

*Outride Collaborates with Loma Linda University to Investigate the Impact of In-School Cycling Programs on Middle Schoolers' Mental Health*

Morgan Hill, CA, October 12th, 2023 — Outride is dedicated to improving the well-being of youth through research-backed cycling programs. A study carried out in collaboration with researchers at Loma Linda University (LLU) examined the effects of in-school cycling programs on the mental health of middle schoolers. [The study](#), recently published in *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, reveals the positive impact of cycling education on psychosocial well-being, while highlighting the role other factors play in shaping students' mental health outcomes.

Physical activity has long been associated with improved mental health, yet the decline in physical activity rates among teenagers is a growing concern. [One in six](#) school children in the United States is diagnosed with some form of mental disorder. Outride and LLU sought to explore the potential of cycling as a means to support mental well-being among adolescents.

The research, carried out in 2021, involved a sample of over 1,200 middle schoolers aged 11 to 14 and assessed changes in mental well-being before and after participating in the [Riding for Focus \(R4F\) program](#)—a cycling education initiative developed by Outride. The R4F program is now in nearly 300 schools, with over 50,000 middle schoolers going through the program. The program aims to equip students with basic cycling knowledge and experience, so that they may ride safely and confidently. Dr. Esther Walker, Senior Research Manager at Outride, stated, “Program data shows that access to bikes at home, as well as safe places to ride, is not equitable across the student population, and so providing access to such a program during the school day gives everyone the opportunity to learn a skill they can use throughout their life.”

At the same time, the program aims to instill confidence and self-efficacy in the students in a supportive and positive environment, ultimately with the aim of supporting positive mental health in students.

According to the study, participation in the program during the Covid-19 pandemic was associated with improved psychosocial well-being amongst middle schoolers in the United States. Dr. Sean Wilson, a professor at Loma Linda University and the senior author on the study, added that the results demonstrate that “short term physical activity programs [like R4F] hold promise of having a positive influence on mental health and wellbeing in adolescents.”

Fletcher Dementyev, a research fellow at Loma Linda University and the first author of the study added, “Our findings were incredibly encouraging. A large proportion of students had a positive learning experience and continued interest in cycling. Moreover, improvements in psychosocial well-being scores were linked to the Riding for Focus program for both participants in aggregate and certain disadvantaged populations. We hope that this study will attract the attention of both practitioners and researchers and broaden participation in cycling education implementation and research.”

In addition to measuring overall well-being, the study examined other factors that influenced students' well-being pre- and post-program participation. Dr. Walker emphasized, "While participating can certainly contribute positively to one's day-to-day life, ultimately, to see large-scale improvements, changes in policy, reductions in systematic disparities in access to nutrition, health services, safe environments, and beyond need to be put in motion."

### **The Power of Collaboration**

This study sheds light on the potential of cycling programs to enhance the mental well-being of teenagers, providing valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and healthcare professionals as they work together to address the mental health challenges facing today's youth. The work was made possible through a collaboration between Outride and a National Institutes of Health funded research program at Loma Linda University that aims to provide research opportunities to up-and-coming undergraduate students. Dementyev, an incoming college freshman at the time of this research, shared his enthusiasm about the collaboration with Outride. "Working with Outride was special because of the organization's commitment to a collaborative and multidisciplinary research effort. This meant we had access to support, resources, and opportunities that propelled our work forward. In particular, I am grateful to Outride Research Manager, Dr. Esther Walker for her mentorship, guidance, and expertise." Dr. Wilson added, "We are excited to have collaborated with Outride examining the health benefits of the Riding for Focus program as it fits into the larger mission of Loma Linda University, which is focused on improving health and well-being. We look forward to future opportunities to explore the health and wellness benefits of the program."

You can access the paper [here](#).

### **About Outride**

[Outride](#) is a non-profit organization dedicated to empowering communities' cognitive, socio-emotional, and mental well-being through research, school-based cycling programs, and community grants. At Outride, we believe in the power of cycling to transform lives. We envision a world where billions of people use cycling to improve the well-being of their communities. Outride has a direct focus on expanding opportunities to access the benefits of cycling, partnering with programs that intentionally work to provide the social, emotional, and cognitive health benefits of cycling to underrepresented demographic groups.

Learn more at [outridebike.org](http://outridebike.org)