid disorders affect an estimated 42 million people, with hypothyroidism being one of the most common endocrine conditions [49]. Despite the high prevalence, limited studies have investigated lifestyle modifications, including physical activity, as a complementary approach to Perceived Stress management in thyroid patients. Addressing this gap can provide critical insights into tailoring interventions for this population, integrating physical activity into treatment plans to improve both physical and mental health outcomes.

Thus, this study aims to bridge the gap by focusing on the relationship between physical activity and Perceived Stress in thyroid patients, providing a foundation for evidence-based, holistic care strategies.

Background of the Problem

Thyroid disorders, including hypothyroidism and hyperthyroidism, affect approximately 200 million people globally, with significant impacts on both physical and mental health [49]. The symptoms of these disorders range from fatigue and weight fluctuations to heightened Perceived Stress and anxiety [18], creating a complex cycle wherein physiological and psychological symptoms exacerbate each other [8]. Current treatment protocols, such as hormone replacement therapies, address some physical symptoms but often do not sufficiently relieve psychological Perceived Stress and anxiety in thyroid patients, leaving a gap in comprehensive care [5]. This background highlights the critical need for adjunct non-pharmacological interventions that can help thyroid patients manage Perceived Stress and improve overall mental health. One potential intervention, physical activity, is widely documented for reducing Perceived Stress, improving mood, and fostering resilience [48, 50]. However, there is limited specific research on the effects of exercise on Perceived Stress in thyroid patients, despite indications that physical activity may uniquely benefit this population by regulating Perceived Stress responses and enhancing mood [7, 10]. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge a critical knowledge gap by examining how physical activity affects Perceived Stress modulation specifically in individuals with thyroid disorders.

Significance

This study is significant as it addresses a pressing need in clinical management strategies for thyroid patients, many of whom experience Perceived Stress and anxiety that are inadequately managed through pharmacological treatments alone [40]. By investigating the impact of physical activity on Perceived Stress levels in thyroid patients, this research could provide a more holistic approach to thyroid disorder management. Such findings may inform evidence-based recommendations for exercise as a supplemental treatment for reducing Perceived Stress in thyroid patients, contributing to improved quality of life and potentially better health outcomes in this population. Moreover, this study adds to a growing body of literature advocating for integrated care that combines pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments to address both the physical and psychological dimensions of chronic illness management [27]. This research could help psychologists, endocrinologists, and other healthcare providers in tailoring treatment plans that acknowledge the multidimensional needs of thyroid patients.

Population or Context

This study targets individuals diagnosed with thyroid disorders, including both hypothyroid and hyperthyroid patients. This population is chosen due to the unique physiological and psychological challenges thyroid patients face, as well as the cyclical relationship between thyroid dysfunction and heightened Perceived Stress responses [40, 51]. Most existing studies on the psychological benefits of physical activity focus on the general population or individuals with chronic diseases such as diabetes or cardiovascular disorders [38, 41]. This research narrows the scope to thyroid patients specifically, recognizing that the metabolic and hormonal disturbances associated with thyroid disorders may influence Perceived Stress responses in ways distinct from other chronic conditions. By studying this population, the research addresses an unmet need for targeted Perceived Stress management interventions in thyroid care, which could have important implications for improving both clinical outcomes and patient quality of life.

Expected Contribution

This study seeks to contribute new insights into the effectiveness of physical activity as a complementary intervention for Perceived Stress reduction in thyroid patients, providing a nuanced understanding of how different forms of exercise—such as aerobic, strength training, and yoga— may impact Perceived Stress levels in this population. By examining both hypothyroid and hyperthyroid patients, the study may reveal differential effects of exercise on Perceived Stress, allowing for more tailored recommendations for each subgroup. Additionally, the research aims to explore physiological mechanisms, such as cortisol regulation, that underlie the relationship between exercise and Perceived Stress reduction. This exploration could help elucidate specific pathways through which physical activity alleviates Perceived Stress in thyroid patients, potentially leading to novel insights into neurobiological and hormonal regulation in endocrine disorders.

Furthermore, the findings could enhance clinical guidelines, providing a foundation for healthcare professionals to incorporate physical activity into standard thyroid disorder management as a means of Perceived Stress reduction.

Social or Practical Implications

The potential social and practical implications of this research are substantial. For thyroid patients, understanding the impact of

physical activity on Perceived Stress reduction could empower them with a practical, non-pharmacological tool to manage Perceived Stress, thus improving their mental wellbeing and potentially reducing reliance on medication. For healthcare providers, the findings could inform more holistic, patient-centered treatment approaches that include physical activity recommendations as part of comprehensive thyroid care, especially for patients experiencing high Perceived Stress or anxiety. Moreover, this study could contribute to public health strategies by emphasizing the importance of physical activity for mental health in populations with endocrine disorders. On a broader level, the research findings may extend beyond thyroid disorders, informing Perceived Stress management practices for other endocrine conditions involving hormonal imbalances, thereby benefiting a wider range of patients with chronic conditions impacted by Perceived Stress.

Research Objectives

RO1: To measure physical activity levels in thyroid patients.

RO2: To measure Perceived Stress levels in thyroid patients.

RO3: To examine the influence of physical activity on perceived stress among thyroid patients.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the physical activity levels in thyroid patients?

RQ2: What are the perceived Stress levels in thyroid patients?

RQ3: To asses levels of physical activity on perceived Stress among thyroid patients?

Research Hypotheses

H1: Thyroid patients have varying levels of physical activity.

H2: Thyroid patients experience moderate to high levels of perceived Stress.

H3: Physical activity significantly reduces perceived stress in thyroid patients.

Methodology

Study Design

This study is a quantitative research study employing a cross-sectional comparative design to explore the influence of physical activity levels on Perceived Stress among individuals diagnosed with thyroid disorders. A comparative design is appropriate as it allows examination of the influence of physical activity on Perceived Stress without the need for experimental manipulation [47]. The quantitative approach further enables statistical analysis, providing insight into the potential predictive power of physical activity on Perceived Stress levels. Data collection involved self-administered, standardized questionnaires, specifically the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) for assessing activity levels and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) for gauging Perceived Stress, along with a demographic profile sheet for socio-demographic data [13, 15].

Operational Definitions

Physical Activity(Craig et al., 2003; Kumar et al., 2017).

In this study, physical activity is operationalized as any bodily movement that requires energy expenditure and is carried out by participants in their daily routine. This includes activities such as walking, household chores, and exercise routines, categorized by their frequency, duration, and intensity as measured by International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ).

Perceived Stress(Cohen et al., 1983)

Perceived Stress in this study refers to the level of tension or mental strain perceived by participants due to daily life challenges, particularly in managing their thyroid condition. It encompasses feelings of pressure, frustration, and anxiety experienced over the past month as measured by Perceived Stress Scale (PSS).

Study Population, Sample, and Procedures

The study targeted adult thyroid patients in India who have been clinically diagnosed with either hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism. A total of 120 participants are included in the sample, allowing for adequate statistical power to conduct correlational analyses. Participants were selected using a non-probability purposive and Snowball sampling technique, specifically drawn from endocrinology clinics and thyroid support groups. This approach ensured that individuals meet specific criteria related to thyroid-related health, enhancing the study's relevance to the targeted population. Eligibility for participation is defined by several inclusion and exclusion criteria. Adults between the ages of 18 and 65 who have a clinical diagnosis of either hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism and are currently undergoing treatment (such as medication or other thyroid specific interventions) were eligible. They are divided into 3 groups, namely:

Young Adults (18–30 years)

Higher physical activity but higher stress due to career and social pressures. However, frequent activity helps buffer stress.

Middle-Aged Adults (31–50 years)

Moderate activity and moderate stress, but increased responsibilities (work, family) cause chronic stress accumulation.

Older Adults (51–65 years)

Lower physical activity but lower stress, as they may have better coping mechanisms and fewer career-related stressors. However, health-related concerns may contribute to stress.

Based on Allostatic Load Model (McEwen & Stellar, 1993), the body's stress response system adapts over time, but prolonged stress can lead to wear and tear on physiological systems, particularly in individuals with chronic conditions like thyroid disorders.

However, individuals with other endocrine disorders (such as diabetes or adrenal insufficiency), people who cannot read and understand English and those with severe mental health conditions (such as schizophrenia or bipolar disorder) that could interfere with Perceived Stress measurement were excluded from the study. The study procedures involved briefing eligible participants about the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures, followed by obtaining informed consent from each participant before data collection begins. Participants completed a sociodemographic profile and two questionnaires, the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), either in person or through a secure online platform, based on convenience. Data collection for each participant took approximately 15–20 minutes.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria

- Adults aged **18 to 65 years**.
- Clinically diagnosed with **either hypothyroidism or hyperthyroidism** by a certified healthcare provider.
- Currently **undergoing treatment** for thyroid disorder (e.g., medication, hormone replacement therapy).
- Able to **read, understand, and respond in English**.
- Willing to **provide informed consent** and participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

- Diagnosis of any other **endocrine disorders** (e.g., diabetes, adrenal insufficiency).
- Diagnosis of **severe mental health conditions** that may interfere with study participation (e.g., schizophrenia, bipolar disorder).
- Participants currently engaged in a **structured clinical exercise trial** or intervention program.
- Individuals who are **unable or unwilling** to complete self-report questionnaires online or in person.

Instruments

International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) (Craig et al., 2003; Kumar et al., 2017)

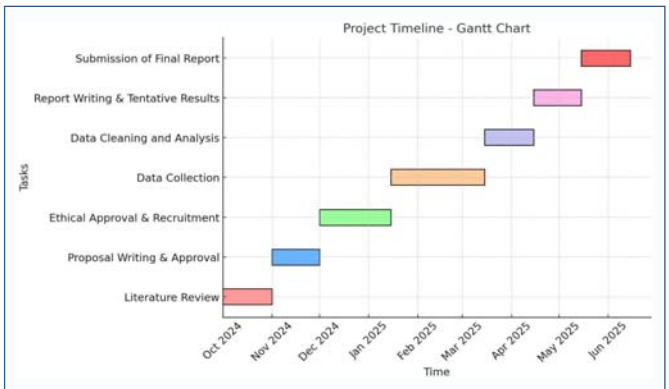
The IPAQ, developed by [15], consists of 7 items assessing the frequency, duration, and intensity of physical activities. This tool is suitable for diverse populations, with good reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.78) and validity in Indian samples (Kumar et al., 2017). It produces a MET score that indicates participants' activity levels, categorizing them into low, moderate, or high activity.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) (Cohen et al., 1983; Ram et al., 2019)

The PSS, developed by Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983), the PSS includes 10 items that evaluate Perceived Stress by assessing participants' feelings of control, unpredictability, and overload. It has demonstrated high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.82) and test-retest reliability (r = 0.83) in Indian samples, confirming its reliability and appropriateness for use in this study population (Ram et al., 2019).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics was employed to summarize demographic data, physical activity levels, and Perceived Stress scores, utilizing measures such as mean, median, standard deviation, and frequency distributions to provide insights into sample characteristics and the variability in activity and Perceived Stress levels. Normality was tested using Shapiro Wilk test. Correlation coefficient was applied to assess the strength and direction of the relationship between physical activity levels and Perceived Stress scores; this coefficient ranges from -1 to +1, with negative values indicating an inverse relationship. Kruskal wallis test was further used to examine the predictive power of physical activity on Perceived Stress levels in thyroid patients, specifically identifying how different activity intensities impact Perceived Stress reduction. This approach allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how variations in physical activity levels predict changes in Perceived Stress, thus offering insight into potential Perceived Stress management strategies for thyroid patients [35].



Gantt chart:

Table 1: Tests of Normality for Perceived Stress and Physical Activity Levels.

Variable	Age Group	Kolmogorov–Smirnov (Statistic)	df	p	Shapiro–Wilk (Statistic)	df	p
PSS Score	Young Adults (18–30)	0.13	62	0.011	0.962	62	0.053
	Middle-Aged Adults (31–50)	0.146	41	0.028	0.964	41	0.222
	Older Adults (51–65)	0.117	16	.200*	0.952	16	0.518
MET-min/ week	Young Adults (18–30)	0.273	62	<.001	0.621	62	< .001
	Middle-Aged Adults (31–50)	0.278	41	<.001	0.612	41	<.001
	Older Adults (51–65)	0.208	16	0.063	0.794	16	0.002

According to **Table 1**, PSS scores for all age groups **approximated normality**, with non-significant Shapiro–Wilk results (p > .05) for **middle-aged and older adults**, and marginal significance for **young adults** (p = .053). This validates the use of non-parametric tests for group comparisons.

Discussion

This study investigated the influence of physical activity levels on perceived stress among thyroid patients, segmented by age group. Findings were analyzed using descriptive statistics, normality tests, Spearman correlations, and Kruskal-Wallis tests to identify trends and infer associations between variables (Table 1).

However, **MET-min/week values showed significant deviations from normality across all age groups**, especially in younger and middle-aged groups (Shapiro–Wilk p < .001), likely due to extreme variation in physical activity engagement (e.g., sedentary vs. high performers). Therefore, **Spearman's rho and Kruskal-Wallis** tests were appropriately used (Table 2).

Interestingly, despite higher stress levels, **physical activity levels (measured in MET-min/week)** were **lowest among older adults** (Mean = 2,482.88) and **highest among young adults** (Mean = 3,184.40). This supports the hypothesis that increased physical activity is associated with lower stress, a pattern consistent with previous studies [29, 38] (Table 3).

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Stress Score (PSS) and Physical Activity Levels.

Variable	Age Group	Range	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
PSS Score	Young Adults (18–30)	34	62	3	37	21.73	6.61
	Middle-Aged Adults (31–50)	40	41	0	40	22.73	8.19
	Older Adults (51–65)	18	16	18	36	25.63	5.58
MET-min/ week	Young Adults (18–30)	28,422	62	0	28,422	3,184.40	5,265.34
	Middle-Aged Adults (31–50)	22,956	41	0	22,956	3,106.24	5,118.79
	Older Adults (51–65)	10,746	16	0	10,746	2,482.88	2,734.18

As shown in **Table 2**, perceived stress scores (PSS) were highest among **older adults (51–65)** (Mean = 25.63, SD = 5.58), followed by **middle-aged adults (31–50)** (Mean = 22.73, SD = 8.19), and **young adults (18–30)** (Mean = 21.73, SD = 6.61). This age-wise increment in stress levels could reflect the cumulative stress burden and health anxieties that often accompany aging, particularly among individuals with chronic illnesses such as thyroid disorders.

Table 3: Spearman's Correlation Between Physical Activity and Perceived Stress.

Variable	Age Group	1	2
PSS Score	Young Adults (18–30)	-	–.321*
	Middle-Aged Adults (31–50)	-	–.365*
	Older Adults (51–65)	-	–.297
MET-min/week	Young Adults (18–30)	–.321*	-
	Middle-Aged Adults (31–50)	–.365*	-
	Older Adults (51–65)	–.297	-

Table 3 highlights **a significant negative correlation** between physical activity and perceived stress in both *young adults (r = –.321)** and ***middle-aged adults (r = –.365)****, suggesting that higher physical activity is linked with lower stress in these groups. While the correlation for **older adults (r = –.297)** was not statistically significant, the trend remained consistent.

This pattern aligns with the **biopsychosocial model** and **HPA axis framework**, which suggest that physical activity mitigates stress via neuroendocrine modulation, including reduced cortisol levels and enhanced endorphin release (Chrousos, 2009; Scully et al., 1998). It also supports prior findings in general and chronic illness populations where exercise was found to significantly alleviate stress symptoms [48] (Table 4).

These findings reinforce the effectiveness of **moderate-to-vigorous physical activity** in stress reduction, consistent with prior literature highlighting aerobic and moderate-intensity activities as most beneficial [38, 50]. The lack of significant results in older adults could stem from smaller sample size or the influence of other co-morbidities, limited mobility, or pre-existing coping strategies (McEwen & Stellar, 1993).

The influence of physical activity on perceived stress among thyroid patients, by age group, was investigated in this research. Statistical analysis utilizing descriptive statistics, normality tests, Spearman correlations, and Kruskal-Wallis tests showed patterns of

Table 4: Kruskal-Wallis Test for Differences in Perceived Stress Across Activity Levels.

Age Group	Activity Level	N	Mean Rank	H	df	p-Value
Young Adults (18–30)	Low	6	21.75	6.742	2	0.034
	Moderate	23	37.09			
	High	33	32.68			
Middle-Aged Adults (31–50)	Low	5	25.1	6.354	2	0.042
	Moderate	19	38.16			
	High	17	20.74			
Older Adults (51–65)	Low	2	7.00	2.326	2	0.313
	Moderate	7	9.43			
	High	7	11.86			

As detailed in **Table 4**, physical activity levels significantly influenced perceived stress scores in **young (p = .034)** and **middle-aged adults (p = .042)**, but not in **older adults (p = .313)**. Among younger and middle-aged participants, those in the **moderate activity group reported the lowest stress**, followed by the **high activity group**, while the **low activity group showed the highest stress scores**.

significance in physical activity as a factor in reducing stress in young adult and middle-aged cohorts.

The findings indicated a strong negative correlation between physical activity and perceived stress among younger and middle-aged participants, supporting the hypothesis that higher levels of physical activity are linked to lower levels of stress. This is consistent with earlier research showing the stress-buffering effects of exercise [38, 48]. In addition, the determination that moderate levels of activity were linked with the greatest decrease in stress corroborates previous findings that emphasized moderate aerobic exercise as best for psychological gain (Nakamura et al., 2022).

Theoretically, the results reinforce the biopsychosocial model (Engel, 1977; Hallberg et al., 2018) emphasizing the interconnection between biological, psychological, and social parameters of disease outcomes. The physical activity, as a behavior factor, affected physical well-being as well as subjective attitudes towards stress, demonstrating the integrated character of managing thyroid disease.

The allostatic load theory (McEwen & Stellar, 1993) also elaborates the above findings by hypothesizing that chronic stress results in physiological wear-and-tear, such as hormonal dysregulation. Those who were more physically active might have had less cumulative stress burden, such that physiological equilibrium was maintained—a protective factor against the cumulative stress that is common to chronic thyroid disease.

Furthermore, the results agree with the HPA axis dysregulation model (Chrousos, 2009), since physical activity would have most likely modulated neuroendocrine responses. Previous research has already established that exercise would normalize cortisol levels [29], which, in turn, would stabilize thyroid hormone conversion and mood, lending biological validity to the negative association found between activity and perceived stress in this sample.

While older adults showed a similar pattern, the interaction

between physical activity and stress was not statistically significant among them. This may be explained by having a smaller sample size, comorbidities, decreased mobility, or use of non-physical coping mechanisms. The theory of neuroplasticity [34] can still hold here—though neurobiological adaptation through exercise is plausible in older adults, the point of view might be greater or need to be sustained.

The results also indirectly corroborate the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), which posits that perceived self-efficacy is a central factor in the change of health behavior. The younger participants might have had greater physical activity-related self-efficacy, which allowed them to better buffer stress. Conversely, older individuals might have had greater environmental or cultural constraints to participation, particularly within the Indian scenario where age- and gender-related customs could prevent physical activity (Kaur et al., 2020).

Taken overall, these findings not only confirm theoretical expectation but also support earlier empirical findings. For instance, Choi and Lee (2019) found that yogabhaya interventions lowered stress and enhanced thyroid hormone profiles in subclinical hypothyroid women, whereas Delgado and Martinez (2021) obtained the same effects through moderate aerobic exercise. The reproducibility of findings such as these across populations and study designs adds further support to conclusions drawn from the current study.

In summary, the marriage of theoretical concepts with empirical findings of this research provides compelling evidence for the application of physical activity as a non-medication therapy in lowering perceived stress among thyroid patients. The findings underscore the importance of developing age- and culture-appropriate strategies to encourage physical activity as an integral aspect of holistic thyroid management.

Limitations

While the current study provides a worthwhile addition to knowledge regarding the effects of physical activity on perceived stress in thyroid patients in India, there are several limitations that need to be recognized. These limitations are crucial in interpreting the findings and in informing future research aimed at expanding upon these results.

Cross-Sectional Design Precludes Causality

The greatest limitation of the current research is its cross-sectional design. Although the statistical tests indicated that there is a negative relationship between the levels of physical activity and perceived stress, the direction of this relationship cannot be established. It is impossible to ascertain whether higher levels of physical activity reduce perceived stress directly, or whether people who have lower stress levels are more likely to be physically active. As a result, causality cannot be assumed. Longitudinal or experimental designs, e.g., randomized controlled trials, would be needed to create a robust cause-effect link [48].

Age Group Imbalance in Sample Size

While the study sought to describe age-specific patterns by dividing participants into three age groups—young adults, middle-aged adults, and older adults—the distribution was not balanced. The older adult group (ages 51–65 years) was underrepresented compared to the other groups. This imbalance would potentially affect the statistical power of older adult-related analyses and might have led to the non-significant findings in this category. Therefore, conclusions on this group should be approached with caution, and future research should provide representation in all age strata.

Use of Self-Report Instruments

Both Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ) are validated and standardized measures but are based on self-report. Such methodology is subject to inherent biases such as recall bias, social desirability bias, and subjective interpretation. The physical activity levels or perceived stress may have been overestimated or underestimated by some participants because of poor recall or for presenting themselves in a positive way. Although these tools provide convenience in community-based studies on a large scale, the inclusion of objective measures—e.g., wearable fitness trackers, salivary cortisol, or heart rate monitors—would enhance the validity of subsequent research [15, 43].

Failure to Differentiate Between Thyroid Illness

The research failed to differentiate between hypothyroid and hyperthyroid individuals for analysis. While both illnesses are within the category of thyroid dysfunction, the illnesses have quite different symptomologies, hormone levels, fatigue, and psychiatric presentations. Not stratifying results by type of thyroid could have concealed subtle trends or distinctive stress-related outcomes unique to each disease. Furthermore, the treatment phase (e.g., initial diagnosis vs. stabilized on meds) was not controlled, which could have affected participants' levels of stress and activity participation.

Cultural and Societal Factors Not Quantified

Although the study was based on an Indian sociocultural context and recognized pertinent gender norms and societal pressures in the analysis, they were not directly measured or controlled for. In India, physical activity tends to be influenced by availability of secure public areas, household duties, and cultural beliefs—particularly for women.

Some participants would have experienced barriers to usual physical activity that were not assessed using the IPAQ. The lack of measurement of these sociocultural variables restricts the analysis depth for environmental and behavioral determinants of physical activity and stress.

Omission of Psychological Mediators and Behavioral Constructs

While the study was theoretically informed by theories like the biopsychosocial model, allostatic load theory, and HPA axis regulation, it lacked empirical testing of key psychological or behavioral mediators. Psychological or behavioral variables like self-efficacy, motivation, coping style, perceived social support, and psychological flexibility could be key to understanding why some people are more physically active or less stressed. Their absence limits the study's explanatory reach.

Single Time Point Measurement

Perceived stress and physical activity data were both measured at a single cross-sectional time point. The snapshot method fails to capture day-to-day or week-to-week variation in either variable and seasonal or situational variation in stress levels or activity behavior. Therefore, the results are at best a fleeting snapshot of participants' lived experiences and lack the ability to examine patterns or trends over time.

Limited External Validity

Participants were also recruited from targeted clinics and support groups through purposive and snowball sampling. While this recruitment ensured clinically diagnosed thyroid patients, it restricts the external validity and generalizability of the study findings. The findings cannot be applied to the larger thyroid population, especially in rural locations, people who are undiagnosed or untreated, or those with no access to organized healthcare facilities.

Conclusion

The current research aimed to examine an important but not much researched confluence of clinical psychology and endocrinology: the connection between physical activity and perceived stress in patients diagnosed with thyroid disorders in India. By taking a cross-sectional, correlational approach and incorporating well-established theoretical frameworks like the biopsychosocial model, allostatic load theory, and the HPA axis dysregulation framework, this study offers a multifaceted perspective on how lifestyle variables, specifically physical activity, can impact psychological well-being in a population living with a chronic endocrine disease.

The study results offer strong evidence for the existence of a statistically significant negative relationship between perceived stress scores and levels of physical activity among young and middle-aged patients with thyroid disease. Those who had moderate to high rates of physical activity, as assessed by the International Physical Activity Questionnaire (IPAQ), reported consistently lower perceived stress, as assessed by the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). These findings confirm the hypothesis that exercise is a very potent non-pharmacological method for dealing with psychological stress in patients with thyroid disease.

Most importantly, the study also revealed age-related differences that further illustrate how perceived stress presents itself at varying stages of life and how physical activity can influence its magnitude. Young adults, although being subjected to greater academic and professional stress, showed greater physical activity participation and lower perceived stress levels. Middle-aged adults, being typically saddled with job and caregiving duties, showed moderate activity and stress levels. Older adults, although having possibly more time for themselves, showed the greatest perceived stress and least amount of physical activity, perhaps because of physical impairment, comorbidities, or lack of motivation. This stratified analysis by age implies the necessity for age-specific, individually appropriate interventions and highlights the appropriateness of taking a lifespan perspective in developing physical activity-based stress management strategies.

These results complement and build on past work with its emphasis on the value of physical activity for fostering mental health and modulating endocrine function [38, 50]. The neurobiology of such benefits is well established, especially in relation to the control of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and lowering of circulating cortisol levels—crucial in both stress perception and thyroid function (Chrousos, 2009). Physical activity also promotes regular release of endorphins and aids neuroplasticity, hence leading to better mood, cognitive function, and emotional stability—all areas commonly impaired in thyroid patients despite their attainment of biochemical euthyroidism.

From a clinical viewpoint, the current study necessitates a paradigm shift in the management of thyroid conditions. Conventional models of management continue to be largely pharmacological, targeting hormone replacement or suppression while not necessarily dealing with the psychological upset experienced by most patients. The findings of the current study indicate that the addition of formal recommendations for physical activity—whether aerobic exercise, yoga, or walking—can be a low-cost, non-invasive adjunct to medical therapy. Endocrinologists, psychologists, and primary care physicians should work together to create integrative care plans addressing both the physical and psychological aspects of thyroid disease.

In the Indian context, given that thyroid disorders are prevalent and disproportionately affect women, this study acquires particular relevance. Social norms, gender-related taboos, restrictions on women, and lack of access to secure recreational areas regularly hinder women from undertaking routine physical activity. Since women make up the majority of thyroid patients in India, any attempt at incorporating exercise into treatment protocols would have to be followed by gender-sensitive policy and grassroots support mechanisms. This could involve women-only exercise programs, home-based exercise materials, or culturally tolerated group activities such as yoga or dance therapy.

The public health consequences of the results are also significant. With increasing non-communicable disease burden in India, and with sparse mental health infrastructure, encouraging physical activity as a double-action intervention addressing both physical and mental well-being is at once practical and tactical. Physical activity should be a priority in health promotion campaigns, clinical practice guidelines, and government initiatives not just for metabolic health but also as a key element in mental well-being, especially in individuals with chronic conditions such as thyroid dysfunction.

Scholarly, this study adds to the increasing literature that attempts to frame chronic illness in a systems-based manner. It fills an important lacuna in psychoneuroendocrinology by exploring the interaction among lifestyle, stress, and hormonal control in an Indian clinical population. Utilizing standardized instruments (IPAQ and PSS) and stringent statistical analyses such as Spearman correlations and Kruskal-Wallis tests, the research lends empirical validity to the theoretical assertion that disease experience and management outcomes are shaped by lifestyle behaviors. Furthermore, the results offer a strong justification for the implementation of the biopsychosocial model within academic curricula and clinical education for health professionals.

Future studies should seek to overcome the limitations of this research by using longitudinal designs, including objective physiological indicators like salivary cortisol or thyroid hormone panels, and adding psychological mediators like coping style, self-efficacy, and perceived control. There is also potential for developing and piloting structured physical activity interventions for thyroid patients, with longer-term outcomes to identify durability and clinical effectiveness. Qualitative research may also provide a means of assessing the experiences of living with thyroid disease, particularly in rural or disadvantaged areas, and therefore providing more information on the facilitators and barriers to physical activity participation in everyday settings.

In summary, this research affirms that physical exercise is not just a lifestyle preference but a strong, evidence-based treatment modality for controlling perceived stress among thyroid patients. It pushes the understanding of thyroid disease further than hormonal imbalance to

incorporate the emotional, behavioral, and social aspects of recovery. In this way, it helps foster a more empathic, holistic, and culturally sensitive model of care—a model that acknowledges the rich interplay between body and mind, particularly in those communities that have traditionally been underrepresented in clinical and psychological research.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to ethical standards by prioritizing participants' rights and confidentiality. Ethical approval will be obtained from a university or institutional ethics review board (IRB) before data collection begins. Key ethical measures include:

Informed Consent

All participants received a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks, and they provided written consent before participation.

Right to Withdraw

Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality

Personal information and responses have been be kept confidential, stored securely, and used solely for research purposes.

Debriefing

Participants received information about the study findings post-study, and researcher was available to discuss the outcomes and address any questions.

Deception

No deception was involved in this study; all participants were given full transparency about study procedures and objectives.

Conflicts of Interest

Researchers declared any potential conflicts of interest to maintain objectivity and integrity throughout the study.

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