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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

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The Role of Outdoor Recreation Program in Mental Health Among Hikers at Wawasan Hill, Puchong, Selangor

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I. Introduction

Mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and stress are notably increasing, including in Malaysia. Nature-based interventions, particularly outdoor activities such as hiking, may enhance psychological well-being by providing physical activity, social engagement, and exposure to nature. This study focused on the effects of outdoor recreation programs on hikers at Wawasan Hill, Puchong, Selangor, with objectives to identify key factors of outdoor experiences, assess levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among hikers, analyze gender differences in mental health, and explore the connection between outdoor recreation and mental health outcomes.

II. Methods

A structured questionnaire was distributed via Google Form to hikers at Wawasan Hill as part of this study's quantitative research approach, and 296 valid responses were obtained. Three elements comprised the instrument: the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS-21), a 21-item Recreation Experience Preference (REP) scale, and a demographic profile. The data was analyzed using SPSS Version 31, which used Pearson chi-square analysis to examine the association between outdoor recreation programs and mental health, an independent t-test for gender differences, and descriptive statistics to summarize factors.

III. Results and Discussion

A. Outdoor Recreations Programs

Achievement recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.24, SD = 0.752), followed by skill development (M = 4.18, SD = 0.734), family togetherness (M = 4.04, SD = 0.830), social recognition (M = 3.87, SD = 0.865), and escaping family (M = 3.83, SD = 0.883). These findings indicate that hikers primarily engage in outdoor recreation for personal accomplishment and skill enhancement rather than avoidance motives.

B. Mental Health

For depression, 35.1% of hikers were normal, while 64.9% faced varying degrees of severity. Anxiety was more pronounced, with 39.9% reporting extremely severe levels, making it the leading mental health issue. Stress levels were predominantly normal (35.8%) to moderate (32.1%), indicating hiking may positively influence stress management compared to depression and anxiety.

C. Gender Differences in Mental Health

An independent t-test indicated no significant difference in mental health scores between male (M = 4.02, SD = 0.672) and female hikers (M = 4.06, SD = 0.753), $p > 0.05$, suggesting gender does not significantly influence mental health outcomes among hikers at Wawasan Hill.

D. Outdoor Recreation Programs-Mental Health Relationship

Pearson chi-square analysis found no significant relationship ($p < 0.001$) between outdoor recreation program and mental health scores. Despite the psychological benefits of outdoor recreation, mere participation may effectively reduce depression, anxiety, or stress without structured or therapeutic programming.

TABLE I
OUTDOOR RECREATION PROGRAMS – MENTAL HEALTH RELATIONSHIP

		MENTAL HEALTH
RECREATION EXPERIECE PREFERENCE (REP)	PEARSON CHI-SQUARE	<0.001
		1.000
	SIGNIFICANT (2-TAILED)	296

IV. Conclusions

This study emphasizes outdoor recreation's role in personal achievement and skill development for hikers. Despite high anxiety levels, stress is managed better. No significant gender differences or strong links between outdoor programs and mental health were discovered, indicating that while hiking is beneficial, structured interventions may be necessary for psychological enhancements. The research enhances the understanding of outdoor recreation's impact on community mental health in urban Malaysia.

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