Using the Theory of Planned Behaviour to Investigate the Antecedents of Physical Activity Participation among Saudi Adolescents

Submitted by

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Abstract

Despite the widely documented physical, psychological, and social benefits of participation in physical activity (Sallis, Prochaska, & Taylor, 2000; U.S Department of Health & Human Services, 2000), less than half of young Saudi adolescents are involved in non-school organised sport (General Presidency for Youth Welfare, 2007; Al-Hazzaa, 2004). Thus, examination of social and psychological determinants of participation in leisure time physical activity is important. This PhD examined these determinants within Saudi adolescents.

A mixed methods approach was adopted to identify and test the important social and psychological determinants of participation in leisure-time physical activity. Phase one of the research was qualitative in nature. The purpose of this phase was to illustrate how an elicitation method can be used to identify salient behavioural (termed consequences), normative (termed referents), and control (termed circumstances) beliefs about physical activity as perceived by adolescents. These findings, along with theoretical propositions and evidence from previous studies, contributed to the development of a model of the social and psychological determinants of participation in leisure-time physical activity. They also contributed to the development of ways to measure important concepts in the model.

Phase two was quantitative in nature and used multiple regression analysis to test the relationships among the key variables of interest. In part one of this phase, self-report questionnaires measured the respondents’ intention to participate in leisure time physical activity (dependent variable); it also measured their attitude toward physical activity behaviour, as well as subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, descriptive norms, self-efficacy, self-identity, and past behaviour (independent variables). The results revealed that attitudes, subjective norms, perceptions of behavioural control predicted physical activity intentions in a Saudi Arabian context. Moreover, descriptive norms, self-efficacy, and past behaviour contributed to the
prediction of intentions, while self-identity did not. The results also pointed to some gender differences: while Saudi females considered attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control and self-efficacy during intention formation, Saudi males considered attitude, subjective norms, perceived behaviour control, self-efficacy, and past behaviour only during intention formation. In terms of the salient beliefs, being active, maintaining fitness and controlling weight predicted attitudes; friends, mother, and brother predicted subjective norms; and availability of place, availability of time, and bad weather predicted perceived behavioural control. The results also pointed to some gender differences. While Saudi females considered being active, maintaining fitness, controlling weight, friends, family, father, mother, and brother, availability of place, availability of time, and bad weather, Saudi males considered being active, friends, family, father, brother, availability of place, availability of time and bad weather. In part two of this phase, five weeks after completing the main questionnaire, participants completed a follow-up questionnaire that assessed self-reported physical activity during the previous five weeks. Results revealed that intention, perceived behavioural control, subjective norms, self-efficacy, and past behaviour, but not attitude, descriptive norms, or self-identity predicted physical activity. Results also pointed out important gender differences. That is, while Saudi males appeared to consider intention, perceived behavioural control, and past behaviour when predicting exercising behaviour, this was not the case for Saudi females who considered intention, subjective norms, self-efficacy, and past behaviour only.

Overall, the findings of this thesis offer partial support for the capacity of the theory of planned behaviour to predict participants’ physical activity intention and behaviour. The standard TPB variables, self-efficacy and past behaviour predicted intention, while, subjective norms, self-efficacy and past behaviour predicted behaviour. In general, findings also point out important gender differences. That is, while Saudi males appear to consider the standard TPB variables, self-efficacy, and past behaviour when predicting intention, and perceived behavioural control and past behaviour when
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predicting physical activity behaviour, this is not the case for Saudi females. In contrast, Saudi females consider attitude, subjective norms, and self-efficacy when predicting intention, and self-efficacy and past behaviour when predicting physical activity behaviour. Implications of these findings are that in order to alter physical activity patterns, factors influencing adolescents’ intention and behaviour to participate in physical activity must be addressed. Specially, effective interventions should target cognitive, social, environmental and psychological factors aimed at promoting physical activity among adolescents.
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