



Perceived Physical Competence and Enjoyment as Predictors of Physical Activity in Middle Eastern Female College Students

Oral Presentation

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This study investigates the motivational factors influencing moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA) among Middle Eastern female college students, a population that is underrepresented in physical activity research. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, the study focuses on perceived physical competence (PC) and enjoyment as key motivational constructs behind activity behavior. PC reflects individuals' confidence in their physical abilities, while enjoyment captures intrinsic motivation. The study examines both variables and their interaction, considering whether one moderates or enhances the effect of the other on MVPA. MVPA was assessed objectively via accelerometry, controlling for wear time, with body mass index (BMI), handgrip strength, and hand size included as covariates.

A longitudinal design was employed, where PC and enjoyment were measured twice over eight weeks, and MVPA was assessed at the end. The sample included 206 female college students (Mean age = 20.67, SD = 1.89 years) from the United Arab Emirates. Data collection involved questionnaires, laboratory assessments, and accelerometer monitoring across academic and weekend settings. Despite cultural and logistical challenges, the study achieved broad participation and received institutional ethical approval.

Path analysis revealed that PC at baseline predicted enjoyment over time, and both PC and enjoyment demonstrated temporal stability. Higher levels of PC and enjoyment were associated with increased MVPA. BMI was negatively associated with both PC and enjoyment, whereas handgrip strength was positively associated with enjoyment. The model explained 29% of the variance in enjoyment, 18% in PC, and 15% in MVPA. Notably, only 12% of participants met physical activity guidelines.

These findings underscore the importance of fostering competence and enjoyment to promote physical activity among young women in culturally specific contexts. The results provide critical insight for developing targeted, theory-based interventions to improve health behaviors in Middle Eastern female populations.