

"STUDYING THE EFFECT OF ECOLOGY ON THE PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS"

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DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.22788869

Received: 8 September 2026 | Accepted: 15 September 2026 | Published: 16 September 2026

ABSTRACT.

This study investigates the impact of ecological factors on the physical development of children and adolescents aged 6–17 years. Using a comparative cross-sectional design, environmental indicators such as air pollution (AQI), water quality, and soil contamination were correlated with physical development indicators including height, weight, body mass index (BMI), and lung capacity. Statistical analysis reveals a significant negative correlation ($r = -0.62$ to -0.78 , $p < 0.05$) between pollution levels and growth parameters. The results emphasize the importance of environmental protection policies in safeguarding child health.

KEYWORDS:

ecology, child development, environmental pollution, growth, adolescents, public health

INTRODUCTION

The ecological environment is one of the most important determinants of physical development in children and adolescents. In recent decades, rapid industrialization, urbanization, and environmental degradation have significantly altered living conditions, leading to increased exposure to harmful ecological factors. These changes have created new risks for child health, particularly affecting growth, physiological development, and overall well-being. Physical development, commonly assessed through indicators such as height, weight, body mass index (BMI), and lung capacity, reflects not only genetic potential but also environmental influences. Numerous studies have demonstrated that adverse ecological conditions can negatively impact these indicators.

Materials, Methods and Statistical Analysis

Children are particularly vulnerable to environmental hazards due to their biological and physiological characteristics. Their organs and systems are still developing, making them more sensitive to toxic substances. Additionally, children consume more air, water, and food relative to their body weight compared to adults, increasing their exposure to pollutants. Their detoxification systems are also not fully developed, which reduces their ability to eliminate harmful substances from the body. As a result, environmental exposure during childhood can

lead to long-term and sometimes irreversible effects on physical development.

The present study is based on a comparative cross-sectional analysis of children aged 6 to 17 years, focusing on the relationship between environmental conditions and physical development indicators. The study included 240 participants divided into two groups: an urban group exposed to higher levels of pollution and a rural group with relatively cleaner environmental conditions. The main physical development parameters measured were height, weight, BMI, and lung capacity. Environmental indicators included air quality index (AQI), water contamination levels, and soil toxicity.

Statistical analysis was conducted using a multiple regression model to assess the influence of ecological factors on physical development:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \epsilon$$

Where:

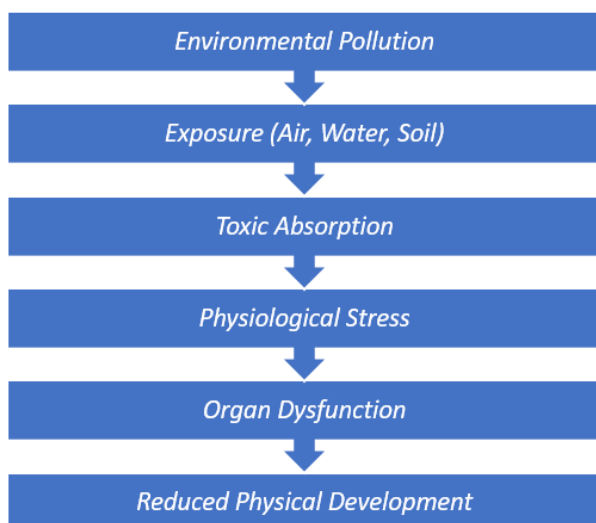
- Y = Physical development indicator
- X_1 = Air pollution (AQI)
- X_2 = Water pollution
- X_3 = Soil contamination
- β = coefficients

In this model, the dependent variable represents physical development indicators, while independent variables include air pollution, water contamination, and soil toxicity. The results demonstrated significant negative correlations between environmental pollution and growth parameters. For example, the correlation coefficient between air pollution and lung capacity was found to be -0.78 , indicating a strong inverse relationship. Similarly, height and weight showed negative correlations with AQI values (-0.72 and -0.68 , respectively).

Correlation Results Table

Indicator	AQI Correlation (r)	Water Quality (r)	Soil Toxicity (r)
Height	-0.72	-0.65	-0.60
Weight	-0.68	-0.61	-0.58
BMI	-0.55	-0.50	-0.47
Lung Capacity	-0.78	-0.66	-0.62

Interpretation: Strong negative correlations indicate



that increased pollution reduces physical development.

Comparative analysis between urban and rural populations revealed notable differences in physical development. Children living in urban areas exhibited lower average height (148.2 ± 8.5 cm) compared to rural children (152.7 ± 7.9 cm). A similar pattern was observed for weight and lung capacity, with urban children showing reduced values. These findings suggest that environmental pollution and lifestyle factors associated with urbanization, such as reduced physical activity and increased exposure to harmful substances, contribute to impaired physical development.

Comparative Data (Urban vs Rural)

Parameter	Urban (Mean $\pm$ SD)	Rural (Mean $\pm$ SD)	Difference
Height (cm)	148.2 ± 8.5	152.7 ± 7.9	-4.5 cm
Weight (kg)	42.3 ± 6.2	45.1 ± 5.8	-2.8 kg
BMI	19.2 ± 2.1	19.8 ± 1.9	-0.6
Lung Capacity	2.6 ± 0.4	3.0 ± 0.5	-0.4 L

Mechanisms of Impact

The mechanisms through which ecological factors influence physical development are complex and multifactorial. Air pollution, for instance, reduces oxygen availability and leads to chronic inflammation in the respiratory system, which can impair lung function and overall physical performance. Exposure to particulate matter and toxic gases has also been linked to oxidative stress and cellular damage. Water pollution, particularly contamination with heavy metals such as lead and mercury, can disrupt metabolic processes and impair nutrient absorption, leading to growth retardation. Soil contamination introduces harmful substances into the food chain, resulting in chronic exposure to toxins through diet.

The relationship between environmental pollution and physical development can be summarized as a sequential process in which environmental degradation leads to exposure, followed by physiological stress and organ dysfunction, ultimately resulting in reduced

growth and increased risk of disease. This pathway highlights the cumulative nature of ecological impacts, where multiple environmental factors interact and amplify their effects on child health.

Flowchart 1. Ecological Impact Pathway

Graphical analysis further supports these findings. A negative trend is observed when plotting pollution levels against height, indicating that higher pollution is associated with lower growth outcomes. Similarly, lung capacity decreases as air pollution increases, reflecting the sensitivity of respiratory function to environmental conditions. Comparative bar charts consistently show higher physical development indicators among children living in cleaner environments.

The discussion of these results emphasizes that ecological factors are not isolated influences but interact with socioeconomic conditions, nutrition, and lifestyle. Children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are often more exposed to environmental risks due to poor living conditions and limited access to healthcare. Furthermore, early-life exposure to environmental hazards can have long-term consequences, affecting not only physical development but also cognitive function and overall health in adulthood.

Preventive Strategies

Preventive strategies must therefore address both environmental and health-related factors. Reducing air pollution through stricter industrial regulations, improving access to clean water, and minimizing soil contamination are essential steps. At the same time, health interventions such as regular medical screening, nutritional support, and public health education can help mitigate the effects of environmental exposure. Schools and communities play a crucial role in promoting healthy behaviors and raising awareness about environmental risks.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study provides substantial evidence that ecological conditions play a decisive and multifaceted role in shaping the physical development of children and adolescents. The analysis demonstrates that exposure to environmental pollutants—particularly air contamination, unsafe water, and soil toxicity—has a statistically significant negative impact on key growth indicators such as height, weight, body mass index, and lung capacity. Among these factors, air pollution appears to exert the most pronounced influence, especially on respiratory development, which in turn affects overall physical performance and endurance.

Importantly, the findings indicate that the effects of ecological factors are not isolated but cumulative and synergistic. Continuous exposure to multiple environmental risks leads to chronic physiological stress, disruption of metabolic and endocrine processes, and impaired organ function. These biological disturbances ultimately manifest as delayed growth, reduced physical capacity, and increased susceptibility to both acute and chronic diseases. The observed differences between urban and rural populations further reinforce the conclusion that environmental quality is a critical determinant

of child health, with cleaner environments supporting more optimal developmental outcomes.

Another key implication of this study is the long-term impact of early-life environmental exposure. Adverse ecological conditions during critical periods of growth can result in irreversible developmental deficits that persist into adulthood, potentially affecting productivity, quality of life, and overall population health. Therefore, the issue extends beyond individual health outcomes and represents a broader socio-economic and public health concern.

The results also highlight the importance of integrating environmental considerations into pediatric healthcare and public health policy. Preventive strategies should not be limited to medical interventions but must include comprehensive environmental management approaches. These include reducing industrial emissions, improving urban air quality, ensuring access to safe drinking water, and controlling the use of harmful agricultural chemicals. At the same time, strengthening health systems through early screening, nutritional support, and health education can help mitigate the negative effects of environmental exposure.

Furthermore, the study underscores the need for interdisciplinary collaboration between environmental scientists, healthcare professionals, policymakers, and educators. Only through coordinated efforts can effective solutions be developed to address the complex interactions between ecological factors and child development. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies, larger population samples, and advanced analytical models to better understand causal relationships and to develop targeted interventions.

Overall, ensuring a healthy ecological environment is not only a matter of environmental protection but also a fundamental prerequisite for the normal physical development of children and adolescents. Investing in environmental sustainability and child health today is essential for building a healthier, more resilient population in the future.

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